

"BUNTER, THE DETECTIVE."

THE
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LIBRARY NUMBER 92.
VOLUME 4.

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for All.

Grand School Tale of
HARRY WHARTON & CO.

By
Frank
Richards.



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WITH THE HEAD.**



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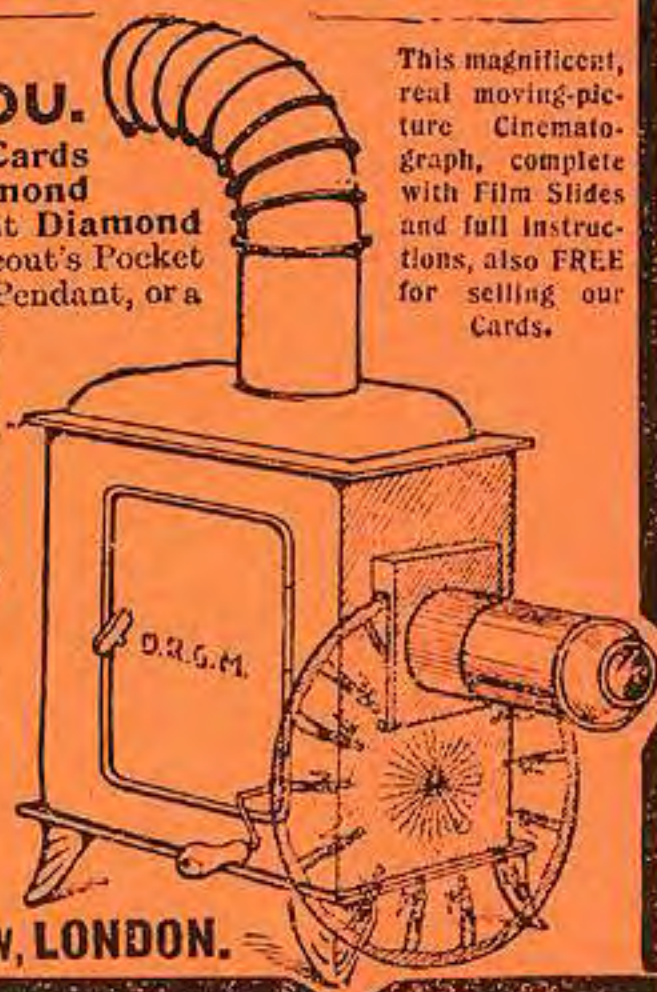
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Bunter, the Detective!

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School Tale of
The Boys of Greyfriars.

— BY —

FRANK RICHARDS.

THE FIRST CHAPTER.

The Mystery of Billy Bunter.

"TEA'S ready!"
"Bunter!"
"Tea's ready!"

Billy Bunter neither answered nor stirred.

He was sitting in the armchair in No. 1 Study at Greyfriars, his fat knees clasped in his fat hands, and a deeply thoughtful frown upon his fat brow.

Harry Wharton, Frank Nugent, and Hurree Jamset Ram Singh, who had the honour of sharing No. 1 Study with the fat junior, stared at him.

They stared at him blankly.

Bunter had not taken part in getting tea ready. Bunter was the laziest fellow in the Remove, certainly, and never took part in any work if he could help it. But he did not regard the preparation of meals as work. That was a pleasure to Bunter—a pleasure only exceeded by eating them when prepared.

The chums of the Remove had been surprised to see him remain in the armchair while they were cutting bread-and-butter, opening tins of sardines, and frying eggs. Even the smell of the frying failed to rouse him.

There was evidently something the matter with Billy Bunter, and the Removites did not disturb him. They could only conclude that he must be extraordinarily fatigued if the smell of cooking did not even make him look up.

But when tea was announced as ready, and still he failed to respond, their surprise changed to blank amazement.

But it was no dream.

Twice had the warning that tea was ready been repeated, and Bunter had not even raised his head, and the deep frown upon his brow had not relaxed.

The juniors exchanged glances. Nugent tapped his forehead solemnly. There seemed to be no other explanation. Billy Bunter was "off his rocker."

Harry Wharton tapped the fat junior gently upon the shoulder.

"Bunter! Billy Bunter!"

"Eh?"

"Tea's ready!"

"Oh, tea!" said Bunter indifferently.

"He must be ill," said Nugent softly.

"The illfulness must be terrific," murmured Hurree Singh, "or else the honourable Bunter is completely off his esteemed rocker!"

Harry shook the fat junior.

"Wake up, Bunter! Tea's ready! Tea! Eggs! Sardines! Cake!"

It was enough to make Billy Bunter jump up like a jack-in-the-box at any other time. Now he simply looked bored.

"Tea! Oh, all right!"

"Aren't you hungry?" asked Nugent, in an awed voice.

"Hungry!" said Bunter absently. "Ye-es, come to think of it, I'm a little peckish! Yes; I'll have some sardines!"

"It's a jape," said Nugent; "he's putting this on! It's utterly impossible for Bunter to forget a meal-time. We've known him too long to be taken in like that!"

"I say, you fellows——"

"Look here! What's the little game, Billy?"

"Game!" said the fat junior vaguely. "I say, you fellows, what's the time? My watch has stopped, I think!"

The juniors grinned. Bunter's watch had stopped several terms ago, and had not gone since. Wharton looked at his own.

"A quarter-past six," he said.

Billy Bunter gave a jump.

"A quarter-past six! My only hat!"

"What's the matter?"

"I must be off!"

And Bunter clutched up his cap and rushed to the door.

"You must be off," agreed Nugent—"off your rocker! What's the row?"

"Can't stop to explain now!"

"You haven't had your tea!"

"No time for tea!"

That was too much. The chums of the Remove were simply floored. When Billy Bunter said that he had no time for tea, the world must be coming to an end. Nothing short of that could possibly account for it.

They stared at the fat junior blankly as he tore open the study door and rushed out into the passage.

"I say, he must be dotty!" said Nugent. "He oughtn't to be allowed out in that state, you know!"

"By Jove, no!" exclaimed Wharton.

He dashed after the fat junior. Billy Bunter heard his footsteps in pursuit, and broke into a run. He had a good start, and he streaked rapidly for the stairs.

The passage was clear of juniors, but one study door was open. It was the study where Bulstrode, the bully of the Remove, Hazeldene, and Tom Brown, the new boy from New Zealand, dwelt together in more or less of harmony.

Harry Wharton uttered a shout:

"Brown! Tom Brown! Stop him!"

If Tom Brown had been in the study he might have darted out in time to stop Bunter. But apparently he was not there, for there was no reply to Wharton's shout, and the New Zealand junior did not appear.

Bunter was going strong, and he reached the stairs in a few seconds, and dashed down them at a reckless speed.

At the bottom of the stairs a group of juniors were standing, chatting. They were Bulstrode, Skinner, Snoop, and Stott, and one or two more boys, by no means on the best of terms with Harry Wharton & Co.

Bulstrode glanced up the stairs as Billy Bunter came pounding down.

"Hallo, Bunter!"

In a spirit of pure mischief, he planted himself in the fat junior's way, because he saw that Bunter was in a hurry. Bunter blinked at him through his big spectacles, and slackened speed.

"Lemme pass!" he gasped. "Wharton's after me! Lemme pass!"

"Oh, Wharton!"

The chance of giving Wharton trouble was too good to be lost by Bulstrode and his friends. They opened to allow Bunter to pass, and he whisked out into the Close in two seconds, and disappeared.

Wharton came racing down the stairs.

"Collar him!" murmured Bulstrode.

"What-ho!"

As Wharton dashed by, the juniors closed up in his way. He came in contact with Bulstrode, with a crash that made them both reel.

"Oh, you, dummy!" gasped Wharton.

"Yah! You ass!"

Bulstrode grasped Harry, as if to save himself, and Skinner and Stott bumped against them, and all four went to the floor together.

Harry Wharton was underneath—Bulstrode & Co. took care of that—and he gasped and struggled under their weight.

Athletic as the captain of the Lower Fourth was, he had no chance against the three of them, and they pinned him down by sheer weight.

"Oh!" panted Wharton. "Lemme gerrup, you asses! I'm in a hurry! Chuck it!"

"What did you run into us for?" demanded Bulstrode, getting up as far as to sit on Wharton's chest, instead of sprawling across him.

"I didn't! You got in my way on purpose, you rotter!"

"Same old Wharton!" said Bulstrode, grinning. "Same old nerve; same old cheek! Bump him for his clumsiness!"

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NEXT WEEK: "THE CIRCUS AT GREYFRIARS."

"You'd better not! I——"

"Bump him!"

"Rescue!" shouted Wharton.

Bob Cherry and Mark Linley, of No. 13 Study, were coming into the House. They ran to the rescue at once. In a few seconds Bulstrode & Co. were rolled off their victim, and Wharton staggered to his feet.

"You cads!" he gasped.

The two parties drew together, and a general conflict was imminent, when the door of Mr. Quelch's study opened. Mr. Quelch was master of the Remove, and he didn't approve of "rowing" indoors.

"Cave!" muttered Bob Cherry.

Wharton swallowed his rage.

"Right-ho!" He turned away from the grinning Bulstrode. "Did you see Bunter a few minutes ago, Bob?"

Bob Cherry nodded.

"Yes; he just passed us in the Close, running for his life, I should say, from the speed he was putting on."

"Thanks!"

Harry Wharton dashed out of the House. Bob Cherry and Mark Linley stared after him in astonishment.

"Hallo, hallo, hallo!" said Bob. "I wonder what's the row?"

"Looks like trouble," said Mark.

They looked out of the doorway after Wharton. But he had disappeared in the dusk. The early evening was closing in darkly over Greyfriars.

Billy Bunter was not visible in the Close. It was time for the gates to be locked, as they were always locked at dark. Where was Bunter gone?

Wharton went down to the gates. Gosling was just coming out of his lodge with a bunch of keys in his hand. He was late to lock up, as he frequently was.

He looked at Harry Wharton sourly.

"Wot I says is this 'ere," he remarked. "I 'ope he had a pass, that's all!"

"Who?" asked Wharton.

"Master Bunter."

"Has he gone out?"

"Ho 'ave!" said Gosling. "And wot I says is this 'ere—I 'opes he had a pass! I'm a-lockin' these 'ere gates now, Master Wharton, and if Master Bunter ain't got a pass, there's a row for Master Bunter when he comes in!"

And Gosling grinned, as if the prospect of a row for Master Bunter was rather agreeable to him than otherwise, as doubtless it was.

Wharton did not reply. He stepped outside the gates, and looked up and down the dusky lane. Had Billy Bunter a pass? What had he gone out for after the hour of locking up? What meant that sudden bolting from No. 1 Study?

It was inexplicable.

Gosling rattled his keys.

"Wot I says is this 'ere, Master Wharton. Are you goin' to stay hout or are you comin' hin? I'm goin' to lock these 'ere gates!"

Harry Wharton stopped inside the gates. Gosling locked up, and went back to his lodge, grunting. Harry slowly retraced his steps to the School House.

Nugent and Hurree Jamset Ram Singh looked at him curiously as he re-entered No. 1 Study. They had started tea, and made a considerable inroad therein. Harry dropped into his chair at the table, and stirred his tea.

"Where's Bunter?" asked Nugent.

"Gone out!"

"Gone out! It's past locking-up!"

"Yes. Bulstrode shoved himself in my way, and Bunter got off. He's gone out. I don't know whether he's got a pass. I can't understand it."

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A Splendid Tale of Harry Wharton & Co. By FRANK RICHARDS.

"Somebody said the age of miracles was past," Nugent remarked. "Yet, here's Bunter missing a meal!"

"The miraclefulness is terrific!"

"There will be a row if he's gone out without a pass," said Wharton. "Blessed if I can understand Bunter. We know he's a silly ass, of course; but it looks to me now as if he's absolutely off his rocker!"

And the chums of the Remove, in great amazement, discussed the curious proceedings of the fat junior while they discussed their tea. The tea was finished, and then they set to work with their prep. The preparation was finished, too, and still there was no sign of Billy Bunter!

THE SECOND CHAPTER.

Missing.

"WHERE'S Bunter?"

Several fellows asked that question of Harry Wharton & Co., when, their prep. done, they descended to the common-room. Bunter's movements seemed to be exciting unusual interest in the Lower Fourth at Greyfriars.

As a rule, Bunter was not considered of much account. His greediness, his habit of borrowing from all who would lend and forgetting to repay, had not endeared him to his Form-fellows. Sometimes he attracted a great deal of notice by some new wheeze—for Bunter was famous for his ideas—always impracticable. Bunter, the hypnotist, and Bunter, the photographer, had made the Greyfriars fellows laugh till they cried.

Now he seemed to be attracting interest again, but in a different way. Ogilvy, of the Remove, was one of the first to inquire for him. The Scottish junior came up to the chums of No. 1 in the common-room, with a red and wrathful face.

"Where's the beast?" he demanded.

"Which?" asked Wharton genially. "If you mean Bulstrode, he's over by the window! If you're alluding to yourself, here you are!"

"I mean Bunter! Where is he?"

"Gone out!"

"Then I'll jolly well watch for him to come in, that's all!" said Ogilvy. "He's been at my plates again. He asked me if he could have six plates for his blessed camera, and I told him he couldn't—and now there are six missing. He's taken them."

"Phew!"

"I suppose it's photography again," Nugent remarked, as the wrathful Ogilvy walked away.

Wharton shook his head.

"I don't know! Even Bunter wouldn't go out to take photographs after dark, I should say."

"Hallo! Here's Bob Cherry on the warpath."

Bob Cherry rushed up to them.

"Has that fat burglar come in?"

"Bunter? No!"

"He's taken my lantern!" howled Bob. "My dark lantern. He asked me to lend it to him, and I refused, and now it's gone. You know how he looks after things he borrows. I sha'n't see it again—or, if I do, it will be wrecked. I'll scalp him."

"You can boil him if you like!" said Nugent.

The chums settled down to play chess. Morgan of the Remove came along, and tapped Harry Wharton on the shoulder. Harry did not look up.

"Check!" he said, moving his rook.

"Where is Bunter, look you?" demanded Morgan. "He has been in my study. He asked me for the Guy Fawkes mask I kept after the Fifth, and I told him he couldn't have it. Now it's gone!"

"A Guy Fawkes mask? My hat! He's making a collection of some sort, I suppose!"

"I am going to slay him, look you!"

"Slay him, and welcome!"

There was evidently a storm waiting to burst on Bunter as soon as he returned. Carberry, the most unpopular prefect at Greyfriars, looked into the common-room as the school clock chimed half-past nine.

"Bed, you rats!" he said, in his pleasant way.

Wharton rose from the chess table. He had not finished the game, and only a few more moves were required, but it was of no use to say that to Carberry.

"Never mind," said Nugent, as he swept the pieces into the box; "it was practically a checkmate, old chap!"

"Good," said Wharton, "I had you fixed, and no mistake! I only had to clear off the bishop and shove the queen forward. I suppose you saw it?"

Nugent stared.

"Eh—what are you talking about? I mean it was practically a mate on my side. I was going to fix you with the knights."

"The knights? Why, your knights were nowhere!"

"I had you just on the point——"

"Now, look here, Nugent——"

THE MAGNET—No. 92.

NEXT
WEEK:

"THE CIRCUS AT GREYFRIARS."

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ONE
HALFPENNY.

LIBRARY.

"Why, as for your queen——"

"Bedtime!" said Carberry unpleasantly. "You can finish that jabber in the dormitory. Are all you young rascals here?"

"There are more rascals here now than there were a minute ago," said Bob Cherry, agreeably; and then he dodged a lunge from the prefect.

The Remove formed up to go to bed, and Carberry's angry eye noted that two were wanting. Two of the Remove who should have been there were missing.

"Where are Brown and Bunter?"

Harry Wharton started. He had known that Bunter was still out of doors, but it was news to him that Tom Brown of Taranaki was absent. No one replied to the prefect's question.

Carberry raised his voice angrily.

"Where are Brown and Bunter?"

"I'm here!" said a cheery voice in the passage, and handsome, sturdy Tom Brown of Taranaki came in. He looked a little dusty, and a little flushed, as if he had walked fast. The prefect stared at him.

"Have you been out?"

"Yes," said Tom Brown quietly.

"You had a pass, I hope?" said Carberry grimly. "Otherwise, it will be my painful duty to march you in to the doctor by the scruff of your neck."

"Yes, I know how painful the duty would be to you, Carberry," said Tom Brown. "I had a pass. Here it is!"

Carberry looked scrutinisingly at the pass. It was signed by Wingate of the Sixth, the captain of Greyfriars, and was quite in order.

"Do you know where Bunter is?" he asked.

"No," said Tom Brown. "Is he out?"

"Wasn't he with you?"

"Oh, no; I haven't seen him!"

"Hallo, hallo, hallo! Here he is!"

Bunter came into the common-room. The fat junior was clasping his hands together hard, and his fat face was contorted. Carberry stared at him.

"What's the matter with you, Bunter?"

"Ow, ow, yow!"

"What's the matter?"

"I—I've been in to the Head! Ow! I've been out, you know, and—and Mr. Quelch refused to accept my explanation. Ow!"

Carberry grinned.

"You young ass! Get to bed!"

Bunter was mumbling and growling all the way up to bed. He had evidently had some strong proofs that the Head disapproved of juniors breaking bounds. He nursed and clasped his hands with deep groans as he sat on his bed.

"Ow! I say, you fellows, the doctor can lay it on!" he gasped. "I believe he goes in for exercise, you know, to bring his muscle up before he starts on us. Ow!"

"You young duffer!" said Harry. "What did you go out for?"

"Ow, wow!" mumbled Bunter, apparently not hearing the question.

"What did you break bounds for, ass?"

"Ow, yow! This does hurt, and no mistake!"

Carberry looked into the dormitory. The juniors scuttled into bed, and the prefect turned out the gas and slammed the door. Then a dozen voices were heard at once, all demanding an explanation of Bunter.

"Bunter! Bunter!"

"Where have you been?"

"What's the little game?"

"Own up, you ass!"

"Bunter! Billy Bunter!"

From Billy Bunter's bed came a deep and unmusical snore. Merely that and nothing more!

THE THIRD CHAPTER.

In the Stilly Night.

"BUNTER!"

Snore!

"Billy Bunter!"

Sno-o-ore!

"He's fallen asleep jolly soon," said Bob Cherry suspiciously. "Bunter, old man, wake up, before I squeeze a sponge down the back of your neck!"

Snore!

Bob Cherry stepped out of bed, and fumbled at the washstand in the dark. There was a sound of quick movement in Bunter's bed.

"Here, hold on! Don't you jolly well squeeze a sponge over me, you beast!"

"Ha, ha, ha! You've woke up, then!"

"You—you woke me up!"

"Aren't you hungry, Bunter?" asked Nugent, with great solicitude. "Remember, you missed your tea—a thing you have never done before."

"Well, I had a snack in the village—I mean——"

"So you've been to Friardale?"

"I—I——"

"Friardale?" exclaimed Tom Brown. "I've been to Friardale, too, and I didn't see you, Bunter. You must have been there at the same time, too."

"Curious, wasn't it?" grunted Billy Bunter.

"And what have you been to Friardale for?" demanded Wharton. "What's the little game, if you're not off your silly rocker. We're getting alarmed about you, Bunter. It seems to me that the inevitable has happened at last, and you're right off your crumpet."

"Oh, really, Wharton! I—I went to Friardale for—for a walk, you know."

"And you had to bolt off and miss your tea—for a walk!" said Nugent.

"Well, you see——"

"I see that you're telling whoppers!" said Wharton bluntly. "I can't see what you're making a mystery about. I can't understand why you broke bounds and took a licking."

"There are lots of things you can't understand, Wharton."

"Why, you young sweep——"

"Perhaps I'll let you into it some day," said Bunter. "Perhaps there's a mystery, and perhaps there isn't. Perhaps I'm on the track, and perhaps I'm not. You fellows make game of me. You'll see one of these days!"

"Oh, sheer off!" said Bob Cherry. "It's touched his brain, missing his tea, you know. The question is whether we ought to get him a strait-jacket."

"Oh, really, Cherry——"

"Let's rag him, and make him explain!" suggested Skinner.

"Oh, let him alone; he's not worth it!"

Bob Cherry tumbled back into bed. The fat junior was rather glad that he was not worth ragging. He was soon snoring in earnest; but it was some time before Harry Wharton went to sleep.

The young captain of the Remove could not help thinking about the matter. Billy Bunter was about the most stupid fellow at Greyfriars, but he was convinced of his own extraordinary cleverness, and that frequently led him into scrapes. As he was in Wharton's study, Wharton felt bound to look after him to some extent, but Billy was a most troublesome fellow to look after. It seemed to Wharton that the fat junior was getting into some new scrape now, though he could not imagine what it was.

Bunter had often caused his study mates anxiety in other ways, too. He had developed a habit of sleep-walking, and on a well-remembered occasion he had cleared out the pockets of several fellows in the Remove dormitory, and hidden the proceeds, and unconsciously caused a suspicion of theft to fall upon Mark Linley.

The truth had been discovered, much to Bunter's own astonishment; but, as a matter of fact, he was rather proud of his somnambulistic tendencies, as marking him out from the common herd, as he would have expressed it.

Wharton was thinking for some time about the mysterious conduct of the Owl of the Remove, but he fell asleep at last. He woke again, a little later, with the impression that somebody was moving about in the dormitory.

He sat up in bed.

At once the thought occurred to his mind that Bunter might be sleep-walking again, and he peered through the gloom of the dormitory in the direction of the fat junior's bed. A ray of moonlight through one of the high windows fell upon the bed, and Wharton started as he noted that the clothes were thrown back and the bed was empty.

"The young ass! He's at it again!" murmured Harry.

He stepped quietly out of bed. The dormitory was dimly lighted by the glimmer of the moon at the windows, and his quick glance soon discovered the fat junior.

Billy Bunter, in his pyjamas, was standing beside Tom Brown's bed, and bending over the chair upon which the New Zealand junior had carefully arranged his clothes.

Wharton suppressed an exclamation.

He had no doubt that the somnambulist was "at it again." He could see all Bunter's actions with sufficient clearness, and he saw that the fat junior was going methodically through Tom Brown's pockets.

Wharton hesitated a moment. He knew that it was dangerous to suddenly awaken a sleep-walker, and he wondered what he had better do.

If Bunter tried to leave the dormitory, he determined

that he would stop him. The passages and staircases were too dangerous for a somnambulist. But so long as he remained there, it was possible that he would return to bed at any moment, and so Harry decided to wait and see.

He watched the fat junior curiously.

Bunter had his spectacles on, and there was a glimmer of moonlight upon them, and he looked as if he were awake; but Wharton could not see his eyes.

The Owl of the Remove went through pocket after pocket, carefully folding up the clothes after he had examined them.

Suddenly a faint exclamation broke from his lips. He had taken a folded paper from the breast of his jacket.

Wharton was surprised. In the previous attacks of somnambulism, he had not known the fat junior to make a sound.

Billy Bunter unfolded the paper, and fixed his eyes upon it, as if to read it, and Harry marvelled more. The sleep-walker was going through all the actions of a waking person. But if Bunter had been awake, the dormitory was too dim for reading.

The fat junior lowered the paper again, and seemed to hesitate.

Finally he slipped the paper into the pocket of his pyjamas, and moved away towards the door of the dormitory.

It was then that Wharton resolved to interfere. He stepped quickly towards the door, and put his foot and hand against it. His idea was that Bunter would try to open it with the handle, find it impossible, and give up the attempt. To a sleep-walker, Wharton himself would have been invisible all the time.

But, strangely enough, as he crossed the fat junior's path, Billy Bunter halted, and stared straight at him, as if he were broad awake.

A terrified exclamation left his lips.

"Wh-wh-what——"

"Bunter! You're awake!"

Harry Wharton uttered the words sharply.

THE FOURTH CHAPTER.

Billy Bunter is More Mysterious than Ever.

WHARTON advanced quickly towards the fat junior. Billy Bunter stared at him as if he were a ghost. He seemed rooted to the floor with terror.

"Wh-wh-Wharton!"

"Yes, it is I."

"You—you—you——"

"I've been watching you," said Harry. "I thought you were sleep-walking, and playing your old tricks again in your sleep. But——"

"But—but—but what?"

"You're awake!"

"I—I—I'm awake now, certainly," stammered Bunter.

"Ye-es, I'm awake."

"What have you been through Brown's pockets for?" demanded Wharton scornfully.

Bunter seemed to make an effort to recover himself.

"I—I—have I been through Brown's pockets?" he stammered.

"You know you have."

"I—I don't know. I—I woke up. I—I didn't know I was out of bed. You—you know I'm a sleep-walker, you know."

"I thought so, but——"

"You woke me."

"I didn't make a sound."

"Well, I woke. What do you think I should go through Brown's pockets for?" asked Bunter, recovering some of his old manner. "Oh, really, Wharton, I'm surprised at you."

"Well, I don't think you're a thief," admitted Harry; "and, as far as I could see, you took nothing but a bit of paper. I'm willing to believe that you were sleep-walking, and that you suddenly woke up."

"Let's get back to bed," said Bunter, with a shiver.

"It's jolly cold standing here."

"Right you are! But the paper?"

"What paper?"

"The paper you took out of Brown's jacket. You must put it back."

Billy Bunter shifted uneasily.

"I suppose it doesn't matter about putting an old bit of paper back," he said peevishly. "Brown might wake up, too, and misunderstand."

"It might be a letter or something."

"Oh, stuff!"

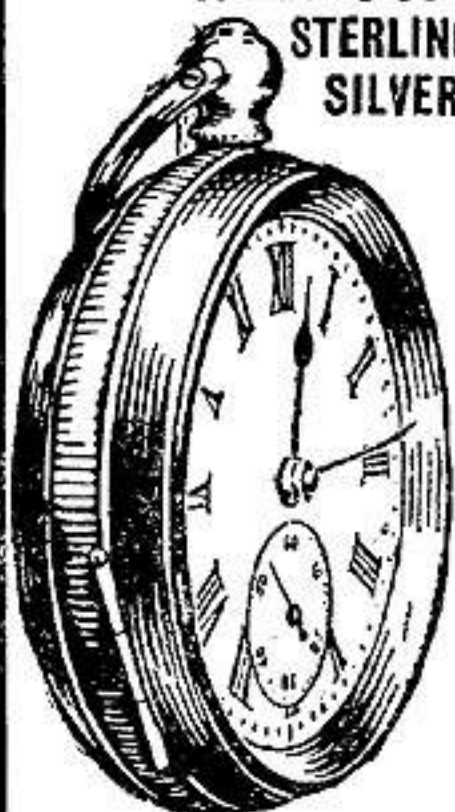
"Anyway, you're going to put it back," said Wharton grimly. "It's Brown's property. Put it back at once,

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while I see you, or I'll wake Brown and leave him to settle it with you."

Billy Bunter shivered.

"You ass! That would ruin everything. I—I mean—"

"Blessed if I can guess what you mean. But put the paper back at once, or I'll call Brown and explain to him."

"Oh, all right! I don't know where it is," mumbled Bunter, fumbling in his pocket. "Strike a match, will you, so that I can see that it is the one."

Wharton looked steadily at him.

"You weren't asleep," he said. "You tried to read it when you took it out of Brown's pocket."

"Oh, really, Wharton—"

"And you dared not strike a light here, for fear of waking us, so you were going to take it outside the dorm. and strike a match there to read it."

"I—I—I—"

"Now you want a light to read it by, not to identify it," said Wharton angrily. "You young cad! It's a private letter, and you're poking your inquisitive nose into it. By Jove, I've a good mind to give you a licking on the spot!"

"Oh—er—oh, really—"

"Put that paper back at once!"

Billy Bunter made no further demur. He fumbled for the paper, took it out, and unwillingly retraced his steps to Tom Brown's bed.

There he fumbled with Brown's jacket, and restored the paper to the pocket he had taken it from. Then he blinked peevishly at the captain of the Remove.

"I hope you're satisfied now," he grunted.

"Yes; get back into bed."

"Look here, Wharton—"

"Get into bed, you worm! For two pins I'd give you a spanking now," said Wharton, in disgust. "I don't believe you were asleep at all. You were simply spying into Brown's private concerns."

"Oh, really—"

"Shut up, and get to bed."

Billy Bunter turned in. His fat face was very angry and disappointed as he pulled up the bedclothes round him.

"Now, look here," said Wharton, "I'm going to sleep. But I sha'n't sleep very soundly, and I shall wake up if

anybody moves about. No more of your mean tricks to-night, Bunter."

"I'm going to sleep."

"You'd better! I don't know whether I ought to wake Brown now and warn him—"

"You ass! You'll spoil everything—you—"

"What do you mean?"

"I—I can't explain. I—"

"You mean little toad! I suppose it's just inquisitiveness."

"No, it isn't. You'll understand later, when it all comes out."

"When what all comes out?"

"The—the—I can't quite explain."

"It seems to me that you're going fairly off your chump. I shall have to tell Brown in the morning, of course, or you'll be at his pockets again some time when I'm not on the look-out."

"Oh, I—I— Don't be an ass, Wharton."

"I'll make him promise first not to lick you unless you try it on again," said Harry, relenting a little.

"It—it isn't that. You—you'll spoil everything. I can't explain, but—"

"You'll jolly well have to explain, or else—"

"Well, I—I'll explain in the morning," gasped Bunter. "Don't say anything to Brown till I've explained, that's all."

"Blessed if I can understand you. But I'll do that much, anyway."

"That's all right."

"Now go to sleep; and, mind, no more pocket-picking."

Billy Bunter was soon fast asleep. Harry Wharton, too, dropped off into slumber, but he woke up several times that night, and each time he took a glance up and down the dormitory.

But nobody was stirring. Billy Bunter, once fairly asleep, was not likely to wake for anything short of a cannon-shot, and Harry was reassured at last. Bunter did not wake, as a matter of fact, even when the rising-bell went in the morning, and he did not leave his bed till Bob Cherry generously took him by his ankles and yanked him out; and then the Owl of the Remove was far from grateful.

NEXT
WEEK:

"THE CIRCUS AT GREYFRIARS."

A Splendid Tale of Harry Wharton
& Co. By FRANK RICHARDS.

THE FIFTH CHAPTER

The Greyfriars Detective.

THERE were at least three fellows in the Remove who wore thoughtful looks that morning. One of them was Billy Bunter, and another Harry Wharton. The third was Tom Brown, of Taranaki.

Billy Bunter blinked at Brown several times while the juniors were dressing. It was this that attracted Wharton's attention specially to the New Zealand junior. And then Wharton noticed the thoughtful frown on Brown's face. Tom met his glance, and smiled; but the smile was only momentary, the cloud returned.

Harry Wharton was puzzled. Tom Brown was usually the brightest and sunniest fellow at Greyfriars, and it was decidedly unusual for him to look worried. Harry wondered whether it had anything to do with Bunter. He was determined to have an explanation from the Owl of the Remove, or else speak to the New Zealander, and put him on his guard against Bunter's prying.

Bunter showed a strong desire to avoid Wharton. Loquacious as he usually was, on this occasion he evidently did not want to talk. But Wharton was not to be denied. After breakfast he followed Bunter out of the dining-room, and came up with him in the Close. Bunter walked away very quickly when he saw Harry coming, and the captain of the Remove quickened his pace.

"Billy! Hold on!"

"Oh, is that you, Wharton?" asked Bunter, affecting to see him for the first time.

"You know it is."

"Oh, really, Wharton! You—you see, I—I was looking at the pigeons, you know. Don't they look pretty?"

"Yes. Now about that——"

"I hear you've got a footer practice match on for this afternoon," went on Bunter. "I——"

"Oh, dry up! You don't care anything about footer."

"Oh, I do, you know. I——"

"Look here, come to the point."

"Certainly. I think that if you play Cherry and Nugent, and——" Bunter broke off as Wharton grasped him by the shoulder and shook him. "Ow! Oh! Don't! You'll make my glasses fall off; and if they get broken, you'll have to pay for them."

"Come to the point. You've got to explain. What's all this about looking through Tom Brown's pockets while he's asleep?"

Bunter drew a deep breath. There was no help for it; he had to explain.

"Well, look here, Wharton, what I tell you is in confidence, you know."

"I shall use my own judgment about that."

"Oh, that's not cricket. If you make me explain, you ought to keep the secret. Play the game, you know."

"Well, that's right, I suppose," said Harry, hesitatingly. "Only I reserve the right to warn Brown about your pocket-picking, if I think fit."

"Oh, all right! Now, look here!" Bunter blinked at Harry Wharton. "When you look at my face, Wharton—just look at it—what strikes you most about it?"

"It's fatness."

"Oh, I don't mean that. Anything else?"

"Yes, it's ugliness."

"Oh, really, Wharton! What I mean is, you ought to be able to see the—the unusual intellect—the keen eye—the thoughtful brow——"

"Are you off your rocker?"

"No, I'm not. You know I've taken up a good many ideas since I came to Greyfriars—and made a success of all of them——"

"I don't think."

"Well, I've found out at last what my real line is—my metier, as the French say," said Billy Bunter.

He made this announcement impressively, but Harry Wharton did not seem to be particularly impressed.

"Oh! What is it—picking-pockets?" he asked.

"Oh, really Wharton! No! It's detective work."

Wharton jumped.

"Detective work!"

"Yes. I have felt for some time that I was born to be a detective," said Bunter. "I did not confide it to you fellows, because you always show so much jealousy about the things I do. I waited for some case to come along, so that I could prove my ability, and silence envious tongues."

"You young ass!"

"And that was how I came to take up the case of Tom Brown!" said Bunter.

"The case of Tom Brown," said Harry dazedly.

"Exactly."

"What are you babbling about?"

"I'm not babbling," said Bunter, indignantly. "I've

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been studying the methods of Sherlock Holmes and Sexton Blake, and I know what my mental powers are like. With my splendid abilities as a detective, I can undertake to clear up any mystery. Of course, you fellows never noticed that there was a mystery about Brown."

"A mystery about Brown!"

"Yes," said Bunter, delighted with having made an impression at last. "He's got a secret. I discovered it yesterday morning."

"You ass!"

"He had a letter at breakfast time. He simply jumped when he opened it, and I watched him reading it. I was curious at first, that was all. Well, I noticed that he went about as glum as an owl afterwards, and kept it up all day. That made me more curious. Then he borrowed half-a-sovereign of Wun Lung. Now, you know Brown never borrows money."

"No business of yours if he did."

"My business as a detective," said Bunter, in his best Sherlock Holmes manner. "A detective's trained intellect takes note of the merest trifle——"

"Ass!"

"Oh, really, Wharton! Well, when I saw him borrowing tin, I knew something was up for certain. I determined to get a sight of that letter—— Oh!"

Bunter squirmed as Wharton shook him.

"Ow! Ow! Ow! Chuck it!"

"You young cad! Do you mean to say that you read a chap's private letter?"

"Well, as a detective, you know," gasped Bunter, jerking himself away. "Of course, I wouldn't do anything mean; but as a detective——"

"You young fathead."

"Well, I watched him change his coat at footer practice, and then I nipped into the pavilion and looked at the letter."

"You worm!"

"I only had time for a peep at it, when that ass Cherry came blundering in, and I didn't want him to see me, so I bunked. But I had time to see that there was something in the letter about bringing money, and an appointment was made to meet the writer at the cross-roads, at six o'clock."

Wharton started. He remembered how Billy Bunter had bolted the previous evening and missed his tea, and broken bounds into the bargain.

"So that's where you went?"

"Certainly—as a detective."

"As a mean, prying cad, you mean," said Wharton, sternly.

"Oh, really, Wharton! Well, I went—but owing to you fellows, I was late. I got to the cross-roads, scouting behind the hedges, you know—and there in the dusk I found 'em. Brown was talking to a chap I couldn't see very clearly—it was dusk, and you know I'm a little short-sighted—but he was a chap in a long dark coat, and I shouldn't wonder if he was an Anarchist or something."

"Ass!"

"Well, I couldn't hear what they said—I couldn't get near enough without showing myself—but I saw Brown give him money, and he wrote something on paper and gave it to Brown."

"Oh! And that was what you were trying to get at last night?"

"Yes: I should have read it, and unravelled the whole mystery, if you hadn't interrupted me," said Bunter, in an aggrieved tone. "You can see now what an ass you were."

"I can see now what a prying little bounder you were, Bunter."

"I was acting as a detective," said Bunter, with dignity.

"Detectives do a lot of things ordinary chaps don't do. You can see that there's a mystery about Tom Brown. In fact, without this I should have known that there was something fishy about him, with my experience as a detective. You see, he's so open and frank in his ways, that it's bound to be because he has something to hide. It's my ability as a detective that makes me able to deduce that, you know. Now, it's pretty clear to me that Tom Brown is mixed up in a shady case. Perhaps he's being blackmailed by somebody—and in that case he has a guilty secret, and ought to be expelled from Greyfriars. I shall be doing my duty in showing him up."

Wharton glared at the self-satisfied detective of the Remove.

"You utter ass! Brown is as straight as a die, and anybody but a crass idiot could see it," he said. "If he's giving money to a chap, it's his business, not yours or mine; and you've got to stop this spying. You understand?"

"But——"

"Nuff said! You've got to drop it. I won't make you promise, because you'd break it; but I'll lick you if I catch you spying again. That's flat!"

"Oh, really, Wharton—"

"And I shall warn Brown—"

"Oh, hold on! You—you promised—"

"I won't mention names. But I shall warn him not to leave his papers about where a spying cad could see them, that's all."

Bunter drew a breath of relief.

"Give it up, Billy. You're not a bad cook, but you're a rotten detective. Chuck it, and don't be an ass," advised Wharton.

"I'm sincerely sorry to see this petty jealousy in you, Wharton. I'm accustomed to it from Nugent and Bob Cherry, but—"

"Oh, ring off!" said Wharton impatiently. And he walked away, leaving Billy Bunter still talking.

THE SIXTH CHAPTER.

The Mystery of Tom Brown.

HARRY WHARTON attached no importance whatever to the theories and suspicions of the amateur detective of the Remove; but he could not help observing Tom Brown a little more than usual that morning. Harry felt a sincere friendship for the frank, open-hearted New Zealand junior, and if Tom had been in trouble, he would gladly have helped him. And he could not help noticing that the Colonial was in a thoughtful frame of mind that morning, and a little inattentive in class. Mr. Quelch noticed it, too, and he was sharp with the New Zealander. Tom Brown was usually as keen in class as he was on the football field, and that was saying a good deal.

"Your mind is wandering, I think, Brown," said Mr. Quelch sharply, when Brown had made him an absent-minded answer. "I asked you what was one of the principal products of this county, and you said 'bookmakers.' I trust that your acquaintance with those gentry is not so extensive as to keep them always in your mind."

The Remove giggled, as they always did, at their Form-master's little jokes, and Tom Brown turned scarlet.

"Ye-es, sir," he stammered. "I—I mean, no, sir."

Mr. Quelch looked at him very keenly.

"Your answer is a little contradictory, Brown. I will speak to you after lessons. Kindly remain after the Form is gone."

Tom Brown looked very uncomfortable.

"Yes, sir."

The lesson was resumed. Billy Bunter shot a triumphant glance at Wharton, who was looking surprised and worried. Bunter wrote on a slip of paper with a pencil, and passed it along to Wharton. Harry glanced at it and read:

"What do you think now? The chap he met in the lane must have been a bookmaker. It's betting and gambling."

Wharton destroyed the note.

But he could not get the thought out of his mind. It certainly looked as if the New Zealand junior was falling into bad hands, and that Billy Bunter, by a curious chance, had been the first to discover it.

Harry told himself that it was no business of his, and that it was not his business to meddle. But he was captain of the Remove; and then, Brown was a new boy, from a distant country. If he were getting into trouble, surely it was any decent fellow's business to give him a word of advice in time! Harry shrank from appearing officious, and he was still in doubt upon the subject when the Remove were dismissed.

Tom Brown stayed behind at the master's desk, as he had been directed to do. Mr. Quelch gave him a keen but not unkindly glance.

"You made a most singular reply to me, Brown," he said.

"Yes, sir."

"It was, I suppose, the result of absent-mindedness. You were thinking of something else when I asked you the question."

Tom Brown coloured.

"Yes, sir."

"Now, that was a slight fault, and I can pass over it, as you are usually attentive and painstaking," said the Form-master. "It is for your own sake that I am speaking about the matter now. You made a most singular reply. You appeared to be thinking upon a subject that should be utterly unknown to the thoughts of a boy of your age—horse-racing and gambling."

Tom's colour deepened, but he did not reply.

"I must ask you to satisfy me upon this point, Brown, for your own sake," said the master of the Remove. "Have you made any acquaintance with bookmakers since coming to this school?"

Quick and unhesitating enough was the answer:

"No, sir."

"Have you had any dealings with bookmakers?"

"No, sir."

"Good, so far. But why did you make that singular answer, Brown?"

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NEXT
WEEK:

"THE CIRCUS AT GREYFRIARS."

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HALFPENNY.

"I—I was thinking of something or other, sir, and—and—"

Brown stammered, and came to a stop.

"Very well," said Mr. Quelch, "I accept your explanation that you know nothing of that class of men, and have no dealings with them. A boy was expelled from Greyfriars for betting on horse-races. I considered it my duty to speak to you, as you are a new boy. But I accept your assurance. You may go."

"Thank you, sir."

And Tom Brown drew a deep breath of relief as he quitted the class-room, leaving the Remove-master with a somewhat puzzled expression upon his face.

It was difficult to look into Tom Brown's frank, honest face, and doubt his word. Yet his inadvertent mention of bookmakers had certainly been most singular.

Harry Wharton was waiting for the New Zealander in the passage. Tom Brown was passing him when Harry tapped his arm. Brown started. In his preoccupation he had not noticed the captain of the Remove.

"I want to speak to you," said Harry.

Tom Brown coloured, and then laughed.

"And I want to speak to you," he said. "Go ahead!"

"I want to give you a warning."

The New Zealander started.

"My hat! What's the row? You don't think, too, that—"

He paused.

"I think you had better be careful how you leave any papers or letters about," said Wharton, "especially in your pockets, of a night."

"What?"

"There are prying chaps in the Form, who aren't above reading another fellow's correspondence," said Wharton bluntly.

"My hat!"

"As a matter of fact, I know it has been tried on; but I don't want to give the rotter away," said Harry. "He's more fool than rascal. But I thought I'd mention it to you, so that you can take care of your things."

"Thanks awfully!" said Tom gratefully. "It's jolly good of you. Not that I've got anything I should mind anybody seeing."

He paused, and his colour deepened.

"I say, Wharton, will you—will you do me a favour, if you can?"

"Certainly."

"I'm short of tin," said Tom, his face scarlet now. "I—I've had a run on my money, you know, and—and I want some. I've got a postal-order coming on Saturday—" He stopped, and burst into a merry laugh. "That sounds like Bunter, doesn't it?"

Wharton laughed, too.

"Yes; but I know your remittances are real ones," he said. "That's all right. As it happens, I'm in funds now, and I can lend you some tin if you like."

"You know I'm not a borrower as a rule," said Tom, colouring again. "I don't like it. But this is an exceptional case. I want a sovereign badly."

Wharton gave a low whistle.

"I'm afraid you've stumped me, old chap," he said. "My uncle is pretty liberal with pocket-money, but I haven't many sovereigns knocking about. They don't grow very plentifully in the Lower Fourth, you know."

Tom Brown laughed ruefully.

"I—I suppose not."

"But it's all right. I can raise it," said Wharton quickly.

"I can manage half myself, and I will raise the rest in No. 1 Study. Wait a minute till I speak to Nugent and Inky."

"You're awfully good."

"Bosh!"

Wharton ran off, and found Frank Nugent and Hurree Janset Ram Singh going on to the football-ground. He was not gone long, and Tom Brown waited for him at the door of the Schoolhouse. Wharton returned in a few minutes.

"Here you are!" he said.

He had a half-sovereign, three half-crowns, and some small silver in his hand. He slid it into Tom Brown's hand.

"Thanks!" said Tom awkwardly. "This is jolly decent of you. I'll make it all square on Saturday."

"That's all right!"

A weight seemed to be lifted from the New Zealand junior's mind as the money jingled into his pocket. Wharton looked at him curiously. He had been in doubt as to whether to give Brown a little friendly advice; but the fact that he had just lent him money seemed to make it impossible now.

"Coming to the footer practice?" he asked.

"Yes, rather!" said Brown brightly.

"We're getting up a scratch match this afternoon," said Wharton. It was Wednesday, a half-holiday at Greyfriars.

"Bob Cherry is going to captain one side, and myself the other. We're picking the best men for the Form team. It will give you a chance to show what you can do in the Soccer line, Brown."

Brown coloured again.

"I—I sha'n't be able to play this afternoon," he said awkwardly.

Wharton stared at him.

"Why on earth not?"

"I—I've an appointment."

Harry Wharton looked very serious.

"Well, I don't want to interfere with your appointments," he said, "but you oughtn't to miss a match like this, at the beginning of the season, too. It may have some influence on whether you go into the Form eleven or not."

"I'm sorry."

"You can't put off your appointment?"

"Oh, impossible!" said Tom hastily.

"Well that settles it."

And Wharton said no more on the subject. They went down to the ground, and Tom Brown threw himself heartily into the practice till it was time to go in for dinner. While they were kicking and passing, a fat junior sat on a bench under the elms, blinking over a pocket-book, in which he was making notes.

Bunter, the detective, had had his eye on the two, and had contrived to hear most of what they said. As a matter of fact, they had not lowered their voices, having no idea that an eavesdropper was at work.

Bunter's notes ran as follows:

"T. B. borrowed a pound of Wharton. Borrowed a half-sov. of Wun Lung yesterday. Usually flush of money, and never borrows."

"T. B. is cutting the match this afternoon. Usually very keen on football, and won't miss a match for anything. Important appointment."

"T. B. talked about bookmakers in class when off his guard."

"General deduction: T. B. mixed up with gambling, races, and bookmakers—in debt, probably blackmail—expelled if found out."

And Bunter read over his notes, grinned with satisfaction over them, then snapped the book shut, and jammed it into his breast-pocket.

"Good," he murmured. "I rather think I shall be on the track this afternoon, when Brown keeps his appointment. Where did he go last night? I was on their track after the meeting in the lane, for over an hour, and I lost sight of him. That was because it was dark. I shall have a better chance in the daylight. I rather think Brown won't escape this time."

Bunter pursed up his lips thoughtfully.

And when he had found Brown out in all his iniquity, what then? That was the next thought in the fat junior's mind.

It would prove his ability as a detective to give the New Zealander away, and have him expelled from the school. But Bunter was not ill-natured. He would tell a few fellows the facts, in justice to himself, and then he would let Brown off lightly. Brown was usually flush with money, and Bunter was the reverse. A vision of a long succession of free feeds in the school shop rose before Bunter's mind and dazzled him.

Bunter, the detective, felt that he was going strong!

THE SEVENTH CHAPTER.

No Chance for Bunter!

"BUNTER! Where's that ass Bunter?"

It was Bulstrode who demanded the whereabouts of the Owl of the Remove. Bulstrode and Hazeldene, and Stott and Skinner stood in the hall, two of them carrying big baskets. They were not playing in the match of the afternoon, and as the weather was unusually mild for the season, Bulstrode had planned an open-air feed on the slopes of the Black Pike.

He wanted Bunter. Bunter was usually quite ready to accompany any feeding expedition, and as he was a wonderful cook, his services were sometimes requisitioned, and he was allowed to feed. As a rule, the sight of the big baskets carried by Hazeldene and Stott would have drawn the fat junior to the spot like magic. On the present occasion, however, even Bulstrode's stentorian voice failed to fetch him.

Bulstrode growled with anger.

"Where is that fat dunmy?" he exclaimed. "I say, Brown, have you seen Bunter?"

Tom Brown was just coming by with his cap on, evidently going out. Although he shared Bulstrode's study, he was on the worst of terms with the bully of the Remove. He glanced at Bulstrode.

"He was in the Remove passage a minute ago!" he said, and passed on.

Bulstrode growled.

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"The young fathead! He must have heard me calling then! Why doesn't he come?"

"He can't know it's a feed," grinned Hazeldene.

"Bunter—Bunter!"

"Here he is!"

The fat form of Billy Bunter came scuttling down the stairs. But he did not come towards Bulstrode & Co. He hurried after Tom Brown, who had just gone out of the house into the sunny Close.

Bulstrode stared after him in blank amazement.

"Bunter—Bunter!"

Bunter heard but did not heed. He made a bee-line for the door, and it was clear that his only desire was to escape before he could be captured.

Bulstrode stood staring at him for some moments in amazement, and then he made a rush after the fat junior.

Billy Bunter quickened his pace as he heard him coming, but the Remove bully ran him down a few yards from the door. Bunter squirmed in his grasp and yelled.

"Ow! Leggo! Don't! Yow! Help!"

"You young idiot! I'm not going to hurt you."

"Oh, really Bulstrode—"

"We want you to come with us," said Bulstrode.

"I—I can't really."

"It's a feed."

At any other time those words would have settled it. Bunter would have gone with the Remove bully with the greatest alacrity. But now he only wriggled.

"I—I—I'm sorry, Bulstrode, but—I really can't come."

"You young ass! What do you mean?"

"I—I've got an appointment—an important appointment."

"Bosh!"

Billy Bunter blinked towards the school gates, where the figure of Tom Brown was just disappearing. He squirmed in Bulstrode's grip, but the bully of the Remove would not let go. His grip tightened instead.

"Oh, Bulstrode! Really, I—I must go."

"Rubbish! You're coming with us."

"I—I can't."

"I tell you it's a feed!"

"I don't care! I can't come!"

"Can't you?" said the Remove bully grimly. "We'll see. Are you coming quietly, or shall I give you a licking first, and then lead you by the ear?"

"Oh! I—I'll come quietly."

"Oh, let him go!" said Hazeldene. "We don't want him, if he doesn't want to come."

Bulstrode scowled.

"Mind your own business, Vaseline. You can stay out if you want to. I'm jolly well going to take Bunter to cook for us!"

"We don't want any rotten bullying."

"If you don't like it, get out!"

Hazeldene set down his basket.

"Well, I will!" he exclaimed. "Blessed if I want to come, anyway! You can carry your basket yourself!"

And he walked away.

"Here, I say—" began Bulstrode; but Hazeldene was gone.

"Never mind," said Skinner, with a grin; "all the more for us! I'll carry the basket! Bring that fat beast along!"

"I—I say, you fellows—"

"Shut up!"

"I—I sha'n't shut up! I've got an important appointment this afternoon! I—I wouldn't miss it for worlds, and—"

"Who's it with?"

"I—I can't exactly tell you—"

"Where is it, then?"

"I can't explain—"

Bulstrode gave the fat junior a shake that made him gasp for breath.

"You're lying as usual!" he said savagely. "I don't know what your little game is, but you're coming with us!"

"He's off his rocker, I think!" said Skinner. "I heard that he went out last night and missed his tea!"

"Oh, that's too thick!" said Stott incredulously.

"Well, I had it from Nugent."

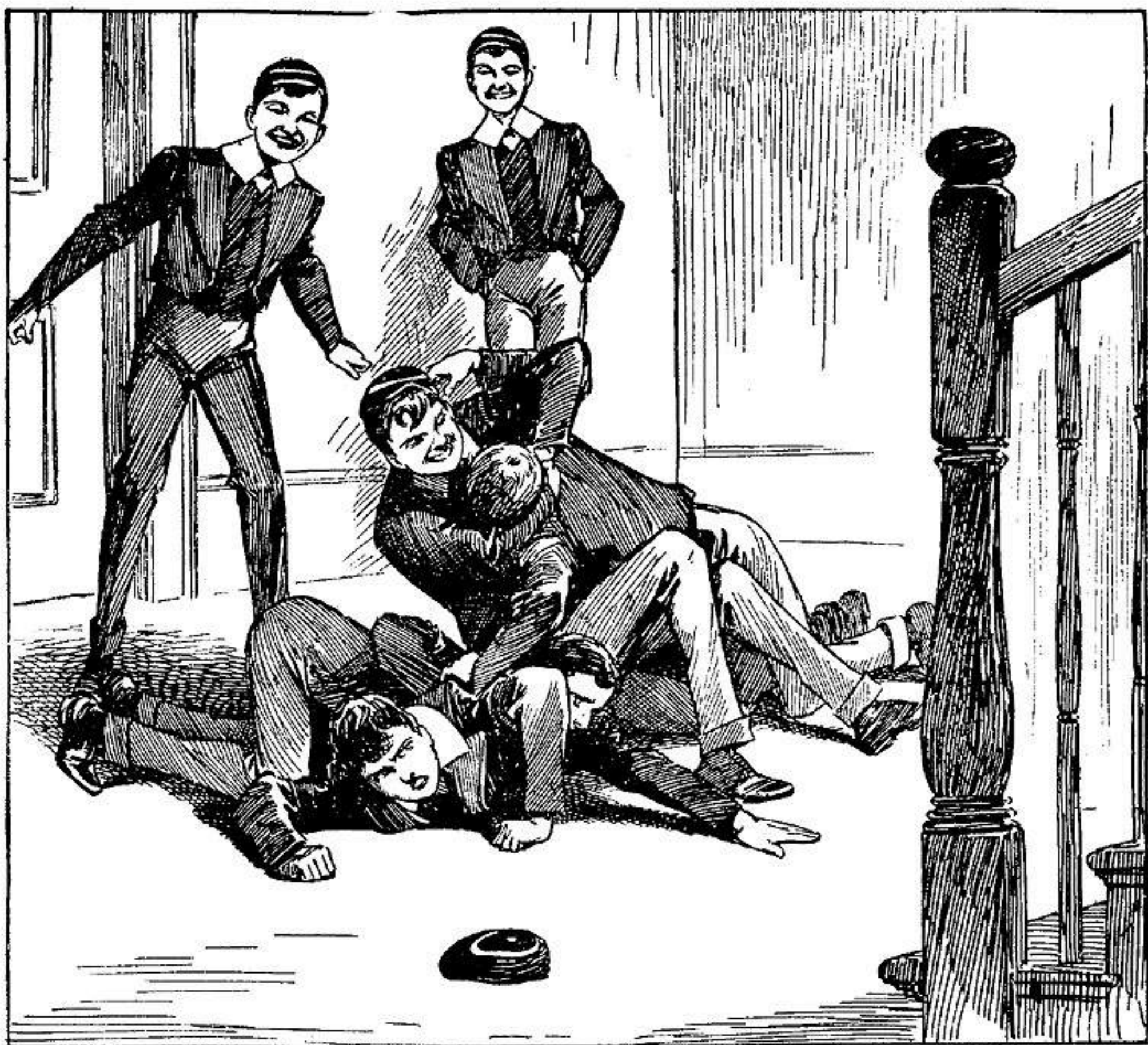
"I say, you fellows—"

"Come on!"

Bulstrode kept a grip like a vice on Bunter's arm. The fat junior looked round helplessly as he was marched towards the gates. Harry Wharton & Co. were on the football-field, hard at work with the footer. They were too far off for help, and in any case he would have got little sympathy from them in his desire to spy on Tom Brown. It looked as if the detective business was to be a rank failure for that afternoon.

Billy ventured upon another remonstrance, which only elicited a tremendous shaking from Bulstrode, and that left him too little breath to remonstrate further. He was marched out into the lane.

There he glanced up and down for Tom Brown. The sturdy



Harry Wharton gasped and struggled under the weight of Bulstrode & Co. "Lemme gerrup, you asses!" he panted. "I'm in a hurry."

figure of the New Zealander was not in sight. Bunter was puzzled. If Brown had been going down to the village, he would still have been in sight in the lane. Where had the New Zealander gone?

But Bunter had no time to think of that. Bulstrode's grasp dragged him on, and the party left the lane and took the foot-path through the wood towards the rugged slope of the hill known as the Black Pike.

THE EIGHTH CHAPTER.

Bunter Runs for It.

BILLY BUNTER looked downcast and worried as he tramped up the sloping path of the Pike. That afternoon he was to have run Tom Brown and his mysterious acquaintance to earth, and to have gathered all the threads of the mystery in his hands. Bulstrode's picnic had knocked the whole thing on the head.

No wonder the Greyfriars detective was worried!

Bulstrode watched his fat face curiously as they went up the hill, the short-sighted Owl quite unconscious of his scrutiny.

"What on earth's the matter with you, Bunter?" exclaimed Bulstrode at last. "You want to come to a feed as a rule!"

"I've got an appointment."

"Bosh! Can't you tell the truth?"

"Oh, really, Bulstrode—"

"Oh, get on with you!" said Bulstrode, in disgust. "You're THE MAGNET—No. 92.

jolly well going to come and do the cooking for us, and if you don't look a bit more cheerful about it, you sha'n't have any thing to eat!"

"I say, you know—"

"Shut up!"

Bunter's eyes glinted behind his spectacles.

He was not resourceful as a rule, except in borrowing money or getting feeds, but his wits were sharpened now by necessity. He simply had to get away and get on the track of Tom Brown.

He could not escape Bulstrode by force, but he might by cunning. He assumed a sickly sort of grin.

"Well, you can let go, Bulstrode. I'm not likely to run on this sort of ground," he said. "I suppose I had better come."

"You had, my son—and you've got no choice in the matter."

"What have you got in the baskets?"

"Cooking things in one; grub in the other—ham and eggs, pork-pies and mince-pies, pudding and cake, oranges and apples and cocoanuts—"

"I—I say, I'll come."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Bulstrode released the fat junior. Bunter punted along beside him with his little jerky steps.

"I—I say, Bulstrode, why not stop here and have a snack?" he suggested. "I suppose you fellows are getting peckish—I am!"

"Rats!"

"It isn't half an hour since dinner!" said Stott. "Blessed if I know where Buntie puts it! I say, this hill is jolly steep!"

"There's a flat half-way up, where we're going to camp," said Bulstrode.

"I say, you fellows! Better rest here, and——"

"Shut up, Bunter!"

They tramped on. In the clear sunlight the Pike rose before them, clad in thick woods and bush. On either side of the tramping juniors rose thick trees, shutting out their view of the surrounding country.

Bunter looked round him cautiously.

If he could only get fairly among the trees, it would be impossible for the others to run him down, for there would be no trace on the hard soil, and a fellow might be only six yards distant, and yet completely hidden from sight.

Now or never was his chance.

He affected fatigue, and dropped a pace or two behind, in order to avert suspicion. He really surprised himself by the depth of his cunning.

"I say, you fellows, don't hurry like that!" he gasped. "I can't keep up with you!"

"Walk faster, then!"

"I can't! Go slower!"

"Rats!"

Bunter grinned silently. He was five or six paces behind now, and there was nothing to prevent him from making a run for it.

Quickly, with beating heart, he stepped aside from the path and plunged into the thickets. The rustle made Bulstrode look round.

"Bunter! Why—where? My hat! He's gone!"

"Gone!" ejaculated Skinner and Stott.

Bulstrode snapped his teeth.

"You two keep on with the baskets—I'll have him in a jiffy!"

"Right you are!"

Bulstrode rushed back along the path. There was a crackling in the wood as the fat junior forced a passage through, and Bulstrode rushed after him.

"Bunter! Stop! Come back, or I'll scalp you!"

His voice rang echoing through the wood. Bunter heard it, and redoubled his efforts. He ran on blindly down the slope of the hill, several times falling and rolling over, then picking himself up and tearing on.

But he had not calculated upon the fact that his brushing through the thickets might be a guide to Bulstrode. The noise he made could have been heard at a hundred yards' distance, and Bulstrode was not a dozen yards away.

The Remove bully grinned as he dashed in pursuit.

Bunter burst through a belt of young furze, and came into an open space, caught his foot in a root, and rolled helplessly on the ground.

Before he could rise Bulstrode came tearing out of the thickets, and almost fell over him. He halted.

"You fat duffer! I've caught you!"

"Oh!" yelled Bunter. "Ow! Lemme alone! Help! Murder! Yow-ow! Help!"

"You ass!"

"Help! Murder! Fire!"

"Hold that row! Come back with me!"

"I won't! I——"

Bulstrode seized the fat junior by his collar, and dragged him to his feet. There was a rustle in the furze, and a sturdy figure came into sight.

"Let him alone, you bully!"

Bulstrode started, and let go Bunter in his surprise. He stared blankly at the junior, who stood before him with flashing eyes.

It was Tom Brown of Taranaki!

THE NINTH CHAPTER.

The Fight.

TOM BROWN faced Bulstrode with clenched fists over the collapsed form of the fat junior, who had dropped into the grass again as Bulstrode released him.

Bunter lay gasping and panting, and blinking from one to the other.

He was utterly amazed by the sudden appearance of Tom Brown, not having had the faintest idea that the New Zealander was anywhere near the Black Pike.

It flashed into his mind at once that the mysterious appointment Tom was keeping that afternoon was amid the woods of the Pike. It was for that reason that the New Zealander was there, and had been able to come to Bunter's rescue so opportunely.

Bulstrode glared fiercely at the New Zealander.

More than once he had come to strife with Tom Brown of Taranaki, though as yet there had been no stand-up fight between them. But it seemed to be inevitable in the long run.

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Tom Brown met the Remove bully's furious glance coolly.

"Let him alone!" he said.

"You interfering cub!"

"Better language, please."

"You—you hound!" roared Bulstrode, almost beside himself with rage. "You dare to dictate to me! Why, I'll knock you to pieces!"

Tom Brown smiled quietly.

"You had better not try," he said.

"Stand back!"

"Rats!"

Bulstrode almost gasped for breath. His eyes were blazing, his fists clenching almost convulsively.

"Stand back!" he said hoarsely.

"You are not going to touch Bunter. I've stopped your bullying him before. I know he's a mean toad——"

"Oh, really, Brown——"

"But I'm not going to stand by and see him bullied by a fellow nearly twice his size," said Tom Brown scornfully. "I don't know what he's done——"

"I—I haven't done anything, Brown! Bulstrode wants me to cook for him, and I won't. I—I've got other business."

"You are coming with me, Bunter, if only to show this Colonial rotter that he can't put on airs with me!"

"I—I won't!"

"Bunter shall do as he likes," said Tom Brown, with quiet determination. "I don't want a row with you, Bulstrode, but I stand by Bunter."

"Then you'll have a row, whether you like it or not!" said Bulstrode between his teeth. "Take your jacket off, you cub!"

Tom Brown stripped his jacket off, and pushed back his cuffs.

"Very well! Come on! You can clear, Bunter!"

Billy Bunter staggered to his feet. He was breathless and panting. He put his glasses straight, and blinked at the two juniors, about to close in strife.

Perhaps for a moment the fat junior's conscience smote him, as he remembered how he had only come there because he wanted to spy upon the New Zealander. But that feeling was only momentary.

He blinked at them for a moment, and then scuttled off into the trees. Bulstrode made a movement to follow him, and Tom Brown stepped quickly into the way.

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

Bulstrode ground his teeth.

"Then come on, you cad!"

He rushed at the New Zealander. Tom Brown was ready for him, and in a moment they were going at it hammer and tongs.

Billy Bunter disappeared into the trees. But he did not go far. The fat junior had no intention of losing sight of his quarry now that he had found him.

He ensconced himself in the thickets, at a point where he could watch the contest without showing himself.

It was worth watching, too—even to Bunter, who took little interest in fisticuffs as a rule. The opponents were well-matched, and equally determined.

Bulstrode was by far the bigger of the two, and perhaps the stronger, but he lacked the quick, lithe activity of the New Zealand junior.

Tom Brown, too, knew all there was to be known of the manly art of self-defence, and Bulstrode, though a good boxer, was not quite his equal in science.

The fight was a fast one—no stopping for rounds or rests. They simply fought on, hammer and tongs, with flushed faces, glinting eyes, and rapid fists.

Bulstrode was the first to go to grass.

He dropped on his back under a terrible right-hander, which caught him fairly on the point of the chin, and lay there gasping.

Tom Brown stepped back, and leaned against a tree.

He waited for his adversary to rise, and did not touch him until he was fairly on his feet and ready to resume—a piece of chivalry Bulstrode would probably have been slow to imitate.

The Remove bully looked very groggy as he stood up.

His chin and jaw ached terribly, and a kind of jar had gone all through him, and his sight, too, was by no means clear after the hammering his face had had.

Tom Brown showed plentiful signs of punishment, but he did not look nearly so battered as the Remove bully.

Bulstrode staggered a little as he advanced towards Tom again.

"I've had enough if you have," said the New Zealander quietly. "I don't want this to go any further."

Bulstrode laughed scornfully.

"You're afraid!"

"Oh, no!"

"Then come on!"

"Just as you like," said Tom quietly.

They closed in strife again. Bulstrode was putting all his

strength into the conflict, but he began to feel that it was too fast to last. There was a wiriness about the New Zealander—a tirelessness that quite outdid Bulstrode's endurance.

Bulstrode had "bellows to mend" with a vengeance now, and he was growing so exhausted that he could scarcely guard his face.

Tom Brown's blows grew fewer and less telling.

The Remove bully gritted his teeth with helpless rage. Tom was sparing him, and he knew it. Its only result was to make him strive harder and harder to reach the New Zealander, and to knock him out; but that was past his power now.

Every blow was stopped, and whenever a fist reached its mark, it was one of Tom Brown's fists.

Bulstrode dropped at last into the grass with a heavy bump, as an upper-cut sent him whirling off his feet.

This time it was full five minutes before he rose.

Tom Brown leaned against a tree, breathing hard. He had got the better of the fight all along the line, but it was telling upon him too.

Bulstrode staggered up at last. His face was black with rage.

"I'll square this some time!" he muttered thickly.

Tom Brown smiled scornfully.

The Remove bully gave him one furious look, and then dragged his jacket on and plunged into the trees.

Exhausted, and aching with pain, the burly Removite tramped through the wood to the plateau half-way up the Black Pike, where he had arranged to camp with Skinner and Stott. They were already on the ground when he arrived and flung himself down exhausted.

The two juniors stared at him.

"Where's Bunter?" asked Skinner.

"I don't know."

"You haven't brought him back with you?"

"Can't you see I haven't?" snarled Bulstrode.

"Well, yes. But how did you get your face in that state? Surely Bunter didn't use you like that?"

If Bulstrode had had an ounce of strength left that unlucky question would have cost the questioner dear. As it was, he only scowled blackly.

"No, you fool! I've been fighting."

"Who with?"

"Tom Brown."

"You licked him?" asked Stott.

"We—we agreed to chuck it," said Bulstrode.

"Oh!" said Skinner and Stott together. And there was a great deal of significance in the way they uttered that "oh."

THE TENTH CHAPTER.

Bunter's Gratitude.

BILLY BUNTER, like Brer Fox, lay low.

He saw Bulstrode depart, and he watched Tom Brown from the cover of the thickets. He wondered what the New Zealander would do. Was this spot in the woods of the Black Pike the scene of the "appointment" which had brought him away from Greyfriars, and caused him to miss the football match?

Tom Brown wiped his face with his handkerchief. He was breathless, perspiring, and there was a stream of red from his nose, another from a cut lip. Tom had suffered less than Bulstrode, but he had been hard hit all the same.

He gave a rueful laugh as he donned his jacket.

"Blessed if that fat worm was worth it!" he exclaimed.

Bunter grunted in the thicket.

Tom gave his face another rub, and then went slowly into the wood. Bunter saw him glance at his watch as he went. For a few moments Bunter remained still.

After the way Tom Brown had stood up for him, and rescued him from the bully of the Remove, any sort of decency ought to have kept the fat junior from following him. But Bunter forgot that. He only remembered that he was an amateur detective, and on the track.

He rose silently from his hiding-place, and stepped after the New Zealander, cautiously and carefully.

Tom Brown had not the slightest suspicion that he was being followed, and he was so fatigued by the fight with Bulstrode that he proceeded very slowly. And so Bunter had no difficulty in keeping on his track. When the junior vanished from his sight, the snapping of twigs formed a sufficient guide to the pursuer.

Tom Brown went on and on, till Bunter would gladly have stopped and rested; but suddenly he came to a halt.

Bunter heard the trickle of water, and caught the glint of a woodland stream ahead among the trees.

The New Zealand junior had stopped by the stream, and thrown off his jacket and vest. He was bathing his face in the cool water.

Bunter grunted with disgust.

It was not the rendezvous after all. Probably Tom Brown had plenty of time for that; and, at all events, he was bathing his injuries now.

Bunter sank down into the thick grass to wait.

The New Zealander splashed and splashed, and grunted.

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with satisfaction as the cool water streamed over his bruised and aching face.

He spent a good ten minutes by the stream, and then he began to mop his face with his handkerchief, and at last he donned his collar and tie and jacket again.

Bunter, lying low, caught a glimpse of his face, and, indeed, it was much improved by the washing in the stream.

The cuts and bruises could not be got rid of, but the blood and dust were gone, and Tom Brown looked decidedly the better for it.

But the Colonial's face was a little rueful as he looked at his reflection in the stream.

"My hat! what a chivvy!" he murmured. And all for that fat worm of a Bunter! Well, it can't be helped."

The fat worm in question heard every word.

"Blessed if I don't make him swallow his words before long," murmured Billy Bunter. "Wasn't worth it, wasn't it! I'll show him! You wait till I've got you nailed, you bounder, that's all!"

And that was the gratitude of William George Bunter!

Tom Brown looked at his watch again, and left the stream, going on further through the thick woods.

The ascent of the Pike was now abrupt, and Billy Bunter's fat legs, unaccustomed to exercise, began to ache dreadfully.

But he would not give in.

Tom Brown, rested and refreshed, strode on as if the rugged steep of the Pike was nothing to him, as indeed it was not. To Bunter it was as Mont Blanc and the Jungfrau rolled into one, and he mumbled and gasped as he proceeded, taking care, however, to make no sound that could reach the ears of the junior he was shadowing.

Billy Bunter was making the discovery that a detective's life is not a happy one; but he stuck to the trail gamely.

Tom Brown suddenly disappeared.

Bunter, pressing on through the thickets, could neither see nor hear him, and he blinked round through his spectacles in blank amazement.

Where was the New Zealander?

It looked as if the earth had suddenly swallowed him up—and, indeed it had, in a sense.

Bunter, pushing on cautiously, came out upon the verge of a huge hollow in the side of the hill, where an abrupt slope led downwards.

There the trees and even the bushes gave way to hard stone and barren earth. The sudden slope was bare of vegetation.

Bunter crouched in the last bushes, and looked ahead.

It was impossible to follow the Maori down that slope without betraying himself to the most careless glance if Tom Brown should happen to turn his head.

"Crumbs!" muttered Bunter. "What a rotten shame! It looks to me as if the beast has come this way on purpose. I—I'd like to punch his beastly head!"

He blinked down the slope. It extended for a dozen yards, and was very steep. Loose stones rolled to the bottom as Tom Brown tramped down.

Bunter uttered a suppressed exclamation of glee.

Another figure beside Tom Brown's was visible in the hollow, and he knew it was the same figure that he had seen with Tom in the lane the previous night.

This was the place of the mysterious appointment.

Bunter blinked at the stranger. He was a fellow of about Tom Brown's own size, or a little bigger, and he wore a soft felt hat pulled down over his face. Even without that, the fat junior was too short-sighted to distinguish his features at that distance.

Whether it was a boy or a man, the fat detective did not know. In the soft hat and coat it might have been either to Bunter.

The stranger made a step forward as Tom Brown came down the slope.

"Hallo, Tom!"

It sounded like a youthful voice.

"Hallo!" called out Tom cheerily in reply.

Then he joined the stranger.

That was all Billy Bunter heard. The fat junior strained his ears to hear more, and a murmur of voices came to his ears as the two conversed in low tones; but that was all. He could not catch a word.

"The beasts!" murmured Bunter—"the beasts!"

The Greyfriars detective seemed to consider that it was the duty of his quarry to do their talking within his hearing, so that he could become cognisant of their secrets. He blinked and scowled at them.

But suddenly he gave a start, and his eyes gleamed.

Tom Brown was fishing in his pockets, and as his hand came out there was a gleam of gold and silver in the sun.

"Money!"

The coins were passed to the stranger, and Bunter thought

he made out the words, "Thank you, Tom, old man." But he was not quite sure.

Money had passed between the two again.

Then a paper was handed by the stranger to Tom Brown, who smiled and thrust it into his pocket.

Billy Bunter's heart beat faster.

Money had passed again, and another mysterious paper. If he could only get a sight of that paper.

What a dark secret it might tell him!

Probably it contained some clue to the secret transactions of Tom Brown, whether in the line of crime or of betting on horse races.

Was he being blackmailed, or was this stranger an agent for laying his bets on the races?

In either case, the facts becoming known would be sufficient to get him sacked from the school.

"I've got him!" murmured Bunter. "I've got him in the hollow of my hand!"

The two had resumed conversation, and Bunter would have given one of his ears to hear what they were saying.

In his eagerness to do so, he leaned out in view of the talkers, if they had turned their heads in his direction.

Suddenly a stone slipped under his foot, and rolled down the slope. The noise it made startled the two talkers, and they started away from each other and looked round.

Billy Bunter gave a start, too, and overbalanced himself. The next moment he had lost his footing, and was following the rolling stone to the bottom of the steep slope.

THE ELEVENTH CHAPTER. A Defiant Culprit.

"OH!"

"Ow!"

"Yarrah!"

Thus the amateur detective of Greyfriars made his presence known to the junior he was shadowing.

As he rolled down the slope, amid a clatter of stones and roots and dirt, Tom Brown stared at him in blank astonishment, and Tom Brown's friend turned suddenly away, and plunged into the nearest bushes.

It was pretty clear that he did not want to be seen, but Billy Bunter had no chance of noting that circumstance or any other now.

He rolled to the bottom of the slope, and came to a stop in a sitting posture, in a pool of water left in the soft soil by the last rainfall.

Muddy water splashed up round him, as Bunter sat dazed, and snorting and gasping like a grampus.

Tom Brown, standing alone now, stared at him.

"Bunter!"

"Ow!"

"How did you get here?"

"Ger-orororoooooh!"

"Get up!"

"Ow! ow! Yow!"

"You're sitting in a puddle, you ass!"

"Ow! I'm nearly killed. Yow! I've broken my neck—I mean, my leg! I've dislocated my shoulder-blade, and put my backbone out of joint. Ow!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Bunter glared at him.

"You—you unfeeling beast! I'm dying."

"You're making a jolly lot of row for a dying grampus," said Tom Brown laughing. "Get up. You're worth dozens of dead pigs yet."

"Oh, really, Brown—"

Tom Brown helped the fat junior to his feet. Bunter leant against the slope of the hollow, dripping with water, and gasping for breath.

"Ow! I'm nearly dead!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Yow! It was all your fault, you beast!"

"My fault!" said Brown, staring. "How on earth do you make that out? By the way, how did you come to be here?"

"I—I—I came, you know," said Bunter, feebly.

It occurred to him that it would not be wise to let Tom Brown know too much. But the New Zealand junior was already guessing a great deal.

His brow became very stern.

"Bunter! You've followed me!"

"I—I—oh, really, you know—"

"You're the chap who's been trying to pry into my affairs, too!" exclaimed Tom Brown, understanding now in a flash that it was Bunter whom Harry Wharton had been alluding to in that strange warning.

Bunter gasped, keeping a wary eye on the angry Colonial.

"Oh, really, Brown, if Wharton has been telling you that I—"

"Wharton did not mention you to me. He warned me to

be on my guard against a cad who might spy on me, that's all."

"I—I—I—"

Tom Brown advanced closer to the fat junior. Billy Bunter shrank away, blinking nervously. The sturdy young Colonial looked very savage.

"You've been spying on me, Bunter?"

"Well, you shouldn't go in for gambling and horse-racing and blackmail," said Billy Bunter defiantly. "I've lately taken up detective work as a hobby, and I've run you to earth. I've solved the mystery now."

"Are you mad?"

"No; I'm jolly well not mad!" said Bunter indignantly. "You're a blessed rascal, that's what the matter is; and it's through you I've got this beastly fall and sprained both my ankles!"

"I'm a—a—a what?"

Tom Brown seemed scarcely able to believe his ears.

"A blessed rascal," said Bunter. "I've been keeping an eye on you. I don't mean to say that I'm going to show you up."

"Show me up!"

"That's it! But I'm going to keep an eye on you, I promise you. I know your little games, and I could get you expelled from Greyfriars with a word."

Tom stared blankly at him.

"So you'd better jolly well mind your p's and q's," said Billy Bunter. "It's no good trying to pull the wool over my eyes, either. With my splendid abilities as an amateur detective—"

"You utter fool!"

"Here, I say—what—"

"I've a jolly good mind to give you the licking of your life, you mean, prying, silly young ass!" said Tom Brown, in a concentrated voice.

"You'd better not lay a hand on me!" said Bunter, in alarm. "I'll jolly well show you up at Greyfriars, if you do, and let the fellows know what I've found out."

"Found out! What have you found out?"

"Everything!"

"You cad! I—"

"Oh, hard words break no bones, you know!" said Billy Bunter, with a grin. "I don't mind 'em. I've found everything out—about your dealing with bookmakers, giving 'em money on the quiet—paying blackmail—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Yes, you can cackle if you like," said Bunter nettled. "But you'd jolly well cackle to another tune if I told it all at Greyfriars."

"You young ass! You ought to have a licking, but you're not worth it. I wish I had left you to Bulstrode, though. I dare say he was only going to give you what you deserved. Look here! I won't lick you now. But if you begin any more of your rotten spying, I'll give you a thick ear. Bear that in mind!"

And Tom Brown turned and strode away.

Billy Bunter blinked after him for some moments in astonished silence; astonished that the culprit, whose guilt he had discovered, should venture to treat him in this cavalier fashion.

"I say, Brown, come back!" he shouted at last.

Tom Brown did not turn his head.

"Brown! Come back! I want to speak to you! You'd better come back, or I'll make it jolly warm for you!"

The New Zealand junior, without paying the slightest heed, disappeared into the wood. Billy Bunter gritted his teeth.

"The—the beast!" he muttered. "He thinks he can carry it off with a high hand. I'll jolly well show him! I'll make him squirm!"

And Bunter, with many a grunt and gasp, made his way back to Greyfriars from the rugged sides of the Black Pike.

THE TWELFTH CHAPTER.

Accused!

HARRY WHARTON came off the football-field with a red glow of health in his cheeks, and a sparkle in his eyes. It was only a scratch match, but it had been a vigorous one, and all the twenty-two were the better for it. Bob Cherry was limping a little, and Frank Nugent caressed a nose that was a little larger than usual. But what of that? Football was football, and they did not expect it to be as gentle as marbles.

Tom Brown was standing outside the pavilion when the Removites came off.

"Good game?" he asked.

"Yes, rather!"

"The goodfulness was terrific," remarked Hurree Jamset

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Ram Singh. "Has the honourable Brownful chum been watching the gameful sport longtimefully?"

Tom Brown laughed.

"No; I've only just got in. If any of you chaps are standing tea, I'll come along; I'm stony this afternoon."

Then he coloured a little as he met Wharton's eyes. Only that afternoon the captain of the Remove had lent him a sovereign.

"Right-ho!" exclaimed Nugent. "Tea in No. 1 Study. We've got rather a decent spread, owing to the amazing fact that Bunter hasn't been raiding the grub the last day or two. He seems to have gone off gorging a bit."

"He's gone off his rocker, I think," said Tom Brown.

"Very likely. But why?"

"I've just met him on the Black Pike, and he seems to me to be a babbling idiot," said Tom. "He says he's taken up some detective bosh, or something."

"Ha, ha! One of Bunter's new wheezes."

"Bunter, the detective!" grinned Bob Cherry. "My hat! He grows richer and richer! This beats the hypnotism business, and even the boxing."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"We're going to have tea as soon as we've changed, Brown," said Harry Wharton. "We'll be glad for you to join us. Wait a bit!"

"Right! I'll wait here."

The somewhat dishevelled and perspiring footballers proceeded to clean themselves and change into ordinary attire, and Tom Brown leaned on a post and waited. There was a frown of thoughtfulness on his boyish brow.

A tired and dusty figure came limping in at the gates of Greyfriars.

It was Billy Bunter—hot, tired, thirsty, and in about the worst temper it was possible for a fat and fatigued youth to be in.

Tom Brown grinned a little as he saw him.

Bunter seemed to have paid pretty dearly for his shadowing. The fat junior sighted him. He stopped only to take a draught of water at the fountain, and then came over towards Tom Brown, with a truculent look upon his face.

"I say, Brown, I've found you, then."

"I haven't been hiding," said the New Zealand junior contemptuously. "Don't bother me, Bunter! I don't want to hit you, but I'm not in a humour to stand any more of your rot, so I warn you!"

"You've got to stand it!"

"What?"

"Better listen to me. If you raise a finger I'll yell for help, and tell the whole yarn before the whole school," said Bunter savagely.

Tom Brown could only stare at him.

"I'm thirsty," said Bunter, "and I'm hungry. I want a feed. I want plenty of ginger-pop, and the best spread that we can get at Mrs. Mumble's."

"I hope you'll get it."

"You're going to see to that."

"I!" said Tom Brown.

"Yes, you."

"You must be dotty," said the New Zealand junior, in wonder. "Go and lie down for a bit."

Bunter snorted.

"You can try to carry it off by cheek, if you like, but I'll make you squirm, my fine fellow! You—you gambling rotter!"

Tom Brown's eyes glinted, and he made a swift step forward, and caught Bunter by the scruff of the neck.

"Ow! Leggo! Yow!"

Shake! Shake! Shake!

"Ow! Help! Hellup! Yow! Help!"

Harry Wharton & Co., having changed their clothes, came out. They looked on in astonishment at the spectacle of Billy Bunter being shaken like a rat by the angry New Zealander.

"Hallo, hallo, hallo!" exclaimed Bob Cherry. "Is our friend Brown adopting Bulstrode's persuasive methods?"

Tom Brown turned scarlet, and let go the fat junior. Billy Bunter staggered away, gasping for breath.

"What's the row?" asked Harry wonderingly.

Tom breathed hard.

"You'd better ask Bunter. He's got something to tell you."

"And—and I'll jj-j-j-jolly well—well tell him, too!" spluttered Bunter. "You—you beast! I'll make you wriggle."

"Don't be an ass, Bunter."

"I—I say, you fellows—"

"Oh, come along and have tea!" said Harry Wharton.

"He's got something to tell you," said Brown, with a hard face. "Let the young cad get it off his chest."

Wharton looked uneasy. He guessed now that the Greyfriars detective had been at work again.

"Oh, never mind!" he exclaimed. "Bunter—"

"Let him speak!"

"Oh, all right, if you prefer it. What is it, you fat duffer?"

THE MAGNET—No. 92.

NEXT
WEEK:

"THE CIRCUS AT GREYFRIARS."

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

"Oh, really, Wharton—"

"Get to the point, or shut up."

"I'm jolly well going to show that cad up!" spluttered Bunter. "Ow! He's nearly dislocated my neck! I was going to let him off lightly, if he—if he—"

"If I stood him a feed at the tuckshop," said Brown, with a scornful laugh.

"Well—oh, really, I—"

"Go on, porpoise!" said Bob Cherry. "Hurry up; we can't stand here the rest of the evening, you know."

"I've tracked him down," said Bunter. "He's—he's been gambling, and a bookmaker is blackmailing him, and I saw him give the man money. Serve him jolly well right if I gave him away to Dr. Locke or Mr. Quelch—"

"Shut up!" whispered Bob Cherry suddenly, as he caught sight of Mr. Quelch coming round the corner of the building.

But Bunter was too excited to heed.

"I say he'd be expelled if I told Mr. Quelch about his gambling and betting with bookmakers—"

"Cave!"

But it was too late!

Mr. Quelch stopped and looked fixedly at the juniors.

"What is that, Bunter?"

"Oh-h-h-h-h-h!"

"Bunter! Repeat your words!"

"Oh-h-h-h-h-h!"

"Were you alluding to Brown?"

"Oh-h-h-h-h-h!" stammered the terrified Bunter.

"Yes, sir, he was," said Tom Brown, meeting the Form-master's stern eyes fearlessly. "He had got a silly notion into his head that I have been gambling and dealing with bookmakers—why, I don't know."

The Form-master frowned.

"This must be sifted out," he said. "It is very curious, to say the least of it, taken in connection with your peculiar words this morning, Brown."

Tom Brown coloured deeply.

"I'm not afraid of an investigation, sir," he exclaimed.

"Very good! Now, Bunter—"

"I—I—I don't want to say anything against Brown, sir," stammered Billy Bunter. "I—I don't wish to be the cause of a chap's being expelled, sir."

"What you wish has nothing to do with the matter," said the Remove-master sternly. "You will do as I tell you."

"Ye-e-e-es, sir!"

"Now tell me what your accusation against Brown is founded upon?"

"I—I—I—"

"You can speak out," said Tom Brown contemptuously. "I'm not afraid of anything coming to light. I've done nothing to be ashamed of."

"I'm jolly certain of that," said Wharton. "It's that ass Bunter making another of his idiotic bloomers!"

"Oh, really, Wharton! You know jolly well—"

"Kindly explain yourself, Bunter," said the Remove-master icily.

"Certainly, sir. I—I discovered that Brown was playing a deep game, sir. It was owing to my splendid abilities as an amateur detective—"

"Keep to the facts, please, Bunter!"

"But—but that is a fact, sir."

"Dear me! The boy is very stupid!"

"Not at all, sir. You don't understand, that's all. I have lately taken up amateur detective work as a hobby, and the case of Tom Brown is the first I've investigated. I found out that he was being blackmailed by a bookmaker—"

"Blackmailed!"

"At least, he was paying money out to somebody, sir. He borrowed a half-sov. of Wun Lung, sir, and a sovereign of Harry Wharton."

"Is that correct, Brown?"

"Quite correct, sir!"

"Did you pay the money to a bookmaker?"

"No, sir!"

"How do you know it was a bookmaker, Bunter?" asked Mr. Quelch, in a tone that boded ill for the fat junior if he failed to make out his case.

"By inference, sir. Brown bungled out something about bookmakers in class this morning, which showed that they were on his mind. After he had paid over the money, in each case, he received a paper from the other fellow, too."

ANSWERS

13

A Splendid Tale of Harry Wharton
& Co. By FRANK RICHARDS.

Tom Brown smiled.

"He was gone to meet the bookmaker last night, sir, and stayed out to bedtime, and he met him again this afternoon, sir."

"There is no reason to suppose that the man was a bookmaker, Bunter, or that he was blackmailing Brown," said Mr. Quelch. "I am afraid you have been reading foolish detective romances, and have allowed a vivid imagination to run away with you. You are, I think, the stupidest boy in my Form!"

"Oh, really, sir—"

"At the same time, Brown," said Mr. Quelch, turning to the New Zealander—"at the same time, you will see that there is something in this that, for your own sake, had better be cleared up. Are you willing to give a full explanation?"

"Quite willing, sir, only I hope you won't ask me to mention names," said Tom Brown. "I met a chap on the ship coming over to England, sir, when I came to Greyfriars. He was a decent chap, but a bit weak and easily led. I've heard from him several times since I've been at Greyfriars; the last time yesterday morning. He told me he had obtained a post at a bank in this county; but, like an ass, he went to the races, and allowed a rotten bookmaker to get hold of him there. He ended up by owing the man ten pounds, which he couldn't possibly pay. He raised most of the money by borrowing, and asked me if I could help him. He still wanted more."

"Ah!"

"I raised all I could of my own, sir, and borrowed a half-sovereign of Wun Lung, though I'm blessed if I know how Bunter knows anything about it," said Tom Brown. "I met him last night, and gave it to him. Then he told me he was still a pound short, and I promised to try to get it, and meet him to-day with it. As he was very anxious, of course, to avoid anything coming out, we arranged the second meeting on the Black Pike, for this afternoon. Bunter seems to have taken it upon himself to spy on all my actions; but he was never near guessing the facts."

"Did it take you till late last night to give him a half-sov.?" sneered Bunter.

"The rest of the time was spent in showing him the road to the Black Pike, sir. I had a pass from Wingate to stay out."

"And what did he give you the papers for, then?" persisted Bunter.

Tom Brown smiled, and drew a paper from his pocket. He handed it to Mr. Quelch.

"Will you look at this, sir? It's the paper the chap gave me this afternoon. The other is in my other clothes, but it's worded much the same."

The Remove-master glanced at the paper. It bore the simple legend: "I O U £1.—H. K."

"This is an I O U," said the Remove-master.

"Yes, sir."

Billy Bunter's jaw dropped.

Mr. Quelch passed the paper back to Tom Brown.

"I am quite satisfied," he said. "You have acted generously, if a little thoughtlessly, in helping an acquaintance out of an unpleasant scrape, Brown. I hope it will be a lesson to him. As for you, Bunter, nothing can exceed the contempt I feel for your baseness in spying upon your Form-fellow, and your petty meanness in placing the worst possible construction upon everything you discovered."

"Oh, really, sir!" stammered the amateur detective.

"You see, sir—"

"Not a word, Bunter! You disgust me!"

And Mr. Quelch passed on majestically.

Bunter stood overwhelmed for a moment. The other Removites, without a word to him, moved off towards the house.

Bunter started after them.

"I say, you fellows—"

"Oh, shut up!" said Nugent. "We've had enough of you for a bit, you worm. Don't talk to us: You make me sick!"

"Oh, really, Nugent—"

"Scat!"

Bunter blinked at them. He began to wish that he had not adopted the role of detective, or that he had used more honourable means in the pursuit of his new hobby.

"Nugent! Wharton! I say, Brown, it was all a joke, you know. I—I didn't really think you had been betting. I suppose you don't bear malice?"

"Not I," said Tom. "You're not worth it."

"I—I—I'm coming in to tea, you fellows."

Harry Wharton turned round.

"You're not," he said abruptly. "We can't stand you. You are a little too thick. We'll see whether we can stand you later, but for the present—pah! Get off! If you show your nose inside No. 1 Study, you'll go out on your neck."

"But—but—"

"Oh, buzz off!"

And the chums went in to tea. Billy Bunter stared after them. He knew that Wharton was a fellow of his word. No. 1 Study was a closed apartment to him for that evening.

He went as far as the Remove passage. In the study he could hear the clinking of knives and forks, and the clicking of crockery, and from the door ajar came floating the savoury smell of bacon and fried eggs. It made Bunter's mouth water. But he did not venture to enter; he remained like the Peri at the gate of Paradise—a very fat, discontented Peri.

But there was no help for it. Within the study the chums of the Remove chatted merrily, making much of Tom Brown, while in the passage, cooling his heels and murmuring things not loud but deep, was the Greyfriars detective.

THE END.

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A BRIEF RESUMÉ OF THE EARLIER CHAPTERS.

Ronald Chenys is forced to leave Sandhurst through the treachery of his stepbrother Ian, and enlists in the Wessex Regiment under the name of Chester. Unfortunately for Ronald, Ian joins the Wessex as a subaltern, and, assisted by Sergeant Bagot and Private Foxey Williams, does his best to further disgrace Ronald. The unscrupulous Bagot, however, gets caught in his own toils, and is publicly degraded to the ranks. Foxey Williams meets his death mysteriously in a burning barn. In the shooting match for the Fairly Cup, between B and F Companies, two old soldiers, Mouldy Mills and Hookey Walker, of B Company, contrive by means of an ingenious trick to cause B to win. Dame Fortune, however, does not smile on the two wily scamps, for when they get back to barracks they discover that they made a terrible mistake. The Royal Wessex Regiment are ordered to garrison a couple of forts guarding Plymouth. For a whole week they will be on guard, to repel an attack by torpedo boats.

(Now go on with the story.)

The Sea Citadels—A Seven Days' Vigil—Mouldy and Hookey Determine to Improve the Shining Hour.

For seven days and nights this vigil would be kept unceasing. Once, twice or thrice in this period, the long, lean destroyers would come sneaking in with lights masked, hovering on the farthest rims of the rays, biding their time till the electric eyes grew weary of watching.

Then, with a rush and a headlong leap they would be unleashed for the race into the throat of death. On they would come with plumes of flame streaming from their glowing funnels, straining every nerve to come to grips before the storm of shot and shell should burst upon them.

Beyond the boom drawn across the narrow neck leading into the harbour, there were ships of sleek size bare and defenceless. To batter through the boom and get amongst this helpless flock, launching death and destruction right and left, would be the destroyers' work in time of war.

In peace they would stop short in the headlong charge upon the spike-studded barrier, and leave it to the umpires to decide how far they might have succeeded had there been shell in the fort guns as well as powder, and if the electric mines had been sprung.

Besides the torpedo-boat destroyers, the enemy had two submarine craft; and these made the task of the defenders ten times more exacting.

Between Eastguard and Chequer Forts ran the main channel into Plymport Harbour. On either fort was mounted two enormous searchlights of great power, which were kept perpetually on the move, ranging the horizon with their beams. On the instant of the supposed declaration of war the fort magazines were opened, ammunition hoisted up on the hydraulic lifts, and the guns loaded.

In a few minutes everything was cleared for action, guards and look-outs posted, and those not immediately on duty were ordered to turn in again, ready dressed, to spring to their stations at the first call of the bugle. The artillerymen slept at their stations beside the guns.

Ronald found himself detailed as corporal of the guard on the upper parapet of the tower, and, having posted his

sentries, found the situation so novel and exciting that he determined to keep watch.

Muffled up in his greatcoat, he found a niche well sheltered from the cutting breeze, and sat there, marvelling at the restless searchlights keeping watch and ward.

Every now and then, as the revolving lights lit upon some stray craft stealing away in the offing, the beams would be halted upon it, throwing the hull and rigging into ghostly relief, and making it look as if it were fashioned in burnished silver.

It was as if a dozen policemen in search of a burglar were turning their bullseyes on every passer-by, regarding them stonily until they were sure that the stranger was not their quarry in disguise, and then permitting him to go on his way.

The cold, drowsy hour just before the dawn, when the heart beats feeblest, and even the most vigilant sentinel must take care that he is not caught napping, passed away in peace and quiet, and soon a rosy light crept into the sky and a crimson mist spread over the waters.

So far there had been no sign of the enemy. The searchlights were switched off, and soon three black, vicious-looking torpedo craft of the defensive forces came stealing out of Plymport, and out past the forts, passing seawards to reconnoitre.

Ronald watched them go slipping by, then the bugles blew "Reveille," and Fort Eastguard became a busy, teeming hive once again.

Give Tommy Atkins half a grievance and he will grouse till all is blue. One night in the gloomy, draughty, bomb-proof casemates had been enough for Mouldy Mills, Hookey Walker, and their like.

"Cold-blooded murder, I call it!" spluttered Hookey indignantly, alternately blowing on his frozen fingers and scrubbing his blue nose on his sleeve. "Bust me, if bof 'Ouses of Parliament didn't ought to come down 'ere and inspect this pigsty for themselves! Why, it ain't fit for 'ogs, even, much less delicate aristocrats like me, what 'as been used to being nattered in the lap of luxury all their lives! Wot say you, Mouldy?"

"The same as you, 'Ookey, me lad!" responded his chum dismally. "There's only two comfy places in the 'ole place, as far as I can see, and they're the guard cells and the mortuary. An', 'pon my word, I'm that downhearted I don't care whether I go to one or t'other, or both!"

"Look at the canteen, now! 'Ere's nigh on six 'undered soldier men, all with 'ighly developed and powerful thirsts, and only one small rabbit 'utch, not bigger nor 'alf a wash-house to quench 'em in! 'Ow, I asks yer, can yer expect efficiency in the Harmy when such 'owling scandals as that exist, and right under the very noses of the public, too? Is that the way to win your battles, eh, with canteens no bigger nor an Eytalian ice-cream barrer? I said it was, and I'll knock the nose off the man wot says it isn't!"

Mouldy and Hookey glared round at the rest of the squad sharing their draughty quarters, but as none seemed anxious to dispute the relative dimensions of the refreshment department of Fort Eastguard, they were compelled to look elsewhere for a victim.

NEXT
WEEK:

"THE CIRCUS AT GREYFRIARS."

A Splendid Tale of Harry Wharton
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For half an hour they debated seriously a scheme for mutinying, and thereby earning seven days "clink," which would secure, at any rate, shelter from the cold and regular nights in bed.

When Ronald came upon them a little later, however, he found the two old warriors on the landing-stage, all their grievances forgotten for the moment, busily engaged with two handlines they had borrowed, and baited with shreds of bully beef, hauling up crabs, five fingers, and other denizens of the deep.

"Tell you wot, 'Ookey, me lad," said Mouldy suddenly, as he pulled in his line and disengaged his bait from the tender embrace of a shrimp, "I've just got an idea—a great idea—a splendid idea! We've struck a puffick goldmine, we 'ave!"

"Goldmine?" echoed Hookey dismally. "Let's 'ave it! I want a few goldmines just now to restore my shattered fortunes arter that balloon-shootin' bloomer o' yours!"

"Mine? I like that, you great, lop-eared—"

"Go on, stow it! We've called ourselves enough names over that affair to last us as long as ever we are likely to live! Let's 'ave this wheeze of yours, and if there's money in it, I'm on!"

"Well, there is, take my word for that!" growled Mouldy, content to let the balloon bloomer drop into everlasting oblivion, from which it had been resurrected. "It's this fishin' I mean!"

"Fishin'! Goldmines! Rats!" jerked Hookey scornfully.

"Right-ho! Then you stand out and watch me!" sneered his chum. "If I don't net a quid or two, or ten, afore I leave this sea-girt isle—so to speak—I'll lay down and let you kick me!"

"If it's like that, cough it up, old chappy, I'm listening!" said Hookey, not anxious to be left out of such a good thing.

"Look 'ere, it's this," said Mouldy. "As soon as the rest of these silly jugginses 'ave done gaping round the fort at the silly guns, and searchlights, and sech things, they'll all be down 'ere like crows, wanting to know where we got these handlines, so that they can go and borrow some for their-selves. The gunner chaps will let 'em have theirs on the same terms as we got ours—namely, the price of a pint, and find your own bait. Now this is my scheme. I propose that you and me form a blessed liability company, which we'll call the Royal Eastguard Fort 'Andlines, 'Ook, and Bait Supply Association, Limited. We'll corner all the 'fishin' tackle in the fort and 'ire it out to the public at pher-nomenal prices."

"Mouldy, old mug, you're a genius!" exclaimed Hookey, in admiration.

"What is more, we'll get up angling competishuns on the sweepstakes principle, open to all comers, at tuppence a nob. No 'andicaps. Princely and costly cash prizes, everything wot comes up on the 'ooks, whether it's a sea serpent or a sardine tin, to count; and we takes fifty per cent. of the prize-money for ourselves."

"Marvellous!" gasped Hookey. "Let's go to the gunners and borrow their fishlines at once!"

Straightway the two warriors reeled in their gear and sauntered round among the artillerymen, inquiring casually if any handlines were on hire for the week.

There were plenty forthcoming. Mouldy got the first dozen at fourpence, but after that the gunners began to get suspicious, and prices went up by leaps and bounds.

"We can't stop now," growled Mouldy, grinding his teeth at the brazen extortion. "We've got to nobble every hook and line in the fort, or we shall find ourselves dished by a rival firm. If the cowards ask eighteenpence we've got to give it, or even half a crown, for that matter."

A Howling Success—Mouldy and Hookey want more profit!

There being a hundred gunners in the fort, and each man possessing one or more handlines, the Royal Eastguard Fort Handline, Hook, and Bait Supply Association, Limited, found itself operating on a scale which might well have demanded the brain and resource of a Pierpont Morgan to pilot it to prosperity.

As no cash was to pass in the transaction till pay-day, Mouldy and Hookey plunged recklessly, and when the last line had changed hands temporarily at a figure ten times its original value, and the last hook and lump of lead gathered in, the association found itself liable for a sum of seven pounds four shillings and elevenpence by the end of the week.

Hookey was appalled at the amount, and so, at heart, was Mouldy, but the latter did not mean to be beaten. Moreover, the gunners were all giants, and did not disguise the fact that it would be a case of cash or trouble for the association if their financial affairs went wrong.

Mouldy consumed a whole bottle of ink in writing out an enormous placard, announcing the First Royal Military Deep-Sea Angling Tournament, in which there were twenty prizes of various amounts, ranging from half a crown to sixpence, and for which the entrance fee was only twopence. The hire of lines for the day was fixed at threepence.

It was a bold venture, but the scheme caught on. Every man of the Wessex who could escape duty entered, and the landing-stage, the gangway, and half the embrasures were filled chock-a-block with excited anglers.

Bully beef, tinned mutton, bread, sardines, everything that sounded as though it might be good for bait, and could be purchased at the dry canteen, was stuck on the hooks. The lines streamed out like cobwebs from a hedge on a fine evening, getting entangled, and having to be hauled up and unravelled, with a great waste of time and expenditure of violent language.

Mouldy and Hookey looked on and smiled. If this was war, and if they had to live for the rest of their natural lives in Eastguard Fort, so long as things were as they were they were more than satisfied.

"One 'undred and twenty-two 'andlines at thrippence," said

Mouldy softly, "is one ten six; one 'undred and twenty-two entrance fees at tuppence is one pun' and fourpence; less twelve and a tanner prize-money leaves one eighteen four; an' six workin' days at one eighteen four makes eleven pun' ten shillings; less 'ire of plant, equals four pun' five and a penny clear profit. If that ain't good enough, 'Ookey, me lad, what is?"

"More profit!" said Hookey promptly. "Shove the entrance up to-morrow to thrippence and the 'ire of 'andlines to fourpence. They'll stand it."

The first prize went that day to Spud Murphy, whose gross catch was one fish of sorts, twenty-seven crabs, five starfish, and an ancient pair of trousers.

The next night passed off without any sign of a torpedo attack, and the following day the association put its prices up, as Hookey had suggested.

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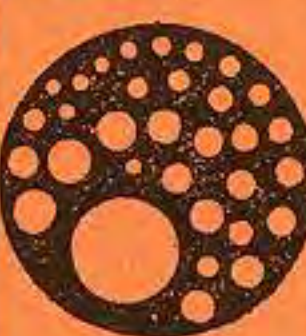


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