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## The Greyfriars Bun Fight

A Splendid Tale of  
Harry Wharton & Co.,

— BY —

FRANK RICHARDS.



### THE FIRST CHAPTER.

#### Something Like a Mystery!

It was pinned up on the notice-board at Greyfriars, among a crowd of other notices, and it attracted general attention:

"N.O.B.F.

"The first meeting of the above will take place in No. 13 Study, in the Remove passage, at seven o'clock precisely.

(Signed) R. CHERRY,  
President, N.O.B.F."

N.O.B.F.!

The fellows looked at it, and wondered. What those initials might possibly imply, nobody seemed to have an idea. The fellows read the notice, and re-read it. They looked at one another; and they pondered and debated. But nobody seemed to be able to arrive at a solution of the riddle.

The Remove, of course, were specially interested. As R. Cherry was giving the meeting of the N.O.B.F. house-room in his study, and was the president of the N.O.B.F.; and as R. Cherry belonged to the Remove, that Form naturally felt very curious to know what it all meant.

But fellows in other Forms looked at it, and wondered. Even Wingate of the Sixth was seen to pause before the notice-board, and look at the announcement with wrinkled brows.

"What does this rot mean?" asked Wingate, looking round at the crowd of juniors before the board.

"Blessed if I know!" said Bulstrode. "Some piffle of Bob Cherry's, I suppose. I expect it's only a lark."

"What's the N.O.B.F.?"

"Nobody knows."

"Where's Cherry?"

"Gone out on his jigger."

Wingate grunted, and walked on. The fact that the captain of the school had deigned to read the notice, of course, gave it an added importance in the eyes of the juniors.

They re-read it, and re-read it, and tried to make it out. What was the N.O.B.F.?

"Hang it!" said Bulstrode. "It's some lark. Cherry went out immediately he had stuck the thing up there; and I suppose it was so as not to be questioned about it."

"He said he would be back at seven, I remember," Skinner remarked.

"I say, you fellows——"

"Hallo! Here's Bunter! What do you know about this, Owl?"

Billy Bunter blinked at the notice on the board through his big spectacles. He read it through, and looked puzzled. "Look here, you know something about it!" said Skinner. "Bob Cherry used to be in your study till they chucked him into No. 13. What's the N.O.B.F.?"

Bunter blinked at the mysterious initials. He never confessed to not knowing anything; and, as a matter of fact, he generally knew as much about other people's business as they knew themselves.

"Lemme see!" said Skinner. "The 'B' may stand for Bunter. Ahem! 'Now Our Bunter Feeds!' Is that it?"

"Oh, really, Skinner—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Blessed if I see anything to cackle at in a rotten remark like that!" said the fat Removite. "You fellows know I don't eat much; in fact, I'm quite taking up the simple life lately. The letters don't stand for anything of the sort. I was going to say that Mark Linley and that Chinese chap are in No. 13 with Cherry; and they're bound to know something about it."

"Good! Where's Linley?"

"He went out with Cherry," said Russell.

"Where's Wun Lung?"

"Let's look for him."

"Come on!" exclaimed Bulstrode. "If it's not a lark, and it means anything, we'll screw it out of the Chinese."

And a crowd of Removites rushed off in search of Wun Lung, the little Chinese member of the Remove.

They ran to No. 13 Study first. But that apartment was empty. Bulstrode looked round it; but there was nothing to indicate that a meeting of the N.O.B.F. was to take place, or what the N.O.B.F. might possibly be.

"Try the Common-room," said Skinner.

In the Common-room Wun Lung was found. The little Celestial was curled up in a chair, and from his comfortable position he was suddenly yanked by a grip on his shoulder.

"Now, then," exclaimed Bulstrode, fixing a terrifying glance on the little Chinese, "what's the N.O.B.F.?"

"Eh?"

"What's the N.O.B.F.?"

"Me no savvy."

"The N.O.B.F.?" roared Bulstrode, shaking him.

"No savvy."

"Look here; you dig in Cherry's study! You must jolly well know what it means. What wheeze is Bob Cherry getting up to?"

"No savvy."

"You—you worm! You savvy well enough when you want to!" growled Bulstrode. "Now, look here, I'm going to twist your wrist until you savvy—see?"

"No savvy."

Bulstrode grasped the little Celestial's wrist, and compressed his grip upon it. Then he twisted it; and Wun Lung gave a sharp cry.

"No twistee! Hullo!"

"What does N.O.B.F. stand for?"

"No savvy. Ow!"

"Here, chuck that!" said Ogilvy. "Don't twist his arm, Bulstrode. Don't be a cad!"

"Mind your own business! Now, Wun Lung, what's the N.O.B.F.?"

"Ow! No savvy. Ow-wow!"

"Stop that!"

It was a sharp, angry voice; and Harry Wharton, the captain of the Remove, pushed through the crowd of juniors.

Bulstrode turned a furious look upon him.

"Mind your own business, Wharton. I'm going to make this whelp answer."

"You are not!"

"Who'll stop me?" roared Bulstrode.

"I will!"

Bulstrode, gritting his teeth, gave Wun Lung's arm another twist that brought a cry of pain from his lips.

Wharton did not waste any more time in words. He grasped the bully of the Remove by the collar, and, with a powerful heave, dragged him away from the little Celestial.

Bulstrode swung away, collided with a chair, and went reeling to the floor, where he fell with a heavy bump.

"Serve you jolly well right," said Ogilvy. "Why couldn't you let the little beggar alone?"

"Oh, rot!" said Skinner. "Bulstrode wasn't hurting him. And why shouldn't he be made to speak, anyway?"

Bulstrode staggered to his feet, blind with rage. He made a blind rush forward, hitting out furiously; and it happened unfortunately for Skinner that he moved at the same moment, and inadvertently stepped into the bully's way.

There was a terrific yell from Skinner as Bulstrode's crashing blows got home.

The right caught him on the ear, the left on the side of THE MAGNET.—No. 77.

NEXT  
WEEK:

"HARRY WHARTON & CO.'S BANK HOLIDAY."

the chin; and Skinner went down as if he had been struck by a cannon-ball.

"Take that, then!" roared Bulstrode. "Why, what—who—you ass!"

"Ow!" groaned Skinner.

"What did you get in the way for?"

"Ow-wow!"

The Removites burst into a roar.

Skinner was groaning on the floor, and Bulstrode looking at him in surprise.

Harry Wharton smiled.

"You'd better clear off, Wun Lung!" he said. And the little Chinese did not wait for the advice to be repeated.

He scuttled away; and Bulstrode made a movement to follow him.

Harry stepped into his path.

"No, you don't!" he said quietly.

"Stand aside!"

"Rats!"

"Then I'll jolly well shift you!" shouted Bulstrode, springing at him.

"Go it!" said Stott. "Go it—ooooooooh!"

Wharton met the rush of the Remove bully with perfect coolness. His left swept up the lashing fists, and his right came out with stunning force upon Bulstrode's jaw.

The Remove bully reeled back, crashed into Stott and sent him spinning, and fell across him on the floor.

Wharton glanced at them, and walked out of the room.

Bulstrode sat up dazedly. Stott rubbed his head, and snarled.

"Go for him!" he exclaimed. "Bulstrode, you're not going to take that lying down, are you? Go for him!"

"He looks as if he's taking it lying down!" grinned Trevor.

"Go for him, Bulstrode!"

"Oh, shut up!"

Bulstrode rose dazedly, holding his chin.

"Oh, don't be a funk!" said Stott. "I—Ow—leggo yow!"

Bulstrode grasped him by the collar, and shook him till his teeth rattled.

Stott gasped for breath.

"Who's a funk?" demanded Bulstrode.

"I—ow—ow—leggo—yow—ow!"

Bulstrode gave him a final shake, and left him gasping on the floor. Then he stalked out of the Common-room.

"Beast!" gasped Stott.

"Serve you right!" said Ogilvy. "If you want Wharton gone for, why don't you go for him yourself. That tap on the chin was enough for anybody, I should think. But look here, you chaps, we haven't found out yet what the N.O.B.F. means."

"I say, you fellows—"

"Oh, you ring off, Bunter! You don't know anything about it!"

"Oh, really, Ogilvy! I was going to say that as I used to dig with Cherry, I—I might have an idea. You see—"

"Well, what's the N.O.B.F., then?"

"I—I'm feeling faint at the present moment," said Billy Bunter. "I could explain, only I feel I'm not up to it. If you liked to stand me a snack at Mrs. Mimble's—"

"No fear!" said Ogilvy, turning away.

"I say, you fellows—"

But the fellows did not stay to listen. They knew very well that Billy Bunter had no information to impart. The puzzle remained unsolved, and fellows went to and fro, asking one another what on earth the N.O.B.F. might be, and what it was meeting in R. Cherry's study for, without receiving anything like a satisfactory answer.

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A Splendid Tale of the  
Chums of Greyfriars.

## THE SECOND CHAPTER. A Mysterious Meeting.

**H**ARRY WHARTON entered No. 1 Study, with a parcel under his arm. He had been down to the tuckshop to get something for tea, when the disturbance in the Common-room had called him there, to the rescue of Wun Lung. The captain of the Remove was looking very thoughtful as he came into the study.

Frank Nugent looked up from the grate, where he was lighting the fire—a fire of sticks, for the purpose of boiling the kettle.

"Got the grub?" he asked. "Good! What's all the row about? The fellows seem to be excited about something."

"There's something on in No. 13," said Harry. "Have you ever heard of the N.O.B.F.?"

"The which?"

"The N.O.B.F.!"

"What is it—something to eat?"

"No," said Harry, laughing. "It's some wheezo that Bob Cherry is getting up. You know what those fellows in No. 13 have been saying—that they'll make No. 13 the top study in the Remove. I suppose this is some scheme Bob is working for the purpose. He's succeeded in making the whole Form curious about it."

"The N.O.B.F.?" said Hurree Jamset Ram Singh, the dusky member of the Remove. "I have never heard of the honourable N.O.B.F. before. Perhaps it's a secret society which the esteemed Cherry is forming."

"Ah, perhaps! We ought to look into it, really," said Wharton. "We're top of the Remove in this study, you know. We all like Cherry, but we've got to keep No. 13 in its place. I vote we attend the meeting of the N.O.B.F."

"I say, you fellows," said Bunter, coming into the study, "is tea ready? I'm hungry. Anything you'd like me to cook?"

"You can boil the kettle."

"Oh, really, Nugent! I'm hungry. You don't mean to say that that measly bit of ham is all you've got for tea, Wharton?"

"Yes, it is, my son."

"But there's hardly enough for me. What are you fellows going to do? Aren't you going to have any?"

Wharton laughed as he turned out the ham upon a plate. Funds were not high in No. 1 Study just then; but Billy Bunter, who never made any contribution to the funds, always expected something good for tea. Bunter watched him with great disfavour, and he only grunted when Nugent asked him if he were going to mix the cocoa. Tea had run out; but, as Nugent said, cocoa was ever so much better for anybody than tea, so it was really an advantage.

"Kettle's boiling," said Nugent. "Lemune see, did you say you didn't want any cocoa, Bunter?"

"No, I didn't," said Bunter. "It's pretty hard cheese that I should have to go without my cup of tea, I think. But I'm getting accustomed to meanness in this study."

"Then it won't worry you so much when you get used to it," said Nugent. "Let me see, you like your cocoa weak, I think?"

"No, I don't, Nugent! You know jolly well I like it thick!"

"Any sugar?"

"Look here, you know I take four lumps!"

"You don't take four lumps this time," said Nugent cheerfully. "There are only eight in the basin, you see. You take two."

"Oh, really, Nugent!"

"Carve the ham, Wharton. Inky is standing out of this course; but there's a cold pie for him."

"A cold pie!" said Bunter, looking round. "Why, I—"

"I've got it locked in my desk," said Nugent, grinning.

"I knew where it'd go if it were left in the cupboard. You haven't had a chance to scoff it. Ham for you, Bunt?"

"I'm fearfully hungry!"

"Good! Any bread-and-butter with your ham?"

"Oh, really—"

They sat down to tea—or, more exactly, to cocoa, and bread-and-butter and ham. Bunter grunted discontentedly. He seemed to take shortage of funds in the study as a personal affront to himself.

"Blessed if I think I can stand this much longer!" he said. "I've a jolly good mind to follow Bob Cherry, and dig in No. 13 with them!"

"They wouldn't have you, Billy. And it may be rough on you to stand this study, but what about the study having to stand you?" demanded Nugent.

Bunter grunted. The door was opened just then, and Ogilvy put his head in.

"You chaps interested in the N.O.B.F.?" he asked.

"Yes, rather! Have you solved the mystery?"

"No. But it's just on seven, and Bob Cherry and Linley have come in. They're going up to No. 13. If you want to look into it, now's your chance. Bulstrode's talking about raiding the study."

THE MAGNET.—No. 77.

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And Ogilvy vanished.

The chums of No. 1 jumped up from their untouched tea.

"Come on!" said Harry Wharton.

"I say, you fellows—"

But Wharton, Nugent, and Hurree Singh hastened out of the study without listening to him. Billy Bunter blinked after them in surprise. Then, as he glanced at the tea-table, a grin of satisfaction overspread his fat face.

In about two seconds he had gathered up all the ham on to his own plate, and was travelling through it at express speed. Most of the bread-and-butter accompanied it, and the surreptitious feed was washed down by four cups of cocoa.

Billy Bunter rose from the table feeling more cheerful.

"I told Wharton there was hardly enough for me, and there wasn't!" he murmured. "He doesn't realise how important it is for me to keep up my strength by taking ample nourishment. I'm jolly glad Ogilvy looked in just then. I suppose I'd better get out before they come back. They may be annoyed at my finishing up the tommy. Fellows are so selfish!"

And Billy Bunter scuttled out of the study.

There was a crowd in the Remove passage. Word had passed through the Form that Cherry and Linley had come in, and they were followed to their study by a large part of the Form. Harry Wharton and his friends had rushed out just in time to see them enter No. 13—a pair of sturdy, well-set-up juniors, with frank and cheery faces, the said faces wearing expressive grins at the present moment.

"Here, I say," exclaimed Bulstrode, tapping Bob Cherry on the shoulder as he went in, "what's the N.O.B.F.?"

"The N.O.B.F.? It's the—er—the N.O.B.F.," said Bob cheerily. "Anything else I can tell you?"

"But what does it stand for?"

"I don't know that it does stand. But if it does, I suppose it would be because there was nothing to sit on."

"Oh, don't be funny!" roared Bulstrode. "What does the silly rot mean, anyway?"

"If it's silly rot, I don't see why you should be interested in the meaning," said Bob loftily. "Hang it all, can't a chap hold a meeting of the N.O.B.F. in his own study if he wants to?"

"But what is the N.O.B.F.?" shrieked a dozen voices.

"I've explained to Bulstrode, haven't I?" Bob Cherry pushed the study door shut; but Bulstrode and Skinner jammed their feet in the way.

"No, you don't!" said Bulstrode. "We're going—"

"That you are!" agreed Bob Cherry, and he gave Bulstrode a push. "Get off!"

"Keep your paws off me, or—"

"Wun Lung!"

"Me hele!"

"Is the poker in the fire?"

"Allee light!"

"Is it red-hot?"

"Quite led-hot."

"Bring it here and jab these legs."

"Allee light!"

The legs vanished in a second, as Wun Lung was heard to clink the poker from the grate. Bob Cherry chuckled, and closed the door.

Outside, the Removites growled and sniffed, and some of them kicked at the door.

"The kids seem to be curious," grinned Bob Cherry.

"The N.O.B.F. seems to be making rather a sensation."

Mark Linley laughed.

"Yes, it does. Looks like being a row."

"Never mind. They can't make too much row out there, as Quelch is in his study. Keep that poker handy, though, Wun Lung."

"Allee lightee," grinned the little Chinese.

The noise in the passage was increasing. The news that Bob Cherry had come in, and that it was upon the stroke of time for the mysterious meeting of the N.O.B.F. brought the juniors from near and far. Even fellows in the Upper Fourth and the Shell came along the Remove passage, inspired by curiosity. There was a general demand for information, but none was forthcoming.

Harry Wharton opened the door of the study and looked in. Bob Cherry had arranged the chairs round the table, as if for a meeting, and Harry noticed that there were several extra chairs in the study. A little wooden mallet, such as is used in table-croquet, lay on the table at one end. Harry took in these details at a glance, and then looked at Bob.

Bob Cherry waved his hand.

"Cut off, you kid!"

"Look here, Bob Cherry—"

"Buzz off!"

"As captain of the Remove—"

"Captain of the Remove is nothing in the committee-room of the N.O.B.F.," said Bob Cherry. "I'm boss here, as President of the N.O.B.F."

"You utter ass! What is the N.O.B.F.?"

"That poker hot, Wun Lung?"

"Quitee plenty."

"Give that chap a jab with it."

Harry Wharton closed the door.

"Blessed if I can make it out!" he said. "I suppose a chap has a right to play the giddy goat in his own study, if he wants to. Still, it isn't showing a proper respect towards the top study in the Remove. But, look here, if there's to be a meeting of the N.O.B.F., it—he—or they—or whatever it is, will have to come along here. We'll watch for 'em!"

"Faith, and let us pass, darlings!" said a cheery voice, as Micky Desmond came elbowing along the passage. "Make room for ye're uncle, then!"

"Stop your shoving, Desmond. You can stand where you are!"

"But, sure, I want to go into the study, darlings."

"They won't let you in!"

"Faith, and they will! It's a meeting of the N.O.B.F."

"What!" roared a dozen voices. "Do you know what the N.O.B.F. is? Are you going to the meeting?"

"Sure and I am. Lemme pass!"

"Hold him! Collar him! Make him explain!"

Micky Desmond made a wild rush, and broke through the Removites. He went bundling into No. 13 Study, with five or six hands clutching at him a second too late.

"Faith, and I've had a trouble gettin' here!" he gasped. "Look afther the door!"

"Where's the poker, Wun Lung? You're doorkeeper."

And the door closed again. In the passage there was a greater ferment than ever. The mystery of the N.O.B.F. was evidently known to other members of the Remove beside the chums of No. 13. Micky Desmond had got through, but the juniors in the passage watched grimly for the arrival of the next member of the N.O.B.F. The next would not escape their clutches so easily.

### THE THIRD CHAPTER.

#### Billy Bunter Looks In.

"MAKE way there!"

"Stop your shoving, Lacy!"

"I'm going into the study."

"Oh, here's another of them!"

Hands were outstretched on all sides to grasp Lacy. He was seized and jammed against the wall, and pinned there fast.

"Now, then! Are you a member of the N.O.B.F.?"

"Yes," gasped Lacy. "Let me go!"

"What's the N.O.B.F.?"

"Find out!"

"Bang his napper against the wall, Skinner."

"Right-ho! Here goes!"

"Hold on! The N.O.B.F. is—or—it's the N.O.B.F., you see. It's a society—a sort of association, you know."

"What does it stand for?"

"That's a secret only known to the members."

"It's going to be known to us jolly soon," said Bulstrode.

"Give him the frog's-march up and down the passage."

"Rescue!" shouted Lacy. "N.O.B.F. to the rescue!"

Bob Cherry's study door opened, and he rushed out, followed by his friends. There was a scrambling struggle in the passage, and Lacy was perforce released. He retreated into the study with the tenants of No. 13, and the door was slammed again.

Skinner kicked at it, and Stott hammered, and Ogilvy thumped, till Harry Wharton called them to order.

"Hold on!" he said. "We don't want to bring Quelch up here, you know. Don't make such a ghastly row!"

"Let's raid the study," said Bulstrode.

"What about that giddy red-hot poker?"

"And what about the prefects? They've started making a rotten fuss about a row or two in the Remove passage."

"Stop shoving against me, Morgan! What are you up to?"

"I want to get by, look you."

"You don't mean to say you're a— Hold him! Collar him!"

But Morgan had slipped into No. 13. He had quietly worked his way through the crowd, and it did not dawn upon them till the last moment that he was a member of the N.O.B.F. The door closed behind Morgan.

"My only hat!" said Nugent. "This is getting too thick! I wonder who else is in the game? Hallo, they've locked the door!"

The key clicked in the lock of No. 13. That evidently meant that the meeting was complete. So the Removites were in possession of one fact at least with regard to the

THE MAGNET.—No. 77.

NEXT  
WEEK:

"HARRY WHARTON & CO.'S BANK HOLIDAY."

A Splendid Tale of the  
Chums of Greyfriars.

N.O.B.F., that it had six members—Cherry, Linley, Wun Lung, Lacy, Desmond, and Morgan.

"Well, I give it up," said Harry Wharton. "I'm going to do my prep."

And he walked away. The Removites hammered on the door a little, till a voice was heard from the direction of the stairs, inquiring what the row was about, and whether they wanted the speaker to come up with a cane. Then they gave it up. As they dispersed, a fat figure came along the passage, and tapped at the door of No. 13. It was Billy Bunter. The fat junior was too short-sighted to see that he was observed by at least half a dozen pairs of eyes.

Nugent caught Harry by the arm.

"Look there!" he muttered. "It's Bunter! Can he be in it?"

Harry shook his head.

"Hardly. Ask him."

Nugent ran along the passage and caught the fat Removite by the collar. Billy Bunter squirmed in his grip.

"I—I say, you fellows, leggo! Ow! I—I didn't finish up the ham; it was the cat! I haven't the faintest idea who drank the cocoa! Ow!"

"Why, the young cormorant, he's scooped our tea!" exclaimed Nugent.

"I—I haven't! It was the cat! I—I—"

"Look here, do you belong to the N.O.B.F.?"

"Certainly not! I—I—I—"

Billy Bunter squirmed away from Nugent's hold, and scuttled into the box-room.

Frank Nugent rejoined Harry, laughing.

"The young cormorant's finished our tea," he exclaimed. "I expect he's only going there because he thinks there's some grub going. Come on! We sha'n't find anything to eat left in the study."

And Nugent was right—they didn't. Billy Bunter watched them cautiously from the half-open door of the box-room, and ventured out when they were gone. He tapped again at the door of Bob Cherry's study.

"Clear off!" called out Bob Cherry. "No admittance except on business."

"But I want to attend on business," said Bunter, through the keyhole. "I know jolly well you're having a feed in there. Let me in!"

"Scoot, you young cormorant!"

"Look here, I'll join the N.O.B.F. if you like. I—I'll join anything."

There was a chuckle in the study. Nobody there doubted that Billy Bunter would join anything if there was a feed attached.

"Look here," said Bob Cherry, through the keyhole, "I'll tell you what N.O.B.F. stands for, as far as you're concerned—Not Our Big Feeders. See?"

"Oh, really, Cherry—"

"Buzz off, or I'll come out to you!"

Bunter discontentedly left the door of the study. On a previous occasion, by his trick of imitating voices, he had caused Bob Cherry to open the door; but it had caused trouble, and the fat ventriloquist did not feel inclined to risk it again. He retired into the box-room, which adjoined No. 13. No. 13 was, in fact, an extra room which had been turned into a study to accommodate the overflow of juniors. It was separated from the box-room simply by a wooden partition, which was papered on the side of the study, and painted on the box-room side. Billy Bunter blinked at that partition with a glimmer in his eyes. He bent and placed his fat ear close to it, and heard a sound of tapping, and then a murmur of voices.

His eyes gleamed behind his spectacles.

The sound of voices was audible, but he could not distinguish a single word. But if he could find a knot-hole, or any rift in the partition—

The thought had no sooner come into his mind than he was acting upon it. Billy Bunter was one of the most incurable slackers in the Remove. In a competition of laziness, Bunter would have been an easy first. But he could be very energetic when he liked. He was as curious as a monkey, and whenever his curiosity was excited, he would leave no stone unturned to gratify it. And Bunter was not troubled with any of those scruples about eaves-dropping which would have placed obstacles in the way of other fellows.

A pair of steps was kept in the box-room, and Bunter, having closed and locked the door, carried them over to the partition, and set them up. Then he mounted them, and proceeded to make an examination of the boards.

His eyes gleamed suddenly. There was a knot-hole, more than half an inch in width, at a height of eight feet or so from the floor. He could not see into the study, because the wall-paper on the other side covered the hole.

But there was simply the thickness of the wall-paper between the two rooms at that particular spot.

"My word!" murmured Billy Bunter. "They won't keep

the secret from me very long, I think. I'll jolly well find out what it is; and if there's any wheeze on, I'll make Bob Cherry stand me a feed to keep it dark."

And the fat junior chuckled.

Since No. 13 had set up in the Remove passage, a rivalry had been growing up between the new study and No. 1, and that rivalry was growing keener and keener every day. No. 1 and No. 13 each claimed to be top study; but No. 1 had the prestige, so far. No. 13 still had its spurs to win, so to speak. That the new Co. were in quest of some scheme for "putting No. 1 in its place" everybody knew, and the upshot was awaited with considerable interest by the Remove. If that was what the N.O.B.F. were discussing, and Bunter could learn the particulars, it would mean very much to the Owl of the Remove. In his mind's eye he already saw himself consuming a succession of big feeds in the school shop, the price of his silence.

Bunter opened his penknife, and with a cautious hand slit the wall-paper on the other side of the knot-hole.

The keen knife made no sound shearing through the paper, and the slit did not enable Bunter to see into the study. But the voices from within came more clearly to his ears.

Rap, rap!

"Order!"

It was the voice of Bob Cherry. He was evidently chairman of the meeting, and he was tapping on the table with the toy croquet mallet.

Billy Bunter grinned gleefully. He turned the knife in the paper, and made a cross slit, and then another, so that a square of the paper was cut away on three sides.

It was then easy for him to press the piece of paper back, without a sound, and leave himself an unobstructed peep-hole into the study.

From where he stood, with his eye to the peep-hole, he could see the whole of the interior of No. 13, with the exception of the wall below him.

And every word that was spoken in the room came to his ears as clearly as to those of the juniors who were attending the first meeting of the N.O.B.F.

## THE FOURTH CHAPTER.

### The Noble Order of Bun Fighters.

**B**OB CHERRY had taken the head of the table. The other five members of the N.O.B.F. were seated round it. There was a slight twinkle in the eyes of Mark Linley, the lad from Lancashire, as if he did not take the proceedings wholly seriously. Wun Lung, too, wore his usual smile, "child-like and bland." Morgan, Lacy, and Micky Desmond were as serious as could be expected. As for Bob Cherry, he was solemnity itself. He had the toy croquet mallet in his hand, and was rapping for order.

"Gentlemen——"

Bob Cherry had said "Gentlemen" at least a dozen times already, but the N.O.B.F. had been somewhat hard to reduce to attention. But the chairman's mallet having rapped on Micky Desmond's head instead of the table, cut short the flow of his conversation, and the meeting gradually came to order.

"Gentlemen——"

"Hear, hear!" said Lacy.

"Gentlemen, this is the first meeting of the N.O.B.F. Our numbers are not very numerous so far, but that is because the extent of the society is not yet——"

"Extensive!" suggested Morgan.

"Not yet extensive," agreed Bob Cherry. "It will grow. I have asked you chaps—ahem!—you gentlemen to join the N.O.B.F. chiefly because you dig at this end of the passage, and you would naturally back up No. 13 against—well, against aliens from the other end."

"Hear, hear!"

"I hope later to rope in the Remove one by one, and gradually get the whole Form into the fold," said Bob Cherry. "Then we shall be irresistible, and No. 1 Study will have to sing small with its diminished head."

"Good!"

"The society——"

"Hold on!" said Lacy, rising. "Is it in order to inquire what the initials N.O.B.F. may happen to mean? We've attended the meeting because we understood that there was some sort of a feed to follow—ahem!—because of our friendship for our esteemed president, I mean. But as we're sailing under the name of the N.O.B.F., it would be rather advantageous to know what it means."

"Hear, hear!"

"Brother Lacy's remark is quite in order," said the chairman graciously. "The initials N.O.B.F. stands for the Noble Order of Bun Fighters!"

"The—the what?"

"The Noble Order of which?"

"Bun Fighters," said Bob Cherry, firmly. "I consider it a ripping title. I presume you all know what a bun fight is. We're the bun fighters. N.O.B.F.—Noble Order of Bun Fighters."

THE MAGNET.—No. 77.

NEXT  
WEEK:

"HARRY WHARTON & CO.'S BANK HOLIDAY."

EVERY TUESDAY, The "Magnet" ONE HALFPENNY. LIBRARY.

"Oh! I suppose that means that there's going to be a bun fight, or a tea scramble, or something of the sort," remarked Morgan.

"Exactly!"

"Go ahead! We're on."

"The society is formed for the purpose of backing up No. 13 Study, and putting the other end of the passage in its place," said Bob Cherry. "That is the chief end of the——"

"Passage?"

"No, ass, of the society. Incidentally, we shall give the Upper Forth beans, and the Shell socks——"

"Why not give the Shell beans, and the Upper Fourth socks?"

"If you are going to be funny, Lacy, you can get on the other side of that door. No rotten jokes are wanted in the N.O.B.F. We're going to keep up the end of the Remove against all comers, and keep up our own end in the Remove. And, as it is necessary for every society to have a feed at regular intervals, to bind it together in the strongest possible bond of union, we shall establish a periodical bun fight—say every Saturday."

"Hear, hear!"

"The Vice-President of the Society, the Honourable Wun Lung, Esquire, has the good luck to be as rich as a giddy Cæsus. I, the President, have lately received a remittance from a rich uncle who says I can buy a bicycle with it if I like. As my jigger is all right, I'm using the money as a Foundation Fund for the Noble Order of Bun Fighters. Funds are only allowed to be subscribed by Presidents and Vice-Presidents."

"Hear, hear!"

"Every Saturday during term a bun-fight will be held—and I need not say that the grub will not be limited to buns. A certain amount of good grub will always be provided by the N.O.B.F.—but any member will be invited to add anything he chooses to the stock. Now for the rules."

"Rule No. I.—A bun fight every Saturday, as afore-said——"

"Hear, hear!"

"Rule No. II.—Implicit obedience to the orders of the President, even to the extent of facing cannon."

"That's all right!"

The members of the N.O.B.F. were never likely to be called upon to face cannon by their President, so they subscribed to that rule with easy minds.

"Rule No. III.—A meeting to be called whenever the President considers it necessary, such meeting to be held in No. 13 Study or some other place."

"Right!"

"Rule No. IV.—No. 13 Study to be considered top study in the Remove, and every member of the N.O.B.F. to back up the President in keeping it there."

"Good!"

"No. V. Rule.—Strict secrecy to be observed, and as many recruits as possible to be gathered into the N.O.B.F. Only reliable and useful members to be initiated into the mysteries of the N.O.B.F."

"What mysteries?"

"Don't interrupt! These are the rules of the N.O.B.F., and they can be added to, or subtracted from, as occasion requires, at any future meeting of the N.O.B.F. Gentlemen, are these rules adopted?"

"Hear, hear!"

"Hands up for the rules."

Every right hand went up.

"Good," said Bob Cherry. "The—what was that?"

"What was which?"

"I heard somebody sniff."

"Well, I suppose a chap can sniff if he likes," said Morgan. "There's no rule against sniffing in the rules of the N.O.B.F., is there?"

Bob Cherry looked round to the partition behind him.

"Hark!"

A sound could be heard through the partition.

It was the sound of a heavy footfall on the floor, as if somebody had suddenly descended from a higher place and missed his footing in his hurry.

Bob Cherry snapped his teeth.

In an instant the truth rushed upon him.

There was an eavesdropper in the box-room, and he had heard all that was said—he had heard Bob remark upon the sniff, and was hurriedly beating a retreat.

The whole secret of the Noble Order of Bun Fighters was at the mercy of the spy!

"The—the oad!" gasped Bob Cherry. "We——"

"What's the matter?"

"There's somebody in the box-room—he's been listening——"

"He couldn't hear through the wall!"

Mark Linley pointed to the cut fragment of wall-paper.

It could be seen easily enough when the eye was directed specially towards it.

"Look there!"

"Phew!"

Bob Cherry was rushing to the door. He unlocked it and threw it open, just as a fat figure dodged out of the box-room and flew along the passage.

"Bunter!" roared Bob Cherry.

For a moment the members of the N.O.B.F. stood paralysed.

It was Bunter—a member of the rival study—and he had heard the whole plans of the Bun Fighters—and was going to report them to Wharton!

"Stop him!" gasped Lacy.

"Faith! Collar the spalpeen!"

Bob Cherry was already speeding after the fat Removite.

Billy Bunter heard the pattering footsteps behind, and he put on a desperate spurt, gasping with terror.

Exactly what Bob Cherry would do if he caught him the fat junior did not know, and he did not stop to think.

He simply ran as if he were running for his life!

Patter! patter! patter!

With his eyes staring wildly, and his spectacles slipping down his nose, Billy Bunter dashed along, Bob Cherry close on his track, and the rest of the N.O.B.F. bringing up the rear.

Bob was gaining fast: but Bunter had a start, and he had not far to go. He reached the door of No. 1 Study, and hurled it open, and hurled himself in.

Right in he went with a terrific impetus, right at the table where the chums of No. 1 sat doing their prep.

Crash!

The table went flying, and Wharton, Nugent, and Hurree Jamset Ram Singh jumped to their feet with startled exclamations.

"You young ass!" roared Wharton. "This isn't the first time you've done this! I'll—"

"Help!" gasped Bunter. "The enemy! I've found them out! I've been—er—scouting! They're—"

"What's he talking about?"

"They—oh! Keep him off! Help!"

The Bun Fighters tore into the study in an excited crowd.

## THE FIFTH CHAPTER.

### In the Tolls.

**B**ILLY BUNTER made a dive to get under the table, but Bob Cherry's grasp closed upon one of his plump ankles, and he was dragged out again. He squirmed in the grip of the leader of the N.O.B.F. Bob Cherry yanked him towards the door, Billy squealing piteously for help.

Exactly what had happened the chums of No. 1 did not know. The chances were that Bunter was in the wrong. But they were not going to have their study invaded in this way, and they rushed at once to the rescue.

Harry Wharton grasped Bunter by the shoulders, and tried to drag him away from Bob Cherry; and Bob tightened his grip upon the fat ankles, and pulled the harder. Wharton was trying to rescue the fat junior: but Billy Bunter's last state was worse than his first.

"Let go!" shouted Wharton.

"Rats! You let go."

"Ow!" gasped Bunter. "Help! Fire! Leggo! I'm being pulled to pieces! Rescue!"

"Line up, you chaps."

"Hurrah! Give 'em socks."

The odds were on the side of the N.O.B.F.

They charged at No. 1 Study party, and Hurree Singh and Frank Nugent were driven back towards the window and pinioned there.

Then Micky Desmond lent Bob a hand with Bunter, and they dragged him towards the door. But Harry Wharton pulled harder, and yanked him back again.

Billy Bunter yelled and squirmed frantically.

He was in the position of the slain hero in the battle of Lake Regillus.

"Fiercer waxed the fighting  
Around Valerius dead,  
For Titus dragged him by the foot,  
And Aulus by the head."

Only Billy Bunter was not dead—but he felt very nearly so. He was dragged furiously to and fro, in imminent danger of being dropped on the floor any moment, and every ounce of breath was knocked out of his fat body.

"Le-m-m-m-m-me go!" he murmured, faintly. "I—I—I say, you fellows—"

"Let go, Wharton!"

"Rubbish! What do you want with him?"

"He's been spying on us. Let me have him."

THE MAGNET.—No. 77.

NEXT  
WEEK:

"HARRY WHARTON & CO.'S BANK HOLIDAY."

A Splendid Tale of the  
Chums of Greyfriars.

"Rats!"

Morgan suddenly collared Harry Wharton round the neck, and Harry, having to defend himself, relaxed his grasp upon Bunter.

Bob Cherry gripped the fat junior round the body and whisked him to the door.

"Come on," he shouted.

He rushed the breathless Bunter along the passage, and the rest of the N.O.B.F. followed with yells of victory.

The three juniors in No. 1 study were pretty well fagged out by the unequal struggle, but they followed as fast as they could. It was only to see the bun fighters retreat into No. 13, and slam the door in their faces. The key turned in the lock: and the N.O.B.F. were secure in their fortress, and Billy Bunter was a prisoner!

Harry Wharton hammered at the door.

"Let us in, you bounders!"

"Go and eat coke!"

"It's no good," gasped Nugent. "If Bunter had put up a fight instead of yelling for help, he wouldn't have been captured. What are they doing?"

"Can't make out."

A dead silence had fallen in the study, save for the breathless gasps of the captured junior.

But Harry Wharton knew very well that Bob Cherry would not really hurt Bunter, whatever he had done, and so he did not feel uneasy about him. It was only the loss of prestige by the defeat that mattered.

In No. 13 Billy Bunter had been plumped upon the table. Round him the N.O.B.F. stood with solemn and threatening faces, and the fat junior gasped and blinked at them.

"W-w-what's the little game?" demanded Bunter at last. "What are you standing round like a lot of owls for?"

"Silence!"

"Oh, really, Cherry!"

"Here I am not Cherry—I am the president of the N.O.B.F.," said Bob sternly. "Silence, caitiff!"

"Oh, really, Cherry, you know I'm not a caitiff. I don't know what it is, but I don't think you ought to swear—"

"I'm not swearing, you utter ass!" exclaimed the president of the N.O.B.F., becoming Bob Cherry again all of a sudden. "A caitiff is a mean, sneaking, rotten sort of a worm, and it just describes you."

"Oh, really, you fellows—"

"You have surprised the secret of the N.O.B.F.," said the president solemnly. "What is the punishment of a spy upon the mysteries of the N.O.B.F. brothers?"

"Death!" said Lacy, with a dim remembrance of something he had read in some American fiction about Anarchists in New York. "Death!"

"Something lingering, with boiling oil in it," suggested Morgan, with a remembrance of Gilbert and Sullivan.

"Oh, really, you fellows—"

"Suppossee we puttee him to toltule with led-hot pokee?" suggested Wun Lung.

"Why, you heathen beast!" exclaimed Bunter indignantly. "Look here—"

"Silence, caitiff!"

"But—"

"There is one alternative," said the president solemnly. "You have discovered the dread secret of the N.O.B.F. You must die—"

"Ow!"

"Or else join the N.O.B.F., and swear—"

"It's not allowed, and—"

"Silence! And swear to observe its rules and keep its secrets, and join in the bun fight every Saturday."

"I'll swear that willingly enough," said Billy Bunter.

"I—I—I'll swear anything you like."

"Young blackguard!" said Morgan.

"Oh! I—I mean—"

"Then the new member must be initiated," said the president. "Art thou prepared, caitiff, to be initiated into the mysteries of the N.O.B.F.?"

"Certainly, Cherry. Do you mean a feed?"

"No, cormorant, I don't mean a feed. Every applicant for admission to the N.O.B.F. has to go through an initiation to prove his worthiness to be admitted as a member. Art thou prepared?"

"Ye-e-e-es. Does it hurt?"

The president of the N.O.B.F. suppressed a chuckle. "First of all, the candidate must stand upon his head and turn round three times—"

"Oh, really, Cherry—"

"Silence! Then he must do a cake-walk round the study with a can of water balanced on his head—"

"I—I—I say—"

"Then he must take the oath of secrecy. Art thou prepared?"

"Ye-e-e-e-es."

"Bring forth the candidate!" thundered the president,

in a voice that made the fat junior jump. "Let him be initiated."

Morgan and Lacy yanked Billy Bunter off the table and plumped him on the floor. Bunter sat there blinking, and wondering whether the N.O.B.F. were in earnest or not.

"Now, prisoner——"

"I say, you fellows——"

"The initiation will now commence. Wun Lung, keep that red-hot poker handy and prod him if he hangs back."

"Yes; lathel!"

"Candidate! Begin, or die!"

"Ow! Will—will you hold my spectacles, Linley?"

"Certainly."

"Mind you don't drop them. If they get broken you'll have to pay for them. I—I say, Cherry, wouldn't it do if I stand on my feet instead?"

"The poker!" thundered the president.

"Ow! Keep off, you horrid, heathen rotter! I'm just going to begin."

And Billy Bunter, placing his fat hands very gingerly on the carpet, proceeded to stand upon his head, while the N.O.B.F. looked on with suppressed chuckles.

## THE SIXTH CHAPTER.

### Billy Bunter Is Initiated.

"**S**ILENCE!" rapped out the president of the N.O.B.F.

And the chuckles ceased.

Bunter planted his hands on the carpet, and then the crown of his head between them, and slowly raised his feet in the air.

His feet left the carpet about six inches, and then flopped down again, and Bunter scrambled up.

"There you are, you fellows!"

"Bosh! That isn't standing on your head. You've got to stand perpendicularly, or die!"

"I say, you fellows——"

"Bring forth the poker, Wun Lung!"

"Ow! Keep off! I'll try again."

And Billy Bunter up-ended himself once more. This time his fat legs rose higher, till they were at right angles with his body.

"I—I—I say, is that all right?" he gasped.

"Higher, you young ass!"

The feet went up another inch.

"Higher!"

Another inch.

"Shove them up, you duffer! Make an effort!"

Bunter gasped, and made an effort. His feet flew up—and over, and he went down on the wrong side with a bump that shook the floor.

"Oh!" he gasped.

"Caitiff! What do you mean by damaging the study carpet in that way?" demanded the president of the N.O.B.F.

"Oh, really, Cherry——"

"He hasn't turned round three times," said Lacy. "He had better die, after all."

"I—I—I'll turn round now!" gasped Bunter. "Don't be hard on a chap, you know. This is making me fearfully hungry."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Silence!"

"Now for the second ordeal. There's a can of water in the corner, Lacy. Bring it here—I mean, bring it forth. Art thou ready, Bunter?"

"Ye-e-e-es."

Billy Bunter took back his spectacles from Mark Linley and placed them upon his little fat nose. Then he blinked doubtfully at the water in the can.

The can was used to convey water to the study for filling the kettle, and certainly was not planned for balancing on the head.

It was half full of water, and held about two pints, and Bunter shivered as he thought of it running down his back.

"I—I—I say, you fellows, I can't balance that on my head, you know, especially if I'm going to do a cake-walk," he stammered.

"Bring forth the red-hot poker!"

"Hold on! I—I'll try."

Bunter gingerly placed the can on his head. He found that he could balance it there so long as he kept still, but when he started cake-walking it was pretty certain to go.

"Suppose I upset the water?" he grunted.

"Then the execution proceeds," said the president. "You will die the death of a dog—or, to be more exact, of a pig. Proceed!"

"Faith, and start, then," said Micky Desmond. "I'll help ye begin."

And he gave the fat junior a gentle lift with his toe.

Bunter lurched—and the can lurched and went over—and there was a terrific yell from Micky Desmond.

The water swooped fairly upon his head as the can fell.

THE MAGNET.—No. 77.

NEXT

WEEK:

"HARRY WHARTON & CO.'S BANK HOLIDAY."

EVERY  
TUESDAY,

The "Magnet" ONE  
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towards him, and Bunter, plunging forward, escaped getting a single drop.

"Ow! Ooooooooooch!" spluttered Micky. "Taro and ounds! I'm wet! Sure and I'm drenched intirely!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Ye grinning gossoons——"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Silence!"

"I—I say, you fellows, I couldn't help it, you know——"

"The candidate is excused. Brother Desmond, you can go and dry yourself. Get out!"

"Faith, and I——"

"I say, you fellows, I couldn't help it——"

"Silence! Brother Desmond, you can't stand there dripping all over the floor. Go and dry yourself."

"Faith, and I——"

"Order!"

Micky Desmond went to the door spluttering, and leaving a trail of water behind him on the carpet. He shook his fist at Billy Bunter, and went spluttering out of the study, and Lacy locked the door after him.

"Order! Gentlemen, the proceedings will now proceed. The candidate will execute the cake-walk, or we will execute him. Begin."

Billy Bunter, much relieved now that there was no water in the can—and by no means displeased that the water had gone over Micky—replaced the can on his head, and cake-walked.

Bunter could cake-walk, and he rather prided himself upon his ability in that line. He cake-walked round the study, and then stopped and gasped, and looked round for admiration.

The president grunted.

"That will do!"

"Oh, really, Cherry, it was ripping, you know——"

"Silence! The candidate will now take the oath. Sit down."

Bunter sat down.

"Now, repeat this solemn vow after me. I swear——"

"I swear——"

"By the first six books of Euclid and the last book of the Iliad——"

"All right!" mumbled Bunter. "By the first six books of Euclid and the last book of the Iliad——"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Silence!"

"Sorry! Go on."

"By the—the bridge that Balbus builded——"

"Yes; by the—the bridge that Balbus builded——"

"By—by alpha, beta, gamma, and delta——"

"By alpha, beta, gamma, and delta——"

"By the Commentaries of Cæsar and the Georgics of Virgil——"

"By the Commentaries of Cæsar and the Georgics of Virgil——"

"I swear——"

"I swear——"

"To observe the rules of the N.O.B.F.——"

"To observe the rules of the N.O.B.—— Yow!"

"Stop that row!"

"Yow—wowwow! Somebody pinched me!"

"Order! To obey the President of the N.O.B.F. in all orders, even to the extent of facing a cannon or missing a meal——"

"To obey the President of the N.O.B.F., even to the extent of facing a cannon or—or—or missing a meal."

"Good! Now repeat the oath through from the beginning."

Billy Bunter blinked in dismay. He had been able to follow Bob Cherry's lead through that most peculiar oath of secrecy, which Bob was probably composing as he went along; but to remember it was more than Bunter could manage.

"Lemme see. I swear——"

"Yes, go on. Silence, you fellows—I mean brothers of the N.O.B.F. Listen to Bunter swearing!"

"Oh, you shock me, Cherry!" said Lacy. "I'll stop my ears if you don't mind. I was very carefully brought up; and when I first came to school, my great-grandmother took my little hand in hers, and made me promise never to——"

"Ring off, you babbling ass! Let Bunter swear. Go ahead, fatty!"

"I—I—I swear—by the—the bridge that Virgil builded, by the first six books of Balbus, and the Commentaries of Euclid——" stammered Billy Bunter hazily.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"By alpha, beta, Virgil, and Cæsar, to observe the President of the N.O.B.F., and to miss a cannon and face a meal."

A Splendid Tale of the  
Chums of Greyfriars.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Well, that's near enough," said Bob Cherry, laughing. "You are now—I mean, thou art now a member of the N.O.B.F. You will be admitted to all the bun-fights of the noble order. You will back up the N.O.B.F. through thick and thin. By the way, you'll be up against your own study."

"Oh, that doesn't matter, Cherry. Wharton never really treats me properly in the matter of feeding, and if there's to be a bun-fight every Saturday, I'm on your side all the time. That's all right."

"Regular worm, isn't he?" said Morgan.

"Oh, really, Morgan—"

"That's settled," said Bob Cherry. "Mind you keep the secrets of the noble brotherhood, or you will get it where the chicken got the chopper, that's all!"

"I say, Cherry, if that's true about the remittance from your uncle, I—I— Look here, if you like, I'll come and dig in this study."

"I don't like!" said Bob Cherry grimly. "You're a member of the N.O.B.F., but I wouldn't have you in this study if you were hung with diamonds; in fact, I'd prefer you hung with a length of rope!"

"Oh, really, Cherry—"

Bob Cherry unlocked the door.

"Now you can run along."

"I—I—I say, you fellows, isn't there going to be a feed?"

"There isn't. Gentlemen, the first meeting of the N.O.B.F. is now over. The first bun-fight will take place on Saturday afternoon, *al fresco*—a sort of picnic up the Sark, on the Holme Hall land. The time will be duly announced. Gentlemen, you are dismissed."

"Hear, hear!"

"I'm jolly hungry—"

"Hallo, hallo, hallo! You still there, Bunter? Bring forth the red-hot poker!"

Billy Bunter scuttled down the passage.

## THE SEVENTH CHAPTER.

### Bunter Keeps the Secret.

"BLESSED if I know what to make of that young toad Bunter!" Frank Nugent remarked the following day.

He addressed Harry Wharton, who was looking on at a game of cricket played by the First Eleven, and did not reply. Wingate, the captain of Greyfriars, was batting, and knocking away the ball in fine style.

"He seems to have something on his mind," went on Nugent. "He's going about with a—"

"Bravo!"

"Eh?"

"Ripping! That will be a three."

"What the dickens—"

"Bravo, Wingate!" shouted Harry. "Carberry won't send the ball in in time. There, I told you so! The bat's on the crease, with seconds to spare."

"Oh, blow!" said Nugent. "I was speaking to you."

"Were you?" said Harry, looking round, as the bowler took the ball again. "Something about Bunter, was it?"

"Yes. He's going about looking as if he had something on his mind—as if he had a secret."

"Perhaps he has. Hurrah, Wingate!"

"Well, if you don't take any interest in the matter—"

"Oh, but I do," said Harry, looking round. "If there's anything wrong with Bunter—"

"Never mind Bunter. I'm thinking of us. He's been extremely chummy lately with No. 13, and it's beginning to look to me as if we had an enemy in the camp."

Harry Wharton laughed.

"His chumminess with No. 13 seems to me to be only sticking those chaps for feeds," he remarked.

"Yes; but why are they standing him feeds?"

"Blessed if I know!"

"There's something on!" said Nugent impressively.

Wharton looked more serious.

"Hum! Something up against us, do you mean?"

"Yes," said Nugent, with conviction. "You know that Bob Cherry has made up his mind to make No. 13 top study? They're already talking of a re-election, and making Cherry captain of the Remove."

Wharton coloured a little.

"I don't care if they do!"

"But I do! The captain of the Form is going to belong to No. 1 Study, or I'll know the reason why!" said Nugent.

"Hang it, I suppose we're going to stick to our colours! Look here, there's something on, and Bunter knows it. I suppose it's that N.O.B.F. business. I can't make that out."

"I haven't tried."

THE MAGNET.—No. 77.

"Then it's time you did! As to Bunter—"

"I say, you fellows—"

"Here he is! Talk of angels!"

Billy Bunter blinked at the chums of No. 1 Study. He was looking a little discontented.

"I say, you fellows, are you thinking of getting in anything for tea in the study? I don't mind doing the shopping for you."

"I thought Bob Cherry was feeding you lately, Billy?"

"He's so jolly mean," said Bunter confidentially. "He thinks a couple of pork pies and a few tarts are enough for anybody. I think he might treat a member of the N.O.B.F. a little more decently, I do really."

"Oh, so you're a member of the N.O.B.F.?"

"Yes," said Bunter importantly, "one of the principal members. I have a great deal of influence in the N.O.B.F."

"And what is the N.O.B.F.?"

"Ahem! I have sworn—"

"Why, you young rascal—"

"I have sworn to keep the secret. Cherry administered a regular blood-curdling oath in No. 13 when I joined yesterday."

"Oh, he did, did he?"

"Yes, rather! Of course, I can't break the oath; that would be rotten. I say, I'm hungry. What are we going to have for tea?"

"We're going to have tea in Hall. Funds are low."

"Oh, I say, you fellows, you're getting as mean as Cherry!"

"There's Lisle batting now!" said Wharton, turning towards the cricketers. "Jolly good form for the Sixth!"

"Oh, really, Wharton— Look here, I could tell you something."

"Don't trouble, thanks!"

"Yes, but it's important! I suppose you don't want your study to be put in the shade, do you, and the rotters in No. 13 to crow over you?"

"Go ahead!" said Nugent tersely.

"I'm feeling very faint. If you could stand me—"

"We can't stand you!" said Wharton. "Cut off!"

"If you could stand me a few tarts—"

"Rats!"

"Very good. Then I'll keep the secret. If the Noble Order—ahem!—if the N.O.B.F. knock you sky-high, you'll only have yourselves to thank."

"The 'Noble Order,' eh?" said Nugent, grinning. "I expect we shall soon know all about it. What's the rest—Noble Order of Big Feeders?"

"Certainly not! I shall not tell you anything at all. Of course, as a member of No. 1 Study, I should like to put you on your guard."

"Didn't you say you'd promised not to say anything?" asked Harry, with a frown.

"Well, yes, but—"

"Then don't say anything. If you break a promise, you ought to be jumped on; and I'll jump on you!"

"Oh, really, Wharton—"

"Buzz off! I'm watching the cricket."

And Billy Bunter, blinking indignantly, buzzed off. He wandered away disconsolately, with his hands in his pockets. He was in a very discontented frame of mind.

When funds were low in No. 1 Study, Bunter always "felt the draught," as he expressed it. He never contributed anything to the funds, but he took it as a personal injury if they ran low. Tea in Hall had no attractions for him. Bread-and-butter and a slice of cake might do to begin with, or finish with, but the meal would be missing.

Finding himself a member of the N.O.B.F., and in possession of the great secret, he had expected to sponge on the members of No. 13 without limit; but his efforts in that direction had not met with any great success.

Bob Cherry had stood him two or three little feeds, but no big ones, and now he had stopped altogether. Mark Linley had no money to waste upon him, and Wun Lung, when Bunter hinted for a treat, only replied that he did not "savvy." As for Lacy and Morgan and Desmond, they did not even listen to him.

Until the "bun-fight" on Saturday afternoon, Bunter had nothing to expect, and he was dissatisfied.

Hurree Jamset Ram Singh was lying on the grass under an elm, looking on at the cricket, and the short-sighted junior nearly sprawled over his outstretched legs as he walked on. There was a mild exclamation from the dusky junior.

"Really, my worthy Bunterful chum, you might look where you are going! You have made the dustful stains upon my honourable trousers!"

"Oh, really, Inky, I didn't see you!" Bunter stopped.

"I say, Inky, I want to speak to you. I want to—"

"Would you mind standing on one side, Bunter? I am



Bob Cherry threw open the study door just as a fat figure dodged out of the box-room and flew along the passage. "Bunter!" roared Bob Cherry. For a moment the members of the Noble Order of Bun Fighters stood paralysed!

looking at the cricketful game, and you are blockfully interrupting the view."

"I'm sincerely sorry!" said Bunter, shifting. "Is that all right?"

"Yes, that is rightfully agreeable to me; and now, if you will have the inestimable jolly goodness to refrain from the lengthy jawfulness, my obligations to your worthy self will be terrific!"

"You see, I want to speak to you. Those chaps in No. 13 are up to a little game to take No. 1 Study down a peg or two," said Bunter, blinking down at the Indian.

Hurree Singh sat up.

"Indeed! Have you discovered their planfulness?"

"I've got it all from start to finish, Inky, but I feel so faint from want of nourishment, that I don't feel up to talking about it."

The nabob looked at him keenly. Then he rose to his feet, and linked his arm in Bunter's.

"Come, with me, comradefully, to the esteemed grub-shop," he said softly. "There the creditful tick shall be run up to the sum of the couple of shillings, and the esteemed Bunter shall relate his talefulness."

"I say, that's jolly good, Inky."

"Come on, my worthy chum!"

And they went into the school shop. Hurree Jamset Ram Singh raised his cap to Mrs. Mimble with his graceful bow.

"Esteemed madam, may I beg you to supply the grubful THE MAGNET.—No. 77.

refreshment to our worthy friend Bunter up to and including the esteemed value of the twoful shilling-piece?" he exclaimed. "As the fundfulness is low, I must request you to chalk the amount up slatefully."

"Certainly, Master Singh!" said Mrs. Mimble, who knew that the Nabob of Bhanipur could be relied upon to square any little accounts like this. "What will you have, Master Bunter?"

Billy Bunter ran his eyes round the shop.

"Lemme see. Did you say four shillings, Inky?"

"No, my esteemed fat chum. I said two shillings."

"Well, if I owe Mrs. Mimble two, and you owe her two, I suppose that will be all right?"

"It will not be all right, Master Bunter!"

"Oh, really, Mrs. Mimble—"

"The twoful shillings will be sufficient," said the nabob. "And while you are consuming the grubful refreshment my Bunterful chum, you can tell me the news."

"You see," said Bunter, eying Mrs. Mimble hungrily, as he waited for the refreshments. "I suppose a fellow ought to stand by his own study, oughtn't he?"

"Of coursefully!"

"And if I knew anything those Noble Order asses have against us, I ought to let on about it—eh?"

"Certainly!"

"Well, you see, they're planning a— Yes, please—the

veal-pies, Mrs. Mimble. I think you might let me have a quantity at a reduction—say, four for the price of three."

"You were saying, my worthy chum—"

"Oh, yes; certainly! I was saying— Some of the ham, too, Mrs. Mimble. I suppose I'd better have ginger-pop with it."

"You were saying—"

"I'll have it on this little table. Make up the two bob in tarts. You said two bob—was it, Inky, or half-a-crown?"

"Two bob, my dear Bunter! It is enoughfully sufficient to feed anybody but an esteemed cormorant. You were saying—"

"Oh, yes!" said Bunter, as he settled down to his feed. "Wait a minute, till a fellow gets a mouthful. I was saying— This is prime veal."

"But the news?"

"Ah, yes! Some salt and pepper, Mrs. Mimble? I suppose you don't expect me to make a meal without salt and pepper?"

Knife and fork went rapidly to work.

"Jolly good!" said Bunter. "I will say this for Mrs. Mimble—she can make veal-pies. She is very close over accounts, and hasn't any knowledge of the system of building up a big business by means of credit; but when it comes to making veal-pies, she's all there!"

"But the news—"

"Oh, yes; I was coming to that! I could just do another veal-pie, Inky, if—"

"The cashfulness is low, my worthy chum. Try the tarts. And the news—"

"Ahem—yes! Bob Cherry is going to—Ow!"

Billy Bunter broke off with an agonised squeal as a grip of iron was laid upon his collar from behind, and he was lifted out of his chair and plumped upon his feet with a crash.

He wriggled round, and blinked with startled eyes into the indignant face of the president of the N.O.B.F.

## THE EIGHTH CHAPTER.

### Cake for Bunter.

**B**OB CHERRY glared at the fat Removite, and shook him till his teeth seemed to rattle in his head.

Bunter was helpless in his grasp, and he wobbled to and fro like a sack of potatoes, his heels beating on the floor, his spectacles sliding down his nose, and his knife and fork still clutched in his hand.

"Ow," he gasped—"ow! Oh, really, Cherry, leggo! Ow—wow!"

"You young sweep!"

"I—I wasn't telling Inky anything. Ow!"

Shake, shake, shake!

"Oh, really, Cherry, I—I'm sincerely sorry! I haven't told Inky anything about the Noble Order of Bun Fighters; and— Ow!"

"The Noble Order of Bun Fighters?" murmured the Nabob of Bhanipur. "We are getting on famously."

"You young, fat rotter! You were giving the whole show away—selling your promise for a mess of pottage!" roared Bob Cherry.

"I—I—I wasn't! It was veal-pies—ow!—and tarts! I—"

"Ha, ha! You young ass! What have you been telling Inky?"

"I haven't told him anything—I haven't, really! He doesn't know we're going to have a picnic on Saturday, and— Ow!"

"Come with me, you fat, young imbecile! Come on!"

"I—I haven't finished my grub!"

"You're jolly well not going to finish it! Come on!"

"But I—I'm hungry. I—"

"This way!" said Bob Cherry, jerking the fat junior towards the door.

"Ow! Rescue, Inky! I—I say, Inky, rescue!"

Hurree Jamset Ram Singh rushed to the rescue at once, but Mark Linley stepped in the way with a cheerful smile.

"Hands off!" he said.

"My worthy chum, I—"

"Come on, Bunter. Young Mimble can have the rest of that feed. You're not going to sell the secrets of the N.O.B.F. for a mess of pottage. Come on!"

"Oh, really, Cherry, I—"

Billy Bunter disappeared from the tuckshop in the grasp of Bob Cherry. Mark Linley closed with Inky as he tried to follow, and held him in a grip of iron. The Lancashire lad had three times the strength of the slim Hindu, and he held him without an effort. Hurree Singh grinned ruefully, and gave up the struggle.

"If you will releasefully let me go, I will give infully!" he remarked.

THE MAGNET.—No. 77.

NEXT  
WEEK:

"HARRY WHARTON & CO.'S BANK HOLIDAY."

"Right you are!" laughed Linley.

And he let the nabob go. He strolled after Bob Cherry. Bob had linked his arm in Bunter's, and was walking him away across the Close. Bunter was in a state of dire terror.

"Lemme go, Cherry!" he squeaked. "Look here, you know, I'm going to go! What are you going to do, you beast?"

"Boil you in oil!"

"Ow! I—I resign from the N.O.B.F. I—I—"

"Come on!"

Bob Cherry marched the fat junior into the house, and up to No. 13 Study. Bunter could not help himself, but he went in fear and trembling. Bob marched him into the study, with a face of preternatural gravity, and closed the door. Bunter squirmed towards the door, but Bob locked it, took out the key, and put it into his pocket.

Billy Bunter blinked at him through his spectacles, not losing a movement.

Bob took a carving-knife from a drawer in the table, and tested the edge with his finger. He shook his head.

"Not sharp enough?" he murmured.

"W-w-w-what are you going to do?" stammered Bunter.

"You'll see in a minute."

"Look here, Cherry—"

"Silence!"

Bob stooped down before the empty grate, and began to sharpen the knife on the top bar.

Billy Bunter crept to the door and jerked at it desperately, but a locked door was not likely to open. He went to the window, and pushed up the sash cautiously. He looked out into the Close. The risk was too great; he dared not attempt to climb out.

Scrape, scrape, scrape!

The sound of the knife grinding on the top bar of the grate sent cold shivers through Bunter's fat body.

He stole another look at Bob Cherry's face, and saw that it was hard and resolute, the brows heavily contracted.

Scrape, scrape, scrape!

"Oh, dear!" murmured Bunter. "Oh, really, Cherry— Oh, dear! I—I wonder what he is going to do? Ow!"

Bunter jumped as Bob rose from the grate.

Bob felt along the edge of the knife with his thumb-nail, and nodded with an expression of satisfaction.

"H'm! That's better."

"I say, Cherry—"

"Silence!"

"But—but—but, I—I say, Cherry, I—I didn't really tell Inky anything! I—I wouldn't have told him anything for worlds! I—I— Don't murder me, Cherry!"

"Eh?"

"Ow! Don't!" gasped Bunter, as Bob Cherry came towards him. "I—I— Mercy!"

"What!"

"Ow! Mercy!"

"Don't you want me to—"

"No. Ow! No. Don't!"

"But I thought you liked cake?"

"Eh? Cake?"

"Yes. I was going to cut you a slice of cake," said Bob Cherry innocently, feeling the edge of the knife again. "If you don't want any, say so."

"Oh, really, Cherry—"

Bob Cherry opened the cupboard door, and took out the cake. Billy Bunter's eyes glistened. Bob Cherry cut a liberal slice of the cake.

"Was—was that what you were sharpening the knife for, Cherry?"

"Yes; of course, ass!"

"I—I thought—I—I mean— Yes, I should like some cake."

And Billy Bunter started on it. He tried to make out from Cherry's face whether he had been "rotting" or not, but Bob looked perfectly serious. Bunter ate that slice of cake, and another, and another.

"Jolly good!" he said.

"Now, look here," said Bob Cherry. "Not a word in No. 1 about the picnic on Saturday. They'd get up to some dodge to muck it up, and then slap would go your feed. If the bun-fight doesn't come off, you don't get any buns."

"I won't say a word!" said Bunter fervently.

Bob let him out of the study. When he had gone, the president of the N.O.B.F. chuckled.

# ANSWERS

A Splendid Tale of the  
Chums of Greyfriars.

## THE NINTH CHAPTER.

### Bunter Is Patriotic.

"No. 13 is going ahead!" said Frank Nugent.

"Let 'em rip!" remarked Harry Wharton carelessly. "What's the latest?"

"I don't quite know. Only a lot of the fellows are joining the N.O.B.F., whatever that may be. Noble Order of something, Inky says."

"So our Bunterful chum inadvertently informed me," said the nabob.

"It's a society they're getting up in the Form, of course. It doesn't much matter what the name is. The point is, that they're getting a lot of the fellows into it. Skinner, and Stott, and Ogilvy, and Lyell have joined, I know, and I think Russell and Trevor. They'll have the whole Form in soon at this rate. And they're all talking among themselves about something that's coming off."

"Perhaps it's a row among themselves," said Harry, laughing. "They won't be in a society together long without a row."

"I don't know. There's something up against us, so far, and we've got to keep our eyes peeled. I think it's rotten that a chap in our study should join them. We ought to make Bunter resign."

"The oughtfulness is terrific."

"Oh, he'll resign when they can't feed him any longer," said Harry.

"Oh, really, Wharton!" Billy Bunter came into the study. "I don't like to hear you fellows running a chap down behind his back."

Harry coloured.

"Don't be an ass!" he exclaimed. "You know jolly well I'd have said the same if you'd been here. I'll say it now if you like—you've only joined the N.O.B.F. for what you can make, and you'll chuck it up when there's no more grub."

"I'm sincerely sorry to see this jealousy and petty spite so rampant in the study," said Bunter, with dignity. "If I had been treated well here, I should have been willing to lend you my assistance, and exert my influence with the Form in your favour. Blessed if I can see anything to cackle at, Nugent."

"I was thinking of your influence with the Form," chuckled Nugent. "Go on."

"Oh, really, Nugent! Look here, I'm quite willing to treat you fellows the same as ever, and I shall not refuse any little loan on Saturdays as heretofore. I'm not the sort of chap to go back on old chums."

"So long as the tinfiness lasts," purred the Nabob of Bhanipur.

"Oh, really, Inky! As a matter of fact, I should like a few bob just now, to contribute a few extras to the bun fight—I mean—"

"What bun fight?"

"Oh, that—that was a slip of the tongue. I didn't mean anything."

"Bun fight," said Nugent. "Why, that's what the initials stand for, then. Noble Order of Bun Fighters. Ha, ha, ha!"

"Oh, really, Nugent—"

"So you're going to have a bun fight to-day," said Harry Wharton, laughing. "Where?"

"That's a dead secret, Wharton. I—I mean, we're not going to have one."

"Up the river, I suppose?"

"Of course—or, rather, no, certainly not. Down the river."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I say, you fellows, if you could lend me five bob—"

"Five rats!"

"Half-a-crown would do at a pinch."

"Well, I can give you the pinch," said Nugent, fastening his finger and thumb upon the fat junior's arm. "But not the half-crown. Now—"

"Ow, ow, cw!"

"What's the matter?"

"Ow, yow!"

Billy Bunter tore himself away.

"Yow! Ow, you beast! Look here, I'm done with this study! I shall jolly well go and dig in No. 13. I wash my hands of you!"

And the fat junior rolled out of the room.

"We're disinherited and done in," grinned Nugent. "Fancy Bunter washing his hands at all! Look here, you chaps, those bounders have got something up for to-day, and we're going to wade in and make them sing small."

"The idea is a wheezy good one."

Harry Wharton nodded.

"I'm on, if you like. We must keep up the dignity of the study. The Noble Order of Bun Biters has got to be busted."

"Ha, ha! It's pretty clear that there's going to be a picnic of some sort up the river, and we'd better be on the scene, and chip in."

THE MAGNET.—No. 77.

NEXT  
WEEK:

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"Good!"

And the chums of the Remove kept their eyes upon the members of the N.O.B.F. It was easy enough to see that the Bun Fighters had something on. They hardly made a secret of it.

Bob Cherry was observed to go into the school shop, and emerge with a large cane basket, which seemed to weigh very heavily.

Morgan went down to the village on his bicycle, and came back with a parcel; and the chums of No. 1 knew as well as if they had been told, that he had been to obtain comestibles not obtainable at the school shop.

Later, they sighted Billy Bunter hanging hungrily round the door of No. 13. He tried the door several times, but it was evidently locked, and the key was gone.

Harry Wharton laughed as he went into No. 1.

"Cherry's locked the grub up in the study till he's ready," he remarked. "Bunter is looking for a snack."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"The snackfulness would be terrific if the esteemed Bunter once got at the honourable grub," remarked the Nabob of Bhanipur.

"Hallo, here he is!"

Billy Bunter's spectacles gleamed into the study.

"I say, you fellows—"

"Hallo, haven't you washed your hands of us, Bunter?"

"I didn't really mean that, you chaps. Do you—er—mind if—"

"What are you doing with that key?"

Bunter gave a guilty start.

He had come into the study, and was standing with his hands fumbling behind him at the key in the lock.

"I—I—I— You—you see—"

"What are you mumbling about?"

"You see, I—I've left something in No. 13, and I think perhaps this key will fit the lock," stammered Bunter. "I—I've tried some of the others, but they won't."

"You young cormorant! You want to get at the grub!"

"Well, as a matter of fact, Wharton, I can't help thinking that it would be only patriotic of me to stand by my own study, after all," said Bunter. "You see, I belong here, so I'm really up against No. 13. Suppose we raid the grub?"

"Well, you—you worm!"

"Oh, really, Wharton! As a patriotic—"

"Oh, cut off! You make me tired!"

"Can I take the key?"

"Yes, if you like! Buzz away!"

Billy Bunter buzzed away willingly enough, when he had extracted the key from the lock.

In two seconds he was fitting it into the lock on the door of No. 13. But it did not seem to fit very satisfactorily.

He twisted it, and jammed it, and ground it, but it would not fit; and he was still busy with it when a hand fell upon his shoulder.

Bunter gave a jump.

"Oh, really, Wharton—"

"What are you doing?"

It was Bob Cherry's voice.

"Ow! Oh, really, Cherry! I—I—I wanted to see if the grub was safe—that was all. Those fellows in No. 1 were talking something about raiding it, and I thought I'd have a look to see if it was all right."

"That's right, roll 'em out," said Bob Cherry scornfully. "If you had a farthing for every lie you told, Bunt, you'd simply roll in wealth."

"Oh, really, Cherry—"

"Buzz off!"

Billy Bunter disconsolately drifted down the passage.

True, there was the feast in the afternoon, but that was to be after a pull up the river, and was some hours off yet. And Bunter wanted to begin at once; and he didn't particularly fancy a pull up the river on a hot afternoon. If he could have wired in now, he would have missed the bun fight on the grounds of Holme Hall.

He returned the key to No. 1 Study.

"Any luck?" asked Nugent, with a grin.

Bunter shook his head dolefully.

"No; that beast Cherry came along. Look here, you chaps, he's alone there, and if you like to back me up, we can raid him."

"Jolly good suggestion, from a member of the N.O.B.F.," grinned Nugent.

"Well, as a patriot—"

"Oh, cheese it!"

"But I say, you fellows—"

"Turn him round, Inky."

"With the greatest pleasurefulness, my worthy chum."

"Here, hold on—that is to say, leggo—leggo! What—how— Oh!"

The nabob caught hold of Bunter, and slewed him round in the doorway.

Nugent lifted his boot, and gave Billy Bunter a lift into the passage, and the fat junior tottered away. He brought up against the opposite wall, and turned round to blink at Nugent.

"I—I—I say——"

"Cut off!" roared Nugent.

And Billy Bunter disappeared.

## THE TENTH CHAPTER.

### On the Track.

"**T**HERE they go!"

It was Nugent who spoke, about an hour later. Bob Cherry and Mark Linley were leaving the gates of Greyfriars, and each of them carried a well-packed bag.

Billy Bunter was scuttling after them, his little fat legs going like clockwork to keep pace with the sturdy stride of the two juniors.

"Well, they're off," said Wharton. "Only three of them! What about the rest of the Noble Order of Bun Feeders?"

Nugent shook his head.

"They may be going to meet some of them later—or it may simply be a picnic for No. 13 Study. Anyway, it's up to us to bust it up."

"Good!"

"The goodfulness is terrific."

"We'll wade in and lick them, and raid the grub, and then if they like to make it pax, we'll let 'em have a share of their own feed," grinned Nugent. "How's that for high?"

"Jolly good. Let's get along."

They left the school gates. Hazeldene, of the Remove, was in the lane, with a clean collar on, and they stopped for a moment to speak to him.

"Coming along?" asked Harry. "We're going to raid the N.O.B.F."

Hazeldene laughed.

"I'd come willingly, but I've got an engagement. My sister's been over to Southcote, and I'm going to meet her at Holme Hill, and walk back to Cliff House with her. Ta-ta!"

And Hazeldene strolled away. Harry Wharton looked after him somewhat enviously.

He would, as a matter of fact, quite willingly have let the raid go, and walked with Hazeldene to meet his sister Marjorie.

But that was not to be thought of now. No. 1 Study were on the war-path.

Keeping Bob Cherry in sight, the chums left the precincts of the school, following the lane up the river.

Bob Cherry and Mark Linley kept straight on, without once looking back. As for Billy Bunter, he never even thought of looking over his shoulder. All his energy was taken up by plodding on after the others. Bunter was not a good walker. He took too little exercise, and ate a great deal too much to be in good condition. He was in a profuse perspiration as he tramped on, and he ventured to protest at last.

"I say, you fellows, don't go so jolly fast," he mumbled. "I'm fagged, you know. I'm rather delicate, and you oughtn't to work me like this."

"We've got to get to Holme as soon as the boat with the other fellows in it," said Bob Cherry.

"There's no hurry."

"The grub's in the boat—most of it."

"Still, we've got enough with us in case of accidents," said Bunter. "Don't you think it would be a good idea to sit down by the roadside here for half an hour or so, and have a snack?"

"No, I don't."

"I'm jolly hungry."

"Then you'll enjoy the bun fight all the more."

"There's such a thing as over-taxing a fellow's strength. You wouldn't like me to fall down in a swoon at your feet, Bob Cherry."

"I shouldn't mind, Billy. Don't mind me. I sha'n't interfere with you. It would be better than your keeping on jawing, anyway."

"Oh, really, Cherry——"

"Come on; it isn't much further."

And they strode on, Bunter gasping and complaining all the time. At a good distance behind, the chums of No. 1 kept them in view.

No. 1 Study were inclined to triumph.

There was no doubt that when they ran the bun fighters down, they would have things all their own way, for Bunter counted for nothing in a tussle; and, in fact, he was certain to join the winning side, whichever it was.

THE MAGNET.—No. 77.

**NEXT WEEK: "HARRY WHARTON & CO.'S BANK HOLIDAY."**

The N.O.B.F. were approaching an ignominious defeat, as far as the chums of No. 1 Study could see.

"They haven't the faintest idea that we're on their track," grinned Nugent. "They haven't looked back once. Hallo, they're stopping now!"

The bun-fighters had turned from the lane into a path that led down to the river. Ahead through the trees could be seen the waters of the gleaming Sark.

"They're going to camp there," said Wharton.

"Good! Keep cover!"

The juniors crept on through the trees and underbrush beside the path, keeping the school caps in sight as they followed the picnickers.

Bob Cherry stopped on a stretch of green velvety sward that sloped down to the water, under the shade of a gigantic elm.

It was an ideal spot for a picnic; and the bun-fighters dropped their bag there with the evident intention of making a camp of it.

Billy Bunter sank upon a grassy knoll, and gasped.

"I say, you fellows, I hope you're not expecting me to make the fire or anything," he mumbled, "I'm too exhausted."

"Well, you chose to walk, you know," said Bob Cherry.

"You could have gone in the boat."

"Yes, but you said I should have to row."

"Well, you can't join the N.O.B.F. to lead a lazy life," said Mark Linley. "But sit where you are; I'll make the fire."

"Hallo, hallo, hallo!" exclaimed Bob Cherry. "What's that?"

Three figures rushed from the trees as he rapped out the words.

Without wasting time in speech, the chums of No. 1 Study dashed to the attack.

Wharton closed with Bob Cherry, and Nugent with Mark Linley, and they rolled over and over in the thick grass.

The Nabob of Bhanipur pranced up to Billy Bunter with his fists in position, and the fat junior jumped up and dodged round the tree.

"Here, hold on!" he roared. "What's the game? You're not going for a chap in your own study, are you?"

"My worthy Bunterful chum, on the present suspicious occasion you are an enemy, and I am going to lick you terrifically."

"Hold on, you inky idiot! Stop! Chuck it!"

Bunter dodged actively round the tree, and the dusky junior dodged after him.

Hurree Singh was only in fun, as a matter of fact; but Billy Bunter thought he was in deadly earnest, and he was in great terror.

He dodged round the tree till he fell over one of the baskets, and then he plumped down in the grass and yelled.

"Ow—wow—yow! Keep off! Oh! I've broken my leg! I've sprained my back—I mean my ankle! Keep off! Yow!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Pax!" roared Bunter. "I'm on your side, you ass! I'm on your side all the time. A chap has to stand up for his own study. Lemme alone!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Wharton was sitting on Bob Cherry's chest by this time; but, on the other hand, Mark Linley was sitting upon Nugent. Hurree Jamset Ram Singh soon altered that. He caught Linley by the shoulders and rolled him over, and Nugent came uppermost.

"Oh!" gasped the Lancashire lad, as he rolled in the grass. "Groo!"

"Got him!"

"Got them both!" grinned Wharton. "Now, then, my nobby bun-fighters, where do you come in?"

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

"Hallo! What are you sniggering at?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You utter ass——"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Bob Cherry was gasping with laughter; breathlessly, but with evident genuineness.

The victors in that brief struggle were amazed.

Bob Cherry was amused; but they could see nothing amusing in being licked and captured, and having his picnic raided.

"Look here!" exclaimed Wharton, shaking his prisoner, and making him laugh the more thereby. "What does this sniggering mean?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Look here, Linley——"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You shrieking duffers——"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Oh, they're off their rockers!" said Nugent.

**A Splendid Tale of the Chums of Greyfriars.**

"The off-fulness of their honourable rockers is terrific."

"The silly asses——"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

There was a splash of an oar in the water, and a bump of a boat among the thickets on the shore. A shout rang over the bank.

"Arrah! To the rescue, darlings!"

And Micky Desmond rushed upon the scene, followed by Lacy, Skinner, Trevor, and the rest of the bun-fighters.

Wharton and Nugent jumped up.

But they had no chance!

There was a moment's struggle, and then the chums of Study No. 1 went to grass again, with overwhelming odds sprawling over them.

## THE ELEVENTH CHAPTER.

### The Triumph of the N.O.B.F.

**B**OB CHERRY staggered to his feet, gasping with laughter. Harry Wharton, Nugent, and Hurree Singh lay in the grass now, each with a couple of bun-fighters sitting upon him. The tables had been turned with a vengeance.

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Bob Cherry. "This is where we snigger!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" yelled the bun-fighters.

"My hat!" gasped Wharton. "I—I——"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"We've got them, the bounders!" said Billy Bunter, getting up, and adjusting his spectacles. "I say, you fellows, you ought to make an example of them. They were going to make a raid on the grub, and if I hadn't put up a jolly good fight, they'd have been off with it before now. I——"

"Shut up, Bunter!"

"Oh, really, Cherry——"

"Oh, ring off! Look here, my innocent infants," said Bob Cherry, addressing his prisoners, "you're no match for the N.O.B.F. The sooner you chuck it up the better. The new Co. are scoring all the time, and it's time for Study No. 1 to go out of business."

"Rats!"

"I knew you had screwed some information or other out of that sneaking worm, Bunter——"

"Oh, really, Cherry——"

"Shut up, Bunter! I knew that, and I laid my plans. Ha, ha, ha!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" yelled the N.O.B.F.

"We came along here on our little lonesome, and I knew jolly well you chaps were following," chuckled Bob Cherry. "You didn't see us look back, did you? That was because we were leading you into this."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The chums of Study No. 1 exchanged sickly looks.

It certainly looked as if they had been completely done by Study No. 13 this time.

"Most of us were coming by boat, you see," explained Bob Cherry, chuckling. "The boat was in sight when you rushed us, though you didn't see it."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"And now——"

"Oh, go and eat coke!" said Wharton. "You've done us. But we'll make you wriggle another time. As for Study No. 13 being top study, that's all piffle."

"You're prisoners of war. We're willing to make it pax," said Bob serenely. "First of all you've got to admit that you are licked."

"Well, I suppose we may do that," said Harry ruefully. "There's not much doubt on that point."

"Next, you've got to own up that Study No. 13 is top study."

"Bosh!"

"Rats!"

"The ratfulness is terrific."

"Then we'll make it pax, and let you into the picnic," said Bob Cherry.

"Oh, really, Cherry——"

"Shut up, Bunter!"

"Yes; but there's none too much grub now, and I'm hungry. I think——"

"Shut up! What do you say, Wharton?"

"Go and eat coke!"

"Good! Get the pickles out of the bag, Micky!"

"Faith, and here they are!"

"Do you like pickles, Wharton?"

"Sometimes—what are you driving at?"

"Do you like them taken externally?"

"Eh?"

"Because that's what you're going to get. You're going to own up that Study No. 13 is top study, or else be anointed with pickles. I'm letting you off lightly, you know, on the score of ancient friendship."

"Look here——"

THE MAGNET.—No. 77.

NEXT  
WEEK:

"HARRY WHARTON & CO.'S BANK HOLIDAY."

EVERY  
TUESDAY, The "Magnet" ONE  
LIBRARY. HALFPENNY.

"Here you are, prime pickles! Warranted to make you wriggle when they're poured down the back of the neck."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I say, Cherry, couldn't you pour some water or something down Wharton's neck? It's a sin and a shame to waste good pickles."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You can have them when I've finished with them, Bunter. I don't suppose Wharton will want to keep them down his neck."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Oh, really, Cherry——"

Bob Cherry opened the pickles, and approached Wharton. The leader of No. 1 Study struggled furiously, but he was held in the grasp of Morgan and Trevor, and he had no chance.

"Hold on!" he exclaimed. "I—I——"

Bob Cherry chuckled.

"Do you admit that Study No. 13 is top study?"

"No!" roared Wharton.

"Then——"

"My goodness!"

Bob Cherry gave a jump, and the bottle of pickles dropped into the grass.

It was a girl's voice that spoke.

He swung round in a twinkling.

From the path in the wood two fair faces were looking, and Hazeldene's grinning countenance was beside them.

The two girls were Marjorie Hazeldene and her friend Clara, the pupils of Cliff House. They had come upon the scene quite unexpectedly, and were looking on in blank amazement.

"Goodness gracious!" said Marjorie.

Bob Cherry turned crimson.

He jerked off his cap, and the other fellows did the same, all of them looking very confused and guilty.

"Get up, you duffers!" muttered Bob.

Wharton, Nugent, and the nabob scrambled to their feet. There was a moment's awkward silence.

"My hat!" said Hazeldene, grinning. "Is this a picnic?"

"Ye-e-es," stammered Bob Cherry, "it's a-a-a-a-a picnic. A-a-a picnic, you know."

"Exactly," said Harry Wharton, recovering his presence of mind with his usual quickness. "We should be glad if you would join us, Miss Hazeldene, and you, Miss Trevlyn."

"Jolly glad!" said Bob Cherry heartily.

A glimmer of amusement came into Marjorie's eyes.

She understood very well that she had arrived in time to put an end to a scrimmage of some sort, and that was quite sufficient to decide her to remain.

"I suppose you fellows were doing some—some gymnastics!" said Hazeldene.

"Ye-e-es, in a way," said Bob Cherry; "and I—I was—was showing Wharton some pickles. I say, Miss Marjorie, we've got a jolly good feed. It's awfully good of you to join us. Bunter, you fat young villain, why haven't you lighted the fire?"

"Oh, really, Cherry——"

"How can we boil a kettle without a fire?"

"Yes, but——"

"Light the fire."

Wharton pulled his collar straight. The arrival of Marjorie and Clara had been a very fortunate thing for him. He would never have admitted that Study No. 13 was top study; but he would certainly have had an uncomfortable time if he hadn't done so.

And so he was more than usually pleased to see Marjorie.

All signs of warfare were banished from the camp of the N.O.B.F. at once.

A fire was lighted, and the kettle slung over it and boiled, and the goodly array of eatables set out on white cloths on the grass.

"My goodness!" murmured Clara. "How ripping!"

"Oh, Clara!"

"Well, spiffing, then," said Clara.

And Marjorie laughed.

The picnic was certainly a very enjoyable one. Wun Lung shaded the girls from the sun with his big umbrella, sitting between them with great state and a contented grin on his face; but whenever Billy Bunter drifted near the girls, there was always somebody to give him a shove and send him away again. Bunter attributed it to jealousy; but there was no help for it.

The picnic was enjoyed by all; and when towards the finish Bob Cherry gave the toast—to the N.O.B.F.—in ginger-beer, it was drunk with enthusiasm; only the girls inquiring what the N.O.B.F. might happen to be.

Bob Cherry explained, and struck by a great idea, begged Marjorie and Clara to become honorary members; which they forthwith did.

"I say, you fellows, what about the initiation?" said Billy Bunter. "All new members—"

"Shut up, Bunter! The initiation is waived in case of all lady members."

"Oh! But—"

"Shut up!"

And Billy shut up. The N.O.B.F. grinned cheerfully at the chums of No. 1 Study. They had secured two lady members for the Noble Order of Bun-Fighters, and after that they naturally considered that it was time for Harry Wharton & Co. to strike their colours.

When their picnic was over, most of the N.O.B.F. walked home with Marjorie and Clara, and so did Wharton and his chums. They parted with the girls at Cliff House, and walked back to Greyfriars together. It was tacitly agreed that it was "pax" for the rest of that day. Bob Cherry

gave Wharton a staggering slap on the shoulder as they entered Greyfriars; but it was a friendly one.

"I rather think that Study No. 13 is top study now, old son?" he remarked.

To which Wharton replied with the ancient and classic monosyllable:

"Rats!"

But afterwards, in No. 1 Study, Harry Wharton & Co. talked it over, and agreed that it was time they "pulled up their socks," as Nugent expressed it, and settled that burning question for good and all!

THE END.

(Another splendid tale of the Chums of Greyfriars next Tuesday, entitled "Harry Wharton & Co.'s Bank-Holiday," 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 necessaries, 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 to Woolchester. Arrived there, 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. On the night that he is doing his first sentry-go, Ian Chenys, his unscrupulous step-brother, enters the regiment as a subaltern, and recognises the sentry. After a stormy interview Ian savagely assaults Ronald, and flees at the approach of the guard. Ronald is discovered bruised and bleeding, but, refusing any explanation, is sent to the guard-room. As the result of his trial, he receives the sentence of thirteen days' confinement to barracks. Corporal Kedge, who is a friend of Ronald's, congratulates him on his light sentence.

(Now go on with the story.)

### The Great Fight—Ronald in Training—Blackest Treachery.

"And now, before I forget it," added Kedge, "you're to report yourself to Lieutenant Fairly as soon as our guard is dismissed. He's just sent out word. T'chun! Left turn! Quick march!" And Ronald and his comrades on escort marched back to get ready for the new guard, shortly to relieve them.

Inside the orderly-room serious business had been suspended for the moment.

"Well, I feel that I've been over lenient," Colonel Conger was saying for the third time, trying to look very fierce. "Thirteen days C.B. is a perfectly ridiculous sentence for a pig-headed young fool like that; but I must agree that it's uncommonly sporting of him to take his gruel like that."

Bob Fairly looked up to see how Ian regarded this; but the new sub-lieutenant had slipped away.

"And you think you can get him for Wednesday week, Fairly?" asked the grizzly little colonel, looking up with sudden boyish eagerness. He had won an officers' bantam-weight championship himself in a particularly hot year away back in the sixties somewhere.

"Certain of it, sir—that is, if he will only fight."

"Fight, by thunder!" roared Colonel Conger. "He's got to fight! Do you think I've let him off lightly like this for nothing—eh? If he refuses and let's the regiment down,

THE MAGNET.—No. 77.

NEXT  
WEEK:

"HARRY WHARTON & CO.'S BANK HOLIDAY."

A Splendid Tale of the  
Chums of Greyfriars.

groat Scott, I'll cancel the sentence and give him cells instead, the obstinate young ass! Besides, what makes you think he won't fight? Hasn't he heart enough, or is it a question of a purse?"

"A heart as big as a haystack, sir. As for a purse, the less we say about that the better. If Chester boxes the sailor, it will be for the honour of the regiment entirely. The moment we talk about offering him money, we can call the match off, so far as he is concerned."

"H'm! And you think he can beat this Navy pet?" asked the colonel.

"It'll be a contest of science against beef, and you know that that always means a toss-up, sir," said Lieutenant Bob. "If I can only have him entirely to myself—"

"Well, you can't!" snapped Colonel Conger. "I've sentenced him to thirteen days' C.B. simply and entirely to leave him free for the night of the contest, and that is a deuced sight more than I ought to have done. You've got to get him fit now as best you can. Besides, pack-drill and extra fatigue ought to be jolly good training in itself. Sergeant-major, put down that date in the diary, and see I'm reminded of it. If I miss that fight, I'll court-martial the whole of the battalion, hanged if I won't!"

It took all Lieutenant Fairly's good tact to induce Ronald to enter the arena for the Wessex regiment against the Navy champion; but he succeeded at last.

Had it been a mere sparring match, Ronald would certainly have refused. He was a keen boxer, and he had no fear as to his own fistic powers, but he had at the same time a fixed determination not to allow himself to be pushed forward as a pugilist.

In the cause of charity, however, and in honour of his regiment, he waived his own inclinations. The challenge was confirmed, and he settled down to hard training.

For thirteen days he did his three hours' extra pack-drill a day as a defaulter, and double fatigue, and spent his spare moments in the gymnasium, sparring with Lieutenant Bob, Spud Murphy, and every other heavy-weight who would stand against him.

He had yielded to the demands of Hookey Walker and Mouldy Mills that they should act as his trainers, and the two veterans, who were both supposed to have been renowned scrappers in their time, were a dozen times a day on the

verge of blows over the right and wrong way of preparing their man.

"Raw steak! That's the stuff!" Hookey insisted for the thirteenth time. "That's what Sayers and Heenan an'—"

"Yes; and Goliath and Julius Caesar, and Bluebeard and Captain Kidd, and a lot of other old mummies used to train on. I know just what you're goin' to say, Hookey. To hear you talk, anyone would think that you were a hundred years old, and had got a solid wooden head into the bargain. It's all science nowadays, my boy, and science says raw beefsteak is all rats. What Chester wants is milk puddings and chicken, an' fruit and marmalade, like they trains the Oxford and Cambridge crews on."

"Well, an' how much milk puddings an' chicken an' marmalade 'as 'e 'ad since we started—eh?" demanded the indignant Hookey.

"Ah, now you're beginning to talk sense!" Mouldy replied, with a note of regret. "He ain't had none, o' course, except them kippers this morning and the sausages last night. But there you are. That's the theory, as the skientists would say. Anyway, anythink but raw steak is my motto."

To all of which Ronald smiled, and ate what he could and what he wanted.

So keen was the interest in the noble art suddenly developed in the battalion, that the canteen was comparatively deserted in the evenings in favour of the gymnasium.

Lieutenant Bob Fairly was the master of ceremonies, having blossomed from a languid dandy, too bored to do more than he could possibly help, into the life and soul of this side of soldiering, and the idol of the men.

Differences that might never have been settled under the old conditions, but left to rankle and heal as best they could, were now adjusted with promptness and despatch.

In all this the "hard nuts" of B Company were well to the fore.

Mouldy and Hookey and other veterans stood by and criticised while the youngsters belaboured one another with a vast amount of energy, and not much to show for it.

Private Augustus Smythe was a regular attendant, dividing his time between furious encounters of the Kilkenny oat variety and painful contortions with dumb-bells and Sandow exercisers.

In his brief moments of rest he would stand with arms folded, his knuckles carefully arranged so as to make his skinny biceps look as big and terrible as possible, scowling at Mouldy and Hookey.

He had never forgiven this pair for their hoax about the Elephant Hussars, and it was his intention to challenge one or both to mortal combat as soon as ever he had developed his biceps sufficiently.

It was Mouldy who first scented the appalling fate which threatened them.

He and Hookey were standing swapping accounts of imaginary battles in bygone days with champions of the fistic art, for their own amusement and the benefit of the awestricken youngsters who stood around.

Ronald had just finished a rattling six-round spar with Spud, the Irishman—the last before the great contest on the following night.

He was feeling as fit as a fiddle, and strong enough to fight a windmill. Having made it a rule in life to keep always in good fettle, he had needed only a fortnight's hard training to get him into tip-top trim.

The one thing he did not like about the morrow's contest was the amount of money which had been laid on his chance of victory. He hated betting himself, and he hated still more to be the subject of a wager, however small.

At that moment, however, he knew that many hundreds, if not thousands of pounds had been booked on him. The odds being then at five to one in favour of the champion of the Navy, the Wessex stood to win a fortune if Fate was kind to their representative.

If any man in the battalion had laid against Ronald's chance, he was discreet enough to keep the fact to himself, and book his bets elsewhere.

Ronald hated all this, but there was no backing out now. After all, the show was in the cause of charity, and that is said to cover a multitude of sins.

He had had his rub down, and was laughing quietly over Hookey's latest anecdote of a hundred and twenty round contest which he had waged with Tom Sayers for £500 and the championship of the world.

If it had only been true, it would have made Hookey somewhere between seventy and eighty years of age at the present moment.

"Time!" sez the referee," continued Hookey, telling the story. "It was the two hundred and nineteenth round—"

"You said one hundred just now," said Mouldy, suddenly betraying an inclination to cast doubts. Augustus Smythe was smiling in open scorn and derision.

"Oh, all right! One hundred and nineteenth, if you're so beastly pertickler!" said Hookey, rather annoyed. "It was the one hundred and nineteenth round. 'Time!' sez the referee."

THE MAGNET.—No. 77.

NEXT  
WEEK:

"HARRY WHARTON & CO.'S BANK HOLIDAY."

EVERY  
TUESDAY, The "Magnet" ONE  
LIBRARY. HALFPENNY.

"Go on! Get on with it, chum! You said all that once before," giped Mouldy.

"I rose from my corner so blind—"

"Blind what?" interrupted Mouldy.

"Blind! I couldn't see, and so groggy about the legs I couldn't stand."

"Liar!"

Gussy's clean cut and curt summary of Hookey's status as a teller of the truth came with startling effect in the middle of a dramatic pause.

"Somebody calling you, Hookey," sniffed Mouldy.

"Liar!" snarled Gussy, in a melodramatic voice, slowly drawing off one boxing-glove. "I say again, liar! Coward! Craven! I challenge you to mortal combat, and there"—flinging the glove with a smack in Hookey's bewildered face—"there is my gage!"

"Bravo! Hear, hear!" roared Mouldy, slapping Gussy on the bare shoulder in a way that brought tears to his eyes. "That's the way to talk to 'em! Now go and hit him on the nose to clinch the bargain!"

"Just half a mo!" said Hookey, holding him off. "Did I understand you, Gussy, my lad, to say that I'm a coward?"

"Yes, a coward and a liar!" yelled Gussy fiercely.

"We won't say anything about the liar part of it. Perhaps you're right there," admitted Hookey coolly. "It's the coward I cannot stummick, particularly from one so fresh and green as you. Young man, you've done it this time. Jest look your last upon the gas, for, by the pig that bit my Aunt Jemima, thou diest the death. Jest give me them gloves, Chester, and hold me back when you think I'm gettin' too 'cartless and 'orrible in my revenge."

Hookey's manner of accepting the deadly insult had a somewhat dispiriting effect on Augustus Smythe. Nor was Hookey feeling over comfortable.

However much he knew in theory of the noble art, he knew absolutely nothing of the practice, and in view of all his bouncing during the past two weeks, he would have given anything to have got out of the awkward fix he was now in.

There was no denying Gussy's spirited challenge, however, and there was the crowd all yelling and cheering and pressing round to see the fun.

Hookey saw no way of getting out of it, so he pulled on the gloves and climbed into the ring. Ronald was his second, while Mouldy officiated in the same capacity for Gussy.

The latter was white and trembling, but there was an angry spark in his eye, and a tight look about his jaw, which revealed a determination to do or die.

Spud Murphy took the time, and at his shout the seconds whisked the chairs out of the ring, and the combatants advanced.

Augustus dispensed with the familiar handshake, and smote the unsuspecting Hookey on the nose instead.

Hookey staggered back aghast at this, and Augustus, following up smartly, hit him a thump in the wind which made Hookey whoop with pain. But Augustus was merciless. He shut his eyes, and rushing in under Hookey's windmill arms, gave him an upper-cut which just caught the tip of his nose.

The crowd yelled at this success. They cheered and laughed themselves hoarse, while Mouldy got so near hysterics that he had to cling to the ropes for support.

Still Gussy raged like a lion, while Hookey wallowed like a buffalo, and hit out blindly with the force of a battering-ram.

Down went Augustus at last, felled by a swinging blow, and down sat Hookey in the middle of the ring, so breathless and exhausted by his exertions he could only roll his eyes.

But Augustus was up like a flash. Blind with fury, and the tears streaming from his eyes, he charged across the ring, tripped up over Hookey's prostrate body, and, pitching head foremost, clutched Mouldy round the neck.

Mouldy howled. The crowd howled, and Ronald could hardly lift a hand for laughing.

Thinking it was time to interfere, he was just about to climb into the ring, when suddenly the gas went out, plunging the gymnasium into darkness.

He had ducked his head to dodge beneath the ropes, and at that instant something whirled past his ear, and dealt him a crushing blow on the shoulder.

The pain was so excruciating for the moment that he could not help crying out. He staggered, then recovered himself, and clutched at somebody he felt was close behind him.

The cudgel swept down again, but fortunately missed him clear, and then his hands closed on the man's arms in the darkness.

He clutched the sleeve, but his grip had gone. His left arm was numbed from wrist to shoulder.

### A Surprise for Sergeant Bagot—Underhand Work.

The wrathful yells of the spectators when the gas was put out, and the boxing duel between Gussy Smythe and Hookey Walker stopped in the most exciting part, drowned all sounds of the struggle between Ronald and his treacherous assailant.

To add to the pandemonium, Rough had also joined in the fray, barking and growling furiously.

So numbed was Ronald's left arm by the crushing blow which had descended out of the darkness on his shoulder, that his foe had little difficulty in wrenching his cuff from his grip. But the next instant Ronald's right hand closed on a tunic collar, and the two fell together with a crash.

Matches had now been struck, and the crowd of soldiers came surging round to see what it all meant. To their amazement, they found their champion of to-morrow's fight grappling on the ground with a comrade; while Rough, the terrier, had got already one handsome mouthful of the enemy's trousers in his teeth, and was returning for more.

Who it was that Ronald was pinning by the throat could not be seen in the flickering light; but when Spud Murphy intervened, and dragged the unknown to his feet, there was a gasp of amazement on every side, for it was none other than Sergeant Bagot.

Ronald, too, was taken aback at the discovery. To strike or lay hands on a non-commissioned officer, no matter under what provocation or circumstance, is a penal offence in the Army, and Bagot was not the man to forgo his pound of flesh for the indignity he had suffered.

His face was ashy pale with the white heat of passion, yet there was a hunted look in his eyes.

Ronald was quick to see this, and it only convinced him the more that Bagot was the author of the dastardly attempt to disable him.

At that moment the gas was relit, and the crowd parted to admit the passage of someone in authority. It was sub-Lieutenant Ian Chenys who pushed his way to the front.

"What is the meaning of all this, Sergeant Bagot?" he asked coldly, a sneer curling his lips as his eyes met Ronald's.

"I hardly know, sir," answered Bagot, still struggling between blind rage and craven fear. "The gas was turned off suddenly, and Private Chester and his infernal cur set upon me in the dark, knocking me down and mauling me as if they intended to throttle me!"

"I saw it," said Ian quietly. "I was in the gallery. Let him be put under arrest at once. Corporal Kedge, take this man to the guard-room!"

An involuntary murmur of surprise and anger rose from the crowd of Tommies, and Ian turned upon them with a threatening scowl.

"Just one moment, Chenys, please!" said a voice.

And Lieutenant Bob Fairly strolled leisurely forward.

"I have already put this man under arrest, Mr. Fairly!" retorted Ian hotly, as if to put an end to all argument.

"And I am senior here, Mr. Chenys!" drawled Lieutenant Bob. "Moreover, I have been present from the first at the ring-side, and not in the gallery. We will discuss anything further you may wish to say in another place. Meanwhile, I prefer to look upon it in the light of a very natural mistake, due to the room being plunged suddenly into darkness; and, in any case, I mean to hear the evidence of both sides. Why, whatever is wrong with that left arm of yours, Chester?"

Bob Fairly drawled no longer. The sight of the ugly bruise on the Wessex champion's shoulder, and the arm hanging limp, roused him at once.

"Somebody aimed a blow at me, sir, soon after the gas was put out," answered

Ronald, grey to the lips with pain. "Whoever it was, struck at my head; but I had moved, and the weapon struck me here. He struck again. I caught his sleeve though, just in time, and we struggled and fell, and—well, no one was more surprised than I to find that the man I had got hold of was Sergeant Bagot!"

"Do you dare to insinuate that it was I who set upon you?" spluttered Sergeant Bagot, with a brave show of indignation.

"I suggest nothing. I can only tell you what happened exactly," answered Ronald, looking Bagot so steadily between the eyes that he fell back a pace, muttering an oath. "I may have been mistaken."

"Ah, what makes you say that?" asked Lieutenant Bob, eager enough to clutch at any straw to prevent the matter drifting further for the moment.

"I caught my man with my left hand, but, that being numbed, he tore himself free. I then gripped him with the right."

"Exactly!" sneered Bagot.

"Why exactly, sergeant? What do you mean by that?" asked Lieutenant Bob, with a quick glance.

"That he is mistaken, of course, sir!" stuttered Bagot, obviously taken aback for the instant. "He lost his first grip of the real man, and fastened his second upon me."

"Then you admit it was all without malice—a pure accident?" said the officer.

But Bagot did not reply. Instead, his lips twitched with baffled spite. He had no wish to see his pet aversion escape so lightly as this. His crime was a technical one, perhaps, but it was a crime nevertheless.

"Very well," said Lieutenant Bob, as if he had consented. "I am sure now, Chenys, that you should agree that it should rest at that."

Ian shrugged his shoulders, but answered nothing. "The fact remains that a blow was struck by some despicable creature here, and apparently with one intent," continued Fairly, ignoring the contemptuous gesture—"to disable Chester on the eve of his fight. That is a stain on the honour of our regiment, which can only be wiped out when that brute has been run to earth!"

A roar of "Hear, hears!" greeted his words.

"Very well, lads," added Lieutenant Bob. "I hope you will make it your duty, as I mean to make it mine, to sift this conspiracy to the end. For the present I am afraid that we of the Wessex must swallow defeat as best we can, for the contest must be declared off."

"No; not off, sir!" answered Ronald.

"Why, man alive, you can't enter the ring with an arm like that!" exclaimed Lieutenant Bob.

"I can do my best, sir. After all, I don't believe it's quite so bad as it feels," said Ronald, raising his arm cautiously, though the effort made him bite his lip with pain. "I'm better with my right than my left, anyway."

"Bravo, Chester!" shouted Hookey. "That's the way with the Wessex—ain't it, chums?"

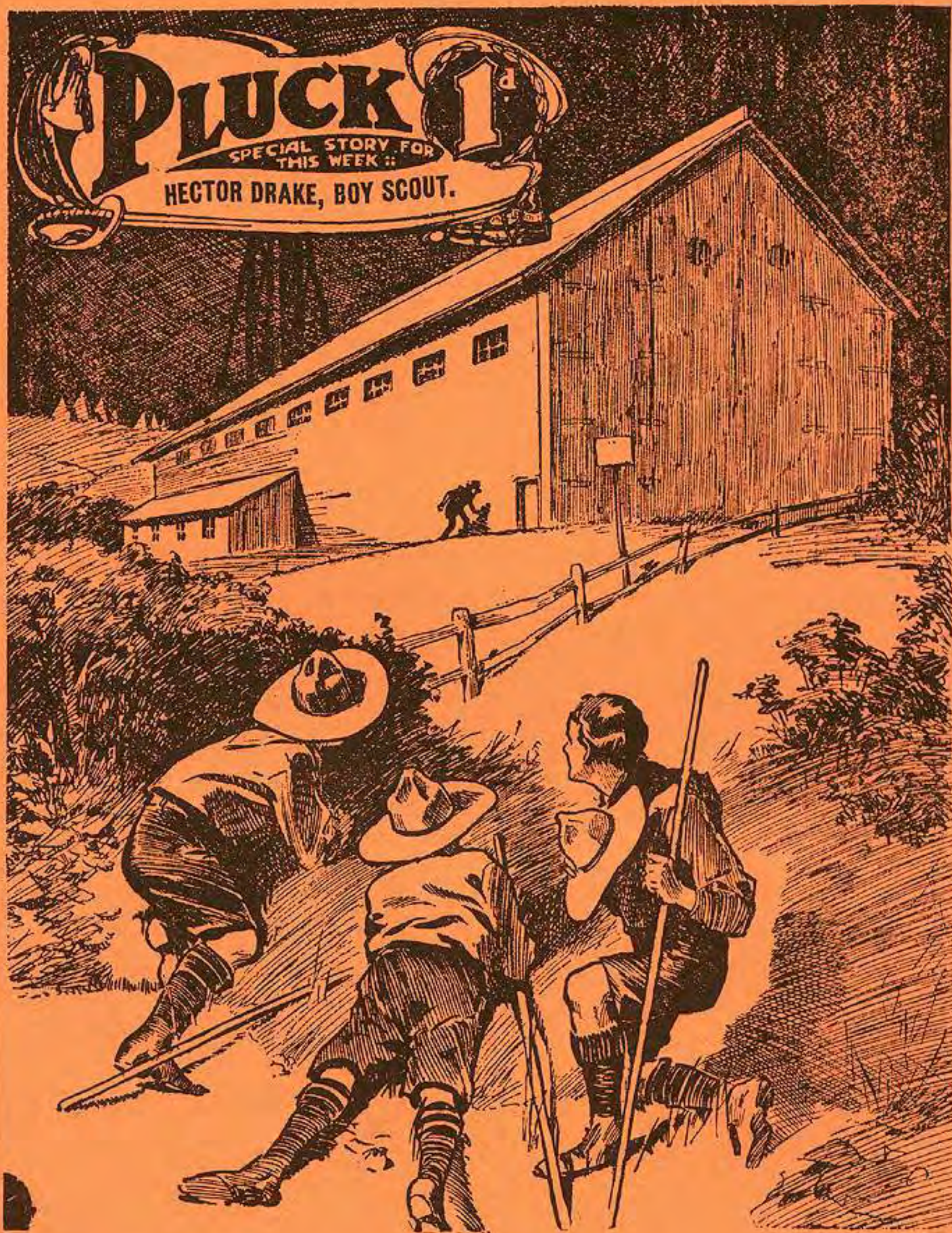
A wild yell of applause greeted the old soldier's words, and, but for risking further injury to their plucky champion, there is no doubt that they would have marched him off shoulder-high.

"Well, you're a game one to talk like that," said Lieutenant Bob. "If you mean to fight, though, we must see about getting that shoulder of yours under the doctor's hands at once. Put a coat round your shoulders, and come with me."

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