

"THE GREYFRIARS SKATERS."

The Magnet **12**

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NO. 96.

Complete School Tale for All.

By Frank Richards.

VOL. 4.



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The Greyfriars Skaters



A Splendid, Long, Complete
School Tale of
The Boys of Greyfriars.
BY
FRANK RICHARDS.

THE FIRST CHAPTER. Not Freezing.

"O H-H-H! It's freezing!"

Billy Bunter made that statement, in a lugubrious tone, as he sat up in bed in the Remove dormitory at Greyfriars, in the cold winter morning.

If there was anything Billy Bunter disliked more than missing a meal, it was getting up in the morning. And in the winter he disliked it more than ever. The clang of the rising bell always had a bodeful sound, like a knell of doom, to the ears of the Owl of the Remove. And now it was ringing through the frosty air, with an energy that showed that Gosling, who was pulling the rope, wasn't pleased either at getting up early.

Clang! clang! clang!

"Oh! Br-r-r! Gr-r-r! It's freezing!"

Bob Cherry jumped out of bed with a single bound.

"Freezing! Jolly good!"

"Oh, really, Cherry——"

Bob, regardless of the cold, ran to the nearest window and looked out into the Close. He could see only a dim vision of leafless trees, for the frost was wet on the panes, and he turned a wrathful eye upon Billy Bunter.

"You young ass!" he exclaimed. "What do you mean? It's not freezing—it's thawing."

"I—I—m-m-meant it was jolly cold, Cherry."

Bob Cherry snorted.

"Ass! Fathead! You made me think we were going to get some skating at last, and now—— Br-r-r-r!"

"It's j-j-j-jolly c-c-cold——"

"Oh, get out!"

"I—I say, you fellows, do you th-think Mr. Quelch would let me have my breakfast in bed this morning, if you t-t-told him I was ill?"

"Yes—I don't think!" said Bob Cherry. "Shall I help you out?"

"Ow! Keep off! Keep that beast away, Wharton!"

Harry Wharton laughed as he turned out.

"By Jove, it's jolly cold whether it's thawing or not, Bob. Make an effort and jump out, Billy. No good shivering there. That's the way to catch cold."

"I—I feel ill this morning—"

"I'll give you some medicine," said Bob Cherry, unhooking his braces, and coming towards Bunter's bed. "I'll teach you to tell yarns about it's freezing, when I've been waiting for it to freeze for a week or more. I—"

"Ow!"

Thwack!

The braces fell forcibly across the bedclothes, and the fat form beneath. Bunter wriggled, but he could not face the cold air, and he yelled instead of getting up.

"Ow! Yow! Leave off! Yah! Yaroo!"

"Up you get!"

"I—I—I'm ill, you know. Yaroo!"

"Well, your lungs aren't affected, anyway," grinned Nugent, as Bunter's yells rang through the dormitory; and Hurree Jamset Ram Singh remarked that the lungfulness of the honourable Bunter was terrific.

The fat junior skipped out of bed.

"Yah! Yow! Chuck it! I'm up! Can't you see I'm up, fathead?"

"Ha, ha, ha! Yes."

"You—you beast—I'm ill—"

"Oh, you want some more medicine," said Bob Cherry, coming round the bed.

Billy Bunter dodged behind Wharton.

"No! Ow! No, I don't! I'm all right, you know, I—I was j-j-joking."

"Then don't you make any more j-j-jokes," said Bob Cherry, fastening his braces on again. "Lemme see, you're going to have a cold bath this morning, ain't you, Bunter?"

Billy Bunter shuddered. He was already bundling into his clothes.

"Oh, don't be a beast, Cherry. I've got my constitution to think of. It's simply rotten that we don't have a fire to get up by. I was thinking that the Remove might send a round robin to the Head on the subject."

"And you'd like the housekeeper to come and wash you, I suppose?" suggested Nugent.

"No, he wouldn't like that," grinned Tom Brown. "Bunter's opposed to washing, on principle."

"Oh, really, Brown—"

Billy Bunter was at his washstand now. He had clothed himself from neck to feet, and left only his face exposed. That face he now proceeded to gingerly rub with a sponge. He wetted a circle round his nose, with a shudder, and hastily towelled it. The Removites watched him curiously.

"Going to wash, this morning?" asked Bulstrode.

"Oh, really, Bulstrode, I have washed! It's jolly cold!"

Billy Bunter was never much given to washing. And as the weather grew colder and colder, so his amount of washing in the morning was observed to grow smaller by degrees and beautifully less.

Bob Cherry shook his head seriously.

"We shall have to take this matter in hand," he remarked.

"The Upper Fourth fellows have begun chipping about it, too. I think we ought to make an example of Bunter."

"Let's yank him along to a bath-room now, and shove him in," suggested Skinner.

Bunter made a rush for the door. In two seconds he was outside the dormitory, and speeding downstairs. The Removites laughing heartily, followed him more slowly.

It certainly was a cold morning. There were heaps of snow in the quadrangle, but it was not freezing. There was a blur of dampness over everything.

Most of the juniors were looking forward to a spell of freezing weather. As soon as the ice on the Sark was strong enough to bear with perfect safety, there was to be an ice carnival, which was to be shared in by the Greyfriars fellows and the village folk, and—last, but not least—the girls of Cliff House. Marjorie Hazeldene and her friends at Miss Penelope Primrose's Girls' School were great skaters, and they were anxious to show their friends at Greyfriars that girls could skate quite as well as boys. All the fellows were looking forward to it, but the weather obstinately remained in a damp and muggy state, in spite of their wishes. Hence, it is easy to understand Bob Cherry's exasperation at Bunter's false alarm that it was freezing.

It wasn't freezing, by any means, and there was no sign of it. But if the Removites couldn't skate, there was snow for a snow fight, and they had to content themselves with that. The Remove poured out of the School House in the dim winter morning, and the Upper Fourth met them amid the snow. The chance was too good to be lost! In a few seconds the two Forms were at it hammer and tongs.

"Go for 'em!" shouted Temple of the Upper Fourth. "Go for the Anti-Soap Brigade!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Listen to the rotters!" said Bob Cherry, turning red with wrath. "Only listen! That's all on account of Bunter."

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NEXT
WEEK:

"THE GREYFRIARS SWEEPSTAKE."

"Oh, really, Cherry—"

"Br-r-r-r!"

"Oh, give 'em socks!" said Nugent.

And the battle of the snowballs raged furiously. Billy Bunter was early put hors de combat. A snowball burst under his chin, and another behind his ear, and he retreated to the doorway in hot haste. As he went, another ball broke on his forehead, filled his eyes and covered his spectacles, and still another clumped upon his mouth. Billy Bunter gave a prolonged gasp, and dropped in the snow.

A rush of the Remove passed over and round him, and Bunter staggered to his feet at last, breathless and panting. He made a wild rush for the house door, and ran in. He was blinded by the snow in his eyes, and did not see Monsieur Charpentier, the French master, standing on the steps, looking out with an amiable smile upon the exhilarating scene.

"Buntair, you vas hurt— Ah, Ciel!"

The little Frenchman staggered back into the hall as Bunter butted him blindly fairly upon the waistcoat.

"Oh!" roared Bunter.

"Ah, Ciel! I am keel! I am slay! Ah, mon Dieu!"

"Yow!"

"Helas!"

Billy Bunter sat up, rubbed the snow out of his eyes, and wiped his spectacles. He was sitting upon something, but what it was he was too short-sighted to see without his glasses. Strange groans came from beneath him, and gasps and grunts.

"Ciel! I am slay! I am squash! Ah! Helas! A moi! Help!"

Bunter was still rubbing his glasses. Wingate of the Sixth came along, and gave a jump as he saw the fat junior sitting upon Monsieur Charpentier wiping his spectacles. He took Bunter by the back of the collar, and jerked him off.

"Ow! Oh, really, Carberry—"

"You young ass!"

"Oh, is it you, Wingate? I—I ran into somebody, I think—"

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Wingate. "I think you did." He gave Monsieur Charpentier a hand up, and the little Frenchman staggered to his feet. "Not hurt, Mossos?"

"Ah, I am knock down! I am almost keel! Buntair!"

But Bunter was scuttling off.

"Buntair!"

"He's gone, sir," grinned Wingate. "I think it was an accident, sir."

Monsieur Charpentier rubbed his waistcoat tenderly.

"I am much out of ze breath," he said. "I zink zat I will go and sit down. Zat garcon is always causing ze trouble viz himself."

And Mossos staggered into the dining-room. He was still looking very pale when the Remove, red and ruddy, trooped in to breakfast. Billy Bunter came in last, looking round cautiously for the French master. But Monsieur Charpentier affected not to notice him, and Bunter, with great relief, sank into his place at the Remove table.

THE SECOND CHAPTER.

Bunter's Wheeze.

"I SAY, you fellows—"

"Shut up, Bunter."

"Yes, but I say, I've got an idea—a little scheme—"

"Go and boil it!"

"Oh, really, Cherry! I suppose you fellows want to take the prizes in the skating event when it comes off?" said Bunter, with an air of injured dignity. "Of course, if you don't care for the honour of the Form, it doesn't matter."

"What are you talking about?" asked Bob Cherry.

The Remove were going to their Form-room for morning

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

lessons. Billy Bunter had been poking at the ribs of Harry Wharton & Co. all the way, but Bunter never was listened to when he wanted to speak. It was really his own fault, for he seldom spoke about anything but himself—his schemes, or his cleverness, or his excellent appetite, and his various wants—and, as Bob Cherry remarked, it was possible to get fed up with Bunter, in the long run. And so when Bunter started talking, somebody generally said, "Shut up, Bunter," from force of habit.

"You see, we can't get any skating while it's thawing," said Bunter. "But I've got a scheme for getting into form for the ice carnival."

"Oh, some more of your blessed physical culture, I suppose," said Nugent. "Go and eat coke!"

"It's a ripping wheeze——"

The Removites trooped into the room, Bunter still with his ripping wheeze unuttered. The fat junior blinked indignantly at the chums of the Lower Fourth, but he did not venture to continue, for the Form-master was already in the room. But a little later, when Mr. Quelch was busy with the blackboard Bunter started again. He gave Harry Wharton a poke in the ribs that made him jump and give a gasp, and turn on the fat junior with a wrathful look. But Bunter was too short-sighted to see the wrathful look, and he went on quite placidly.

"I say, Wharton, about that scheme, you know——"

"Shut up!"

"It's a ripping scheme. We could get permission to use the gym., you know, and the floor is really good—it has been used for the same purpose before——"

"What are you talking about, ass?"

"My scheme. You could hire them in Friardale—I know that——"

"Hire what?"

"The skates."

"I've got skates, and so have most of the fellows."

"Yes, ice skates; but I'm thinking of roller skates."

"Oh, I see!"

"We could get the roller-skates in Friardale this afternoon, and turn the gym. into a rink," said Bunter. "It's a ripping scheme, I think. I'm a dab at roller-skating myself, and I'd put you fellows up to it, you know."

"Well, it's not a bad wheeze," said Wharton.

"I'm rather short of money myself," said Bunter. "I've been disappointed about a postal order this morning. You could buy me a pair of skates——"

"Rats!"

"I mean hire me a pair, you know—a slip of the tongue," said Bunter hastily. "I know the gym. has been used for roller-skating before."

Wharton nodded. Bunter's suggestion was really a good one. There had been very little ice near Greyfriars so far, and what there had been was thin and bad. If permission could be obtained to use the gym. as a rink, nothing could be better for a half-holiday.

"What do you think of it, Wharton?"

"Good! Don't jaw now, though—Quelch is looking this way."

"Yes, but——"

"You are talking, Bunter," said Mr. Quelch.

"Oh, really, sir——"

"Take a hundred lines!"

And Billy Bunter relapsed into silence. He did not mention his great scheme again till lessons were over for that morning.

But as the Remove came out of the Form-room, he dug his fat knuckles into Harry Wharton's ribs.

"What about those roller-skates, Wharton?"

Harry nodded.

"I'll run down to Friardale on my bike and see about them, Bunt. It's a really good idea for once."

"I'll go, if you like, while you're doing the lines."

"Eh, what lines?"

"That impot," said Bunter peevishly. "I suppose you're going to do it, as you were the cause of my getting it, through talking to me?"

Harry Wharton laughed.

"Well, I'll help," he said; "but I'll go down to Friardale about the skates. I'll see first if we can have the gym. this afternoon."

"Better hand over the money to me, and——"

"Rats!"

"If you can't trust me with a few shillings, Wharton, the sooner we cease this discussion, the better."

"Quite so," agreed Wharton; and he walked away, leaving Bunter the picture of indignation.

It was a half-holiday at Greyfriars that afternoon, and the ground was in too bad a state for football to be thought of. When the idea of the roller-skates was mooted in the Remove, it was caught up with enthusiasm. Nugent remembered that Fleet's, in Friardale, had a lot of roller-skates in; he had seen them the last time he was in the village. If the use of the gym. could be obtained, there was no reason why the Remove should not spend a most enjoyable afternoon rinking.

Billy Bunter, as the originator of the idea, claimed to have the arrangements left in his hands; but his claim was far from being admitted. Bob Cherry pointed out to him that he

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would be getting the use of the skates for nothing, while the other fellows would have to pay for them; so he ought to be satisfied. Bunter couldn't see it; but that did not trouble the other fellows much.

"The question is about the gym., really," said Harry Wharton thoughtfully to a little meeting in the common-room after dinner. "If we can't have the gym., it's no good."

"And a lot of the fellows may want it, as the ground's too rotten for footer," Tom Brown remarked.

"We might claim it for an hour—or a couple of hours——"

"Rats!" said a voice at the door, as Temple, the captain of the Upper Fourth, came in. "You kids are getting too much cheek for anything. What's that about having the gym. to yourselves for an hour?"

"Little boys shouldn't ask questions," said Bob Cherry. "Run away and play."

"Are you coming out to finish that snow-fight?"

"Not to-day."

"What little game are you getting up to in the gym.?"

"That's tellings."

"Look here——"

"Rats!"

Temple glared wrathfully at the juniors. He wished now that he had not spoken quite so quickly, as he might have heard what they were planning. But it was too late to think of that now. The Removites, with the very natural misgiving that the Upper Fourth might forestall them if they knew what was on, prudently did not utter a single word on the subject of roller-skates.

"Travel along, Temple, old chap," said Bob Cherry politely; "we're talking."

"I say, you fellows——"

"Shut up, Bunter. Temple, are you going out on your feet or on your neck?"

Temple snorted, and went out on his feet. The odds were against him just then. Frank Nugent slammed the door, and the juniors finished their discussion. Bob Cherry took Bunter by the ear in a most emphatic way, and the fat Remove squealed.

"Not a word to the Upper Fourth," said Bob. "If you let on to them, they'll get up to some dodge to mess up the skating. When we get the skates, we'll lock ourselves in the gym., and grin at 'em!"

"Ow!"

"You understand, you fat duffer?"

"Yow! Leggo my ear!"

"I'll go and ask Mr. Quelch," said Wharton. "If he gives us permission to use the gym. from, say, three to half-past four, that will be all right. He can fix it up with Wingate about the other Forms."

"Right-ho; buzz along!"

And the Remove captain presented himself at the Form-master's study. Mr. Quelch listened to his request kindly enough.

"I have no doubt it could be arranged, Wharton," he said. "I am sure the other Forms will be willing to leave the gymnasium alone for an hour or so, so that you can do as you wish. I will arrange it with the captain of the school."

"Thank you very much, sir."

And Harry hurried away to tell the good news. Five minutes later he was wheeling his bicycle down to the gates of Greyfriars. In the gateway Temple, Dabney & Co. were lounging, looking out at the dripping woods across the lane, and wondering whether they should venture out for a stroll.

"Hallo, where's the Remove kid off to?" exclaimed Fry, as Harry mounted his machine and went pedalling down the rutty, miry lane.

"Friardale, I suppose," said Temple.

"Not going for a ride for pleasure on a road like this, I imagine," Fry remarked. "Blessed if I should care to cycle this afternoon."

"Oh, rather," said Dabney.

Temple wrinkled his brows thoughtfully.

"There's something on among those Remove kids," he said.

"They were talking about getting permission to have the gym. to themselves for a time this afternoon."

"Oh, rot!" exclaimed Fry and Dabney together, wrathfully. "Cheek!"

"Yes, it was cheek, of course. I wonder if Wharton's going to Friardale has anything to do with it?" Temple said thoughtfully. "He looked as if he was going on business."

Fry chuckled.

"Well, if there's a secret in the Remove, there's always one way of getting at it," he remarked.

"Ha, ha! Bunter!"

"Exactly."

Temple chuckled, too.

"Let's look for Bunter," he said.

And the chums of the Upper Fourth walked straight over to the school tuck-shop. They knew where they were likeliest to find Bunter.

THE THIRD CHAPTER.

Temple, Dabney & Co. Take a Hand.

"Oh, really, Mrs. Mimble—"
 "No more, Master Bunter."
 "But just a few tarts—"
 "Certainly not!"

"I say, I'm awfully hungry, you know," said Billy Bunter persuasively, leaning his elbows on the little counter of the school shop, and blinking at Mrs. Mimble through his big spectacles. "I never really get enough to eat, you know, Mrs. Mimble. My constitution is rather delicate, and I need keeping up with good nourishing food. And your pastry is so good, you know."

"If it's good, it's worth paying for," said Mrs. Mimble with a sniff, which showed that she was not to be taken in by Bunter's blandishments.

"I hope you don't think I'm likely to act dishonestly, Mrs. Mimble? I am expecting a postal order this evening—"

"Nonsense, Master Bunter!"

"Oh, really—"

"I won't trust you with any more till you've paid my account," said Mrs. Mimble with emphasis. "You paid me up once, through using another boy's banknote—"

"That was a mistake—"

"Yes; and I should never have been paid otherwise. Now you owe me six shillings again."

"I'm expecting a postal order for ten to-night. Let me have four bob's worth now, and you can take the whole postal order when it comes!"

"I don't believe there is no such postal order," said Mrs. Mimble.

"Oh, really—"

"Hallo, Bunter!" said Temple affably, coming into the tuck-shop. "I say, what ripping tarts. Have some?"

"Certainly, Temple. This is very decent of you. I'll do as much for you fellows when my postal order comes. Did you say I was to have a dozen?"

"No, I didn't; you can have two," said Temple, throwing a shilling on the counter. "I've got a mouth, too, you know. Besides, you mustn't over-eat yourself, or you won't be fit this afternoon—that little game in the gym., you know."

Billy Bunter blinked at him in surprise.

"I didn't know you knew about that," he said. "Has Bob Cherry told you? He warned me not to say a word about the roller-skates."

Temple jumped.

"Roller-skates!"

"What! Didn't you know, after all?" exclaimed Bunter in dismay.

"Ha, ha! No, no; but we know now," grinned Temple.

"Oh, rather!"

"You may as well tell us the lot now," chuckled Fry. "Have some more tarts. We won't give you away to the others, you know. What's this rot about roller-skates?"

"It isn't rot," said Billy Bunter, with his mouth full. "I'll have another, please. I say, these tarts are ripping. You see, it was my idea to use the gym. for a rink and have roller-skating there, to get into form for the ice carnival."

"Of course, the other fellows took it up, and shoved me out of my own scheme, as they always do," said Bunter in an injured tone. "There never is a good wheeze in the Remove that doesn't come from me, but I never get the credit."

"Of course, you don't," said Temple sympathetically. "You ought to be captain of the Remove, really; that's about your mark."

"Well, I'm glad to see there are fellows who can appreciate my qualities," said Bunter, taking another tart. "You see, I'm rather a dab at roller-skating, and I thought it would be a good idea. And Quelch has got us permission to have the gym. to ourselves for an hour and a half—from three o'clock this afternoon."

Temple winked at his chums.

"Oh, good! But what about the roller-skates?"

"Wharton's gone to Friardale to get them."

"Oh, I see. How many?"

"Twenty pairs. There are twenty fellows going in for it, you know, and some of the others will have turns with the skates as well. I expect all the Remove will get into the gym."

"My hat! How's Wharton going to carry twenty pairs of roller-skates on his bike?"

"He isn't. Fleet's man will bring them in the handcart, of course. There's plenty of time—it's more than an hour to three now." Billy Bunter bolted the last tart. "Did you ask me if I'd like some ginger-pop, Temple?"

"No, I didn't," said Temple.

And the chums of the Upper Fourth walked out of the school shop, leaving Billy Bunter in the throes of a pathetic argument with Mrs. Mimble about ginger-pop. The three Fourth-Formers were chuckling.

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"My only hat!" said Temple. "This is about the richest joke on record. You chaps like roller-skating?"

"Oh, rather!" said Dabney.

"Cut off, and tell the fellows they're to sneak into the gym. in twos and threes, and stick there," said Temple. "Fry and I will wait on the road for Fleet's man. You come back and join us by the old oak, with two or three more. Savvy? It's no good giving Fleet's man the trouble to carry those skates up to the school."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Dabney hurried off, and Fry and Temple strolled down to the gates again. In the Close they passed Bob Cherry and Mark Linley, who were throwing snowballs at a mark set on the school wall to improve their aim. At sight of the leaders of the Upper Fourth, the two Removeites naturally changed their aim a little, and let Temple and Fry have the benefit of the snowballs.

Strange to relate, and astonishing to the two juniors, the Upper Fourth fellows did not retaliate, but only turned up their coat-collars and went on, and disappeared out of the gate. Bob Cherry gave an expressive whistle.

"They're going on a blessed important journey, I should think, to take that quietly," he remarked. "Never mind, here's Bunter. Ten to one I knock his cap off!"

"Done!"

And the two marksmen recommenced, with Bunter for their target. The fat junior fled wildly across the Close, and they pursued him, and forgot all about Temple and Fry. The latter, in the meantime, went down the lane in the direction of Friardale, and stopped at an old oak tree that grew out of the hedge right into the lane. They scrambled through the hedge into the field, behind the oak.

There they waved their arms and stamped their feet to keep themselves warm. In a few minutes Dabney rejoined them, bringing with him Scott and Lisle of the Upper Fourth. The Fourth-Formers were all grinning, and carrying big cricket-bags.

"It's all right," said Dabney. "The fellows are getting into the gym. The Fifth and Sixth won't be there at three, so the coast will be clear."

"Good! What are the Remove doing?"

"They're getting up another snowballing affair, to fill up till Wharton comes back, I suppose."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The Upper Fourth fellows waited and watched the road. It was a cold vigil, but the proposed jape on the Lower Fourth was worth it. They stamped their feet, till a whisper from Temple warned them to be cautious.

"Look out—here's a jigger coming."

There was a plugging sound of a bicycle driven through mud and thawed snow. Harry Wharton went pedalling past, without a suspicion that five pairs of keen and eager eyes were watching him from behind the old overhanging oak. The Upper Fourth fellows burst into a chuckle when he had passed.

"Innocent babe!" murmured Temple. "It's all serene. Now to wait for Fleet's man. Look out, and if he gets by with the skates I'll scalp you and boil you in oil afterwards."

And the Fourth-Formers waited and watched, while the damp dripped off the branches upon them, and their feet grew cold upon the half-frozen ground. They stamped and waved and grunted, till the sound of a heavy machine driven along the slushy lane warned them that the time had come. A quarter to three rang out from the distant clock of Greyfriars.

"Here he comes!"

They peered through the hedge. A bicycle-cart, recognised at once as belonging to Fleet's Fancy Stores, was being driven up the lane by Fleet's young man. The Upper Fourth fellows swarmed out into the road, and the bicyclist perforce came to a halt.

Temple waved his hand commandingly, feeling a great deal like a brigand chief holding up an unfortunate traveller.

"Down you get!" he said.

Mr. Fleet's young man stared at him in amazement.

"Eh?" he said. "What? I don't catch on!"

"The road's so muddy, we can't bear to think of your having to drive that rocky machine all the way to Greyfriars," said Temple blandly. "We've come to carry the skates for you!"

"But Master Wharton—"

"Blow Master Wharton!"

"Yes; but—but—"

"Now, look here," said Temple, "you know we belong to Greyfriars, so the skates will be safe enough. We're five to one, and if you object we shall yank you off your jigger and pitch you into the ditch. The best thing you can do is to hand over the skates and go back to your shop, and tell Mr. Fleet it's all right. It's a jape on the Remove, if you want to know. Now, down you get."

And as Mr. Fleet's young man still hesitated, Temple and Dabney took hold of his arms and helped him down. Then the back of the bicycle cart was opened, and twenty pair of roller-skates, fastened in pairs, were revealed.

"Pack 'em into the bags," said Temple. "We can take some under our coats, too. It won't do to let the Remove kids see 'em. Good."

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

"I—I can't prevent you," said Mr. Fleet's young man, helplessly.

"Of course you can't," said Temple, pressing a shilling into his hand. "It's a jape, and it's all right. Get back to Friar-dale."

"But I ought to explain to Master Wharton——"

"If you come near Greyfriars under two hours we'll duck you, that's all," said Temple. "Don't I tell you it's a jape. Clear off!"

And Mr. Fleet's young man, looking very bewildered, as if he did not quite know whether he was on his head or on his heels, mounted his machine and pegged away slowly towards the village. The Upper Fourth fellows, chuckling, packed the skates out of sight, and then strolled towards Greyfriars. They strolled in at the gates, with an air of exaggerated innocence, which might have aroused suspicion, if the Remove had been on the look-out. But the Remove were snowballing, near the Cloisters, with a band of youths from Herr Rosenblum's Foreign Academy, and they had no eyes for Temple, Dabney & Co. The heroes of the Upper Fourth made directly for the gym.

It still wanted five minutes to three when Temple, after a hasty glance round to see that there were only Upper Fourth fellows present, slammed the big door of the gym, and turned the key in the lock.

THE FOURTH CHAPTER.

One for the Upper Fourth.

THE snow fight round the old Cloisters of Greyfriars was over. The aliens had been driven back ignominiously into their own territory, and the big iron gates had clanged to and covered their retreat. And the Remove, flushed with victory, trooped back into the Close. And then they remembered the roller-skates that were to arrive before three o'clock. Harry Wharton glanced up at the Greyfriars clock-tower. It was a quarter-past three.

"Fleet's man must have been, and gone," he said. "I suppose he's left the skates for us at Gosling's lodge."

"Let's go and see," suggested Nugent.

And they went to see. Gosling, the school porter, came to his door grunting with discontent. Gosling did not like being disturbed, especially in the afternoon. Gosling had just been settling down to the full enjoyment of a glass of gin and water, and he had spilt some of it over his waistcoat when a thundering rap had suddenly come at the door. The juniors did not possess a light touch in dealing with a knocker.

"Himps!" said Gosling. "Go away!"

"Has anything come for us?" asked Harry Wharton. "We're expecting a lot of roller-skates to be sent in from Fleet's."

"Well, they ain't come," said Gosling sourly. "And wot I says is this 'ere——"

But they did not wait to hear what Gosling said. They went down to the gates to look up the road, leaving Gosling to slum his lodge-door and return to what was left of his gin and water.

There was no sign of Mr. Fleet's young man on the road. The juniors concluded that he must have taken the consignment of skates up to the house, though it would have been easier to leave them at the lodge. But inquiry at the house elicited the information that nothing had been seen of Mr. Fleet's young man or the roller-skates. Harry Wharton looked, and felt, puzzled.

"I don't understand it," he said. "Fleet said he would send them at once, and he usually keeps his word, too."

"I suppose they can't have been taken to the gym?" suggested Mark Linley.

"Well, I told Fleet we were using the gym for a rink," said Harry. "It's barely possible. May as well have a look there, anyway."

And the anxious Removees hurried off to the gymnasium. They found the door fast, and it refused to budge when they tried to open it. From within the gym, came a sound of voices, and another sound that the juniors could not quite make out. It was a sliding, scratching, swishing sound, and it puzzled them.

"Somebody else has got the gym," said Wharton, wrinkling his brows, "and we're locked out."

"Let's cut round and try the other door."

"Well, go; but I expect that's fastened, too, Bob."

Bob Cherry returned in about a minute, to admit that it was. Harry Wharton rapped sharply on the door with his knuckles. There was no reply from within; the shouting and that strange swishing noise went on incessantly.

"Boots!" said Bob, sententiously.

The juniors kicked at the door. They kicked, and kicked again, till the din they made must have been audible as far as the School House. Then there came a slackening of the voices and the noise within, and there was a rap of knuckles on the inside of the big door.

"Hallo!" called out Temple from within.

"Open this door!"

"Presently."

"We've got permission to use the gym from three o'clock!" bawled Bob Cherry. "Open this door at once, you Upper Fourth worms!"

"Who gave you permission?"

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"Quelch."

"You never asked us," went on Temple politely.

"You! Asked you! That's likely!"

"Well, you fags must be kept in your place, you know. You can run away and play in the wood-shed. You can't have the gym; we can't allow it!"

Wharton kicked furiously on the door.

"You waster!" he roared. "Open this blessed door."

"Go and eat coke!"

"We want to come in!"

"Ha, ha, ha! I'm afraid you would interfere with the roller-skating!"

"WHAT!" yelled the Removees.

"Ha, ha, ha! The roller-skating!"

"You—you—you've got roller-skates?" gasped Wharton. "Where did you get them?"

"Mr. Fleet's young man brought a cargo of them—we carried them in," said Temple. "Ha, ha, ha! This is where the Upper Fourth gloats!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"My only hat!" gasped Bob Cherry. "The beasts! It's a sheer do! They've got our skates, and our rink, and—oh, my only Aunt Penelope!"

"I say, you fellows——!"

"Oh, shut up, Bunter! What the dickens are we to do?" exclaimed Harry Wharton. "I—I confess I never looked for anything of this sort. I didn't know they knew anything about the roller-skating wheeze."

There was a sudden yell from Billy Bunter as Bob Cherry seized him by the collar and shook him as a terrier shakes a rat. Bunter's eyes rolled, and his spectacles slid down his fat nose, and he kicked and struggled and gasped spasmodically.

"Ow! Ow! Hellup! Leggo!"

"You fat owl! You told Temple about the skates!"

"Ow! Ow, really, Cherry——"

Bob released him at last, glaring. Bunter gasped and gasped.

"You—you beast! Yow!"

"How do you know he told Temple, Bob?" asked Brown.

"Well, I suppose he did. He must have—somebody did, and it was pretty sure to be Bunter," said Bob. "If you didn't, Bunter, you can pass on that shaking to the fellow who did."

"Ow! Ow! Yow!"

The skating had recommenced inside the gym. That was the swishing sound the juniors had heard. Harry Wharton moved along to the nearest window, and climbed on Bob Cherry's shoulders to look in.

It was a merry scene inside the gym.

The floor had been cleared, and the smooth expanse, very well suited for roller-skating, had been turned into a rink, just as the Removees had intended. But it was their deadly rivals who now enjoyed the rinking. Temple, Dabney & Co., and two-thirds of the Upper Fourth Form, were on skates, and dashing merrily to and fro, and the rest of the Form stood round, shouting and waiting their turns with the skates.

Temple was a fine skater, and he was making rings round Fry and Scott, and winding among the other skaters with rare skill. Wharton could not help admiring him as he looked on. Some of the skaters caught sight of his face at the window, and they waved their hands to him and gave a mocking yell.

"Hurray! Who scores this time?"

"Upper Fourth!" was the roaring answer.

"Who gets it square in the eye?"

"Remove! Ha, ha, ha!"

Harry Wharton dropped to the ground again. The Remove looked at one another with glum faces. There was no doubt that they were "done."

"Hang it!" said Harry. "We can't let them crow over us like this. We've got to pay for the skates, too. What's to be done?"

But no one replied to that question. No one had any reply to make.

THE FIFTH CHAPTER.

Something Like a Tussle!

"BOTHER it!" said Bob Cherry at last. "Something's got to be done, you know. We can't take this lying down."

"Not likely!"

"But what?"

"We've got such a jolly good Form captain, you know," said Bulstrode, with a sneer. "That's why we always get licked by the Upper Fourth."

"Oh, shut up, Bulstrode!"

Harry Wharton's brows were wrinkled. He was thinking deeply. Bulstrode looked at him, and then looked round at the other fellows.

"No good waiting for our blessed Form captain to think of anything!" he exclaimed. "How many of you will follow my lead?"

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"Oh, all of us if you've got anything good to suggest!" said Nugent. "What is it? Get it off your chest, and not so much jaw!"

"Well, we can get a couple of ladders from the stables and scale the windows," said Bulstrode. "It's a chance, anyway."

"Rot!" said Harry abruptly. "You could only get in one at a time, or two at a time, and they would collar you quite easily."

"Well, I'm going to try," said Bulstrode insolently. "You fellows can back me up or not, as you like."

And Bulstrode walked away towards the stables. Several fellows followed him, and they returned in five minutes carrying a couple of ladders. The ladders were set up at the two nearest windows. Harry Wharton glanced at them, and shrugged his shoulders.

"I tell you it's no good!" he exclaimed.

"That's our business."

And Bulstrode mounted one of the ladders. Skinner followed him, and then Stott.

Trevor went up the other ladder, and Price after him. The rest looked on.

Bulstrode and Trevor mounted to the top of the ladders, and looked in at the half-open windows, which were of the revolving kind, turning over on a central pivot. There was plenty of room for the juniors to squeeze through if they liked, but it was no joke to drop down the distance inside.

But Bulstrode squeezed through. He was ambitious to take the lead in the matter out of Harry Wharton's hands, and to succeed where the captain of the Remove was perplexed what to do.

"Come on, kids!" he exclaimed. "You can drop inside from your hands, you know, and it's not so very far."

"Right-ho!" said Trevor a little dubiously, as he looked inside from his window.

"A few of us can keep the cads occupied, while one or two make a rush for the door, and open it for the fellows outside," explained Bulstrode.

"All right! We're on."

There was a sudden shout from within the gym. Some of the Fourth-Formers had caught sight of Bulstrode and Trevor, hanging by their hands inside the windows.

"Ware, kids!" yelled Fry.

"Collar them!"

"Ha, ha!"

A dozen skaters came whirling up to the threatened spot, and the Upper Fourth fellows who were not on skates ran up as hard as they could. Bulstrode looked down as he hung, and did not like the prospect. He realised now that he would be seized the moment he dropped, and he could hardly hold his own against so many till help came. But it was too late to retreat now. His arms were already aching with his weight, and he would have found it difficult to pull himself up again if he had wanted to.

"Come on, Trevor, old man," he whispered desperately.

"All right," muttered Trevor.

And they dropped down from the windows at the same moment. In a second they were rolling on the floor, quite losing their balance in the long drop. Half a dozen Fourth-Formers fastened upon them before they could rise, and pinned them down to the floor by sheer weight.

Skinner and Price were squeezing through the windows, but they paused there, one leg within and one leg without, as they saw the prompt fate of their leaders.

Temple waved his hand invitingly to them.

"Come down!" he shouted. "The more the merrier."

"Rescue!" bawled Bulstrode, struggling in vain to shake off the juniors piled on him. "Rescue, Remove!"

"Blessed if I can rescue you!" said Skinner. "The best thing I can do is to stick here."

"What ho!" said Price emphatically. "No good dropping down into that."

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared the Upper Fourth.

"Rescue!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

But there was no rescue for Bulstrode or Trevor. They were pinned fast by crowding hands, and they had not the ghost of a chance of getting loose and getting to the door to open it to the rest of the Remove.

"Cut off to the store-room and get some rope, Dab," said Temple. "We'll tie these beauties up, and sit them here to watch the skating."

"Oh, rather! Ha, ha, ha!"

And Dabney cut off. He disappeared into the room where the gym paraphernalia was kept, at the back of the building, and reappeared in a couple of minutes with a length of rope in his hand.

"Here you are!"

"Tie their ankles together," said Temple thoughtfully. "Needn't bother about their hands. Now, keep quiet, Bulstrode!"

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"Yah! Rescue!"

"Rescue's off," grinned Temple. "Completely sold out. If you struggle like that, my boy, you may get hurt."

But Bulstrode fought fiercely. He was hitting out now, right and left, in a furious temper, and he was somewhat roughly handled by the Fourth-Formers in consequence. Trevor, more sensibly, realised that he had no chance, and gave in.

The Removites' legs were tied together, and Bulstrode's hands too, as he was so violent, and then they were sat upon a bench close to the wall, where they could watch the skating.

"Sorry we can't ask you to join us," Temple remarked, with his bland smile; "but we bar cheeky kids, you know. But you can look on. There's no charge."

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

"You chaps who aren't skating stay here and keep an eye on the windows," said Temple. "If any more burglars poke their heads in, you know what to do with them."

"Ha, ha! Rather!"

And the Upper Fourth fellows resumed skating. The feelings of Bulstrode as he sat helplessly and looked on may be better imagined than described. He had tried to outdo Harry Wharton and take his place as leader of the Remove, and it had led him to this! It was not a pleasing result.

Outside the gym, the Removites looked up at Skinner and Price, still seated in the windows. They had not retreated from that coign of vantage, but they were not in the least disposed to advance further and share the fate of Bulstrode and Trevor.

"Well," said Bob Cherry, with a chuckle, "how fares the noble Bulstrode? Is he bearing down all before him in his gallant charge?"

"He's sitting on a bench," grinned Skinner. "They've trussed him up a good deal like a Christmas turkey."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"It stood to reason there was no chance that way!" exclaimed Harry Wharton impatiently. "Bulstrode has only himself to thank. Look here, I've thought of a wheeze, if Temple & Co. haven't guarded against it."

"Go ahead! What's the idea?"

"The little store-room at the back of the gym—the window of that is near the ground. I don't suppose the Upper Fourth have thought of it. Temple wasn't built to be a great general, you know."

"But we should have to get in one at a time," said Ogilvy.

"That's so, but they wouldn't see us getting in, and we could all cram into the little room, and rush out on them when we were ready."

Bob Cherry gave Wharton a slap on the shoulder that sent him staggering against the wall of the gym.

"Ripping!" he exclaimed. "Splendid!"

"Oh, you ass!" said Wharton, rubbing his shoulder.

"Sorry—merely a little exuberance."

"Well, keep your exuberance for the Upper Fourth, duffer! Look here, half a dozen of you chaps stay here and hammer at the door, so as to keep them off the scent. You can go on slanging them at the window, too, Skinner."

"What-ho!" said Skinner.

"The rest of you follow me."

Readily enough the Remove obeyed their young captain. Bob Cherry and a chosen band hammered and kicked at the door, and shouted breathless insults through at the skaters, to which the Upper Fourth fellows replied with an occasional yell of defiance.

Harry Wharton and the rest reached the rear of the gym, and stopped at the window of the store-room. The window was shut, but Wharton could see that it was not fastened. If it had been, he could have forced back the catch, which was a simple one, with the blade of his pocket-knife. As he had said, Temple was not built to be a great general, and in the flush of victory he had never thought about that weak spot in his armour.

In two minutes Harry had the little window open—opening it very cautiously, and making hardly a sound. He climbed through noiselessly, and stepped towards the door opening into the gym. That door was ajar, just as Dabney had left it. Harry could see through the slit into the gym, where the Upper Fourth were making merry. The skaters were whirling round and round merrily, and Temple was cutting strange figures. Harry stood at the door quietly, ready to jerk it shut, and keep it shut, while his followers poured in behind him, if the Upper Fourth took the alarm.

But that they showed no sign of doing. They skated on merrily, while one by one the Removites climbed into the window, and ranked behind their leader.

The room was soon crammed, and there were still Removites outside, pushing on. Harry gave the signal.

"Follow me!"

He threw open the door and stepped into the gym.

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THE SIXTH CHAPTER.

Bravo, Remove!

"SOCK it to 'em!"

It was a sudden yell from the Remove as they swarmed in after Wharton. There was a shout of alarm from the skaters.

"Look out!" yelled Temple.

"Oh, rather! It's those young cads!"

"Ware Remove!"

But the warning came too late. The Removites were rushing vengeancefully to the attack. The fellows with skates fastened on their feet were at a disadvantage. The rush of the Remove sent them reeling, and it was not easy to get up in a hurry with roller skates on their boots.

In a quarter of a minute the Upper Fourth were sprawling right and left, and most of the fallen Fourth-Formers had victorious Removites sitting on them. The fellows who were not on skates made the best fight, but they were hopelessly outnumbered. Skinner and Price dropped down now, and rushed to the door and opened it to Bob Cherry and his comrades, and then released Bulstrode and Trevor to join in the fight. The whole of the Remove was now on the scene, and they made short work of the Upper Fourth.

There were yells and shouts and strugglings and rallyings, but the Upper Fourth had no chance from the first.

Harry Wharton, after three minutes' hot work, looked breathlessly over the scene of combat.

Every Fourth-Former was on the floor, and every one was pinned down by a Removite, the more dangerous of the enemy having two or three fellows sitting on them. Billy Bunter, who had contented himself with being a spectator till the fight was over, came forward to sit on Temple's head at the request of Bob Cherry, who was sitting on the Upper Fourth hero's chest, and found his seat there a rocky one.

"Certainly, Cherry!" said Bunter. "Anything to oblige. I'm sincerely sorry if it hurts you, Temple. I'm feeling very tired, owing to not having that ginger-pop, and you may find me heavy."

"Ow! You little beast! Gerroff!"

Bunter took no notice. He took a comfortable seat upon Temple's head instead. But in about three seconds he jumped up with a fiendish yell.

"Ow! Yaroooh!"

"What on earth's the matter?" exclaimed Harry Wharton.

"Yow! Yaroooh! Ow!"

"What is it—for goodness' sake?"

"Ow! I'm bitten!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Ow! Blessed if I can see anything to cackle at! Yow! Yaroooh!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Kick those Upper Fourth wasters out!" exclaimed Nugent. "They can go out through the little window, and then they won't get a chance of coming in again. We'll fasten the door at once."

"Good egg!"

"Look here, you cheeky fags," roared Temple, "I'm going —"

"Of course you are," agreed Tom Brown, unfastening his skates. "Take his other leg, Bob, and we'll help him along."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

And Temple skated along on his back. Wharton, laughing, closed the big door and refastened it. One by one the Upper Fourth were marched into the store-room and ejected ignominiously from the little window.

There was no chance of their rallying there. The window was not large enough for more than one at a time to pass. As the last Fourth-Former was rolled out, the Removites sent a yell after their defeated enemies, and the window was shut down, and the catch fastened. Then, to make assurance doubly sure, Harry Wharton closed the wooden shutters within, which were secured by an iron bar. Then the juniors returned into the gym., and the communicating door, as a final precaution, was locked.

"They won't get in again in a hurry, I think," Wharton remarked, with a chuckle, as the key clicked in the lock.

"Not much," grinned Bob Cherry; and the Nabob of Bhanipur volunteered the opinion that the not-much-fulness was terrific.

"Now for the skating," grinned Nugent. "This makes a ripping rink, and no mistake. It's the next best thing to ice skating. I wish Marjorie & Co. were here. Marjorie told me she liked roller skating."

"Yes, I wish they were," said Wharton. "Marjorie said something about giving us a look in this afternoon, but she hasn't come. I suppose Miss Primrose wanted her. Phew! what a row those fellows are making."

The Upper Fourth were not taking their defeat quietly. They were hammering at the door of the gym., just as the Removites had done before them, and yelling at the windows.

The Removites sent back a few counter yells and catcalls, but they soon ceased to do even that, being busy with the skates.

The score of fellows who had clubbed the money for the skates were busy fastening them on, and as they were adjustable

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there was no difficulty about the sizes. Billy Bunter sat down on a bench and blinked round expectantly.

"Are you going to put on my skates, Cherry?" he asked.

"No; I'm putting on mine," said Bob affably. "I can't wear two pairs of skates at a time, you know."

"Oh, really, Cherry! I mean are you going to put them on for me? Will you put my skates on, Nugent?"

"Some other fine afternoon," said Nugent. "Remind me on the thirty-first of November, and we'll see."

"Look here—oh, he's gone! I say, Wharton, put on my skates, will you?"

"Where are they?"

"I suppose you've left me a pair," said Bunter indignantly. "Well, this is jolly nice. It's my idea to have the skating at all, and you won't even let me have a pair of skates."

"Rot!" said Bulstrode. "The fellows who're paying for the skates have the right to the first turn. You can wait."

"Oh, really, Bulstrode—"

Bob Cherry fished in his pocket.

"Here's some milk-chocolate, Bunter—a whole sixpenny bar. Gnaw it, and shut up!"

Bunter took the chocolate, and was soon gnawing it, as Bob Cherry expressed it. He blinked at the chums of the Remove a little more cheerfully.

"Of course, I don't mind waiting my turn," he remarked.

"So long as the chocolate lasts," grinned Tom Brown.

"Oh, really, Brown—"

The twenty skaters were soon chasing one another gaily round the gym. The fellows who were waiting for their turns with the skates stood about under the windows, watchful for any attempt on the part of the Upper Fourth. Temple, Dabney & Co. were still hammering at the door.

"Let us in, you beasts!" roared Temple.

"Rats!"

"We'll lick you to dusty atoms later on."

"More rats!"

And that was all the satisfaction Temple, Dabney & Co. received. The noise at the doors died away, save for an occasional knocking; the Upper Fourth had given it up in disgust. Meanwhile, the skaters were whirling round merrily.

Harry Wharton & Co. could skate very well, but not all the others were equally good. There were many falls, and naturally the bad skaters made things warm for the good skaters, and the best of them went down sometimes with the worst. But all was good-humour and merry laughter.

"My only hat!" Bob Cherry exclaimed, as he stopped for a moment to rest, and put his hand on the door to steady himself, "this is ripping! A little crowded, but simply spiffing!"

"The spiffingfulness is terrific."

There was a rap on the door.

"Oh, go away!" bawled Bob Cherry. "Take your face away and bury it!"

Rap!

"You escaped lunatic, go and buy a padlock and chain yourself up!" shouted Bob. "We're not going to open the door, if you stay there till you're as blue in the face as you are weak in the head! Go and eat coke! Go and boil yourself! Yah!"

"Oh, dear!" said a sweet voice outside, "that is Cherry speaking, Clara."

"Oh, Marjorie!"

Bob Cherry sank weakly against the door. He had, of course, thought that the rapping proceeded from some of the Upper Fourth. And it was Marjorie and Clara, from Cliff House, who were there!

"Oh!" gasped Bob weakly.

And he leaned on the door. He had forgotten that he was wearing skates. In a second his feet were in the air, and he was sitting down dazedly.

"Oh!"

Harry Wharton and Nugent yanked him out of the way and opened the door.

THE SEVENTH CHAPTER.

Bunter Skates!

MARJORIE HAZELDENE looked in with a smile. Bob Cherry sat dazed, and looked at her. He was trying to recall exactly what he had said through the door, and wondering how many sorts of an ass Marjorie would think him. Some of the skaters went on whirling, and others came skating up to the door. The Removites were on the look-out, in case Temple, Dabney & Co. should make a rush. But the Upper Fourth had long given it up, and they were nowhere in sight. It was poor fun to hang about in the snow and damp shouting to fellows who were enjoying themselves under cover.

"Marjorie!" exclaimed Harry, shaking hands with the girl from Cliff House, "how jolly of you to come!"

"And how jolly you look here," said Marjorie, laughing.

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"Yes," said Miss Clara. "What fun!"

"Yes, it is jolly," remarked Nugent. "Bob prefers sitting on the floor, but the rest of us like roller skating awfully."

"Oh, rats!" said Bob, getting up.

"You fell down?" asked Marjorie sympathetically.

"N-no, not exactly," stammered Bob. "You see—"

"Yes, I see."

"I mean I slipped. I forgot I had the skates on."

"Yes, that often happens, I know," said Miss Clara, with a wise shake of the head.

"But I wasn't skating at the time," said Bob warmly. "I was leaning against the door, and—"

"And the floor seemed to rise up and hit you," said Miss Clara. "I understand perfectly."

The chums giggled. Bob Cherry was growing perfectly crimson in his efforts to explain that he hadn't been skating at the time he fell down.

"I wasn't a duffer!" he exclaimed. "I had stopped skating—"

"Yes, it often happens like that," agreed Miss Clara. "You stop skating, and then suddenly your feet walk away—"

"No, no; it wasn't that. You see—I say, I suppose you think me an awful ass for slanging you through the door?" said Bob, changing the subject. "I thought it was that Upper Fourth lot coming back, you know. I didn't dream it was you."

Marjorie laughed merrily.

"Well, I didn't really think that you were telling me to go and boil myself," she admitted. "I thought there must be some mistake."

"And so we stayed," said Miss Clara. "We were determined to stay if we became as blue in the face as we are weak in the head."

"Oh!" groaned Bob Cherry.

"Well, you frabjous ass!" murmured Nugent, "you'd better sit down again, and crawl out of sight somewhere. I say, Miss Hazeldene, you're going to skate, of course?"

"Oh, I should like it immensely."

"Come on, then," said Harry. "I'll get you some skates."

And Nugent looked after Miss Clara, while Harry took charge of Marjorie. Skates were soon forthcoming, the smallest sizes being yielded up, and the juniors managing to fix them upon the girls' boots. Then Marjorie glided into the rink with Harry, and Clara with Nugent, and very handsome couples they made. Bob Cherry looked the door again, in case the Upper Fourth should look in, after all.

Billy Bunter had come up to make himself agreeable to the girl visitors, but they were skating before he had a chance to speak—and then, of course, he had no chance. He blinked after the graceful figure of Marjorie as she glided along with Harry, and then dug his fat knuckles into Bob Cherry's ribs.

"I say, I've finished that chocolate."

"Then go and eat coke!" said Bob.

"I'm ready to skate. I'm rather a dab at roller-skating, and I want to take Marjorie round. She will naturally expect to go round with the best skater."

"She's doing that," said Hazeldene, with a glance after his sister and the captain of the Remove.

"Oh, really, Vaseline—"

"Look here, can you really skate, Bunter?" asked Bob Cherry bluntly.

"Haven't I told you I can?"

"Yes; but you're such a—ahem! What you tell a chap doesn't make much difference, that's all. Can you skate?"

"I'm a regular dab at it!"

"If you can't, I'll hold you up and take you round, that's all," said Bob. "If you can skate, all right."

"I should think I could do such a simple thing as roller-skating, even if I hadn't tried before," said Billy Bunter, with a great deal of dignity.

"Well, I'll get you some skates. I don't believe you can skate, but as you started the wheeze, it's only fair we should let you bother us a bit."

"Oh, really, Cherry—"

Russell had taken off his skates for a rest, and to give somebody else a turn, and Bob bagged them for Bunter. He slung them across to the fat junior, who sat down on a bench by the wall to put them on.

Now, as a matter of absolute fact, Billy Bunter knew exactly as much about roller-skating as he did about skiing or ballooning; but the other fellows were going round so easily, that it never occurred to Bunter that there might be some difficulty in it. Nothing looks so simple as roller-skating—to a bystander. Tackling it for the first time is a somewhat different matter. But Bunter, in his boundless conceit, imagined that he had only to come, to see, and to conquer. Some of the fellows were tumbling over and sitting down occasionally, certainly, but Bunter didn't intend to do anything of that sort. He intended to go sailing round in a way that should draw Marjorie Hazeldene's eyes upon him at once, and make her say to Wharton, "How well Bunter skates!" And, as a first step

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to that triumph, he began putting on the skates backwards, and was surprised to find that they didn't fit his boots.

"I say, Cherry," he said peevishly, "I think you might have given me the right size in skates, or something near it."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Blessed if I can see anything to cackle at. I can't get this strap right at all."

"You might if you tried putting the skates on right-side before," grinned Bob Cherry. "Here, let me do it for you?"

"Do you think I can't put a pair of roller-skates on?"

"Oh, very well."

"Still, you may as well do it for me. I don't like bending down."

Bob grinned and fastened on the skates. He was aware by this time that Bunter's pretensions were all wind.

"Now, that's all right," he said, rising. "Shall I take you round a bit?"

Bunter sniffed.

"Of course not. I'll take you round if you like, Cherry, if you feel at all nervous."

"Ha, ha! No thanks! Upon the whole, I'd rather be further off from you when you start," grinned Bob Cherry.

Bunter rose to his feet.

What happened next was never very clear to Billy Bunter. His impression was that the floor suddenly rose, grasped him by the ankles, and hurled him over. That was an impossibility; but, if it wasn't that, Bunter didn't know what it was. When he could think clearly, he was lying on his back, looking up at the roof, with a pain in about six or seven places, and a general dazed and tired-of-life feeling.

Bob Cherry bent over him. As Bunter was to boast and decline the help he so much needed, Bob felt sorry for him.

"Here, up you get," he said, seizing the fat junior.

"Ow!"

"Hurt?"

"I—I think I'm dying," moaned Bunter. "My back's broken in three places, and both my arms are sprained, as well as my legs; and I don't think I have a sound rib left. I think my heart has been driven into my lungs, or else my lungs into my heart; and my shoulder-blades are out of joint. My brain is fractured, as well!"

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

"Ow! You heartless beast! Send for a doctor! I—I'm dying!"

"Here, Inky, Bunter's dying! Come and lend us a hand to yank him out to the dust-bin!"

"With pleasurefulness, my worthy chum!" said Hurree Janset Ram Singh, clinking to a halt, and taking hold of Bunter on the other side.

The Owl of the Remove groaned deeply.

"Don't touch me! Let me expire here!"

"You're jolly well not going to expire here," said Bob Cherry, indignantly. "Do you think we want to keep tumbling over your dead body? By the time we'd finished, you wouldn't make a beautiful corpse, I assure you. If you want to expire, you can have the decency to expire in private, I should think."

"Oh, ratherfully!"

"You—you beast, Cherry! I—I—ow! I—I feel better! I don't think my back is broken after all," said Bunter, as he was lifted into a sitting position.

"Ha, ha! I don't, either. You'll find that your brain isn't fractured, either. Of course, it would be the first to go, as it's the weakest spot."

"Oh, really—"

"Up you get!"

"Not hurt much, I hope?" said Marjorie, slowing down as she passed with Harry, and giving Bunter a much kinder look than the fat junior deserved.

"Oh, no, Miss Marjorie," said Bunter at once. "A little accident—Bob Cherry is always so clumsy. He'd put the best skater out."

Marjorie smiled and whirled on. Bob Cherry glared wrathfully at Bunter.

"You—you young ass!" he exclaimed. "I am clumsy, am I! Why?"

"Well, somebody must have got in my way, or I shouldn't have fallen down," said Bunter peevishly. "I suppose it was you. Do help me up."

"Can you stand alone?"

"Of course, I can; I'm a dab at skating."

"Yes, you look it," granted Bob Cherry.

With a combined effort Bob and Hurree Singh dragged the fat junior to his feet. Billy's whole weight hung upon them, his right foot shooting forward and his left foot shooting back. He made a terrific clatter with the skates as he tried to get his balance, but it was in vain. As fast as he mastered one skate, the other started playing tricks, and his legs went as if he were on a treadmill. The clatter, clatter attracted attention from all parts of the rink, and there were encouraging shouts from the skaters.

"Go it, Bunter!"



"No more, Master Bunter, until you've paid my account!" said Mrs. Mumble, with emphasis.

"Keep it up!"

"He's beating tattoo!"

"Ha, ha! Go it, Bunt!"

Bunter snorted. Do what he would, those terrible skates somehow wouldn't keep steady. At last he made a side-stroke, quite inadvertently, and fairly kicked Bob Cherry's skates away from under him.

Bob gave a yell and went down in a heap, his legs flying in the air; and, of course, Bunter went down on top of him, and as Bunter was clinging to Hurree Singh like a limpet to a rock, the Nabob of Bhanipur was added to the heap.

The mixed and mingled forms writhed and rolled, amid a yell of laughter from the other parts of the gym.

Tom Brown and Mark Linley skated up quickly to help, and the unfortunate three were sorted out. Hurree Singh took out his handkerchief and dabbed his nose, which was flowing with crimson. Bob Cherry nursed an eye that had already begun to assume a greyish-blue colour. Bunter seemed to be unhurt. He sat up and blinked at the juniors, and put his spectacles straight.

"I say, Brown, will you lend me a hand?" he said. "If I stay near Cherry much longer, there will be some accident. He's about the clumsiest ass I ever saw or heard of!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"What!" yelled Bob Cherry.

"Don't you come near me," exclaimed Bunter. "You're too jolly clumsy! I never saw such a chap for falling down! It's my belief that he likes it! You might have broken my
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spectacles; and if you had, you'd jolly well have had to pay for them, I can tell you!"

"Well—my only hat!"

"Got me out of his reach, Brown," said Bunter. "He's dangerous! I'm a bit out of practice, I think, but I shall be all right in a few minutes, if Bob Cherry doesn't help me."

And Tom Brown and Mark Linley, grinning, piloted the fat junior away, leaving Bob Cherry simply speechless.

THE EIGHTH CHAPTER.

Bunter Is Not Quite a Success.

BILLY BUNTER moved slowly along between Tom Brown and Mark Linley. The two sturdy juniors were holding him up by main force, he could not fall, and his skates were playing a sort of castanet tune on the floor.

"Use one foot at a time," suggested Tom. "Make a stride, you see, and throw your weight on that leg. Then, with the other—"

"That's all right, Brown," said Bunter patronisingly; "I'm a dab at this sort of thing, you know."

"I'd better let go, then?"

"Oh, no! Hold on!"

"Then not so much of your rot!" said the junior from New Zealand. "You can't skate for toffee, and you know it. I don't believe you've ever been on a pair of roller-skates before."

"Oh, really, Brown——"

"What on earth are you trying to lift up both feet at once for?"

"I—I wasn't trying to; they went up."

"Well, keep 'em down."

"That's all very well; but——"

"You ass! If you hack me again, I'll drop you! Do you think my legs are made of iron, or wood, like your head?" roared Tom.

"I—I'm sincerely sorry; but Linley is so clumsy——"

"Eh! Then I'd better sheer off," said Mark.

"Ow! No! Don't!"

"Blessed if I ever held up such an utter duffer," growled Tom Brown. "It wouldn't be so bad if it wasn't for his gas. Here, get out of our way, chaps. We can't get out of yours, with this fat, silly porpoise to drag about!"

"Why, I thought Bunter was a dab at skating?" exclaimed Nugent, slowing down with Miss Clara. "Anything wrong, Bunter?"

"I—I'm a little out of practice."

"Ha, ha! You must be."

"I—I say, Miss Clara, would you like me to take you round?"

"Want to commit suicide?" asked Tom Brown.

"Oh, really, Brown——"

"I—I think I'll wait till you're in a bit better practice, Bunter," said Miss Clara with a demure smile; and she glided off with Nugent.

Bunter gave a smirk.

"Did you fellows notice how she smiled at me?" he murmured. "It's curious how the girls take to a medium-sized chap with a good figure."

"You young duffer!" said Mark Linley.

"Of course, she smiled," said Tom Brown. "It is enough to make a stone image smile to see you on skates!"

"Oh, really, you know, it wasn't that——"

"Then your face," said Tom deliberately. "How could anybody look at a face like that—a fat lump with little round eyes like currants peering out behind the fat—and a pair of goggles like an owl—how could anybody look at that without smiling?"

"Oh—oh, really——"

"And then your figure—like a barrel rolling about on two smaller barrels," said Tom. "Enough to make anybody smile—or weep!"

"Of course, I know you're jealous of my figure," said Bunter; "everybody is. What I say about it is—yarooh!"

Bunter broke off with that as his legs went skyward again. With great difficulty the juniors righted him. It was a heavy labour, but with unfailing patience they piloted him round, till at last even Bunter managed to keep on his feet so long as he was held on both sides.

He soon grew confident—as soon as he found he could move without falling down—and as soon as Bunter felt sure of himself, he always grew impertinent.

"Don't hold me so blessed tight, Brown," he said. "If you're afraid of falling, you can hang on to Linley."

"You ass! I've a good mind to let you go."

"Well, I really wish you would. I was a bit out of practice at the start, but that's no reason why you should try to make out that I can't skate."

Tom and Mark exchanged glances. Bunter was very trying, indeed.

"Look here," said Mark. "we'll help you, or let you go, as you like! Which do you want?"

"Let me go, please. I'm all right."

"You're not all right."

"That's my business, Linley, I suppose."

"Oh, very well! have your way!"

And Bunter was released. Brown and Linley, still willing to aid, stood ready to catch him, but they had no chance.

Bunter made a wild clatter with the skates, losing his balance at once, and he threw out his hands frantically. One hand caught Tom Brown across the face, and sent him reeling. The other clumped upon Linley's chest, and the Lancashire lad skated backwards at an unexpected speed, and narrowly escaped a fall. The shock sent Bunter skating, too, and he shot away at express speed.

By a miracle, as it were, he retained his balance, but he had not the slightest control over his legs or his skates.

He dashed away, too frightened even to yell, and his fat figure assumed a sitting position, so that he was squatting just above his skates as he shot straight onward, in a direct line across the gym.

As the skaters were all going round the gym in one direction, and Bunter cut straight across, the havoc he wrought may be imagined.

Bunter was a heavyweight, and anything he came in contact with was bound to go. He sent skater after skater flying, catching them on the legs and knocking them over helplessly as he rushed by.

"Look out!" roared Bob Cherry. "Danger!"

"Oh! Ow!"

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NEXT WEEK: "THE GREYFRIARS SWEEPSTAKE."

"Stop him! Slay him! Jump on him!"

"Stop, you idiot!"

"Back-pedal!"

But Bunter could not stop or back-pedal. He went on like an avalanche or a cyclone. Harry Wharton, with rare skill, steered Marjorie out of his way, and saved her, and Nugent circled round with Clara, and just escaped. But by the time Bunter biffed into the wall, he had left a trail of nine or ten sprawling and furious skaters behind him.

"Oh!" gasped Billy, as he stopped suddenly, and rolled on his back. "Oh! M-m-in-my word!"

"Go for him!" shrieked Hazeldene. "Jump on him!"

"Yank his skates off!"

"Knock his silly head off!"

"Here, I say, you fellows!" gasped Bunter, sitting up as the vengeful skaters gathered round him. "It's all right, you know! It was an accident. It was that clumsy ass Brown——"

"Jump on him!"

"Are you hurt, Bunter?"

It was Marjorie's voice. And as Marjorie came up the avengers cleared off, and Bunter escaped a severe licking. They could hardly jump on him in the presence of Marjorie, but if the girl had not been there, Bunter would certainly have had a rough handling.

"Oh, n-n-no, Miss Marjorie," said Bunter, with a gasp. "only a—a little winded! It was all through the clumsiness of that duffer Linley, you know. Would you like me to take you round?"

Marjorie did not appear to hear that question, as she glided on. Bob Cherry and Skinner seized Bunter, and dragged off his skates. Billy protested in vain.

"I say, you fellows, I was just getting into the spirit of the thing, you know! Besides, I want to take Marjorie round."

"I say, Hazeldene, Bunter says he wants to kill your sister."

"Oh, really, Cherry——"

"Off with his skates! Now get out of the way, Bunter. It's a case of too much Billy Bunter, and you're in danger of getting trodden on, so I warn you."

And Bunter sat disconsolate while the skating went on, in the firmly-fixed opinion that the whole matter was due to jealousy of his fine figure, and wondering how he stood it. And the skaters skated away merrily, untroubled any longer by the Owl of the Remove.

THE NINTH CHAPTER.

Outside, Bunter!

WINGATE kicking at the door of the gym brought to mind the fact that time was up, and the roller-skating ceased at last. Wharton took off Marjorie's skates, and dropped his own, and, a little breathless but very bright and happy, they walked out of the gym. Bob Cherry looked after them with a curious expression upon his face for a moment, and then he set about gathering up the skates, to be returned to Mr. Fleet in Friardale.

"I have enjoyed it so much," said Marjorie, "and our gardener says that it is going to freeze this week, so we may get the ice-skating on Saturday."

"That will be ripping!"

"Of course," said Miss Clara, coming along with Hazeldene, Nugent and Brown. "Of course, you fellows know that we are going to beat you hollow."

Harry laughed.

"Let the best man—or the best girl—win," he said. "Most of us are entering for most of the events. There will be a good many prizes, as Dr. Locke and Miss Primrose are both taking it up, as well as the Mayor of Holme."

"Yes, and there will be a good many competitors," Marjorie remarked. "The Pool will be the place, and there will be plenty of room—if it will only freeze."

"We're all whistling for a frost, every morning," said Harry, laughing. "It can't be far off now. Saturday afternoon will be ripping."

"It will be after dark," remarked Nugent. "With Chinese lanterns and illuminations and so on. It ought to be very effective."

The chums of Greyfriars walked home to Cliff House with Marjorie and Clara, chatting of the coming affair all the time. The ice carnival, as it was somewhat grandly termed, was causing a great deal of excitement in the neighbourhood. As they walked home to Greyfriars the juniors met Trumper, the leader of the Boy Scouts of Pegg.

"Going in for the skating?" asked Trumper.

"What-ho!"

"Good! We're going in for it, too, in scout costume," said Trumper. "We shall be glad to wipe you off the ice."

"Good—only we may do the wiping," said Nugent. "Have you escorted any more girls through the wood yet?"

And Trumper coloured and tramped on without replying. He had never been allowed to forget the occasion when a

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Greyfriars junior, disguised as a girl, passed through the lines of the Pegg scouts, who had undertaken to stop any fellow that tried to get through. Chuckling, the juniors walked back to the school. Billy Bunter met them at the gate in the dusk. The fat junior was looking indignant.

"I say, you fellows, I don't think you ought to play it low down on a chap like that," he said.

"What's the matter now, porpoise?"

"Well, you know I wanted to see Marjorie home, and you marched her off before I could get my coat—"

"That's all right, Bunt! She's safe home, and it was ever so much better without you grunting along," said Nugent cheerfully.

"I'm thinking about Marjorie. It was a disappointment to her."

"Oh, ring off!"

"You can pretend not to see it if you like, Nugent—it's jolly mean jealousy on your part, that's all—but that girl thinks a lot of me. I—hallo, Vaseline, I didn't see you! I—ow—what are you up to? Ow!"

Billy Bunter yelled as Hazeldene pushed him into the nearest puddle. He sat down with a horrid squelch, and yelled again. The juniors walked on.

"I say, you fellows," roared Bunter, after them, "aren't you going to give me a hand up? You beast, Vaseline! Yow, I'm wet! Hellap!"

But no one even looked back. The fat junior had got what he deserved, and no one was inclined to help him out. He staggered up unaided, dripping and running with muddy water.

"The—the beasts!" he gasped. "I won't stand this petty jealousy—a fellow can't be a bit out of the ordinary in looks without having everyone going for him like this. It's absolutely rotten!"

And Bunter toddled away to get a change of nether garments.

He was very distant to the chums of No. 1 Study—until tea-time. Then he was his most agreeable self again. Nobly forgiving all offences, he offered to do any shopping and any cooking that was required, and was shocked and pained when Nugent took him by the ear and led him out of the study, assisting his progress down the passage with his boot.

Bunter went down the passage, as long as the impetus of Nugent's kick lasted, and then he stopped, somewhat dazed. As soon as he recovered from the shock, he returned to the study and opened the door, and blinked in cautiously.

"I say, you fellows!"

Harry Wharton looked at him with a frown.

"Get out, you worm!" he said.

"But it's tea-time," said Bunter indignantly. "Do you want to starve me to death?"

"You can have your tea in Hall."

"Oh, really, Wharton—"

"You're going to have a lesson about being a cad," said Harry Wharton. "The only way to touch you is in the eating line. You can go and grub in Hall."

"I—I say," said Bunter, in dismay, "I—I'm sincerely sorry—"

Wharton relented a little.

"Well, if you like to say you're really sorry for being such a conceited, nasty, creepy little puppy, you can come in!" he said.

"Oh, really, Wharton—"

"Are you sorry?" roared Wharton. "Yes or no!"

"Yes, yes, yes, of course!" spluttered Billy Bunter, who would have said he was glad, or sorry, or both, rather than miss a meal. "I—I'm sincerely sorry."

"Well, you can come in, then."

"But if there's any more caddishness, you go out on your neck," said Nugent.

"The neckfulness will be terrific."

"I don't understand you," said Bunter, with dignity. "I suppose I can come into my own study if I like. I don't think you ought to call me names. It's not my fault I'm good-looking. What are you having for tea?"

And Bunter was soon poaching eggs, and soon after eating them. The roller-skating had made the juniors hungry, and they did full justice to the tea. Billy Bunter had done less skating than the others, but he did more justice to the tea. As Bunter ate at express speed, and never stinted himself of anything, he generally managed to put up a show equal to any two of the others. He always finished last, however, because he was never finished till the table was quite clear.

"I feel a bit better now," he remarked. "Skating's rather exhausting work, especially when you have a clumsy lot of duffers insisting on helping you. It was pretty mean of you not to let me take Marjorie round once, Wharton."

"I don't know whether she's insured."

"Oh, really, you know! Think of the girl herself! She must have been looking forward to it, and it was a disappointment."

Wharton was silent.

"Of course, she really came over to see me," went on Bunter, encouraged by the general silence. "That girl thinks a lot of me, I can tell you. Of course, you fellows wouldn't see it. I'm used to jealousy."

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NEXT WEEK: "THE GREYFRIARS SWEEPSTAKE."

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"So you are beginning again, Bunter?"

"Eh! I don't—"

"Haven't you been warned off that enough times?"

"Oh, really, Nugent! Ow—leggo my collar!"

Nugent dragged the fat junior out of his chair so quickly that the chair went flying, and Bunter sprawled, and he gasped for breath as he hung on his collar. He scrambled on to his feet.

"Leggo! Yow! Leggo! Beast!"

"Outside!"

"I—I'm not going! I—I haven't finished my tea. There's—there's one egg left."

"Hand it over, Inky."

Hurree Singh handed over the egg, and Nugent broke it upon Bunter's nose. It streamed over the fat face, and Bunter squealed.

"There's the egg," said Nugent. "Now get out!"

"Ow! Ow! Oh, I won't!"

But he went, all the same. He alighted in the passage in a sitting position, and Nugent's boot helped him along. The fat junior, with unusual activity, leaped up and ran, as if for his life.

A yell of laughter greeted him from every fellow he passed, at the state of his face. He was brought up finally with Mr. Quelch's hand on his shoulder, and the Remove-master, refusing to listen to a word, gave him fifty lines, on the spot, for going about in such a state. Whereat the feelings of Billy Bunter were too deep to find expression in mere words.

THE TENTH CHAPTER.

Early Waking.

"WILL it freeze?"

That was the question the Greyfriars juniors were asking themselves every day.

And when there was a sharp frost on Friday, they blessed the weather, and hoped for the best.

All the fellows who had ice-skates had them ready, and all those who hadn't had managed to beg or borrow a pair, for nearly everybody was to be at the Pool that Saturday afternoon.

It might have been imagined that Billy Bunter, after his experience on roller-skates, would have given the ice carnival a wide berth.

But Billy was thinking of nothing of the sort. Having tried in vain to borrow the money to buy a pair of skates, he had hired a pair, and was looking out for opportunities to practise.

"Looks like real freezing at last," Bunter remarked on Friday evening. "There's a blessed lot of frost, and the ground's as hard as iron. I shall get up early in the morning to put in some practice with my skates."

"What for?" asked Nugent, naturally enough.

Bunter blinked at him in surprise.

"For the competition Saturday afternoon, of course," he said. "It's finally fixed for to-morrow afternoon, now."

"Are you coming to look on?"

"Oh, really, Nugent—"

Nugent burst into a roar.

"Ha, ha, ha! You're not going to compete, surely?"

"Why not?" demanded Bunter indignantly. "I'm a bit out of practice with roller-skates, but I'm simply a dab on the ice."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Blessed if I can see anything to cackle at. I've entered for the biggest events, anyway, and I suppose I've got as good a chance as anybody."

"My only chapeau!"

"I'm getting pretty sick of this jealousy, I can tell you," said Bunter. "I suppose you don't want me to walk off the prizes. I shall take the speed prize—that's £3 offered by the Mayor of Holme—and the figure prize. I don't mind if the others go, as they're not cash prizes."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"It will be five pounds altogether," said Bunter. "I hear that the Head is offering £1 for the one-legged race, and that Miss Primrose is putting up £1 for something. You fellows can have them, if you can get them. I'm going to rope in the £3 and the £2."

"Go it," said Nugent. "The judges will have a fit when they see your form. Have you made any arrangements about insurance?"

"Oh, really, Nugent—"

"That's for the other fellows to do," grinned Wharton.

"The other competitors will be in more danger than Bunter."

Bunter sniffed, and walked away. Opposition only made

ANSWERS

him the more determined, and it was useless to argue with him. The juniors chuckled at the thought of the figure he would cut on the ice.

"I say, Cherry," said Bunter, when they went to bed that night. "Will you call me in the morning, if you wake before rising-bell? You're always awake early."

Bob Cherry stared at him.

"I'll call you, if you like," he said. "You won't get up. What's the little game?"

"I'm going out early to get some practice at figure skating."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I'm not joking. Look here, sometimes I go to sleep again after I'm called, and it's important for me to get up early to-morrow. Will you see that I really wake up, and—and don't take any notice of anything I say, you know. Of course, I shan't feel like getting up, but I'm determined to."

"Oh, all right!" said Bob Cherry grinning.

And the Remove went to bed. Bob had a shrewd idea that Bunter would repent by the morning; but he was determined to carry out his part of the compact, at all events.

Bob was often an early waker, and he frequently rose early to take a run before rising-bell with his chum Mark Linley. On that particular Saturday morning he did not mean to get up early, but he was quite willing to wake Bunter if he woke himself. And he did wake!

The faintest grey glimmer of dawn was stealing in at the high windows when Bob Cherry opened his eyes and yawned.

He heard the clock chime three-quarters, and knew that it was a quarter to seven, and after lying for a few moments, to get quite awake, he raised himself on one elbow, and called to Bunter.

"Bunter! Bunter! It's a quarter to seven! Wake up!"

A deep and unmelodious snore was the only reply from Bunter's bed. Bob Cherry grinned, and turned over in his mind the best method of waking Bunter without getting out of bed. It was bitterly cold in the dormitory, and Bob had a natural objection to getting out if he could help it. He finally decided upon the pillow.

"Bunter! I say, Bunter!"

Snore!

Bob Cherry sat up, and grasped the pillow. He took deadly aim, over Nugent's bed, which was between him and Bunter's. The pillow flew through the air, and dropped fairly upon Billy Bunter's head.

"Gr-r-r-roooh!"

There was a wild splutter from Bunter, and his fat arms came flying out, and the pillow was knocked aside, and Bunter blinked wildly in the gloom.

"Groo! What was that? Oh!"

"It's all right, Bunter. It's my pillow. Chuck it over, will you? I'm not getting up yet."

"Ow! You beast!"

"Why, you asked me to call you!" exclaimed Bob Cherry indignantly.

"Yah! Lemme alone."

"But you've got to get up early to get some practice on your ice-skates."

Bunter grunted and turned over.

"I've changed my mind. Shurrup! Gr—" Snore.

"You told me I wasn't to take any notice of anything you said," said Bob Cherry, with a shake of the head. "I'm going to keep my promise. Wake up, Bunter."

Snore!

Bob groped for his bolster, and sent it whirling after the pillow. There was a fiendish yell from Billy Bunter as the bolster smote him.

"Yah! Yow! Wharrat? Shurrup!"

"Time to get up, you know."

"Lemme alone! Beast!"

"But you asked me to—"

"I've changed my mind. I'm such a dab at skating that I don't need any practice. Lemme alone, you rotten beast."

"Can't be did. A chap's word is his bond. I'm not going to take any notice of anything you say, just as I said I wouldn't."

Snore!

Bob looked round for another missile. He could not spare anything more from his bed. His washstand was near at hand, however, and the sponge was within reach. He groped for the sponge, and dipped it in the jug. To his joy he found that the water was frozen. There would be good ice that day.

The sponge, however, was cold enough for the purpose, without being wetted. Bob Cherry took good aim, and dropped it fairly upon Bunter's face.

Bunter woke and gasped. The sponge was resting on his neck, and it sent cold shivers through him. He squirmed away from the cold touch, and the sponge rolled into the bed, and found repose on his chest.

"Oh! Oh! Oh! Yow! Gerrooh!"

Bunter grabbed the sponge and sat up.

"All right now?" asked Bob Cherry cheerily.

"You—you beast!"

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"THE GREYFRIARS SWEEPSTAKE."

And Bunter hurled the sponge back again with all his force. But without his glasses Bunter fully deserved the title of the "Owl" of the Remove. The sponge knocked against the wall over the head of the next bed, and fell downwards—and dropped on Nugent's face.

There was a gasp and a yell from Frank.

He leaped up, and grabbed the sponge away from his skin, and cast a perfectly ferocious glare round the gloomy dormitory.

"Who's playing these silly tricks?" he roared. "Whose sponge is this?"

"Mino," said Bob. "But—"

"Then you can have it back," howled Nugent.

The sponge caught Bob Cherry under the chin, and bounded off to the floor. Bob gave a yell of wrath.

"You ass! It was Bunter dropped it on you."

"Oh! Well, it was your sponge."

"And this is my soap," howled Bob, catching it from the washstand, and landing it on Nugent's nose.

"Oh!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You—you ass!"

Nugent's own soap came back, and his sponge followed it, and then a jacket. Bob Cherry buried his head under the bed-clothes, and only a muffled chuckle proceeded from him. Nugent snorted, and hurled a pair of slippers and a pair of trousers, which only elicited further chuckles. Then he said some things, and lay down to sleep again. Bob's head emerged from under the blankets like the head of a tortoise.

"I say, Bunter! Are you up?"

Snore!

Bunter was fast asleep again. Bob Cherry gave a sleepy chuckle, and dropped off into slumber too, with his head resting on his arm in lieu of a pillow. And there was no more early waking in the Remove dormitory that morning—not an eyelid wagging until the rising-bell clanged through the frosty air.

THE ELEVENTH CHAPTER.

On the Ice.

BUNTER did not get any practice that morning. He had a narrow escape, in fact, of not getting his breakfast, so late was he down. And it was not an extraordinary attention to his ablutions that delayed him, either, as Bob Cherry remarked.

The washing of Bunter showed the regular amount of diminution, and it was calculated by some fellows in the Remove, who had a gift for mental arithmetic, that it would disappear altogether before Christmas. There were whispers in the Form of a surprise waiting for Bunter in this connection, of some discipline he was to be put through on the subject, but for the present the juniors were thinking too much about the ice to think much of Bunter and his deadly vendetta against soap and water.

For it was freezing. There was no doubt about that. At any other time, perhaps, the juniors would not have welcomed the fact that their toes were nipped with cold in the class-room, in spite of the roaring fire kept up there, and that their fingers were almost too stiff to hold the pens.

But on this particular morning even that was a subject for rejoicing, for it was proof that the ice was holding, and that the Pool of the Sark would be as hard as iron that evening.

And when, after school, the juniors dashed down to the Sark, and found it frozen as hard as bricks, there was a cheer.

"It's all right!" roared Bob Cherry, the first to reach the bank, in a voice that rang far along the stream and woke the echoes of the Black Pike, and Hurree Janset Ram Singh opined that the allrightfulness was terrific.

And now eager eyes devoured watches and clocks till it was time to get to the Pool.

It had been agreed that it would be more fun to have the affair after nightfall, and there was the advantage, too, that it gave a chance to the men and lads engaged in business during the day who wished to compete.

Haughty aristocrats like Billy Bunter and Snoop were a little shocked to find that the baker's young man and the butcher's boy from Friardale were competing in the skating competition. But their first remarks on the subject met with a reception which did not encourage them to proceed.

When Harry Wharton had waltzed Bunter round with an iron grip on his ear, till the fat junior had squealed for mercy, and Bob Cherry had calmly and kindly dipped Snoop's head in the half-frozen fountain, and then rolled him in the Close to dry, they thought that the matter had gone far enough, and there was no more heard of their aristocratic prejudices.

The ice carnival was, indeed, a very mixed gathering, and all the better for that. The Greyfriars fellows turned up in great force, all Forms being represented. Temple, Dabney & Co. were there ready for the sport, and on civil terms with the Remove for once for the sake of the public. The Boy Scouts of Pegg were there, in their light and airy costume, facing the bitter cold with the hardiness of true scouts. Lads from Friardale,

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and fishermen and farmer's fellows were there, and not least were the girls of Cliff House.

Marjorie & Co. were there in force.

Dr. Locke of Greyfriars, and Miss Penelope Primrose, the Principal of Cliff House School, were on the scene, with the Mayor of Holme, and several Greyfriars masters and Cliff House mistresses, who got on remarkably well with one another.

The dusk had deepened into blackest night at an early hour; but the whole scene was lighted up by electricity under the management of the Mayor of Holme, who informed the doctor that that was his "line."

Dr. Locke had a very hazy notion of his meaning, working out in his mind some connection between the aforesaid "line" and the electric wires.

Besides the electric lights, which made the Pool and the surrounding banks as light as a summer's day, there were coloured Chinese lanterns in all the trees near the river, and they gave a fairy-like and enchanted aspect to the scene.

"It is really very pretty," Dr. Locke remarked to Miss Primrose.

And the old lady nodded assent.

"It is very pretty," she agreed, "and it is so pleasant to see the dear children enjoying themselves. You look quite happy, my little man," added Miss Primrose, patting Bob Cherry on the head with a sweet smile.

Bob turned crimson.

He was nearly a foot taller than Miss Primrose, and she had to reach up to pat his head, and he didn't exactly like being called a little man with the mocking eyes of Miss Clara before him.

"Yes, ma'am," he stammered, and he passed on as quickly as he could.

His blush became deeper as he caught Miss Clara's eyes.

"What a ripping evening," said Miss Clara, as they shook hands.

"Yes. Warm, isn't it?" stammered the confused Bob.

"Warm?"

"I mean hot—that is to say cold."

"Yes, isn't it?" smiled Miss Clara. "Isn't Miss Primrose a dear?"

"Yes, at any price," murmured Bob.

"What did you say?"

"Yes, she is awfully," said Bob.

"The dear boys are so affectionate," said Miss Primrose to Dr. Locke. "Boys are quite as affectionate as girls, only not so demonstrative. Did you see how the dear boy blushed with pleasure when I patted his dear little head?"

The Head coughed.

"Ye-es, I certainly observed him colour, Miss Primrose," he remarked.

"They're just starting," said the mayor, whose voice proceeded from the depths of the big fur collar of a big fur coat. "The ice is ripping."

Miss Primrose gave a faint shriek.

"Oh! Oh dear! Stop them at once!"

Boys and girls who were putting on their skates looked round in amazement.

Miss Primrose had risen from her chair of honour in her excitement.

"Is anything the matter?" asked Dr. Locke mildly.

"Yes, yes! Did you not hear what Mr. Linx said?"

"Er—yes. Some remark in praise of the ice, I believe."

"No, no! Come back, my darlings! Come back!"

This was addressed to several fellows who had shot out from the banks of the Pool to try the ice.

They skated back, looking very much surprised.

"Anything the matter, Miss Primrose?" asked Harry Wharton.

"Yes, yes! The ice is not safe!"

There was a general protest.

"It's nine inches thick, ma'am."

"Safe as houses."

"It's all right."

"It would stand a troupe of elephants."

"No, no! It is dangerous! Mr. Linx said so."

"I!" said the Mayor, in amazement.

"Yes. You said it was ripping."

There was a gurgle from the younger competitors.

Dr. Locke turned his face away.

The Mayor of Holme stared, and then burst into a chuckle.

"Ha, ha! Excuse me, ma'am. I only meant it was—er—ripping."

"Well, well! If the ice rips it cannot be safe."

"Excuse me. A slangy expression," said Mr. Linx, smiling broadly. "I meant it was first rate. Very good ice, ma'am."

"Dear me! How very singular!"

"The ice is quite safe, ma'am."

"You are quite certain?" asked Miss Primrose anxiously.

"You are not saying this to reassure me, Mr. Linx?"

"Not at all, ma'am. It's as safe as the Bank of England," and Miss Primrose sat down again, and put her feet on her footstool, and allowed Miss Locke to arrange her furs again.

The ice was indeed in splendid condition. It was hard and firm, and there was not the slightest chance of anything going amiss.

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

The first event was a speed test, and half Greyfriars had entered for it. Wingate, and the best skaters of the Upper Form had chivalrously kept out of it to give the youngsters a chance; but Carberry had entered, and Loder and Carne. Billy Bunter, of course, was on the scene, and he called on Harry Wharton to help him put his skates on.

"You young ass!" said Wharton, in a low voice. "You'll only make a silly ass of yourself. Keep off the ice."

"I'm a dab at skating, Wharton."

"Ass!"

"Oh, I know you want to keep me from winning the cash prizes. You needn't mind, as, if I win them, I shall stand a big feed, and ask you fellows."

"You can't skate."

"I suppose I ought to know best about that," said Billy Bunter, with dignity.

"You'll make the Remove look ridiculous with your foolery."

"Oh, really, Wharton—"

"Are you ready?" called out Wingate, who was arranging the heats.

He was not competing himself, and he was invaluable in making arrangements.

"Yes," said Wharton; "but Bunter—"

"Wharton wants me to keep out of it, Wingate; but I'm not going to. Will you fasten that skate on for me, Wharton, or will you not?"

Wharton made no further objection.

Wingate grinned; but he knew Billy Bunter, and he said nothing.

Bunter was among the first starters.

THE TWELFTH CHAPTER.

Good for Greyfriars.

"HURRAY!"

Down the smooth, shining ice went a dozen skaters, in line, and down on his back in the first three feet went one of them. Needless to say which one.

"Oh! Ow! Yah!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared the crowd on the bank. "Bravo, Bunter!"

"Ow! Help! The ice's cracked! Help!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Ow! I say, you fellows—help!"

Wingate and another Six-Former stepped on the ice-track, dragged Bunter off, and plumped him on the ground.

The fat junior sat there dazedly. He jammed his spectacles straight on his little fat nose, and blinked round him. He expected to see a big hole in the ice, but he only saw a firm and smooth surface and a circle of grinning faces.

"Wh-wh-what's happened?" he demanded.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I—I thought the ice had given in."

"You young ass!" said Wingate good-humouredly. "You can't skate. Your feet went up into the air as soon as you started. That's all."

"Oh, really, Wingate, I'm a dab at skating, you know."

"Rats!"

"You'd better put me in the second lot—"

"I'll put you in the nearest ditch if you begin any more of your piffle," said the captain of Greyfriars. "Take those skates off, and go and sit down somewhere."

"Oh, really—"

"Clear out, I tell you!"

And Bunter, on reflection, thought that he had better. It was really a relief to get the skates off. They made him feel so very uncertain as to whether the world was still under his feet, or had floated away into some other quarter of the solar system.

He found a seat beside Miss Wilhelmina Limburger, to whom he confided that skating was a lot of rot, and that he was looking forward to supper, and in Miss Limburger he found a kindred spirit, who fully agreed with him.

The skaters were swift, the ice in splendid condition. The races were watched in great excitement by a thronging crowd on both sides of the river. In the final test were Harry Wharton and his chums, and Trumper, and Miss Marjorie Hazeldene, and Carberry of the Sixth. They were watched with the keenest interest as they fairly flew over the ice, and reached the turning flag on the ice at the end of the Pool.

Round the flag went five of them—Harry, Tom Brown, and little Wun Lung, the Chinese, and Marjorie and Carberry. Half-way back to the winning-post Carberry, Sixth-Former as he was, dropped behind quite blown, and a second later Tom Brown took a tumble, and Wun Lung took a tumble over him. Harry and Marjorie were left speeding on side by side. Harry was

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drawing ahead, and he glanced back and saw the pretty face with a set look of determination upon it.

And he slackened till they glided level.

Miss Marjorie turned her eyes upon him and met his glance, and her eyes said as plainly as her tongue could have said, "If you let me win I will never speak to you again." And Harry understood—and he smiled, and shot ahead.

He breasted the tape a yard ahead of Marjorie.

"Wharton wins!" said Wingate.

"And Marjorie takes second prize," said Miss Clara proudly, as she hugged her chum, and very nearly brought about a disaster thereby, for hugging is hardly safe when the huggers are standing upon smooth ice with their skates on.

Marjorie laughed, and shook hands with Harry.

"You deserved to win," she said. "It would have been mean of you if you had let me take the prize when I couldn't win it. I'm glad you won."

"Good!" said Harry; "and I'm glad you're pleased."

And Marjorie laughed again.

Bob Cherry gave Harry a hearty slap on the back as he came off, knocking nearly every ounce of breath out of his body.

"Jolly good, old chap!" said Bob. "I hope you'll do as well in the figure skating; I've not entered for that. Buck up for Greyfriars!"

"Then leave me a gasp or two of breath to do it with."

Bob grinned, and turned to Miss Hazeldene.

"I congratulate you, Miss Marjorie——"

"Not the same way, please!" exclaimed Harry, interposing hastily. "Marjorie isn't made of iron, you know, and——"

"You ass!"

"Well I thought——"

"You frabjous duffer!"

"Next event," said Wingate.

The events followed one another briskly.

Marjorie and Clara divided the ladies' prize for figure skating, and the gentleman's prize was divided by Harry Wharton and Mark Linley.

For skating couples Harry and Marjorie were easily first, though Nugent and Miss Clara made a good second.

It was good fun, and every winner was heartily cheered; and none cheered louder than the Greyfriars juniors when Trumper carried off the one-legged prize.

And when the last event had been skated off, the prizes all awarded, and the last speech made, the whole crowd poured on the ice for an hour or two of skating and sliding before the meeting broke up.

The meeting wound up in great style. The results had been good for Greyfriars, and especially honourable for the Remove; for beside the other prizes the Removites had carried off between them a sum of six pounds in cash, two pounds more being in the possession of Miss Hazeldene.

"It's ripping!" said Harry, as he chatted with Marjorie before saying good-bye. "We're in funds now, and no mistake."

"So are we," smiled Marjorie.

"My idea is that we ought to get up some sort of affair together to spend the tin," said Harry—"some sort of a celebration, you know."

"Good wheeze!" said Miss Clara.

"Oh, Clara!"

"So it is," said Miss Clara. "I think it's ripping! Let's pool the funds, you know, and have a real ripping time—high jinks, I think you call it."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Jolly good idea," chimed in Billy Bunter. "I say, you fellows, if you like to let the celebration take the form of a feed, I don't mind taking the matter in hand, and running it for you, and making all the arrangements, and so on, you know."

"You're too generous, Billy."

"Well, you know, my intention is to be generous," said Bunter, blinking. And he wondered why a laugh followed his remark.

And when the Greyfriars chums parted with the girls of Clift House, it was fully agreed that the cash prizes should be expended in some tremendous celebration, though what form that tremendous celebration was to take was not yet decided. But it was pretty certain that it would not take the form suggested by Bunter—the form of a big feed with Billy Bunter as the central figure!

THE END.

(Another splendid story of Harry Wharton & Co. in next Tuesday's "Magnet" Library. Please order your copy in advance. Price One Halfpenny.)

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"THE GREYFRIARS SWEEPSTAKE."

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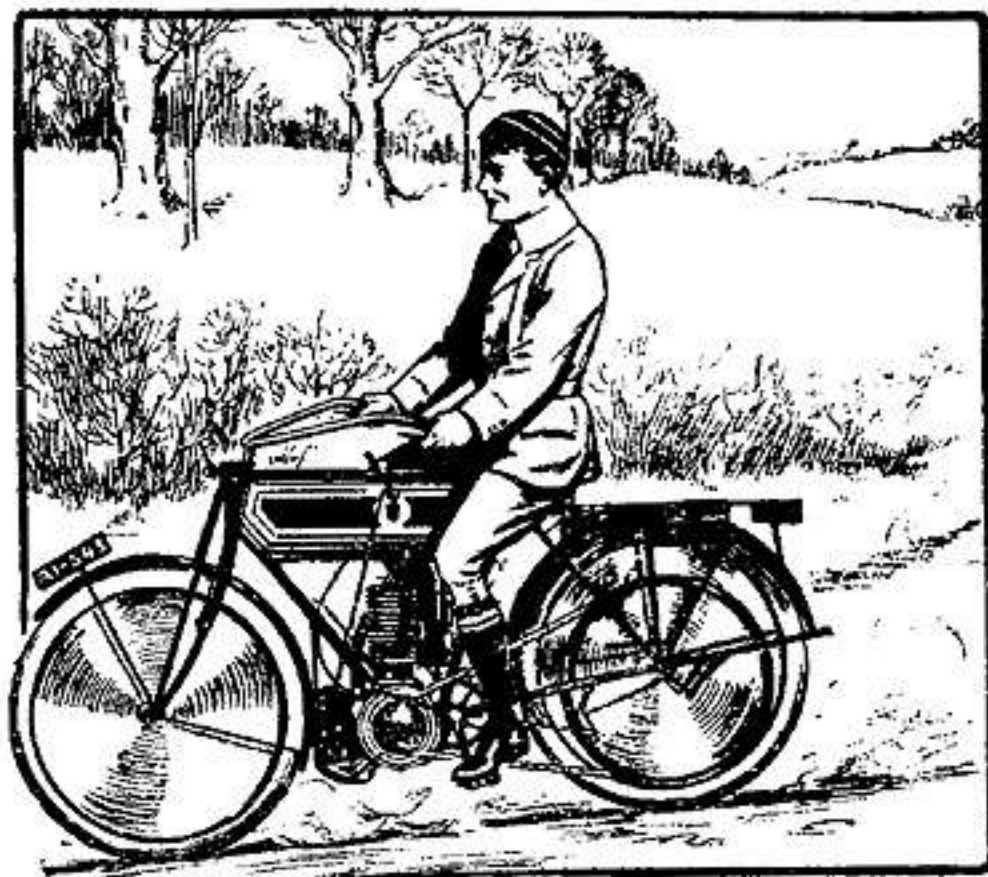
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A Splendid Tale of Life in the British Army.

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. The Royal Wessex are forming the garrison of Eastguard Forts, near Plymport, during manoeuvres. After some nights' weary vigilance, the enemy make an attack, and the Fort's guns cannot be supplied quickly enough with powder and blank-shot. Ronald is told off with a party of men to help in the magazine. Bagot, an ex-sergeant, attempts to blow the place up, and when Ronald captures him the two fall into the sea. They are, however, rescued by one of the enemy's torpedo boats and, are eventually put ashore. From that moment the two men disappear, so Gussie, one of Ronald's comrades, goes to Lieutenant Bob Fairly, and tells his superior officer some strange news.

(Now go on with the story.)

Ronald's Two Champions.

"Then you think that it was Mr. — H'm!" Lieutenant Bob came to a halt. "No, we won't discuss that any further. This is sufficiently desperate as it stands, without any further speculating on any possibilities. You have made a most serious charge, and you must substantiate it, Smythe; but not now. You can go. But mind, not a word of any of this to a soul!"

There was no need to impress the necessity of silence upon Gussie just then. He went out again, shaking like a leaf.

Lieutenant Bob re-read his statement, whistled low and long, folded it carefully, put it in an inside pocket, and started for Aldershot to interview Cosgrave.

With this terrible document, also reposed certain letters which had been found in Ronald's kit, and taken charge of by Lieutenant Bob Fairly. They were the odd bills and letters which Ronald had picked up when he had rescued Foxey from the blazing loft. But Pushoffsky's letter to Ian, in which he explained the cause of his flight, and his fear that their plot was discovered, was not included in the sheaf.

Nor did Fairly miss it, being ignorant of its existence.

How, when, or why these papers could come to be in Ronald's possession he could not imagine.

As he unfolded these papers to Cosgrave one by one, he explained the story, having first sworn the other to secrecy.

Cosgrave, when asked for a motive for this reckless, diabolical hatred of Ian's against his own half-brother, supplied it readily enough. Ronald had made him his confident more than once when things at home were at their worst, and his relations with his father and stepmother strained to breaking point. He knew of the unscrupulous plot to rob the older boy of his inheritance that was being hatched by mother and son.

He also knew, by something that had recently transpired, that it was Ian who had planted at Ronald's feet in the examination-room the "crib," or slip of notes, that had been the means of getting him expelled from Sandhurst.

He had discovered, too, that Ian on the strength of Ronald's supposed death, had borrowed heavy sums of Mordecai.

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"There you have it," he added grimly. "In the hour of success, when the path looked absolutely straight to his father's fortune, Ronald crops up again. Even though he seems to have played Ian's game for him, and taken the utmost care to conceal his identity, his very existence was a menace to the other's schemes. Hence this dastardly plot to remove him before anybody else tumbled to the fact that he was alive. By Jove! I thought little enough of young Chenys, but could not believe it possible that even he could descend to such depths of villainy as this."

"Nor I," added Bob Fairly.

"And now you say that Ronald has disappeared. Tell me how. What were the circumstances?" asked Cosgrave.

Lieutenant Bob was stumped for the moment. He was under oath with Colonel Conger not to divulge one word of the discreditable incident of the day before.

"Was it anything to do with the attempt to blow up Fort Eastguard? I see some of your battalion were in garrison there."

Cosgrave came out so pat with the question that Bob Fairly was flabbergasted.

"I saw it in this evening's paper. There it is!"—tossing an "Extra Special" across for him to read.

Half a column was devoted to this sensational tit-bit.

"The two men," ran the concluding paragraph, "suspected of devising this hideous plot, involving the lives of hundreds of comrades and millions of pounds worth of property, succeeded in escaping by leaping into the sea and swimming to a passing torpedo craft. As the full extent of their villainy was not discovered, unfortunately, until some hours later, they were allowed to land at Plymport, and promptly disappeared, nor have the police been able to discover any clue as to their whereabouts."

"Was one of those men Ronald Chenys?" asked the other, seeing that Lieutenant Bob still kept silence.

"He was," answered Bob Fairly. "Of course, this about his complicity in the plot is an infamous lie."

"Of course," said Cosgrave quietly.

"There are some who think it is true, but we know it is impossible!" Bob Fairly continued hotly. "However, the thing has leaked out, though Heaven knows how, and in one way it will do good."

"How?"

"The battalion, I expect, will be released, and sent back to Woolchester. I am glad of that, for I tell you what. Cosgrave, I mean to devote myself, heart and soul, hand and foot, to draining this conspiracy to the blue, black filth at the bottom of it. Ian Chenys is guilty of much, we know, and for that he shall suffer!"

"And I," added Cosgrave. "I'll apply for leave at once on urgent private affairs, and if they still bottle you up in Fort Eastguard, I'll carry out your work on land!"

"Bravo!"

On Dry Land Again—The Man with the Twisted Face.

Bob Fairly was right when he said that since the secret of the Eastguard Fort had leaked out, the Wessex were likely to be released, and sent back to barracks.

Now that their hands had been forced by the newspapers, and to avoid further sensation to the affair, the authorities gave orders for the battalion to embark on the following day,

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and return to Woolchester. Thence they were to march out at once, and take up their new quarters in Fort Alma—one of the belt of fortifications encircling the landward side of Plymport, rendered obsolete for defence by the enormous range of modern sea artillery, and now only used as infantry barracks.

The news of the change was received with delight in all ranks. Woolchester was a quiet, sleepy little town, and they had seen more than enough of it. Plymport, on the other hand, was busy and bustling, with plenty to offer in the way of sport and amusement.

There was another advantage, which appealed more particularly to the men of No. 4 Section B Company. This was, that their removal to Plymport would enable them one and all to lend a hand in solving the mystery of Ronald's disappearance.

The first intimation of the change came when an advance party of fifty men, under Lieutenant Chenys, was ordered to embark overnight, on an Admiralty tug, dispatched to convey them up the harbour.

Among B Company's contingent of this party, as it happened, were Gussie and Mouldy Mills.

"Where's the Castle Gate Wharf, that Chester and Bagot were landed at?" asked Gussie, as the tug passed the grim land batteries, guarding the harbour, and scurried up the narrow fairway. Past the lamp-lit quays and wharves, and on to Plymport Dockyard.

"Castle Gate?" echoed Mouldy. "Why, you see that tumble-down rookery, where them bust-up malkins is, and them three-storeyed sheds alongside, that's Castle Gate, and a wery pleasant place, too, the only inconvenience bein' that you has to swallow your watch and money fust before you goes there, in case the enlightened natives takes a fancy to 'em, and begs them of yer as a souvenir."

"It looks a reg'lar rathole. I wonder Chester, as soon as he was put ashore, and saw the kind of place that he had got into, didn't sing out for the boat to take him higher up. It's about the last place I'd like to find myself stranded in with a maniac who had first tried to shoot me, and then blow me up. Bagot, I expect, simply clipped him one unaware, and toppled him back into the river."

"Why, they know he didn't do that! The boat's crew saw them turn quietly down one of them alleys under a lamp, and besides, if Chester was drowned they'd have picked him up before now."

"P'raps you're right," agreed Gussie moodily. "I wonder why they call the slum Castle Gate?"

"Dunno," answered Mouldy. "Wait, though, I've 'eard tell that there was an old castle once. Hundreds of years ago, before Plymport was as big as it is now; but if that was so, there ain't nothin' of it left so far as I can remember."

"Were you ever there, then?" asked Gussie.

"Well, yes—once," answered Mouldy.

"When was that?"

"Some years ago, when I was still a young soldier," said Mouldy, "and didn't know what was good for me. I thought of deserting, then, and me and another chap fixed it all up to do a guy. He knew the ropes, for it wasn't the first time for him. There was a chap what kept a pub somewhere round about this wery part, what would give us a hand, he said. Two quid down he wanted for the job."

"D'yer mean he made a reg'lar trade of it?"

"Suttinly! Hid you up, gave you a suit of old clothes, and shipped you off, when all was quiet, on one of them old traders what are always knocking about in and out of port. When you'd got free, you had to part up with another fiver as soon as he thought you could afford it, or else the hound 'ud put the police on to you somehow."

"Look here, Mouldy," said Gussie, after a moment's thought, "did Bagot know of this place, do you think?"

"He might have done. He was about as sick of the Service as I was at that time. Why do you ask?"

"Because, don't you see, if Bagot knew of this haunt, and it still existed, it would be about the first place he would have headed for. He'd have Chester in the trap before he tumbled to what the game was, and then it would be any odds on one, for Chester would be bound to show fight."

"Great gumboils! Why didn't I think of that before!" exclaimed Mouldy, thumping himself on the head. "Why, o' course, that's just what he would have done. What we've got to do is to find out where this place is. If I hadn't been such a chicken-hearted jossler then, and backed out, I'd have known all about it."

"Yes, and you wouldn't have been here to bother your head now, so that's all bunkum. Just keep your mouth shut about this till I get time to think it out. Mum's the word for the present, and here we are at the landing-stage, anyway."

"And bust me if that ain't old Rough, too. Come all the way from Woolchester to meet us!" exclaimed Mouldy, as the terrier, draggled and muddy, and so pinched with hunger that its ribs stuck out beneath its shaggy coat, came scampering along the quay, and started yelping with joy at the sight of familiar faces.

When the order came to mobilise and garrison the sea-forts, Ronald had to leave his four-footed chum behind in barracks. So determined was Rough to follow him, however, that it was necessary to chain him up. But even this precaution had been unavailing. Six inches of broken chain dangling at his collar showed that he had snapped the links in his struggles, and by some instinct had followed his friends to the point at which they had embarked.

That he had since been roaming in Plymport, hungry and homeless, was evident.

Scarcely had the tug rubbed along the landing-stage, than the dog bounded from the quay on to the rail, and thence along the deck, sniffing and whining, looking from face to face in search of his master.

In vain his favourites caught him up, and tried to comfort him. He seemed to read in their eyes that something was amiss, and wriggled himself free to commence his search anew.

When he came to Ian, he sprang back, growling and showing his teeth.

"Hang the little beast!" snarled Ian, shrinking back. "Here, kick him into the river somebody, and tie a brick round his neck first."

But no one moved. Had anyone attempted to carry out the brutal order, there is not the slightest doubt that he would have been pitched neck and crop overboard.

So Ian contented himself with giving the word "Fall in!" and the advance-party filed across the gangway, and, with their kitbags under their arms, tramped through the dockyard gate, and on the road to the station.

If any man was loth to leave Plymport that night it was Ian. Every attempt he had made for shore-leave since the affair at Fort Eastguard, had been frustrated by the colonel.

Had he succeeded, he scarcely knew what he would have done, or where he would have turned. Some inkling of his hated half-brother's fate was what his black heart ached for, and only news of Ronald's death could have brought it healing.

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