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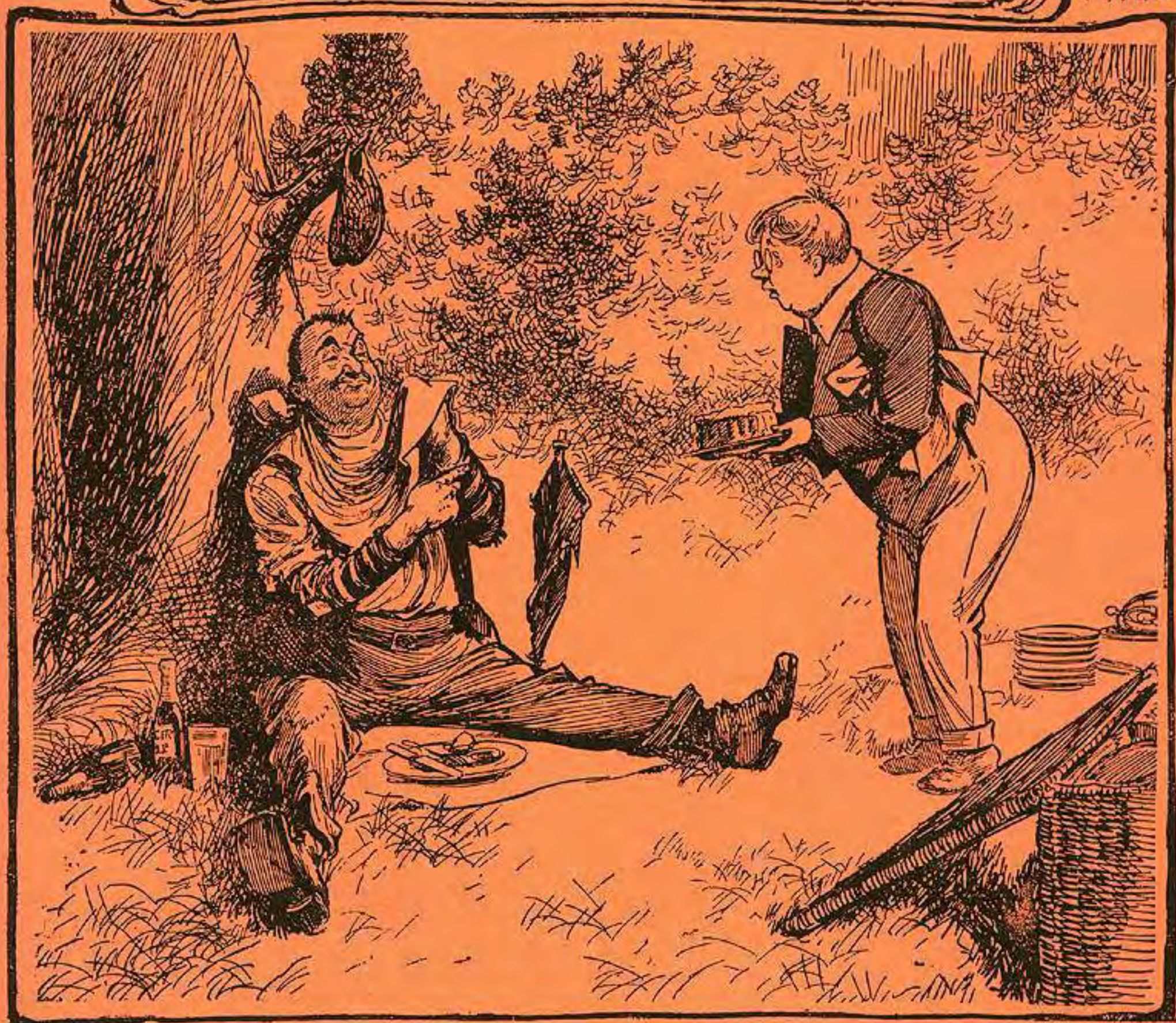
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By
**FRANK
RICHARDS**



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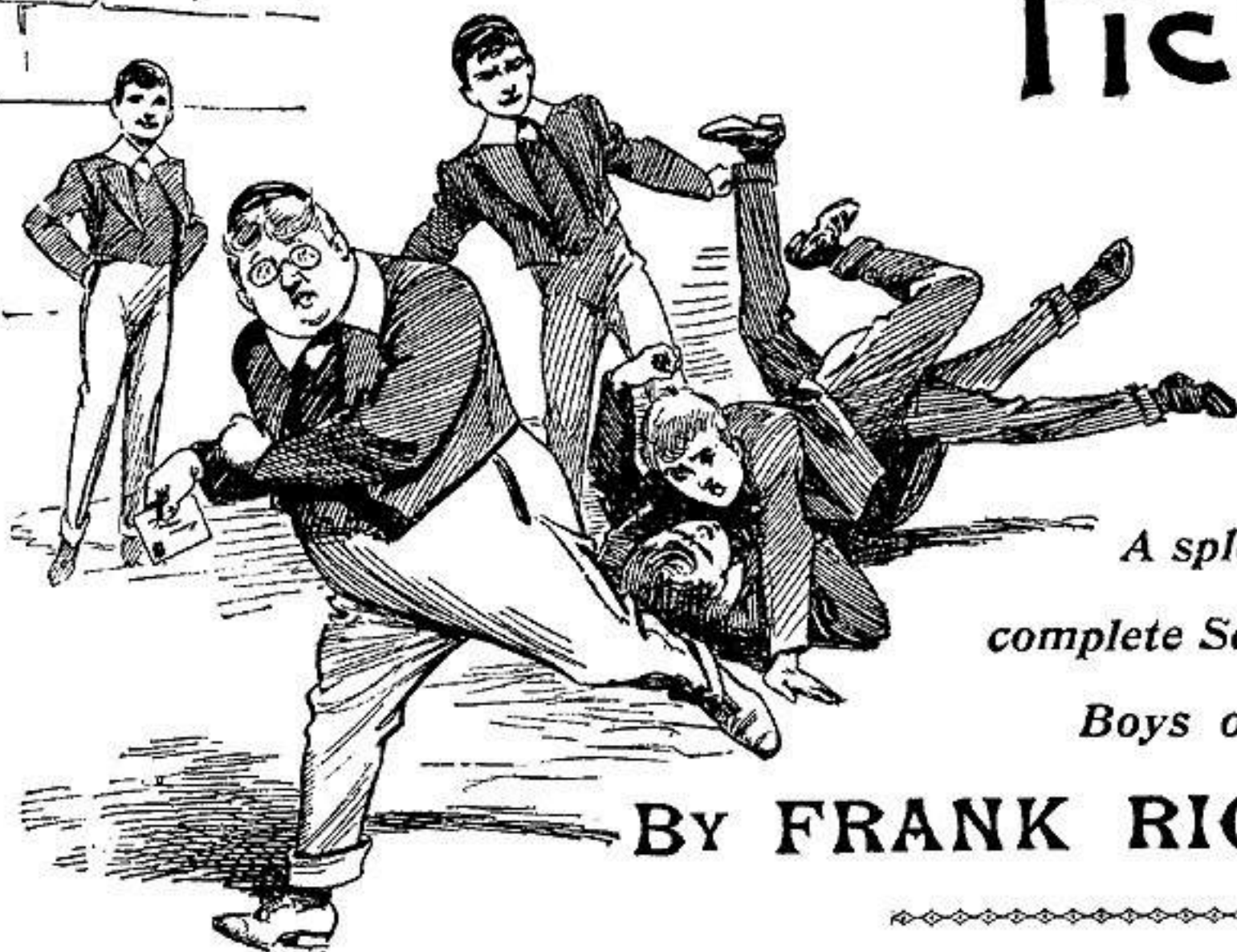
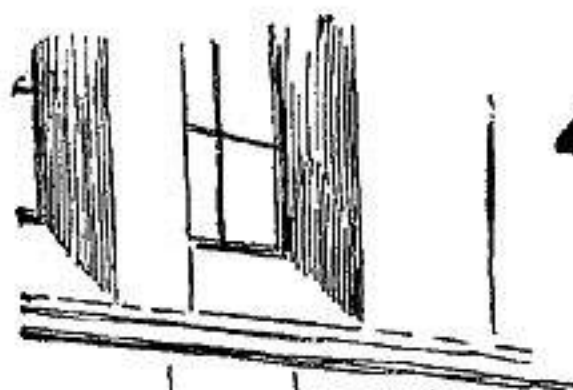
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The Greyfriars Picnic



A splendid long,
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Boys of Greyfriars.

BY FRANK RICHARDS.

THE FIRST CHAPTER. Billy Bunter Plans a Picnic.

HARRY WHARTON paused in the doorway of No. 1 Study in the Remove passage, and looked surprised. Afternoon school was over at Greyfriars, and in the fine April weather the fellows were mostly on the cricket-field. Wharton had been delayed in the Form-room, and he had run up hastily to the study for his bat as soon as he was free. But as he looked into the study he forgot his bat and the junior cricketers who were expecting him to join them.

The Famous Four—Wharton, Cherry, Nugent, and Hurree Singh—shared that study with Billy Bunter, the Owl of the Remove. Within the walls of that historic apartment many

a scene of jollity had taken place, and much hard work had been done. In the former—especially when the celebrations took the form of a feed—Billy Bunter had always kept up his end nobly, but the hard work he was generally content to leave to the others. He was always at the bottom of the class, and he was always receiving lines, which he seldom wrote. Hard work didn't agree with him, and one or another of the Famous Four was always good-natured enough to do his impots. The chums of the Remove would as soon have expected to see Bunter working hard in the study, as to see a gryphon or a mock turtle dancing a hornpipe there. And yet that was exactly what Wharton saw as he looked in that fine April afternoon. No wonder he forgot his cricket bat and paused, staring!

Billy Bunter was working!

He sat at the table, his big spectacles jammed upon his little fat nose, a pen in his hand, and a sheet of paper before him. The paper was covered with mysterious hieroglyphics, which might have represented letters, or figures, or both. Bunter was not a great penman, and Bob Cherry said he always wrote English as if he intended it to be read as Greek, or shorthand. What the marks upon the paper might imply, no one knew or could know, except Bunter. But they meant that he was working. There was a huge wrinkle in his forehead, as if his mental powers were all concentrated in a mighty effort—as doubtless they were. He was so deeply absorbed that he did not see Wharton; and Harry was so astonished that he remained there staring for a full minute before he made a sound.

"My only hat!" he ejaculated at last.

Bunter looked up. He blinked in his shortsighted way at Harry, and looked annoyed at being interrupted.

"Oh, really, Cherry—" he began.

Harry Wharton laughed.

"It's not Bob, ass; it's I! What on earth are you doing?" He came over towards the table. "Is that Latin?"

"No, it isn't!" said Billy Bunter peevishly.

"You haven't taken up Greek?" asked Harry, in astonishment.

Bunter sniffed.

"Does that look like Greek?"

"Blessed if I know what it looks like! Is it algebra," asked Wharton; "or has Hurree Singh been teaching you Urdu?"

"Oh, really, Wharton—"

"My—my hat!" exclaimed Wharton, catching sight of a decipherable word on the scribbled paper. "'Marjorie!' What are you writing? You don't mean to say you've got the cheek to be writing to Marjorie Hazeldene?"

"Why shouldn't I invite Marjorie if I want to?" sniffed Bunter. "I suppose I can have what guests I like at my own picnic?"

"Your own picnic?" murmured Wharton.

"Yes. I'm glad you've come in, really, as you can help me word this letter. I don't often write to girls," said Bunter. "They write to me often enough," he added, with a fat smirk. "But I—ow! What the dickens are you doing?"

"Twisting your ear."

"Ow! Oh! Drop it! What the—"

"Then no more of your rot!" said Wharton, releasing Billy Bunter's ear, which was quite crimson in colour from the strong pressure of his finger and thumb. "Blessed if I know why it is that a fat little toad like you always looks upon himself as a masher! But you know what to expect when you start going on that tack in this study. We don't like it."

"Oh, really, Wharton—"

"Shut up! What's that rot about a picnic?"

"I suppose I can't help it if fellows are jealous of me," said Bunter. "The girls will look at me—"

"Perhaps they're surprised to see you outside the Zoo!"

"Oh, really— Here, don't buzz off for a minute"—Wharton was picking up his cricket bat from the corner—"I want you to help me! I'm asking Marjorie, and Clara, and the girls to the picnic—"

"What picnic?"

"The one I'm giving on Wednesday afternoon up the river."

"Oh, cheese it! You know perfectly well that a picnic party costs money, and you haven't any!"

"That's all you know!" said Bunter loftily. "I know I don't have much pocket-money as a rule, but I'm a fellow with resources. I'm expecting a postal-order—"

"Oh, come off!"

"But apart from that—though it's certain to be here before Wednesday—a fellow of my ability need never be short of tin, you know. I am getting three pounds a week for colouring artistic postcards for the Patriotic Home Work Association—"

"Getting it?" laughed Wharton.

"Practically getting it. My work hasn't been quite up to the mark so far, but I'm certain of it this week. Three pounds will be enough, though I shouldn't object to you fellows making a contribution. As a matter of fact, I've coloured such a lot of postcards for the Home Work Association that I expect five or six pounds this time—a fiver at least."

"I hope you'll get it—good-bye!"

"Hold on! I'm going to blue the money on a picnic up the river, and I want all you fellows to come. To make the party complete, there must be some girls. A picnic without girls isn't much good! I am going to ask Marjorie, and Clara, and Wilhelmina. I rather like Wilhelmina—she understands what a good feed really is, that German girl does! How would you word the invite?"

No. 63.

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NEXT
TUESDAY: WHARTON & CO. v. MERRY & CO.

"I'd make sure of the picnic, I think, before I issued the invitations."

"Oh, I'm quite sure upon that point, you know! I'm expecting the remittance from the Patriotic Home Work Association by every post now—in fact, I dare say it's in the rack downstairs at this moment—and it can't be under five pounds. There's no difficulty about that! Besides, if the girls accepted, I suppose you fellows would stand the tin—if I should be short of money by any accident—rather than have them disappointed?"

Wharton's hand dropped on Bunter's shoulder.

"You needn't send that invitation, Billy. You can't expect us to hand over the total of all our pocket-money to you, you fat little ass. When we want to give a picnic, we'll arrange it ourselves."

"Oh, I say, Wharton—"

"Rats; that's enough!" And Wharton picked up his bat and walked out of the study.

Billy Bunter blinked after him.

"Well, of all the rotters!" he murmured. "I've a jolly good mind not to ask him! Lots of the fellows would come willingly enough! But I don't know if Marjorie and the girls would come without Wharton and his lot—they're shy of accepting invites from me, somehow. I suppose they've all got a soft corner for a good-looking, medium-sized chap, and they naturally feel a little shy with me. There's Clara—wouldn't come for a cycle ride with me; and Alice declined to let me take her out in a boat; and Marjorie wouldn't go for a walk on the sands! It must be that they're shy because I'm so fascinating. Well, I suppose I shall have to take Wharton and the rest! But I don't care what he says—I'm going to send the invites!" And Bunter resumed his literary labours.

He found it hard work.

He had to intimate to the Cliff House girls that they could depend upon finding Wharton & Co. in the party, or else he knew very well that they would not come. Whether it was because the fat junior was so fascinating, or for some other reason, the girls certainly kept him at arm's-length. Bunter was not usually cautious, but he did not venture to write the invitation in Wharton's name.

Finally he produced an effort that satisfied him.

"Dear Miss Hazeldene"—Marjorie did not exactly like Bunter calling her by her Christian name, doubtless because he was so fascinating—"We should all be very glad of your company at a picnic to be held up the river on Wednesday afternoon. We shall all be there, and if you would come, and bring Miss Clara and Miss Wilhelmina, we should be delighted. Wharton, Cherry, Nugent, and Inky send their kind regards."

Bunter chuckled a little over that missive.

It was certain to give Marjorie the impression that the picnic was a general plan of all No. 1 Study, and she would have no hesitation about accepting. She would learn that she was Bunter's guest when it was too late to withdraw.

"Lemme see, how shall I sign it?" murmured Billy Bunter, rubbing his forehead. "'Your humble adorer' would do—but it might startle her. 'Your very sincere friend'—hum! Perhaps 'Yours sincerely' would be best—I don't want them to decline the invitation."

And Bunter signed the letter and sealed it.

By the time he had finished the effusion to his satisfaction, and sealed the envelope, the afternoon was growing old and the cricketers were coming in to tea. There was a sound of many feet on the stairs, a trampling in the passage, and four ruddy-faced and cheerful youths burst into No. 1 Study. Harry Wharton threw his bat into a corner, and Bob Cherry playfully dropped a cricket-ball upon Bunter's toe.

"Ow!" roared Bunter. "What's that? Ow!"

"It's all right—"

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A Grand School Tale of Harry Wharton & Co., and the Pupils of Cliff House.

"Is it all right?" howled Bunter. "You've nearly squashed my toe, Nugent—oh, is it you, Cherry, you beast!"

"Never mind, Bunter! Let's have some tea; I'm hungry!"

"The hungerfulness is terrific!" said Hurree Singh, the Nabob of Bhanipur, in his purring voice. "The teaful refreshment would be the proper caper!"

"That's all right," said Bunter; "I've only got to post a letter, and then I'll get tea! You can get the kettle filled, Nugent, while I go down to the school box!"

Wharton, who was stirring the fire, looked round quickly. "Who is the letter to, Billy?"

"Oh, really, Wharton, I don't think you ought to be inquisitive!"

"I'm not inquisitive, ass; but if you are sending that asinine invitation to Cliff House for a picnic that won't come off—"

"I suppose I can do as I like?" said Bunter, with dignity, as he slipped the stamped letter into his pocket and moved towards the door. "I—"

"No, you can't! I know jolly well you're making use of our names!"

"Well, you can come to the picnic!"

"Look here, I—stop, I tell you! Bring that letter back!"

"Got to catch the collection!" said Bunter, leaving the study. "Get the kettle on, and I'll be back in a jiffy—the eggs are on the shelf!"

"Bring that letter back!" roared Wharton. "I tell you—stop him, Bob!"

"I'll stop the young ass!"

Bob Cherry ran into the passage after Bunter. But the fat junior did not mean to be stopped. He was running himself, and he had a good start. Bob Cherry sprinted after him, and it was a race to the school pillar-box.

"Stop, will you?" roared Bob Cherry.

But Billy Bunter only ran the faster.

THE SECOND CHAPTER.

Bunter's Windfall.

"COLLAR him!" shouted Harry Wharton, looking out of the doorway of No. 1 Study.

"Right you are!" called back Bob Cherry.

Billy Bunter was down the stairs, and Bob Cherry went down them three at a time after him. Bob's long legs were more than a match for Bunter's short, fat ones, and the Owl of the Remove would infallibly have been run to earth in the lower passage—but Bob's luck was out! Monsieur Charpentier, the French master, came out of a study. Bob nearly ran into him, but stopped himself just in time—panting. The French-master beckoned him to stop as he was dodging past, with a severe frown.

"Zat you stay and listen to me!" he said sternly. "You run viz yourself too fast on ze stairs, and zat lead to ze accident! You hear me, Sherry?"

"Yes, sir!" gasped Bob, on tenterhooks as he saw Billy Bunter slip out into the Close. "I'm very sorry, sir. I was in a hurry!"

"Zat you not hurry like to zat in ze house," said Monsieur Charpentier, wagging a warning forefinger at Bob. "You may go, Sherry—and remember zat vich I say to you!"

"Yes, sir!"

Bob was glad to escape, but he dared not dash at top speed to the door with the French-master's eye on him. But as soon as he was outside, he broke into top speed again. But by this time Bunter had almost reached the letter box.

The fat junior had the letter in his hand now, and was running his hardest. Once it was slipped into the slit of the red box nothing could recover it, and Bunter knew that.

Bob Cherry dashed after him desperately.

"Stop him!" he roared to the other juniors in the Close.

"Stop him, Bulstrode!"

Bulstrode, the bully of the Remove, who was talking to Skinner, looked round. His first impulse was to stop Bunter, as desired, and he could have done it easily enough. His next was to help him to escape—for Bulstrode was "up against" the chums of No. 1 Study all the time, and he was glad of a chance to disappoint Bob Cherry. He shrugged his shoulders.

"Stop him yourself!" he said carelessly.

Bunter whisked past. Bob Cherry grunted, and put on a desperate spurt. His outstretched hand was close behind Bunter. It looked like an even chance whether he would grasp the fat junior before he was able to post the letter. Bulstrode winked at Skinner, and suddenly walked into Bob Cherry's way.

There was no chance for Bob to avoid the collision. He crashed right into Bulstrode, and they rolled on the ground together.

Bunter, gasping, thrust the letter into the box, and gave a breathless chuckle as he heard it drop inside.

"Done it!"

Bob Cherry staggered up, feeling somewhat dazed. Bulstrode was dizzy, too, but he was grinning. He didn't care.

in the least what the trouble was about; but he had disappointed Bob Cherry, and that was enough for him.

"You rotten cad!" roared Bob Cherry. "You did that on purpose!"

"I suppose I can walk about in the Close if I like," said Bulstrode insolently. "Have you bought up the place? I don't see why you should expect people to get out of the way when you're racing about. Besides, I don't approve of bullying!"

"My hat!" murmured Skinner.

"Wh-what!" gasped Bob Cherry, scarcely able to believe his ears. To be accused of bullying, and by the worst bully in the Lower Fourth at Greyfriars, was rather a surprise.

"I'm not going to have you bullying Bunter," said Bulstrode loftily; and then he glared at Skinner as the latter chuckled. "I don't approve of bullying—"

"Why, you—you rotter—"

"Nuff said! You get off, Bunter; and mind this, Cherry, there's to be no more of this bullying small boys, or you'll hear of it."

And Bulstrode walked away with Skinner, leaving Bob Cherry quite speechless. It was a full minute before Bob Cherry recovered himself. Meanwhile, Bunter had discreetly made himself scarce. He had succeeded in posting the letter, but he did not feel inclined to return to No. 1 Study just then. There might be trouble there. The fat junior scuttled off, and Bob Cherry returned to the study to report that he had failed, and to pick out a nice, strong strap ready for Bunter. But Bunter did not appear, and the chums of the Remove—considerably to their surprise—had their tea alone. When Billy Bunter missed a meal it was a sure sign that something unusual had happened; and that was the case now. It was not only fear of trouble with Bob Cherry that kept the fat junior away.

"The rotters!" murmured Bunter to himself, as he strolled under the trees in the growing dusk of the afternoon. "Fancy their wanting to stop me inviting the girls to a picnic, when I'm going to invite them, too. I'm getting sick of this jealousy in the study. Blessed if I wouldn't rather be a long-legged gargoyle like Bob Cherry, or a nigger like Inky, rather than have all this trouble because girls grow fond of me! It isn't my fault. I'm sure I don't encourage 'em! H'm! I forgot to look in the rack for my letter. Hallo! What's that?"

Billy Bunter stopped. A glimmer of a letter on the ground caught his eye. It might have been an old letter thrown away by someone; but useless or not, Bunter was not likely to pass it unnoticed. The fat junior was as inquisitive as a monkey, and he was not troubled with many of the ordinary scruples about looking at another fellow's correspondence. He stooped and picked up the letter.

It was thick dusk in the Close now, and Billy Bunter, too, was extremely shortsighted. The big spectacles he wore did not assist his vision very much, to judge by the absurd mistakes he made. The letter was addressed, but he could not read the writing. He could only make out the words "Greyfriars School." The letter had been opened, and Bunter calmly drew the contents out of the envelope. There was a double sheet of paper folded, and as Bunter unfolded it, he uttered an exclamation of surprise.

Something crisp rustled in his fat fingers.

"My word!"

It was a five-pound note!

Bunter could not read what was on the note, but he knew the "feel" of a Bank of England note. He could make out the big "5." It was a fiver, and Billy's fat face was immediately wreathed with a grin of satisfaction.

"They've sent it after all," he murmured. "Somebody else has had the letter by mistake, and opened it, or perhaps the postman dropped it here. They're awfully careless with the letters. I've several times been disappointed about a postal-order I've been expecting. Of course, this must be my fiver. I wish I could read the letter! Lemme see." He blinked at the letter, taking it out from under the shadow of the trees. "Ah, there it is! B-U-N-T-E-R—Bunter! That's enough to show the letter is for me! I'll take it up to No. 1 and read it out to them. They'll have to believe in the fiver when they see it. No, I won't, though. I shall have to wait till that beast Cherry has calmed down a bit. I may as well go and get some tea in the tuckshop. Mrs. Mimble will cash it for me. I can read the letter presently."

Bunter thrust the letter and envelope into his pocket, and crumpled the five-pound note in his hand. The mere feel of it was delightful to him. It was the long-expected fiver at last—the reward of his hard home work for the Patriotic Association. He walked into the school shop with a new importance in his manner, and Mrs. Mimble came out of her little parlour. She looked far from pleased at the sight of Billy Bunter. He was her best customer—and her worst.

He would order any quantity of anything—and never pay if he could help it.

"It's all right," Bunter hastened to say, as he caught the expression upon the good dame's face. "I've had a remittance. Can you change a five-pound note for me?"

"A—a—a five-pound note, Master Bunter!" gasped the amazed Mrs. Mimble.

"Yes, certainly."

"I should like to see it first, Master Bunter."

"I'm sincerely sorry to see that you don't trust me," said Bunter, with dignity. "Here it is, Mrs. Mimble. I suppose you can believe that."

"I suppose this note is really yours, Master Bunter?"

"Oh, really, Mrs. Mimble—"

"Where did you get it?"

"I don't see that that concerns you," said Bunter loftily. "But I don't mind telling you it's for work I've done in the evenings for the Patriotic Home Work Association. I'll show you their letter if you like." Bunter thrust his hand into his jacket. "My word, where's it got to? Dear me, I must have let it fall instead of shoving it in my pocket. Never mind, my name's on it, so anybody who picks it up will bring it to me. It's too dark to look for it now. Just change that note, please, Mrs. Mimble, and let me have some grub."

And Mrs. Mimble, with some hesitation, took the note. A thought crossed her mind, and she brightened up.

"You will be able to pay your account out of this, Master Bunter."

"Oh, really, Mrs. Mimble—"

"It's over fifteen shillings. I will deduct it—"

"Look here, gimme that note. I'll get the Form-master to change it."

"Nonsense!" said Mrs. Mimble. "If you don't pay your account now you have the money I shall complain to Mr. Quelch."

"My word!" gasped Bunter. "You're—you're an unprincipled woman. I suppose I shall have to submit to this extortion. I think you ought to allow me a discount for cash."

"Nonsense!" said Mrs. Mimble.

And she deducted the amount of the account to the last penny. She gave Bunter four pounds three shillings and fourpence change. The sight of so much gold and silver comforted the fat junior.

"Well, I hope you'll be ready to trust me in future," said Bunter. "It isn't often you find a chap paying up his debts promptly like this. Now let me have some of the rabbit-pies and the—steak-puddings, and the sardines and—"

Bunter's list was a long one. With the change of the fiver in his pocket, jingling cheerily whenever he moved, he sat down in the tuckshop and enjoyed a record feed. His waistcoat was feeling several sizes too small when he took his way, at last, to No. 1 Study to acquaint the chums of the Remove with the wonderful news.

THE THIRD CHAPTER.

Bunter Surprises No. 1 Study.

BILLY BUNTER came cautiously along the passage, and peeped in at No. 1. The chums of the Remove were busy with their prep., having finished tea and cleared the table. Bob Cherry looked up as he heard a sound at the door, and he assumed an expression of ferocity that made Bunter skip back suddenly into the passage.

The fat junior ran half-way to the stairs before he discovered that he was not being pursued. Stopping there to recover his breath—which was very short after the excellent feed he had enjoyed at Mrs. Mimble's—Bunter paused some moments, and then stole towards the study again. He looked in; Bob Cherry had not even risen from the table. He looked round again at Bunter, however, and Billy stood very dubiously in the doorway.

"I say, you fellows—" he began.

"Give me that ruler, will you, Nugent?"

"Certainly; here you are."

"Oh, really, Cherry—"

Bob Cherry swung the thick ebony ruler into the air, as if to hurl it, and Bunter darted away. But the ruler did not come, and by this time it was dawning upon the fat junior that Bob Cherry's ferocity was all assumed. He grunted, and came into the study.

"Look here, you fellows—" he began.

Harry Wharton looked up from his work.

"Bob says you've posted that silly letter," he said.

"Well, why shouldn't I?" said Bunter, with an injured expression. "If I like to stand a picnic—"

"Oh, come off that! You know jolly well that you're only

talking nonsense," said Harry impatiently. "Be sensible, for once."

"Oh, really, Wharton, you know I'm getting three pounds a week from the Patriotic Home Work Association, and—"

"You young ass, will you talk sense for once—"

"But I've got the money."

"What!"

"They've sent me a fiver on account."

The chums of the Remove looked at Bunter. He was not always particular to distinguish between the true and the untrue when he made his statements, but he seemed to be telling the truth this time.

"You've got the money?" said Nugent, breaking the amazed silence.

"Yes—a fiver."

"Show it us!"

"I can't now, because—"

"Why, you—" began Nugent.

"Because I've changed it at Mrs. Mimble's," said Bunter hastily. "I've got the change here. I've paid up my old account with Mrs. Mimble, and had a bit of a feed. I was in a rather low state from want of nourishment, and I thought I ought to have a bit of a feed, in justice to myself; but I've got nearly four pounds left."

And Billy Bunter, with the air of a prince, laid his cash upon the table in sight of all—three sovereigns and a half-sovereign, and five or six shillings in silver.

The Removites stared at it blankly. Bunter had never been in possession of such a sum before, and it was certain that his people, who were poor, had not sent it to him. Yet it required an effort to believe that he had obtained it of the Home Work Association, which all the juniors firmly believed to be a fraud.

"I don't understand this," said Wharton abruptly, knitting his brows. "You are such a young fool, Bunter, that one never knows what you may do next. Where did you get that money?"

"I'm sincerely sorry to see that you doubt me, Wharton."

"What else can I do, when you hardly ever tell the truth?" said Wharton impatiently. "Where did you get that money?"

"I had it to-day from the Home Work Association."

"Upon your word?"

"Yes, upon my word."

"I suppose I must believe you," said Harry, after a searching look at Bunter's face, which certainly looked earnest enough this time. "I can't understand it, though."

"There may be some things you don't understand," said Bunter loftily. "You never believed I was a ventriloquist for a long time till I proved it to you. You fellows haven't any faith in me. That's what the trouble is. The jealousy and envy in this study are—"

"Oh, cheese it! Don't understudy the little brook, and go on for ever," implored Bob Cherry.

"Well, about that picnic," said Bunter, changing the subject. "Now I've got the money, I suppose you admit it's all right asking the girls for to-morrow afternoon, Wharton?"

"Ye-es, I suppose so."

"I want all you fellows to come," said Bunter. "I dare say we can do the whole affair on, say, three pounds. If you fellows like to make any contribution, however, you can do so. I won't say no. But it's my picnic—"

"Yes, but—"

"I'm firm on that point. I'm standing this picnic, and that's got to be understood. I really think, Wharton, that you might back me up in this, and not try to take the thing out of my hands."

"Oh, all right!" said Wharton. "Only I don't think the girls will accept your invitation, that's all. Girls are awfully keen in some things, you know, and they have a natural horror of a conceited little beast."

"Oh, really, Wharton—"

"But we'll come," said Bob Cherry. "You can lay in any amount of grub you like, and we'll see that there's none left over."

"Certainly!" said Nugent. "You can rely on us, Billy."

"The relyfulness is terrific," murmured the Nabob of Bhanipur.

"Ye-es, certainly!" said Bunter. "But it won't be a picnic without the girls. I know they're rather shy of me, and I suppose it's because— Never mind! They'll come if you ask them, Wharton. In fact, I've used your name in the invite."

"I knew you had, and—"

"Well, it's all right, isn't it, as there's really going to be a picnic? You can speak to Marjorie about it, and that will make it all right."

"Oh, very good! Now let me work."

Bunter stood hesitating for a minute or two. "I say, Wharton," he said at last, "I wish you'd take charge of this cash, and keep it till it's laid out. I—I think I might run through it without thinking, you know. I'll keep the half-sovereign in—in case I get low for want of nourishment. You put the three quid in your pocket."

Wharton laughed, and pocketed the money. It was unusually cautious of Bunter, and though he regretfully watched the coins disappear, he felt relieved to know that they were safe.

THE FOURTH CHAPTER.

A Disappointment for Bunter.

BUNTER was up unusually early the next morning. As a rule, he was last to leave his bed in the Remove dormitory, but just now he was anxious about the reply from Cliff House. Bunter had so many failings of various kinds that the chums of No. 1 Study sometimes found their patience taxed to its utmost limits; but even Bunter was not without his redeeming points.

He had always declared that when he was in funds he would stand a ripping feed, and show the fellows that he could give as well as receive; but as yet he had never had an opportunity of proving as good as his word.

The opportunity came at last, and there was no denying that Bunter was "playing up" as well as could be expected. He was standing a picnic to the Famous Four and their girl chums, and expending upon it the greater part of his unexpected remittance. More could not be asked. In fact, he had, on reflection, requested the chums not to make any contribution themselves. He wanted for once to be really standing the feed. Like many fellows in whom mean traits are brought out by want of funds, Bunter could be generous when he had money.

And the Famous Four began to think a little more of him than they had thought hitherto. There were some traits in his character they simply could not stand; but, after all, he wasn't so bad according to his lights. And the way he skipped out of bed almost at the first clang of the rising-bell on Wednesday morning showed how earnestly he was taking the affair.

Bunter wanted that picnic to be a success, and without the girls it could hardly be considered one. The reply from Cliff House was awaited as anxiously by the fat junior as the remittance itself had been. Bob Cherry sat up in bed and grinned as he watched the fat junior splashing at his washstand. Bunter was not given to extensive ablutions, and he frequently put his shirt on before he commenced, and then he would make a dab at the centre of his fat face, and then a second dab to get the soap off, and then towel it hastily, as if the touch of soap and water had hurt him.

"Better make it a whole wash this morning, Billy," said Bob Cherry, grinning. "You don't go on a picnic every day, you know. You ought to make it a point to wash for picnics as well as for Christmas."

Bunter made no reply; he was too busy. He finished his ablutions, and left the dormitory, while the chums of the Remove were turning out of bed. Bunter, feeling extremely virtuous and self-satisfied over his early rising, made his way down the corridor, and descended the stairs. An early maid was sweeping there, and she, naturally, looked surprised at the sight of Bunter.

In the lower passage Bunter sighted Wingate, the captain of Greyfriars. The big Sixth-Former was going along the passage with a slightly worried look upon his face, apparently looking for something he had lost. He glanced at Bunter.

"Hallo! What are you doing down here?" he asked.

"Rising-bell's gone, Wingate."

"Yes, but—Turning over a new leaf? Well, I'm glad to see you beginning to get out of your rotten lazy ways!" said Wingate. "I hope it'll last."

Bunter looked injured as he walked on. It was rather hard that he wasn't to have any credit for his early rising. Wingate turned to the maid with the broom, and began to ask her questions, apparently on the subject of the missing article he was scanning the passage for. But the maid shook her head. This was lost on Bunter, who was hurrying to the letter-rack to see if there was an answer from Cliff House. But his early rising was a little too early; the post wasn't in yet.

The fat junior walked down to the gates to meet the postman. He blinked excitedly when that individual gave him a letter from his bag, and Bunter recognised the handwriting of Marjorie Hazeldene on the outside. He scuttled off to open it. Of course, it contained an acceptance of the invitation.

But as he read the letter his jaw dropped.

"Dear Mr. Bunter,—I am so sorry I shall not be able to come to the picnic Wednesday afternoon. Thanking you very much for your kind invitation.—Yours sincerely,

"MARJORIE HAZELDENE."

Billy Bunter stared at the letter. It was a refusal, and though it was put politely, it was a blank refusal. Marjorie had not said that she had any other engagement; she was not the girl to tell even a polite fiction. She had simply said that she could not come, without stating the reason why she could not. The reason could have been supplied by any fellow in No. 1 Study—or differently, by Bunter himself. After the first blank dismay, a smug smile appeared upon Billy Bunter's fat face.

"I suppose she would be shy under the circumstances," he murmured. "But it's beastly awkward, though! She must come. I thought she'd imagine from the letter that Wharton was getting up the party; but then, of course, I suppose she guessed that if it was Wharton, he wouldn't have left the letter to me to write. I never thought of that. Girls are so deuced sharp in some things. Hang it! What's to be done?" He staggered, as someone slapped him on the shoulder. "Oh, really, Bulstrode—"

"Ha, ha! It's not Bulstrode!"

"Oh, is that you, Hazeldene?" said Bunter, blinking at Marjorie's brother. "You—you startled me! I wish you wouldn't thump me in that sudden way. You disturb my nerves, and you might make my spectacles fall off. If they got broken you would have to pay for them."

"You were looking worried," grinned Hazeldene. "I say, Wingate's looking for a letter he lost. Seen anything of it?"

"No," said Bunter peevishly. "Blow Wingate's letters! I've lost one myself, as a matter of fact, somewhere in the Close last evening. I—"

"Hallo! That's my sister's writing!" exclaimed Hazeldene, in astonishment, as he caught sight of the letter. "What on earth—"

Billy Bunter explained. It occurred to him that Hazeldene might be able to help him in the matter.

"Of course, I meant to ask you, Vaseline," he added. "I want you to come, and I want Marjorie to bring the girls—especially Wilhelmina. I think you might speak to Marjorie about it. Wharton and the rest are coming, you know, and they'll be awfully disappointed."

Hazeldene looked at him.

"I'll speak to Wharton first," he said. "If it's all right, I'll go over to Cliff House on my bicycle after dinner, and speak to Marjorie."

And Hazeldene walked away. Bunter was feeling anxious as he went in to breakfast. It would be too bad if Marjorie did not come. And for once the fat junior wished he was not so fascinating.

THE FIFTH CHAPTER.

Off Up the River.

HARRY WHARTON smiled a little when Bunter showed him Marjorie's letter. It did not surprise him, and he guessed the girl's reason for refusing. At the same time he felt rather sorry for the fat junior, who was really doing his best this time to stand a treat for everyone. He did not feel inclined to interfere in the matter himself, but he hoped that Hazeldene would be successful. Hazeldene himself was pretty certain of it.

"It's all right," he said to Wharton. "Marjorie would like to come, but you see, she knows Bunter. For one thing, he's as likely as not to issue invitations, intending to sponge on somebody else for the tin to stand the picnic. Then he's not a fellow girls take to. He's too beastly fat and conceited. If Marjorie accepted his invitation, he would plume himself on it, and think he was an awful masher. Girls don't like that sort of chap. Bunter does think he's a terror with the girls, you know, and I know he makes 'em tired. I can make it all right with Marjorie. I'll try, anyway."

And after morning lessons, Hazeldene mounted his bicycle and pedalled off to Cliff House. Bunter called on Wharton for the three pounds, to expend it in laying in supplies for the picnic. Harry handed the money over.

"We'll have the picnic, anyway," said Bunter. "I think Vaseline will make it all right with the girls, too. I know why Marjorie refused, and, of course, her brother being there will be a good pretext—Ow! You utter beast, Cherry!"

Billy Bunter wiped a splash of ink off his fat face, and looked unutterable things at Bob Cherry. But Bob only glared at him, and Bunter thought it would be wiser to say no more on the subject. He walked off huffily to the school shop, where Mrs. Mumble received him graciously enough. The good dame was all smiles now. The bank-note Bunter had changed with her the previous evening was a good one, and it had impressed her wonderfully. She began to think that, perhaps, she had been a little too

hard upon Bunter in the matter of running up accounts. At all events, he was a welcome guest in the school shop so long as the change of the fiver lasted. And he now proceeded to give orders on a scale that warmed Mrs. Mimble's heart.

Bunter was a connoisseur in these matters. It was of no use trying to palm off stale tarts or buns or "wangy" rabbit-pies on William George Bunter. He knew the quality and the age of a pie at a glance. He meant to have the best; but as he was in the unusual position of being able to pay for it, Mrs. Mimble raised no objection.

"Which I am only too glad to serve you, Master Bunter," she said. "And I hope you don't mind me being a little careful in the accounts, as it ran so long."

Bunter waved a fat hand in a lordly way.

"That's all right, Mrs. Mimble. There won't be any more accounts. I am expecting three pounds a week regularly now, and I shall pay cash for everything."

"Three pounds a week!" gasped the good dame, utterly amazed.

"Yes; and perhaps more than that. This is only a beginning. Yes, I'll have three dozen of the cream puffs."

With the fiver in her little till, a bodily proof that Bunter wasn't without resources, Mrs. Mimble was inclined to believe that the fat junior spoke quite truly. He evidently believed what he said. The dame almost purred, and she brought out her best things for Bunter. The collection came to over three pounds, and Bunter paid up in cash with the air of a millionaire. He called upon the chums of the Remove for aid in carrying away his purchases, and they willingly helped. Bags were packed with the good things, ready for conveying up the river in the afternoon. Needless to say, the affair attracted attention. That Bunter was in funds was a sufficiently surprising circumstance to make the whole Form discuss it. That he was going to stand an expensive picnic to the girls of Cliff House was more than sufficient to make fellows fish for invitations on all sides. Billy Bunter suddenly found himself a lion; and he enjoyed it.

Fellows in the Fifth were very polite to him about this time, to say nothing of Temple, Dabney & Co., of the Upper Fourth. Bunter accepted their compliments and their polite attentions, and even little delicacies which were presented as peace offerings; but he did not ask them to the picnic. When hints became very broad, he explained that the party was full up. Bulstrode led him to the school shop, and filled him up with tarts, and Bunter ate as many as he could, and then expressed his polite regret that it was impossible to ask Bulstrode to the picnic. Bulstrode kicked him out of the tuck-shop, but Bunter went away pretty well satisfied. The tarts were worth the kicks.

Harry Wharton & Co., as well as Bunter, waited anxiously for Hazeldene's return. The junior came buzzing into the Close on his bicycle at last, jumped off, and cannoned into Bunter, causing him to sit down with more haste than comfort.

"Sorry," said Hazeldene; "but it's all right."

Bunter gasped, as he staggered up.

"Oh, really, Vaseline—"

"It's all right; they're coming! I've told them the spot fixed for the picnic, and they'll be there at half-past three. Marjorie and Clara, and Wilhelmina."

"Good!" said Harry Wharton, with much satisfaction.

"The goodfulness is terrific!"

"We may as well go up in a boat," remarked Nugent. "It will be easier than carrying the bags along the bank, and Bunter can row."

"Oh, really, Nugent—"

"Might as well ask Mark Linley and Wun Lung to come," said Wharton. "Linley can lend a hand with the oars."

Bunter nodded. He was all hospitality, and as he remarked grandiloquently, any friend of Wharton's was welcome to join the picnic.

He asked Mark Linley, the lad from Lancashire, himself. Linley hesitated a little, and Bunter went on to press the invitation, in what he considered a very tactful way.

"It's all right," he said. "You can come. You see, there's no nonsense about me. Lots of the fellows cut up rough because you used to be a mill-hand, and came here on a scholarship, and all that. Now, I don't mind speaking to you."

"Thank you," said Mark.

"Oh, not at all! Of course," explained Bunter, "you wouldn't think of considering yourself a chap like me."

"No, I certainly shouldn't," said Mark.

"That's all right, then. We'd all like you to come, and —"

"Sorry I can't come," said Mark, turning away.

"Oh, really, Linley—"

But the Lancashire lad was already walking away, and

Bunter was left blinking after him in perplexity and some indignation. The Lancashire lad appeared to Bunter extraordinarily touchy, and he couldn't imagine what was wrong, but he wasn't disposed to worry about it. He looked for Wun Lung, and found the little Chinese under the trees in the Close, looking round as if searching for something.

"Lost something?" asked Bunter.

Wun Lung turned his almond eyes upon the fat junior, and shook his head.

"Me no losee," he remarked. "Wingate losee. He askee me lookee. Me lookee. Wingate losee lettet. Me findeo p'laps."

"Well, I've lost a letter, too, somewhere about here," said Bunter. "You can look for that at the same time. It's the letter I had from the Patriotic Home Work Association yesterday. But I say, will you come to the picnic this afternoon?"

Wun Lung grinned.

"Me comee. Thankee muchee."

"Good! We start from the boathouse at three."

"Allee light. Me savvy."

At three o'clock the chums of the Remove were ready. Wharton wrinkled his brows a little as he came down to the wooden landing-stage, where Cherry was running out the boat, and saw that Mark Linley was not there. Bunter explained that the Lancashire lad couldn't come, and Harry nodded shortly.

"Me see him gooe out," said Wun Lung. "He takee Gleeck bookee, and walkee upoo liver."

"Up the river? We might see him, then. Jump in!"

The juniors pushed off, and, followed by more than one envious glance, they pulled up the river towards the rendezvous for the picnic.

THE SIXTH CHAPTER.

The Picnic Party.

It was a fine, clear, sunny April afternoon; warm, but not hot. There was no hint of a cloud in the blue sky. A soft breeze rustled the foliage by the river, and played in the tall reeds. Among the reeds, the sunny waters rippled and sang. The Greyfriars juniors looked cheerful as they bent to the oars, and made the skiff fly. With four of them rowing, the boat went up the river at a spanking pace. Wun Lung was steering, and Billy Bunter kept a fatherly eye on the bags containing the supplies. Hazeldene kept an eye on Wun Lung, in case the little Celestial should play any trick with the rudder lines. Wun Lung was not always to be relied on. But he was upon his best behaviour this afternoon. The little Chinese, though not in the least touched with the unpleasant conceit of Bunter, was a ladies' man in his inoffensive way. He had donned his finest attire for the picnic, and his loose garments were ablaze with curious Chinese figures in vivid colours, and his yellow-complexioned face wore a smile which Bob Cherry declared belonged to the variety that wouldn't come off. Wun Lung steered well, and the oarsmen rowed easily and well, and in a very short time the boat was abreast of the bank in the spot selected for the Greyfriars picnic.

It was a beautiful spot. The ground sloped down to the water, in a carpet of green, and the grass was shaded by big trees. Through the branches, now growing rich in the green of spring, the sunlight fell in bright patches on the grass. There was no sign of the Cliff House girls yet, but it wanted a good ten minutes to the appointed time. The juniors made fast the boat, and unpacked the bags, and by the time they were finished, Bob Cherry caught sight of a patch of colour in the trees. It was a girl's dress; and a minute later Marjorie, Clara, and Wilhelmina came down the footpath.

Marjorie was looking very bright and pretty, and Miss Clara, if not quite so sweet as Marjorie, was very charming. Wilhelmina was more to the liking of Bunter, as he had confessed. The German girl was exceedingly plump, rivalling Bunter himself in that line, and her plump face wore a perpetual smile of stolid good nature, which became almost beatific at the sight of a well-spread table. Miss Wilhelmina Limburger had a gastronomic taste almost as pronounced as Bunter's, and Bob Cherry had given it as his opinion that they were simply born for one another. It was a case of "Two souls with but a single thought; two hearts that beat as one."

"So jolly glad to see you," said Bunter, taking off his hat with a bow so profound that it nearly winded him. "So jolly good of you to come."

Marjorie coloured a little as she replied. The meeting was a very cordial one upon all sides. The boys and girls were glad to see one another, as boys and girls always should be. And, indeed, anybody would have had to be misanthropic, indeed, to be anything but happy and cheerful

that splendid afternoon, under the blue sky, by the murmuring river. As for the trouble involved in the picnic, that was cheerfully taken charge of by Bunter. He was a born cook and caterer, and he wanted to be left alone to get a really ripping spread ready, while the others went up the river. And this was an arrangement which, of course, was very pleasing to the others. The girls had to be back at Cliff House for tea, for Miss Penelope Primrose was a somewhat strict school-mistress. But the afternoon was theirs. A pull up the river, exploring the shady backwaters, and navigating little, unknown channels, was delightful to the boys and girls alike, and they willingly left Bunter in charge of the camp. The juniors embarked, and the girls were accommodated with cushions in the stern. They had brought their parasols, and three bright parasols with three bright faces under them looked a very charming picture. Wun Lung added himself to it, with his famous umbrella up to keep off the sun. Hazeldene steered, and Wharton, Cherry, Nugent, and Hurree Singh rowed.

Bunter waved a fat hand as they pushed off. "Don't be more than an hour," he said. "I'll have tea ready by then, and it's going to be a ripping one, I can tell you."

"Right you are, porpoise!"

"Oh, really, Cherry—"

The oars dipped in time, and the boat glided away. It went with a murmur of cheery talk and laughter. It was a happy party that disappeared up the river, and they left a happy picnicker on the bank. Bunter was in his element.

He knew all about camping. He built a fire on the hearth of stones, picked from the river. He slung a kettle over it to boil, and proceeded to warm up cooked bacon and sausages. He laid a cloth on the green grass, and laid out cutlery and crockery in cheerful array. Comestibles of all sorts came to view, and a smell of cooking spread itself among the trees.

Billy Bunter had no idea that a pair of eyes were watching him from the thicket.

A man in ragged and dirty attire, with an unshaven, beery face, had come through the wood, attracted by the ruddy glow of the fire on the river bank. He stood among the trees, looking on through the thickets, for some time, watching Bunter and smacking his lips. He was a tramp, that was evident at a glance, and a particularly rough-looking specimen of his kind. He had a short, knobby cudgel in his hand, and a greasy, spotted handkerchief in which the remains of a meal seemed to be tied up.

"Blow me!" murmured this pleasant-looking traveller. "This 'ere is a soft thing. The kid's alone. This 'ere is a soft thing, 'Enry Tigg, my boy."

And Mr. Henry Tigg cautiously looked up and down the bank, and then round among the trees. Like Moses of old, he looked this way and that way, and saw that there was no man. Bunter was evidently alone. If he had companions, they were nowhere in sight. It was, as Mr. Tigg told himself, a "soft thing."

The tramp stepped out into the open.

Billy Bunter was too busily occupied to notice him, or to hear his tread on the yielding grass. He turned round from the fire for something, and found Mr. Tigg at his elbow, and jumped.

Mr. Tigg smiled agreeably.

"Afternoon!" he said.

"Er—good-afternoon!" stammered Bunter.

"Nicely fixed 'ere, ain't you?" said Mr. Tigg.

"Ye-es—n-no—yo-es!" said Bunter. "I—I'm busy."

"You look it. Cooking, ain't you?"

"Ye-es."

"That's right." Mr. Tigg laid his parcel on the ground, and sat down beside it, with his broad back against the trunk of a tree. "You go on cooking, my lad. You can spare time to wait on me, too."

"To—to—to what?"

"To wait on me." Mr. Tigg's pleasantness vanished, and he scowled savagely, and made a significant motion with his cudgel. "Don't you want to feed a pore man?"

"Ye-e-es, of course!" stuttered Bunter.

"That's all right, then. I'm 'ungry."

"I've got some bacon rinds here you can have, and—"

Mr. Tigg rose to his feet, and seized Bunter by the collar. He shook him till the fat junior's head was swimming, and he hardly knew whether he was on his head or his heels. Then he released him. Bunter dropped helplessly into the grass, and blinked dazedly at Mr. Tigg.

The tramp rescaled himself in the grass at the foot of the tree.

"That 'ere's a lesson," he remarked. "Do you want another?"

"N-n-n-n-no!"

"You will feed me, with the best you've got?"

"Ye-es, with—with pleasure."

"Then get on with it!"

Bunter staggered to his feet. There was no help for it. He was at the mercy of the terrible tramp, whose mere look

frightened him out of his wits. Unwillingly, and palpitating with terror, Billy Bunter began to feed the tramp. Mr. Tigg, with his back to the tree and his legs stretched out, received the endless helpings with a grinning countenance, rapping out his orders to Bunter as if the junior had been a waiter. Bunter's face grew longer and longer as the tramp's meal lengthened out. He dimly wondered how much of the provisions would be left. This was the picnic Billy Bunter had planned with such loving care!

THE SEVENTH CHAPTER.

A Terrible Guest.

BILLY BUNTER, with growing rage—which was well kept under by his terror of the terrible visitor—served the hungry Mr. Tigg with delicacy after delicacy.

After getting through the solid portion of the meal, and making sad havoc with the bacon and sausages and rabbit-pies, Mr. Tigg munched up tarts and cake at a surprising rate. Then he finished with dessert, and he made seldom more than two bites at an apple, flinging the rest away with the air of a man who could afford to be careless.

Bunter hoped against hope that his chums would return in time to catch the hungry Mr. Tigg. They could not make him disgorge, but it would be some comfort to see him soundly thrashed. Yet there was uneasiness mingled with the fat junior's hope. Mr. Tigg would probably make off at the sight of the returning boat, and he might take the remainder of the provisions with him, and, quite possibly, knock Bunter on the head to keep him quiet while he got away. Bunter stole more than one uneasy glance at the thick stick lying across Mr. Tigg's knee. A "lick" with that cudgel would be a very painful experience. Bunter had never been in quite so uncomfortable a position; but one thing was quite clear to his mind—he must keep his awful visitor in a good temper if possible.

So long as Mr. Tigg was satisfied with eating, he was good-humoured. But after making a meal big enough for three ordinary men with good appetites, Mr. Tigg bethought himself that he was thirsty.

"Whatcher got to drink?" he inquired.

"Water," suggested Bunter.

Mr. Tigg glared at him.

"Do you want another shaking—eh?"

Bunter backed away in alarm.

"N-n-n-no, please!"

"Then don't you tork to me about drinking water," said Mr. Tigg darkly. "Ain't yer got nothing else?"

"There's lemonade—"

"Ugh!"

"And ginger-beer—"

"Gr-r-r-r!"

"And red currant wine—"

"Bah!"

"Shall I make you some tea?"

Mr. Tigg glared at him.

"Ain't you got nothing fit to drink?" he demanded.

"Ain't you got any sperrits of any kind—not even a drop of whisky or gin?"

"N-n-no. We—we don't drink spirits at Greyfriars."

The tramp snorted.

"I s'pose there ain't no way of getting nothing to drink," he snarled. "'Ang yer! I s'pose I may as well 'ook it."

Bunter tried not to look relieved. The tramp roared slowly, with a grunt. He had eaten heartily—too heartily for comfort. His face was fat and greasy. He opened the knotted handkerchief, and shook out the fragments of bread and bones it contained, into the grass.

"I'll take some of that grub with me," he remarked.

"If—if you p-p-please—"

"Got anything to say agin it?" roared Mr. Tigg.

"N-n-n-n-no!"

"Then 'and over the things, and look lively."

Bunter, with growing dismay, saw Mr. Tigg wrap up article after article in the white serviettes, finally tying the lot up in a huge bundle in the spotted handkerchief.

Then the tramp proceeded to stuff his pockets with apples, oranges, bananas, and tinned salmon, and other articles, till Bunter wondered dismally whether there would be anything left for the picnic.

"That's about orlright!" said Mr. Tigg, at last. "Now, 'ave yer got any money?"

"M-m-m-m-money!" stuttered Bunter.

"Yes, m-m-m-money!" mimicked Mr. Tigg. "I've left my cheque-book at 'ome on the grand planner," he explained sarcastically, "and I'm in want of a little ready money. I'll 'ave all you've got; I ain't pertickler. Likewise your watch."

"Oh really—"

"And it hover!" roared Mr. Tigg, making a threatening motion with his cudgel.

Bunter had only a few shillings, and his watch was a cheap silver one. The prize was not a great one to the footpad, and he looked discontented.

"You've got more'n this," he growled.

"Oh, really, I haven't," gasped Bunter. "I—"

"Turn out yer pockets!"

The terrified boy obeyed. There was nothing more to be found, but the tramp was not satisfied. He swung his cudgel into the air with a savage look.

"I want a quid," he said. "Now then—"

Bunter backed away in terror.

"I—I haven't any more money!" he gasped. "Don't—"

"Help, help!"

"Old yer row!"

"Help, help! Murder!"

Bunter was frightened out of his wits now. The tramp was probably only attempting to terrify him into revealing any money he might have concealed, but it was deadly earnest to the junior. He fell upon his knees, yelling for mercy and for help in the same breath. And as it happened, there were ears to hear.

A quick patter of footsteps sounded in the wood, and a stalwart, boyish form came into view among the trees. The tramp looked round quickly as Mark Linley dashed up breathlessly. The Lancashire lad still had his Xenophon under his arm. He had been seated by the flowing river, studying in the open air—a favourite occupation of his on half-holidays—when Bunter's terrified cries reached him.

"What does this mean?" cried Mark.

Bunter squirmed behind the Lancashire lad in a twinkling.

"Help! Murder! Fire!" he gasped incoherently.

"I wasn't going to 'urt 'im," said Mr. Tigg, willing enough to make off now. He was not afraid of a boy; but there was something in Linley's sturdy figure and flashing eyes that he did not like.

"He's a liar!" almost sobbed Bunter. "He's robbed me! He's stolen my watch! And he was going to brain me!"

"Robbed you!"

Mark Linley sprang into the tramp's path as he was striding away. Mr. Tigg had no choice but to stop.

"Get outer the way!" he roared.

Mark's face set determinedly.

"Not till you have restored what you have stolen, you scoundrel!"

It was a bold speech. The ruffian towered over the lad, and his grip was on the cudgel. Mark was unarmed. Yet never for a moment did the Lancashire lad flinch. His flashing eyes never left the beery, brutal face.

"Will you get outer the way?" demanded Mr. Tigg, in a hoarse voice.

"No, I won't!"

The tramp wasted no more time in words. He gripped the stick harder, and sprang directly at the boy.

But Linley was ready for him.

He had let the thick, square volume slide down to his hand, and as the tramp came on, he hurled it with unerring aim. The book crashed under the tramp's chin, and he uttered an exclamation of pain and staggered back. His arm sank, the cudgel dropped into the grass. As he staggered, Mark Linley sprang at him, and they closed.

Boy against man, the struggle would have been too terribly unequal to last. But Mark Linley did not pit his strength against Mr. Tigg's. Strong as he was, that would have been useless. But the Lancashire lad was up to every trick of wrestling. Before the tramp knew what was happening, Linley had backheeled him, and Mr. Tigg went down heavily into the grass, Linley falling on top of him.

The bump on the ground, and Linley crashing on his chest, knocked every ounce of breath out of the ruffian.

He lay gasping feebly. Linley planted a knee on his chest, and called to Bunter.

"Give me the stick, Bunter."

Billy mechanically obeyed. As Mr. Tigg gasped for breath, and slowly began to recover himself, he found his own cudgel raised threateningly over his face.

"Keep still!"

"Look 'ere—"

"Hold your tongue, and keep still."

And Mr. Tigg thought he had better do so. Billy Bunter had looked on in terrified wonder, but as soon as he saw his enemy conquered, he was quite himself again.

"Hold the beast tight, Linley," he said. "You may as well give him a bash with the stick to start with."

Mark laughed.

"Not if he keeps quiet."

"Well, he was going to bash me, you know. He's got my watch."

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"Take back what he has stolen."

That was a pleasant task to Billy Bunter. He went through the tramp's pockets, clearing out all the stolen goods. He ripped open the spotted handkerchief with his penknife, and turned out the contents. He did not go through Mr. Tigg's pockets gently. He pulled and pinched and jerked and bumped till Mr. Tigg was inclined to risk the cudgel and make a fight for it. But he could not quite make up his mind to do so. He was despoiled at last of everything except what he had eaten. That, of course, was beyond recovery.

"But he's eaten about ten bob's worth of grub," said Bunter dolefully. "There's no getting that back. He ought to be thrashed, Linley. Well, let's duck him in the river, then."

"Ere, young gents, don't you—"

"It would serve him right," said Mark Linley. "But I don't like the idea of going for a chap who's down." He removed his knee from Mr. Tigg's chest, and rose to his feet. "Get off, you rascal!"

Mr. Tigg rose slowly. He rubbed his aching bones, and looked at Mark, and looked at the cudgel in his hand. He seemed half inclined to attack the lad.

"You can go," said Mark.

"Gimme me stick, then."

"I'll give it you about your shoulders if you don't get off."

Mr. Tigg looked at him again, expressively, and then slouched off into the wood. Billy Bunter drew a deep breath of relief as he disappeared among the trees.

"I'm jolly glad he's gone—though the brute's taken a lot of our grub inside him," he said. "Where are you going, Linley?"

"You don't want me any longer; he won't come back."

"Here, hold on; he might! Don't you leave me alone!" exclaimed Billy Bunter, in alarm. "Why can't you join the picnic, and be sociable? I'm awfully obliged to you for coming along as you did; I am really, Linley. The fellows will be back any minute now, and you may as well picnic with us."

Mark Linley hesitated. As he stood thinking, there was a splash of oars in the river. He looked along the Sark, and Marjorie, in the returning boat, waved her hand as he raised his cap.

"I'll stay," said Mark; "and thanks!"

And he stayed.

THE EIGHTH CHAPTER.

Missing—A Fiver.

WINGATE of the Sixth wore a worried look. He had been inquiring up and down the Sixth Form for his lost letter, without finding it. In the afternoon, lessons over, he had devoted a good hour to searching for it, without avail. Then he bethought him of calling on the fags. A good many juniors had already spent some time in looking for the missing letter, for Wingate was popular, and anybody would have been glad to oblige him. The fags of the Third Form willingly hunted for the letter for a promised reward of a shilling to the finder. But the afternoon wore on, and the captain of Greyfriars was still minus his letter.

It was, as it happened, Burke of the Sixth who found it. He came up to the captain near the school-house door with a torn and muddy envelope in his hand, and Wingate's face brightened up.

"Is that it, Burke?" he exclaimed.

"Faith, it's addressed to you!" said Burke. "I spotted it in a puddle under the trees over yonder."

"Ah! I must have dropped it there yesterday," said Wingate, greatly relieved, as he took the letter. "I remember taking a cut under the elms to get to the Head's garden yesterday afternoon. Thanks, old chap!"

"Awfully important, I suppose?" grinned the other.

"Not the letter exactly—but what's in it. It contained a five-pound note from my pater for my new cricket things," the captain of Greyfriars explained.

"Faith," said Burke, "I hope the fiver's still in it, then."

"Oh, that's all right; the letter's here, so the fiver—"

Wingate broke off. He unfolded the letter, but there was no sign of a banknote in it.

Burke whistled.

"Sure you didn't take the fiver out before you lost the letter?" he asked.

"Of course I didn't! I've not been making all this fuss over a letter, but over what was in it," said Wingate abruptly. "Hang it! Where's the fiver?"

"Must have fallen out."

"You saw how the letter was folded—in three, in the envelope. The fiver ought to have been folded inside it."



Hurree Singh stood up, glass of ginger-beer in hand. "Gentlemen," he said, "I call upon you for the healthy toast of our esteemed Bunterful chum!"

Somebody has taken the letter out, removed the fiver, folded the letter again and put it back."

Burke coloured.

"I say, old chap, I—I—"

"Don't be an ass," said Wingate. "Do you think I should think you did it, duffer?"

"I jolly well wish I hadn't found the letter," said Burke uncomfortably.

"Don't be an ass! Somebody has taken the banknote out. It may be a rotten, silly joke. I shouldn't like to think there was a thief in the school. But this has got to be cleared up. I can't afford to lose a fiver. I can guess what my pater would look like if I asked him for another. I'll jolly well make the joker sit up when I find him!"

And Wingate proceeded to inquire. The news that a five-pound note had been taken out of Wingate's letter sent a shock through the fellows. As it happened, more than half the school were out of doors, but among those who were within the walls of Greyfriars there was concern and anxiety. It was not long, of course, before someone thought of Billy Bunter and his unexpected fiver in connection with the loss of Wingate's banknote. As a matter of fact, it was Snoop, of the Remove, who first placed two and two together, and he hastened to confide in Bulstrode. And Bulstrode, as he listened to Snoop's muttered suspicions, grinned with an unholy joy.

"That's where Bunter got the tin from," grinned Snoop. No. 16.

"I knew jolly well all along that he never got anything from any rotten Home Work Association."

"Yes, but that isn't all," said Bulstrode eagerly. "Don't you see? No. 1 Study are in it. They're helping Bunter to spend the money. The young rat wouldn't take me along; I'm jolly glad he wouldn't now. I don't want a feed on stolen money. Wharton & Co. are in it, and they're practically parties to the theft."

"They couldn't have known—"

"How do you know they couldn't?" demanded Bulstrode, in his most bullying tone. "Of course they knew."

"Ye-es, that's what I—I mean," said Snoop.

"And I'm jolly well going to give them away to Wingate," said Bulstrode; and he went off immediately in search of the captain of Greyfriars. Wingate was easy to find; he was still inquiring after his missing fiver.

"Can I speak to you, Wingate?" began Bulstrode.

"Yes, if you've got anything to say," replied Wingate, none too cordially.

"It's about the fiver."

"Oh! Do you know where it is?"

"I think I do."

"Well, where?"

"Wharton and his friends have been spending a lot of money on a picnic to-day—"

"Don't be a fool, Bulstrode! If you mean to hint that

Wharton would have stolen it, you're lying, and you know you're lying."

Bulstrode looked considerably discomfited. There was something in the direct glance of the Greyfriars captain that made him feel very small.

"I—I don't mean exactly that, Wingate——"

"Then what do you mean? Sharp!"

"I mean," said Bulstrode, recovering his spirit a little as he reflected what a strong case he could make out—"I mean that Wharton and the rest changed a fiver at the tuckshop for the grub they've taken out."

Wingate started a little. Wharton had a well-to-do uncle, but a fiver was a very rare tip for a junior.

"You are sure of that, Bulstrode?"

"You can ask Mrs. Mimble."

"Well, I will."

Wingate turned away and strode directly to the tuckshop. Bulstrode was left with an evil smile on his face. He had done his best to blacken the captain of the Remove, and he might have succeeded; and he had nothing to lose if he had failed.

Wingate entered the little shop, and Mrs. Mimble's ready smile faded away at his expression.

"You changed a five-pound note for a junior to-day, Mrs. Mimble."

"Last evening I did, Master Wingate."

"H'm, it's all the same. Have you the note still?"

"Yes, Master Wingate. I hope——"

"Let me see it, please."

Mrs. Mimble, feeling and looking very uneasy, picked out the banknote from its safe corner, and handed it over without a word. Wingate drew his father's letter from his pocket. The number of the note was written there. He compared the number given in the letter with that on the banknote.

They were the same.

"I—I hope there's nothing wrong, Master Wingate," said Mrs. Mimble, beginning to tremble at the sight of the Sixth-Former's face.

"Yes, there is," said Wingate. "This banknote is mine. I lost it yesterday. Who did you cash it for?"

"Deary me! It was for Master Bunter."

"Did he tell you where he got it?"

"Indeed he did; he said it was payment for some Home Work, or something——"

"Ah! Was he alone at the time?"

"Yes, Master Wingate."

"Wharton and his friends had nothing to do with it?"

"No, he was quite alone. Bless my soul! I hope Master Bunter did not steal the banknote."

"I hope not."

"But—but are you going to take it away?" faltered Mrs. Mimble, beginning to whimper. "I—I—I can't afford to lose so much money. It will ruin me. I——"

"Don't be afraid," said Wingate. "I must take this note now, but you shall not lose the money. The five pounds will be refunded to you. You can rely on that."

"Thank you, Master Wingate; I know you'll keep your word. I don't think Master Bunter stole the banknote, either. He is a dreadfully careless boy in money matters, and never seems to understand that he ought to pay for things, but I am sure he is not a thief. There is some dreadful mistake."

Wingate nodded, and walked out of the shop. He hoped that the good dame was right, and that it was all a mistake. But where could the mistake come in? Bunter must have opened the letter and deliberately taken the banknote out of it. There did not seem room for a mistake in that. The Greyfriars captain knew Bunter pretty well, and he knew that the fat junior had sailed pretty close to the wind in some of his transactions. But then, that was more through stupidity than what could be called dishonesty. He clung to the hope that Bunter might be able to explain, though he could not imagine what the explanation would be.

"Do you know where Bunter is, Bulstrode?" he asked, beckoning the bully of the Lower Fourth to him.

"I think I could find him."

"Go and find him, then, and bring him to me at once. I have found out," went on Wingate, looking at the junior sternly, "that Bunter cashed the banknote with Mrs. Mimble, and that he was alone when he did it. What grounds have you for associating Wharton and his friends with the matter?"

"They've all gone out on a picnic with the money."

"Had they any reason to suppose that Bunter had come by it dishonestly?"

"He never has any money."

"True; but he might have explained this to them as he did to Mrs. Mimble. You knew he never has any money, and you knew he had this banknote. Did you think he had stolen it, before you knew that I had lost one?"

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"I—I never thought of it."

"Of course you didn't, and Wharton didn't either. You are trying to blacken Wharton, and you know very well that he would scorn to be mixed up in anything dishonourable," said Wingate, in a biting tone. "I wish I could think the same of you, Bulstrode. You seem to me to be only too willing to take half a chance of slandering a better fellow than yourself!"

And Wingate swung round on his heel, leaving Bulstrode almost green. A cackle from Skinner and Stott of the Remove showed him that Wingate's plain speaking had been heard by other ears than his own. He looked towards them furiously, and they beat a hasty retreat, still laughing.

Bulstrode thrust his hands deep into his pockets, and strode out of the gates of Greyfriars. He had been told to find Bunter, and he knew where to look for the picnickers. He had that consolation; the mission he was bound upon was a very congenial one to him.

THE NINTH CHAPTER.

A Jolly Afternoon.

"HALLO, hallo, hallo!" exclaimed Bob Cherry, as he jumped out of the boat, and gave Mark Linley a slap on the shoulder. "Fancy meeting you! So you've turned up after all. Bunt, you young porpoise, you haven't got the grub ready!"

"It's all been bolted," said Billy Bunter dolefully. "I had enough ready for all of us, and it's all——"

"You've bolted it all!"

"No, I haven't!" exclaimed Bunter indignantly. "It was a beastly tramp, and he'd have taken the rest of the grub away with him if I hadn't called for help, and then Linley came up, and we——"

"My hat!"

"We settled him between us, and got the stuff back," said Bunter. "Linley was as brave as I was, and he's going to stay to the picnic. It's all right. I'll have it all ready again in a jiffy. There's plenty left. Fortunately, I laid in a good supply."

Bunter, as he proceeded with the preparations, related the adventure with the tramp; but when he told about feeding Mr. Tigg with the choicest morsels, he was surprised and indignant at the scant sympathy he received. The juniors seemed to regard it as a joke, and Nugent said he would have given a week's pocket-money to be there to see Bunter's face at the time. Billy Bunter snorted indignantly, and the chums of the Remove roared with laughter, and even Marjorie smiled. Wilhelmina was the only one who seemed to realise what a serious matter it was to lose the provisions.

The loss was soon forgotten, however. As a matter of fact, the picnickers had much more than they could possibly eat under any circumstances. They brought the cushions out of the boat for the girls to sit on, and seated themselves in the grass round the glistening cloth.

The juniors had enjoyed their pull up the river, and it had made them hungry. They had spent an hour and a half in exploring the backwaters of the Sark, and they had returned in a mood to do full justice to the meal.

The scent of warming sausages was very agreeable to them, and the girls looked appreciatively at the teapot, which gave out a fragrant odour.

Billy Bunter, in the midst of a clatter of knives and plates and a smell of cooking, speedily recovered his good humour.

He served the viands with loving care, and the beaming appreciation in the plump face of Miss Wilhelmina made him particularly attentive to that young lady.

Bunter liked to see good things fully appreciated, and there was no doubt that he had found a kindred spirit in the German girl.

The proof of the pudding, they say, is in the eating, and Miss Wilhelmina certainly gave a practical proof that she enjoyed the picnic.

There was a pleasant murmur of voices, clatter of plates, and popping of corks.

Bob Cherry looked round him with great contentment, as he sat between Marjorie and Clara, busy looking after them both.

"My hat!" he said. "This is what I call ripping!"

"Ripping isn't the word," said Nugent. "It's stunning!"

"Stunning!" agreed Miss Clara, who was rather given to picking up boyish expressions. "Simply stunning, old fellows!"

"Oh, Clara!" murmured Marjorie.

"So it is," said Miss Clara, with emphasis. "It's simply stunning, and I would say it if—if Miss Penelope were here, so there!"

Marjorie almost turned pale at the thought of what Miss

Penelope Primrose would have said if she could have heard Clara described as "simply stunning."

Miss Wilhelmina nodded slowly. She did everything slowly, except eating. At that, she could keep up a very good pace, and was an excellent stayer.

"Tat is right," she said. "I call it stunning, pefore. I tink tat is good—sehr goot. Tat is vat I tink."

"The goodfulness," said Hurree Janiset Ram Singh, "is terrific. I proposefully suggest that there is a healthy toast drunk to our esteemed friend Bunter, who is the never-to-be-sufficiently-respected founder of the feast."

"Hear, hear!"

The nabob stood up, glass of ginger-beer in hand. Bob Cherry hastily filled Marjorie's glass, and spilled some on her dress, and Marjorie smiled sweetly; but only a girl could understand what that smile cost her, as she saw the ginger-beer on her pretty frock.

"Gentlemen," said the Nabob of Bhanipur, "I request you to fillfully replenish your glasses. In the honourable and non-intoxifical beverage of the beer of ginger. I call upon you for the healthy toast of our esteemed Bunterful chum!"

"Hear, hear!"

"Our Bunterful chum has his faults. Farful be it from me to denyfully contradict that statement. He is fat, and he is lazy—"

"Ha, ha—Hear, hear!"

"Oh, really, Inky—"

"But I will not referfully remark upon those circumstances, because I am speaking the praisefulness of our fat and esteemed chum. The esteemed Bunter is fat and lazy, and has been compared to the honourable porker by invidious critics, but I maintain that the porkerful Bunter has his good qualities. Where shall we find a better cook in the honourable school—"

"Hear, hear!"

"Where shall we find a more keenful appreciator of cooking—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Where shall we find a more successful getter-up of honourable picnics? I repeat that the esteemed Bunter takes, in all these instances, the worthy cake. There is a songful composition that asks the question, 'What's the matter with England?' and answers it in this phrase, 'She's all right!' If the honourable poet, who is not present, will allow me to paraphrase his remark, I shall ask 'What's the matter with Bunter?' and—"

"He's all right!" shouted the juniors.

"That is exactfully the case. He's all right. Therefore I suggestfully propose that the healthy toast be drunk to the esteemed Bunter."

"Hear, hear!"

And the toast was drunk with enthusiasm and ginger-beer.

Bunter coloured with gratification. In his excitement he drank his own health, and some of the ginger-beer went the wrong way, and Bunter spluttered. Hazeldene thumped him on the back, and nearly winded him. Bunter's face was red as a beetroot as he staggered to his feet to reply.

"Gentlemen—"

"Hear, hear!"

"You have heard the too flattering remarks of my friend Inky. I must say I think my friend is prejudiced in my favour," said Bunter modestly. "At the same time I will take the credit of being the best cook in Greyfriars. That's a well-known fact, and it would be false modesty in me to deny it."

"Hear, hear!"

"The only chap who can run me close in that line is Wun Lung, and he often cooks oats and things, and you never know what his soup's made of, so I think I may state without contradiction that I really consider I take the cake. I am very happy to see so many beautiful and cheerful faces round me on this auspicious occasion," went on Bunter, with a dim remembrance of a speech he had heard on the occasion of some family gathering. "I trust that this will be the last—I mean will not be the last occasion upon which we shall meet upon the—I mean around the festive board. Gentlemen, I thank you."

"Hear, hear!"

"Blessed row you're making there!" said a disagreeable voice, and Bulstrode came up the bank of the river and joined the picnickers.

THE TENTH CHAPTER.

Trouble to Come.

HARRY WHARTON looked expressively at the bully of the Remove. But Bulstrode did not walk on. He stopped, his hands in his pockets, and looked at the group with a sneer on his face, and without raising his cap to the Cliff House girls.

"Bunter's wanted!" he said.

Bob Cherry picked up a boathook from the grass, and flicked off Bulstrode's cap. The bully received a smart rap on the head, and gave a cry.

"You—you—why—"

"It's a common custom to raise one's hat to a lady," said Bob Cherry. "I dare say you weren't brought up to be decent, so I'm instructing you."

"I'll—"

"You'll get along," said Harry Wharton, rising to his feet with a glint in his eyes. "You cad, to come here to kick up a row. Get along, or I'll throw you into the river!"

Bulstrode did not move.

"Wingate sent me here to fetch Bunter—"

"Oh, stuff!" said Bunter. "What does Wingate want with me? It's only rot, you fellows! I'm not going."

"He wants you, and it's—"

"Well, you've given your message, if it's a true one," said Wharton. "Now cut!"

"I won't! I—"

"You'll go, or you'll be chucked in the water. Take your choice."

Bulstrode's face flamed with rage. The girls were on their feet now, looking alarmed. They knew something of Bulstrode, and expected trouble. The Remove bully had intended to blurt out the story of the banknote, and make things generally uncomfortable if he could, but he was too angry to think of it for the moment.

"I won't go! I—"

Biff! Smack!

Bulstrode reeled back, and staggered into the water. Wharton's blood was up, and he wasn't disposed to stand upon ceremony.

Splash!

Bulstrode sat down in a foot of water, and the splashes came over the picnickers. He scrambled up in a towering rage, and burst through the rushes ashore. He shook his fist furiously at Harry Wharton.

"You—you—I'll—"

"You'd better get along."

"I'll tell you why Wingate wants Bunter," yelled Bulstrode. "He's stolen that five-pound note—"

"That's enough!"

Harry Wharton advanced upon the Remove bully. Bulstrode defended himself as well as he could, but he was no match for the angry Form captain. He went heavily to grass, with a spurt of claret from his nose. Wharton stood with flashing eyes, waiting for him to rise. He rose, and walked quietly away into the wood. He had had enough!

Harry returned to the campers, a troubled expression upon his handsome face. He looked apologetically at Marjorie Hazeldene.

"I—I'm awfully sorry this has happened," he said awkwardly. "I don't want you to think me a fighting chap. I—"

"You couldn't help it, Harry."

"You see, he came here looking for trouble, and he had to go. But I'm sorry—awfully sorry. It was rotten."

The girl nodded quietly. She knew how Wharton must feel at being driven to fighting in the presence of a girl. But it was certainly true that Harry was not to blame. Bulstrode had been looking for trouble, as he said.

"Don't think about it, Harry."

He nodded, and sat down again. It was a decidedly unpleasant incident, and it broke up the cheerfulness of the picnic. But Billy Bunter ran on with a stream of talk that filled up the uncomfortable silence.

"Of course, Wingate never sent for me!" he said. "It's all gas! Fancy his saying that I stole a banknote! He must have been in an awful temper to say a silly thing like that. I had a banknote yesterday, you know, from the Patriotic Home Work Association, for a lot of picture post-cards I've been colouring for them. Bulstrode's an awfully jealous chap."

Wharton was silent. Bulstrode's words were ringing in his ears. He had found it hard to credit that Bunter had really had the banknote from the Home Work Association. He firmly believed that association to be a fraud. It seemed to Harry that there was something in what Bulstrode said. Bunter must have somehow got hold of somebody else's banknote by mistake.

"Oh, he was talking out of his hat!" said Bob Cherry

ANSWERS

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WHARTON & CO. v. MERRY & CO.

A Grand School Tale of Harry Wharton & Co., and the Pupils of Cliff House.

carelessly. "If Wingate wants you, he can have you when we go back. We can't spare you now."

"Not muchfully," agreed the Nabob of Bhanipur. "Our worthy Bunterful chum is indispensable. He is the esteemed founder of the estimable feast, and may his august fatness never grow shadowfully less."

"Oh, really, Inky—"

Wharton dismissed the thoughts that were crowding on his mind. It was evident that Billy Bunter, at least, had no idea that there was anything wrong about his possession of the banknote. Wharton assumed a more cheerful look, and gradually the talk became gay and animated again, and the unpleasant incident of Bulstrode was forgotten.

It was a happy party. Perhaps the happiest of all there was Mark Linley. The Lancashire lad was given to taking his pleasures quietly, and he was very quiet now, but none the less enjoying himself thoroughly. Miss Wilhelmina, having finished eating, allowed Bunter to arrange cushions for her to lean back against a tree, and she looked very happy and comfortable there, and disinclined to move. But the sun was sloping down the red sky.

Marjorie gave a little sigh.

"We must be going, I am afraid," she said.

"Oh, not yet!" cried Bob Cherry, with a start. "It can't be five."

Marjorie laughed.

"It's nearer six," she said.

"My hat, how the time flies!"

"In happy moments the time slipfully glides away," said the Nabob of Bhanipur. "I do not remember so happy an honourable afternoon since I landfully set foot in this esteemed and ludicrous country."

"What you tinkee?" said Wun Lung. "Me tinkee allee samee."

Harry Wharton rose to his feet.

"I suppose you're right, Marjorie—we must be moving. You mustn't be late at Cliff House, or Miss Primrose won't let you come to a picnic again. Will you come back in the boat as far as the school, and then you can take the short cut."

"With pleasure."

So they entered the boat, and the remains of the picnic were stowed away, and then the picnicers dropped lazily down the current towards Greyfriars.

There was a red sunset in the sky; it was growing towards the beautiful evening of a beautiful day.

They passed other boats on the water, all pulling home to Greyfriars now. At the landing-stage they stopped, and the girls were handed ashore. Burke, of the Sixth, came from the boathouse and looked at them.

He was about to say something, but he saw the girls, and changed his mind. He hesitated a moment, and then spoke in a low tone to Wharton.

"Take Bunter in to Wingate as soon as you can."

"Is anything wrong?" asked Harry quickly.

The Sixth-Former nodded shortly.

"Yes; very wrong."

"About the banknote?"

"Yes."

Harry said no more, in case Marjorie should hear. He went back towards the girls.

"We're all going to Cliff House, of course!" said Bob Cherry. "We've got heaps of time before locking up."

"The heapfulness is terrific," remarked Hurree Jamsset Ram Singh, looking at his big gold watch.

"Wingate wants to see me," said Harry; "I should awfully like the walk to Cliff House. You chaps will see Marjorie & Co. home safe."

"Yes, rather," said Bunter; "I'll look after them! You see—"

"You are to come in with me, Bunter."

"Oh, really, Wharton—"

"Wingate wants you."

"Well, I suppose he can wait until I come back," expostulated Billy Bunter. "I don't see why I—"

"Don't be an ass, Bunter; you know you must come. Good-bye, Marjorie!"

The girl looked at him quickly as she shook hands.

"Is there anything wrong, Harry? You look—"

He nodded.

"I hope it's nothing," he said. "Bunter has been getting into trouble again, that's all."

"Bunter is a great trouble to you."

Harry laughed slightly.

"He's rather a trouble to everybody who knows him, I think. But he hasn't been doing anything wrong this time—there's some mistake. It will be all right. Good-bye, Marjorie! This has been a jolly afternoon for me."

"And for me," said the girl softly.

They parted. Marjorie, Clara, and Wilhelmina went down the road with Hazeldene, Bob Cherry, Hurree Singh,

Nugent, and Wun Lung. Mark Linley lingered a moment to speak aside to Wharton.

"I can see something's up, Wharton. Can I be of any use?"

"Thanks, old fellow—none! I think it will be all right."

"Right you are!"

And Linley hurried after the girls and joined Marjorie. Billy Bunter was looking decidedly grumpy, and disposed to grumble. Wharton passed his arm through the fat junior's, and led him into the school, directly to Wingate's study.

THE ELEVENTH CHAPTER.

A Narrow Escape for Bunter.

HARRY WHARTON tapped at Wingate's door and entered. Billy Bunter followed him uneasily. The fat junior could not imagine what was wrong, but he had a feeling that there was to be serious trouble.

Wingate was looking out of the window. He turned round, and gave the juniors a searching look.

"I'm glad you've come," he said. "You ought to have been here before. I sent Bulstrode to look for Bunter."

"We were picnicking up the river," said Harry. "I did not know whether to believe Bulstrode. He came and blurted out some nonsense about Bunter having stolen a five-pound note."

"Such rot!" said Bunter. "I had that banknote from—"

Wingate fixed his eyes upon the fat face.

"You had a banknote, Bunter?"

"Yes, certainly. I—"

"Is this the note?"

Wingate pointed to a banknote lying on the table. Bunter blinked at it through his spectacles.

"I daresay it is, Wingate, if you got this from Mrs. Mimble. One banknote is just like another, you know."

"I suppose you know every note is numbered?"

"I didn't take the number of mine," said Billy Bunter; "I hadn't any occasion to. I changed it with Mrs. Mimble as soon as I received it."

"Where did you get the note from?"

"From the Patriotic Home Work Association."

"They sent it to you for—what?"

"For colouring postcards for them."

"Don't talk nonsense!" said Wingate brusquely. "Tell me the truth! This is a serious matter. Listen! I lost a letter containing a five-pound note in the Close yesterday. It was found to-day—with the banknote missing. That note I had the number of. It was the same number as that of the note you changed with Mrs. Mimble—that is to say, it was the same note."

Bunter shook his head.

"Impossible, Wingate! How could the note I received from the Home Work Association be the same one that was in your letter? You must see there's a mistake."

"I hoped there was some mistake!" said Wingate sternly. "But it seems to me that there is something worse than that. It was my banknote you cashed with Mrs. Mimble. You had taken it from my letter."

"Oh, really, Wingate—"

"Nothing else is possible. Now, if you really had a banknote of your own, tell me who you received it from."

"I've told you."

"Do you know anything about it, Wharton?"

Wharton was looking disturbed and distressed. He did not know what to make of the matter. It was certainly Wingate's banknote that had come into Bunter's hands. But Billy was in earnest in his denials. And the fat junior, though not always quite veracious, would never have had the art or the nerve to keep up a scene like this unless he was conscious of innocence.

"I don't know, Wingate," said Harry slowly. "Bunter had a fiver yesterday, and he told us it came from the Patriotic Home Work Association. We couldn't believe it, of course; but there was the fiver, and we had to believe that. It never crossed our minds that Bunter might have stolen it—and I am quite sure that he did not. There is some mistake. Bunter's a little beast in some respects—"

"Oh, really, Wharton—"

"But he's not a thief. I am certain he did not steal the banknote. That's all I can say on the matter."

"Then how did it come into his hands? Look here, Bunter, you say you had your five-pound note from the Patriotic Home Work Association. In that case, I suppose they sent you a letter of some kind with it?"

"Yes, of course!"

"Well, where is the letter?"

"I'm sincerely sorry, as it turns out, but I've lost it. You see, I had that letter under rather peculiar circumstances."

"Oh!" said Wingate. "Explain the circumstances. Perhaps we are getting to the truth now."

"I'm sincerely sorry to see you doubt my word, Wingate. Any fellow in the Remove can tell you how truthful I am. You see, this is how it was. I had been expecting a remittance from the Patriotic Home Work Association for some time, and I knew it couldn't be less than a fiver. Last evening I picked up my letter under the trees in the Close, and found the fiver in it. You see, the postman must have dropped it there, or else it had been delivered to the wrong person by mistake, and he found out it wasn't his when he opened it, and just lost it carelessly. Anyway, there it was, and the banknote was in it. I—"

Wingate stared hard at the fat junior.

"Are you certain the letter was addressed to you, Bunter?"

"Well, you see, it was dusk, and I'm a trifle short-sighted," said Billy. "I couldn't read the writing, but I knew it was my letter, because there was a five-pound note in it."

"Why, you—you—"

"Besides, I managed to spell out the word 'Bunter,' though it was so dark," said Billy. "It was all right. It was my letter. Unfortunately, I lost the letter, after taking the fiver out—I was thinking more of the fiver than of the letter, as a matter of fact. Of course, the banknote was the important part."

Harry Wharton laughed. He could not help it. Bunter's mistake was so utterly ridiculous, his assumption that the letter must be his because there was a banknote in it was so utterly absurd that even Wingate laughed. The matter was clear enough now. It was Wingate's letter Bunter had found, Wingate's five-pound note he had taken out of it. He had dropped the letter where Burke, of the Sixth, had found it again. There never had been any letter or any remittance from the Patriotic Home Work Association.

"If you weren't the biggest fool in Greyfriars," went on Wingate, with emphasis, "I should think this was a cock-and-bull story you had made up to tell me. If I didn't know perfectly well that you've got less sense than a kid of five, I should believe that you were a thief. As it is, I believe that you made a mistake which nobody outside a lunatic asylum ought to have made. You imagined you read your name on the envelope because you wanted to spend the fiver. Well, the matter's ended, and you're jolly lucky to escape being expelled. I should advise you to be more careful another time. People have

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gone to prison before now for making mistakes like that. That's all. Only the five pounds has to be refunded to Mrs. Mimble in the place of my banknote."

"It's all right," said Harry Wharton quickly. "We'll stand that. The tin was spent on a picnic for all of us, and it's only fair we should have a whip round to pay the piper. I'll see that Mrs. Mimble has the money by next week, Wingate, if that will do."

"Good enough. Go and tell her so."

The juniors left the study. Billy Bunter blinked at Wharton with a deeply-injured expression outside.

"Fancy Wingate thinking that was his banknote," he said. Wharton stared at him.

"I can't see that my fiver was Wingate's," continued Bunter obstinately. "You can pay Mrs. Mimble if you like. I call it rot. Of course, that fiver was sent me from the Home Work Association—"

Wharton laughed. It was evidently useless to argue with Billy Bunter. But as they passed the letter-rack Bunter caught sight of a letter addressed to himself. He opened it, and looked into it, and then his fat face was a study.

"Oh, really!" he gasped.

Wharton looked at him inquiringly.

"It's—it's from the Patriotic Home Work Association," said Billy Bunter feebly. "They say that, owing to my colouring of the postcards not being quite up to their standard, they are not able to send me anything for them. The—the banknote wasn't from them, after all!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Blessed if I can see anything to cackle at!" growled Bunter. "I consider I've been treated badly. Wingate has no right to be so careless with his rotten banknotes. Look here, Wharton, couldn't you pay Mrs. Mimble that fiver in instalments, so much a week? And then you could lend me—"

But Harry Wharton was gone!

THE END.

(Another splendid tale of the Chums of Greyfriars next Tuesday, entitled "Harry Wharton & Co. v. Tom Merry & Co." Order in advance. Price One Halfpenny.)

The First Chapters of a Grand Story.



A Splendid Tale of Life in the British Army.

PROLOGUE.

"LOOK here, I have been hunting for you, Ian! Oblige me by putting that gun down, while I give you the biggest hiding of your life!"

Ian Chenys swung round to see Ronald coming through the trees. The two were half-brothers. Ronald's mother had died while he was quite little, and old General Chenys, their father, had married again. Ian was

the son of the second wife, and was Ronald's junior by over two years.

Ian was a slight, dapper youth, dark haired, dark eyed, and thin lipped, with just a faint pencilling of moustache to show that he was not quite the youngster he looked.

"What the dickens do you mean?" he demanded savagely. Ronald, advancing over the soft carpet of pine needles, No. 63

had come upon him unawares, and he resented this more, perhaps, than the threat.

It was not often that Ian allowed himself to be caught napping.

"I mean that you have been up to your dirty tricks again. Not content with blackening my name at every opportunity to your mater and the guv'nor, you must needs begin to slander old Rough, here."

Old Rough, a wire-haired fox-terrier, with all his good points invisible to the eye, wagged his tail, and looked at his master as though to say this was so.

"You've told them that it was he who killed the mater's prize Buff Orpington, when you know that it was your own tyke that savaged it. You're a liar, Ian, fair, square, and slap in your teeth. It's old news I'm telling you; but if you'll put that gun down, I'll prove my words."

"Stand off, you hulking brute!" threatened Ian, tightening his lips, and bringing the rook rifle he held to the ready.

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NEXT TUESDAY:

WHARTON & CO. v. MERRY & CO.

A Grand School Tale of Harry Wharton & Co., and the Pupils of Cliff House.

"I'll not be man-handled by you, or any other bullying bad. Stand off, or, by jingo, I'll pull the trigger!"

But Ronald Chenys came of a line that had never flinched yet from a gun muzzle.

With a quick stride, he caught the barrel, and wrenched it upward. Then two vigorous twists tore the rifle from his step-brother's grip.

At the same instant the weapon exploded, and the bullet struck the fir-tree, against which Ian had recoiled, ripping a jagged furrow in the red bark, not a foot above his head.

Simultaneously a woman's scream added a double consternation to the feathered occupants of the rookery overhead. The birds tumbled from their perches in terror, and wheeled, wide and high, above the tree-tops, clamouring to know what all this excitement was about.

Ronald, who had fallen back a pace, white and shaken by the awful possibilities of the accident, was aroused to his senses by the rustle of silken skirts.

Turning, he found his stepmother hastening towards them, while a little behind strode the old general, looming swiftly up like a thunder squall.

Fury and hatred were in the woman's face. All the rankling dislike she bore to her husband's eldest boy blazed in her dark eyes, and all her love for her own child made her quiver like a tigress, crouching to spring in defence of her cub.

"You coward!" she gasped, almost choking in her passion.

"You shot at Ian! You would have killed him!"

"Mother, you do not know what you are saying!" said Ronald quietly, regarding her with steady, blue eyes.

"I do know! Did I not see Ian here struggling to take the gun from you, and then you flung him back and fired!"

"I did not fire. I was taking the gun from him, as it happens, and it went off by accident."

"Accident?"

His stepmother gave a little hysterical scream of derision, and turned in furious appeal to her husband, who had now stumped on the scene.

Old General Chenys had been darting quick glances from under his shaggy eyebrows, first at the sturdy lad of nineteen, who stood, rook-rifle in hand, his shoulders squared, looking every inch a soldier's son, and then at the dark, slim youth, who still leant in dramatic pose against the tree, his head nearer the bullet mark than before.

There was no gainsaying the likeness between the general and the boy of his first marriage.

Ronald had the same ruddy skin, the same frank, blue eyes, and clean-cut features. Ian, on the other hand, was modelled like his mother—dark, handsome, and slender.

He crouched there, watchful as a cat, while Ronald faced him like a bull-terrier.

"Steady, Julia!" said the old general. "There is no reason to go into hysterics or make a scene. Remember, please, that we are not a thousand miles from everywhere. And now, sir, what have you, as the eldest, got to say in explanation of this disreputable brawl?" he added grimly, turning on Ronald.

The eldest lad gave his shoulders an almost imperceptible shrug, as if he knew by bitter experience how hopeless any explanation of his must be. He had long given up all thought of contending with the forces of slander, misrepresentation, and mistrust which had been used relentlessly, ever since he could remember, to discredit him in his father's eyes. Whatever he said would be ridiculed by his stepmother, and denied flatly by Ian, so what was the use? He was not a sneak, anyway.

"I have explained already, sir, that the explosion of the gun was a pure accident. I had occasion to take it from Ian here, and something must have fouled the trigger as he let go. It was a desperately close thing, and I am sorry for my share in it.

"Your share of it, pray!" sneered Ian, with emphasis. "Perhaps you will condescend to explain what my share was, then!"

He knew he could try Ronald thus far, that his step-brother would not deign to open his lips as to his own threat to fire.

Ronald regarded him with steely eyes.

"You hound!" he said softly.

"Halt, sir! Confound it!" choked the old general, suddenly boiling over. "Isn't it enough to have you two lads, who one day hope to hold his Majesty's commission as officers and gentlemen, flying at one another's throats like East End hooligans, without adding vulgar abuse to your crime?"

"It is the truth nevertheless!" retorted Ronald frankly.

"Confound and hang it all! Are you going to defy me openly?" roared the old general, making the pine needles scatter under his stick. "It is rank, unadulterated mutiny, that's what it is! Silence, Julia, I will not be interrupted!"

Mrs. Julia Chenys, whose only anxiety was to feed the flames and keep her husband's anger blazing, subsided with a few hysterical whimpers.

"Now look here, Ronald, I hold you responsible for this. I know your fiery temper when roused, and I know that some day it will land you in worse trouble than you can imagine. By an ace only you have missed blowing your stepbrother's brains out."

Ronald compressed his lips to stem the bitter words he might have uttered and regretted. There was a time when the old dad would have bitten his tongue through before he would have made an accusation like that; but things were sadly different now.

"Constant dripping weareth away the stone," and the ceaseless calumnies and bitter gibes of his second wife had so warped the old general's heart that he was beginning to hate Ronald, too, in spite of himself.

As for Ian, there was never any doubt that he was his father's favourite. Ronald's grim silence seemed to incense the old soldier.

"To-morrow you both return to Sandhurst," he continued grimly. "For you, Ronald, it is your last chance. You have fooled away your time, frittered away your opportunities, and failed in your exams."

Ronald bent his head, for it was so.

"If you fail again, your chance of holding the King's commission, as you know, will be gone for ever. You will have disgraced the name and traditions of Chenys, as they have never been disgraced before, and you will have broken all my ambitions into dust. In the future you will have to fend for yourself. I will have done with you, and my doors will be closed against you."

A triumphant gleam shone in his wife's eyes at this. By hook or by crook this triumph must be consummated. With Ronald disgraced, her son would stand first in favour and fortune. His rival must be driven to the wall. He must not succeed.

"You hear me?" demanded the general severely. "Then go, both of you!"

Ian moved from the tree, his eyes fixed upon his mother. He read some signal there which told him too well to leave things alone, and depart.

He turned in the direction of the house, and Ronald, as though he had been waiting for him to move, raised his cap, swung on his heel, and took the opposite path.

Rough cocked his head on one side, and looked long at the old general, as much as to say, "You don't mean this, sir; you know you don't." But Ronald's whistle sounding through the trees, made him turn, too, and trot after his young master.

Ronald threw one gaitered leg over the stile at the far corner of the plantation, halted irresolutely, and sat down astride the rail.

What a glorious view it was! To the right the old manor-house; behind, the ranks of fir-trees, glowing red in the sunshine, and before him, field and furrow, weald and wold, the broad inheritance of the Chenys for three hundred years.

"My doors will be closed against you!"

Ronald seemed to hear the words again, and sighed.

"Poor old dad!" he said aloud. "I believe he means it, too. And, after all, I'm not surprised. Jove, how that woman hates me! Eh, Rough? You know, don't you? You've seen something of it in the five years you and I have chummed together, haven't you, old boy?"

And Rough jumped on to the step of the stile, and rubbed his shaggy muzzle against Ronald's cord breeches, as much as to say, "Haven't I just!"

"Never an opportunity missed to put in a bad word for me with the dad, to run me down, and cut me up, and all for what—eh, Rough? You don't know, do you? But you're only a dog—just a dog, who thinks that to have a chum always, and a little bit of grub once in a while, is about everything a healthy-minded creature should want in this world."

The terrier wagged his stubby tail to show that these were his sentiments exactly.

"But you're right, Rough; and if the worst comes to the worst—and I don't care if it does, except for the old dad's sake—we two will trot out into the world together, and leave the share that might have come to us one day—and a sad, sorrowful day that will be, Rough—to those that have schemed for years and years to grab it for themselves. Ah, Rough!"

But Rough had had enough of this moralising, and said so emphatically. There were sure to be rats taking the evening air among the rushes in the brook at the foot of the five-acre field, and he moved that this meeting should now adjourn, and the proper business of the day be transacted.

"Right-ho, Rough!" said Ronald, leaping from the stile. "And to-morrow we go back to the old coll., and that

beastly exam., upon which so much depends. My last shot, Rough, old boy, so wish me luck!"

Rough complied with a succession of ear-splitting barks, and then dashed downhill for the brook, as if he were an entire regiment of cavalry, and all the rats had been drawn up in hollow squares to repel the charge.

THE FIRST CHAPTER.

The Last Exam.—Ronald Is Accused of Cheating.

The Royal Military College, Sandhurst, is the training school for all officers of the cavalry and infantry of the British Army. Hither comes the youngster from the big public schools to be taught the whole duties of a soldier, who will some day have to lead soldiers.

From early morning he is swotted in the drill-ground, in the riding-school, and in gymnasium, and is swotted in the lecture halls. He must know not only how to drill, but be drilled; not only how to superintend the construction of bridges and field works, but to set to with axe and shovel to build and trench with his own hands.

And so he passes from examination to examination, until he receives his Majesty's commission, and is sent to guard the Empire in one of the four corners of the earth.

Sandhurst was in the throes of the examination at the time this chapter opens. From ten in the morning till one, and from two till five, the halls echoed softly to the ceaseless scratching of pens, the rustling of completed folios, the scrape of impatient heels, and now and then a sigh of despair.

The sighs were coming thick and fast from one corner, and more than one uniformed cadet, in a breathing moment of triumph, turned and shot a sympathising glance in its direction.

"Poor old Ronald!"

Ronald was having a bad time, though he tried hard not to show defeat. Still, he comforted himself that it might have been worse. At the outdoor work, at bridging, entrenching, riding, drilling, shooting, anything he could see with his eyes and get at with his hands—few could equal, and none could surpass him.

But at book work he was a rank duffer.

However, the fates had been fairly kind up till to-day; and, after all, he deserved success. He had swotted hard that term, cutting his cricket, and every other pleasure, so that he might grind at his beastly manuals.

So far he had not done badly, though none too well. The present paper on military topography was a corker, however, and threatened to eat up the small margin of hope of success.

If he got ploughed, what would happen? He would be the first eldest son for ten generations of Chenys who had failed to lead a company for his country. And that was a thing which did not bear reflection.

"Confound it all," he groaned under his breath, "only another hour to go!"

Already some of his more fortunate comrades had finished their papers, handed them up to the examiner, and quietly left.

Ronald glared at the dreary questions till the type was seared into his bewildered brain; then he stared at the ceiling, and seemed to read them there printed again.

Phew! It was hot! Even under the open window just above him there seemed scarcely a breath of air.

Figures, formula, scales!

He had adopted a system—a foolish one—of writing down lists of knotty facts in skeleton notes, and these he had carried about with him to scan at odd moments.

They were all in his room, of course, and here was he, helpless, trying to call them up, one by one, from the dim cells of his brain.

Suddenly a gleam shot through the mental fog enshrouding him. He had just remembered the answer to one particularly tricky question, and that would help him to two others, at least.

He gave one wild glance at the crawling hands of time, and flew headlong at his task.

Scratch, scratch, scratch! Old Ronald was bucking up. The professor on duty looked up slyly, and noted the sudden industry which had replaced the groaning inactivity.

He yawned, stepped off his dais, and took a turn or two up and down the room.

Ronald drove on. It was a race against time, and all his fortunes depended upon it. Even now he might scrape through.

The hall, the professor, his fellow-victims were forgotten. So far as he remembered or cared they might have been at the bottom of the sea.

"Mr. Chenys!"

Scratch, scratch, scratch!

"Mr. Chenys!"

This time the voice was louder, and there was a harshness in the tone which brought Ronald up with a round turn.

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NEXT
TUESDAY:

WHARTON & CO. v. MERRY & CO.

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He looked up, and saw the professor's face—white, bewildered, furious—bent upon him.

"Sir!" he exclaimed, sitting up.

"Perhaps you will explain the presence of this list of notes in an examination-room?"

"Sir!" said Ronald again, now as white and bewildered as he, and glared at the accusing slip which the examiner held in his hands.

It was one of those condensed lists of difficult facts he had drawn up, and carried them about for the purpose of memorising them.

"Why, where did that come from, sir?" he gasped, turning sick with horror.

"It is for me to ask you that," came the stern reply.

"Is it in your handwriting?"

"Yes."

"And I found it here, beside your desk, on the floor. You must have dropped it," suggested the professor, in sneering irony.

Ronald's face flew from white to a furious red, and then to white again at the insinuation.

"Sir, I swear on my honour that I did not bring that paper into this room, and I have not the least idea how it came here."

"And you had not seen it before I showed it to you, of course?" suggested the professor, with an undisguised curl of the lip.

"Only in my study, not here," replied Ronald, with desperation.

"Let me look at what you have written."

The examiner took the papers, and glanced through them with a supercilious smile.

Everyone in the room had laid down his pen, and was staring in Ronald's direction, paralysed with astonishment. Even the ticking of the precious moments could not lure them back to their work while this awful thing was happening in their midst.

That Ronald Chenys could do such a low-down, despicable thing none was ready to believe, yet—

"It is a curious thing," said the examiner, breaking a deathlike stillness, "that of all the questions set, the only ones you have shaped at are those included in this—what shall I call it?—a crib!"

"Confound it, sir—" began Ronald, his anger blazing up in a flash.

"Silence! Don't dare to address me in that language!" commanded the professor, white with rage. "Here are three questions, the keys to which are contained in these notes, which you have answered fully; the others, not included, you have scarcely touched."

"That may be, and yet I say again that I know nothing of this thing," cried Ronald. "The conclusions you attempt to draw, sir, are pure coincidence. On my honour, I am innocent!"

But the professor had already turned on his heel in contempt.

"If I remember rightly, you have failed one term already," he rapped out suddenly, as he reached his seat.

"That is so!" said Ronald, his heart dropping, if not his head, for his chin was high, and his blue eyes blazed like unwinking stars.

"Exactly; and on your passing this time depends whether you gain your commission or not."

Ronald kept his lips shut; but the question was tipped with such unmistakable venom, that the other cadets present could not suppress a faint hiss of disgust.

The man swung round upon them with a tigerish glare, but he met two score of glinting eyes which never flickered in their gaze. He flung down Ronald's papers on the desk with a vicious jerk.

"From this moment, Mr. Ronald Chenys, I place you under close arrest," he said at last. "Your case will be reported to the assistant commandant. Meantime, go to your room!"

Ronald dragged his heels under him, and tried to rise. The whole thing had so stunned him, however, that for the moment he felt he had not the strength to move. All hopes, ambitions, even life itself seemed to have crumbled.

Then the proud blood of the Chenys again leapt, and he sprang to his feet. Straight as a lance, steady as on parade, he marched down the long room and through the door.

The bell rang; the examination was over.

The news spread like wildfire through the college. Ronald Chenys, the best bat, the best half-back, the best rifle shot, the best of good fellows—the best of everything, in fact—had been caught cheating.

(Another long instalment of this splendid Army story next Tuesday. Please order your copy of "The Magnet" Library in advance. Price One Halfpenny.)

IN THE RANKS.

(Concluding Chapters).

Tom Howard, unable to repress a smile, ventured to turn appealing eyes on the colonel.

"We will keep him out of harm's way, sir, and won't let him get to the front," said Tom, saluting, detecting, as he believed, a questioning in the chief's eye.

"I don't see you, Sergeant Hogan," said the colonel, looking in the other direction.

Hogan turned to his companions with a huge smile of immense contentment, and brandished his sword silently above his head, which set them all laughing again.

They had to pick their way slowly before they reached the plain without, for the ground was cumbered with debris and manifold signs of the previous night's engagement; and, as they passed the Ploughshires, who were just calling the roll, Tom started at the sound of his cousin's name.

"Lieutenant Dashwood is missing, sir," said the sergeant-major, in his loud, authoritative voice. And Tom felt his sabre quiver in his right hand. "Jenkins thinks he saw him on the hillock yonder, and he must have been killed after they retired."

And Tom, following the direction of the sergeant-major's finger, absolutely leaped in his saddle.

A wounded man lay on the side of the sandhill, plainly visible in the bright morning light, and approaching him stealthily was a knot of nine or ten white-garbed tribesmen.

"By heaven, that is Leonard!" ejaculated the sergeant.

And he insensibly quickened his horse's pace, worming his way into the press of men who filed through the opening.

Leonard Dashwood was looking wildly round, and realised his danger, and up over his bare head went his arm, which he waved feebly—a little flash of light on the nickel-plating showed them that it held a revolver—and, leaning painfully back on his elbow, for the effort had been too much for him, he fired two shots into the murderous group, who were not twenty paces from him.

Tom's heart stood still, and then began to beat violently. A thousand emotions surged in his brain, and Clavering, who realised the position, saw that his face went a curious grey colour under its tan. Tom did not know that the colonel had caught sight of him, and knew what was passing through his mind; but, casting all proprieties to the wind, the sergeant clapped his spurs into his mare's sides, and shot past the chief like an arrow from the bow.

A smile played under Greville's grey moustache, and he opened his mouth to give the word to gallop; but before he could do so a wild Irish howl rent the morning air, and Hogan, twenty years younger at the long-forgotten feel of a good horse under him, followed in our hero's wake, the skirts of his frock-coat flying in the wind.

The Hussars cheered as they got under way, and the Ploughshires cheered the Hussars. Colonel Martin watching through his glasses, imparted to those about him the sum total of what he saw, with all the eager excitement of a man watching the finish of a big race. And it was a big race—for life or death!

"By gad!" cried the colonel of the Ploughshires. "Look at those chaps up yonder! Half a hundred of them, at least, bolting like smoke!"

More than fifty of the discomfited rebels had lain low in a nullah, waiting developments. And as Tom Howard, followed by Hogan, swept past them at lightning speed, they peeped up to see the long line of Hussars

coming up with a thundering that made the plain shake. The fierce mountaineers had lost heart, and, leaping from their concealment, ran, with discordant cries.

The little incident of the sergeant and the wounded officer on the hillock faded into insignificance before this opportunity, and, inclining to the right, as by a common impulse, the bulk of the squadron dashed off in hot pursuit, leaping the nullah with one or two horses down.

Colonel Martin swept his glasses back upon his own officer, and the little man's face was very stern and set.

"He has shot another one! Ten thousand pities that the man was such a scoundrel! He is making a good fight of it! Great Scott! He is trying to lift a rifle and bayonet, but he's too weak!" And the colonel uttered a sharp exclamation. "The fiends are on top of him! Bravo, sergeant! Never saw such a thing in my life! Good, sir, good! Two down! Three down!"

Dick Vivian, his glasses also glued to his eyes, was sobbing like a child in his excitement.

By this time, Colonel Greville, the Hon Algy, and twenty more of the Hussars—Jim Clavering among them—had reached the scene of Leonard Dashwood's last stand. Hogan was bareheaded. The second-hand solar helmet he had bought in Bombay lay on the plain, cleft in two, and Hogan was bleeding from a wound on his temple. The man who had inflicted it had not lived to strike again, for Hogan drove the life out of him with the celebrated "Cut 1" of his youth, and of the nine tribesmen who had stalked the wounded officer, eight lay still or writhing in their agony round about the disgraced lieutenant.

Before Colonel Greville had reached the spot, Hogan had caught Tom's mare. For, the business done, Sergeant Sir John Dashwood had leapt to the ground, and was now kneeling beside his dying cousin.

Tom—shall we still call him by the old name?—had stuck his sabre into the sand. Leonard Dashwood was stretched upon his back, and to all appearance he had passed away. He was terribly cut about, and both his legs were broken.

Tom, almost as white as the wounded man, placed his canteen to Leonard's lips, and managed to force some water between his set teeth.

"He has gone, Hogan," said our hero, looking up with haggard eyes at the old soldier.

Death was nothing to Sergeant Hogan in itself. He had braved it a thousand times, in every shape and form. But even his rough, uneducated nature felt the solemnity of that moment as, possibly, he had never done before.

"No, he is still alive," said Tom, as Leonard's hand opened and closed convulsively on the grip of his empty revolver, and his eyelids quivered a little.

Colonel Martin had sent out two hospital bearers and an ambulance stretcher on his own responsibility. They were even then coming across the plain towards the group. And as Colonel Greville's shadow

fell across the prostrate man Leonard Dashwood opened his eyes and looked up into the face bending over his own. A spasm convulsed his features. The eyes dropped again, only to open a little later, and his mouth twitched as though he were trying to speak.

The colonel got down from his horse and unbuttoned the breast of Dashwood's jacket.

"Hopeless—hopeless!" he said, with a shudder of horror. "He is absolutely cut to pieces! I don't know whether we ought to risk moving him."

It was not the whisper that reached the dying man's ears that made Leonard Dashwood start, but the action of turning back his jacket. His eyes opened wide again, and fixed intently on Jack's own.

(This story will be concluded shortly. There will be another long instalment of "ONE OF THE RANKS" next week. Please order your "Magnet" Library in advance.)

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