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By
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The Greyfriars Camp



A Long, Complete

Tale of the

Chums of Greyfriars.

BY FRANK RICHARDS.

THE FIRST CHAPTER. A Complete "Mess-Up."

"WILL it rain?"

The Lower Fourth at Greyfriars were busy. They were in the Form-room, under the eye of Mr. Quelch, the Form-master; and they were engaged in a more or less interesting excursion into early English history. The Lower Fourth—otherwise called the Remove—were not particularly thrilled by the names and dates of the Saxon kings. But, as Nugent said, it was "form" to show a certain amount of interest in lessons; and, besides, Mr. Quelch and his "pointer" had to be considered. And so the Remove were keeping up an admirable appearance of interest.

Yet there were several juniors who showed signs of unrest.

Bob Cherry was the chief offender, and Mr. Quelch's eye had been upon him several times. Thrice, at least, Bob had twisted his head round to get a look at the high class-room windows. Apparently he was keenly interested in the

weather. The morning had been fine—very fine and dry. But as last lesson commenced, there had come a drift of cloud over the blue summer sky. Now, as the afternoon was a half-holiday, and some of the Removites had special plans for that half-holiday, there was some excuse for anxiety. But the glint in Mr. Quelch's eye showed that he was growing, as Billy Bunter would have expressed it, very "waxy."

"Will it rain?"

Bob Cherry murmured that remark, and Nugent answered with a sympathetic grunt. Harry Wharton looked round at the windows, caught the master's eye fixed upon him, and looked back to his desk again. Hurree Jamset Ram Singh, the Nabob of Bhanipur, looked round, too, and did not notice that Mr. Quelch was beginning to glare.

"Hurree Singh!"

The dusky junior twisted round again.

"Yes, sir—the yesfulness is terrific," he stammered.

"Will you oblige me by sitting still?"

"Certainly, respected sahib."

"Cherry!"

"Yes, sir."

"If you stir in your place again I shall have something to say to you."

"Thank you, sir; I—I mean, yes, sir."

And the lesson proceeded. Some of the Removites were grinning. They knew the cause of the uneasiness of Harry Wharton and his chums. If it rained that afternoon, one of the finest excursions that had ever been planned in No. 1 Study would be "messed-up." For five juniors of the Remove were going "caravanning."

They had planned it before, the previous Wednesday; but, although a really serviceable gipsy caravan and a good horse had come into their hands, a series of misfortunes had completely knocked the caravanning on the head. But since then they had had time to mature their plans. The caravan belonging to their old gipsy friend, Nadesha, was at Mr. Milsom's livery-stables in the village, and the horse was at their service, and all sorts of supplies had been laid in—at Mr. Milsom's. There was no chance of a raid of the Upper Fourth fellows spoiling the expedition this time. The excursion was bound to come off—bound to be a success—if only the weather held good.

They had a right to expect fine weather in the heart of the summer; but, with the English climate, you never can tell! Hence the anxiety of the Removites who were of the crew of the caravan.

The drift of cloud across the patch of sky that could be seen from the Remove windows caused deep alarm and disquietude. It was almost impossible for the juniors to think or care whether William conquered Harold, or Harold conquered William while there was a threatening of rain in the air.

"Will it rain?" muttered Bob Cherry once more.

Mr. Quelch's head was turned away for a moment. Bob's anxiety to look at the windows behind the class was keen. The cloud might have passed over—or the first drops might be falling!

Bob simply had to look. After all, Quelch hadn't eyes in the back of his head. Bob twisted round once more and looked at the windows.

The dark shadow was still over the blue. But Bob Cherry ceased to think of that the next moment, as he heard the voice of the Form-master. Mr. Quelch apparently had eyes in the back of his head after all—at all events, he had looked round at Bob Cherry, and caught him in the act.

"Cherry!"

Bob Cherry jumped.

"Yes, sir."

"It appears that you cannot keep still."

"Yes, sir. No, sir. I—I hope so, sir."

"You will stay in one hour this afternoon, Cherry, and write out one hundred times, 'It is necessary to keep order in the Form-room.'"

Bob Cherry gasped.

"Stay in, sir?" he said faintly.

"Yes, Cherry. Did you speak, Wharton?"

"I, sir?"

"Yes, you, Wharton. Did you speak?"

"I only said 'My hat!' sir," stammered Harry.

"Ah! You may stay in and keep Cherry company, and write out fifty times, 'I must not utter absurd ejaculations in the Form-room.'"

"Ye-e-e-es, sir."

Harry Wharton uttered no more absurd ejaculations. He was stricken dumb. In a moment all had been ruined.

With himself and Bob Cherry detained, the expedition would be a frost. They could start later, but all their plans were thrown out of gear by this. It was a bolt from the blue—more unexpected and more disconcerting than bad weather. They might have managed to caravan in the wet—but there was no getting over a Form-master's detention.

Frank Nugent, Hazeldene, and Hurree Singh looked as dismayed as Wharton and Cherry. Billy Bunter blinked at them sympathetically through his big spectacles. Billy Bunter was going with the caravanners—he had not been included in the party, but with his usual coolness he had included himself. There were some of the Remove who grinned. Bulstrode and Snoop and their friends were not displeased by any disappointment that fell upon Wharton.

Mr. Quelch resumed the lesson with a stern and unrelaxing brow. He was a very severe master as a rule, and the Remove admitted—with pride—that they required a tight hand. When they had had a weak Form-master, they had ridden over him rough-shod. Quelch knew how to handle them; and if he was a little too hard at times, they had only themselves to thank for it.

But the caravanners were in no mood to think about that now. They were worried about the excursion.

"Of all the rotten sells," murmured Frank Nugent cautiously, "I think this is about the rottenest. Quelch is a beast!"

"Nugent!"

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NEXT
WEEK:

"THE TENANTS OF STUDY 13."

"Ye-e-es, sir."

"Who succeeded Edwy the Fair upon the throne of England?"

"William the Conqueror, sir. I—I mean Henry the Eighth—that is—"

Mr. Quelch smiled grimly.

"Your thoughts seem to be wandering, Nugent. The thoughts of several boys here seem to be wandering this morning. I should have thought that even the most stupid boy in the Remove would know that Edwy the Fair was succeeded by Edgar the Peaceful. You are not the most stupid boy in the Remove, Nugent; and therefore I can only conclude that you are paying no attention to me. You will stay in this afternoon and write out the names of the Saxon kings from Egbert to Edward the Confessor, fifty times."

"My only aunt Matilda!"

"What did you say, Nugent?"

"Ye-e-e-es, sir."

Hurree Jamset Ram Singh, much concerned for his friends, rose in his place, his dusky face very earnest.

"If you please, honourable teacher sahib—"

"You may sit down, Hurree Singh."

"But I have the respectful and ludicrous remarks to make to your honourable and never-sufficiently-to-be-esteemed-and-venerated self. My worthy chums have not possessed the disgusting intention of displaying the unworthy disrespect towards their instructor sahib—"

"Sit down!"

"Yes, sir; but they were impressed with anxiousness concerning the statefulness of the esteemed weather. That is why—"

"Silence!"

"I will be as silentful as the esteemed grave; but if the honourable sahib will allow me to explainfully point out—"

"You will stay in two hours this afternoon!" thundered Mr. Quelch. "And if you speak another word I will send you in to the Head."

Nugent dragged the dismayed nabob down into his place.

Mr. Quelch's face was very ruffled during the remainder of the lesson. He dismissed the Remove at last, much to their relief.

But the faces of the Famous Four were clouded as they left the Form-room. After dinner they had to return there, while the horse and the caravan were waiting for them at Friardale.

"It's rotten!" said Nugent.

And his disconsolate chums agreed that it was.

THE SECOND CHAPTER,

A Friend in Need.

A BLAZE of summer sunshine greeted the juniors as they came out into the Close. The drift of cloud had passed on towards the sea, leaving the sky a spotless blue. It was to be one of the finest afternoons of the summer; and their anxiety had been without grounds. But the weather mattered little now. They were detained, and it might have rained cats and dogs without making their plight much worse.

Cheerful juniors crowded down to the cricket-field, and the merry click of bat and ball rang in the sunshine. The Famous Four did not join them. They were trying to think of a way out of the scrape, but they could not.

"Quelch thinks it was a jape," said Harry Wharton. "If he knew that we were really worrying about the weather, I think he'd let us down a little more lightly; but it's no good trying to explain to him. He wouldn't listen to a word from us now."

"I say, you fellows—"

"Oh, don't bother now, Billy!"

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A Splendid Tale of Harry Wharton & Co.
and the Pupils of Cliff House.

"Oh, really, Cherry—"

"Buzz off!"

"But look here; I think I might be able to help you. I don't want the excursion to be messed-up this afternoon, as I'm coming with you."

"Oh, you're coming, are you?" said Bob Cherry grimly.

"Yes, of course. I'd jolly well like to know what you'd do for a cook without me," said Bunter indignantly; "and, besides, I shall be able to get some snapshots on the road. Of course, I shall take my camera. Speaking of the camera, will you lend me a few shillings to get new plates, Wharton? I can get them in the village. I'll let you have it back out of my postal order to-morrow."

"Go and eat coke!"

"Look here, I think I might use my influence for you," said Bunter. "Perhaps if I were to put it straight to Quelch—"

Bob Cherry inserted his knuckles into Bunter's collar, twisted the fat junior round, and applied his boot to him. Bunter squirmed and ran, rather unsteadily.

"Now, you buzz off!" said Bob.

"Oh, really, Cherry—"

Bob Cherry ran at him with his foot uplifted, and Bunter promptly "buzzed off." He ran right into Mark Linley, the lad from Lancashire, who was coming to speak to Wharton. Linley caught him by the shoulders and stopped him.

"Ow! Oh, really, Bulstrode—"

"Mind where you are going!" said Linley, laughing.

The fat junior blinked at him.

"Oh, is that you, Linley? Can you lend me five bob?"

"No, I can't."

And Linley went on, leaving Bunter blinking and gasping for breath. The Lancashire lad nodded cheerily to the Famous Four.

"You're in hard luck," he said.

Mark Linley had been invited to join the caravanning party, but he had not been able to accept. The "scholarship boy" put in a great deal more time at work than any other junior at Greyfriars. Some of the fellows sneeringly spoke of him as a "swot" and a "sap," but Mark did not care. He knew that his scholarship at Greyfriars was limited in time, and that when it had expired, his people were too poor to dream of keeping him there. He meant to make hay while the sun shone; and there were several masters and prefects who were glad to lend a hand to the lad who was so resolute to help himself. That afternoon Mr. Quelch had promised him a couple of hours to help him with his Greek, an "extra" subject at Greyfriars which Mark could not afford to take up in the regular way. And even the prospect of a jolly afternoon in a caravan did not tempt Mark from such a chance as that.

"Hard isn't the word," growled Bob Cherry. "It's just as well that you decided to stick to your old Greek, as the excursion's messed-up anyway."

"Couldn't you try to explain to Mr. Quelch—"

"Oh, he wouldn't listen to a word! We shall have to grin and bear it."

"It's hard cheese!"

"Beastly hard! Last time the caravanning was messed-up, through those Upper Fourth rotters, and now— Oh, it won't bear talking of! Let's go and get some cricket, kids, or I shall get into a bad temper."

There was evidently nothing better to be done. Mark Linley was looking thoughtful as he watched the chums of the Remove go down to the cricket ground. He would gladly have helped them if he could.

The cricket put the detained juniors into a little better humour. They came in to dinner with rosy cheeks, and less clouded brows. After dinner they had to repair to the class-room, instead of cycling down to the village, as they had intended.

"It's rough on you, too, Vaseline," Bob Cherry remarked to Hazeldene, who walked with them to the Form-room. "I suppose you can't go alone—eh?"

Hazeldene laughed ruefully.

"No, not very well. I think I'll have a spin over to Cliff House, and get some tea with Marjorie and the girls."

"You lucky bargee! I wish I were in your shoes!" said Nugent.

And the detained juniors went glumly to their desks. Hazeldene strolled away, and passed Mark Linley, who was going towards the Form-master's study with his books under his arm. Hazeldene glanced at him, and made a wry face.

"My word!" he said. "What have you got there? Xenophon's 'Anabasis,' 'Liddell and Scott'! Phew! You must like work!"

"Mr. Quelch is going to help me this afternoon," explained Mark.

Hazeldene yawned.

"Rather you than I! Pity you can't be detained instead of Wharton; you wouldn't mind it. So long!"

Mark smiled as he walked on. He tapped at Mr. Quelch's door, and the Form-master bade him enter. Mr. Quelch greeted him with a smile and a nod. Like many a master

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WEEK:

"THE TENANTS OF STUDY 13."

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of great attainments, he was gratified to have a pupil who understood the real value of knowledge, and was anxious to learn. He had some good pupils in the Remove—especially Wharton and Nugent—but the rest, though by no means dull, had not that keen thirst for knowledge which a master is always glad to see in a pupil. They had too many other interests.

Mark put his books down, and instead of accepting Mr. Quelch's kind invitation to be seated, he remained standing, irresolute, with the colour deepening in his cheeks.

The Form-master looked a little surprised.

"If you please, sir, I—I should like to speak to you a moment," stammered Mark. "I hope you won't think it impertinence on my part, sir."

"I have never found you impertinent, Linley."

"It's about Wharton, sir, and the others."

"Ah, they have been detained! Surely they have not asked you to speak to me for them?" said Mr. Quelch, his brow darkening.

"Oh, no, sir, nothing of the sort! But—I thought you mightn't mind my telling you—that—they had a special excursion planned for this afternoon."

"I am sorry for that."

"They didn't mean to be japing—I—I mean, to be impertinent in the Form-room this morning, sir," said Mark eagerly. "They were anxious about the weather. It came over cloudy, sir, and that was the reason."

Mr. Quelch's face relaxed.

"Ahem! They ought not to have been thinking about the weather in lesson time. Still, what you have told me alters the matter a great deal. You can take them a message from me. Tell them that they can do a hundred lines each instead of being detained this afternoon."

"Oh, thank you, sir!"

And Mark hurried away with the good news. Needless to say, it was greeted with joy in the Form-room. Bob Cherry gave a cheer that made the old room ring, and hugged the Lancashire lad round the neck.

"Come to my arms, my giddy preserver!" he exclaimed.

"Here you are, Nugent; fold him to your bosom and weep."

Mark Linley laughed.

"It's a hundred lines each instead," he remarked. "You're getting off cheaply. I hope you'll have a good time. Good-bye!"

"And thanks, awfully!" said Harry Wharton. "We're very much obliged to you, Linley."

And the Lancashire lad returned to the Form-master's study. The Famous Four hurried out joyfully. As Hurree Jamset Ram Singh said, the joyfulness was terrific. They found Hazeldene wheeling out his bicycle, and imparted to him the good news.

Billy Bunter was standing disconsolately watching the cricketers, when Bob Cherry, in the fullness of his heart, gave him a mighty smite on the shoulder that made him stagger.

"It's all right, Bunter!"

"Is it all right?" shrieked Bunter, recovering himself, and grasping at his glasses. "You utter maniac! You nearly knocked my glasses off, and if they had got broken you'd have had to pay for them. You—you—you—"

"But it's all right; we're going caravanning, and you can come."

"Oh, really, Cherry, that alters the case! Wait a minute while I get my camera. Are you sure you have enough grub?"

"Heaps!"

"Better make quite sure, you know. I shouldn't mind doing some shopping for you—in fact, it would be a pleasure. Mrs. Mimble has some nice fresh pies— Oh, really, Cherry, I wish you wouldn't walk away while I'm talking!"

"How are we going to get the porpoise to Friardale?" asked Hazeldene, as Bunter joined the juniors. "He hasn't a machine."

"I could ride any of them, Vaseline, if one of you fellows wouldn't mind walking."

"Yes, that's extremely likely!"

"I don't think you ought to be selfish. I—"

"Bunty can stand on my machine," said Bob. "He can put his hoofs on the foot-rests, and his paws on my shoulders. It's not a long run. Luckily, I've just had a new back tyre. Come on!"

And the juniors, in a merry mood, set out for Friardale.

THE THIRD CHAPTER.

The Start.

"I—I—I say, you fellows!" gasped Billy Bunter. "Hallo, hallo, hallo!" exclaimed Bob Cherry, looking round at the fat junior, perched behind him on the bicycle. "What's the matter with you? Is it lying on your conscience because you're having such an easy time, and not doing any of the work?"

A Splendid Tale of Harry Wharton & Co.
and the Pupils of Cliff House.

"I—I—I'm not having an easy time, Cherry. I—I—I'm awfully uncomfortable, and I—I—I don't feel safe."

"My dear Bunt, there's too much of the first person, singular number about you. There always is. Shut up and hang on."

"I—I—I—I—"

There was a foot-rest on either side of Bob Cherry's rear wheel, and so the fat junior ought to have been able to stand there easily enough, holding to Bob's shoulders behind. But Billy Bunter was not noted for activity. He swayed from side to side in a way that threatened to drag the bicycle over, and hurl himself and Bob Cherry into the ditch, and the machine as well.

The only way Bob could counteract that swaying was by putting on speed, and he did so; and the bicycle rushed along at a rate that made Billy Bunter's head swim.

"I—I—I say, Cherry, stop—please stop! Ow! I'm falling!"

"Oh, hold on, old chap!" said Bob Cherry encouragingly. "If you fall you'll break something, and the other chaps will pile on you."

"Ow, ow, ow!"

"Here, hold on, Bob!" called out Harry Wharton. "Let the young ass get down. He can walk the rest of the distance, while we're getting the caravan out."

Bob Cherry jammed his brake on.

The machine stopped, and Bunter sat down in the road, sending up a cloud of dust, and without any clear idea as to how he got there. He gave a gasp like escaping steam.

"Well, of all the duffers!" ejaculated Bob Cherry. "You, a chap who took up physical culture, too! You're only fit to browse in a field. Scat!"

"Oh really, Cherry—"

"Come on to Milsom's, Billy!" said Wharton, laughing; and the juniors rode on, leaving Billy Bunter to pick himself up and dust himself, which he did very slowly. He was not looking pleased.

"Selfish rotters!" he murmured. "Fancy leaving me to walk—and I'm such a jolly bad walker! I suppose I'd better get on. Br-r-r-r!"

And the fat junior got on. The cyclists were only a few more minutes in reaching Mr. Milsom's. That gentleman greeted them very civilly, and announced that the caravan and the horse were quite ready. The Artful Dodger, as Bob Cherry had named the horse, on account of his many wiles, looked at the juniors over the edge of his stall, and Bob said there was a twinkle in his eye. Perhaps he remembered the time when he had carried the helpless Bob careering round the Close at Greyfriars, and trampled over the doctor's flower-beds. Bob Cherry had expressed the rather contradictory opinion that that horse was almost human, he was such a beast.

Still, there was no doubt that the Dodger was a powerful and active animal, quite equal to the task of pulling the Saucy Susan caravan up hill and down dale; and that was what the young caravanners wanted.

"E's glad to see you," said Mr. Milsom affably. "E's a wonderful 'oss, he is. Never forgets a face."

Harry patted the horse's head. The Artful Dodger whinnied; but when Bob Cherry was about to bestow the same attention upon him, he put his ears back. It was evident that the Dodger had his likes and dislikes.

The Saucy Susan stood ready in the yard. The gipsy caravan had been washed down, and the interior touched up with fresh paint, at the expense of the Greyfriars chums. The windows had been made to open, and the interior was well aired—a change from the stuffy state it had been accustomed to in the hands of old Telengro. The horse was harnessed, and Mr. Milsom's man led it out of the yard. As it rumbled into the street, Billy Bunter arrived, very red and breathless. There was no clatter of pots and pans hanging to the van now; they had been removed, and only the utensils necessary to the juniors for camping purposes were left in the van, and secured so that they would not clatter and clang with every movement.

"I—I say, you fellows, I've had a walk!" gasped Bunter. "It's hot! Almost wish it had rained, after all. Are you ready to start?"

"Yes; jump in."

"Good! By the way, I should like to get some new plates for my camera. I've only six I borrowed of Ogilvy, and there'll very likely be a row when he misses them. I can't help that, of course. I must take some photographs when I go on an excursion, or what's the good of having a camera? Will some of you lend me ten shillings?"

"No!"

"The nofulness is terrific."

"Well, a bob would do," said Bunter, who could always come from big sums down to little ones, if necessary, with surprising suddenness. "Make it a bob, Wharton. We shall pass the shop. I'll give you an enlargement of the best picture to hang up in the study—I will really. I think

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you might do the decent thing, as it was my influence that got you off your detention this afternoon."

Harry Wharton laughed, and tossed a shilling to the fat junior.

"There you are! Don't keep us waiting."

And Billy Bunter darted off. Harry Wharton mounted into the driver's seat, and took the reins. A number of the curious youth of Friardale collected round to see them start, and some derisive ejaculations were heard. One youth demanded to know whether they had any clothes-lines or clothes-props to sell, and another whether they mended kettles and saucepans. Taking no notice of those frivolous inquiries, the Greyfriars juniors drove off.

The caravan lumbered down the old High Street of Friardale, and many were the glances cast towards it. But however curious it looked to see the juniors in charge of the gipsy vehicle, there was no doubt that Wharton handled the horse well, and some of the glances were admiring. The old High Street was narrow in places, and though there was little traffic what there was was frequently congested. In a strait, with a butcher's cart and a dray in opposition, Wharton brought off the caravan in triumph.

Billy Bunter came out of the photographer's shop with a packet in his hand, and boarded the caravan, which then rolled out into the open country.

Wharton had mapped out the route. He had a pass from Wingate, the captain of Greyfriars, which allowed him and his friends to cut afternoon roll-call. The chums had not to get back to the school until locking-up, which was at dusk, and at this time of the year dusk was very late. There was ample time for a really extensive expedition, and the chums naturally wanted to get as far as they could from familiar surroundings. So long as they were encircled by scenes they knew, the sense of adventure was to some extent lacking.

Wharton was driving. Bob Cherry sat on the roof of the caravan with his legs dangling down in front, and Hurree Jamset Ram Singh and Frank Nugent were on the shafts. Hazeldene and Billy Bunter were inside the vehicle. The Artful Dodger, so far, was on his best behaviour. But about a mile out of Friardale the travellers reached the first hill of any consequence, and there the Dodger began to show the cloven foot.

The pace of the caravan dropped to a crawl, and all, except the driver, of course, walked. But that lightening of the load did not inspire the Dodger with new energy. He showed signs of exhaustion, and Bob Cherry uttered an exclamation of disgust.

"The beast!" he said. "We've been taken in with this brute, Harry! Look at him hanging his head! He's fagged out already!"

Harry Wharton laughed. He knew more than Bob Cherry did about horses.

"That's all right," he said. "It's only humbug. He could take this hill at the run if he wanted to. I'll give him a touch up."

A flick of the whip was all that was necessary. The Dodger bucked up at once, and the caravan rumbled up the incline at quite an active rate. They rattled cheerily over the hill, and down the opposite slope. Then Harry turned from the high road into a rutty lane.

"No good following the beaten tracks," he remarked, as the caravan began to bump on the ruts of dried mud. "We shall get to the woods this way."

"Can we get the van through the trees?" asked Nugent.

"Yes, rather—gipsies often do."

"Well, it will be ripping," said Bob Cherry. "I suppose you know this way, Harry? I don't."

"I've a good idea of it."

The caravan bumped on. There was a glimmer of sunlight on flowing water ahead, and white stepping-stones glistened in the bed of a shallow stream.

"All aboard," said Harry, and those who were walking, jumped into the caravan. The Remove captain brought the van carefully down to the stream, and the Artful Dodger took the ford cheerfully enough.

Splash! Splash!

"My hat!" said Bob Cherry. "This is exciting!"

"If we get stuck in the sand—" remarked Nugent.

"The excitement will be terrific."

The water rose round the wheels of the van, and over the axles. The horse's hoofs splashed up water and sand. In the middle of the stream the water was almost up to the floor-boards.

"Get on," said Harry, as the Dodger stopped.

But the horse did not move.

"Crack, crack!" rang the whip, and then the lash curled round the horse's shoulders. The Dodger snorted, but did not advance. In the middle of the stream, with tricklets of water creeping in over the floor, the caravan remained at a standstill.

"COME up!"
"Get on, you beast!"
"Go it!"

The whip cracked, and the reins jerked. But Dodger declined to move. He looked round once reproachfully at Harry, and then hung his head, and remained still.

"My hat!" said Bob Cherry. "This is lively! He wants us to stay here for the term of our natural lives!"

"The liveliness is terrific!"

"The brute!" muttered Harry. "It's only obstinacy; but if he won't go on, the wheels will get stuck in the mud, and we shall be anchored. One of you fellows jump down and lead him."

"No fear," said Nugent promptly. "The water's too wet. See if it's dry on your side, Bob."

"No, it's wet over here, too," grinned Bob Cherry. "I'm relying on the driver. Wharton will bring us through all right."

Harry Wharton laughed rather ruefully. As he had taken charge of the horse, he was bound to bring the caravan through. But it was no joke to plunge up to the waist in the water to lead the obstinate Dodger. He preferred to try the whip again. The lash curled round the Dodger, but he stuck fast, with a grim determination oftener found in a donkey than in the equine species.

"He likes that, I believe," said Bob Cherry, comfortably perched on top of the caravan, and looking down with an air of detachment upon the scene, as if he were nothing more than a spectator at a show. "You'll have to try something else, Harry."

"Perhaps the van's too heavy," said Nugent. "We might reduce the weigh by half, by throwing Bunter out."

Bunter, who was looking out of one of the open windows, blinked at him in alarm, not knowing whether he was in earnest.

"Oh, really, Nugent—"

"Better get on," said Hazeldene, looking out of the other window. "The water's beginning to come into the van."

"You ass!" exclaimed Harry. "I'm not sticking here for fun."

"Well, try and get on, you know. The water's coming into—"

"Go it, Harry!"

"I'll take the reins if you like," said Nugent.

Harry sniffed. He gave the obstinate Dodger a touch again with the whip, and the Dodger heeded it this time. It was a gentler touch than he had had before, but perhaps the Dodger thought the joke had gone far enough, or perhaps he was tired of standing in the water. At all events, he made a sudden plunge forward, and the caravan moved so suddenly that the juniors had to clutch hold to avoid being thrown off. But Bob Cherry, sitting in an easy attitude on the roof with his legs dangling, had nothing to hold to. He made a desperate grasp at the chimney, but missed and rolled off the roof.

Splash!

"Ow-w-w-w-w-w!"

The water splashed up over the caravan and the caravanners as Bob Cherry plunged into it. He went right under, but the water was shallow, and in a moment he was on his feet, the stream flowing round his waist.

"Ow! Oh! Br-r-r! Stop for me!"

But the caravan could not stop.

The Dodger, having made up his mind to go on, went on, and the caravan splashed and rumbled through the stream rapidly, and was dragged up the opposite bank.

It was all Wharton could do to handle the reins, and keep the Dodger from wrecking the caravan in the mud, or stranding it in the rushes, without thinking of Bob Cherry. The unfortunate junior, drenched and dripping, plunged after the van, and scrambled ashore, gasping.

"Ow!" he roared. "Look at me! I'm drenched!"

"You do look wet!" gasped Harry, as he turned the caravan into the road again. "You might as well have got down and led the horse, after all."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Bob Cherry did not join in the laugh. He grunted indignantly, and clambered into the van to change his clothes. Billy Bunter had a fire going to cook the lunch, but he objected strenuously to Bob using the stove to dry his clothes. The caravan rattled on merrily while the dispute raged inside.

"You're making everything wet, Cherry," said Bunter warmly. "I think you might show a little more consideration, I do, really."

"Haven't I got to change my clothes?" roared Bob, who was not in the best of tempers by this time.

"Well, I don't think you ought to make the place all wet. You're interrupting my work. Look here, couldn't you sit on the roof and get dry in the sun? You'd very likely be dry in an hour or two."

Bob Cherry did not reply in words. He gave Bunter a No. 74.

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push on the chest that made him sit down in a great hurry, and proceeded to change his clothes. He stripped off the wet garments and arranged them round the little stove, and a thick steam was soon rising. Hazeldene went out on the step at the back to make more room; but Billy Bunter sat on a stool and glowered through his big glasses.

"Gimme a towel!" roared Bob, so suddenly that Bunter nearly fell off the stool.

The juniors had brought towels, in case they should have an opportunity to get some bathing. Bob rubbed down his wet limbs and dripping hair with a rough towel, and felt better. But although the first half of the changing was easy, it was not so easy to finish. The caravanners had made no provision for such an accident, and there was no second suit of clothes in the caravan. Bob Cherry eyed Bunter grimly.

"You'd better get those things off, and let me have them," he said. "You can wear a sack or something for a few hours."

Whether Bob was serious or not, Bunter didn't know, and he didn't stop to inquire. He rolled out of the door of the caravan, and scrambled up in front on the shaft. Bob chuckled, and looked round for some sort of clothing. There was an ancient pair of trousers in the caravan that had belonged to the former owner, and Bob looked at them long and doubtfully. But there was nothing else, and he had to take them or nothing. With a grunt he slipped the garment on. They were baggy, and they came down below his ankles, but he fastened them on with his belt, taking in great folds of the thick cloth, and then rolled them up at the ankles, till his feet were clear. Billy Bunter, who never forgot anything that could conduce to his personal comfort, had brought a pair of slippers, and Bob immediately put them on. They were small for him, but he made them easier for his toes by cutting some slits with his pocket-knife. Then he gave Hazeldene a poke in the back that nearly rolled him into the road.

"Here, hold on!" exclaimed Hazeldene, holding on himself.

"Will you lend me your jacket?" asked Bob.

"I want it, ass!"

"Look here, you can go in your shirt-sleeves for a bit—I can't go about like this. Lend me your jacket."

Hazeldene looked at him and chuckled. He stripped off the jacket, and Bob Cherry put it on. It was tight for him, and tighter still when he had buttoned it up; still, it completed his attire, and made it possible for him to show himself in public. The tight school jacket, and the huge, baggy trousers of a loud check, patched with big patches of different colours, gave Bob an aspect that made Hazeldene chuckle. The unlucky junior stepped out into the road, and as soon as his comrades caught sight of him, there was a roar of laughter.

"Ha, ha, ha! Any old clothes!" gasped Nugent.

"Rags and bones!" chuckled the Nabob of Bhanipur. "The rag and bonefulness of our worthy chum's honourable attire is terrific."

Bob Cherry snorted.

"I suppose it does look a picture," he growled. "All the fault of the silly ass who drives a van and pitches a fellow overboard."

"My hat!" said Wharton, looking at him, and bursting into a laugh. "I'd recommend you to keep inside the van in that rig, Bob."

"I'm not going to be shut up in a rotten van a whole rotten afternoon."

"You'll get chipped on the road."

"Let 'em chip!"

"What I admire about him most is his trousers," said Nugent, looking at Bob critically. "They'd fit him better, though, if he took in another couple of yards."

"Oh, go and eat coke!"

"Why, he's wearing my slippers!" exclaimed Billy Bunter indignantly.

"Did you think I was going around in wet boots, porpoise?"

"Yes, but those slippers are too small for you!"

"That'll be all right—I've let 'em out a bit with my pocket-knife."

"You—you—you've been chopping my slippers! You—you—"

"Don't worry, they'll last till my boots get dry," said Bob consolingly. "I can walk in them all right, too."

"Here comes somebody," grinned Wharton. "Better go inside, Bob."

But Bob was obstinate.

"Blessed if I do. Let 'em stare."

It was a butcher's cart that was approaching, driven by a butcher's boy of Friardale, who knew the juniors well by sight. They had exchanged badinage and blows with that

butcher's boy more than once, as a matter of fact. The moment he caught sight of Bob Cherry he stared—and then burst into a roar.

The junior gave him a ferocious look.

"What are you cackling at, you ass?"

"He, he, he!" yelled the butcher's boy. "Ho, ho, ho!"

"If you want to be yanked out of that cart and bunged into the ditch, you had better say so!" roared Bob Cherry.

"He, he, he!"

Bob made a rush towards the cart. The butcher's boy whipped up his pony and dashed on, but his laughter came echoing back till he was out of sight. Bob turned a very red face towards his grinning chums.

"I can't see anything to cackle at," he said crossly. "I suppose people have got wet and have had to change into old clothes before now? Anyway, I'm not going inside. It's a free country, and I'm not going to be bottled up to please anybody."

"There's some cyclists coming!" grinned Hazeldene.

"Let 'em all come!"

And Bob Cherry tramped on obstinately beside the van. The caravan was following a deep lane now, with huge trees on either side. They had a choice of routes before them—one of the turnings ahead leading down to the bay and the village of Pegg and the girls' school at Cliff House, another led towards the moor, and a third to the woods. It was the last-named that the juniors intended to take. The lane was a smooth and shady one, much liked by local cyclists, and Hazeldene had just caught sight of a couple of riders coming along towards them.

Wharton, from his higher seat, saw the cyclists more clearly, and he gave a sudden chuckle.

"I say, Bob, better get inside——"

"Rats!"

"They're ladies."

"I tell you I won't go in," growled Bob Cherry, a little less resolutely, however. It was not pleasant to cause surprise and amusement to lady cyclists, and he could not punch their heads, as he might have done with cyclists of the masculine gender.

"My hat," exclaimed Hazeldene suddenly, "it's Marjorie!"

"What!"

"It's my sister, and Clara."

"Oh!"

Bob Cherry made one bound into the caravan, and slammed the door shut. The next moment the little blinds were rattled over the little windows; and then Bob sat, with his grip on the handle of the door, holding it shut and trembling.

THE FIFTH CHAPTER.

Rough on Bob Cherry.

MARJORIE HAZELDENE glanced at the caravan, and recognised her brother and the chums of Greyfriars. She stopped and alighted from her machine, and Miss Clara followed her example as Harry Wharton drew the horse to a halt. The juniors raised their straw hats, and Hurree Singh, in an excess of Oriental politeness, waved his round his head. Wharton was on the ground in a moment.

"How awfully jolly to meet you!" he exclaimed. "You haven't seen our caravan yet! A ripper, isn't she?"

"Yes, isn't it delightful!" said Marjorie, in great admiration; and Miss Clara, who was addicted to slangy expressions, pronounced that it was ripping.

"Are you in a hurry?" asked Nugent. "You'd like to have a look at it?"

"I should, very much! No, we are only going to the village. But you must not allow us to delay you——"

"Not a bit of it! Our time's our own up to half-past eight to-night!" said Harry Wharton cheerfully.

"Then we should awfully like to see it," said Miss Clara, allowing Nugent to take her machine and lean it against a tree. "What great fun it must be, caravanning! What a beautiful caravan—and what a sweet horse! I suppose you have all the things for cooking and so on inside?"

"Yes, everything," said Harry. And then, as Miss Clara went towards the door, his face fell a little. He suddenly remembered that Bob Cherry was inside too, in his unique and remarkable clothes.

"How utterly lovely!"

"It's close on time for our lunch," said Nugent, looking at his watch. "If you are not hurried for time, you ought to camp with us for lunch. It's near tea-time, you know—it's really a high tea."

"We shall be delighted!" said Marjorie.

Bob Cherry, who heard everything from within the van, was not delighted.

As a rule, Bob Cherry was willing to take a great deal

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of trouble to meet Marjorie Hazeldene, but the present was not one of those occasions. The idea of appearing before the astonished Marjorie in his present attire, and of meeting the mocking glances of Miss Clara, made him turn hot and cold. He was tempted to change back as quickly as he could into his clothes, wet as they were—but he knew he would not have time. He dared not let go the handle of the door.

Miss Clara was already trying the door on the outside.

"Dear me, the door won't open!"

That was not surprising, as Bob Cherry was holding it inside. Nugent hurried to the rescue.

"Won't it? Let me try."

Hazeldene chuckled, and Billy Bunter let off a cachinnation that startled the birds on the trees overhead. Nugent wrenched at the door.

"Hallo, Bob!" he called out. "Open the door!"

"Is Cherry in there?" asked Marjorie in surprise.

"Oh, yes! Open the door, Bob!"

There was no reply, and the door did not open.

"Perhaps he's asleep!" suggested Marjorie.

"Oh, no, he isn't! Open the door, Bob!"

Nugent wrenched at the handle, and the door came open. There was no help for it now, and Bob gave himself up for lost.

Marjorie and Clara started back in surprise and alarm as a strange figure appeared in the doorway of the caravan.

It was Bob Cherry, with flaming cheeks!

"My goodness!" exclaimed Clara.

"Dear me!"

"I—I—I'm sorry to startle you!" said Bob.

"Oh, dear, it's Cherry!"

"Yes, I'm Cherry," said Bob, with a furious glance at Nugent, who was doubled up with mirth. "I—I—I—Stop that cackling, Frank, or I'll jump on you!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Nugent. "I remember how you cackled when I was boy-scouting in girls' clothes! Ha, ha, ha!"

"Shut up!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Marjorie and Clara joined in the laughter—they could not help it. Bob Cherry's appearance was so utterly absurd that an owl might have been excused for laughing. But as she saw the look of real vexation on Bob's face, Marjorie became grave again at once.

"Oh, please forgive me!" she murmured. "But—but——"

"But you do look—er—odd, you know!" gasped Miss Clara.

Bob Cherry's face relaxed.

"Well, I suppose it is a bit odd," he said. "You see, I was ducked in the stream over yonder, owing to the way Wharton was driving——"

"Here, draw it mild, Bob!"

"Owing to Wharton's rotten driving," said Bob firmly, "and I had to get a change somehow, and this was the best I could do. I suppose it's funny."

"Funny isn't the word!" gasped Nugent. "Bunter, get your camera!"

"Don't you do anything of the sort!" roared Bob Cherry. "If you bring that camera near me, I'll jump on it!"

"Oh, really, Cherry——"

"Here's a jolly spot for camping!" said Harry Wharton, pointing to a patch of rich grass under the shelter of the trees by the roadside. "There's a spring on the other side of the hedge, too. If you're going to be outside the van, Bob, you'd better put a coat on."

"It's too jolly hot for a coat."

"Well, take your choice!" said Harry, laughing. "This road is pretty frequently used, and you will get chipped!"

"We might put him in a cage, and charge for admission to see him," suggested Nugent. "I'd write a notice—'A Jolly Good Laugh, Twopence a Time!'"

"Oh, cheese it!" growled Bob. "Perhaps I'd better put the coat on."

And he did.

THE SIXTH CHAPTER.

Ladies to Tea.

THE caravan was drawn up at the roadside, and the horse was tethered in the grass to feed, released from the harness while the juniors camped. Billy Bunter was soon busy at the stove in the van. It was a hot afternoon, and the stove in the van made the interior decidedly sultry. But Billy Bunter did not mind. He took off his jacket and rolled up his cuffs and set to work. Bunter was not an industrious youth, but no one had ever found him unwilling to work when it was cooking to be done, and he was allowed to take his "whack" in what was cooked.

While Bunter was poaching eggs and cutting up corned

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beef and bread-and-butter, the juniors dragged out stools and cushions to make seats for the girls. It was a pleasant spot, under the shade of the trees, with the summer sun glinting through the boughs overhead and dancing in golden patches on the wavy grass. It was near the usual tea-time at Cliff House, and as the girls had intended to obtain some refreshment at the tea-shop in Friardale, they were ready for the "lunch." The smell of freshly-made tea proceeding from the van was refreshing and grateful.

From the spring in the field fresh water was obtained in abundance, and Bunter was impressed with the necessity of carefully boiling it before using, in case of accidents. As it was only wanted to make tea, however, that caution was hardly needed, as Bunter wasn't likely to brew with cold water.

Plates and other crockery were in the van in abundance. A few of them had belonged to the previous gipsy owner, but most had been bought by the juniors to stock the van. There were more than enough plates and cups—a rather unusual state of things at a junior feed.

Billy Bunter, glowing with heat and hospitality, came out of the van with a huge dish loaded up with poached eggs, all done to a turn and piping hot.

"Ripping!" said Nugent. "You're worth your weight in gold, Billy, when it comes to cooking."

"I'm sincerely glad you can appreciate me in some respects, Nugent. I'd like to see your feed if I hadn't come with you."

"You'd always like to see a feed, wouldn't you?"

"I mean—"

"Pass the eggs! You're keeping Marjorie waiting."

Eggs and corned beef, and ham and watercress and radishes, and huge piles of bread-and-butter and cake, made a lunch that was very enjoyable to hungry juniors, but it was a little too solid for the girls to do it full justice. However, they did their best; though if they had eaten half of what their hosts wanted them to eat, they would have rivalled Billy Bunter.

The tea proceeded merrily, and Billy Bunter beamed with delight at the keen appreciation shown for his cooking. The tea was pronounced delicious.

"I say, you fellows, this is really ripping!" said Billy Bunter. "I suppose we'd better have a bit of a rest after tea, hadn't we? I'll give you some ventriloquism if you like."

"Give us some cake instead," said Bob Cherry, passing his plate.

"Oh, really, Cherry—"

"Hallo! What are you doing here?"

The campers started and looked round towards the road. A man in the garb of a keeper, with a gun in the hollow of his arm, had stopped, and was staring angrily at them. They looked at him without replying.

"What are you doing here?"

Wharton's temper began to rise at the bullying tone, but he answered quietly.

"I should think you could see—we are having tea. What business is it of yours?"

"This is private land."

"I was not aware of that."

"Well, you're aware of it now," said the man roughly.

"There's a notice up at the end of the lane warning you not to picnic on the grass. Get off at once!"

"We shall do nothing of the sort," said Harry quietly.

"If the land is private it ought to be enclosed. You can get on."

"Get off this land!" said the keeper angrily.

The girls began to look a little scared, but the boys did not. Even if they had been trespassing, they would never have given in to a bully. The man's tone and manner were quite enough to put their backs up at once. There was a ditch between the grassland and the public road, but no fence of any sort, and the ditch was covered in for a considerable part of its length, rendering access easy. Whether or not they were entitled to camp there, the Greyfriars juniors did not mean to be ordered off by a bully. And Harry suspected very strongly that the keeper was only attempting to extort a tip—which he was determined not to give.

"Are you going?" shouted the man.

"No!"

"Then I'll shift you!"

And, leaning the gun against a tree, he laid his hands roughly upon Harry's shoulders. Wharton's eyes blazed. His fist came out like lightning, and it caught the fellow under the chin with a hammerlike blow.

The keeper staggered back helplessly, and, losing his footing on the edge of the ditch, went backwards into it with a splash.

There was more mud than water in the ditch, and when the man scrambled to his feet he was a shocking sight. He was smothered with mud from head to foot, and almost stuttering with rage.

The juniors grinned at his appearance, and even Marjorie and Clara smiled, alarmed as they were.

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"My only hat!" said Bob. "Here's another change of clothes wanted! Don't come near me, old chap; I don't like the whiff of that mud."

"You—you young—"

"Hold your tongue!" said Harry.

His tone was so peremptory that the man stopped the abuse that was on his lips, and glared at him.

Wharton pointed down the road.

"You'd better be off," he said.

"Be off! I—I—"

"Cut! We've had enough of you!"

The man glared at him, and, too enraged for words, sprang at him, hitting out savagely. But big and burly as he was, he had to deal with an athletic lad to whom every secret of the boxer's art was known.

Wharton knocked aside his clumsy blows with ease, avoided his rush, and gave him a right-hander fairly under the ear.

The man staggered drunkenly to and fro for a second or two, and then went headlong into the ditch again.

This time he fell face downwards, and a terrific gasping and sputtering was heard before he dragged himself out of the mud and slime.

The juniors shrieked as he came into view again over the ferns. Black mud was caked all over his clothes and his face, and he was spitting it out savagely, and trying to knock it out of his eyes.

He sputtered out savage words, till Bob Cherry picked up the caravan whip, and made the lash whistle in the air.

"I give you one second to clear," he said grimly.

The man looked at him, and cleared. He shook his fist at the juniors as he went tramping furiously down the road. Bob threw down the whip.

"Good riddance," he said, seating himself again. "What a beast!"

"He may come back," murmured Clara.

Wharton laughed carelessly.

"If he does, he shall go into the ditch again," he said.

"Never mind him! Another cup of tea for Marjorie, Billy."

"Certainly," said Bunter, taking up the teapot. "You handled that chap well, Wharton. I was just going to tackle him myself; but I'm glad you did it. If I had been roused, I might have hurt him too much."

The tea finished cheerfully, without any sign of the discomfited keeper. In the merry chatter over the teacups, the incident was forgotten.

Marjorie rose to her feet at last.

"We must get on," she said. "Thank you so much; it was a splendid tea."

"Ripping!" said Miss Clara cheerily.

Wharton and Nugent wheeled the bicycles into the road, and the two girls mounted, while the juniors stood hat in hand as they pedalled away. They looked back and waved their hands at the bend of the lane, and then disappeared towards Friardale.

"We'd better get on, too," said Nugent. "Lend us a hand with the horse."

The Dodger seemed somewhat unwilling to resume his place between the shafts. But as he had been tethered, he had no chance to show his heels, and he was brought up to the van.

Nugent backed him into the shafts, and very nearly backed him over Billy Bunter, who got in the way. The harness was adjusted, and Harry Wharton was fastening the last buckle, when there was an exclamation from Hazeldene.

"Hallo! There's that chap again!"

The juniors looked quickly up the road.

The keeper, accompanied by a stout, red-faced gentleman in shooting clothes, was returning to the scene. He had evidently been giving an indignant account of his treatment, for the fat gentleman was looking as angry as his man.

The juniors drew together. They did not want trouble—but it looked as if they were going to get it whether they wanted it or not. The stout gentleman had a riding-whip in his hand, and he looked as if he intended to use it. Billy Bunter quietly scooted into the van, but he was the only one who did not stand his ground.

THE SEVENTH CHAPTER.

A Little Ventriloquism.

THE stout gentleman came to a halt within about three feet of Harry Wharton, and jammed an eyeglass into his eye, surveying Wharton through it as if he had been some curious animal. Harry met his gaze quite calmly.

"Is this the rascal, Crake?"

"That's him, sir," said the keeper, with a venomous look. "Knocked me into the ditch, the lot of them, sir—but he was the ringleader."

A Splendid Tale of Harry Wharton & Co.
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"You young scoundrel——"

"Better language, please," said Harry Wharton.

The stout gentlemen gasped.

"What! What! You talk to me! What! I am Major Popham. I own all this land. What! You talk to me! Me?"

"I am not used to being called a scoundrel," said Harry quietly. "If you want to speak to me you had better be civil."

"What! I am Major Popham! What?"

"What do you pop?" asked Bob Cherry, with an innocent expression.

The major's glance turned upon him.

"What! What?"

"The popfulness of the honourable major is terrific," remarked the Nabob of Bhanipur. "He remindfully recalls to me the honourable bantam in the esteemed farm-yard."

"What! What! You have trespassed on my land—assaulted my keeper, by George, sir! I'll have you locked up, you young rogues and vagabonds! What?"

"We are not rogues and vagabonds, and we will not be called so," said Harry. "Will you kindly step aside? You're in the way of the horse."

"What? What?"

"And we did not assault your keeper. I knocked him into the ditch for acting like a blackguard, but no one else touched him. He has told you an untruth. If this is your land, we're quite willing to get off it, if you'll get out of the way."

"What? What? I'll have you locked up—sent to the treadmill, by George, sir! My keeper assaulted—lying young rascal—by George!"

Wharton flushed crimson.

"If you were not old enough to be my father, I should know how to answer that," he said, with a glint in his eyes.

"Please get out of the way."

"What! What! On my own land——"

"Whoa! Please get aside!"

"Young rascal! I'll—I'll horsewhip you——"

"You had better not try it."

"What—what——"

"Oh, chuck it, major!"

The major swung round.

The voice that spoke to him was the voice of Crake, his keeper, and how was the major to know that there was a ventriloquist in the caravan?

He jammed his eyeglass tighter into his eye, and glared at Crake.

"What! What!" he roared. "What! You—you dog! You speak to your master! What?"

"I—I didn't speak, sir!" said the keeper gaspingly. "I—I heard——"

"You lie! I distinctly heard you! You are lying, Crake!"

"I hain't sir! I swear I never——"

"Silence! Silence! What! You dare to talk to me? What?"

"Oh, not so much of your old buck!"

The keeper almost staggered in astonishment at hearing his own voice say that, when he hadn't moved his lips. The major almost jumped clear of the ground.

"What? What?"

"Go and eat coke, you hot-tempered old bantam!"

"What? What? Crake, you are drunk! Drunk, by George, sir! You are discharged! Go! Get out of my sight! What?"

"I—I—I hain't—I——"

"Go!" shouted the major, brandishing his riding-whip.

"Go! Get out! At once! What? What?"

"But I didn't——"

"As for these young scoundrels——"

"Draw it mild, old codger!"

The major swung round on his astounded keeper again. He was too angry for words this time. His riding-whip whistled through the air, and descended with a telling slash across the unlucky Crake's shoulders.

"Take that, you rascal! Take that! What?"

"Oh!" roared Crake, jumping back and rubbing his shoulder. "Hold on! Leave off! Oh!"

"Impertinent rascal——"

"Silly josses!"

The major simply raved.

He ran towards the keeper flourishing the whip, and the alarmed man backed away, and in his confusion did not

notice that he was backing into the ditch. When his foot slipped on the verge it was too late.

"Splash!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Bob Cherry. "He's fond of that ditch!"

"The fondfulness is terrific."

The enraged major danced on the edge of the ditch, brandishing his riding-whip.

"Get out, you rascal! Come here, scoundrel! What? What?"

"Groo!" gasped Crake. "Groo-oo-oo!"

He was reeking with mud as he crawled out of the ditch; but the major was not satisfied. In crawling out, Crake was fairly exposed to the whip, and the whip descended, with a slash that made the man roll over with pain.

"Take that, rascal! What?"

Crake jumped to his feet savagely. His temper was not good, and what he had gone through was enough to exasperate anybody.

"You old hass!" he roared. "I never said nothing. Look 'ere——"

The whip lashed down again, and that was too much for Crake. He went for his angry master, and in a moment they were grappling and fighting. The juniors of Greyfriars looked on with grinning faces. In the struggle half the mud and slime from Crake's clothes was transferred to the major's, and his natty shooting-clothes became a shocking sight.

"Impertinent rascal——"

"You old hass!"

"I discharge you!" hissed the major. "I will horsewhip you into the bargain."

Crake replied by pommelling. If he was discharged, perhaps he felt that he might as well avenge his dismissal while he had the chance.

They staggered to and fro in combat, and Harry Wharton quietly led the horse into the road, as soon as the way was clear, and mounted to his seat.

As he cracked his whip, the combatants parted.

Crake was hurled into the hedge, and the major, overcome by his exertions, leaned against a tree, gasping for breath.

He groped for his eyeglass, and looked after the caravan, which was beginning to move. The juniors waved their hats to him.

"Good-bye, Bluebell!" sang out Bob Cherry.

"Good-bye, major!"

"Young rascals!" gasped the major. "Deuced impertinence! By George, sir! What?"

And that was the last remark of Major Popham's that the juniors heard. He was too exhausted to think of pursuit, and the caravan rumbled off out of his sight. Billy Bunter chuckled in the van, and the juniors chuckled too. The fat junior put his head out of the window and blinked at his comrades with great satisfaction.

"I say you fellows, I got you out of that all right," he remarked. "Funny, wasn't it?"

"Ha, ha! It was funny! Lucky we had you to protect us."

"Oh, really, Cherry——"

"Of course, we knew we were safe with Bunter," said Nugent. "The way he dived into the van when the enemy came along showed how fearless he was."

"Oh, really, Nugent! I—I got into the van because—because I can ventriloquise better when—when I'm quiet and undisturbed."

"Of course," grinned Nugent; "that's all right—we all know how brave you are. Still, it was a good jape, and we're well out of the way of the major."

And the juniors chuckled long over the adventure as the caravan rumbled on through the shady lanes.

THE EIGHTH CHAPTER.

Bunter Catches It.

"STEADY now!"

It was Wharton who spoke, and he addressed the Artful Dodger. The caravan had turned out of the lanes, and followed a rutty track into the woods, and now it was brushing under the boughs of the trees, and the foliage was scratching against the little windows.

Round the caravan was the deep green and the scent of the forest.

"Mind the chimney!" exclaimed Bob Cherry. Bob had just jumped out of the caravan; his clothes were dry at last,

HECTOR DRAKE

In The
PLUCK Library.



The Dodger made a sudden plunge forward, and Bob Cherry, sitting in an easy attitude on the caravan roof, with his legs dangling, had nothing to hold on to. He made a desperate grasp at the chimney, and missed, and rolled off the roof! Splash!

and he had donned them, and was once more, as Nugent put it, clothed, and in his right mind.

Billy Bunter was at the stove in the caravan, cooking. Nobody else wanted anything cooked, but Bunter felt that he required a snack. The "snack" consisted of bacon, of which he was cooking three big rashers, and he was getting on nicely with them when the caravan entered the wood.

The bumping on the uneven ground drew a yell of protest from Bunter, whose frying-pan gave a dangerous lurch.

"I say, you fellows, hold on!"

But the caravan did not hold on. Harry Wharton was thinking of his horse, not of Bunter's cookery.

"Mind the chimney—look out!"

It was too late!

Harry had forgotten the chimney, and a low branch crashed against it as the van rolled under a tree, and it was levelled with the roof.

There was a roar from within the van.

"Ow! Yow!"

The chimney was made only of a flimsy pipe of tin, and the crash of the breakage had shivered it inside the van as well as out. There was a goodly accumulation of soot inside the tin chimney, and when it came apart at the joints, the cook at the stove received the full benefit of it.

"Halt!" roared Bob Cherry.

Harry Wharton dragged in the horse.

"The chimney's gone! Hallo, hallo, hallo! What on earth's that?"

"That" was Billy Bunter.

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He appeared at the door of the caravan, but for the moment his friends did not know him. His face and hair were hidden under a shower of soot, and Bunter was stuttering and blinking with soot in his mouth, and his nose, and his eyes. He had the frying-pan still in his hand, and it was half-full of soot.

"Oh! Ow! Yow! Gr-r-rooh!"

"My only hat!"

"What's happened?"

"The chimney!" yelled Bunter. "Yah! Groo! I'm choked! I'm suff-suff-suffocated! Gr-r! You ass! The chimney's come to bits, and I'm smothered."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You—you—you—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

It was rough on Bunter, perhaps, but he looked so comical that the juniors could not restrain their merriment.

He jumped out of the van, and Harry looked round from his seat and gave a shout of laughter, too.

"You rotters!" howled Bunter. "There's nothing to cackle at! I'm suffocated! I shall never get over this! Grooh!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"It was your own fault," said Harry, "you ought to have been outside, helping the van along, instead of cooking in there. What the dickens were you cooking for just after tea?"

"Yah! Gerrooh! I was hungry!"

"Well, you've got plenty to eat now," said Nugent; "if it soots you."

"Ha, ha, ha! Rotten!"

"The rottenfulness is terrific."

"Look here, what's going to be done?" roared Bunter. "I'm sooty! I'm smothered! I can't stay like this! Yah!"

"We'll come to a stream soon, and you can get a wash," said Harry. "It will be some time before all that comes off your clothes, I think. Come up, Dodger!"

Dodger "came up" and the caravan rumbled on.

As the chimney was already levelled with the roof, it did not get in the way again, and the caravan scraped under the boughs of trees, and bumped through the bushes, without further accidents.

Billy Bunter preferred walking, and he walked—with a series of discontented grunts, and growls, and snorts.

The adventurers plunged deeper into the wood. Where the trees were too thick for progress to be made, another path was sought; and winding and turning, the juniors were soon in the heart of the wood, with giant trees and thick bushes on all sides of them, and not a foot-track to tell of human neighbourhood.

"My hat!" said Bob Cherry. "What a ripping place! Let's hope there are no more Major Pophams about!"

Harry Wharton laughed. He was walking at the head of the horse now, leading the Artful Dodger.

"This wood is public," he said. "It's a jolly long way from any town, so it doesn't get many picnickers. It's a ripping place!"

"Hallo, hallo, hallo! There's a bunny!"

A rabbit looked out of the grass at the caravan, and scuttled away. Save for the faint rustling of the trees, the wood was silent and still. The caravan lumbered and bumped on till Harry caught sight of a glimmer of water ahead.

"Looks like a stream," said Bob Cherry. "There's your wash, Bunt."

The thickets were tangled on the banks of the woodland stream. It was with difficulty that the caravan forced a passage through to the water. The heavy vehicle rolled out upon a slope of greensward, under the shade of mighty trees, where the stream glimmered and glinted in the rays that filtered through the foliage overhead.

It was a solitary scene—but all the more to the juniors' taste on that account. There was a sense of adventure in camping in the heart of a lonely wood.

"Halt!" said Harry.

The caravan stopped. Billy Bunter began to strip off his things to wash. Bunter was not fond of washing, as a rule, but the soot upon him was too thick for comfort. He washed, and washed, and washed; but even then it would not all come off. And it was a task of equal difficulty to brush his clothes anything like clean. While he was busily engaged, the juniors unharnessed the horse, and prepared for the camp.

Harry Wharton glanced at his watch.

"We can afford a couple of hours here," he said, "and then get back to the school by another route. We can have a camp fire here."

"Ripping!"

"The stove won't burn again, unless the chimney's mended," grunted Bunter, "and I can't mend it."

"That's all right; we'll light a fire. Get some sticks, kids!"

The juniors willingly set to work.

A camp-fire was built by the stream, in a circle of pebbles from the bank, and was soon roaring away cheerily.

By that time Bunter had done as much washing as he intended to do, and he was ready to take charge of the cooking.

Supplies were brought out of the caravan. The Dodger was already having his meal. As the woods were so thick round them, the juniors did not think he was likely to wander, and they allowed him to browse without restraint. The horse showed no signs of wishing to give them the slip. He browsed quietly till he was satisfied, and then lay down to rest in the rich grass.

Billy Bunter cleaned out the frying-pan, and started frying eggs. A savoury smell rose under the trees, and the juniors, who were getting hungry again, sniffed appreciatively.

"You fellows can lay the cloth," said Billy Bunter. "The grub will be ready soon. You can put some ham on my plate, Bob Cherry, and some of the cold beef, and some of the tongue. I will have some pickles, too. And—"

"Hallo! Hallo! Hallo!"

Bob Cherry uttered the exclamation suddenly, as a stranger emerged from the trees, and stood regarding the camp.

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NEXT WEEK: "THE TENANTS OF STUDY 13."

THE NINTH CHAPTER.

An Unwelcome Visitor.

THE stranger was a powerfully-built fellow, in gaiters and a loose cardigan jacket, the pockets of which were weighted down. The head of a dead rabbit protruding from one pocket, showed what he was carrying, and what he was doing in the wood. He had a knobby stick under his arm, and his hands in his trousers' pockets. His face was unprepossessing, and adorned with a stubbly growth of beard and a ragged moustache. He looked at the juniors, and grinned.

"S'elp me!" he remarked.

No one felt called upon to reply to that observation, and the boys went on with their preparations. The poacher—for such he evidently was—came nearer.

"Campin' 'ere?" he asked.

"Yes," said Harry Wharton shortly.

"Want to buy any rabbits?"

"I say, you fellows, we might as well have some rabbits. I could cook them a treat, and they're awfully ripping."

"Where did you get them?" asked Harry.

"Found 'em," said the man, with a leer. "I'm selling them cheap—tanner each."

"Better have some, Wharton. You see—"

"Hold your tongue!" growled Bob Cherry.

"Oh, really, Cherry—"

"We don't want your rabbits," said Harry Wharton quietly. "It's pretty clear that you took them in this wood, and that's poaching. The wood's public, but you're not allowed to touch the animals. We don't want them."

An ugly look came over the man's face.

"You don't want my rabbits?"

"Certainly not."

"You can 'ave 'em cheap."

"Cheap or dear, we don't want them. Good-day!"

The man made no movement to go.

"Perhaps you're going to ask me to feed with you?" he grinned.

"Nothing of the sort."

"P'raps I'm going to stay without being invited."

Wharton's eyes glinted. The man's manner was growing more bullying every moment, and it was plain that he believed that he could frighten the party of boys, in that lonely place, far from all interference.

"You certainly won't," said Harry. "We don't want any of your sort here. You'll oblige me by taking yourself off."

"What if I won't?"

"If you won't, you'll be put."

The man chuckled.

"Who'll put me?"

"I will!" exclaimed Wharton, beginning to lose his temper. "What do you come here troubling us for? Why can't you go on your way?"

"Perhaps I don't choose," said the poacher, seating himself coolly on the turned-down shafts of the caravan. "Mebbe I want a meal—mebbe I want to be waited on. I'm going to have some of that grub."

"You're not!"

"And I'm going to have some shiners to 'elp me on my way," said the poacher, taking hold of his cudgel, and making it whistle through the air. "Do you know how far you are from the nearest house?"

"I don't; but I know there are six of us, and you can't scare us," said Harry disdainfully. "Get off that caravan."

The ruffian grinned.

"Put me off!" he suggested.

"That I will, jolly quick!"

Wharton made a stride towards the ruffian. The cudgel swung aloft, but at the same moment Bob Cherry caught the frying-pan—full of eggs and melted butter—from Bunter's hand, and hurled it fairly in the face of the ruffian.

He gave a wild yell as it smote him, and the eggs and gravy plastered over his face, blinding him for the moment. Bunter gave a yell, too, of angry dismay at seeing his cookery thus wasted.

The poacher dropped his cudgel, and clasped both hands to his face. The juniors burst into a shout of laughter. Harry picked up the cudgel, and with a twirl of his wrist, sent it spinning into the stream.

The poacher knuckled the grease and egg-yolk from his eyes, and blinked and glared at the grinning juniors.

Then he burst into a torrent of abuse, at which Wharton's brows contracted. He laid hands on the ruffian, and Bob Cherry collared him at the same moment. The poacher was run away headlong through the thickets, and sent spinning into a bush.

"Now get off," said Harry Wharton. "You'll get hurt if you come back!"

They returned to the camp. The man struggled out of the bush, considerably scratched and cut, and after a

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moment's hesitation, plunged into the wood and disappeared.

"He's gone," said Nugent.

"Jolly good thing, too," said Hazeldene, drawing a deep breath. "He was a dangerous-looking brute. I wonder if he has any friends about here?"

"Phew! There may be another row yet!"

"Never mind that," said Bob Cherry. "Let's have some grub. Buck up, Bunter! Why, what have you got there?"

"It's a rabbit."

"Where did you get it?"

"That chap dropped it while you were slinging him off," explained Bunter. "Findings keepings, you know. I—What on earth are you doing, Wharton? Give me that rabbit!"

Wharton had angrily caught the rabbit from his hand.

"You young ass! Do you know you're liable to punishment as a poacher if you take this?"

"But no one would know."

Wharton sent the rabbit spinning over the bushes, and it dropped and was lost among the undergrowth. Bunter simply gasped.

"You—you duffer! What a frightful waste!"

"It may be a waste, but the rabbit's not ours, and we're not going to cook it," said Harry. "Whether anyone would know or not is not the point. You're not going to become a thief."

"Who are you calling a thief?" demanded Bunter indignantly. "I was only going to cook the rabbit."

"Well, that would be stealing it."

"Bosh! Findings, keepings!"

"People have been to prison before now for thinking findings are keepings," said Harry. "I suppose if you found a sovereign, or a gold watch, you wouldn't keep it?"

"That's different."

"It isn't! Well, the rabbit's gone now."

And Bunter, grumbling audibly, started on eggs again.

THE TENTH CHAPTER.

The Man Behind the Gun.

THE sun was sinking lower in the west, and the stream was red in the sunset, while the shadows lengthened in the wood. The Greyfriars juniors had eaten heartily, and after the meal they lay lazily at rest in the grass, with a sense of luxurious idleness that was very pleasant to lads who were usually hard and keen workers. A glorious summer afternoon was drawing to its close.

"This is ripping," said Bob Cherry drowsily. "Jolly ripping! I think I'd like to be a gipsy."

"And mend cans for a living?" asked Harry, laughing.

"There's worse ways of getting a living than that," said Bob sententiously. "There's that chap who paid us a visit, for instance. Speaking of him, we haven't seen him again."

"No; I hope we sha'n't, either."

There was a rustle in the thickets. Harry raised his head and looked round. The next moment he was upon his feet.

"Jump up, you chaps!"

The juniors scrambled up.

Three rough-looking fellows had come out of the thickets—one, the man in the gaiters, whose face was still greasy from the frying-pan—and two more very like him in appearance.

Billy Bunter gave them one blink, and scuttled into the caravan. Bob Cherry, for a reason of his own, followed him.

Harry stood erect, facing the three ruffians as they advanced. There was an unpleasant grin on the greasy face of the leader.

"I've kin back," he remarked.

"I see you have," said Harry. "What do you want?"

The juniors drew together. Nugent picked up the frying-pan, and Hurree Singh a stick. Hazeldene and Wharton clenched their fists—they had no weapons at hand. The three ruffians had cudgels in their hands, and if they attacked, it was likely to go hard with the juniors of Greyfriars. And there was little doubt of their intentions.

"Hold on, there!"

It was Bob Cherry's voice from the caravan.

The junior was looking out of the window, and in his hands glimmered a levelled gun.

Wharton started at the sight of it.

The gun had been slung on the wall inside the caravan, but he knew perfectly well that it was a useless old weapon belonging to Telengro, the gipsy, and that there was no ammunition for it in the caravan.

But Bob Cherry's face was grim and threatening. He had levelled the gun through the van window, and his eye glanced along it in a businesslike manner. His finger was on the trigger, and the muzzle of the gun bore directly upon the three poachers.

They stared at him dumbfounded.

Through the little window of the caravan they could only see the levelled gun, and the threatening face of the boy behind it.

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"Hold on!" said Bob Cherry. "Throw those cudgels down, or I'll pull the trigger! Quick!"

The poachers glared at him furiously. One cudgel and then another went into the grass, but the man in the gaiters still gripped his savagely.

"You dare not!" he yelled.

"You'd better not try me!"

"You dare not fire!"

Bob Cherry pressed the trigger slightly, so that the hammer began to rise.

The ruffian changed colour.

"Now, then," said Bob crisply, "I give you while I count two, and if the stick isn't down by then, I pull the trigger, and you take the consequences."

"Hang you! I—I—"

"One!"

"I will not—"

"Two!" roared Bob.

"Stop! Stop!"

The cudgel clattered down on the others.

"Just in time!" said Bob Cherry. "Pick up those cudgels, kids!"

The juniors quickly obeyed.

"Now, get off, you scoundrels! Quick!"

The poachers glared at him in helpless rage. They had expected to find easy victims at the juniors' camp, but the sight of the gun had completely turned the tables upon them. They were not prepared to face firearms, and what added to their alarm was the knowledge that a gun with a boy's finger on the trigger wasn't a safe thing to be near, anyway. Even if Bob did not intend to fire, the gun might go off at any moment.

"Sharp's the word!" said Bob, making a motion with the gun. "Clear off!"

"You young hound—"

"Are you going?"

The poachers exchanged glances of helpless rage, and turned away. They plunged into the thickets.

The foliage rustled for a few moments, and then was silent.

They were gone.

Bob Cherry came out of the van, grinning, with the ancient gun in his hand. Seen at close quarters, old Telengro's gun did not look so dangerous. The probability was that if it had been loaded and discharged, it would have burst.

"My only hat!" gasped Nugent. "What a bluff!"

"The bluff-fulness was terrific!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Bob. "I wonder what those johnnies would say if they knew the gun hadn't been loaded for a dog's age?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The juniors laughed loud and long over the adventure—as they could afford to do now. But for Bob's prompt action, however, it would probably have ended very differently.

Billy Bunter blinked round the door of the caravan as he heard the reassuring sound of laughter.

"Are they gone?"

"Ha, ha! Yes. You can come out now!"

"Oh, really, Vaseline—"

"It's quite safe," said Nugent. "You can show yourself."

"Oh, really, Nugent, I hope you didn't think I was getting in the caravan because I was afraid! I was just going for my camera!"

"Your camera!"

"Yes. I was going to—to take a snapshot of those rotters, you know!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Oh, really, you fellows—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Bunter blinked indignantly at the laughing juniors, but it made no difference. Bunter as a hero was not to be believed in. His friends would sooner have believed in the reality of the remittances he was always expecting.

"We'll keep these cudgels," said Nugent. "They may come in handy. We may come across those brutes again, and they'd rob us as soon as look at us if they had a chance. About time we harnessed up, I think."

"Yes, rather! We'll go home by way of Linford, and over the hill."

"Help us catch the Dodger, then!"

"Oh, he's all right!" said Bob Cherry confidently. "I can get him easily enough. He's given up his little tricks, I think."

And Bob Cherry walked over to where the Dodger was lazily reposing in the grass. The horse looked at him out of the corner of his eye.

"Come on, old boss!" said Bob, with the collar in his hand ready to slip over the horse's head. "Come on!"

The Dodger whisked to his feet.

He had been sleepy and drowsy for some time, but now that he was wanted to draw the caravan, he became lively all of a sudden.

Bob reached the collar towards him, and Dodger calmly dodged it. Bob tried to get hold of his mane, but it was tossed away from his reach. Then the horse backed away, keeping his eyes upon Bob.

"Dodger! Dodgy! Come on, old hoss!"

But Dodger persisted in backing away. Bob Cherry looked round at his grinning chums.

"You'd better lend me a hand, you chaps!"

"Ha, ha! I think we had better—rather!"

"The ratherfulness is terrific!"

Wharton, Nugent, Hazeldene, and Hurree Singh approached the horse on different sides. Harry rather regretted now that he had not either tethered or hobbled the horse; but the Dodger had been so good that he had not thought it necessary, especially as the wood was too thick for him to stray. But he did not know the Dodger yet.

With five juniors round him, closing in on him, and the thick wood behind, the horse seemed certain to be caught; but the Dodger was never at the end of his resources. He suddenly whinnied and ran right at Hazeldene, and the junior weakly jumped out of the way and let him pass.

The Dodger dashed on, and plunged into the thickets, and was lost to sight in a moment.

THE ELEVENTH CHAPTER

Camping Out.

"**W**HEW!"

"My hat! He's gone!"

"The beast!"

The juniors stood in a group, staring after the horse. The Artful Dodger could be heard trampling and plunging in the thickets.

"We've got to get him!" said Harry. "Come on!"

"Right you are!"

And they dashed in pursuit of the steed.

The Artful Dodger looked at them from the bushes, and allowed them to come quite close, and it seemed as if he would be caught peacefully; but all of a sudden he threw up his heels and tore away.

This time he did not stop.

The juniors heard him plunging through the thickets, but though they rushed after him, the sounds soon died away in the wood.

They halted at last, breathless and excited.

"He's gone—the brute!" growled Nugent. "What asses we were to give him the chance! I suppose we shall get him back some time?"

"We shall have to pay Milsom to a pretty tune if we don't," said Hazeldene.

"Oh, he'll turn up!" Harry remarked slowly. "But we can't get him now. He's gone. What the dickens are we to do?"

"Give it up!"

"We can't walk back to Friardale from this distance, and we can't abandon the caravan. It was lent to us."

"Quite true!"

"There's no capturing that beast now! What the dickens—"

"We shall have to stay out, that's all!"

"And camp in the wood all night!" said Bob Cherry gleefully. "It will be ripping fun!"

"It won't be fun facing the Head to-morrow, though! The last time we were out with the caravan we got in awfully late, and he looked over it, because it was an accident beyond our control. But—"

"Well, this is beyond our control, too," said Bob Cherry. "That beast of a horse is beyond anybody's control, I should think!"

"Something in that! I suppose we shall have to take our chance!"

"It will be great fun!"

"No doubt—in a way!"

They returned to the camp. Bunter was awaiting them there, and methodically finishing up the cold ham and beef.

"Got the horse?" he asked.

"Yes; he's in my waistcoat pocket!" said Bob Cherry sarcastically.

"Oh, really, Cherry! If you haven't got the horse, how on earth are we to get back to Greyfriars? It's high time to start!"

"We're going to camp here all night!"

Bunter jumped up in alarm.

"You're jolly well not! Why, those poacher brutes might come back, and knock us all on the head in the dark! We can't stop here! Can't you find the horse?"

"Of course we can't, ass, or we should have done it!"

"I say, you fellows, I can't stop here! I—"

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NEXT WEEK: "THE TENANTS OF STUDY 13."

"Then clear off!" said Bob Cherry. "Nobody wants you to stay, that I know of! Get off the earth!"

"I can't possibly walk to Greyfriars, and you know that jolly well! I'm exhausted already!"

"Well, shut up, then!"

"Look here, couldn't you chaps manage to pull the caravan? I could get inside, and with you five fellows tugging at the shafts, you ought to be able to manage it. I wish you wouldn't go away while I'm talking, Wharton! Listen to me! I—"

But no one was listening, and Bunter desisted at last in disgust. The sun was sinking, and it would be sooner dark in the wood than in the roads, and the juniors had their preparations to make for the camp.

There was certainly nothing else to be done; they had to camp out for the night, and they made up their minds to it.

The distance to Greyfriars was great, and if they had walked it, they would certainly not have arrived there till hours after locking-up. And after an afternoon spent on the road, none of them felt inclined for a record walk in the dark lanes.

And, in spite of the hour of reckoning on the following day, there was something very taking in the idea of camping-out all night. It was a real adventure, at all events—and the juniors were only half-sorry that they were compelled to do it.

They began by collecting a huge pile of firewood for the fire, to keep it going all night. Warm as the day had been, the night was likely to be colder, and the juniors were not provided with the necessaries for camping-out. There were only two coats in the party, and no bedding or blankets in the caravan. In the caravan, too, it was hardly possible for six fellows to sleep—there wasn't room. And on the bare boards their sleep would have been decidedly uncomfortable. But in the rich, thick grass, beside a glowing, ruddy camp-fire, there was no reason why a comfortable night should not be spent.

Heaps of grass and ferns and leaves were gathered to furnish them with beds, and the fire was banked up with wood. The deeper and deeper silence of the wood, as darkness descended, was somewhat awesome to the boys.

Billy Bunter cast many uneasy glances into the deep shadows of the trees, and he carried a heap of ferns and leaves into the caravan, to pass the night there. He intended to fasten himself in, and if any danger should arise, it was not likely that the fat junior would show himself.

He was allowed to do as he liked, and he did it with an injured expression, as if he had something very much up against his comrades for getting him into this scrape.

By the time the sun had gone the juniors had finished getting ready for the night, and the aspect of the camp was really cosy.

The ruddy fire leaped and danced, reflected on the stream and the glimmering foliage of the trees round the camp.

Cake and hot coffee formed the supper of the Greyfriars caravanners, and they enjoyed it greatly. By the time it was disposed of they were sleepy enough. Billy Bunter crept into the caravan, fastened the door, and laid down to sleep in his bed of ferns, and soon unmelodious snores were heard proceeding from the interior of the Saucy Susan.

The juniors laid round the fire, with their feet towards it, half-hidden in the ferny beds, and one by one they dropped off to sleep.

There was no need to keep watch, for Harry did not believe that the poachers would return; and besides, it was hardly possible for anyone to approach the camp through the thickets without making sufficient noise to awaken some of them.

The fire grew less ruddy as the fuel was consumed, and long dark shadows played to and fro over the camp.

The woods were strangely, eerily silent, save for the faint rustling as animals stole forth from their coverts in the gloom.

A stoat looked out of the thickets and blinked at the twinkling fire, and rabbits scuttled through the grass within reach of the sleeping juniors.

They slept soundly—the sleep of health and fatigue.

Suddenly, through the silence, a louder sound became audible.

It was a sound of rustling foliage and the parting of twigs, as a heavy body brushed through.

Still the juniors slept on.

The fire was dying down now, and the red glow of what was left was dull, and gave only a dim light a few feet away from it.

The noise in the thickets came closer.

Harry Wharton started and awoke. He sat up in the grass, rubbing his eyes, and looking round him dazedly. He had been dreaming of the school, and he woke up expecting to find himself in bed in the Remove dormitory at Greyfriars.

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In a moment, however, he realised where he was. He shivered a little, and stretched out his hand for fuel to make up the fire. As he did so he started, and his hand was arrested.

The noise in the thickets caught his ear, and he remained still, breathing hard, listening.

Crackle, crackle, crackle!

It was the parting of twigs and leaves, as a body was pushed through the undergrowth. The thought of the poachers rushed into Harry's mind at once.

He was upon his feet the next moment, grasping the cudgel he had laid by his side in the ferns, in case it should be wanted.

Crack, crackle, creak!

Somebody, or something, was approaching the camp slowly and cautiously in the darkness.

Harry Wharton stooped and shook his companions into wakefulness.

"Hallo, hallo, hallo!" murmured Bob Cherry drowsily.

"What's the matter?"

"Someone is coming!"

"Phew!"

Bob Cherry jumped up. Nugent and Hazeldene and Hurree Singh were up in another second, grasping their sticks. They listened intently in the darkness and silence of the lonely wood.

Crackle, crackle!

Closer and closer the sound came to the camp, and then suddenly ceased.

THE TWELFTH CHAPTER.

A Night Out!

HARRY WHARTON listened with almost painful intensity. Whoever it was that was approaching the camp, had stopped suddenly when within a dozen paces of them. The thickets hid the intruder.

"He's seen us!" muttered Bob Cherry. "There's enough fire to show us here. He knows we're awake."

"Looks like it."

"It must be the poachers," murmured Nugent.

"No doubt."

"Hang it, I wish they'd show themselves!"

The juniors all wished that keenly.

Whatever foes they had to face, it was better to face them than to wait there with beating hearts and thrilling nerves, listening.

The minutes slowly passed away. Each one seemed like an hour to the group of juniors, standing there weapon in hand, with thumping hearts.

Still no sound came from the stranger.

"He's gone!" muttered Bob Cherry at last.

Wharton shook his head.

"We should have heard him go, Bob."

"True!"

"Hang him!" muttered Hazeldene nervously. "What is he lurking there for, then? Why doesn't he come or go? Suppose we go for him?"

"There may be a gang of them," said Nugent.

They waited and listened. They started anxiously as there was a rustle in the thicket. It was audible for a few moments, then dead silence again.

Harry Wharton gritted his teeth.

"It must be the poachers!" he said savagely. "I'd like to get to close quarters with them. Shove something on the fire, so that we can see."

He watched the thicket from which he expected the attack, while Bob Cherry threw a mass of fuel upon the fire, and stirred it with his cudgel.

The fire smoked blackly for some seconds, and then the flame shot up through the dry fern and boughs, and blazed in radiance over the camp.

In an instant the whole scene was as light as by day, and the flame danced upon the foliage and the glistening waters of the stream.

The light reanimated the juniors; in the light danger was not so unnerving as in the darkness.

"Suppose you hail him," said Nugent. "It will show the cad we know he's there, anyway."

Harry nodded; he was thinking the same himself. He watched the thicket steadily as he called out.

"Hallo, there!"

The silent wood echoed back his shout, but that was the only reply. A thousand echoes seemed to die away in the glades. Then there was silence again.

"Hallo, there! Who are you?"

"You!" rang back the echoes of the wood. But no voice replied.

"Show yourself, you cad!" shouted Bob Cherry. "Show yourself, you measly worm, if you're not afraid to!"

Still silence, save for the echoes. Wharton's eyes glinted.

"Look here, we'll have him out—or them—whichever it is!" he exclaimed. "We can't go to sleep again without. Come on!"

"Right-ho!"

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And Harry Wharton ran towards the thicket. There was a sudden rustling, and he heard the stranger moving hastily away. The sounds of retreat encouraged the boys. They rushed on resolutely. Bob Cherry caught his foot in a trailing root, and went heavily to the ground, and Nugent rolled over him.

"Hallo, hallo, hallo!" gasped Bob. "Gerroff!"

"Oh! Ow! I'm hurt!"

In the darkness of the thicket the sounds of falling and gasping voices naturally gave the others the impression that a fight was going on. Wharton and Hurree Jamset Ram Singh dashed upon the spot, with Hazeldene close behind.

"Got him?" gasped Wharton.

"Ow! I— Oh!"

Nugent gasped as Harry, falling over him in the darkness, came a cropper, and bumped him heavily upon Bob again.

"Hallo!" exclaimed Harry. "Is that you, Nugent?"

"Ow! Yes. Groo! Fathead! Yes."

"Weil, I couldn't see you. Have you got him?"

"I've got a silly dummy called Bob Cherry."

"Oh!"

The juniors, breathless and a little bruised, scrambled to their feet. They soon discovered that only themselves were in the thicket. But from the wood came the sound of rustling repeated.

"He's going!" gasped Nugent.

Harry Wharton listened keenly.

"He's going towards the stream," he said, in a whisper.

"He wants to sneak into the camp, I expect, while we're out here in the tangle. Come on—only keep together this time! It's no good rushing in the dark."

"Right you are; let's get after him!"

More cautiously this time the juniors crept through the thickets. The rustle of the stranger ahead guided them. He, too, must have heard the brushing of the boys through the undergrowth, but seemingly it did not alarm him. The sound of his movements ceased.

"He's got as far as the stream," muttered Harry.

Bob Cherry clutched his arm suddenly.

"Listen!"

"What—"

"He's drinking!"

"Phew! My hat!"

There was no doubt about it. From the darkness towards the stream came a sound of lapping and trickling water, as if someone were drinking greedily of the stream.

"Beast!" muttered Bob Cherry, in disgust. "He's lapping up the water like an animal."

"It's a chance to catch him now. Come on!"

They crept forward through the bushes. In this spot the undergrowth grew right down to the water's edge, and in the shallow water, and they had to part the branches and foliage as they advanced. The sound of the drinking grew louder and clearer, and then suddenly stopped.

"Careful now!" whispered Bob.

There was a crashing in the thicket by the stream, as if the drinker were turning round to come back the way he had gone.

The juniors halted abruptly.

Harry grasped his cudgel hard.

"He's coming back!" he whispered. "No need to go on any further."

"He must have heard us."

"Well, he's coming back; it sounds as if he's going to walk right into us. Mind how you handle those sticks; don't brain one another. You can't see an inch in the dark here. Collar the cad if you can without hitting him."

"That's sensible!"

"My worthy chum is right," murmured the Nabob of Bhanipur. "If the esteemed asses use the sticks in the darkness, the brainfulness will be terrific."

"Quiet!"

"Ready!"

Crackle, crackle, crackle!

The stranger was coming right on to them.

The juniors waited with beating hearts. They could hear a sound of heavy breathing now. The darkness in the trees was so intense that Harry could not see his hand before his face. He could only wait—and listen.

A thrill ran through him as he felt a hot breath on his face.

Something ran against him in the darkness, and he grasped at it desperately with both hands.

"Here he is!" he shrieked. "Give in, you scoundrel! Ah! Oh, my hat!"

"Got him?" shrieked Bob Cherry.

"Yes, but— Ha, ha, ha!"

"Eh? What?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

It seemed to the astounded chums that Wharton had suddenly gone into hysterics.

He was shrieking with breathless laughter.

"What's the matter?" roared Bob. "Who is it? What—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Bob groped in the darkness, and his hands trailed through a horse's mane. In a moment the truth burst upon him.

"My hat! The Dodger!"

"What?" roared Nugent.

"The Artful Dodger! Ha, ha, ha!"

It was the horse!

The utter absurdity of the situation made the juniors shriek. The wandering steed had come back to drink at the stream, and perhaps the light of the camp-fire had attracted him. He had blundered into the juniors. But Harry, surprised and startled as he was, and gasping with merriment, did not let go his mane. The Artful Dodger had been caught, and was not to be allowed to go again.

But to do the Dodger justice, he didn't seem to want to go. Harry led him through the thickets into the camp, and he went as quietly as a lamb. His look was as innocent as a babe's. He seemed quite unconscious of the fact that he had given anybody any trouble—in fact, he gave a pleasant little whinny, which was possibly his way of joining in the general merriment.

"You boulder!" said Harry, as he slipped the collar over the horse's head. "You won't get loose again in a hurry! Now we've got the hoss, kids, we'd better break camp—and we shall be at Greyfriars by morning. We can take it in turns to drive and to sleep in the caravan."

"Good wheeze!"

"The wheeziness is terrific."

The Artful Dodger was harnessed to the caravan. He submitted with exemplary meekness, and rubbed his muzzle on Harry's shoulder. Then Harry taking the first turn at leading the horse, the caravan moved off through the shadowy woods. The juniors remained behind for a few moments to stamp out every remnant of the camp-fire.

There was a sudden yell from within the caravan.

"Hallo! Ow! Stop! What—who-yow!"

Bunter's head came out of the window. He was minus his glasses, and, anyway, it was too dark for him to see anything. He was yelling to the juniors.

"Stop! I say, you fellows— Oh! Ow! The van's going over! They're carrying me off! Rescue!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Bob Cherry. "I can see anybody

carrying Bunter off! It's all right, Billy—we're going home, that's all. The hoss has come back."

Bunter gasped.

"Oh, that's all right, then! I woke up suddenly, and—and—"

"And being so brave, you—"

"Oh, really, Cherry! It's all right—I'll go to sleep again."

"Open the door first."

"I'd rather keep it fastened."

"If you don't open that door instant, we'll make you walk all the way!" howled Bob. "Nuff said—open the door!"

And Bunter thought he had better open it. Bob Cherry and Nugent got into the van, and Hazeldene and the nabob sat in the front and snoozed there, while Wharton led the horse. Harry remained in charge of the Dodger till they were out of the wood, and then he slept in the van while Nugent drove along the lanes. Taking it in turns to look after the horse, the caravanners slowly but surely covered the ground, but the dawn was creeping up the sky when they rumbled into the village of Friardale.

They were early risers at Mr. Milsom's, and the gates were open when the Saucy Susan arrived. Mr. Milsom looked relieved to see them.

"Blessed if I didn't think something had happened to you!" he said. "You'll get into a row-up at the school! I sent a message to the doctor about where you'd gone!"

The juniors were thinking so, too, as they pedalled back to Greyfriars on the bicycles. Dr. Locke was already up, and his look was very serious when the juniors reported themselves to him.

"I suppose you were not to blame, in a way," he said at last. "I received Mr. Milsom's message, or I should have been very anxious indeed. I was anxious—but I suppose that, under the circumstances, you were not to blame. But something seems to go amiss with your caravanning every time, and I really think that this expedition had better be the last. I shall not punish you, but I cannot allow you to take the caravan out again unless you have a senior with you in charge of the party."

And with that, and without the expected caning, the Head dismissed the Greyfriars Caravanners.

THE END.

(Another splendid tale of the Chums of Greyfriars next Tuesday, entitled "The Tenants of Study 13," by Frank Richards. Order your "Magnet Library" in advance. Price One Halfpenny.)

The Opening Chapters of a Grand Story.



A Splendid Tale of Life in the British Army.

A BRIEF RESUMÉ OF THE FIRST CHAPTERS.

Ronald Chenys, a cadet in his last term at Sandhurst, is falsely accused of cheating in an exam., so one night, packing up a few necessities, he leaves Sandhurst with his dog Rough. He walks to London, enlists in the Royal North Wessex Regiment under the name of Chester, and is sent down as one of a draft of recruits for that regiment to Woolchester. Arrived there, the rookies are taken charge of by two old soldiers, known as Mouldy Mills and Hookey Walker, who are deputed to explain their new duties. Ronald unfortunately manages to fall foul of Bagot, a bullying sergeant, and Foxey Williams, a private, on the first day, and so he comes in for a rough time. One day when he causes Ronald to drop from the blanket in which he is being tossed, Foxey is led by fear to apologise. Ronald takes it so quietly, however, that Foxey immediately repents his apology. (Now go on with the story.)

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"THE TENANTS OF STUDY 13."

The New Subaltern.

Foxy felt, in fact, that he had given himself away, and that his pals would think that he had funk. So to prove the opposite, he enlisted George and Alf one evening, to help to give his enemy, Ronald, a thrashing.

The result was a gorgeous barrack-room battle, with odds of three to one. It ended in Foxey suddenly finding himself under a bed, with a nose so swollen that he could barely see round it. Alf went "out" to a straight left, while George in a sudden desire to get out, too, but in a less painful fashion, went bumping down a flight of ten iron steps on his back.

That cleared the atmosphere for a time, and Ronald was left in comparative peace.

The three weary months of recruit drill were over now,

A Splendid Tale of Harry Wharton & Co.
and the Pupils of Cliff House.

and he was a full-blown duty man at last. To-night he was doing his first turn of sentry go, pacing briskly up and down beneath the deep archway which formed the main entrance to the barracks, when Foxey turned the corner.

Inside the guard-room, where a snug fire was blazing, sat Sergeant Bagot and the men off duty.

Foxey was their orderly man, told off to look after their needs, so that his entry caused no comment.

"Thought I would jest look in and see whether you was wanting anyfink, sergeant," he volunteered, in explanation and sat down. "I suppose the new bloke will be joining us soon?" he added, knocking out the ashes of his pipe.

"If you mean, by the new bloke, the new subaltern of B Company—" began the sergeant loftily, and then broke off. "That just reminds me," he said.

"Chenys his name is, ain't it?" asked Foxey innocently, raising his voice and glancing towards the door. He had heard Ronald's heavy footfall approaching, and he hoped to see some start of surprise at the sound of the name; but the cloaked figure passed unheeding.

"You seem to know a blessed lot about it, considering he was only gazetted yesterday, and I only heard the news myself some ten minutes ago," said Bagot; "but that ain't the point. He arrives to-night and I've been warned to have a servant ready for him. Now you're here, how would you like the job?"

Foxey turned up his nose in lofty scorn.

"You'd be done with most parades and duties—and then there's the pickin's," added Bagot.

"How about our friend outside?" suggested Foxey. "I ain't the one to do a better man out of a job, and it sounds as if it might just suit him."

Bagot chuckled.

"It don't matter to me who takes it on," he said. "Only there you are. If you want it, report yourself to Colour-sergeant Jones at once. He's waiting now."

"Very good, sergeant," said Foxey. "I've been a good many things in my time, and among them a waiter in a corfee shop. If valeting's anything like that, I might do worse, I suppose. I'll hate to be denying meself the pleasures of parading and the prospects of promotion, but—as you say, sergeant—there are pickin's."

Foxey was half through the door, when there sounded the brisk clatter of hoofs, as some vehicle turned sharply in from the road and entered the gate.

It was a station cab, and the top was littered with bags and uniform cases, resplendent in new varnish.

Ronald, standing at ease, caught a glimpse of the paraphernalia of military rank, and sprang to attention, sloping arms smartly in salute.

"Pull up, cabby, we'll just ask the way!" cried a voice, which sounded strangely familiar. "Here, sentry."

The face of the occupant of the cab was thrust forward, so that the light of the lamp fell full upon it, throwing up the features in startling relief.

Ronald stood as if turned to stone. For the moment his heart stopped beating, and only the rigid, convulsive grip of the fingers prevented the rifle on his shoulder from clashing to the pavement.

It was Ian, his step-brother, who had appeared suddenly out of the mist and darkness like some evil spirit.

The look of terror and amazement in the younger lad's eyes was distorted into a demoniacal grin by the light at his cheek. But the eyes were the eyes of a man brought face to face suddenly with the dead.

"You?"

That was all Ian said. His voice rang out in a thin whisper, and he only flung himself back on to the seat in time to prevent himself pitching headlong.

"Now then, fat 'ead, wake up, can't yer! Don't yer 'ear the gentleman a-talkin' to yer?" growled the cabby impatiently. "Which is the way to the officer's quarters?"

Ronald shrugged his shoulders, half convinced that this was only some horrible nightmare. But Foxey sprang forward to the rescue. He had seen enough.

The cab moved on, and Foxey doubled beside, his heart exulting. There were pickings in this for a certainty, and Slaney knew only half the story. Where Slaney had extracted shillings from his victim, Foxey could picture himself fingering pounds.

"Hallo, Chester, you look as if you had been seeing ghosts. Pull yourself together, man!"

Ronald looked at Corporal Kedge, as if he also was only part of the dream. He had not realised that the reliefs had already paraded behind him, and that his two hours spell of duty was up.

"Was that the new chap that just drove in?" asked the corporal.

"A new officer, I think. I didn't know we were expecting one so soon," answered Ronald, now on his guard.

"Nor did any of us until this evening. Chenys, his name is, and he's coming to 'B.' Quick march!"

Ronald's heart sank like a lump of lead under this last remark. So the old life he devotedly hoped had been done with for ever, was to be unrolled afresh.

The Vampire's Claws—On Guard.

Huddled into a wicker chair, white, trembling and shaken, like one who has only just battled his way through an exhausting illness, sat Second-Lieutenant Chenys, of the Royal North Wessex Regiment.

He was in a little bedroom plainly furnished, and very like his old quarters at Sandhurst.

How he got there he scarcely knew. He had a hazy recollection of the cab jingling its way across a vast, ill-lit square, and pulling up before a row of modest, creeper-covered cottages.

These were the officers' quarters of the Woolchester Barracks. Whether he paid the cabby, or who received him, he neither knew nor cared.

All he could remember clearly—and the picture was seared deep into his buzzing brain—was that figure at the gate—grim, silent and accusing.

The one he hated most on earth, the one he had perjured his soul to crush and kick out of his path, the one he had seen with his own eyes stretched on a mortuary slab, and buried in a suicide's grave—that one had arisen from the dead to mock him.

Ian's eyes, dilated and unseeing, gradually focussed themselves on a face, white and ghastly, peering at him out of the shadow. He sprang forward in his chair with a guilty start, and the face moved too. It was his own reflected in a mirror.

Yet the discovery left him unrelieved. He was shaking in every nerve, and dripping with the sweat of terror.

He scrambled to his feet. This would never do. He must pull himself together. Somebody was stumbling up the stairs, panting under a heavy load. A knock came to the door.

"Come in," said Ian, turning to settle his tie before the glass to hide the shaking of his fingers.

"Brought up your baggage, sir," said Foxey, sidling into the room, his arms loaded with bags and cases.

"All right," replied Ian curtly. "Put them down and get out. My servant will look after the rest."

"Please, sir, I am your servant," answered Foxey, dropping the bags, and standing to attention.

Ian looked at the thin, cunning face and close-set eyes, which had earned for their owner his expressive nick-name, and made a mental note to alter this arrangement at the first opportunity.

Foxey read all that was hidden in the contemptuous glance; but his cards were ready in his hand.

"I was only warned five minutes ago, so I arsk your pardon, sir, for paradin' in this kit. Private Slaney, as was your servant—"

Ian's hand tightened on the chair before him until the knuckles stood out like knobs of ivory under the pale skin. An inarticulate sound broke from his lips.

"I beg your pardon, sir," said Foxey, coming to a halt.

"What for, you fool?" snapped Ian, recovering himself.

"I thought you was goin' to speak," explained Foxey, pretending to busy himself with the bags again, yet shooting a sidelong glance every now and then at the young officer's face. "I was only venturing to mention that Private Slaney, who was your servint at Sandhurst—"

"Well, confound you, what of him?" demanded Ian.

"Only, sir, he wrote as soon as he heard that you was jin'ing here, and gave me the tip to apply. I 'ope you'll give me a chance to try and give you satisfaction."

Ian did not answer. He was staring into the looking-glass again, fumbling with his tie; but watching Foxey's reflection as a cat may watch a mouse.

What new move was this of Slaney's? Did this mean that he was to be blackmailed and bled by a succession of vampires, bequeathed and handed on from one to another, until the skies split, and exposure and ruin descended upon him like an avalanche? How much did this man know?

At that instant Foxey looked up. His cunning had not taken the mirror into account. His victim's back was turned, and he saw no reason why he should not venture on a little grin of triumph. Ian saw it, and ground his teeth.

Foxey knew something, evidently; but still, how much? "By the way," asked Ian, in a cold voice, "who was that fellow on sentry at the gate as I drove in?"

ANSWERS

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He had regained a grip of his scattered senses, lashing them to heel, and even by sheer force of will driving the craven blood back into his white cheeks. He was still staring into the mirror, watching Foxey.

"A noo recruit, sir. Chester his name is," replied Foxey.

"Got many of his sort in the ranks?" asked Ian.

It was he who was doing the probing now.

"You mean gentleman rankers, sir?" said Foxey. "No, and we don't want them!"

"Ah, not popular perhaps?" suggested Ian casually.

"He ain't—not with me, at any rate. If I 'ad my way, sir—"

Foxey checked himself, but whatever he was going to say he meant it.

At that instant a knock came to the door, and a brother officer in mess-dress entered.

"Welcome to Woolchester," he said, warmly gripping Ian Chenys by the hand. "We're infernally belated, I know, and you must think us a fearfully inhospitable crowd not to have been round to receive you; but the fact is—"

"It's close on your hour for mess, I know. Don't apologise, pray," said Ian.

"That's it, exactly," answered his comrade. "We're all climbing into our pretty clothes just now. I heard your cab drive up, and I've been breaking my neck to get in and say how d'you do, and apologise. My name's Fairly, and we're both of Company B."

"Glad to meet you," said Ian, shaking hands afresh.

He had been training himself during the last few months to look upon all men as enemies; but this fair, sun-tanned young fellow, not a couple of years older than himself challenged no suspicion.

Lieutenant Bob Fairly was no man's enemy except his own, perhaps. Rich, easy-going, and with no particular views or ambitions, he was accustomed to select the smooth ways of life.

He could be all things to all men, chatting as easily and affably with a suspected rogue as with the biggest brute on earth.

Everybody knew Bob Fairly as a shallow-pate, and many there were who proclaimed him a fool. If he had known this he would only have laughed. That was his easy way.

"Well, now, you'll have to buck up, you know, or you'll be late," he said. "You have not reported yourself, of course? No. Then you'd better do that at mess. The old man will probably be skirmishing round after collar studs at this instant. Who's your servant?"

"Here"—Ian turned to Foxey Williams—"you can go now, my man. I'll look after my things myself to-night."

"I say! Who ever put you on that creature?" exclaimed Fairly in surprise, as the door shut on Foxey's heels. "Why, I should think they could not have picked a bigger clown out of the company. We'll have to get that altered for you."

"Oh, I don't know," said Ian easily. "He seems all right, and the sort to knock into shape after a bit."

"Hum! I should doubt it," said Fairly, polishing his eye-glass.

"Really, I was rather taken with him," continued Ian, unlocking his uniform case and extracting a gorgeous mess-kit, resplendent with gilt buttons and heavy gold braid.

"Rum taste," said Fairly to himself. "Personally, I don't think I should trust that fellow Williams within ten miles of a sixpence of mine. But there, it's no business of mine, after all."

A quarter of an hour later the diminutive guard bugler marched fifty paces exactly into the centre of the parade ground, halted, and sounded off the officers' mess call:—

"Officers' wives have puddings and pies; but soldiers' wives have skilly."

Ian and his friend emerged at the last note, and strolled towards the mess room; while

the bugler turned about like an automaton, and marched back another fifty paces exactly, which brought him to the door of the guard room.

He was astonished to see that Ronald had not stirred either finger or foot. For the last ten minutes he had been sitting like a carved image, his chin on his hand, gazing into the fire.

"Got the jore-ache?" asked the bugler—who, for his size, was generally known as Midge—slipping on to the form beside him.

He worshipped this big, good-natured Hercules, though he had never had opportunity or reason of informing him of the fact.

"No, Midge, not the face-ache," answered Ronald.

"Stummick-ache?" Midge suggested.

"No, nor the stomach-ache either, young 'un," answered Ronald kindly.

Bugler Midge's knowledge of human ailments was exhausted for the moment. He knew nothing of heart-aches as yet.

Rough did though, and he watched his young master with mournful, appealing eyes.

Rough had been elected guard-room dog by unanimous vote a long time ago, and he accepted his position with quiet dignity. Whenever parades were over, however, and Ronald was free, Rough was always at his side.

To-night Ronald's presence by the guard-room fire was an unexpected pleasure for the faithful beast.

Midge might have been tempted to exercise his sympathy further, only at that moment the first prisoner of the evening was hauled into the guard-room, shouting and fighting in the grip of the regimental police.

By the time he had been overpowered, searched and bundled neck and crop into a cell, there was a similar job on hand and waiting. From now until midnight the guard was kept busy.

There were quiet culprits for the prisoner's room, and drunken-desperate ones for the cells, and what with the din and clamour, and struggling, and the incessant stream of men on "late pass," reporting their arrival, Ronald had little time for his own thoughts.

But little by little peace began to settle down, and, except for the snores of the prisoners, and the footfalls of the sentry outside, silence reigned at last.

At one o'clock it was Ronald's turn for duty again. Corporal Kedge roused him up from his bed with the other reliefs, and fell them in for inspection outside.

"We'll change your post this journey, Chester," said the corporal, after he had seen that they were all correct. "Morgan here, feels a bit dickey, so I'm shoving him on the guard-room door. You'll be for No. 3 post."

Ronald did not care a button. In fact, he preferred the change. He wanted to be alone to think.

The old sentries were relieved one by one, and fell in with the little squad, and marched off, leaving the new men to carry on their duty.

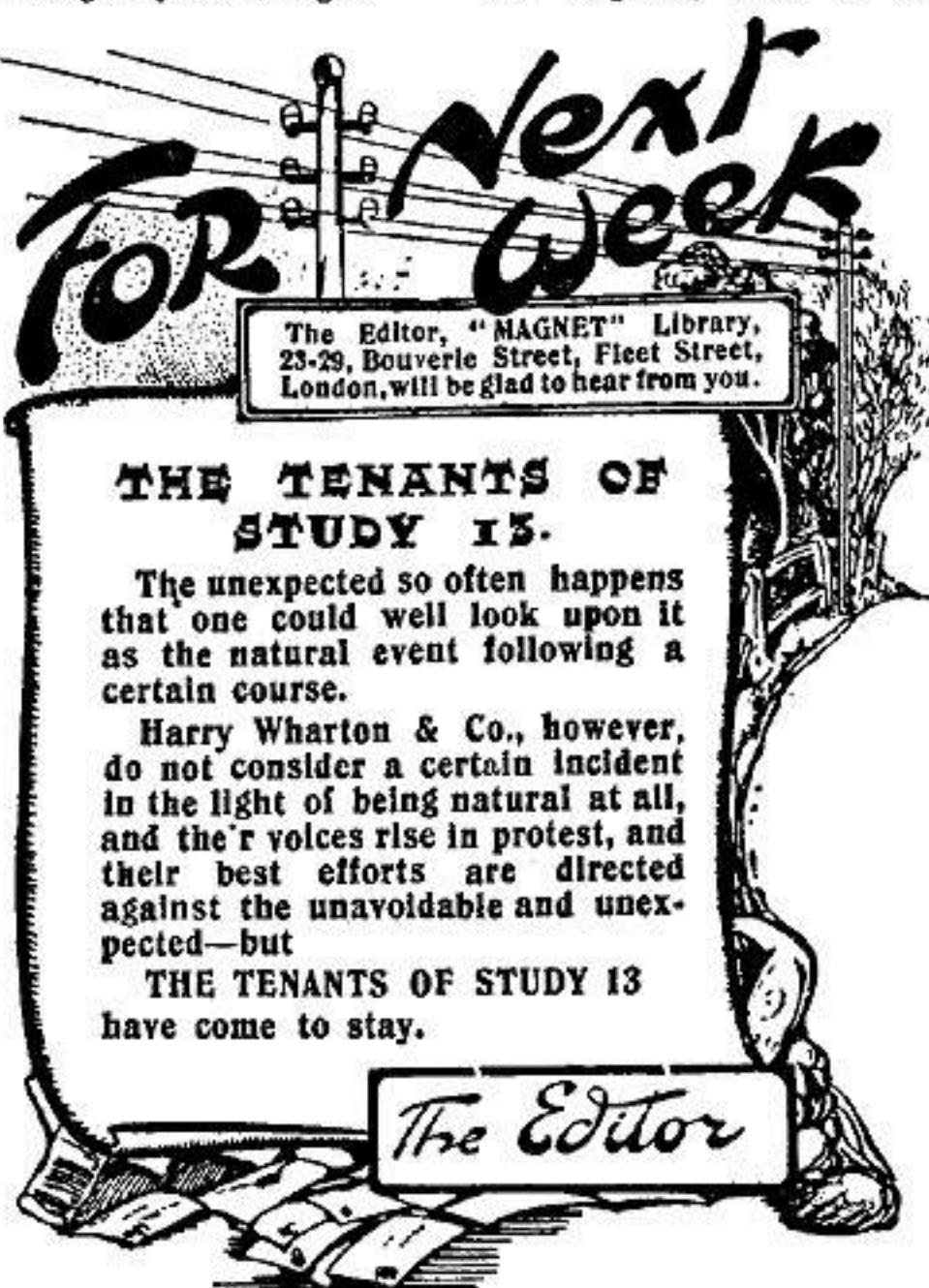
From Ronald's beat he could hear the jingle of the piano in the officers' mess, and occasionally the roar of a rousing chorus. Evidently they were holding high jinks, and keeping late hours. But for the mist which hung heavily over the parade-ground he could have seen the cosily lit windows of the mess-room.

Ian was there. Ronald wondered what thoughts were passing through the youngster's mind to-night.

"Halt! Who goes there?"

He had heard a footfall on the flagstones—a stealthy, uncertain step, as if the man was uncertain of his bearings, and, moreover, had no desire to be detected. In the wreathing mist he could distinguish nobody.

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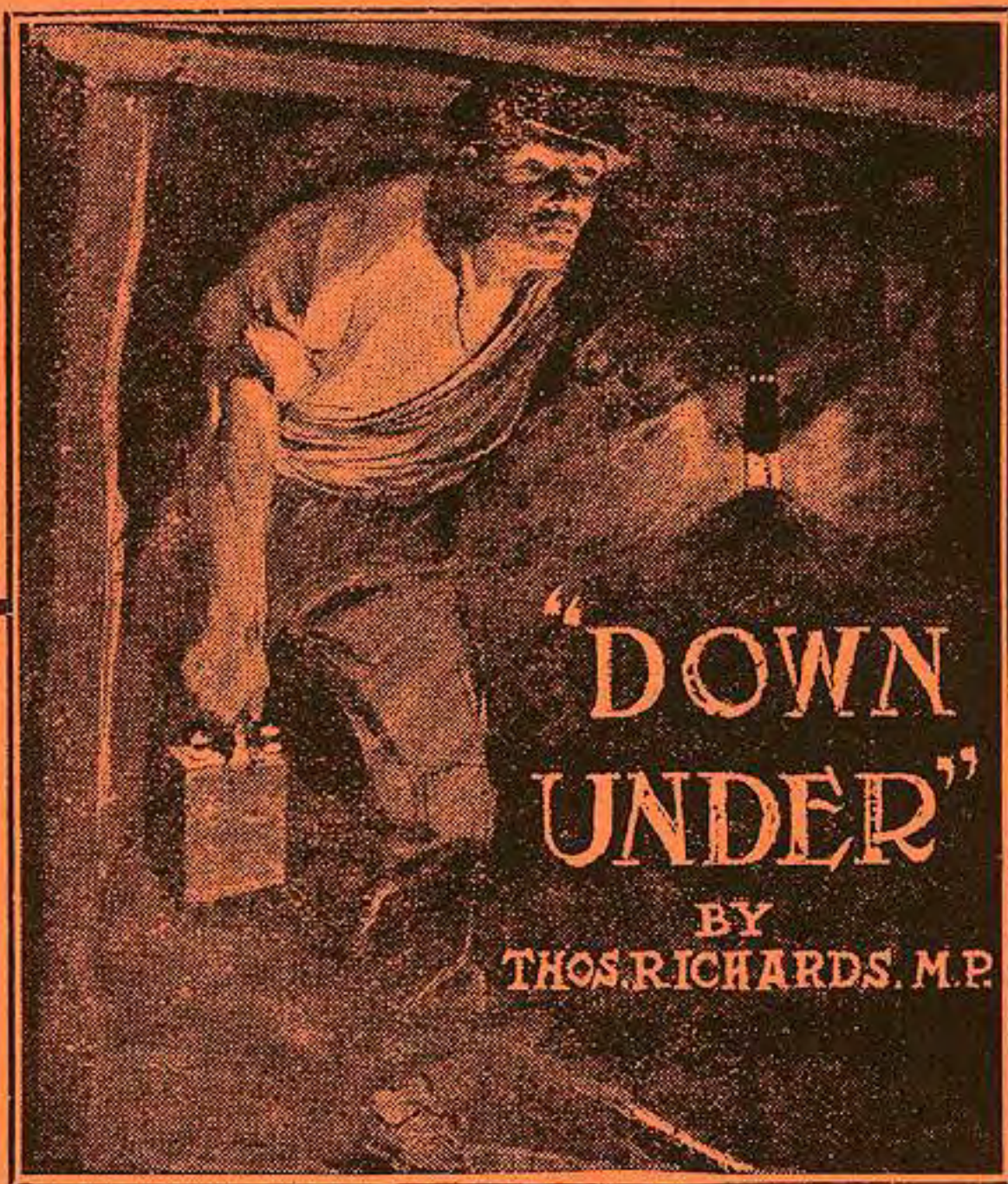
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