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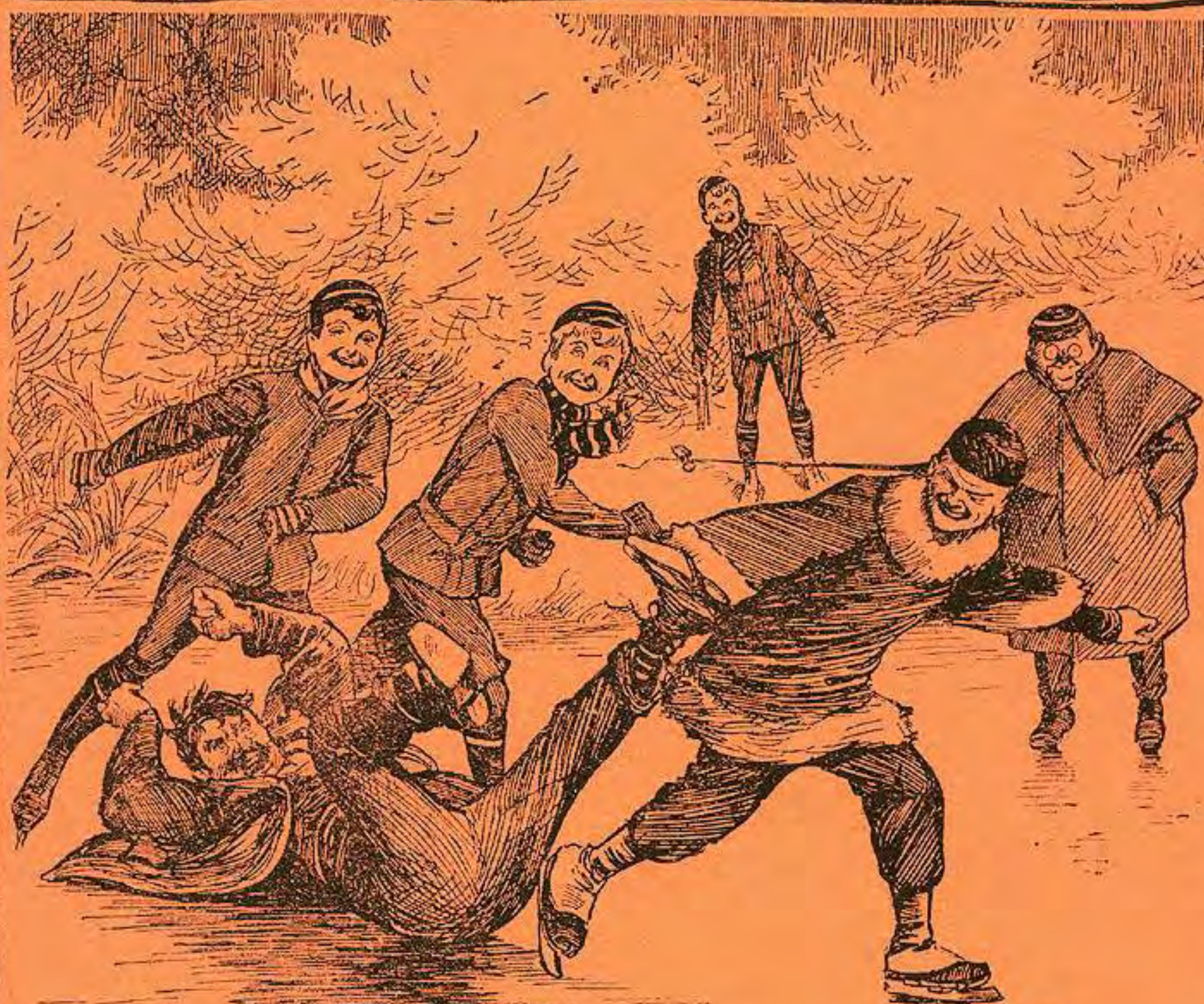
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Vol. 2.

COMPLETE
STORY
FOR ALL

A TALE OF HARRY WHARTON & CO.
HOME FOR THE HOLIDAYS.

By
**FRANK
RICHARDS**



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A Splendid
Complete Tale of
**HARRY
WHARTON & CO.**



By
FRANK RICHARDS.

THE FIRST CHAPTER. Off for the Holidays.

"ARE they coming?"
"No — yes!
Here they come!"
"Stand ready,
you chaps!"

"Ha, ha! Right-ho!"
It was snowing in the Close at Greyfriars—roofs and walls, flower-beds and walks, were covered with a sheet of dazzling white. The flakes were falling thick and fast, but the dozen or so fellows who were gathered outside the great door seemed to care nothing for the snow.

A covered brake was standing near at hand, the driver slapping his hands to keep them warm, and the horses' breath rising like steam in the frozen air. The vehicle was evidently waiting for passengers from within the School House, to convey them to the railway station, but none of the passengers had as yet made their appearance.

Greyfriars was breaking up for the Christmas holidays, and Harry Wharton, the captain of the Remove, was taking a little party of his chums home with him to Wharton Lodge for the vacation. The brake was waiting for them, and so were Temple, Dabney and Co., of the Upper Fourth.

"They're coming," chuckled Temple. "We must give Wharton a good send-off! Got your snowballs ready?"

"Oh, rather," said Dabney.

"Mind, give them the first volley when I give the word, and then pelt as hard as you can," grinned Temple. "We'll give them a running fire down to the gates. There have been

ructions between the Upper Fourth and the Remove, but they shall never say that we failed to give them a good send-off for the holidays."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Shut up," said Fry, "I can hear them coming out."

And the Upper Fourth-Formers stood well back from the doorway, with snowballs ready. There were certainly footfalls audible from within, and as a figure appeared in coat and cap the excited juniors let fly.

Swish! smash! squash!

"Hallo!" roared a startled voice, "what the dickens—"

"Hold on!" shrieked Temple. "You asses—it's Wingate!"

Wingate, of the Sixth, the captain of Greyfriars, staggered under the showering snowballs, and sat down violently. He jumped up again, red with wrath.

"You young rascals!" he roared. "I'll—I'll—"

"Sorry," gasped Temple. "It was an accident. We—we thought it was those Remove kids coming."

Wingate glared at them for some seconds, greatly inclined to rush at the scared juniors and cuff right and left. But a grin broke over his face at last, and the terrors of the Upper Fourth were relieved.

"Well, be more careful next time, you young duffers," he grunted, and strode on his way.

Temple drew a breath of relief.

"Good old Wingate! I expected a fearful row! Hallo, I can hear them coming now."

"Make sure this time," grinned Fry.

"Ha, ha! It's the kids this time, I can hear the Chinese talking."

The voice of Wun Lung, the Chinese junior in the Greyfriars Remove, was audible, and it showed that the right parties were coming at last.

"Ready!" muttered Temple.

Harry Wharton, the handsome young captain of the Lower Fourth, appeared in the doorway with the Chinese junior.

"Let him have it!" shouted Temple.

And the snowballs flew. Three or four broke over Wharton, but he only laughed good-humouredly, and made a run for the brake and clambered in. Wun Lung was after him in a twinkling, and opened a huge umbrella as a defence against the pursuing snowballs.

"Look out!" shouted Harry Wharton. "Look out there!"

But the warning came too late.

Bob Cherry and Frank Nugent were coming out, and a volley of snowballs biffed all over them.

Bob Cherry sat down on the steps, and Nugent sat upon him, and Bob roared.

"Ow! Gerroff!"

"Go it!" roared Temple.

The two Removites picked themselves up and dashed for the brake. The fun was waxing fast and furious now, fellows gathering from all quarters to back up Temple, Dabney & Co. in the snowballing. Harry Wharton and his friends were the first to leave Greyfriars for the vacation, catching an early train that morning. Most of the school were going some hours later by the special, and so they all gladly gathered to give the early goers a good send-off.

Their kindness was hardly appreciated by the objects of it.

Bob Cherry and Nugent dashed through a cloud of whirling snowballs to the brake, and Harry Wharton helped them in, while Wun Lung gallantly held out his umbrella against the showering missiles. Wun Lung's umbrella was a Chinese one, a huge concern which would have answered very well the purpose of a parachute, and it stood the Removites in good stead now.

"Look out!" cried Fry. "Here they come!"

Hurree Jamset Ram Singh, the Nabob of Bhanipur, was the next Removite to come out to enter the brake.

The Indian junior jumped as the snowballs smote him, and broke into a desperate run, and with snow smashing all over him clambered into the brake.

"My solitary hat!" he exclaimed. "The bashfulness of the snowballs is terrific! I am smotherfully covered with the esteemed snow, my worthy chums."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Here comes Billy Bunter," chuckled Nugent. "He was staying behind to look in the study, in case any grub should have been left behind. My hat! He's eating now."

"The surprisefulness of the honourable Bunter will be terrific!" murmured the Nabob of Bhanipur.

Billy Bunter was coming out, all unconscious of the ambush laid by the merry youths of the Upper Fourth.

The fat junior was eating toffee, and one of his cheeks was puffed out to a huge size by a lump of it, as he appeared in the doorway.

Bunter was wrapped in coat and scarf, which made him appear shorter and fatter than ever, and gave to his plump figure somewhat of the outlines of a cask.

His fat face was glowing with the exercise of getting ready, his comrades having been hurrying him for the last half-hour; for Billy Bunter had a way of leaving off to take a "snack" at all sorts of inconvenient moments.

"Look out, Billy!" shouted Harry Wharton.

Billy Bunter blinked round through his big spectacles.

He was too short-sighted to see what was the matter, and he took Wharton's shout of warning simply as some more hurrying.

"Oh, really, Wharton," he exclaimed, "there's plenty of time, and if I hurry I shall get short of breath, and then—ow—ow—ow!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Snowballs were smashing all over Billy Bunter now.

The fat junior started, and jumped, and staggered, and missed his footing, and rolled to the bottom of the steps.

The juniors shrieked with laughter as he sat up blindly in the snow, with the missiles still pelting all over him.

"Gr-r-r-r-r!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Gr-r-r-r! Hold on! I'm chook—chook—chook—"

"What the dickens does he mean?" said Temple. "Is that a word they use in the Remove? What does he mean by 'chook'?"

"Blessed if I know," said Fry. "Give him some more snowballs."

"Oh, rather!"

"I'm chook—chook—I say, you fellows, I'm chook—chook—chooking!"

The lump had disappeared from Billy Bunter's cheek, and the toffee had evidently slid down his throat in the shock.

Harry Wharton jumped down and lifted the fat junior up, amid a shower of snowballs.

"Help! I'm chook—chook—"

Wharton thumped him on the back.

"All right now?"

"No—yes—stop!" howled Billy Bunter. "Yes, I'm all right! What are you knocking me about for, confound you?"

"I was trying to help you."

"Well, don't then! I don't want you to help me by busting my beastly backbone! Help me into the brake!"

Wharton laughed and obliged him. Billy Bunter was hoisted into the brake, and sent rolling among the legs of those already there.

"Go it, give 'em socks!" shouted Temple.

And a perfect hurricane of snowballs smashed on Harry Wharton as he clambered in after the fat junior.

He was rather dazed as he regained his place, and the driver jerked at his reins, and the brake rolled down the snowy drive to the gates.

After the slow-moving vehicle rushed the Upper Fourth, pelting away for all they were worth, and the brake rolled out of the gates of Greyfriars amid a storm of snowballs.

At the gates the pursuers gave it up. They stood there waving their caps as Harry Wharton & Co. rolled on to the village, and the Removites in the brake waved their caps and shouted back with perfect good-humour.

THE SECOND CHAPTER.

The Sandwiches.

HARRY WHARTON laughed as he rubbed the snow out of his hair. The juniors in the brake were pretty well smothered, but it did not damp their good-humour. It takes a great deal to damp the spirits of a healthy youth going home for the holidays.

They laughed as the brake rolled on to the station. Greyfriars disappeared, only the summit of the grey old tower showing still above the leafless, frosty trees. Billy Bunter's was the only face that wore a serious expression, and he looked very serious. He was feeling in one pocket after another with growing anxiety, and apparently without finding what he sought.

"It's gone!" he exclaimed suddenly.

"So it has," said Bob Cherry, looking at his watch. "It's gone nine. We shall have to buck up."

"I don't mean that, Cherry. It's gone—the packet, you know. I put it into my coat pocket, and now it's gone," exclaimed Billy Bunter, excitedly. "Tell the driver to turn back, will you, Wharton?"

Harry laughed and shook his head.

"Can't be did, Billy. We've only just time to catch our train."

"But it's gone."

"What is gone—something valuable?"

"I should say so. It's the packet of sandwiches Mrs. Kebble gave me to eat in the train—it must have fallen out of my pocket when I fell in the snow, when those beasts were pelting me. I say, you fellows, we must go back."

"Rats, my son," said Bob Cherry. "We're going on."

"But I shall be hungry in the train!" exclaimed Billy, as if that were a contingency not to be calmly contemplated for a moment.

"Awful! But we're going on."

And they went on. Billy Bunter blinked indignantly, but it was of no use. The brake went on without a stop, and the juniors alighted at Friardale Railway Station. For a wonder the train was prompt to time, and it was already in the station when the Greyfriars chums hurried on the platform.

"In you get!" exclaimed Bob Cherry, grasping Bunter by the shoulder as he was starting off down the platform.

"Where on earth are you going?"

"I was just going into the refreshment-room for a minute—"

"I know your minutes when you get into refreshment-rooms!" grinned Bob Cherry. "You just come along, my son! The train will go without you."

"You could hang on to the door, and—"

"I'll hang on to you instead. Gee up!"

And the fat junior was bundled headlong into the carriage. He sprawled over Wun Lung, and the little Chinese bumped down, and Bunter bumped on him, and Wun Lung gave a squeak of anguish.

"Ow! Me velly plenty clushed!"

"Sorry," gasped Bunter. "It was the fault of that beast Cherry. You shouldn't get in the way, though. Look here, I'm going to get out again, and—"

Slam! The guard closed the door, and the train started, and Billy Bunter had to give up the idea of getting out and making a desperate dash into the refreshment-room. He scrambled to his feet, put his spectacles straight, and blinked round at his companions with killing looks.

"I say, you fellows, I shall probably arrive at Wharton Lodge in a state of utter collapse!" he exclaimed. "You know perfectly well that my delicate constitution requires to be kept up by constant nourishment. If I don't have anything to eat for a couple of hours, I get into a low state—"

"Havee sandwich," said Wun Lung hospitably.

The little Chinese had opened a packet of sandwiches, and he extended them to Billy Bunter, who promptly accepted the offer. Then Wun Lung passed the packet along, and the chums helped themselves. It was not long since they had breakfasted, but the keen winter air gave them an appetite.

"I say, you fellows, these are ripping sandwiches!" said Billy Bunter. "They're exactly like those Mrs. Kebble made for me—this beef is beautiful, and there's exactly enough mustard. Mrs. Kebble does make ripping sandwiches, but these are quite as good. Where did you get these, Wun Lung? You didn't make them yourself?"

"No makee."

"Did Mrs. Kebble make them?"

"Me tinkee so."

Bunter looked at him in astonishment.

"You don't know! Where did you get them, then?"

"Me findee."

"You—you found them?" said Bunter, a glimmering of the truth beginning to dawn upon him as he saw the juniors grinning. "Where did you find them?"

"Me findee in blakee."

"You—you found them in the brake?"

The Celestial nodded.

"My sandwiches!" shrieked Billy Bunter. "You—you young pirate! They were my sandwiches!"

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

And the Removites roared in chorus. Billy Bunter did not laugh. He looked at the empty packet that had been filled with sandwiches, and he looked at the bland, smiling face of the heathen Chinese. Wun Lung appeared to be absolutely unconscious of having given offence. He smiled sweetly at Bunter.

"Nicee sandwich," he said. "How lucky me findee in blakee."

"You—you young brigand! They were my sandwiches—they must have dropped out of my pocket when I fell in!" shouted Bunter. "They were my sandwiches!"

"No savvy."

"I tell you they were my sandwiches!"

"No savvy."

And Wun Lung was determined not to "savvy," and Bunter failed to make him understand. The chums of the Remove were shrieking, and Billy Bunter sat in a state of boiling indignation while the train rolled onward.

THE THIRD CHAPTER.

Wun Lung's Little Joke.

BUNTER did not smile again till at a station where the juniors changed trains. Harry had a good-sized lunch-basket put into the carriage. Then the fat face of William George Bunter beamed again, and, in fact, wore a smile that wouldn't come off. Wun Lung's little joke was a thing he could not understand; but a well-filled lunch-basket went straight to his heart.

"I must say I like cold chicken," he said, proving his words by his accompanying actions. "This is very thoughtful of you, Wharton. I'm not what you'd call a greedy chap, but I do like a lot. I think it quite possible that a chicken and a veal-and-ham pie and some sausage-rolls will last me till we get to Wharton's place."

"Oh, come," said Bob Cherry, "don't you get stinting yourself! You know that your delicate constitution requires bolstering up by continual gorging!"

"Oh, really, Cherry—"

But Billy did not waste time in words. He travelled into the eatables, and nothing could exceed the seraphic contentment of his smile as he did so. The juniors all did justice to the lunch, and then Wun Lung produced a bag from under his ample coat, and there was a clink of metal. Wharton glanced at the coins he was counting, and looked surprised. Wun Lung was probably the richest junior at Greyfriars, and he was always rolling in money; a fact of which Billy Bunter took full advantage. But the little leather bag of coins, in which there was as much gold as silver, was a little gorgeous even for Wun Lung. The little Chinese met Wharton's glance with a sweet smile.

"Plenty cash," he remarked. "Me givee Chlistmas tippee, you savvy?"

Harry Wharton laughed.

"Better keep it out of sight, though," he said. "It's not safe for a kid of your age to carry so much money about. And silver tips are good enough, as a rule."

"Pool people likee cashee Chlistmas time."

Wun Lung had been handing out tips royally ever since leaving Greyfriars. He had started with Gosling, the porter, surprising that worthy with a sovereign; and then the porter at Friardale Station had been amazed with another. Wun Lung evidently meant to do the thing in style, and as it was his good little heart that prompted him, no one was inclined to say him nay. Billy Bunter glanced at the leather bag with a glimmer in his eyes. The lunch-basket was empty now, Billy having finished up the last fragment.

"I say, you fellows, I forgot to look in the rack before I came away," he remarked. "I rather expect there was a letter for me there."

"You can write to Gosling or Mrs. Kebble to send it on," said Nugent.

"Ye-es, but you see, it will be late. As a matter of fact, I was expecting a postal order this morning, and I've no doubt it was in that letter. It's very unfortunate, as it will have to stay at Greyfriars now, and I'm rather short of tin. I say, Wun Lung, would you mind cashing the postal order for me?"

"Which?"

"The one in the letter at Greyfriars," said Bunter, in a tone of patient explanation, as if it was fully established by this time that there was one in a letter at Greyfriars.

"No savvy."

"You see, it would be a couple of days before it would reach me if it were sent on, and I'd rather have the cash now."

"No savvy."

"It's for ten bob. Will you stand the ten bob, and have the postal order when we get back to Greyfriars?"

"No savvy."

Billy Bunter gave it up in disgust. The train rushed on, through a fleeting landscape dazzling in a winding-sheet of snow. There was a clatter as it stopped at last, the last stop before Wharton Magnus. Billy Bunter looked out of the window.

"I say, Wharton, how long do we stop here?"

"Three minutes; it's the last stop."

"Time for a lunch-basket—"

"Oh, draw it mild!" grunted Bob Cherry.

"If Wharton wants to stand another lunch, Cherry, I don't see why you should try to prevent him. I don't believe in interfering with a fellow."

"I'll fix it," said Wharton, laughing. He remembered that Billy Bunter was his guest, though why he had bothered himself with the cormorant of the Remove he could hardly have explained to himself. And he leaned out of the window. Billy Bunter blinked at Bob Cherry.

"Really, Cherry, you ought to let a chap do as he likes," he said. "I say—"

"Oh, rats! Shut up!"

"The shutupfulness of the honourable Bunter would be the boonful blessing to his worthy chums," sighed the nabob. "I have the pocketful chess in my pocket, and should be glad to playfully engage the esteemed Wun Lung."

"Me savvy."

And the two Orientals were soon deep in chess, while Billy Bunter discussed the contents of the second lunch-basket. The juniors could lend him little assistance this time, but Bunter was quite capable of dealing with it himself unaided. The chess went on without interruption, and so did Bunter's feed, while the rest of the juniors made things lively by singing the latest football song at the top of their voices. Bob Cherry broke off in the middle of a chorus as the train slowed down.

"Here we are, my sons!"

Wharton Magnus was the name of the station. The train stopped, and the juniors poured out. Billy Bunter gulped down the last bite, and was last out of the carriage. Hurree Singh shut up his pocket chess, leaving the game unfinished. A brisk breeze blew up and down the platform, keen from the frozen woods. A couple of porters were on the spot in a moment, ready to take the luggage—and any tips that might be forthcoming. Harry Wharton was well known there, of course, and known favourably. There was a general touching of caps and cheery greeting for the heir of Colonel Wharton of Wharton Lodge.

The luggage was piled on the station hack, but the juniors elected to walk. The colonel had not known the precise train they would arrive by, and so there was no vehicle to meet them. A walk through the frozen lanes in the crisp air was very pleasant to look forward to, after the confinement of the railway carriage for so great a distance. Harry Wharton was generous enough, but the gratuities ladled out by Wun Lung made the porters open their eyes. A feeble old village beggar was outside the station, and his wrinkled old face brightened up at the sight of Harry, in a way that showed that he had known the junior's kindness before. Harry dropped a half-crown into his brown old hand with a smile, and each of the party followed with some contribution, and Wun Lung clinked a sovereign on the little heap of silver. Old Caleb was too dim-eyed to notice it till the juniors had gone, but all of a sudden, as they strode away, they heard the tap-tap of a crutch behind them, and Harry looked round to see the old fellow tottering after them as fast as he could come.

The junior hurried back.

"What is it, Caleb? Anything wrong?" he asked.

"T' foreign young gentleman, sir," said Caleb, "he give me this by mistake."

And he held out the sovereign.

"No mistake," said Wun Lung, with an expansive smile. "Allee light."
 "It's a sovereign, sir."
 "Allee light. Chlistmas timeo."
 "God bless you, young gentleman!"
 And old Caleb was still blessing when the juniors walked on again.

Wun Lung grinned; the surprise of the old fellow seemed to please him and tickle his sense of humour. Wun Lung's little jokes were not always so harmless.

A shade crossed Harry Wharton's face as the juniors turned from the old High Street of Wharton Magnus into the lane that led towards the Lodge. A fellow in shabby attire, with a face that showed the effects of strong drink frequently taken, was lounging by a fence, and trying to light a pipe, the keen wind baffling all his efforts. The expression of the man's face was very savage, and he was muttering to himself. His face was turned partly from the juniors, and he did not see them coming, and as they advanced they heard his flow of language, which consisted principally of curses. A dog was slinking at his feet, and as the match was blown out for the fourth or fifth time, the loafer gave the wretched brute a sudden kick that sent it yelping away into the hedge.

"Cowardly beast!" muttered Bob Cherry. "I've a jolly good mind to chuck him over that fence, the beery beast!"

"The beastfulness of the honourable rotter is terrific," purred the nabob. "Suppose we bump him duckfully in the esteemed ditch?"

The man heard the murmur of voices, and turned his head. Instantly the savage expression of his face changed, and it was replaced by a look of mean and fawning humility. It was the professional beggar's look at once suddenly replacing that of the brutal hooligan. He slipped his pipe into his pocket and came towards the juniors, touching his ragged cap and almost squirming with meekness.

"Do you know that chap, Wharton?" asked Nugent, noticing the look on Harry's face.

"Yes," said Wharton. "His name is Purkiss, and he is a rotter, as you have just seen for yourself. The brute has never done a day's work in his life, I believe."

"A merry Christmas to you, young gentlemen," said Purkiss. "You remember me, Master Wharton—Corporal Purkiss—"

"Bosh!" said Harry, in his decisive way. "You worked that on me before, and I asked my uncle, and he says you never were in the Army."

"It's bitter cold weather, sir," said Purkiss, prudently changing the subject. "It's 'ard on a pore man this time of the year, and I don't know 'ow to get a meal."

"What's the matter with work?" asked Bob Cherry innocently.

The loafer shivered, whether at the cold or at the idea of work was not clear.

"There ain't much work to be got in the country this time o' year, sir," he said, "and it's rough passin' Christmas with an empty larder, young gentlemen."

"I won't give you a penny!" said Harry. "I'm more inclined to give you a hiding for kicking that dog so brutally."

And he strode on. His chums followed him, but Wun Lung seemed to linger. He had taken a sovereign from the little leather bag, and was holding it between thumb and forefinger, as if undecided whether to bestow it on the tramp or not. He had a halfpenny concealed in the palm of the same hand, but that the tramp could not see. The man's beery eyes glimmered at the sight of the gold.

"Bless your kind 'eart, sir," he said. "It's little I've 'ad to eat this blessed day. As for the dog, he deserved it."

Wun Lung hesitated.

Mr. Purkiss stretched out his hand, and the sovereign was still glimmering between the Chinese junior's finger and thumb.

"Which I'm nearly starvin', sir—"

"Velly lough," said Wun Lung sympathetically. "If you really deserve chality, me tinkee me givee cashee."

"I swears, sir, that I 'aven't tasted— Thanky kindly, sir!"

Wun Lung took his hand and pressed it, and left a coin in his palm. The tramp took off his ragged cap, and almost wriggled with delight as the junior passed quickly on. Visions of a glorious "drunk" rose before the mind of Mr. Purkiss. It was not till Wun Lung had rejoined his comrades that the grinning tramp looked at the coin in his palm.

Then he gave a sudden jump.

It was not a sovereign that rested there—it was a halfpenny! Mr. Purkiss stared at it for some minutes in dismayed amazement. Then he looked after the juniors, and saw them laughing heartily, and saw Wun Lung nearly doubled up with merriment.

A black look came over Mr. Purkiss's face. He realised that the Chinese junior had tricked him by a very simple bit of sleight-of-hand, and that he had not intended to give him the sovereign at all.

The things Mr. Purkiss muttered to himself will not bear repeating. He slouched off down the lane, gritting his teeth; but one thought was clear in his mind, and that was what he would do if he met Wun Lung on a dark night. If Mr. Purkiss's chance came, he would not be slow to take advantage of it.

THE FOURTH CHAPTER.

The Poacher.

"MARJORIE!"

The Greyfriars juniors uttered the name together as they entered upon the footpath that afforded a short cut from the road, through the wood, to the Lodge. In the path ahead of them two figures had caught their eyes—a girl and a boy. The latter was Hazeldene, of the Remove at Greyfriars; the former was his sister Marjorie, as the boys called her, was on the best of terms with the Greyfriars chums, and Colonel Wharton had asked her to the Lodge with her brother for the vacation, and Hazeldene had brought her over from their home. The juniors quickened their pace, and at the sound of footsteps in the thick fallen leaves of the path through the wood, Hazeldene and Marjorie turned their heads.

"Hallo, here you are!" said Hazeldene. "We've walked from the lower station. Fancy meeting you here."

There was a general handshaking. Bob Cherry took Miss Marjorie's hand as if it were a delicate piece of china and he were afraid of breaking it. His cheeks were very red, and his eyes downcast. A curious change had come over the sturdy junior, who was wont to greet his acquaintances with a slap on the shoulder, and a boisterous "Hallo, hallo, hallo!"

They walked on together, Harry Wharton walking beside Marjorie. Bob had made a move to take the place, but he yielded it tamely to Harry, who did not even notice that he had wanted it. Hazeldene was on the other side, and the three chatted together cheerily as they tramped over the dead leaves. Bob Cherry's usually sunny face wore a slight cloud, and Bunter noticed it. He dug the junior in the ribs, and Bob started out of a brown study with a gasp.

"I say, Cherry, it's rotten, isn't it?"

"Eh! What! What do you mean?" said Bob, turning red.

"It's rotten! I'm in the same case myself, so I know how it is," said Billy Bunter, with a pathetic look.

Bob Cherry stared at him.

"It's beastly!" said Bunter. "I suppose nothing can be done but to grin and bear it."

Bob Cherry took the fat junior by his fat ear, much to Bunter's amazement.

"You're a funny beast, Bunter," said Bob Cherry quietly, "and you amuse us sometimes; but if you start being funny on that topic, it will mean a licking for you. Do you understand?"

Bunter fairly gasped in his astonishment.

"I say, Cherry, I don't understand you. I'm not being funny: I'm speaking seriously. It's a serious subject."

"I know it is, ass, and so you can let it alone."

"But—but I feel as bad as you do, Cherry."

"Oh, shut up!"

"Haven't you got an inward pain—"

"Will you shut up?" growled Bob Cherry savagely.

"Hallo, what's the matter there?" said Nugent, looking round.

"I—I don't know," said Billy Bunter, bewildered. "I was just telling Cherry that I feel hungry after a long walk, the same as he does, and he's flying into a temper about it. He knows I get hungry."

"You—you—you were talking about getting hungry?" stammered Bob Cherry. "You—you utter young idiot! I—I thought you were speaking about—about something else!"

"What else should I be speaking about?"

"Oh, nothing; shut up!"

"But really, Cherry—"

"Oh, do ring off!"

And Bob Cherry quickened his pace and went ahead, and Bunter turned to Nugent with a look of almost idiotic bewilderment on his face.

"Do you know what Cherry's getting ratty about, Nugent?" he asked.

"Oh, go and eat coke!" said Nugent.

And Billy Bunter was unable to obtain any enlightenment on the subject. The party walked on, Billy still suffering from the pangs of suppressed hunger, and wearing a pathetic expression of which nobody chose to take any notice.

Crack!

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Marjorie started at the sudden sound of a gunshot from the wood.

The juniors stopped and looked quickly round them.

Crack! crack! crack!

"Somebody potting rabbits," said Harry Wharton. "Hallo, look there!"

A frightened bunny came skipping across the footpath, and vanished into the green thickets on the other side. The next moment there was a crash in the bushes, and a powerfully built man leaped into the path. He had a gun in his hands, which was still smoking at the muzzle.

Harry Wharton uttered an exclamation.

"Seth Ives—the poacher!"

The man looked quickly round. There was a stubble of black beard on his bronzed face, and a fur cap was drawn low over his brows.

"Young Wharton, by—"

"Poaching!" cried Harry, and he ran quickly forward. The poacher muttered an oath, and disappeared into the thickets.

"Harry!"

It was Marjorie's voice, with a note of alarm in it, that made Harry turn back instantly. He laughed.

"It's all right," he said. "But this is my uncle's land, and that rascal has been a poacher in this district for years. He takes pheasants, hares, anything, and it can never be brought home to him. And now he's potting the bunnies." The junior's face clouded. "He isn't one of the poor wretches who knock over a rabbit for dinner," he explained. "There's a gang in this district who have dealings with buyers in London, and they carry the thing on on a system, and do no end of damage. The rascal was fairly caught in the act this time, and I wish we could have laid him by the heels."

"He looked a desperate man," said Marjorie, with a shiver.

Harry laughed carelessly.

"Oh, he's only a hulking ruffian. But I say, you chaps, we shall be out potting the rabbits to-morrow, and it will be ripping. I want to get a good big bag to send to the village hospital, and there are plenty here."

"I could do with a rabbit stew now," sighed Billy Bunter. "It's amazing how hungry you get walking. I say, you fellows, how much farther is it to the Lodge?"

"There it is."

Harry Wharton's hand rose to point. The red roofs of the Lodge could be seen gleaming through the leafless trees. Billy Bunter breathed a sigh of relief.

"Buck up, then!"

And in ten minutes they were at Wharton Lodge, and ere long they were discussing a lunch which even Billy Bunter found satisfying.

THE FIFTH CHAPTER.

The Shooting Party.

CHRISTMAS at Wharton Lodge was a cheery season. Colonel Wharton and his sister, Harry's loving aunt, were an ideal host and hostess, and there were many attractions in the fine old place. With skating, sliding, snow-fighting, and shooting, the days passed in a rush of fun and gaiety, and the long evenings were a round of merriment. There had seldom been so merry a party at Christmas-tide at the Lodge, and the old colonel's kind face beamed as though he felt himself a boy again.

Wun Lung the Chinese could do many things, but handling a gun was not one of the things he could do. He declined at first to join the shooting-parties, but he allowed himself to be persuaded at last. On a crisp morning a few days after Christmas the juniors set out in high spirits, with gun on shoulder. Wun Lung, having carefully loaded his piece according to Harry's instructions, proceeded to carry it in the hollow of his arm, with the barrel horizontal and the muzzle pointing directly into the small of Bob Cherry's back.

Harry grasped the barrel and turned it hastily downward, and, of course, Wun Lung's sleeve caught in the trigger, and the gun exploded.

Crack!

Bob Cherry gave a jump, and turned round.

"Anything wrong?"

"Nothing. Only I've just saved your life," said Harry, laughing. "Wun Lung wanted to shoot you in the back."

"Why, the dangerous lunatic—"

"No shootee."

"Look here, you can keep the gun unloaded for a bit," said Harry, "and practise carrying it with the muzzle pointing to the ground."

"Me lemmebel."

And the Chinese junior pushed the muzzle down, and the butt up under his arm behind, and gave Billy Bunter a thump on the chest with it.

"Ow! What is that villain doing now?"

Wun Lung looked round.

"Me solly."

"You ass, you've nearly busted my breastbone!"

"Me velly plenty solly."

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"Oh, rats!" growled Billy Bunter. "You ought to have a catapult or a peashooter. You aren't fit to be trusted with a gun!"

"No savvy."

"Did you load mine, Nugent?" went on Billy Bunter. Nugent winked at Wharton and Bob Cherry. As a matter of fact, he had loaded Bunter's gun with a blank cartridge, in case of accidents.

"Let me see," he said thoughtfully.

Bunter rested the butt of the gun on the ground, and blinked down the barrel through his spectacles.

"You ass," shouted Hazeldene, "you'll blow your head off!"

"I'm looking to see if it's loaded," said Billy, whose knowledge of firearms was limited. "I wish you wouldn't startle me, Vaseline."

"You—you—take it away from him!" cried Hazeldene, in alarm. "He's bound to have an accident."

"The boundfulness is great."

"Rot!" said Bunter. "Do you think I can't handle a firearm. I—Oh! Ow! I'm shot! Murder! Fire! Oh!"

Bang!

"Murder! Help!"

The gun had gone off! Exactly why it had gone off Billy Bunter did not know. A fellow who fools about with a firearm never does know why it goes off.

Billy Bunter fell flat on his back, his little, fat legs kicking up the sward. The gun crashed down into the grass with smoking muzzle.

"Help!" moaned Bunter faintly. "I—I'm dying! My brains have been blown out, and the blood is pouring over my face."

"It's only perspiration, old chap."

"I can feel the blood flowing—"

"Well, I can't see any," said Harry.

"I am bleeding internally. Send for a doctor. Help! I am expiring in agony! I—I forgive you fellows for keeping me so short of grub. I—I am dying!"

"It's all right, Billy, you're not hurt."

"I'm expiring!"

"You see, it was a blank cartridge."

"The blankfulness was terrific."

Bunter sat up, recovering suddenly from his fatal wound.

"Did you say it was a blank cartridge, Nugent?"

"Ha, ha! Yes. I thought it would be better, in case of accidents."

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Hazeldene.

Bunter blinked at the shrieking chums.

"I say, you fellows, that was a mean trick to play on a fellow, you know."

"Would you rather have had your silly brains blown out?" shrieked Nugent.

"Well, certainly, there's something in that; but—but upon the whole, you fellows, I don't think I'll do any shooting to-day. A shock to the system always gives an edge to my appetite, and I think I'll get back and get some more breakfast."

"Good wheeze, Billy."

As a matter of fact, the shooting-party were not sorry to be relieved of so extremely amateur a shootist. The Chinese junior was still marching on with his gun held as Harry had told him to hold it; and Bunter put his discharged gun under his arm, and walked back in the opposite direction. The laughing juniors hurried after Wun Lung.

"You brought some more blanks, Bob?" Harry asked, in a low voice.

Bob Cherry laughed and nodded.

"May as well load Wun Lung's gun for him. We don't want him to kill himself or anybody else if it can be avoided. An inquest would mar the festive season."

"Ha, ha, ha! You're right."

"Me cally gun allee light," said Wun Lung, looking round proudly. "Where we findee labbit?"

"We're nearly on the ground," said Harry. "You stand beside Bob, and he'll load for you while you blaze away."

"Me savvy."

The juniors moved along the wood, and the barking of the keeper's dogs beyond the trees showed that the bunnies were being driven out.

Pop! Pop! Pop!

Harry Wharton was a dead shot, and Bob and Frank were passable, while Hazeldene could hit things sometimes. Wun Lung probably could not have hit the side of a house, but with blank cartridges he hadn't much chance. Bob Cherry cheerfully undertook the task of keeping the Chinese junior's gun loaded that morning. It is probable that Bob saved several lives during the next hour.

Wun Lung's idea of firing a gun was to hold it to his shoulder, pointing it in any direction, and then to shut his eyes and pull the trigger.

He was likely to do more execution among his companions

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than among the game on that system, but under the circumstances he was harmless.

The Chinese looked a little disappointed at the absence of game, while the others were bagging a good number. Nothing fell victim to his shooting, and though he pop-popped away ardently, the result remained always the same.

When the shoot was over, Wun Lung could not count a single "labbit" as his own, and he was a little shamefaced.

"Me shootee volly quick," he remarked. "Labbit quicke too. Lun away too fast."

"Hard cheese," said Bob Cherry sympathetically. "Of course, you're new to it; you'll be better with practice."

"Hallo!" said Hazeldene, coming along. "How many have you bagged, Wun Lung?"

"No baggoe."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Any success?" asked Nugent, in his turn.

"No shootee labbit."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The shooters turned homeward, with fat bags destined for the Wharton Magnus Cottage Hospital. Billy Bunter met them as they came in.

"Good sport?" he inquired.

"Ripping!" said Harry.

"How many did you bag, Wun Lung?"

"Me no baggoe," said the little Chinese, colouring a little.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Me catchee labbit if tinkee catchee," said Wun Lung. "Next time me catchee mole labbit than you."

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Bob Cherry. "How are you going to catch them? By their tails?"

"I say, Wun Lung, I'll come and put you up to a wrinkle next time," said Bunter patronisingly. "You only want to know the ropes, you know."

"Me savvy lopes," said Wun Lung, rather excitedly. "Me show you catchee labbit. Me catchee mole than allee you to-morrow."

The little Chinese spoke with great earnestness, but his promise was received with a shout of laughter; but there was a very determined expression upon the quaint little face of the heathen Chinese.

THE SIXTH CHAPTER.

Wun Lung on the Ice.

"FREEZING like anything," said Bob Cherry, when the juniors came out after lunch. The weather had taken a sudden turn, and the frosty grass crackled under the feet of the Greyfriars chums. "What price the lake?"

"Good!" said Harry. "Let's get the skates."

"Is the ice safe?" asked Billy Bunter, with a glance towards the great sheet in the grounds of the lodge, which glistened in the cold wintry sun.

"Safe as houses, Billy."

"Me likee skatee," remarked Wun Lung. "Suppossee Hullee Singh holdee me, me skatee."

"The pleasurefulness of my honourable self will be terrific," said the nabob politely.

The juniors grinned. It was not so very long since Hurree Jamset Ram Singh had learned to skate, and his extraordinary exploits on the ice at his first lesson had furnished the whole school with food for laughter for a long while. But the nabob had stuck to it, and he had picked up lately.

"Come on, then," said Nugent; "there's plenty of room for a good run, anyway. The lake must be half a mile long."

"More than that," said Harry. "It ends at the wood—you remember, where we saw Seth Ives, the poacher, the day we came down from Greyfriars."

There was a good deal of tacit divergence of opinion as to who should fasten Miss Marjorie's skates, but her brother did it. The girl's face was glowing with colour in the keen wind, and her eyes were very bright. She was very fond of skating, and the lake, with its vast sheet of ice, was one of the best places possible for the healthy exercise. The lake was long and winding in form, and in places it was encroached upon by the trees, so that it varied in width from a quarter of a mile in the widest place to a hundred yards in the narrowest. Harry and Bob, Frank Nugent and Hazeldene, were soon on the ice with Marjorie, Billy Bunter preferring to watch them from the bank. Hurree Singh and the little Chinese found greater difficulty in getting going.

Hurree Singh had been helpless enough when he was learning skating, but he had been an adept compared with the Chinese junior. Wun Lung simply clung round his neck and refused to be shifted. The nabob argued patiently.

"Hold a little furtherfull," he urged. "The easiness of the skateful exercise is terrific. There is not the slightest dangerfulness, my worthy Chinese chum."

"Me slippee."

"I will holdfully grasp you by your honourable collar, and the slipfulness will be the verge of the impossibility."

"Me slippee plenty."

"The skatefulness consists in the slipfulness," explained Hurree Jamset Ram Singh, "unless you slipfully glide on the esteemed ice, there is no possibility of skatefully progressing. I will hold you with the firm grip, and the safefulness of the attempt will be only equalled by the excellentfulness of the performance."

And Hurree Singh urged the Chinese further upon the ice.

Wun Lung promptly collapsed into a sitting position, and shot away, dragging the nabob after him into a stooping attitude.

Then, with a terrific clatter of skates the Chinese scrambled up, and shot off in another direction, grasping Hurree Singh by his scarf and dragging the astonished nabob along after him.

Then suddenly Wun Lung let go and twisted away, and Hurree Singh shot forward, unable to stop himself, and collapsed into a heap of frozen reeds.

Wun Lung made rapid play with his skates, as if unable to keep his footing, while the Nabob of Bhanipur sat up in the reeds ruefully.

"I think I will leave the pleasurefulness of the further instruction to my esteemed chums," he gasped.

"Here, come on," exclaimed Nugent, grasping Wun Lung by the arm, "I'll show you—ow—gerroff me neck!"

Wun Lung clasped Nugent wildly round the neck with both arms, and they went careering away at top speed.

"Help!" yelled Nugent. "Ow! Leggo!"

Wun Lung was dragging his head down, and Nugent could see nothing. One of his feet shot into the air, and his other knee bent, but he careered along on one skate at a spanking rate, the little Chinese clinging to him.

It was bound to lead to disaster, and Nugent was soon skating on his back, with Wun Lung sitting on his chest.

They came to a halt in the reeds near Hurree Singh, who promptly skipped out of the way. The juniors were roaring with laughter.

"Dear me," said Marjorie, "what a terribly bad skater your Chinese friend is, Harry?"

Harry Wharton laughed heartily.

"I don't know," he said. "You see, he hasn't had any bumps himself. Wun Lung is a little joker, and I fancy he is only rotting."

"Looks like it," grinned Hazeldene.

"Helpee me!" called out the little Chinese, to Bob Cherry, who was nearest. "Helpee me learnee skatee."

Bob Cherry grinned. He was beginning to understand that Wun Lung could skate if he liked, and that it was his curious sense of humour that had caused the late catastrophes.

"Come on, then, kid," he said cheerily, "give me a grip on your pigtail."

Wun Lung looked alarmed.

"No glippee pigtail," he said. "Takee hand."

"Rats!" said Bob Cherry emphatically. "It's safer to hold you by your pigtail, and I'm going to do it."

And he skated towards the little Chinese with outstretched hand, with the evident intention of grasping him by his prized pigtail.

Then Wun Lung promptly showed that he could skate.

He glided swiftly away from Bob Cherry. The junior dashed after him, but Wun Lung swept round in an extended circle and eluded him. Bob Cherry shook his fist at him.

"You young rascal! I knew you could skate."

"Me learnee quicke."

"The jokefulness of the esteemed rotten Chinese is great," said Hurree Singh. "I think I will bash him on the ice for a further great jokefulness."

And the nabob shot towards the Chinese.

But Wun Lung promptly dodged out of the way, and Hurree Singh, who was going at a great rate, ran right into Bob Cherry, and both of them went spinning.

Wun Lung, grinning gleefully, skated away at a great speed, and vanished along the lake, under the leafless branches of the trees.

"The young rascal!" said Harry Wharton, laughing.

Harry, Hazeldene, and Marjorie skated on in the wake of the Chinese. Wun Lung was skimming along like a bird, his loose garments fluttering in the wind. His quaint little face was glowing. As he went on, he turned and twisted in curious figures on the ice, till the eye could scarcely follow his movements. Right on he went, till the fringe of trees before him showed that he was reaching the extremity of the sheet of water.

Too intent upon his skating to observe his surroundings very keenly, the little Chinese did not see a pair of savage eyes that were watching him from the thickets ahead, and noting his closer approach with spiteful satisfaction.

The coppery complexion and ragged fur cap of Mr. Purkiss were hidden by the frosty thicket; and the ruffian was grasping a short, thick cudgel.

Wun Lung dashed right on, within a couple of feet of the bushes, and then spun round on his skates.

Whiz!

The oak cudgel flew through the air, but it was difficult for the ruffian's eye to follow the Chinese junior's movements, and an unexpected turn saved Wun Lung from the missile.

The cudgel flew past his head, and crashed down on the ice a dozen yards away, and the Chinese looked at it with a scared start.

Purkiss ground his teeth.

His hand sought the ground for a stone. But Harry Wharton had seen the flight of the cudgel, and he was shouting to Wun Lung.

"Look out!"

"Me lookee out."

Wharton left Marjorie's side, and made a straight run for the bank. In a second or two he was there, and kicking off his skates. Purkiss, from his position in the thicket, could not see Harry, a big tree intervening. But as soon as the junior had got rid of his skates, and came plunging through the bushes towards him, the ruffian realised that he was in danger, and he turned to run.

Harry burst through the bushes as he ran, and sprang upon him from behind and dragged him to the ground.

"Purkiss!" he cried. "I thought as much!"

"Let me go!" panted the ruffian, with an oath. "Let me go!"

"I will not let you go."

Purkiss struggled savagely, and Harry was dragged to the ground. He shouted to his comrades, who were coming up as fast as they could. Bob Cherry, on his skates, came plunging through the bushes, and threw himself headlong upon Purkiss. The rascal was crushed to the ground under the junior's weight. The ground at this spot was sloping, with a steep slope to the frozen lake. The three struggling forms rolled down the bank together, crashed through the reeds, and rolled on the ice.

Wun Lung came gliding up.

"Me catchee," he said. "Me teachee lesson. Lettee go."

On the ice Purkiss was helpless. Wun Lung took a grip on his ankles, and put himself in motion. With a gliding motion on the smooth ice, the weight of the man was nothing. On his back, with his arms outspread, and one leg kicking wildly in the air, Purkiss was dragged along in the wake of the Chinese, while the Greyfriars juniors stood round roaring with laughter.

THE SEVENTH CHAPTER.

Bunter Gives a Little Entertainment.

PURKISS could not help himself—he could only wriggle and writhe and gasp. He did so; while Wun Lung glided on, dragging him along at an increasing rate.

The juniors shrieked at the absurd sight, but Purkiss did not feel like laughing. He was utterly dazed and bewildered, and hardly knew whether he was on his head or his heels. As a matter of fact, he was upon neither, but upon his back. Wun Lung ran him forward for half the length of the lake, the juniors following, laughing too much to keep steady upon their skates.

"Me teachee luffian lesson," murmured Wun Lung.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"The lessonfulness will be terrific."

Wun Lung suddenly let go the ruffian's ankles, and allowed him to shoot on with the impetus he had gained, in the direction of the bank.

Purkiss shot away, and crashed into a mass of reeds, and lay there gasping.

He sat up, and glared at the juniors, who stood in a group looking at him and laughing. The scoundrel slowly staggered to his feet, losing his footing several times, and shook his fist at the boys, then plunged into the wood and disappeared.

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Bob Cherry. "I think he's had a lesson!"

Marjorie was laughing too; she could not help it. The sight of Purkiss's punishment had been too funny. But as the juniors turned to skate along the lake the girl's expression grew very serious, and she pressed Harry's arm a little.

"Wun Lung is in danger," she said, in a low voice. "That attack was a savage one, and might have done him real injury."

Wharton nodded.

"Yes; that was what the villain intended. I told you of the little joke Wun Lung played on him. This is his revenge. I will report this to my uncle, and the police will look for the scoundrel. He ought to be put in prison."

And when the skating was over, and the chums returned to Wharton Lodge, Harry related what had happened to the colonel.

The old soldier's brow grew very dark.

"The hound!" he muttered. "He has always so far kept himself on the safe side of the law, but he has passed the line this time. He can be charged with assault, and he shall be. I will walk down to the village this afternoon and speak to them at the station about it."

And the colonel did not forget to do so. The police in the

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neighbourhood had long known Purkiss's character, and were anxious to give him his deserts, and they were not sorry of a definite charge to act upon.

But the rascal was not to be found. It was evident that he anticipated the result of his action, for he was missing from his usual haunts, and he was searched for in vain. Whether he had left the neighbourhood, or whether he was lurking there in hiding, it was impossible to say.

Colonel Wharton, on his return, impressed upon the boys to be careful in their little excursions, and to keep together, which they promised to do; though the danger did not make, as a matter of fact, much impression on their minds.

During dinner that evening there was a thoughtful shade upon the fat face of Billy Bunter. He was thinking deeply; though that did not prevent him from making an extensive meal. After Billy had finished, and the juniors left the table, he gave Harry a dig in the ribs.

"I've been thinking, Wharton——"

"What with?" asked Bob Cherry.

"Oh, really, Cherry! I've been thinking that if you fellows liked I would give you a little ventriloquial entertainment."

Harry's heart sank a little.

At Greyfriars he would have cheerfully replied "Oh, rats!" but to a guest under his own roof that reply did not seem so suitable.

"You know I have been improving very much," said Bunter persuasively. "I mastered the ventriloquial drone a long time ago, and lately I have been throwing my voice about like—like a potato. I should be very glad to give you fellows a little entertainment—say, for about three hours."

"Make it three minutes," said Nugent.

"Oh, really, Nugent——"

"Ventriloquism," said Colonel Wharton, catching the word. "Is there a ventriloquist here? Let us have a sample, by all means."

"I shall be very glad, sir," said Bunter modestly. "Of course, you must not expect me to acquit myself exactly in the style of Professor Balmicrumpett; but I really think I could give you a ripping little entertainment."

"Oh, go ahead!" said Harry. "It's a—ripping idea."

"I'm glad to see you are beginning to understand my wonderful abilities as a ventriloquist at last, Wharton. You used to be rather jealous of me at Greyfriars. A few hours——"

"Where are you going to give the show?"

"I will stand here," said Bunter. "You can arrange the chairs in a half-circle facing me, and I will stand beside the piano. I will make my voice proceed from the piano first, and give an imitation of a man shut up in the piano and expiring of suffocation."

"Good," said the colonel.

"Very interesting," said Miss Wharton.

The juniors were grinning. There were two or three other young people at the Lodge that evening, and they took the matter seriously. Bunter was taking it seriously enough. His little fat figure looked fatter than ever in evening clothes, which seemed to be almost bursting with his plumpness. His fat face was beaming, and his very spectacles seemed to glisten with satisfaction.

"Ladies and gentlemen," he said, "I will now proceed to make my voice proceed from the grand piano."

"The proceedfulness is terrific," murmured Hurree Singh.

There was a hush in the drawing-room. All eyes were turned on Billy Bunter. Conscious that he was the centre of attraction, the fat junior assumed a more important air than ever. He cleared his throat with a preparatory cough, and began.

"Can you hear me?"

The audience waited breathlessly for a reply. Bunter's face was screwed up in the effort to produce the ventriloquial voice.

"I'm 'ere."

Unfortunately, it was only too evident that it was Bunter who was speaking the reply, which did not appear to proceed from the grand piano at all.

Colonel Wharton looked surprised. He had expected ventriloquism. Miss Wharton, who had a kind heart and was always happy so long as others were happy, smiled sweetly and encouragingly. Some of the guests looked amazed; and the Greyfriars juniors chuckled.

Billy Bunter, all unconscious of the curious results of his efforts, went on with the dialogue with the supposed person hidden in the piano.

"How did you get in there?"

"I didn't get in."

Harry looked round in amazement.

The reply came apparently from Bob Cherry, who was grinning hugely. Billy Bunter blinked round, apparently surprised himself.

"Was that you, Bob?" muttered Nugent.

"I!" said Bob Cherry. "Was what me?"

"Did you speak?"

"Of course not. It was Buntie squeaking."

"Oh!"

It looked as if Bunter were succeeding in throwing his voice, but that the voice was getting thrown in random directions.

"Don't you find it warm in there?" went on the ventriloquist.

"It's very warm, thank you."

All eyes were fixed on Colonel Wharton that time. The voice certainly seemed to come from the direction of the colonel. He seemed surprised to see the general gaze turned upon him.

"Dear me," said Miss Wharton. "We will have the screen put before the fire, dear."

"Eh?" said the colonel.

"Would you like the screen between you and the fire?"

"No, my dear. Why?"

"You remarked that it was very warm."

"I! My dear, I did not speak."

"You—you did not speak?"

"Certainly not! I fancy it was Nugent who remarked that it was warm."

"I, sir!" said Nugent. "Not at all, sir."

"It was the supposed person in the piano," said Bunter mildly. "It was my ventriloquial voice, ladies and gentlemen."

"Oh!" said Harry. "You'd better put a brake on your ventriloquial voice, old chap. It's taken to wandering."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Shall I let you out of the piano?"

"Please do. I'm suffocating."

This time it was evidently Bunter who was speaking. His ventriloquial voice was the most unreliable of ventriloquial voices.

"Do you feel bad?"

"I'm suff—suff—suffocating!" came in an expiring voice from Billy Bunter, and his face was so red and convulsed with the efforts he was making that he really looked as if he were in earnest.

Miss Wharton looked alarmed, and Wun Lung rushed to the rescue at once. A vase of flowers stood near at hand. To clutch out the flowers and dash the water into Billy Bunter's face was the work of a moment.

"Ow! Ooooh!" gasped Bunter.

The Chinese looked round proudly.

"Me blingee to," he said. "Me savee lifee!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The audience simply shrieked. Bunter gasped and yelled; and Wun Lung looked so proud of his timely achievement that the juniors yelled again.

Even the colonel was rocking with laughter. The only two who did not yell were Billy Bunter and the Chinese.

"You—you villain!" gasped Bunter. "You—you've drenched me!"

"Me savee lifee. You chokee plenty quick."

"You—you—you—"

Words failed Bunter. He rushed from the room to towel off the water and change his things; and there were no more ventriloquial entertainments that evening, nor during the rest of the stay at Wharton Lodge.

THE EIGHTH CHAPTER.

Wun Lung is Mysterious.

THE little party at Wharton Lodge occupied a long room, with beds arranged in a row as in the dormitory at Greyfriars. When the boys went to bed that night there was a curious twinkle in the almond eyes of Wun Lung which the others did not observe. The little Chinese appeared to fall asleep the soonest; but when the regular breathing of his comrades told that they were asleep he sat up in bed.

In the dimness of the room his dark eyes peered to and fro.

"Allee sleepce?" he murmured.

There was no reply.

The little Chinese waited a few moments, and then stepped quietly out of bed. He dressed himself almost without a sound, and drew on his boots. Then he crossed to the window.

He opened it, and let himself out upon the roof of an outhouse below, and closed the window behind him.

Quite unconscious of the secret departure of the Chinese junior, the Greyfriars chums slept on undisturbed.

The dark hours of the night glided on, and they did not wake, and neither did Wun Lung return.

Midnight chimed out over the woods from the clock of the church, but still the Chinese junior was absent.

Then the small hours glided by, and still there was no sound in the room save the steady breathing of the juniors.

Harry Wharton suddenly started and awoke.

Through the dimness of the night there came the first faint glimmer of dawn, but it was not sufficient to dispel the darkness.

Wharton sat up in bed.

He had heard something, and it had awakened him, but he did not know what it was. He listened intently, and a creak came to him from the window.

His glance turned in that direction instantly.

The windows of the room were old-fashioned ones, with diamond panes, and they opened outwards on hinges, which creaked a little as they moved. Outside, a darker shadow lay on the window, and a gust of bitter air told that it was slowly opening.

Harry Wharton's heart beat hard.

He knew that the window was opening under the hand of someone who had mounted upon the outhouse below. Instantly the thought of Purkiss came into his mind. The police had seen nothing of the ruffian. Was it possible that he was still lurking in the neighbourhood for revenge, and that this was the first attempt?

Harry Wharton stepped silently out of bed, and touched Bob Cherry on the shoulder, and shook him lightly.

"Lemme alone," murmured Bob drowsily. "'Tain't rising bell."

"Quiet, Bob! Wake up!"

"What is it?" whispered Bob, awake now.

"Somebody's getting in at the window."

"My only hat!"

"Quick—back me up! The others will wake when there's a row."

Harry had no time to say more, for the window had swung open, and in the darkness a scarcely visible form had leaped into the room.

Harry flung himself upon it fiercely.

Down to the floor it went, with Harry on top, and the next moment Bob Cherry piled himself on the heap.

There was a wail of anguish from the fallen intruder.

"Ow! Don't clush me!"

Harry gave a shout of amazement.

"Wun Lung!"

The other juniors were starting up in bed at the sound of the bump. Harry sprang to his feet, and dragged up the Chinese. Wun Lung rubbed his bones ruefully.

"Wun Lung, what on earth have you been doing out of doors?" cried Harry.

"Me no savvy."

"You have been out, haven't you?"

"No savvy."

"Where have you been?"

"No savvy."

Harry Wharton laughed.

"Oh, keep it a secret if you like," he said. "But you came jolly near getting hurt. I took you for a burglar."

"Young ass," said Hazeldene. "What on earth did you want to go out at this time of the night for, and why couldn't you go by the door?"

"No savvy."

"Oh, rats!"

And the juniors returned to sleep. Wun Lung did not sleep, however. The heavy bump on the floor had made him ache all over, and he was still awake when the knock came on the door as the signal to rise.

The juniors rose early, and went down for a run on the lake before breakfast, and came in with a keen appetite for that meal. Breakfast was a cheerful meal at Wharton Lodge. The juniors were thinking of another shooting excursion, and Wun Lung came in for a good many jokes on the subject of his previous exploits. But the little Chinese only smiled.

"Me catchee habbit," he said. "Me catchee mole labbit than Wharton."

Harry laughed heartily.

"We'll see you do it after breakfast," he said. "Unless you catch them by putting salt on their tails, I don't know how you'll manage it."

But breakfast was destined to be interrupted. Word was brought to the Colonel that his head keeper wished to speak to him, and he ordered the man to be shown in. Harper, the keeper, came in with a very serious face.

"Pouchers again, Harper?" said the colonel.

"Yes, sir," said Harper, pulling his forelock. "Wuss than ever, sir. I never see such nerve in my life, sir."

"What have they been doing?"

"We was on the lookout, sir, but we never expected them to come laying of their snares right up close to the house, sir."

Colonel Wharton's brows darkened.

"Is that what they have been doing?"

"Yes, sir, that they have. How many they nave took I can't say, but we've found the snares where they were used, and there's a lot of 'em."

"The rascals! We must look into this. Finish your breakfast, my boys; I shall have to leave you now."

And the colonel went out with the head keeper.

Wun Lung's face was a study.

"The rascals," said Harry. "They're getting bolder every day, it seems to me. It would be great fun to have a hunt for them some moonlight night."



Harry and Nugent hurried through the undergrowth. The poacher had fallen upon his face, and the bull-dog was standing growling just behind his ears. Black George was palpitating with terror, and dared not move on his life.

"Ripping! Let's have one."
"What you do to poachee?" asked Wun Lung, in a tremulous voice.
"Shove him into prison," said Harry.
"What you do to man who snare labbits?"
"Snare rabbits! He's a poacher, of course—he goes in chokey."
Wun Lung quietly left the room.
Some of the boys had caught the expression on his face, and they looked at one another in wonder.
"What on earth's the matter with Wun Lung?" exclaimed Hazeldene.
"He looks frightened," said Marjorie. "He must have been thinking of the poacher who attacked him yesterday."
Wharton looked thoughtful.
"It isn't like Wun Lung to be scared for nothing," he said. "I can't quite make him out this morning. I think I'll go and look for him."
And he hurried after the little Celestial. But Wun Lung had vanished.

THE NINTH CHAPTER.

Wun Lung the Sportsman.

COLONEL WHARTON came in presently with a grave face. Bob Cherry and Nugent had gone out with guns and a couple of ferrets to look for the bunnies. Harry, who was a little uneasy about Wun Lung, was looking for him. He discovered him at last in the gun-

room. The little Chinese was sitting, or rather crouching, in the deep bay of the window, and he started as Harry entered.
"No plison," he said. "No puttee in plison."
"Oh, here you are!" said Harry. "What have you been dodging me for?"
"No puttee in plison!"
Wharton looked puzzled.
"What on earth are you driving at, Wun Lung? What's that about prison?"
"No puttee in plison. Me no savvy."
"What didn't you savvy?"
"Catchee labbit poachee."
"Eh! You haven't been catching rabbits, have you?" asked Harry, laughing. "How?"
"Me catchee in flap."
"Oh, rats! That's not a sportsman's way of killing the bunnies. But what do you mean—have you been snaring them?"
"Me catchee. No savvy poachee."
Wharton understood at last, and he burst into a roar of laughter. The little Chinese looked at him curiously.
"Why laugh?" he said. "Me no savvy poachee."
"Ha, ha, ha! It isn't poaching if you catch rabbits, you young duffer—you're a guest here, and you can do as you like."
Wun Lung's face cleared wonderfully.
"Me do as likee."
"Yes, but don't use snares. Learn to shoot and use a gun,"

grinned Wharton. "I'll give you some shooting at a target in a safe place to start with."

"But me catchee labbit alleddy."

"You've caught rabbits already. Where are they?"

Wun Lung rose, and dragged out a huge sack from a corner, and Wharton to his amazement saw that it was full of the victims of the little Celestial's hunting. He stared at the sack.

"Why—my hat—you've got dozens there! Did you snare them?"

"Me catchee."

"But when—how—why?"

"Last nightee."

A light broke upon Harry.

"My hat! That's what you went out for."

"Me gose out catchee labbit. Me showee you me catchee."

"Ha, ha, ha! You must have made a night of it," Wharton roared. "And that's what Harper has put down to the poachers! Ha, ha, ha."

And Harry rushed off to tell the story of Wun Lung's prowess to the colonel. The little Chinese followed him rather uneasily, still a little nervous as to how the colonel would regard his unintentional poaching; but he was relieved when he found the old soldier shouting with laughter.

"My word, what a giddy sportsman," chuckled Hazeldene. "That young beggar is too funny to live."

"Me catchee plenty labbit."

"Ha, ha, ha."

"Me lealue shoottee gun," said Wun Lung. "Me no savvy; me tinkee catchee, allee lightee; but me lealue shoottee gun allee same Englishman."

And during the morning Harry Wharton gave the little Chinese his first lessons in handling firearms, and Wun Lung, who had plenty of intelligence, picked the thing up quickly enough; though for the present Harry deemed it advisable to keep to blank cartridges for Wun Lung when they went out shooting.

Although the extensive snaring of the night was discovered to be the work of Wun Lung, there was no doubt that the poachers had been busy in the woods, and a great deal of wanton damage had been done, which the colonel thought could be traced with sufficient certainty to Purkiss and Seth Ives and their associates. There was war between that gang of ruffians and all land-owners for a great distance round, and it was war to the knife. Colonel Wharton would never have been hard on anyone who took a hare for a meal, but it was a different matter with a gang of rascals who made a regular business of catching his game and selling it, instead of turning to honest work for a livelihood. Men who lived by theft and spent their ill-gotten gains in bestial revelry deserved no mercy. But neither the keepers nor the police could succeed in dealing satisfactorily with the "Ives gang," as they were called. Even on the occasions when he had been taken, Seth Ives had usually been able to wriggle out of the meshes of the law.

Harry Wharton was thinking over the matter, and the idea of a moonlight hunt of the poachers appealed to his adventurous nature.

The idea was hailed with enthusiasm by the other juniors. Of course, it would be necessary to keep the matter secret.

"We can get out of the window as Wun Lung did," Bob Cherry remarked. "No one would be the wiser, till we came home with a heap of prisoners, and then we should be giddy heroes."

"Ripping," said Nugent. "We might come home with broken heads instead, but that's all in the game."

"The rippingfulness would be terrific."

"The poachers are pretty busy now," Harry remarked. "We'll go out to-night. There will be a moon, and it will be splendid fun. We had better not take our guns—guns go off and cause awkward accidents in a row—but we can take a strong cudgel each, and I think we should be a match for any gang of poachers in the county."

"Yes, rather!"

"The ratherfulness is great."

"Me savvy. Me comee," said Wun Lung, beaming.

"We'll all go," said Hazeldene.

"Well, if you want a capable leader," remarked Billy Bunter modestly, "I don't mind coming along with you. I should be very useful, as in case of danger I could make my voice proceed from the trees or bushes, and make the poachers think the police were upon them."

"You'd only make them think an expiring frog was upon the scene," said Bob Cherry.

"Oh, really, Cherry—"

"Bunter can come, but he'll have to bar ventriloquism, and keep quiet."

"I could not come under those conditions. Upon the whole, perhaps, I'd better stay in—I require more sleep than you fellows."

"You take more, anyway."

And so it was settled. The secret was kept. The capture of the poachers—if it came off—was to be a huge surprise for the colonel next morning. Even Marjorie was not taken into the

secret, in case she should be alarmed, as she very probably would have been. It was as a matter of fact, a foolhardy enterprise, and the juniors were going into grave danger, though they did not quite realise it.

During the day they made some preparations in a quiet way. A set of thick cudgels were smuggled up to the bed-room in readiness, and Harry Wharton promised to wake in time for the excursion and to call the others. There was a great deal of suppressed excitement among the juniors when bedtime came.

"Are you going to stay awake all the time, Harry?" Bob Cherry asked, yawning as he laid his head upon the pillow.

"Not much. I shall wake up at midnight. I can always depend on waking up if I want to. Besides, there's the church chimes; we hear them from here."

"Good. I don't believe I shall open my eyes again till I'm shaken."

And Bob Cherry forthwith went off to sleep. The others soon followed his example, and in ten minutes there was not an open eye in the room.

Harry Wharton was right in saying that he would awake when the time came. His eyes opened, and he lay for a minute listening, and the chimes of the church bells came faintly and musically to his ears through the darkness of the night.

Silence followed the chimes. It was broken by the sound which Harry had heard the night before—the creak of the window as it was opened from outside.

Harry Wharton started.

There was a glimmer of moonlight on the outside of the panes, and as he looked there he saw the dark shadow of a head on the glass. It was too dark in the room for him to see the beds, but he had no doubt that Wun Lung was gone out on another nocturnal excursion.

"What on earth is he gone for this time?" muttered Harry. "Some little trick on us, I suppose—some humbug ready for us in the wood, perhaps."

A whisper came from Hazeldene's bed.

"I say, are you awake, Wharton?"

"Yes."

"Did you hear the window creak?"

"Yes; it's Wun Lung up to his tricks again."

"That's what I thought," Hazeldene chuckled softly. "I say, keep quiet; I'm going to get a jug of water ready for him."

"Good!" said Wharton, with a silent laugh. "He wants a lesson for alarming us in the middle of the night like this."

Hazeldene stepped quietly out of bed and removed the jug from his washstand. Then he crossed to the window, and waited for it to swing open.

It opened the next moment. A form stepped through in the dimness, and Wharton, who was watching, gave a violent start. It was too large a form for Wun Lung's; but Hazeldene noticed nothing. He had the jug of water raised in the air, and at the first glimpse of the dark form he let fly.

Swish!

There was a sudden surprised yell, and then the jug fell to the floor with a crash.

"My hat! It's not Wun Lung!"

A savage voice was rasping out oaths, and it was the voice of Purkiss. Harry Wharton grasped the cudgel from beside his bed, and sprang forward.

THE TENTH CHAPTER.

An Expedition at Midnight.

IT was indeed Purkiss—and fortunate it was for the boys that they were awake. The ruffian had a bludgeon sticking from the pocket of his woollen jacket, and there was little doubt as to what his intentions had been. The swish of the water and the icy drenching he had received almost from head to foot, had utterly confounded the ruffian, and for some moments he hardly knew what had happened.

He had no time to recover himself. Harry Wharton was springing forward with cudgel uplifted, and he wasted no ceremony upon the scoundrel.

The weapon crashed down, and though a movement saved Purkiss's head, the blow took effect upon his shoulder with stunning force, and he was hurled to the ground. There was a shout from the alarmed boys at once.

"What's the matter?"

"Who is it?"

"Get a light!"

But Harry had thrown himself upon the ruffian, and with a knee planted in his ribs was pinning him to the floor.

"Help here!" he cried. "Quick!"

"What-ho!" exclaimed Bob Cherry, rolling out of bed. "Here we are!"

"Quick! Quick!"

Purkiss was struggling desperately. His strength was great, and the boy had hard work to hold him. Hazeldene sprang to his assistance, but a blind blow from the ruffian caught him on the chest, and he bumped over on the floor.

Bob Cherry rushed on, but a kick on the shin bowled him over, and Purkiss, throwing off Harry with a great effort, got on to his feet.

Harry sprang at him again in a second. They closed, and the boy was hurled to the floor. Half a dozen hands were stretching out at the ruffian when he flung himself desperately through the window. There was a crash on the sloping roof below, and then a thud in the garden beyond.

Harry Wharton looked anxiously out of the window. He could hear Purkiss gasping and cursing in the darkness, but the sounds quickly died away. The ruffian was gone.

The noise of the struggle in the boys' bed-room had alarmed the house, and as Harry turned away from the window the door opened and Colonel Wharton appeared with a lamp in his hand.

"Why boys! What is it—what is the matter?"

"Burglars, sir!" gasped Bob Cherry, slowly getting up.

"My word, that beast has nearly busted my shin!"

"Nobody hurt, sir," said Harry quickly. "It was the rascal Purkiss. He got into the window, and I'm sorry to say he's escaped."

"He must have had a jolly hard bump on the ground, though," said Hazeldene.

The colonel snapped his teeth under his grey moustache.

"The scoundrel! I will call up some of the men to look for him."

A few minutes later lights were gleaming in the grounds. But the search was in vain, and Colonel Wharton came back ten minutes later, looking disappointed.

"He is gone, sir?"

"Yes; clean gone. He shall not escape us for long, though. But you may safely go to sleep, boys. These windows will lock; and in addition I have had Fangs tied up below."

"Oh, we're not nervous, sir. Good-night!"

And the colonel retired. The juniors looked at one another dubiously in the candle-light.

"What price our expedition, now?" murmured Bob Cherry. "With a giddy bulldog chained up under the window—"

Harry Wharton laughed.

"It's all right; Fangs knows me," he said. "We'll take him along with us, and he will help us find the poachers."

"By Jove, that's a good idea!"

"It's about time we started, if we're going," said Hazeldene, pulling on his boots.

"Yes; but we must wait till the place is quiet."

The juniors dressed themselves silently. The adventure of the night had not daunted them. In fact, the possibility of finding Purkiss again if they met the poachers made them all the more eager; and, of course, the disturbance had banished sleep from their eyelids.

They waited until half-past twelve had chimed out, and then Harry Wharton noiselessly opened the window.

The juniors, fully dressed, and muffled up in coats and scarves, were close behind him, ready for the adventure. It was bitterly cold, but the moon was emerging from the clouds, and the light growing clearer.

"It's a ripping night for a run," said Harry.

"Yes, rather. 'It's my delight of a shiny night, in the season of the year—'"

"Shut up, old chap—you'll alarm Fangs."

"The alarmfulness will be terrific if the esteemed Cherry sings."

Harry Wharton stepped out of the window, and his comrades followed him. The junior dropped lightly to the ground, and there was a growl and a glimmer of teeth.

"Fangs! Old doggie! All right, doggie!" whispered Harry.

The bulldog knew his young master, and the momentary ferocity died away. Harry unfastened the chain from his collar.

"Come on, you fellows; Fangs is all right!"

One by one the juniors dropped from the sloping roof into the garden. Harry, with his hand on the collar of the bulldog, led the way. They quitted the garden, and in a few minutes more they were in the wood.

Round them were ghostly light and shade, changing with every breath of the wind that rustled the branches or stirred the leafless bushes.

The juniors looked round them very alertly, in the novelty of the expedition fearing a poacher in every moving shadow.

"This way," said Harry, in a whisper. "We shall find them in the south spinney, if at all, I expect."

The juniors followed his lead through the shadowy mazes of the wood.

"Look out here," said Harry, turning his head. "The ground is treacherous—you can tumble into a hole full of snow if you're not careful."

"Oh, that's all right," said Bob Cherry cheerily. "I—oh!"

He broke off suddenly as he plunged up to his waist in a hollow filled with drifted snow, and began to flounder.

"Ow! Help!"

"Me helpee!" said Wun Lung softly; and he caught hold of Bob's hair and began to drag him out.

"Oowww!" gasped Bob. "Leggo! Hold on! Leave go! You young villain!"

"Me helpee!"

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"Ow! ow! Drag him off!"

Two or three hands grasped Bob, and he was yanked out of the drift. He turned wrathfully upon Wun Lung.

"What do you mean by pulling my hair, you young rascal?"

The little Celestial looked innocently surprised.

"Me helpee out."

"Quiet!" said Harry. "Don't make a row. Keep out of the next one, Bob, old fellow, and it will be all right."

"That's all very well—"

"Then come along."

Bob Cherry grunted and followed his leader. The juniors plunged on through the dark woods, now and then emerging into an open tract where the moonlight softly fell. Nugent pressed Harry's arm.

"You're sure you know your way, Harry?"

Wharton laughed softly.

"I've roamed in these woods since I was a tot," he said. "I could find my way about them blindfold. You can rely on me."

"How do you know we shall find them in the south spinney?" Nugent asked, curiously.

"We shall find them there if at all. You see, the wind is blowing from the north, and shots fired there won't be heard from the house."

"Oh, I see!"

"We're pretty nearly near enough to hear them now, though, if they were firing," Harry muttered. "Listen!"

The wind was blowing strongly from the north, and, of course, sounds were carried in the opposite direction. But the juniors were now close upon the spinney, and from the gloom ahead came a muffled sound.

Cr-ack! Cr-ack!

The boys started—and stopped! It was the sound of guns, fired within a hundred yards of the spot where they stood!

THE ELEVENTH CHAPTER.

The First Foe.

THE Greyfriars juniors stood with beating hearts, silent and still. For the first time they realised clearly the terrible danger of the enterprise they had entered upon so lightly.

In the spinney the poachers were at work—armed and desperate ruffians. How many of them there were the boys could not tell, but Harry had distinguished at least two guns.

They were upon the verge of an adventure that might end terribly, yet there was not in a single mind the thought of going back.

Hazeldene was looking a little pale, that was all.

"They're there!" muttered Bob Cherry tensely.

Wharton nodded.

"Yes. Don't make a sound, or the wind will carry it to them and alarm them."

"What's the programme? You're leader, you know."

"We must get round to the south of them, or they'll hear us coming, and bolt—or be prepared. We want to take them by surprise."

"You're right."

"Follow me, then."

"Sure the dog won't make a row?"

"Oh, Fangs is all right."

The dog's eyes were glistening, but his tongue was silent. Harry's hand was still on his collar. Wharton led the way in a wide detour round the spinney. Wun Lung suddenly clutched his arm. The little Chinese was singularly acute of hearing.

"Me heal footstep."

"Stop, kids!"

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Wharton spoke doubtfully; he had heard nothing himself. But even as the juniors halted, a man in a rough coat and with a gun in the hollow of his arm came tramping through the thickets.

That he was a poacher it did not need a second glance to tell. He was evidently one of the gang at work in the spinney.

The juniors felt their hearts beat thickly. The man was tramping straight towards them, and in a second more would see them. They had no chance to avoid the encounter, if they had wished to do so.

The next moment he saw them in the glimmering moonlight, and stopped with a startled oath and clutched his gun.

But Harry Wharton was already upon him, and a fierce blow from his cudgel numbed the poacher's arm, and the gun went down with a crash to the ground.

"Cuss you—cuss—"

The ruffian was dragged down, furiously struggling.

Wun Lung thoughtfully clapped a hand over his mouth, and the torrent of curses was stopped, while the juniors piled themselves on the fallen rascal.

"Fangs! Here, Fangs!"

The bulldog growled, and his white, sharp teeth glistened just over the face of the fallen poacher. The man started and shuddered, and his struggles ceased immediately.

"Mercy!" he gasped. "Oh, take him away!"

"Quiet, then."

"I give in! Take him away!"

"Don't move, unless you want his teeth in your throat," said Harry Wharton grimly, and he rose from the ruffian.

The man lay untouched; but the jaws of the bulldog were close to his throat, and he lay numbed with terror, without daring to move a limb.

"Take him away!" he mumbled. "It's young Master Wharton there, ain't it? I thought so. They're at work in the spinney, Master Wharton—Seth Ives, and Black George, and Purkiss."

"You need tell me nothing," said Harry, with a gesture of disgust. "I am not asking you to betray your associates."

"But I tell you, Master Wharton—"

"Silence! We must secure this rascal somehow. Did you bring the cord, Bob?"

"Here it is."

"Good! Lend a hand, and we'll have him safe in a jiffy."

"Master Wharton, I—"

"Hold your tongue!"

The poacher relapsed into sullen silence. His hands and feet were bound, and then an extra length of cord secured him to a tree.

"Safe enough!" said Bob Cherry, with a chuckle of satisfaction.

"I—I shall be froze!"

"We shall come back for you," said Harry.

"I—I—don't leave me, young gents. By jingo, if you leave me 'ere, I'll yell, and—Ow—ow—ow—ow!"

Bob Cherry was stuffing his handkerchief into the ruffian's mouth. It was jammed well in, and tied with a length of twine, so that it could not be ejected.

"I don't think you'll yell now, my pippin," said Bob Cherry pleasantly. "What do you think?"

The man only glared at him savagely; he could do nothing else. Leaving him alone, still glaring with rage, the juniors plunged into the wood, and made their way cautiously to the southern side of the spinney.

THE TWELFTH CHAPTER.

A Fight to a Finish.

"WHERE'S Wun Lung?"

Harry Wharton asked the question ten minutes later, as he looked round and noted that the Chinese junior was not to be seen.

There was no reply.

Harry stopped and turned back.

"Wun Lung! Are you there?"

"He doesn't seem to be," said Bob Cherry, looking round.

"He was following a few paces behind me. Hallo, hallo, hallo! Wun Lung!"

But the Chinese junior's voice did not reply. He was not there. An anxious look came over Harry's face.

"He must have mistaken the path," he exclaimed. "We can't shout to him without betraying ourselves to the poachers."

"He won't come to any harm," said Hazeldene. "We can halloo for him as we go back."

"That's so."

"Unless he should fall in with the poachers alone," said Nugent.

Harry's brow contracted.

"Let's look for him, chaps—or, rather, let's get at close quarters with the poachers as soon as possible. That will be

best. We might look for Wun Lung for hours here without finding him."

"True. Let's keep on."

"The keeponfulness is the wheezy good idea."

All the juniors were anxious as they plunged on through the shadowy wood. No one had noticed just when Wun Lung had missed the track, and he might have been separated for the past ten minutes. In that case he was doubtless lost in the wood, and the fear of alarming the poachers in the spinney would keep him from hallooing to his comrades.

Harry remembered Purkiss, and his hatred towards the Chinese boy, and he shivered at the thought of Wun Lung falling in alone with the poachers.

While the juniors were pressing forward, to get to close quarters with the as yet unsuspecting enemy as soon as possible, the faint rays of the moon fell upon the yellow skin and glistening eyes of Wun Lung, scarce a hundred yards distant. But he might as well have been a hundred miles away, for all he could see or hear of his friends.

The Chinese had missed the juniors in plunging through a trackless thicket, and he had stopped to listen for them; and they were treading too cautiously for him to hear any sound.

He had followed on in the hope of finding them, and the tangled nature of the wood sent him further and further off the track.

He had halted now in a narrow glade, where the moonlight faintly fell, utterly at a loss. His almond eyes glistened with uneasiness as he looked round him into the dark, silent wood.

"Me losse," he murmured—"losse way. No findee."

There was nothing to guide him. Round the glade were the gnarled, frosty trunks, overhead the branches bare of foliage, threading against the sky, with the moon sailing beyond.

The gusts of keen wind told Wun Lung the points of the compass, for he remembered Harry Wharton saying that the wind was blowing from the north.

But to follow on in that direction might easily cause him to overshoot the mark, and leave his friends behind him in the wood.

The little Chinese stood quiet, motionless, uneasy—listening! If he could only hear a footstep or a voice to guide him.

He uttered a joyful exclamation as there was a sudden rustle in a thicket! His friends were coming back for him, then!

"Hally! Hally Wharton! Here I am!" He called out the words joyfully.

The rustle in the thicket suddenly ceased. Then a voice was audible, the tones of which sent Wun Lung's blood with a rush to his heart.

"By hokey, it's 'im!"

The next moment the footsteps changed their direction, and the burly form of Purkiss sprang out into the glade. His coppery face was furiously excited, his little beery eyes twinkling with savage satisfaction.

The ferocity of the ruffian's look held Wun Lung spellbound for a moment. Then he turned to flee.

"Stop, you whelp!"

Purkiss sprang savagely after him, and caught his foot in a trailing root, and went with a crash to the ground.

Wun Lung was not slow to take advantage of his chance. Fear lent him wings, and he fairly flew into the wood. But there was a rustle in the thickets before him, and Purkiss was calling out fiercely behind:

"Stop him, George! Stop him, Seth! A spy!"

Two burly forms loomed up in the gloom, and Wun Lung, who was running right towards them, stopped in utter dismay.

The heavy hand of Seth Ives grasped his shoulder.

"It's the Chinese brat!"

Wun Lung shivered in the ruffian's powerful grasp. With all his wiliness, all his cuteness, he was caught now. Even his ju-jitsu was little likely to avail him against so bulky an antagonist; but the desperate Oriental tried it. He seemed to curl round the ruffian who held him, and one of Seth Ives's legs was swept from under him. With an oath, the ruffian reeled over and crashed to the ground.

He was still grasping Wun Lung, and the little Chinese strove in vain to tear himself loose. He might have succeeded, but Black George's grasp was quickly upon him.

"Keep still, you confounded eel," growled the poacher.

Purkiss came panting up. He promptly twisted his hand into Wun Lung's pigtail, and the Chinese was a helpless prisoner.

Seth Ives staggered to his feet. There was a very ugly expression upon the poacher's stubbly face.

Wun Lung stood palpitating in the grasp of the ruffians, like a scared rabbit, his dark eyes turning from face to face in terror.

The savage grin on Purkiss's features boded the worst for him. The ruffian tightened his grip, gritting his teeth.

"Got him!" he said, "Got him! This is the brat who tricked me, and who dragged me over the ice on my back, with the others laughing at me. This is the brat."

"Only jokee," pleaded Wun Lung. "Nicee jokee."

Purkiss laughed savagely.

"And now I'm going to joke with you," he snarled.

"Hold on," said Seth Ives. "Hold on a minute, Purkiss. What is the brat doing out here at this time of the night?"

"I don't know, or care. Give me your cudgel, George!"

"Fool! we must know. Do you think it's likely he's out here alone?" snarled Ives. "It looks to me as if there's something wrong."

"Well, ask him then," growled Purkiss.

Seth Ives grasped the Chinese boy by the shoulder and drew Wun Lung towards him, his evil eyes reading the frightened little face.

"Brat! Did you come out alone to-night?"

"No savvy."

"Can't you speak English?"

"No savvy."

"Have you any friends in the wood here?"

"No savvy."

Seth Ives shook him furiously.

"Will you answer me?"

"No savvy."

"He means that he don't understand; but he understands well enough if he chooses," said Seth Ives, with an oath. "We haven't heard or seen anything of any others. The young fool may have come out alone—perhaps for some lark."

"Are you done with him?"

"What are you going to do?" asked Ives, abruptly.

Perkins swung the heavy oaken cudgel into the air.

"Don't be a fool, Purkiss. He will tell tales."

"He won't be able to when I'm done with him."

"Are you mad? You're not going to—"

Purkiss laughed scoffingly.

"No, I'm not! I'm looking after my neck. But he won't tell tales after what I shall give him, all the same."

"Don't go too far, that's all," said Seth Ives, uneasily. "And look here, you can do it by yourself. I'll have no hand in it."

"Nor I," said Black George.

"Go, then. Do you think I care. I'm going to smash him!"

Wun Lung trembled. The deadly purpose in the ruffian's eyes was not to be mistaken. He did not intend to take the boy's life—his coward nature stopped him at that. But a savage beating, which might leave the boy a cripple or an idiot for life—that was what was in the mind of the brute.

Wun Lung's eyes were fixed upon the villain, watching his every movement. The Chinese boy's brain worked rapidly.

Seth Ives and Black George, after a moment or two's hesitation, plunged into the wood, leaving Purkiss alone with his victim. The ruffian, with a ferocious grin, swung the cudgel into the air.

Wun Lung dodged under his upraised arm, and caught him round the body. The next moment Purkiss went with a crash to the ground, with the little Chinese on top.

"Help! Help!"

Wun Lung shrieked out the appeal, and his voice rang with a thousand echoes through the silent glades of the wood.

There was a shout from the distance.

Purkiss was grinding his teeth. He struggled up, and the Chinese was unable to prevent him, but he clung desperately to his burly foe, and still every moment his shrieks for help rang through the wood. Purkiss was calling to his associates, but they seemed in no hurry to come to his aid.

"You brat!" Purkiss seemed to grind the words through his teeth, "I'll kill you!"

"Help!"

A shout rang in the wood; closer now. The Greyfriars chums were tearing to the rescue, crashing through bush and briar.

"Help!"

"Fool, can't you manage a brat alone," hissed Seth Ives, as he came up, and grasped the Chinese boy. "Hark! what is that?"

Purkiss did not reply. He aimed a blow at Wun Lung, but he had dropped his weapon in the struggle, and the Chinese dodged the clenched fist.

From the thickets a couple of running figures burst, and Harry Wharton and Bob Cherry hurled themselves upon the poachers.

Black George fled through the thickets, but Ives and Purkiss had no chance.

Ives let go Wun Lung, but as he did so Harry's cudgel crashed upon the side of his head, and he dropped half-stunned to the ground.

Bob Cherry aimed a hasty blow at Purkiss, which the villain dodged, and the next second they were at close quarters.

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Bob Cherry went down heavily in the grasp of the ruffian, but Wun Lung was gripping Purkiss the next moment, and between them the two juniors kept him busy. Seth Ives staggered half to his feet, but a swinging blow from Harry's weapon sent him crashing down again.

Nugent was on the scene by this time. There was a bump as he hurled himself upon Seth Ives, and crushed him down into the sward. There was a low growl as a bull dog shot past, and tore away on the track of Black George.

Hurree Singh and Hazeldene came panting up, and the poachers found themselves now hopelessly outnumbered.

They fought desperately, and hard blows were given and taken on both sides; but numbers told, and the fortune of war favoured the chums of Greyfriars. In five minutes or less Seth Ives and Purkiss were prisoners, their arms secured behind their backs with their own belts.

They lay panting and cursing in the frozen grass, and the juniors were panting too with their exertions. From the direction Black George had taken came a terrified yell and the snarling of a dog. Bob Cherry gave a shout of delight.

"Fangs has got him!"

Harry and Nugent hurried in the direction of the snapping. The poacher had fallen upon his face, and the bull dog was standing growling just behind his ears. Black George was palpitating with terror, and dared not move on his life.

"Good old Fangs!" cried Harry, patting the bull dog's massive head. "Collar the rascal, Frank!"

Black George was promptly secured. His arms were bound behind him, and he was dragged back to where the others had been captured. The juniors were in high glee now, and Wun Lung was grinning from ear to ear. Save for a few bruises, they were not hurt, and the expedition had been a success! The poachers were captured!

"You've had a narrow escape, Wun Lung," said Harry, patting the Chinese junior on the shoulder, "but all's well that ends well."

"The wellfulness of the end is terrific."

"Me allee light," murmured Wun Lung. "Me tinkee poachee go plison, plenty good."

"They'll be in prison before dawn," said Harry grimly.

Seth Ives and Purkiss and Black George, with their arms bound and the grasp of the juniors upon them, were compelled to march back to the spot where the Greyfriars chums had left their first prisoner tied to the tree. He was released, and tied arm to arm with Purkiss, and then the captured poachers were marched to the Lodge. On the way they tried pleading, threatening, and cursing, all in vain—their captors were not to be moved. They arrived at the Lodge, and Harry Wharton knocked up Harper, the head keeper. The keeper's amazement at the sight of the poachers was great; but it was increased when Harry concisely explained to him what had happened.

"Master Harry!" gasped the keeper, "what will the colonel say? I'll call some of the men to take these scoundrels to the lock-up, and you young gents had better go back to bed."

Now that the excitement was over, the chums were conscious of the fact that they were tired and sleepy. The keeper's advice was too good not to be taken; and a few minutes later the juniors were climbing in at the window, to sleep the sleep of the just till the morning.

Colonel Wharton's amazement at the news he received in the morning was great. He could hardly credit it at first, but the sight of the gang of poachers in custody convinced him. He was a little angry with the boys for running such a risk without his knowledge; but his satisfaction at their success was unbounded.

It was the last adventure of that eventful holiday, but the boys enjoyed a time during the remainder of the vacation which they agreed in describing as "ripping," a description with which Marjorie fully concurred. And the time to return to Greyfriars came all too soon!

13 THE END.

NEXT TUESDAY:

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GRAND TALE OF ARMY LIFE.



READ THIS FIRST.

On the death of his father, Jack Dashwood finds to his astonishment that he has been practically disinherited in favour of his Uncle Dominic and Cousin Leonard. He consequently enlists in the 25th Hussars, under the name of Tom Howard, and soon becomes a corporal. Unfortunately for Jack, however, his Cousin Leonard is attached to the 25th as second lieutenant, and, with the aid of a bullying trooper named Sligo, succeeds in getting Jack deprived of his stripes. Dominic Dashwood's death occurs just as the 25th are sailing for India. On their arrival there, Leonard transfers into the Ploughshires, while Jack is soon reinstated favourite, and becomes once more full corporal. A frontier war breaks out, and the 25th receive orders to mobilise for the front. Sligo is bribed by Dashwood to drug Tom Howard one night while the young corporal is on picket duty. Tom falls asleep at his post and is told that in due time he will be court-martialled. In the meantime, Tom, with Bill Sloggett, is told off to accompany a party of sappers who are to blow up an old ruin, in the underground passages of which a number of Pathans are lurking. Becoming impatient of delay, Tom and Bill enter the passages, unaware that two equally impatient Bengal Lancers have preceded them, and lose their bearings. In the course of their wanderings underground, the two Hussars meet the two native cavalymen, and the four join forces to resist the attack of the tribesmen. Hemmed in the angle of a wall, they are in a tight place, and one of the Lancers, a duffardar, gives a shout of warning, as he sees half-a-dozen of the Pathans run back to their fire and pick up their rifles.

(Now go on with the story.)

How Leonard Dashwood Joined a Search-Party and Found Something He Did Not Expect.

"We're lost!" said the duffardar, reeling as a tulwar cleft his left arm almost to the bone; but the next moment his cry changed to one of delight, for he had staggered into an opening which they had not noticed before, and the duffardar saved himself by a miracle from tripping over a stone stair.

"Up, sahibs—up! This way, Bolar Din!"

And, making a last desperate effort to cover the retreat, the duffardar sprang forward with a circular sweep of his keen blade. The sowar had joined them, and he and the Hussars sprang up the staircase, the duffardar retiring step by step as a roar of disappointed rage burst from the Pathans' lips. And then the already half-expected happened.

A curious, distant rumble rolled through the vault, followed by a terrific explosion. The superstitious tribesmen sprang back, tumbling over each other, and crying aloud to Allah. Another and another deafening crash rent the air, and the pillars of the temple rocked violently.

"They've fired the mine!" cried Tom; but his words were drowned in the sudden collapse of the room they had just left.

As though some giant hand had just plucked those pillars from their foundations, they bent and snapped like some over-strained bow; roof and walls fell in upon the terrified rebels, and amid the choking cloud of dust and smoke that filled the air, the corporal and his comrades sank, stupefied, upon the steps.

The Engineer captain had retired to the foot of the hill with his party when they lit the fuse, and it was a truly magnificent spectacle that greeted his eye. Following upon the first boom of the explosion, a dense black cloud, many yards wide, rose high up into the sky, spreading out like the top of an elm-tree in full foliage, and hurling debris far and wide. When it had subsided, the ancient ruins on the hill

top were seen to have collapsed into a shapeless mass, and great wreaths of smoke poured out from among them.

The officer's satisfaction was considerably damped the next moment, as four Bengal Lancers galloped up to him with loud cries of consternation.

"Oh, sahib, we did not know you were laying a mine!" they cried. "Two of our companions were within there!"

"The dickens they were!" exclaimed the captain. "That's uncommonly awkward!" He looked round for his Hussar guides, but they were not to be seen, as the cordon of Lancers came up one after another and formed up beside the Engineers.

"Sound the 'assembly,' bugler," he said. "I made certain those fellows had got out some other way!"

But there was no response to the bugle-call, and the captain strode up to the ruins, the rest following him.

The explosion had done its work well, and the hill itself had subsided to the south, showing long, volcanic-like fissures radiating from the ruined temple like the spokes of a wheel.

The captain bit his lip and tugged at his moustache. It was very unfortunate, but it could not be helped, and it was something of a relief when he heard the cry of "Halt!" behind him, and, turning round, saw a company of the Ploughshires that had been despatched, under the command of Lieutenant Dashwood. The explosion had been so long in coming that those in camp had begun to fear that the little party had been cut off.

Dashwood halted his men and joined the captain.

"By gad, you've made a pretty mess of it!" he said, fixing his eyeglass and looking at the shattered walls, where he and his company had experienced so exciting an adventure.

"Yes; that's not the worst of it!" said the captain, glad to have a white man to confide in. "Unfortunately a couple of those confounded Bengal Lancers have been poking their noses where they had no business to be, and I'm afraid they're done for. And it does not end there, either for a corporal of Hussars and a trooper acted as my guide here, and I'm sorry to say they're in there, too."

Leonard Dashwood's eyes contracted, and he swallowed a great lump that had risen in his throat.

"Who's the corporal?" he said. "You know I was in the 25th when I first joined."

"Really!" said the Engineer, for the subject did not interest him. "His name was Howard, I believe!"

And he strode forward and bent down to look into one of the great, yawning cracks, with the faint hope that he might discover some trace of the missing men. He did not see the convulsion that worked in Dashwood's face, nor the tightening of the fists.

"Is it possible—is it possible?" muttered the scoundrel. "Jack Dashwood dead at last!"

"If your fellows have got their spades with them, I think we had better dig away here. I see something like a dead nigger at the bottom of this cleft, and we might come across the others."

"Seems to me hardly worth the trouble," said Leonard, frowning. "Nothing could possibly live inside that place when you fired the train!"

"I'm not going back without a thorough search!" replied the officer sharply.

And he gave the word to the Bengal Lancers to dismount, and to his own men to come forward to the spot where he stood.

Every now and then from the interior of the pile of ruins a dull crash would boom out as some huge fragment of the shattered masonry subsided. The Lancers spread over the

hillside, searching diligently, and the Ploughshires, hearing what had happened, got out their entrenching tools with considerable alacrity, and soon the hill was as busy as an ant-heap, with men digging and turning the soil in every direction.

Private Johnson made himself very active, remembering how the missing corporal had dashed in so bravely and fearlessly to their help, and with three or four men he started to explore a long ravine in the hillside strewn with fragments of broken stone, one of the far-reaching results of the explosion.

Every now and then he sank knee-deep, and went warily, for the foothold was very precarious. Once their weight caused a mimic landslip, and they all rolled, embedded in the sand, some thirty yards down the hillside. But Private Johnson was persistent, and was at length rewarded in a very singular manner.

He had struggled a few paces ahead of his companions, helping himself up the steep side of the cleft with the butt of his rifle, when the man behind him sprang back with a shout. Private Johnson, without any warning, had suddenly disappeared from view, vanishing utterly and entirely, and the ground whereon he had stood subsided with him. The startled men gathered together and peered over the edge of what was now a cup-shaped depression, with a gaping hole at the bottom of it. Their shouts brought Leonard Dashwood and the captain hurrying up, and they were told in excited voices what had happened.

"Bring some tackle here!" shouted the Engineer captain. "I am going down into that place!"

"It's useless," said Dashwood, biting his lips. "The man must be smothered with all the weight of that sand."

"That's what I am going to find out," said the captain.

And when they had brought ropes, he made a noose at the end of one, slipped his arms through it, and they lowered him down the crater side. The hole at the bottom enlarged considerably as he reached the edge of it.

"Steady now!" he called back. "And when I tug three times on the rope, haul it up."

The next moment he had passed out of sight, and the rope continued to pay out to the length of about four yards.

Like the crowd at the pit-brow when the rescue-party had gone down the shaft, the Ploughshires and Lancers and Engineers crowded round the edge of the circular cavity, hardly daring to move, lest they should precipitate more sand and stones on the plucky man below.

Then, after an age of waiting, as it seemed, three tugs were given on the rope, and, with a "Heave ho!" they hauled up carefully.

The crumpled turban of Duffadar Lalah Singh suddenly appeared, and as they dragged him towards them, a grin on his face, he left a great smear of blood on the sand from his wounded arm. His face was ghastly pale, and he could not speak; but he pointed down again with an impatient gesture of his hand, and they lowered the rope with all speed. Bolar Din was the next to come up, grinning like a monkey, and he began a voluble explanation to his comrades, which was as Greek to the Ploughshire boys.

"Down with her!" cried the sergeant. "I've a jolly good mind to go myself and give the captain a hand!"

"Hold hard!" cried Leonard Dashwood. And before they knew what he was about, he had snatched the noose from the sergeant's hands, and was sliding down the bank. That all the missing men should have been discovered at one place was too wildly improbable; and, partly with a view to helping the captain, and partly from curiosity to peep into the hidden mysteries below, Leonard had acted on a sudden impulse, and now found himself on the edge of a hole, with the sand sliding past him, and disappearing in a cascade through the opening.

"Look out, Burrows," he called; "I'm coming down!"

"Stay where you are—stay where you are!" came the reply, in a muffled tone. "Hang on to the rope, and give a hand!"

An arm in khaki stretched up out of the darkness, and Leonard, digging his heel into the loose earth, seized hold of it, and felt the fingers grasp his own with a tremendous pressure. He cast his eyes to the top of the bank, and shouted to the men to haul. The rope tightened, and he jerked a dishevelled figure into view.

"Well, I hope you are satisfied," he said. "You've found your two men—"

And then the words died away in his throat, for it was not the captain who stood before him, but Jack Dashwood, who, when he had secured his footing, let go of his cousin's hand, and laughed strangely.

"You don't seem very pleased to see me," he said, reeling. "I believe if you'd known who it was, you would have dropped me back into that abyss again."

"You never said a truer word in your life!" hissed Leonard Dashwood, glaring at him with malevolent hate. "Hang you, I thought I was rid of you this time!"

A Most Remarkable Discovery.

The fates were decidedly unkind to Trooper Alf Sligo, who had gone down to the base hospital with a wound, it is true; but his main object was to get away from the fighting, and have a good time.

To his disgust, his wound healed with astonishing rapidity, and in something less than a week the medical officer discharged him as fit to rejoin his regiment.

And though Sligo pleaded internal pains, and certainly looked the picture of dejection, the M.O. had seen that sort of thing before, and would have none of it.

There were half a dozen other convalescents, all as eager to get to the front again as Sligo was the reverse, and as a convoy of ammunition was going up to the front under the escort of some Bengal Lancers, Sligo and his companions were warned that they would go with it.

On the morning of their departure, while the sowars were saddling up, and Sligo stood frowning at the tents of the base hospital, the mail came in from home, and after they had picked out the letters for the hospital, it was arranged that the convoy should carry the rest up to the field force for distribution to their rightful owners.

"Here, you," said the orderly-sergeant, beckoning to Alf Sligo, "there are twenty letters for the 25th. You can stick them in your pocket, and hand them round when you get up there. Your name's Sligo, isn't it?"

"Yus!" said Sligo, stretching out his hand.

"Well, there's one for you, anyway."

Sligo snatched at the packet, and, running his eye greedily through it, picked out his own letter, and gave a little exclamation of disgust, as he saw the shaky scrawl of his wife.

"More grousing, I suppose. Haven't sent her any money. Usual thing, I bet!" he grumbled, tearing open the flimsy envelope, as the orderly-sergeant went back to his tent. "Hallo, 'Dashwood'!" exclaimed Sligo, catching sight of the familiar name. "What's all this about?"

It was a pathetic little epistle, badly written, and worse spelt. It told a tale of neglect and poverty—how the baby had died, which was, of course, a blessing.

Mrs. Sligo had fallen upon evil times, but of late her luck had turned. She had got work as a cleaner of offices, and for the first time in her life she was living in a respectable house, where she had made a friend.

The name of Sergeant Hogan did not, at first sight, mean anything to Sligo, but as he read on he found that the old soldier was going to play a very important part in the fortunes of several people of his acquaintance.

We will not give Mrs. Sligo's letter in her own words. They were ill-chosen, and would be difficult to follow; but the gist of her letter was this:

Her work had led her to a certain set of offices in Lincoln's Inn Fields, formerly occupied by Mr. Dominic Dashwood.

The firm had changed. New clerks bent over papers, new principals interviewed clients in the panelled room with the green-baize door; but the old furniture still remained there, and in the corner stood the iron safe that had contained Dominic Dashwood's most precious papers and documents.

The safe stood on four feet, which raised it about four inches from the floor, and Mrs. Sligo, being a conscientious little body, had raked out the dust of ages from beneath it—a thing undreamed of by previous generations of charwomen.

While so doing, she had brought to light a paper discoloured with dirt and exposure, and had read it by the light of the candle that stood beside her pal.

To the ordinary mind it would have represented nothing. Most women would have placed it in the dustpan, and from thence to the rubbish heap; but upon the paper the name of Dashwood caught Mrs. Sligo's eyes, and as she read a cold tremor seized her.

Some three months before, a grey-moustached, straight-backed old soldier had taken a room in the tenement house, where Mrs. Sligo laid her weary head at night—an old man with an abrupt military manner, and a pair of bright eyes that always seemed to be searching for something.

"That's too heavy for ye. Let me give ye a hand, young woman," Sergeant Hogan had said, surprising the frail little woman struggling upstairs with a huge bucket of coal and a bad cough.

And he had carried it up to her room for her, and set it down on the floor with a crash, and casting those curious eyes of his about him, as was his wont, had seen a faded photograph on the mantelpiece, about the only ornament the room contained, if, indeed, Alf Sligo's presentment could be termed an ornament.

"You know someone in the Hussars?" said the sergeant sharply.

"That's my 'usband, sir," said Mrs. Sligo. "He's in India with the 25th."

"What!" exclaimed Hogan. "That's my own regiment!"

And there and then began a strange friendship between the Irish sergeant and the little Cockney office-cleaner, whose room, bare and comfortless as it was, was always neat and tidy.

The reason of Sergeant Hogan's appearance in the neighbourhood of Clare Market needs a word of explanation. In his comfortable quarters at Vivian Towers, the old man had brooded over the rascality of his late master's brother and the gross injustice that had driven Master Jack into the ranks until he could stand it no longer.

He felt it incumbent upon himself to get to the bottom of the mystery, if it were possible, and in spite of all protests from Dick Vivian's father, Hogan packed his worldly belongings in an old kit-bag one November morning and came to London, with no actual plan, but a very set purpose in his mind.

For six months he had haunted the neighbourhood of Lincoln's Inn Fields, found out the haunts and habits of the various clerks who had been in Dominic Dashwood's employ, followed them, watched them, got into conversation with some, was snubbed by several, and discovered nothing.

He was alone in London, and there was none with whom he could discuss the question that had become a mania with him, until Fate threw Mrs. Sligo across his path, with very astonishing results.

He told her a good deal, and spoke mysteriously about a missing paper that meant everything to that kindly young corporal who had befriended her when the regiment had left for India, and that was why, when Mrs. Sligo poked the dust and fluff from beneath the safe with the handle of her feather brush, and saw the name of Dashwood on the paper she had unearthed, she folded it very carefully, and placed it in her pocket with her latchkey.

"Sergeant Hogan," said Mrs. Sligo, waylaying the old soldier on the staircase of the tenement-house. "I have found something."

"I'm very glad to hear it, my dear. I hope it's half-a-crown, for your sake."

"It's nothing to do with me," said Mrs. Sligo. "It's a paper that's been lying under the safe in the office I clean—the room that Mr. Dashwood used to have."

"Heavens!" exclaimed Sergeant Hogan, his gnarled and knotted face growing suddenly white.

And as he took the paper from her hand and grasped the banisters, he muttered a silent prayer—the first that had passed his lips for forty years.

"I'm not well," he said hoarsely. "I must sit down."

And he tottered upstairs to his own room, Mrs. Sligo following him, very much alarmed, and hovering about the door.

The sergeant groped blindly for the candlestick, spilled the matches on to the floor, and swore in Hindustani. At last, however, he got a light, and placed the paper on the table, his hands trembling too violently to hold it; and then there rang a shout through that squalid building that brought its inhabitants running to their doors.

"I've found it—I've found it!" cried Hogan. "Oh, I wish that black-hearted villain Dominic Dashwood were alive! The mortgage was paid as I knew it was, and here's the lawyer's signature to the receipt."

"And so," wrote Mrs. Sligo, "Corporal Howard is really Sir John Dashwood, and Mr. Leonard deserves to be hanged for his wickedness. Sergeant Hogan

is writing all about it by this mail, and I would not be in Mr. Leonard Dashwood's shoes for something when his cousin gets the letter."

How Leonard Dashwood Allowed His Anger to Get the Better of His Judgment, and Most Unwisely Kicked Alf Sligo Out.

"Halt! Dismiss!" And Leonard Dashwood, getting rid of his company thus summarily, stalked off to his tent in a very unenviable frame of mind. His hopes had been raised for a moment sky-high, only to be dashed to earth again.

The expression on his face was one of such sullen, vindictive anger that more than one man noticed it as he passed him.

On the principle that misfortunes never come singly, Leonard Dashwood was to have his feelings still further ruffled before the day came to an end, for the convoy, having come through without let or hindrance, reached the camp before noon on that day, and Alf Sligo presented himself with a strange mixture of insolence and excitement in his bearing.

"Letters for you, sir," he said, as Dashwood looked up.

There had been a couple in the mail, and these Sligo handed to the lieutenant. They were both bills, as it happened, and after he had torn them open, Leonard looked up, to find with some annoyance, that Sligo still stood in the doorway of the tent.

"What the dickens are you waiting for? Why don't you clear off?" asked Leonard angrily.

"I was thinkin'," said Alf Sligo, determined to make the most of it, "that perhaps I've got another letter you might like to see. It's a letter from my missus."

"What the dickens have I got to do with your missus? You've come back more insolent than ever! Go to your own lines, or I'll have you taken there pretty quickly!"

"You won't do no such thing!" said Alf Sligo, grinning.

"Read this. They've found the missing paper!"

"Missing paper? What do you mean?"

But at the same time a deadly chill struck Leonard's heart, and beads of perspiration oozed out upon his forehead.

"Why, the paper that Sir John Dashwood has been looking for all this time—Corporal Sir Tom 'Oward John Dashwood. That's what I mean!"

Leonard snatched the letter from him, and hurried through its rambling contents. He read them through a second time, and then sat looking down at the ground, his face and his fingers working.

"Thought you'd like to see it, sir," said Sligo, hugely enjoying the joke.

Dashwood recovered himself.

"What the dickens do you think it's got to do with me?" he said, rather lamely.

"Oh, 'ere, I say, stow it! What do I think you sent him ashore at Port Said for? Why did you give me that little bottle to pour into his canteen? Answer me those questions, and then I'll ask yer some other ones."

"If you want a dickens of a thrashing, you're in the right way to get it!" said Leonard threateningly.

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THE EDITOR.

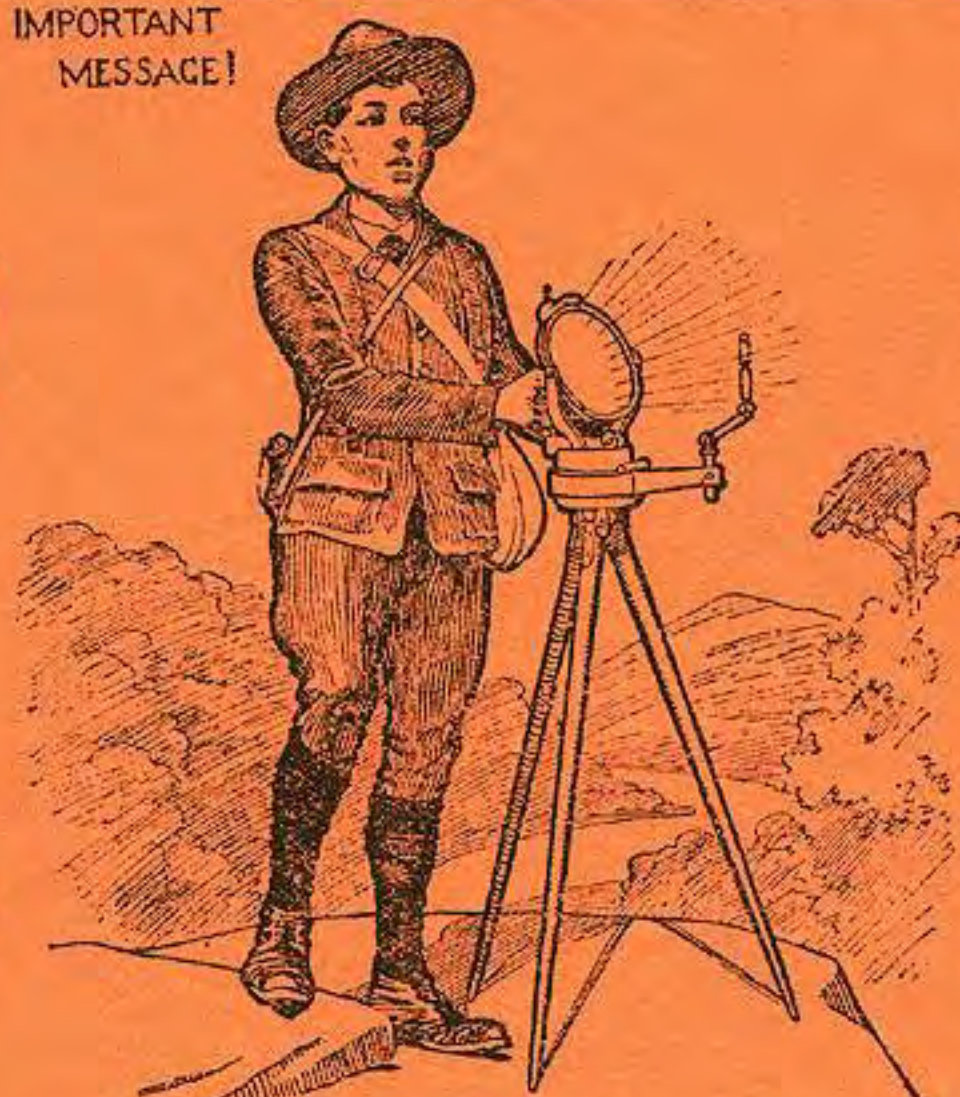
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