

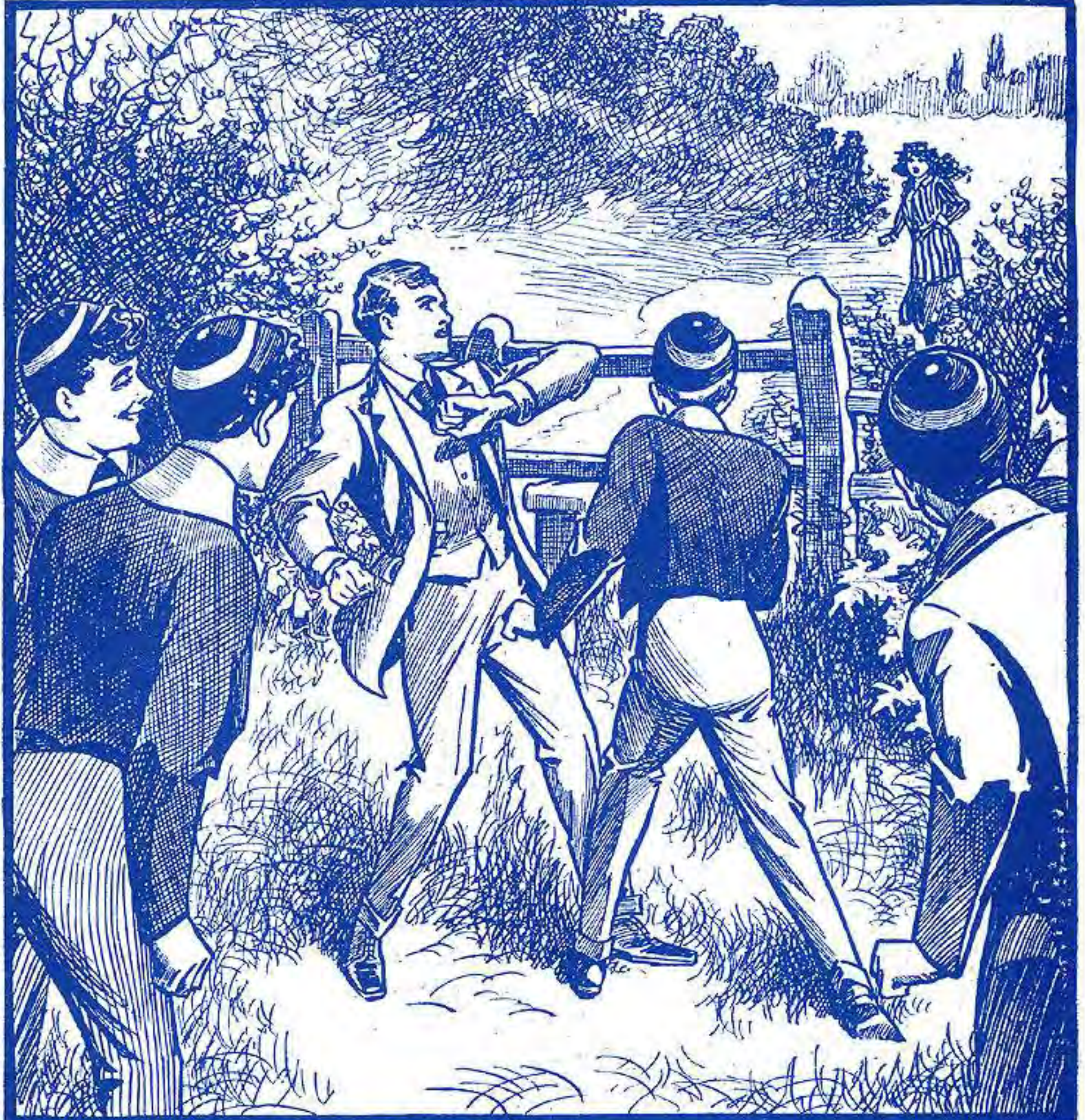
FLAP'S BROTHER!

A Grand Long Complete School Tale of Harry Wharton & Co.



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AN INTERRUPTED FIGHT!

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FLAP'S BROTHER!

By FRANK RICHARDS.

A Magnificent New Long Complete Tale of
Harry Wharton & Co. at Greyfriars School.

THE FIRST CHAPTER.

Looking for Trouble!

"WHERE did you get that eye?"
"Where did you get that face?"

"The facefulness is terrific, my esteemed Skinner!"

Skinner of the Remove did not answer those questions.

He scowled as he tramped up the steps of the School House at Greyfriars.

Harry Wharton & Co. were chatting outside the porch, and naturally they looked at Skinner as he came up.

For Harold Skinner's appearance was really remarkable.

His thin nose was swollen and red. His left eye was circled with dark blue. His collar was torn, his necktie had disappeared, and his jacket was dusty. Skinner was not a fighting-man—when he could help it. Evidently he had not been able to help it this time.

"By Jove, you do look a picture, Skinner!" said Harry Wharton. "Who on earth's handled you like that?"

"I heard you were going over to Highcliffe," grinned Bob Cherry. "Is that the kind of hospitality they handed out?"

"Find out!" growled Skinner.

"But, dash it all, if they handled you like that on a friendly visit, they want mopping up," said Johnny Bull. "Who was it?"

Skinner paused, looking a little less Hunnish.

"Well, if you fellows like to take it up, I don't object," he said. "I'm no match for the cad. He knew that when he set on me."

"Then it was a Highcliffe chap?" asked Frank Nugent.

"Yes."

"Ponsonby—what?"

"No; Pon's my friend," said Skinner. "It was that new Colonial chap at Highcliffe—Derwent. A chap from Timbuctoo, or Tasmania, or somewhere."

"You rowed with him?" asked Wharton.

"No; he rowed with me." Skinner rubbed his painfully blinking eye. "I hadn't any chance against him. He took me unawares, too. Beastly bully!"

Wharton looked at Skinner keenly.

"I don't know all about Derwent," he said. "But I shouldn't have thought he was a bully. He has a very nice sister at Cliff House, and I thought he was quite a decent chap."

"He's rather thick with Pon, though," remarked Bob Cherry. "What did he pitch into you for, Skinner? Highcliffe bounders aren't allowed to bully Greyfriars chaps, and if he was doing that we'll call on him."

Skinner's eyes gleamed.

"He lost his money at nap, and lost his temper," he said.

"Oh, you've been playing cards, you rotter?"

"Well, he bantered me into it, really," said Skinner. "I didn't want to. I was going over to tea with Pon when I met him. I haven't been to Highcliffe after

all. I couldn't go with a face like this. He rushed on me like a wild beast, and got me down. It wasn't a fair fight."

"Derwent might have another version to give," remarked Nugent drily.

Skinner scowled.

"Well, that's the truth. I'm jolly well going to complain to his headmaster about it, too!"

"Don't do that!" exclaimed Wharton quickly. "There's no good in sneaking!"

"I'm not going to be hammered like this for nothing. I tell you he never gave me a chance!"

"Gentlemen," said Bob Cherry, "this wants looking into. Where did you leave that merry Tasmanian merchant, Skinner?"

"The rotter was sitting on the stile on the road when I left him, grinning like a Cheshire cat!" growled Skinner.

"We're going that way," said Bob.

"We shall have time to talk to him, if we find him, before we're due at Cliff House to tea, you fellows. If it's as Skinner says, we'll let him pick out his man, and give him a fair scrap. Highcliffe bounders have got to learn to keep their place."

"Good!" said Wharton. "Let's get off. It's about time!"

"He, he, he!"

That unmusical cackination proceeded from Billy Bunter, as he blinked out of the doorway and spotted Skinner's damaged countenance.

Bunter seemed to think it amusing.

"He, he, he! There's a picture for you!" chortled Bunter. "Where did you dig up that chivvy, Skinner? Better not let Quelch see it! He, he, he!"

"Shut up, you cackling fat beast!"

"He, he, he!"

Skinner made a jump at Bunter.

A stern voice rapped out from within the doorway:

"Skinner!"

It was the voice of Mr. Quelch, the master of the Remove.

Skinner jumped.

"Ye-es, sir?"

"Your face is disgraceful, Skinner. You have been fighting!"

"Ye-es, sir! I—I couldn't help it, sir! A fellow set on me—Why—what—where—?" Skinner stared into the House. Mr. Quelch was not visible.

Billy Bunter chortled, and scuttled down the steps.

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Bob Cherry. "It's all right, Skinner. Only some of Bunter's ventriloquism!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"He, he, he!" came from Bunter, as he scudded away.

Skinner shook a furious fist after the Remove ventriloquist. He was not in a humour for Billy Bunter's ventriloquial tricks just then.

"The—the fat rotter! I'll—I'll—"

"You'd better get something for your eye," said Harry Wharton, laughing.

"We'll talk to the merry Tasmanian for you," Skinner.

Skinner nodded, and went into the House to attend to his damaged features.

He was hurt; but he found some consolation in setting the Famous Five of the Remove on the track of the culprit.

Harry Wharton & Co. walked down to the gates. There Billy Bunter joined them.

"Going my way, you fellows?" he asked affably.

"No."

"How do you know, when you don't know which is my way?" demanded Bunter, as he received that unanimous reply in the negative.

"Whichever way you go, it won't be our way," explained Bob.

"Oh, really, Cherry—"

"Roll away, barrel!"

But Billy Bunter did not roll away. He rolled along with the Famous Five as they started up the lane.

"It's all serene," he said, unheeding the glares of the chums of the Remove.

"I know where you're going, and I'm going to Cliff House, too. I'm going to see that new girl—her name's Derwent. I say, you fellows, she doesn't know. I'm a splendid ventriloquist, you know, and it will be fun making her jump, won't it?"

"Br-r-r-r!"

"I'm going to make her think there's a dog under her chair," grinned Bunter.

"I'll call her a cat in Marjorie's voice, you know. That will make her waxy. He, he, he!"

Billy Bunter's humorous intentions did not seem to meet with the approval of the Co. Five pairs of hands were laid upon the fat junior, and he sat down in the lane with considerable force.

"Yarrah!" roared Bunter. "Wharrer you at?"

"Jump on him!" roared Bob Cherry.

"Now then, all together!"

Bunter squirmed away, picked himself up, and fled. In a second, or less, he vanished in at the school gates.

The Famous Five chuckled, and went on their way, without Bunter's company.

"This way," said Bob, a few minutes later. "There's the stile, and, by Jove, there's Derwent sitting on it still!"

Derwent, of the Fourth Form at Highcliffe School, was resting on the stile, with his hands in his pockets, whistling. He glanced up at the Greyfriars juniors as they came along.

The five juniors halted.

"Good-afternoon!" said Wharton politely.

"Good-afternoon!" said Derwent carelessly. He scented trouble.

"We've been looking for you."

"Well, now you've found me."

"You seem to have waited for us," said Bob, with a grin. "That was kind of you!"

"I'm waiting for somebody—not for you," said Derwent.

"Well, we've come, anyway. You've been pitching into a Greyfriars chap."

Derwent nodded.

"The chap you pitched into," continued Bob, "isn't much of a warrior. He can't uphold the flag of Greyfriars to any extent. You had a pretty cheap victory over poor old Skinner."

"He's a funk!" said Derwent.
 "Ahem! Mustn't call names."
 "Well, he is a funk and a cad, too," said Derwent calmly. "He didn't put up much of a fight. I never took a scratch."

"That rather bears out what Skinner says, that you took him unawares, and never gave him a chance!"

"Oh, he's a liar as well as a funk and a cad!" said Derwent calmly. "Quite a credit to Greyfriars. Any more at home like him?"

"Oh, you deny it, then?"

"I don't take the trouble," Derwent yawned. "Is it any business of yours, by any chance?"

Bob Cherry flushed. He had quite a liking for Derwent since the fight in the cove; but the Highcliffe fellow's manner now was not pleasant.

"Look here! You've licked a seedy funky bouncer who happens to belong to Greyfriars," he said. "Nothing to crow over in that! If you want a fellow who can give you the licking back, here's one ready to oblige you!"

Derwent looked at him.

Then he glanced at his watch.

"All serene! I've got some time to spare, and I'll lick you if you like!"

"Why, you swanking ass—"

"Are you going to fight with your hands or with your tongue?" asked Derwent.

Bob Cherry's eyes gleamed.

"Get off that stile, and I'll show you!" he exclaimed.

"I'm your man!"

Derwent slipped from the stile, and pushed back his cuffs. He faced the famous fighting-man of the Remove coolly.

"Hold on, Bob!" said Wharton uneasily. "I don't believe Skinner's yarn myself—we know what a spoofer he is!"

"The fellow can deny it if it isn't true, I suppose!" exclaimed Bob hotly.

"Well, yes. Look here, Derwent—"

Derwent shrugged his shoulders.

"Is this going to be a talking-match?" he inquired.

Bob Cherry waited for no more. He rushed at Philip Derwent, and, in a moment more they were fighting.

THE SECOND CHAPTER.

Miss Clara's Verdict!

TRAMP, tramp, tramp!

Harry Wharton and Co. looked on, without, of course, thinking of interfering. It was man to man—Greyfriars against Highcliffe.

Philip Derwent was putting up a plucky fight. But Bob Cherry drove him back towards the stile in spite of his resistance. Both the combatants were getting marked at a great rate.

In the excitement of the combat none of the juniors noticed a quick, light step on the path in the field across the stile. They jumped as a quick voice called out:

"Philip!"

"My hat! It's Flap!" muttered Derwent.

Harry Wharton and Co. looked round quickly, colouring as they saw Philippa Derwent, of Cliff House School. Marjorie and Clara could be seen farther across the field. Philippa had run on when she saw the juniors fighting.

The girl's face was flushed, her hair blown out by the wind. She looked a very charming picture as she stopped, breathless, at the stile.

"Stop!" she exclaimed.

The juniors raised their caps awkwardly. Bob Cherry dropped his hands and jumped back.

Derwent laughed.

"Hallo, Flap!" he said.

"Sorry, Miss Derwent!" stuttered Bob

Cherry, his rugged face scarlet; "I—I—I—ahem—we—we—we—oh—ah!"

Which was not very lucid.

"All serene, old girl!" said Derwent.

"The serenity is terrific, honoured and esteemed, miss!" murmured Hurree Jamset Ram Singh.

Miss Derwent frowned.

"What are you fighting for?" she exclaimed.

"N-n-nothing!" mumbled Bob.

"Nothing at all," said Derwent coolly.

"Just to pass the time, you know, while I was waiting for you. Have you got those peanuts?"

Marjorie Hazeldene and Clara Trevlyn came up. Harry Wharton and Co. felt utterly confused and awkward. Philip Derwent did not seem to mind, however.

"Perhaps you'll clear off for a few minutes. Flap, while we finish?" he suggested.

"I shall do nothing of the sort!" snapped Miss Derwent.

"Like to go on, Cherry?"

"No, you ass!" growled Bob.

"I shall count you as the second Greyfriars chap I've licked this afternoon, then!"

"Oh, go and eat coke!"

"If you want me to box your ears, Flip—" began Miss Derwent.

"Bow-wow!" said the Highcliffe junior.

"Surely there is nothing for you two to quarrel about!" said Marjorie, in her quiet voice.

"Not in the least!" said Derwent.

"Then what were you fighting for?"

"I haven't the least idea."

"Perhaps Bob knows?" suggested Clara, with a twinkle in her eyes.

Bob stammered.

"I—I—I—"

"Ladies," said Derwent, "I'm willing to refer it to your judgment, if these Greyfriars bouncers are willing. You shall decide whether honour is satisfied!"

Marjorie laughed.

"That is a good idea," she said.

"Good egg!" said Miss Clara in her boyish way. "Now, then, lay out the case. Who began it?"

"We started together."

"Then why did you start?"

The three girls were smiling now, and the Greyfriars juniors felt more at ease. They felt that Derwent was a rather decent chap after all, though a somewhat whimsical one.

"Flip first, and cut it short!" said Philippa Derwent.

"State your case, Derwent!" said Miss Clara severely.

"Certainly. I was sitting on the stile, waiting for Flap and admiring the beauty of the landscape, and thinking how much nicer it is at home in Tasmania—"

"Oh!"

"When these fellows came up and began jawing me. That's all!"

"Now Bob!"

"I—I asked Derwent a question, and he wouldn't answer," stammered Bob.

"Why didn't you answer, Derwent?"

"I thought the question was cheeky," explained Derwent. "Highcliffe doesn't take cheek from Greyfriars!"

"It is necessary for the court to know what the question was," decided Miss Clara. "Go ahead, Bob! Your move."

"I—I—I—I—"

"Yes, you—you—you!" said Miss Clara. "Get on!"

"I—I—I—I— It was about Skinner. Skinner's got a face like a—a—a sand-bag that's been jumped on, and he said Derwent went for him unawares, and hammered him without giving him a chance."

"It is false!" exclaimed Miss Derwent indignantly.

Derwent laughed.

"I'm sure it is, if you say so, Miss Derwent!" said Bob meekly. "But I don't see why this chap couldn't say so."

"My brother wouldn't bother to say such a thing!"

"Oh! Ahem!"

"Go it, old girl!" said Derwent, grinning. "Stand up for the honour of the family. Give 'em some of the chin-music you usually give me!"

"You cheese it!" interjected Miss Clara autocratically. "Bob, did you believe Skinner's statement?"

Not exactly; but—but—but perhaps I was a bit hasty," confessed Bob.

"No perhaps about it," said Derwent coolly. "You marched up to me and called me to account; and I wasn't going to have it—no fear!"

"Well, there's something in that," agreed Harry Wharton. "We—we might have cut up rusty in the same way."

"Now, the question arises, why did you fight with Skinner, you quarrelsome boy?" demanded Miss Clara.

"I wasn't quarrelsome!" protested Derwent. "I punched the cad because he asked for it. Suppose Flap had come along and found me playing nap with him, she would have jawed me till the end of the term."

"You—you didn't play with him?" exclaimed Wharton.

"No. I was afraid Flap would see me!"

"Oh!"

"Why, the rotter said you lost your money and your temper, too!" stammered Bob.

Derwent laughed.

"Nice boy!" he remarked. "He called me 'Good Little Georgie' because I wouldn't play. Naturally, I punched him. His statement was all wrong. I am not good, I am not little, and my name is not George."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I'm glad you punched him!" exclaimed Miss Derwent.

"Oh, I—I say!" said Bob Cherry. "We—we seem to have put our foot in it all round. I'm sorry, Derwent!"

"Nothing to be sorry about, old scout. I'll get you to show me that hook with the left some time, if you don't mind."

"I'll be pleased," said Bob. He felt sure that he liked Derwent now. There was something very frank and taking about the Tasmanian junior. He had his faults, no doubt, but his nature was a right one.

"So it is all settled, and it was Skinner's fault," said Miss Clara. "Skinner is untruthful. The verdict of the court is, that you two silly asses—"

"Eh?"

"What?"

"Oh, Clara!"

"You two silly asses," continued Miss Clara firmly—"you two silly asses shake hands, and when Bob Cherry goes home he is to punch Skinner's nose."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Clara!" murmured Marjorie.

"What a ripping verdict!" exclaimed Johnny Bull. "Shall I punch Skinner's nose, too, Miss Clara?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"The verdict has been given," said Miss Clara. "Now, then!"

Bob Cherry and Philip Derwent grinned and shook hands. They did not mind in the least.

"Now, about those peanuts, Flap?" said Derwent.

"Here they are! Hadn't you better come home with us to tea?" asked Miss Derwent.

"Can't! I've promised Courtenay to slog at footer practice, and he will scalp me if I don't turn up."

And, taking the bag of peanuts, Philip

Derwent raised his cap to the girls, gave the juniors a careless nod, and sauntered away towards Highcliffe.

Harry Wharton & Co. went on towards Highcliffe with Marjorie and her friends. Bob Cherry, with a very red face, mumbled to Philippa as he walked by her side.

"I—I say, Miss Derwent. I'm sorry, you know, and—and your brother's a ripping chap, isn't he?"

Miss Derwent gave him a very bright smile. Bob Cherry, by that remark, had more than succeeded in making his peace.

THE THIRD CHAPTER.

Punching Skinner's Nose!

VERNON-SMITH met the Famous Five when they returned from Cliff House in the winter dusk. The Bouncer grinned as he saw them.

"Mopped him up?" he asked.

"Eh? Who?" asked Wharton.

"Derwent, of Highcliffe. Skinner says you went out to mop him up."

"Well, we jolly nearly did," said Wharton. "It was all a mistake—or, rather, it was a rotten spoof. Skinner took us in."

The Bouncer chuckled.

"I thought so. I fancied dear old Skinner was using you as the catpaw to pull his chestnuts out of the fire."

"We've got something to say to Skinner!" growled Bob Cherry.

"Don't wreck my study!" called out the Bouncer, as the chums of the Remove went up the staircase.

Bob Cherry thumped at the door of Smithy's study, which he shared with Skinner. The door flew open, and the Famous Five walked in.

Skinner was dabbing his nose, and he looked up quickly as the Famous Five appeared.

"Hallo! You fellows have been a long time. Did you meet Derwent?"

"Yes."

"Good!"

"Not quite so good as you think," said Bob Cherry.

"The goodness is not terrific, considering the verdict of the esteemed miss, with regard to your honourable nose, Skinner," remarked the Nabob of Bhanipur.

Skinner stared.

"Eh? What? What are you driving at?" he exclaimed.

Harry Wharton explained.

When he had finished, Bob Cherry doubled his fists, and Skinner dodged round the table in alarm.

"Hands off, you fool!" he shouted.

"You lied to us, Skinner!"

"I was pulling your leg, if you want to know," growled Skinner. "Why didn't you lick that Highcliffe cad? Funky, I suppose?"

"Why, you rotter——"

"You've heard the verdict," said Bob Cherry. "Will you bring your nose here, Skinner?"

"No, I won't, you fool!"

"Then I shall come after it. I've undertaken to carry out the verdict."

"You—you silly idiot! Oh, crumbs!"

Bob Cherry rushed round the table after Skinner. The latter fairly flew to the door, and fled into the passage.

"Stop him!" roared Bob.

He rushed out after Skinner, followed by a roar of laughter from his chums. Skinner dashed down the passage.

There was a sudden roar as he dashed into Billy Bunter. The Owl of the Remove came out of Study No. 7 at an unlucky moment.

Crash!

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"Yaroooo! Oh, crumbs!"

Billy Bunter went spinning, and Skinner reeled back from the shock. The next moment Bob Cherry's grasp was upon him.

"Leggo!" shrieked Skinner.

"But I've got to punch your nose!"

"You silly idiot——"

"Yow-ow! Help!" roared Bunter. "I'm killed! Yaroooo! Oh, dear! Yooooop!"

Skinner closed with Bob Cherry, struggling desperately. His nose was already painful, and he knew what Bob Cherry's punches were like.

"Hallo, go it!" roared Bolsover major, coming out of his study. "Here's Skinner on the war-path! Ye gods!"

"Go it, Skinner!" yelled Snoop.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"The goodness is terrific!"

Crash! The struggling juniors reeled across Billy Bunter, and went over. They rolled on Bunter, eliciting a fiendish yell from that plump youth.

"Yooooop!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Look out! You'll burst Bunter!"

Peter Todd grasped Billy Bunter by the hair and dragged him out of harm's way. Judging by Bunter's yells, he did not take that act of kindness kindly.

"Yow! Leggo, you idiot! Oh, you chump! Yah!"

Skinner tore himself loose from Bob, and fled for the stairs.

"Stop him!" howled Bob, springing to his feet.

"After him!"

"Put it on, Skinner!"

Skinner went down the Remove staircase three at a time. But Skinner's misfortunes were not over yet. Squiff and Tom Brown were coming up, and Skinner crashed into them. The two Colonials collared him at once, and flattened him down on the stairs.

"You thumping silly larrikin, where are you barging to?" roared Squiff, in great wrath.

"Yow-ow-wooop!"

Bob Cherry was on the scene the next moment. He grasped Skinner, dragged him up, and slammed him against the wall.

"What's the game?" demanded Tom Brown.

"I've got to punch Skinner's nose," gasped Bob Cherry. "He doesn't seem to want me to!"

"Why, you ass——"

"I've promised Miss Clara. Hold him against the wall while I smash his nose!"

Bob closed one eye as he made that request.

"Certainly," grinned Squiff.

"Leggo!" yelled Skinner desperately, as Squiff seized one of his arms, and the New Zealand junior the other. "Yah! Rotters! Lemme go!"

"Pin him!" chuckled Tom Brown.

Skinner was held against the wall in the iron grip of the two juniors. He was quite powerless.

Bob Cherry stood before him, and drew back his right arm as if for a terrific drive.

"Hold your head steady, Skinner!"

Skinner's eyes dilated with terror. A heavy drive on the nose would have jammed his head against the wall with terrific force in his position, and he felt as if his skull would crack like a nut. Certainly he would have been severely hurt.

He struggled desperately, but in vain.

"Let go!" he shrieked.

"No fear!"

"Keep your head steady, Skinner! If I miss you I shall bark my knuckles on the wall!" exclaimed Bob Cherry.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You—you mad fool! You'll brain me!" yelled Skinner.

"Rot! You haven't any brains!"

"Keep off! Help! Oh! Help!"

Bob Cherry squared his jaw, and drew back his arm again. Skinner fairly palpitated with dread as Bob delivered that terrific blow. Bob's heavy fist crashed at his face, and at the last moment slowed down, and his knuckles touched Skinner's nose with a light tap that would not have hurt a baby.

"There!" said Bob. "The verdict has been carried out. Let that be a warning to you, Skinner!"

And he went upstairs, chuckling. Tom Brown and Sampson Field released Skinner, who stood dazed, hardly realising what had happened, and not sure yet that he was not hurt.

But the yell of laughter from the crowd of juniors enlightened him, and he scowled furiously as he realised that the ferocious Bob had only been pulling his leg.

He rubbed his nose.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You cackling idiots!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Skinner strode away to his study, and slammed the door after him with a terrific slam. A howl of merriment followed him. Miss Clara's verdict had been carried out, and probably Miss Clara would have fully approved of the way Bob Cherry had put through his task.

THE FOURTH CHAPTER.

A War Tea for Bunter!

BY gad! It's the Greyfriars porpoise!"

Ponsonby of the Highcliffe Fourth made that remark as Billy Bunter came up the staircase that led to his quarters.

Pon was lounging by the landing window, with Gadsby and Monson, chatting with his nutty chums, when the Greyfriars junior appeared.

Billy Bunter blinked about him cautiously as he came up. Bunter sometimes honoured Courtenay and the Caterpillar with a call—unasked. Such a trifle as an invitation did not matter much to Bunter. But he never knew whether a ragging awaited him at Highcliffe; Pon & Co. had often exercised their humorous proclivities at Bunter's expense.

The fat junior looked a little dismayed as he spotted Pon & Co. on the landing. He slowed down, wondering whether he could dodge them and escape as far as Courtenay's study.

"Dear boy!" said Ponsonby, with an agreeable smile. How kind of you to give us a look in!"

"I—I've dropped in to see Courtenay!" stammered Bunter.

"Courtenay's gone out with Do Courcy," smiled Ponsonby. "But we're glad to see you, Bunter. Come into the study."

"Do!" grinned Monson.

"Oh, do!" urged Gadsby.

Billy Bunter was not very bright. But he could see that that genial invitation resembled the celebrated invitation of the spider who requested the fly to walk into his parlour. He stopped on the stairs, and blinked down the staircase behind him, and to his dismay saw Merton and Tunstall grinning on the lower landing.

He was fairly caught, and he repented him deeply that he had thought of dropping in on Frank Courtenay in search of a free tea.

"Don't be bashful, sweet youth!" smiled Cecil Ponsonby. "I've heard you're a rippin' ventriloquist, Bunter. Can you imitate a fellow yelling as if he were tapped with a red-hot poker?"

"Ye-e-es!" gasped Bunter.

"Come into my study, then, and do

it. Cut in and put the poker in the fire, Gaddy!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I—I say, you fellows——" stuttered Bunter.

Ponsonby took him by one fat arm.

"Come on, old scout! So happy to see you!"

"I—I say, Pon——"

"Buck up with that poker, Gaddy! Bunter is goin' to give us some realistic imitations."

In spite of Pon's bantering tone there was a cruel gleam in his eyes, and Billy Bunter realised that he was in merciless hands. It was great fun to the Highcliffe nuts to rag the helpless fat fellow. There was no danger of Bunter hurting any of the raggers, even if he resisted.

Courtenay would have chipped in if he had been there. But he was not there. Neither was the Caterpillar there. Smithson came along the passage, but he only grinned and passed on as he saw Bunter wriggling in Pon's grasp.

"I—I say, Pon! Don't be a beast, you know!" said Bunter. "I—I'll look in another time, I think. Leggo my arm!"

"Come on!"

"Look here! I'm not coming!"

Ponsonby compressed his grip and walked Bunter towards the study. The Owl of the Remove resisted desperately but quite unavailingly.

"Rescue!" he shouted, hoping that Courtenay might be within hearing.

A study door opened, and Flip Derwent looked out carelessly.

"Hallo! What's the row?"

"I say, Derwent make them lemme go!" howled Bunter. "I say, old chap, they're going to red-hot poker me! Yow-ow!"

Derwent knitted his brows, and came out into the passage.

"Chuck it, Pon!" he said tersely.

Pon stared at him.

"Mind your own business, Derwent!"

"This is my business," said the Tasmanian junior coolly. "Don't be a bullying bounder, Pon! Let the fat fool alone!"

"I'm goin' to make him dance," said Ponsonby. "I'm bored to death this afternoon, and Bunter's dropped in just time. Come and enjoy the fun!"

"No fun in ragging a fat bounder who can't stand up for himself."

"Oh, rats!"

Ponsonby whirled Bunter towards his study doorway, where Gadsby and Monson stood grinning. Derwent promptly caught Bunter's other arm, and whirled him back again, and Pon along with him.

"Look here, you fool——"

"Bow-wow! Let him alone!"

"I don't want to quarrel with you, Derwent——"

"Let Bunter alone, then!"

Derwent wrenched the fat junior away from Ponsonby, and stepped in front of him.

"Get into my study, fatty!" he said.

Bunter did not need telling twice. He bolted into Derwent's study like a rabbit into a hole.

Ponsonby made a furious movement forward, but he found the Australian junior planted firmly in his path. Gadsby and Monson came out to help him, and Merton and Tunstall ran up the stairs and came on the scene. But to Pon's exasperation they ranged themselves beside Derwent.

Derwent grinned.

"Now, is it going to be a pitched battle or sweet and gentle peace?" he asked cheerfully.

Pon was not fond of pitched battles. Moreover, he did not want to quarrel with Flip. His answer was given by striding into his own study and slamming the door.

Derwent laughed, and went into his



Asking for an explanation! (See Chapter 9.)

study, followed by Merton and Tunstall. Billy Bunter blinked at them nervously as they entered. But the Tasmanian's nod and smile reassured him.

"Cocky wants a peanut!" came a sudden howl from the corner. And Bunter jumped, and stared round.

"What's that?" he ejaculated.

"Only Cocky!" grinned Derwent.

"Oh! Your blessed cockatoo!" said Bunter. "Can he talk?"

"Didn't you hear him in the train?" said Derwent, helping Cocky to peanuts.

"He can talk like a Dutch uncle. Did you come here to see anybody, Bunter?"

"Yes; Courtenay—my pal, you know!"

"Well, your pal is out."

"Never mind! I'll have tea with you chaps, if you like!" said Bunter brightly.

"I should like it just as well."

Merton sniffed, and Tunstall grunted, and Flip Derwent looked rather fixedly at Bunter. He was quite aware how much Bunter was Frank Courtenay's "pal."

"What did you bring that fat worm in here for, Derwent?" asked Merton.

"Oh, really, Merton, old chap——"

"Don't 'old chap' me, you fat toad!" Bunter's eyes gleamed behind his spectacles.

"Kick him out!" said Tunstall.

Derwent closed one eye at his friends. "Hold on! Bunter's staying to tea," he said.

"Look here——" began Merton hotly.

"My dear chap, Bunter's asked himself, so we can't refuse. Besides, I'm sure Bunter's welcome to a frugal war-tea."

"Oh!" said Tunstall, understanding.

"All serene. You're very welcome, Bunter."

"Oh, quite!" said Merton.

"Good!" said Bunter. "I don't mind a war-tea—not a bit. I don't want any sugar, so long as there's lots of jam. And you needn't bother about tea—coffee or cocoa will do for me, I assure you."

"Sit down, my fat friend!" said Flip. Bunter sat down.

Merton stirred the fire, and when the kettle boiled he poured the water into the teapot. Flip slipped out of the study, and returned with a large biscuit in his hand—a biscuit of the kind usually

supplied to dogs. Tunstall, with a grave face, laid the cloth.

"Look after Bunter, Merton," said Derwent. "You don't mind the tea being rather weak, Bunter?"

"Not at all."

"Sorry there's no sugar."

"Oh!"

"And no milk."

"Hum!"

"But I'm sure you won't mind."

"Ahem!"

Merton poured out Bunter's tea, and the fat junior blinked at it. It was hot water, without the faintest colouring of tea.

Billy Bunter blinked at the three juniors, but their faces were quite grave.

Derwent was chopping up the dog-biscuit. When it was reduced to fragments, he passed the plate to Bunter.

"Help yourself, old chap," he said affably.

"Wha-a-at?"

"Don't spare the biscuit," said Derwent generously. "We can get some more. There isn't much of a run on these biscuits."

"I—I say——"

"Sorry we can't offer you any butter or jam with it. Butter's short. War-time, you know. But there's some cold cream you can have, and welcome."

"Wha-at?"

"Pass Bunter the cold cream, Tunny!"

"Certainly!" said Tunstall.

"Here you are, Bunter. Pile in, old scout!" said Flip hospitably.

Billy Bunter's glare bade fair to crack his spectacles. He understood now why Derwent & Co. had let him stay to tea. It was a "war-tea" with a vengeance. Billy Bunter could eat almost anything; but even he drew the line at hot water and dog-biscuits and cold cream.

"Not hungry?" asked Merton jovially.

"You—you——"

"Perhaps Bunter would like some treacle?" suggested Tunstall.

Bunter brightened a little.

"Yes, that's all right. I——"

"We haven't any treacle, unfortunately, but there's some gum. That's quite as sticky, an' I dare say it ain't

poisonous," went on Tunstall calmly. "Shall I help you to the gum, Bunter?"

"He, he, he! Cocky wants a peanut! What a fraud!" It was the cockatoo again. "Oh my eye! Have you washed your neck this morning? Ho, ho!"

Billy Bunter's eyes gleamed. The cockatoo's remark had put a new idea into his head—of repaying his kind entertainers for their war-tea. It was a chance for the Greyfriars ventriloquist! And a voice, exactly like Cocky's, and that certainly appeared to proceed from Cocky's cage, went on:

"That cad Merton—he's eaten all the sugar! Rotten cad, never plays the game!"

THE FIFTH CHAPTER.

A Little Too Clever!

MERTON jumped up, his face red and furious.

"What's that?" he shouted.

Flip stared at the cockatoo. Tunstall grinned.

"My hat!" ejaculated Flip. "What's put that into the silly bird's head? He's never said anythin' like that before."

"He's heard somebody say it, in this study, too, and he's repeatin' it!" exclaimed Merton furiously. "Any cad who says I take all the sugar is a liar!"

"Well, I've never said so—"

"What a rotter, Merton!" went on the cockatoo's voice. "Measly cad—cheats at banker, by gum! We wouldn't stand that kind of cad in Tasmania! Ho, ho!"

Derwent's jaw dropped. He was very proud of Cocky, and the remarks Cocky could make. But he was fairly flabbergasted now. Cocky seemed to be making up observations out of his own head, and they were very unpleasant ones.

"So you think I cheat at banker, Derwent?" Merton exclaimed, his crimson face growing white with rage. "You've taught your rotten bird to say that, have you?"

"I—I didn't—I—I never—" stammered Derwent.

"Ho, ho, ho! So does Tunstall!" went on Cocky. "Pair of rotters—pair of sneaking larrikins! Ho, ho, ho!"

"The bird's gone mad!" exclaimed Flip, aghast.

Tunstall gave him a glare.

"The bird's heard you say that!" he shouted. "He could only repeat it if he's heard it."

"I didn't—I never did! Somebody else, perhaps—" gasped Derwent.

"Who else talks about larrikins and Tasmania?" sneered Merton. "Nobody else at Highcliffe."

"I—I—"

"Ho, ho! Cocky wants a peanut! Where's Flip? Kiss me, and call me Albert! Ho, ho!"

It was genuine Cocky, this time.

"The rotten beast! I'll wring his neck!" exclaimed Merton.

"Hallo, Merton! Ho, ho! Got any aces in your sleeve this time, you sneaking larrikin? Ho, ho!"

Merton made a furious rush towards the cage. Flip promptly jumped in the way. Whatever Cocky might say, Cocky wasn't going to be hurt if his master could help it.

"Hands off, Merton—"

"I'll wring his neck, I tell you!" yelled Merton. "You've taught him that, you cad—pretending to be friendly with a chap all the time—"

"Rotten, caddish!" said Tunstall. "Hallo! There he goes again, hang him!"

"Ho, ho! What a swindler! He had an ace in his sleeve, Merton had. He

had it fixed up with Tunstall to cheat! Pretty pair! Ho, ho! Flap doesn't like them, either. She thinks they're cads, and so they are!"

"Get out of the way, Derwent, you rotter!"

"Ho ho! Merton thinks he can play hockey. You should hear what Flap said about it! Conceited ass! Ho, ho!"

Merton's eyes were blazing.

It was impossible that the cockatoo's brain could have originated those observations. Merton could only conclude that the weird bird had overheard Derwent speaking thus, and had remembered the words.

He gave the Tasmanian junior a deadly look.

"So your sister speaks of me like that, does she?" said Merton quietly.

Derwent's face was crimson.

"She doesn't! Flip never said anything of the sort—I know that! It's—it's a trick! Somebody's been teaching Cocky—"

"Yes—you have!"

"I haven't! I—"

"Liar!" shouted Merton. "Come on, you cad! I'll lick you, and I'll wring that beastly bird's neck afterwards!"

"Ho, ho! Cocky wants peanuts! Where's Flap? Hang that cad Merton! I can't stand the fellow! Tunstall's a rotter—Tunstall's a rotter—Tunstall's a rotter! Measly cad! Ho, ho!"

"Oh, hang it!" panted Derwent helplessly. "You fellows, I—I swear I've never said anything like that! Why should I?"

"Because you're a treacherous rotter!" said Tunstall savagely. "That's why! But we know you now!"

"Ho, ho! Pair of rotters—pair of funks! Yah! Ho, ho!"

Derwent stared blankly at the bird. He gave a sudden shout as Cocky's voice was heard that time.

"It's not Cocky!" he shouted. "Look at him! He didn't speak! It's a trick! There's somebody hidden in the study, speaking!"

Billy Bunter gave a gasp.

"I—I say, you fellows, it's time I was off," he stammered. And he made a movement towards the door.

Then a light broke on Merton. He had heard of Bunter's ventriloquism, though he had forgotten it.

He made a rush at the fat junior, and seized him by the collar.

"It's Bunter!" he gasped.

"Bunter!" exclaimed Derwent.

"Yes. He's a rotten ventriloquist! I remember now!"

"Oh, my hat!"

"That's it!" gasped Tunstall. "I've heard of his tricks, now I come to think of it. Hold him!"

"I—I say, you fellows, it wasn't!" exclaimed Bunter, in great alarm. "I—I'm not a ventriloquist, you know. I—I couldn't do it, really. Quite impossible! I—I say, you know—"

Derwent gave him a deadly look.

"So you were playing a trick, Bunter!" he said. "It's plain enough. Cocky's not speaking now. Cocky, old bird—"

"Hallo! Cocky wants a peanut! Where's Flap?" said the cockatoo.

"That's the bird!" said Merton.

"All the rest was Bunter. By gad, the sneaking cad nearly got us to fighting—after you got him away from Pon, too! I—I beg your pardon, Flip! I might have known it wasn't you!"

"Same here!" said Tunstall. "But, you see—"

"All serene," said Derwent quietly. "I couldn't understand it myself. Now, Bunter—"

"I—I say, you fellows, it was only a joke!" mumbled Bunter. "You were

joking me, you know, with your dashed war-tea, so—"

"I don't call it a joke to set three pals fighting," said Derwent. "And that's what you nearly did. Lay him on the sofa, you chaps, and I'll get a stump."

"What-ho!"

"I—I say— Yaroo! Help!"

Whack, whack, whack, whack!

"Yaroo! Help! Yooop!"

Whack, whack!

The door opened, and Cecil Ponsonby grinned in.

"Hallo! Are you slaughterin' a dashed pig? So that's why you took him away—to rag him yourself, you spoofer! Never mind, I'll help!"

Whack, whack!

"That'll do," said Derwent. "Roll him out! You turn up here again, Bunter, and I'll make you hop, you fat cad!"

Bunter fled wildly for the door. Ponsonby made a clutch at him, and Bunter, in desperation, butted him. Pon gave a wild howl as Bunter's bullet head crashed on his handsome waistcoat.

The dandy of Highcliffe went over as if he had been shot. Bunter bolted into the passage, and fled for the stairs. Before Ponsonby could recover himself Billy Bunter was in the quad, and fleeing for the gates. And the Owl of the Remove did not cease running till he was half-way to Greyfriars.

THE SIXTH CHAPTER.

Skinner Plans Vengeance!

OH dear! Oh dear! Yow-ow!"

Thus William George Bunter, when he arrived in the Remove passage at Greyfriars. Bunter had exerted himself that afternoon, and he was quite fagged out.

"Hallo, hallo, hallo! What's wrong with the grampus?"

"Oh dear!"

"Been running a foot-race, tubby?" grinned Peter Todd.

"Yow-ow! I've been stumped!" gasped Bunter. "That cad Derwent—Ow-ow! Groogh!"

"Hallo, Derwent again!" said Harry Wharton, laughing. "That Tasmanian chap seems to be fairly on the war-path!"

"I say, you fellows, you ought to lick him!" said Bunter. "I dropped in to see Courtenay, you know, and went to tea with Derwent—"

"Did he ask you?" remarked Skinner, who was in his study doorway.

"Mind your own business, Skinner! The beast stumped me because I made that rotten cockatoo talk—jealous of my being such a ripping ventriloquist, you know," groaned Bunter. "I say, Wharton, it's up to you to lick him."

"I'll lick you instead!" said Wharton. Bunter rolled on hurriedly.

"Here, come into my study, Bunt!" said Skinner. "I've got some toffee!"

Bunter came in promptly. Skinner kicked the door shut. Billy Bunter blinked round for the toffee. He was tired, and he was indignant, but he was prepared to deal with any amount of toffee.

"Tell us all about it," said Skinner.

"Where's the toffee?"

"Oh, here you are!"

Bunter, with his mouth full of toffee, told his tale of woe, though he was somewhat surprised to find in Harold Skinner a sympathetic listener. Skinner was a very attentive listener, too. He seemed very interested by Bunter's adventures at Highcliffe.

"Too bad!" he said. "That fellow Derwent's a regular hooligan."

"He licked you, yesterday, didn't he?" remarked Bunter.

Skinner scowled.

"He's too jolly handy with his fists," he remarked. "I say, Bunter, it's rotten of him to treat you like that. I'd make him sit up, if I were you!"

Bunter blinked at Skinner suspiciously. He was a fool in some things, but not in everything. And he did not intend to be made a catpaw for the cad of the Remove.

"Rot! I can't lick him!" he said. "I'll hold your jacket for you, Skinner, if you like to try again."

"You're a first-class ventriloquist," said Skinner, unheeding.

"Yow-ow! Of course I am! Oh dear!"

"You can imitate any chap's voice," resumed Skinner. "You could imitate young Derwent's voice, if you liked, so that his own sister wouldn't know the difference."

"Of course I could! But what—"

"Miss Flap is rather bothered about her brother being friendly with Ponsonby," remarked Skinner. "She's afraid that dear old Pon will lead him into naughty ways."

"So he will, if he can."

"I fancy that cheery young merchant doesn't want much leading," said Skinner, with a grin. "But, I say, Bunter, it would serve him right to get his sister in a wax with him, and down on him. You could do it."

"She's a rather nice girl," said Bunter. "A bit spoony on me, too."

"You fat idiot! She can't stand the sight of you!"

"Look here, Skinner—"

"Are you in funds, Bunter?"

"I've been disappointed about a postal-order," said Bunter dolorously. "If you could lend me five bob, Skinner—"

"I could tell you where to get a quid."

"Done! Where?"

"Ask Miss Derwent for it."

Bunter stared at him.

"She wouldn't give me a quid! Why should she?"

"The quid her brother owes you, I mean."

"Her brother doesn't owe me a quid."

"Yes, he does. He owes you compensation for handling you in his study. Fine him a quid!" explained Skinner. "So long as you get it out of the family, that's all right; and I can tell you how to do it."

Billy Bunter nodded.

"That's fair!" he assented. "I've been stumped. I'd like to make the cad pay for it. But—"

"Well, I'll show you the way," said Skinner, his narrow eyes glistening. "It's as easy as rolling off a log. Now—"

The door opened, and the Bouncer came in. Skinner stopped speaking quite suddenly.

"Go on," said Bunter. "How can I make Miss Derwent— Yow-ow! What are you stamping on my foot for, you idiot?"

"Hallo! Have I interrupted a private conversation?" asked the Bouncer sarcastically. "What's that about Miss Derwent?"

"Find out!" snapped Skinner.

Vernon-Smith gave him a suspicious look. Skinner signed to Bunter and left the study, followed by the Owl of the Remove. They stopped to speak in the window-recess in the passage; but Ogilvy and Russell came along, and Skinner had to break off again.

"Come out into the quad," he said.

In the quadrangle Skinner was able to unbosom himself at last.

Billy Bunter listened to him, with his little round eyes growing wider behind his big spectacles.

"By gum!" he ejaculated, when Skinner had finished.

"Easy as falling off a form to a clever chap like you," said Skinner smoothly.

"But—but, I say, it will make 'em waxy with one another!" said Bunter uneasily.

"Serve 'em right, won't it? Derwent's treated you badly."

"Yes; he's a rotter! But—but Flap—"

"She would have backed him up if she'd been there," said Skinner. "It's the only way of punishing Derwent. Besides, it's worth a quid. You're really entitled to that, Bunter!"

"You—you think so?"

"Certainly! Now, Derwent wouldn't pay it, of course, and you'll practically be swindled if you don't get it out of the family somehow."

"That's so," agreed Bunter. "Besides, I could pay it back afterwards out of my postal-order."

"Ahem! Of course," said Skinner gravely. "you could do that! So, you see, it's only borrowing a quid, and getting that cad Derwent into a row!"

"Serve him right!" said Bunter.

"Yes, rather!"

"I'm jolly well going to do it!" said Bunter. "Only—he hesitated—"only Flap's rather spoony on me!"

"You fat idiot!"

"Eh?"

"I—I mean, call on Flap at Cliff House," said Skinner, controlling his angry impatience. "Tell her you've come to take her for a walk. As she's spoony on you, she'll be pleased. I've noticed it myself, now I come to think of it. She's simply sighing for you, Bunter."

"You really think so, old chap?" purred Bunter. "Girls do take to me, you know. I've got a way about me—"

"Exactly. Give her a look in tomorrow, and take her for a walk."

"Saturday," said Bunter. "It's a half-holiday."

"If she treats you well, all right; if not, you carry out what we've arranged," said Skinner. "That's fair."

"Right enough!" said Bunter.

"Hallo! What are you two confabbing about?" asked Sidney James Snoop, joining them under the elms.

"Talking about ventriloquism and things," smiled Skinner. "Ta-ta, Bunter!"

He walked away with Snoop, leaving Bunter looking very thoughtful. Skinner was quite satisfied. If Bunter inflicted his odious familiarity upon Miss Derwent—as he evidently intended to do—he was certain to be snubbed in the sharpest possible manner; and that would put him in the right mood for carrying out the cunning scheme hatched by Skinner's fertile brain. That his scheme was to cause serious trouble between the brother and sister did not trouble Skinner in the least—that, indeed, was his object. Skinner's idea was that Flip Derwent would be sorry for having handled him severely; and Flap would be sorry for having joined in the "verdict" which Bob Cherry had carried out. And the egregious Owl of the Remove was to be the astute Skinner's catpaw.

THE SEVENTH CHAPTER.

A Shock for Flap!

"HALLO, hallo, hallo! Wherefore this thushness?"

Bob Cherry stopped and shaded his eyes as if dazzled, as Billy Bunter came out of the School House on Saturday afternoon.

The Famous Five were killing time till the kick-off in the match they were playing with the Fourth Form that after-

noon. Billy Bunter dawned upon them, so to speak, in all his glory.

Bunter was generally rather slovenly. But this afternoon he was of the nuts nutty. His trousers were creased; his boots were brilliant; his waistcoat was a handsome one of many colours; his silk hat glittered in the winter sunshine. He was wearing gloves, and a beautiful tie, and a flower in his coat.

He gave Bob a look of lofty contempt. "Wherefore, oh wherefore, this thushness?" gasped Bob. "Are you going to the bunshop to steal the hearts behind the counter, Bunter?"

"What a picture!" said Peter Todd admiringly. "Let's see—he's got Mauly's waistcoat and Nugent's gloves, and— and whose is that hat, Bunter?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Smithy's necktie, I think," said Peter critically; "Vivian's gold studs, Newland's cane. Is the collar your own, Bunter?"

Billy Bunter gave a disdainful sniff by way of reply, and rolled away towards the gates, leaving the Removites chuckling.

Heedless of the merry Removites, Bunter started for Cliff House. He was going forth on a mashing expedition, and he had taken unusual care in adorning his podgy person. The slovenly Owl of the Remove had disappeared. On this auspicious occasion, Solomon in all his glory was not clad like William George Bunter.

Bunter was feeling a little pumped, but very cheery and pleased with himself, when he arrived at Cliff House. Luck favoured him, for he found Miss Philippa Derwent looking out over the gate of the garden.

Bunter raised Monty Newland's best silk hat with a gallant bow.

Philippa gave him a cool nod.

"Good-afternoon, Miss Derwent!" purred Bunter.

"Good-afternoon!"

"I came over specially to see you," smiled Bunter.

"Did you?"

"Yes, Flap—you don't mind my calling you Flap, do you?" asked Bunter, with a killing glance.

"Yes, I do; I mind very much," said Miss Derwent calmly. "Please don't do it!"

Bunter coughed.

"We're going to be such friends," he murmured.

"Are we?"

"Oh, yes, Flap! I think an awful lot of you!" said Bunter, with a soulful look, the effect of which was somewhat marred by his glasses catching the sunlight, and glaring at Flap like a pair of search-lights.

Flap burst into a laugh.

"Shall we go for a walk this afternoon, Flap?" asked Bunter, encouraged by the girl's merry laugh. He felt that he was getting on, and did not realise that his mashing rather resembled the tact and delicacy of a bull charging a gate.

"Oh, dear!" said Miss Derwent. "You are a very funny child, Bunter!"

"Oh! I say—"

"Good-bye!"

"I—I say, you fellows—I mean, I say, Flap, don't buzz off!" exclaimed Bunter; "I—I—I've got something to say to you!"

"Nothing that I want to hear, thanks," said Miss Derwent coolly.

"I say, Flap, don't go—look here!" exclaimed Bunter, as Miss Derwent started up the garden path. "It's about your brother."

The girl stopped.

"Have you a message from my brother?"

"N-n-not exactly! But, I say, Flap, do come out for a walk! I came over specially to take you out, because—"

"I think you are a silly boy, Bunter," said Miss Derwent. "You don't seem to see that you are making yourself ridiculous, so I will point it out to you. You should not speak to me, or any girl, in that foolish way. It is silly and common. Now, go away!"

Bunter blinked at the girl from Tasmania. Even Bunter could not consider this encouraging. The amazing truth was borne in upon his mind that Miss Derwent was not spoony on him at all, but regarded him as a somewhat odious duffer. Billy Bunter felt his anger rise.

"Well, I'm not going yet!" he snapped. "As you're so high and mighty, Miss Derwent, perhaps you'll see fit to hand me the quid your brother owes me! I can't go over to Highcliffe, as I'm on bad terms with Ponsonby."

Flap stopped dead.

"My brother does not owe you money!" she exclaimed.

"He owes me a quid."

"I don't believe you!"

"Oh, all right!" said Bunter, red with annoyance now. "I'll write to him for it. If it comes out that he borrowed a quid off me to gamble with Ponsonby, it's your look-out."

"It is false!" said Flap, her face a little pale now. "You are not speaking a word of truth. My brother does not gamble!"

"He, he, he! Do you know where he is now?"

"What do you mean?"

"Perhaps you'd better come and see," said Bunter, with a sneer. "He's not two hundred yards from here, playing cards with Pon and Gaddy."

Flap drew a quick, hard breath. Her eyes flashed at Bunter.

"You are even a more odious boy than I thought," she added quietly. "What you say is impossible. But I will put it to the test, and if you cannot prove your statement I will ask my brother to thrash you!"

"Come and see!" sneered Bunter.

Bunter's self-love was wounded, and all the unpleasantness in his nature had come to the surface. Skinner had calculated well.

Philippa Derwent opened the gate without speaking, and came out into the lane. Her face was pale and set.

"This way!" grinned Bunter. "Will you take my arm?"

With a look of repugnance, Philippa followed him down the lane, keeping at a good distance from the fat junior. If anything more had been needed to make Bunter determined to carry out Skinner's scheme the girl's disdainful manner would have been enough. His eyes glittered behind his spectacles.

He turned from the lane, and Philippa followed. His confident manner gave the girl a chill of doubt. She had feared Ponsonby's influence over her good-natured and easy-going brother. It looked as if a painful discovery awaited her, and she paused. After all, she had no right to watch Flap. But the grin on Bunter's fat face caused her to change her mind again. The fat rascal was lying, she told herself, and she would prove it, and then leave him to Flap to deal with.

Bunter held up a fat finger in sign of caution as they came to a cottage back from the lane. They were following a narrow path behind the cottage, and on the other side of the garden fence a shed could be seen. Bunter pointed to the shed.

"There they are!" he whispered.

"I don't believe it!"

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"Listen!"

Philippa started as a sound of voices came from the shed. It was near enough to the fence for the words to be heard if the speakers were within the shed. A look of pain came over the girl's face as she listened, and detected three voices that she knew—her brother's, and Ponsonby's and Gadsby's.

"Your deal, Pon!"

"Dashed if you haven't all the luck, Derwent!"

"By gad, Derwent has the luck and no mistake, Pon! He had only a quid to begin with, and that a borrowed one, and look at his pile now!"

"Yes, I'm in luck, you fellows! Never mind, luck will change! Deal the cards, Pon—both lightin' a cigarette."

"Wait a bit till a fellow gets a smoke, Derwent."

"Oh, rot! I'm in the vein now; get on with the game!"

Philippa Derwent turned and hurried away. She was ashamed of having heard so much. She would not have come if she had believed that her brother was there gambling with the two cads of Highcliffe.

Billy Bunter hurried after her, grinning. To do Bunter justice, he was far from realising the utter rascality of his trick. He was showing off his cleverness as a ventriloquist, he was paying out Derwent for handling him at Highcliffe, and he was punishing Miss Flap for snubbing him, and he had no sense of

*Eat less
Bread*

rascality at all. He was too obtuse to realise things as they were.

"I say, Flap—"

The girl did not stop till she was at the gate of Cliff House. Then she turned on Bunter, her face cold and contemptuous.

"You had better go," she said icily. "If my brother owes you a sovereign, I will pay it, if you want it."

She took a currency note from her little purse. Bunter's fat fingers closed on it a little uncertainly.

"I—I say, I'll let you have this back next week," he stammered. "I—I happen to be short of money to-day."

"You will do nothing of the kind! You asked me to pay my brother's debt, and I have paid it. Now go! You are a spy and a cad!"

With that Flap went into the garden, leaving Billy Bunter rooted to the ground. The Owl of the Remove turned away very slowly. He was beginning to realise!

If Bunter could have undone his rascally action at that moment he would not have hesitated. But it was too late! He rolled away, the pound note still clutched in his fat hand, heading for Friardale. That pound note meant a feast of the gods at Uncle Clegg's. But for once even the prospect of a gorgeous spread did not make Bunter feel quite happy.

THE EIGHTH CHAPTER.

A Rift in the Lute!

"HIGHCLIFFE—chaps!"

Bob Cherry nearly said "Highcliffe cads" as usual, but he checked himself. The Famous Five were taking a Sunday walk that bright winter morning in the direction of Cliff House, when the Highcliffians came out of a field path into the lane. They were Derwent, Merton, and Tunstall—hence Bob Cherry's amended remark.

"Hallo, Greyfriars worms!" remarked Tunstall, less polite.

"The wormfulness is a boot on the other foot, my esteemed fathead!" said Hurree Jamset Ram Singh warmly.

"If those chaps are going our way, we shall have to buck up," remarked Merton—"that is, if we want to get in before dark."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Hurree Singh looked perplexed for a moment, and then he understood that Merton was making playful reference to his beautiful complexion.

"My esteemed sneaking Merton, that is an asinine remark!" exclaimed the nabob. "If it were not an esteemed Sunday mornfulness, I should bestow the punch on the nose!"

"Shush!" said Harry Wharton. "No rags on Sundays. You bounders going to Cliff House?"

"We're goin' that way," said Derwent.

"Same here! Pax!"

"Oh, all right!"

"Blessed are the peace manufacturers," said Hurree Singh. "I shall regard the offensive Merton's remark over-lookfully, and will not observe that he is a disgusting and ridiculous worm."

"Look here, you blessed nigger—" began Merton.

"Order!" said Derwent. "Shurrup, and let's get on!"

The rival juniors went down the lane together, and, as they had expected, met Marjorie & Co. coming home from church. Marjorie greeted them with a smile, Miss Clara with a careless nod, Philippa Derwent with a very constrained look. Flap walked beside his sister, and eyed her keenly.

"Anything up?" he asked.

"What should be up?" asked Flap evasively.

"Out with it!" said the Tasmanian junior. "You've got something up against me. I can tell that by your eye, Flap."

Philippa was silent.

"Go it!" said Flap resignedly. "It's the right day for sermons, and I'm prepared. Pile it on!"

"I haven't anything to say, Flap."

"Then what are you looking like a boiled owl for?"

"Am I?" asked Flap, smiling faintly.

"Yes, you are. Look here—" Derwent paused. "You—you can have Cocky, if you like; I don't mind."

"I wasn't thinking of him."

"Then what's the matter?"

"Nothing."

"Halt!" rapped out Derwent suddenly.

"Hallo, hallo, hallo!"

"What's the game?" demanded Miss Clara.

The party halted, however. The other Cliff House girls went on their way, leaving Marjorie, Clara, Phyllis Howell, and Philippa with the juniors. They were all looking at Phil Derwent in surprise.

"Ladies and gentlemen," said Flap, "there's something up! I appeal to you all. My sister has got something up against me, and I want it out while I've got my pals with me to protect me. Is

it fair for Flap to save it up till we're alone, and then jaw a chap's head off?"

There was a laugh, and Philippa turned crimson.

"Flip!" she murmured.

"I appeal to everybody present," said Derwent coolly. "Now, go ahead, Flap, and get it over!"

"Good idea!" said Merton. "But, mind, I back up Miss Derwent. I'm quite sure that she's in the right, by Jupiter!"

"Same here!" said Tunstall heartily. "When in doubt, back up Miss Derwent."

"Right as rain!" chimed in Bob Cherry. "We can take it that Derwent has done that which he ought not to have done, or left undone that which he

"Enough to make anybody feel down on his luck," remarked Nugent.

Philippa coloured again.

"Bunter!" exclaimed Derwent. "Is it Bunter? Did the fat bouncer tell you that we scragged him in our study at Highcliffe? He asked for it."

"He did not."

"Then what's the matter?"

No answer.

"Well, I'm off," said Derwent coolly.

"Good-bye, Flap! I'm not coming to see you again till you write and tell me you've got over it. You fellows coming?"

"Ahem! Not yet," said Merton, and Tunstall shook his head.

"Oh, rats!"

Flip raised his cap, and walked back

jolly well punch Flip's head when I get back. He's spoiled our Sunday walk."

They parted at the gate, and the juniors turned back. They were all feeling a little troubled by the evident rift in the Tasmanian lute.

"You fellows know anything about it?" asked Tunstall.

"Blessed if I do!" said Bob.

"The knowfulness is not great."

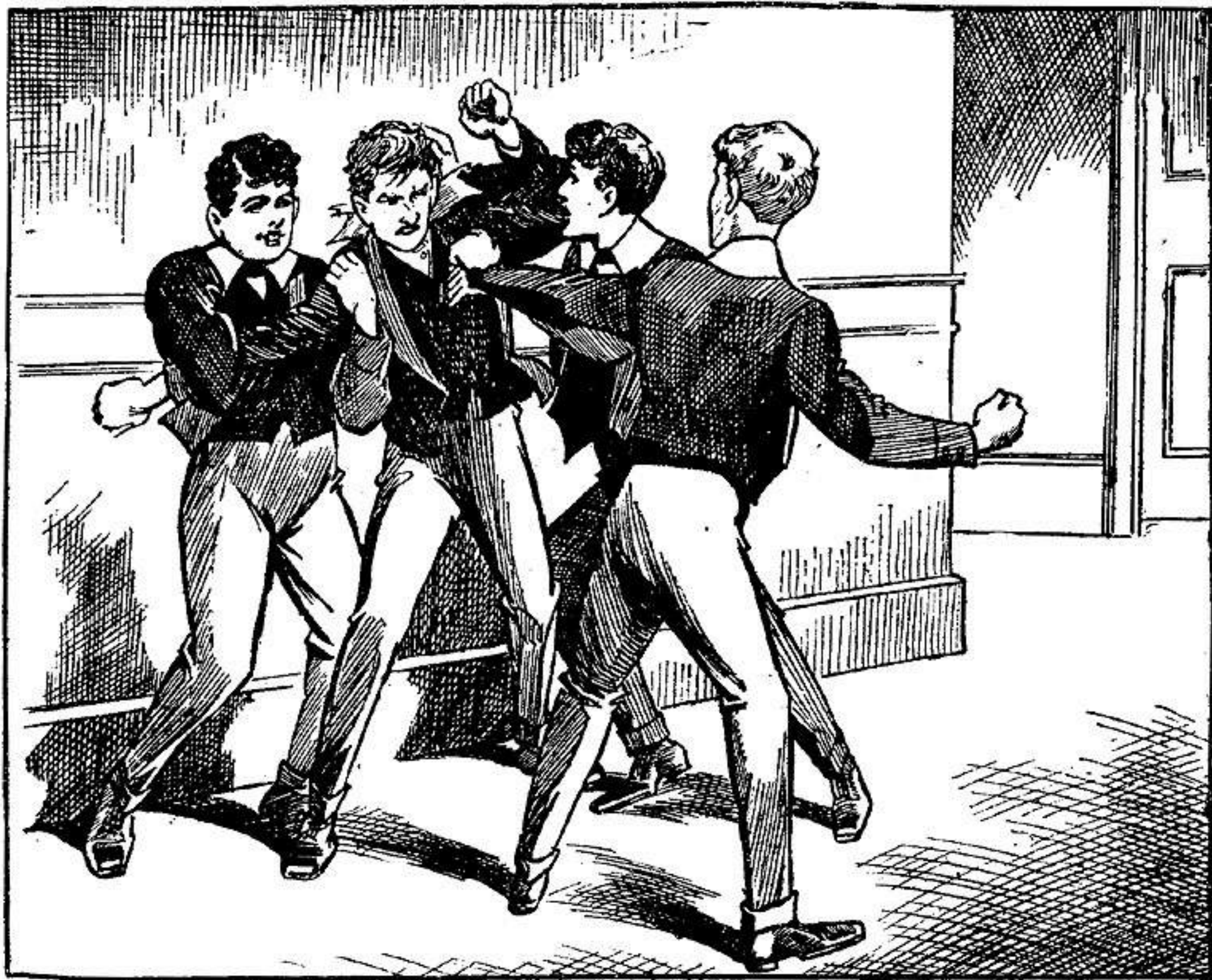
"Bunter may have been making mischief," said Wharton, knitting his brows. "I'll speak to him when I get in."

"Just like a Greyfriars' worm!" growled Tunstall.

"More like a Highcliffe rotter!" observed Bob Cherry.

"You fathead!"

"You silly ass!"



Punching Skinner! (See Chapter 9.)

ought to have done, and he ought to be bumped. Shall we bump him, Miss Derwent?"

"The bumpfulness should be terrific, if the esteemed and beautiful miss is infuriated," remarked Hurree Singh.

Philippa laughed.

"I am not infuriated, and it is nothing," she said. "Let us go on."

"No jolly fear!" said Derwent, with emphasis. "I know what that means. You can get it out now, or else I'm off to Highcliffe. I know where I'm safe."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Is anything the matter, Flap?" asked Marjorie, in surprise.

"N-n-no."

"You've looked down on your luck ever since you saw Bunter yesterday, kid," remarked Miss Clara.

up the lane. Philippa cast a distressed look after him, but she did not speak.

The party moved on again, mostly in silence. Philippa's distressed look was only too plain, and the juniors realised that something was the matter. But the girl from Tasmania did not speak. She walked on with her eyes on the ground.

At Cliff House she left the rest, and ran in by herself.

"My hat!" murmured Bob Cherry. "Is it a merry family trouble, Marjorie?"

"I haven't the faintest idea," said Marjorie.

"Only a row, I expect," remarked Miss Clara. "Everybody has rows with brothers—unless they haven't any brothers."

"Rotten!" muttered Merton. "I'll

"Look here——"

"Oh, cheese it!" said Johnny Bull.

"Let's get back to dinner."

And so they parted. As soon as the Famous Five arrived at Greyfriars they looked for Bunter. They wondered whether Miss Clara's remark was founded on fact, and that Philippa's moroseness dated from seeing Bunter the previous day.

"Hallo, hallo, hallo! Here's the fat slug!" growled Bob Cherry, as they came on William George Bunter in the quadrangle.

Bunter blinked at them.

"I say, you fellows, I've been looking for you! My postal-order didn't come last night after all. Could you——"

"Never mind your postal-order," said

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Wharton. "You went over to Cliff House yesterday afternoon, Bunter?"

Bunter flushed.

"If Flap's told you—" he began.

"Flap's told us nothing!" grunted Johnny Bull. "But there's some trouble between her and her brother, and it looks to me as if you're at the bottom of it."

"He, he, he!"

"What are you cackling at?" demanded Bob Cherry indignantly.

"He, he, he!"

"Have you been making mischief between those two, you fat villain?" demanded Frank Nugent.

"I—I— Certainly not! I—I simply took Miss Derwent for a walk," said Bunter. "She was awfully pleased. She's rather spoons on me, you know—Yaroooh!"

Billy Bunter found himself sitting on the cold, unsympathetic earth, and the Co. walked away and left him there. Harold Skinner came along and gave him a hand up. Bunter was gasping.

"Ow! Beasts! Ow!"

"What's the news?" smiled Skinner.

"They've been rowing already, it seems," grinned Bunter. "I'm jolly glad—Yow-ow! Serve them right! Yow! I hope Flap will jaw that rotter's head off! Grooh!"

Skinner chuckled, and strolled away. He felt that he was getting even with the junior from Tasmania now.

THE NINTH CHAPTER.

Parted!

"FLIP!"

"Hallo, Flap!"

Philip Derwent halted in astonishment.

It was Monday, and he had run out on his bicycle after morning lessons. As he came back towards Highcliffe he was surprised to see his sister standing by her machine in the road. Flap called to him as he came up.

Derwent jumped off his bicycle.

He looked anxiously at his sister's face. It was pale and troubled. All the nonchalance disappeared from the junior's manner at once, and his expression became very kind and affectionate.

"Flap, old girl, what's the matter?" he exclaimed. "You're not waxy because I cleared off yesterday, are you? I knew there was a jaw in store, you know! Look here! You've got me now, and you can jaw as much as you like!"

But Philippa did not smile.

"I—I was coming over to see you, and I spotted you on the road," she faltered. "I must speak to you, Flip!"

"Go it!"

"You know I wouldn't call you over the coals or preach at you, Flip, don't you?" murmured Philippa. "But—but I can't be silent now. Flip, you oughtn't to do it—you know you oughtn't!"

Flip looked astounded.

"Oughtn't to do what?" he exclaimed.

"You know what you were doing on Saturday afternoon."

"My hat! Is there anything wrong in footer practice?" demanded Flip.

"What?"

"Blessed if I see it! Courtenay asked me to practise with the Form Eleven, and I did. I dragged Tunny and Merton into it. That was one of my good deeds, you know!"

The look of deep pain on Philippa's face arrested him.

"For goodness' sake, Flap, what's the matter?" he exclaimed. "Has anything happened?"

"On Saturday afternoon," said Philippa slowly, "you were out with Ponsonby and Gadsby?"

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Derwent shook his head.

"You're mistaken, Flap. Pon and Gaddy had a bridge-party in their study on Saturday, and I declined the invitation—without thanks!"

"Flip!"

Flip stared at her, his brows knitting. "That can't mean that you doubt my word, Flap," he said, very quietly. "I've got my faults, but I'm not a liar."

"You were in a shed at the back of Pegg Cottages on Saturday afternoon playing cards with Ponsonby and Gadsby."

"I've told you I wasn't!"

The girl drew a deep, almost sobbing breath.

"You don't believe me?" exclaimed Flip, astounded.

"Flip!"

"You prefer to take some cad's word rather than mine?" exclaimed her brother indignantly. "Well, my hat! If that's what you've come to tell me, Flap, you'd better have stayed at home."

"I would not take anyone's word against yours, Flip, and you know it!"

"Then, why can't you take mine?"

"Because I know you were there!"

"You—you know it!" stuttered Flip.

"Yes."

"How can you know it?"

"Because I passed the shed and heard your voice inside—and Ponsonby's and Gadsby's."

"What?"

"You were playing cards, and I heard you speaking."

"Either you're potty, or else I am!" said Derwent blankly. "Pon and Gaddy may have been there, though I'm almost certain they were in their study on Saturday afternoon. They were when I went down to the footer, anyway. Flap, I give you my word I wasn't anywhere near Pegg on Saturday."

"I heard you."

"You couldn't have, as I wasn't there."

"But I did!"

Derwent compressed his lips.

"You don't believe me?" he asked.

"How can I believe you when you are denying what I know to be true?" exclaimed Philippa passionately.

"That's enough!" said Derwent, with a steely look. "If I'm a liar, it's not much use talking any more. I'm much obliged to you for your opinion, Flap!"

He wheeled his bicycle on towards the school gates.

"Flip!" exclaimed the girl.

He looked back.

"Well?"

"Flip, I know you must have been led into it. But—but why do you deny it to me when you know that I know? I never thought you'd do that!"

"By gad, this is getting too thick!" said Flip. "If you were my twin brother instead of my sister, Flap, I'd jolly well punch your head!"

"You can punch my head if you like," said Flap, in a low voice. "You couldn't hurt me more than you've done already."

Angry words were rising to Derwent's face, but the pain in his sister's face checked them. He came back a pace.

"Flap, isn't my word good enough?" he said. "I give you my word, honour bright, that whoever told you I was there was lying. Isn't that good enough?"

"Nobody told me. I heard you."

"Did you see me?" growled Flip.

"I could not; I was outside the fence. But I heard you."

"You heard somebody else, then, and thought it was my voice."

"I know your voice, I suppose. But there were Ponsonby and Gadsby. Could I fancy that other people's voices were their voices, too?" said Philippa bitterly.

"Besides, they spoke to you by name."

"By name?" exclaimed Flip.

"They spoke to you as Derwent. Is there another Derwent at Highcliffe?"

"No."

"Well, then—"

"You must have dreamed all this, Flap!" said Derwent. "I tell you it isn't so! I can't say more than that. You can't be well, I think—it's a sort of hallucination."

"It is true."

Flip set his teeth.

"Then you're calling me a liar to my face?" he exclaimed.

"Oh, Flip!"

"That means yes. Good-bye, then! No good for a liar going on telling you lies, is it?" exclaimed Flip savagely.

He jumped on his machine and dashed away towards the school. Flap looked after him, the tears welling into her eyes, till he disappeared in at the gateway, then she turned away.

She had not intended to reproach her brother—only to tell him how much it hurt her that he had fallen so low as to gamble with Ponsonby and Gadsby—to ask him to think over it. She had not expected him to deny it. But he had added barefaced lies to his fault, or so it seemed to the poor girl. She had never dreamed that Philip Derwent could have fallen so low as that.

He had lied!

As Philippa wheeled her machine away, with slow and faltering steps, her face was pale, her eyes heavy with unshed tears, and the bitterness almost of death was in her heart.

THE TENTH CHAPTER.

The Witnesses for the Defence!

"COME in, Derwent!"

"Yaas, amble in, old infant!"

Courtenay and De Courcy both looked curiously at Flip as he stood in the doorway of their study at Highcliffe.

The usually careless face of the Tasmanian junior was darkly overcast.

He stepped into the study unhesitatingly.

Courtenay pushed a chair towards him.

"What's up?" he asked.

"I—I—" Derwent paused.

"Get it off your chest, dear boy!" encouraged the Caterpillar. "You've been lookin' fearfully down on your luck this afternoon. I noticed that sweet old Mobby was down on you lots of times. Have the geegees been playin' their sad tricks over you again? They do, don't they? But cheerio; the Government are goin' to stop racin' for the duration of the war—perhaps!"

"Oh, don't be a silly ass!" broke out Derwent angrily.

The Caterpillar smiled, unmoved.

"I stand rebuked," he remarked.

"Or rather, I sit rebuked—less trouble than standin'. Franky, you tackle him with your well-known sympathetic and tender-hearted manner."

"Dry up, old chap!" said Courtenay.

"If there's anything wrong, Derwent—"

"I want you to do me a favour," said Derwent. "Will you?"

"Certainly, if there's anything I can do," said Courtenay, in wonder.

"Come with me over to Cliff House and speak to my sister."

"Wha-a-at?"

"By gad!" ejaculated the Caterpillar. "That isn't askin' a favour—that's offerin' a treat! Will I do, Derwent?"

The Caterpillar jumped up with unusual energy.

"Derwent, old scout, you've come to the right study!" he exclaimed. "Never mind, Franky—Franky's dreaming of footer and goals and things. I'm your

man! Give me a minute to change my necktie—"

"Do dry up, Rupert!" said Courtenay. "Would you mind explaining what you mean, Derwent?"

"I know I've no right to ask you to take the trouble," muttered Derwent moodily. "We're not friends—"

"Oh, rot! We're good friends enough," said Courtenay cheerfully. "But—"

"You asked me to practise with the Form on Saturday."

"Yes; and you played up first-rate."

"I want you to come and tell my sister that I was at footer-practice with you on Saturday afternoon."

"Me, too!" exclaimed the Caterpillar. "I was there! I'm a witness! Where's my best silk hat, Franky?"

"I'll do it with pleasure," said Frank, neglecting his humorous chum. "But what on earth—"

"I've got to explain, of course. Flap—I mean, my sister—has got it into her head that I was out of doors on Saturday, gambling in a shed with Ponsonby and Gadsby."

"My hat!"

"I don't understand it myself," said Flip. "She thinks she heard my voice—it doesn't rest on a yarn told by somebody else, and—the long and the short of it is that she doesn't believe me. I—I made up my mind at first that—that I'd never speak to her again; but—but she's a girl, you know, and—and, to cut it short, I'm going to put my pride in my pocket, and prove to her that I couldn't have been where she thought I was. That is, if you'll come over with me to see her."

"Certainly I will!" said Courtenay warmly. "I know you were within gates on Saturday afternoon, and could swear to it if necessary. De Courcy knows it, too. He can come as a witness."

"What ho!" said the Caterpillar.

"I—I'd be much obliged if you would. I know it's a cheek to ask you to take the trouble—"

"What rot! Let's get off!"

"Have you had your tea?"

"That can wait."

"You bet!" said the Caterpillar. "Especially as the tea is only hot water, without sugar or milk. It won't be a terrific strain on our self-denial."

"It's jolly good of you!" muttered Flip.

"Bow-wow! We're ready!"

"I suppose you think I'm rather a fool to bother about it at all," muttered Derwent, flushing.

"I certainly don't think so," said Courtenay quietly. "If I had a sister, I know I should be very anxious to keep her good opinion. We're quite at your service, Derwent."

The three juniors left the study together. Even the Caterpillar was a little serious now. Flip would not have revealed his anxiety to Ponsonby or Gaddy or Monson; but his desire to set himself right in his sister's eyes raised him very considerably in the Caterpillar's opinion.

In a few minutes the three were wheeling their bicycles down to the gates. Ponsonby caught sight of them, and called out to Flip; but the Tasmanian junior did not even hear him. Ponsonby was left staring after them, frowning.

Derwent rode at a good speed with his unusual companions. He did not speak during the ride to Cliff House.

Courtenay and De Courcy were both somewhat puzzled by the affair; but they were very willing to do what they could. They reached Miss Primrose's school, and left their machines at the gate.

Flip marched straight up the path, his companions following.

"Hallo, hallo, hallo!"

It was Miss Clara's voice, in playful imitation of Bob Cherry's salutation.

Flip stopped.

"I want to see my sister," he said. "I—I'd rather see her without seeing Miss Primrose. Will you ask her to come into the garden, Miss Clara?"

"Yes, dear boy!"

Miss Clara tripped into the house, and a couple of minutes later Philippa came out, and joined her brother under the trees.

Courtenay and the Caterpillar saluted her very respectfully. The look on her face was evidence of how much she took to heart her brother's supposed fault.

Miss Derwent was surprised to see the two juniors with Flip. But the latter plunged into the subject at once.

"You know Courtenay and De Courcy, Flap. I've brought them as witnesses."

"Flip!" exclaimed the girl.

"Tell her, you chaps!"

"Miss Derwent," said Courtenay, "it seems that you've been led to believe that your brother was out of gates on Saturday afternoon, playing the fool. We can assure you that it wasn't so. He was within gates at Highcliffe the whole afternoon."

"Playing footer," added the Caterpillar.

Philippa looked at them.

She did not speak. She could not. There was absolute truth and sincerity in Courtenay's face; it was impossible to doubt his word.

"There's a mistake somewhere, you see, Miss Derwent," went on Courtenay quietly. "You must see that."

"Well, Flap?" asked Derwent.

The girl panted for breath.

"I—I— Are you sure of what you say?" she managed to articulate. "It was about half-past three on Saturday when I heard my brother's voice in the shed at the back of Pegg Cottages."

Courtenay shook his head.

"You couldn't have," he said. "It was just before three when I asked Derwent to come down to practise with the Form. He was with us more than an hour."

"Honest Injun!" said the Caterpillar solemnly.

Philippa pressed her hand to her brow.

She was utterly bewildered.

"Flap, old girl, it was a mistake. I'm not waxy about it," said Derwent softly. "It was some chap with a voice like mine—"

"Your name was used, I tell you!" gasped Flap.

"Then it looks to me more like a trick than a mistake," said Courtenay. "Somebody was intentionally deceiving you, Miss Derwent."

"I—I can't understand it."

"Tell us how it happened," suggested the Caterpillar. "We may be able to get on the track of the merry individual who took the liberty of imitating Derwent's dulcet voice."

"But—but how could anyone imitate a voice so exactly?" gasped Philippa, her brain in a whirl. "And Ponsonby's and Gadsby's, too? I—I can't understand it."

"Tell us how you came there," said her brother. "What put the idea into your head in the first place? Was anyone with you?"

"Only Bunter!"

"Bunter!" shouted Flip.

"Yes. He—he told me that you were there, and—and I went to prove that he was lying. I thought he was lying!" panted Flap. "Then I heard your voice, and Ponsonby spoke to you by name."

Derwent's face set hard.

"Tell me exactly what was said, so far as you can remember," he said.

"I remember every word," said

Philippa, in faltering tones. "I am not likely to forget."

And almost word for word she repeated what she had heard.

"By gad!" said the Caterpillar, in utter astonishment. "This beats it! Must have been some blessed circus conjurer, with a trick of imitating voices!"

"And—and the pound was alluded to, you see," stammered Flap.

"The pound Bunter said I owed him?" said Derwent grimly. "I never owed Bunter any money, Flap! If I wanted to borrow, do you think I'd borrow of that cringing cad? It was a lie! He swindled you out of that pound you paid him!"

"Oh!" gasped Flap.

"Enterprising youth, Bunter!" murmured the Caterpillar.

"I'm going to see that enterprising youth!" said Derwent, between his teeth. "Poor old Flap! No wonder you were taken in! I can explain the whole thing now—now that I know Bunter was with you."

"You can?" exclaimed Flap.

"Yes. It was his rotten ventriloquism!"

"Wha-a-at?"

"Oh, gad!" exclaimed the Caterpillar. "Of course! Punch my head, Franky, for not thinkin' of it!"

"But—but—" panted Flap.

"That fat scoundrel is a ventriloquist—a beastly trickster with his voice!" said Derwent savagely. "He came to Highcliffe, and played a trick on us, that's how I found him out. He made Cocky talk, and say insulting things about Tunstall and Merton, and nearly set us fighting. That's how I spotted him. I found afterwards that he was well-known to be a ventriloquist, with a gift for imitating voices. That's why the fat cad took you there."

"Flip!"

"There wasn't anybody in the shed, of course," said Frank Courtenay, with a deep breath. "You only heard—you didn't see! It was Bunter all the time! I've known him play-tricks like that!"

Miss Derwent tottered against a tree. She was almost overcome by that revelation of the treacherous trick. Derwent sprang towards her, and Courtenay and his chums, raising their caps, disappeared through the trees. All was clear now, and they left the brother and sister to themselves.

"Flip"—Flap's tears were flowing now—"I—I'm so sorry! How could I guess? But—but I was wrong! I ought to have known!"

"Don't worry, old girl," said Flip. "It's all right. You couldn't have known. You must have thought me an awful spoofer when I denied being there!"

"I—I'm so sorry!"

"Stuff! It's all serene now. Don't blub!" said Flip anxiously.

Philippa smiled through her tears.

"I ought to have trusted you," she said. "I've been so miserable, Flip!"

"And that fat scoundrel's caused it all!" said Flip, gritting his teeth.

Philippa looked alarmed.

"You—you are going to see Bunter, Flip?"

"You bet!"

"Don't—don't hurt him, Flip! I think he is more fool than anything else! He can't have understood the harm he was doing!"

"That's all right, Flap. I'll cut off now," said Flip. "All serene—what?"

"Yes," said Flap, kissing her brother affectionately. "And—and—and don't hurt Bunter—not too much, Flip!"

Flip did not reply to that. He watched Philippa back into the house, and then

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joined Courtenay and Do Courcy, who were waiting outside the gates.

"Thanks awfully, you fellows!" he said. "It's all right now. I'm going to Greyfriars. If you chaps are looking for a row, you can come with me."

"We're not looking for a row; but we'll come," said Courtenay.

"Wouldn't miss seeing Bunter's face for worlds!" chuckled the Caterpillar. "Dear old Bunter—most enterprising youth! Before you kill him, Derwent, I'd ask him a question or two."

"What do you mean?"

"I mean that that fat reprobate hasn't brains enough to think out a little game like this on his own. Bunter was put up to it by somebody. That's what I mean. And that somebody is the fellow you want to slaughter!"

"By Jupiter!" said Derwent.

He looked very thoughtful as he rode away for Greyfriars with his companions. There was a warm time in store for Bunter, and for somebody else, too, if the Caterpillar was right!

THE ELEVENTH CHAPTER.

Stern Justice!

"HALLO, hallo, hallo!"

The Famous Five were in Study No. 1 in the Remove passage, finishing tea, when Wharton called out "Come in!" in answer to a tap at the door.

Then Bob Cherry ejaculated, in surprise, as three Highcliffe juniors presented themselves to view.

"Trot in!" exclaimed Wharton. "Glad to see you, Courtenay—and you other fellows!"

"The pleasurefulness of beholding your superb countenances is great!" purred Hurree Jamset Ram Singh.

"We've come on business!" muttered Derwent.

"Always ready for business!" said Bob Cherry. "Business as usual during the war, you know. But haven't you and I had enough fights, Derwent? We seem to be always at it!"

"Let me explain," said Frank Courtenay, in his quiet tones. "Derwent's come here to see Bunter, but I put it to him that he'd better see Wharton first, as captain of the Form."

"I want Bunter!" growled Flip.

"Well, you're welcome to Bunter," said Wharton. "We'll give him away with a pound of tea, with pleasure!"

"Hold on, though," said Johnny Bull quietly. "If Derwent is hungry for more scrapping, Bunter's not the man for him. Derwent had better pick out a man who can put up his hands. There's plenty here!"

Derwent made an angry gesture.

"Look here," he began. "I'm going to thrash Bunter within an inch of his life—"

"You're not!" said Johnny Bull stolidly. "Bunter's no good at scrapping, and if you touch him you'll have me to deal with first!"

Flip's eyes blazed. He was in a hasty and impatient mood. But Courtenay laid a quick hand on his shoulder.

"For goodness' sake keep your temper, Derwent!" he exclaimed. "Let me explain. Bunter can't fight Derwent, or anybody; but I think you'll agree that he ought to be punished when you know what he's done!"

"Well, what has he done?" asked Bull rather tartly.

"He's told my sister lies, and swindled her out of money, and slandered me!" exclaimed Flip hotly. "Is that enough for you?"

"That's enough—if it's true!"

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"Why, you rotter——"

"Bunter's a Greyfriars fellow, though he doesn't do us credit," said Johnny Bull calmly. "Bunter's going to have justice, I know that. If what you say is true, I suppose you can prove it?"

"Hear, hear!" chimed in Bob Cherry, not greatly pleased by Derwent's manner. "The hear-hearfulness is terrific!"

"Gentlemen," urged the Caterpillar, "let not your angry passions rise! Let Franky explain, in his celebrated parliamentary manner—perfectly parliamentary, except that he doesn't tell crams. Go it, Franky!"

"Yes, go it, for goodness' sake, and let's know what the storm in a teacup is about!" said Harry Wharton.

Courtenay explained quietly.

The looks of the Famous Five changed as they listened.

"We only want to see justice done," concluded Courtenay. "I believe, myself, Bunter was only a catspaw, and there was somebody behind him. We're quite willing to leave it to you fellows to see the right thing done."

Flip grunted; but Courtenay's manner had the desired effect. The Famous Five assented at once.

"That's right enough," said Johnny Bull. "Let's get along and see Bunter. Of course, what Miss Derwent said is true; but Bunter has a right to be allowed to speak for himself."

"Come along!" said Wharton.

The juniors proceeded to No. 7. They found Billy Bunter there, with his study-mates, Peter Todd and Tom Dutton. The latter two were working, and Bunter was indulging in a preliminary groan over the necessity of work. Bunter jumped up in alarm at the sight of Derwent.

His fat conscience was not quite easy, and there was wrath and vengeance in Flip's face.

"I—I say, you fellows——" he gasped.

"Gentlemen, you do me proud!" said Peter Todd, rising. "Always pleased to see your imposing chivvies. But the present hour is supposed to be devoted to prep——"

"Let prep wait for a bit, Toddy," said Wharton. "Bunter's got to answer an accusation."

"All serene! I'll judge the case," said Peter cheerfully. "Bunter is my tame porpoise, and he's going to have fair play."

"I say, you fellows, it isn't true!" howled Bunter.

"What isn't true?" demanded Peter.

"Wha-a-at Derwent's going to say!" stammered the Owl of the Remove.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Shut up, Bunter, you ass! Now, then, out with the merry accusation!" said Peter Todd with his most judicial air.

"That cad imitated my voice, and made my sister believe I was gambling with Pon and Gaddy in a shed on Saturday," broke out Derwent. "He told Flip I owed him a pound, and she paid him. That was stealing."

"One of Bunter's merry ventriloquial tricks, you know," drawled the Caterpillar. "Bunter's such a clever chap."

"I—I didn't!" howled Bunter, as Peter turned a grim look on him. "I—I'm not a ventriloquist at all——"

"What?"

"I—I mean, I never said the beast owed me a pound—at least, I meant he owed it to me as compensation, you know. It was a fine——"

"A fine?" shouted Bob Cherry.

"Yes; I fined him a pound for ragging me in his study. Skinner said that was quite fair."

"Skinner!" murmured the Caterpillar. "I thought there was a giddy Polonius

behind the curtain! We're getting at him now."

"You admit playing the trick, you fat villain?" demanded Peter Todd sternly.

"Nunno!"

"Did you take the quid from Miss Derwent?"

"Nunno. She—she gave it to me!" gasped Bunter. "I told her I would let her have it back out of my postal-order, but she refused."

"Did you tell Miss Derwent the pound was a fine on her brother for ragging you?"

"Nunno!"

"She thought Derwent owed it to you?"

"I—I dare say she did! I—I'm not responsible for what a girl thinks, am I?" said Bunter feebly. "Girls haven't much brains, you know."

"What did you do with the pound?"

"I spent it at Uncle Clegg's—I—I mean, I sent it to a war-fund——"

"And you played a trick with your swindling ventriloquism, and made Miss Derwent believe she heard her brother speaking?"

"It—it was only a lark," groaned Bunter. "I—I say, it was a joke really. You fellows can take a joke, can't you?"

"What had Skinner to do with it?" asked Peter Todd quietly.

Billy Bunter eyed Derwent uneasily. Courtenay was restraining the angry junior. But Bunter felt that his time was coming.

"It was Skinner's idea," he groaned. "I—I said it was too thick. I—I said I couldn't play a trick like that on Flip, considering that she was spoons on me——"

"What?" yelled Flip.

"Here, keep him off!" shrieked Bunter.

Flip tore himself away from Courtenay, and rushed on the Owl of the Remove. Bunter dodged wildly round the table, and yelled for help. Flip's grasp was upon him in a moment.

"Yaroooh! Help! Fire!" roared Bunter.

Thump, thump, thump!

"Yow-ow-ow! Help! Yah! Yooop!"

Thump, thump!

"Toddy, you beast, help a chap——"

"I'll hold your goggles, while you lick him, Bunter, if you like," said Peter Todd calmly.

"Yaroooh!"

"It appears to me, my dear Bunt, that you have asked for it," said Peter Todd. "Twenty thumps is the limit. Go ahead, Derwent!"

"What's the matter?" asked Tom Dutton. The deaf junior was looking on in astonishment. "Shall I interfere, Toddy?"

"Don't interfere!"

"Beer? What beer?" inquired Dutton.

"Oh, crumbs! Don't interfere!" yelled Peter.

"Serve him right, if he's been drinking beer," said Dutton. "I don't see why a Highcliffe chap should punch him for it, though. Still, if you think it's all right, Toddy, I'll get on with my prep."

"Ha ha, ha!"

"While Bunter is getting the wages of sin, one of you fellows might call Skinner in," suggested the Caterpillar.

"Right-ho!"

Bob Cherry and Johnny Bull left No. 7 on that errand. In a few minutes scuffling and yelling were heard in the passage. Apparently, Harold Skinner was unwilling to come.

But he came, all the same—landing in the study in a heap. Bob and Johnny Bull following him in rather breathlessly. Skinner scrambled to his feet, furious.

His face fell at the sight of Derwent, who was still thumping Bunter. The cad of the Remove realised that his sins had come home to roost.

He cast a longing look at the door. But the Famous Five were in the way.

"Look here, what does this mean?" blustered Skinner. "I've got my prep to do!"

"Never mind prep now," said Peter Todd. "Derwent, may I beg to point out that I've counted twenty thumps, and Bunter has had enough?"

"Yaroo! Help!"

Judging by Bunter's wild yells, he had had more than enough.

Derwent did not heed; and Peter stepped towards him, with a warlike look. Peter was lord of creation in Study No. 7; and he did not mean to be overruled by a Highcliffe fellow.

But Courtenay dragged Derwent off.

"He's not had enough!" shouted Derwent angrily.

Bunter plumped into a chair, and roared.

"My dear man, there's somebody else waitin' for you," said the Caterpillar. "Here's dear old Skinner, anxious to meet your eye."

Skinner made a move towards the door. Bob Cherry exhibited a formidable set of knuckles, and Skinner jumped back.

"Now, Skinney, dear boy, kindly explain what you had to do with the trick played on Miss Derwent and her brother," said Peter Todd.

"I don't know anything about it. Was there any trick?" asked Skinner blankly.

"There was, my son—a specially dirty trick, and quite in your line. Bunter, tell us the truth, or as near as you can get—or would you prefer some more thumps?"

"Yow-ow-ow! It was Skinner all the time!" wailed Bunter. "He told me I

could do it because I was a jolly clever ventriloquist! I told him I couldn't; and he said it was only fair to fine Derwent a pound for ragging me. He said Derwent wouldn't pay up, so it was fair to get it from his sister. He said it would be all right if I squared afterwards out of my postal-order! Yow-ow-ow!"

It was evidently the truth, this time, that was streaming from Bunter, accompanied by a series of gasps and howls.

Skinner's face was sickly now.

He backed away uneasily as Flip faced him.

"So you were at the bottom of it, Skinner?" said the Tasmanian junior, between his teeth. "I might have guessed it. I know you're a cunning hound! That fat fool could never have thought of it for himself. You made trouble between my sister and me. It might have gone on—it would have gone on, if I hadn't made up my mind to pocket my pride and prove to Philippa that she was mistaken. It was just a chance. You cowardly cad!"

"Hang you!" said Skinner savagely. "It served you right, you cad! Hang you! I'm only sorry you've found it out! So you can put that in your pipe and smoke it!"

Flip threw off his jacket.

"Shall we step into the passage?" he asked, looking at Peter Todd.

"You'll have a prefect on your neck if you do," grinned Peter. "Keep in the study; I'm honoured, I'm sure."

"Are you ready, Skinner?"

"I'm not going to fight you," said Skinner sullenly.

Flip's eyes blazed.

"You won't put up your hands, after what you've done?" he shouted.

"No, I won't!"

"You'll be licked, all the same. Lend me a cricket-stump, somebody, and I'll larrup him!" said Flip hoarsely.

"Hold on!" said Peter. "Bunter can carry out the sentence—that's all he's fit for. Put Skinner on the armchair. Bunter, there's a stump. If you don't give Skinner twenty of the best, I'll give you fifty!"

Bunter's eyes gleamed behind his spectacles as he grasped the stump. There was no doubt that the punishment would be well laid on; the discomfited Owl of the Remove was feeling like skinning Skinner at that moment.

Skinner made a furious rush for the door; but he was pinned. Then he was stretched on the armchair, and the stump rose and fell. Billy Bunter put all his beef into it, and the yells that rose from the unfortunate Skinner were worthy of a wild Hun.

He was paying for his sins now, with interest. And when the infliction was over, Skinner was pitched into the passage. He crawled away, groaning.

"Justice is done!" smiled the Caterpillar. "I suggest gettin' back to Highcliffe before we're locked out. Good-evenin', dear boys! So pleased to see you on this happy occasion!"

And the Highcliffe fellows left. The next day Skinner was given his choice of refunding the pound, or having the affair reported to Mr. Quelch. With many pangs, Skinner decided on refunding; and a postal-order was accordingly despatched to Miss Derwent at Cliff House. As Bunter had had the quid, Skinner felt that this was hard. But the way of the transgressor generally is hard, in the long run!

(Don't miss "LOOKING AFTER INKY!"—next Monday's grand complete story of Harry Wharton & Co., by FRANK RICHARDS.)

THE GREYFRIARS GALLERY.

No. 51.—JAMES HOBSON.

HOBSON is not a front-rank character. Sometimes we do not hear of him at all for quite a long time. But then he comes in again, to play his part, usually in connection with Form rivalry; and we are quite pleased to renew his acquaintance. For, though Hobson has his faults, like all of us, he is a very decent and likeable fellow on the whole.

He used to be a great chum of Coker's. This was in the days when the magnificent Horace adorned the Shell with his presence. The two shared a study, and practised high-handedness with the fags in partnership—and were pretty often scored off by some of those they classed as fags, too!

The pair invited themselves to the housewarming spread in No. 14 when the mild Alonzo, the egregious Bunter, and the wily Wun Lung moved into that study together. They treated Lonzy roughly. Coker and Hobson are not the likeliest fellows at Greyfriars to understand poor, gentle Alonzo.

Bunter was at the bottom of that trouble. He invited the Shell fellows to the feed. Of course, it was not Bunter's place to issue invitations of that kind; but Bunter did not mind a trifle like that. He had taken refuge from the persecution of Bulstrode in the study of Coker and Hobson; and he had to say something to explain his presence there. So he asked them to the feed, towards which—owing to a postal-order's having failed to turn up, no doubt—he had not contributed a penny.

The Remove were ready for them when they came out. They went to "Hck the fags," but found the boot on the other leg. Frank Nugent made great play with a sooty broom, and the two burly Shell fellows were routed. Rolling down the steps into the quad, they encountered Aunt Judith, and Coker had to tell her that they were playing "King of the Castle." A childish sort of game for those



two to indulge in, of course; but Horace could not tell the doting Aunt Judy the truth—that he and Hobson had been smitten hip and thigh by "the fags"!

Hobson made remarks about Aunt Judy that Coker did not like at all; and that started the coolness between them which has lasted ever since. Coker, shoved up into the Fifth, affected to regard his erstwhile chum

as a mere kid; and Hobson, whose sense of humour is of rather an elementary type, got back on Coker in ways worthy of a kid. Among his new chums of the Fifth, obsequious by reason of Aunt Judy's tips, Coker found himself accosted by Hobson with the query: "Can you settle up that tanner I lent you last week to buy toffee?" Very likely Coker owed the sixpence; very likely it had gone in toffee; but was that any time or any place to rake up such childish bygones? Hobson might think so. Coker certainly didn't!

It was not the thing when Hobson tried to take it out of Coker minor for the defection of Coker major. Reggie could not help it, any more than he could help being so clever that he had to be put into the Sixth, and such a weed that most fellows above the Third could thrash him. It did not seem to Hobson much use going on talking to Horace about his absurd swank and the methods by which he had attained Fifth Form dignity; so Reggie, who had been put still further above Hobson, had to go through it. Hobson and his followers seized him when he came to put out lights in the Shell dormitory, and said they were going to hang him. They carried out the threat, too, though it was not by the neck that the unlucky Reggie suffered suspension—the cord was put under his armpits. Then Wingate came. They might say "Hang Wingate!" when he had gone; but it was not the sort of thing they were at all likely to try on! And Wingate saw to it that they did not try it on Coker minor again.

But they could not let Reggie alone. Just as some of the rougher spirits of the Remove were always getting at Alonzo, till his cousin Peter came along to protect him, so to Hobson & Co. Reggie seemed a fair mark. Four of them insisted on coming to tea with him once. That was not so bad; Reggie would not have grudged them tea. But they made him wait upon them. They stood him on his head. They treated him with contumely. Nemesis lay in wait, however. The Remove espoused the cause of Coker minor, and Hobson & Co. were put through it in their turn.

Some among the youngsters may consider THE MAGNET LIBRARY.—No. 515.

Hobson a bully. But he is not that; theoretically, he does not agree with bullying at all. He did not agree with the way Esmond was treated in the Remove; and when Esmond offered to stand him all the feeds he wanted if he would only lick Bolsover major for him, Hobson enlisted as a mercenary. Then he had a surprise, for Bolsover licked him!

There came a time when Coker reigned as skipper of Greyfriars. And Hobson went to him, seeking to know how many places the Shell was to have in the school footer eleven. Coker "put him in his place," naturally; Coker likes doing that, and the chance to do it to Hobson was too tempting to resist. It did not matter that Hobson, who is quite a capable half, could fairly play Coker's head off; what do little things like that matter in the face of a principle so great as that of proving Coker IT?

Hobson played centre-half in the team which Harry Wharton raised from the ranks

of the Remove, Upper Fourth, and Shell to play—and to beat—the Fifth. Hobson wanted to be skipper. So did Temple. Wharton, who had originated the idea, didn't quite see it, though—and small blame to him!

In games the Shell are far more redoubtable opponents than the Upper Fourth. But Peter Todd's Remove team beat the Shell in the Coker Cup contest, and Hobson was very cast down indeed about it.

Members of the Remove did Hobson a good turn once. The Shell had beaten the Upper Fourth—4 to nil—in a match for the Colonel's Cup. Coker came along and offered to play for the Shell in the next round, against the Remove. Hobson was not exactly polite. He said the Shell had had more than enough of Coker. While a member of the Form he had ruined Mr. Hacker's temper once for all by the sheer atrocity of his construes. There was a row, and Mr. Hacker sentenced Hobson to four hours' detention. The master of the Shell does not

care for footer, and he did not consider it mattered at all that his sentence would keep the Form's skipper out of the Cup match. Arguments and pleading were in vain. Coker appealed; Mr. Hacker took no notice even of him. Wharton appealed—result the same. Hobson was locked in his study; but some of the Remove fellows got a rope up to him, and Ogilvy and Desmond nobly sacrificed themselves to draw Mr. Hacker's attention from his escape. The Shell lost; but Hobson was satisfied—which was more than Mr. Hacker was with the amount of Livy that Hobson had got done. But the skipper of the Shell said that he really felt he had been working very hard; and no doubt he did, for he had fought like a Trojan to stave off defeat in the match.

You may take it that Hobson, if a trifle rough and overbearing, is the right sort. If he had not been, his opponents would not have wanted to do him that good turn—a sportsmanlike deed done for a sportsman!

Extracts from "THE GREYFRIARS HERALD" and "TOM MERRY'S WEEKLY."

HELPING BLINKINS!

By S. Q. I. FIELD.

GROOH! Look out! I say, you fellows—

Billy Bunter stopped dead. There was jolly good reason why. From the window of a largish house, with a veranda looking on to the lane, a curiously-shaped black article had winged its way. It had just missed Bunter's fat little nose, and Bunter was alarmed.

Then the window slammed down. Bunter felt his nose.

"Oh, really! That jolly nearly killed me!" he gasped.

"Pity it didn't quite!" said Peter Todd, stooping down to examine the missile, which lay upon the road.

"Oh, really, Todd!"

"It's a purdonium," said Peter.

"A whatter?" asked Bob Cherry.

Peter Todd was on his way to spend Christmas with Uncle Benjamin. Bob Cherry and Harry Wharton were accompanying him, being included in the invitation. Bunter was not included, but he had joined up, and firmly declined all exemption. The four had landed all right, but since leaving the station they had lost their way.

"I don't care what it is!" said Bunter. "It jolly nearly did me in!" He rubbed his nose tenderly, though that organ could hardly have been damaged by a miss, however near. "Let's get on. I'm hungry!"

"Purdonium," said Peter Todd, ignoring Bunter, "is the Sunday name for a coal-scuttle. The Romans used the cognomen for the coal receptacle, and—"

"Well, I didn't think it was a soup-tureen or a basket of flowers!" said Wharton. "But—Look out! More coming!"

As he spoke the door of the house flew open, and a small what-not came hurtling through the atmosphere.

"I'm off!" said Bunter, suiting the action to the word.

"Stop where you are, porpoise!" said Peter Todd. "Looks to me as if the people here are moving—trying to shoot the moon, perhaps."

The door had closed with a crash, but now it jerked wide again, and Bunter shouted for help as a kitchen shovel caught him in the region of the Equator. He sat down suddenly, his eyes goggling with fright.

"I don't like the look of this," said Bob Cherry. "For all we know, murder's being committed!"

"For all we know, it ain't!" replied Peter Todd. "It's Saturday night, and they may be cleaning up."

"I wish I'd never consented to come to see your blessed old uncle!" rumbled Bunter, scrambling to his feet, but sitting down again promptly as a broom came flying over his

head. "It ain't safe! And you've lost the way to your uncle's house, and I'm fed up!"

"Thought you said you were hungry!" said Peter Todd.

"So I am! I've got that sinking feeling. Yow-ow!" Down went Bunter again as a pail flashed through the air. "Don't try to be funny, Toddy!"

It was getting dark, and they had undeniably lost their way. Quarnton House—whither they were bent—seemed to be dodging them. But Peter Todd forgot such minor troubles as a curious sobbing sound came from behind the garden hedge of the house.

"I'm a lone, miserable, misunderstood man," came in a piteous voice, "and I wish I were dead!"

"It wouldn't be a bad notion!" cried Bob Cherry.

"Someone seems a bit unhappy," remarked Peter Todd.

He hurried towards the spot.

"Hallo, hallo, hallo!" sang out Bob Cherry, hurrying after Todd. "Is anything the matter?"

"Is anything the matter?" replied a doleful voice. "I should say something was the matter! This is one of Matilda's bad days. She is annoyed with me. She has been throwing things."

"I fancied someone was playing at pitch-and-toss," said Harry Wharton.

Peter Todd squeezed through the hedge, and the others followed. They saw a gentleman, clad in a pink dressing-gown, squatting in a flower-bed. He was crying bitterly.

"He's lost his nurse," said Bob Cherry.

"And his trousers!" murmured Peter Todd.

"That's because Matilda—she's my wife, you know, gentlemen—has 'em. She's sewing up the pockets. Not that I spend any money. I never have any. She runs our boarding-house, and it would be all right if it were not for her temper. She's afraid the Christmas dinner won't be ready, and, so far as I can see, it won't. I have lost my nerve. I am morally and intellectually damaged."

He started to weep again, wiping his eyes with the loose sleeve of his strange and comprehensive gown.

"Here, I say, Todd, you know, we'd really better be going on!" said Bunter, gripping Peter's arm. "It's pretty near dark, and that wild woman may begin throwing things again in another minute. I'm cold, and jolly miserable, and—and—Oh, let's move on!"

"Tush, porpoise!" replied Peter Todd reproachfully. "Have you no feeling for the sorrows of others?"

"No, I haven't!" replied Bunter frankly.

Bob Cherry was scrutinising the man of woe.

"What're you up to?" he asked, seeing that

the stranger was fumbling about at his collar.

"It's my stud," answered the man sadly. "I am all out of gear in a minute when my collar-stud goes, and it is always slipping out. Matilda won't let me have a big one."

"Here, let's have a go at it!" said Bob Cherry. "Hold your Adam's apple still. It's that hobbling about which sends the stud out of its place." Bob adjusted the stud. "What's your name?"

"Blinkins, my friend," said the other gratefully—"Onesimus Blinkins."

"A blinking fine name—I don't think!" muttered Bunter impatiently.

"It's the only one I've got, young gentleman," said the melancholy individual, turning to Bunter.

Bunter began to be interested, for he liked being treated with respect.

"I am in a sad way, sir," the queer person continued; and, for some reason which has never yet been fathomed, he addressed his remarks to Bunter, while Bob, Harry, and Peter Todd looked on and listened for all they were worth—which was something considerable, as that Christmas those who ought to give tips had done their duty!

"Matilda and I run Grasshopper House." The speaker made a gesture towards the building close to which they were standing. "It is pretty well full of visitors, and all would be going well only my wife breaks out in her tantrums, and when Matilda has tantrums—well, I give you my word I'd sooner be facing Jack Johnsons than what she throws at me! I am all of a shake. 'Matilda,' I says to her, quite mild-like, 'I'll have the dinner ready for to-morrow,' which is Christmas Day, as you may remember."

"Of course it is!" said Bunter, in a sad sort of way.

"Well, Matilda thought I should be behind, and she has been chasing me all day. It's her fault if nothing is cooked. I am trembling all over. I could not do it. I am not going back to face her. She can do her own cooking, for all I care! I am going off into the world as soon as it's dark!"

"You can't go without your trousers," said Peter Todd thoughtfully.

Mr. Blinkins drew his flowing robe about him majestically.

"I am not going back there," he said. "It is too much to ask of any man. Matilda can't cook. There will be trouble—real, big trouble—and it is only what she deserves. Major Frosher, one of our regular boarders has a hasty temper. Miss Brown has asked a friend to spend Christmas with her, and there are the others. They will be angry. Matilda will hear things."

"Be a man!" said Peter Todd.

Bunter was staring up at the house, then

down at Mr. Blinkins. The house had a kind, mild expression; so had Mr. Blinkins. Then Bunter seemed to have an idea. It was not often he was taken that way, but it happened then.

"Is there plenty of grub in there?" he asked.

"Lots," replied Blinkins mournfully. "But it isn't cooked."

"I can cook," said Bunter; "but I am not going in there if I'm to have coal-scuttles flung at me. Here, I say, what are you up to?"

Blinkins had thrown himself at Bunter, and was hugging the fat fellow to his breast like a long-lost brother.

"You will save the boarding-house!" he burred. "My noble young friend, if you will do that I shall be your debtor for life!"

Bunter wriggled himself free. He disliked being hugged. But it was precious dark, and it did not seem a bit likely that they would be able to reach Todd's uncle that night.

"Let's go in and help this Blinkins chump, Toddy," he said. "You know, one ought to try and help chaps at Christmas-time."

Blinkins made another dramatic move towards the porpoise; but Bunter backed, and escaped the friendly grip.

"No, you don't!" he said. "I was only thinking that if you had plenty of grub we might be of some use. You see, Peter Todd—the chap with the nose—it's all right, Toddy; it was only so that he should know who I meant—he said he had an uncle somewhere in these parts, but we haven't found him, and it strikes me we shan't. I know I am not going any farther in the dark, not a single, giddy step, and if you like to put me up I'll help you; only I won't be made a cockshy for scuttles and brooms!"

The heartening words of William George Bunter produced a positively magical effect on Blinkins. He wanted to clasp Bunter in his arms once more, but Bunter wasn't having any.

The idea was Bunter's, and he took the lead, and Peter Todd and the others followed, because there seemed nothing else to be done. Besides, they wanted to see what Bunter would do.

One thing was evident. Blinkins was in no case to say "No!" to a goose, far less to cook one—except his own.

Blinkins led them round to the back of the premises. He was trembling all over, and so nervous that he tripped over a clothes-line or something behind the house.

"It's all quiet," he whispered. "Matilda always has a nap, to rest herself, after one of her fits."

Bunter did not seem specially interested. He nosed his way into the kitchen. There was nobody about.

"She's scared away the servant," said Blinkins apologetically.

The place looked as if a smart young earthquake had been busy.

"Where's the larder?" asked Bunter, at once.

"This way, sir," said Blinkins.

Bunter soon made himself at home.

Somehow, there was plenty of pity for Blinkins knocking round, although he was such an utter dink. He wanted everything done for him, and was no good for anything except to get in the way of the chaps who had come to his aid. Still, he begged his visitors to have all they wanted—and, of course, Bunter wanted a lot.

Then Bunter got to work. That was what he said, but the work chiefly consisted of telling Wharton and the others to do things. Bunter could cook, and he had the pull there. There were tins of all sorts lying about, and geese and fowls and a large-sized turkey, with a pudding in course of composition.

"If you'll just take charge, gentlemen," said Blinkins, "you will be doing me a very good turn."

He kept on popping to the door to see whether Matilda was on the move, but nothing happened for a considerable time. Most likely the good lady had worn herself out. Anyway, as Bunter said, it was better than footing it through those messy lanes looking for Todd's uncle, who, as likely as not, had dodged off after inviting them. Bunter would have been bumped on the spot, but for the fact that the cooking would have suffered had he turned up rusty.

Then a bell rang. Blinkins' nerves did not allow him to go and see what it was. The bell went on ringing, and Blinkins went on not going to see. At last the door of the kitchen was burst open, and a chap with a big, grey moustache, and a face the colour of beetroot, flung himself into the room.

"What's this mean?" he roared. "I want my dinner!"

His voice closely resembled a sack of coals rattling down a shoot.

"You'll have it to-morrow," said Peter Todd, who was pouring sugar out of a canister into a bowl, as commanded by Bunter.

"I can't wait till to-morrow for dinner!" yelled the angry man, making a dash at Blinkins, who dodged behind a meat-screen.

"It's the major!" he gasped. "He'll kill me!"

"He'd better not!" cried Harry Wharton, lunging at the infuriated man with a rolling-pin.

The major slipped on some potato-parings, and went down with a crash. Peter Todd assisted him up, and then dusted him down.

"Now," he said, "that ought to be a lesson to you. You run away and be a good little major! Then perhaps you'll get your dinner!"

Bunter went on as if nothing had happened, and Blinkins began to cry again. Bob Cherry went and fetched a pail to catch the tears. He was afraid of a flood.

Then suddenly Blinkins, who had been crouching by the fire, bobbed up and listened.

"That's my wife, young gentlemen!" he cried, as a footstep was heard.

"Have no fear, Mr. Blinkins," spoke a deep voice from a cupboard.

Peter Todd had been busy after he had dismissed the major, and nobody would have recognised him as he emerged from the cupboard clad in a dress of a strange and wonderful kind, and with a black bonnet perched on his head.

Mrs. Blinkins dashed into the kitchen like a giant refreshed after her rest.

"Where's that wretched husband of mine?" she shrieked.

"Madam," said Peter Todd, catching her by the arm, "I do not intend to remonstrate with you. Are you not ashamed to go on in this manner? You should never cast aspersions—or coal-scuttles!"

"And who might you be?" shouted the enraged female.

"I am who I am," said Peter gravely. "It is enough for you to know that these abominable proceedings cannot be countenanced or permitted. To what a deplorable state have you reduced that bright young fellow who married you! Think of what he used to be—a bonnie little cherub on his mother's knee; later, a hopeful schoolboy seeking what he might devour, like my prize porpoise; and then, in after years, asking you to be his husband—my mistake, I mean his wife—ready to see in you the realisation of his fondest dreams; and you—you have brought him to this quivering condition of unworthy servitude! I would weep for you, Mrs. Blinkins, but the tap will not turn. Your husband is not a bad old bird at all, and if he had a quiet life I am sure he would be all that you could wish."

"Fire! Police! Help!" cried Matilda Blinkins.

Peter Todd released his hold, and the lady fled from the room, screaming for assistance. She did not reappear, but when Bunter served up the dinner she was calm, and took her place at the table as if nothing had happened.

Mr. Blinkins was ever so much obliged to his new-found friends.

"I wish you young gentlemen would stop here for ever," he said tearfully. "You have no idea what a life I lead! Fourpence a week for pocket-money, and I don't always get that! Major Frobsher—he's not a real major, you know—is my wife's brother, and—and he ain't much better than she is!"

"If you weep any more weeps I shall go!" said Bob Cherry.

"Sorry, sir, but the weakness sometimes takes me," said Blinkins.

They agreed that they must see the old buffer through his troubles over Christmas.

"Uncle Benjy will have to wait," said Toddy. "It's his own fault for not living where a chap can find him!"

II.

IT was the dead of night. Apartments had been found for the four new guests. The major had not given any more bother after his dinner, which was prodigious, falling short only of Bunter's.

Something roused Harry Wharton. He sat up and listened. A bell was ringing like mad. He jumped out of bed and woke the others.

"Lemme alone, can't you?" growled Bunter, rubbing his eyes.

"But there's a bell ringing!"

"Well, I ain't ringing it!" said the porpoise sleepily.

Bob Cherry went out into the corridor. Apparently it was nobody's business to answer the door. The bell was tinkling louder than ever.

Bunter had got out of bed at last, and the four descended to the hall, to hear shouting outside.

"Somebody wants to come in," said Bunter, taken with a sudden bright idea.

Wharton opened the door. Outside a stout lady, a still stouter gentleman, and a crowd of children were standing.

"How dare you keep us waiting like this?" shrieked the lady, bouncing into the house.

"I want rooms—six rooms!"

"I can't have children here!" shrieked Mrs. Blinkins from the staircase. "Go away!"

"Go hon!" said Bob Cherry.

Mrs. Blinkins came down the stairs, candle in hand, with a weird nightcap on her head.

"The house is full!" she said angrily to the newcomers.

"Bring in the luggage!" ordered the stout lady, as she marshalled her family inside.

"I am here, and I am not going hunting for rooms any more to-night. My husband will sleep anywhere, and the dear children can have shake-downs in the kitchen. As for myself, I am not particular as long as I have a feather bed."

Mr. Blinkins crept out of a passage, and stood trembling.

"There's plenty of room, sir!" he said to Peter Todd. "Only my wife is always like that, turning folks away. She and her brother like to have the place to themselves, and they are ruining me!"

"Call yourself a man!" yelled Mrs. Blinkins, hurling a chair at him.

"I wasn't calling myself anything, my dear," replied Mr. Blinkins. "But I think we must put up these worthy people."

A bolster, which was intended to sweep the stout lady off her feet, caught Billy Bunter, and caused him to sit down. The missile was thrown by the major.

Bunter was up, and ready to give fight. He seized the bolster, and gave chase up the stairs. Mrs. Blinkins beat a hasty retreat.

"We'll put you up with pleasure," said Mr. Blinkins to the fresh guests. "That is only my wife's funny little way. She—she didn't mean anything—nothing whatever, I assure you!"

The stout lady snorted, but seemed partially appeased. She and her family were accommodated, and peace descended once more on the domicile.

But what is peace? You think you have it, and find you've got influenza instead!

Bunter was just dozing off when a handful of gravel was dashed into his face. He started up.

"Oh, really, Wharton!" he spluttered.

"What's the matter now?" asked Harry Wharton from the next bed.

"You threw something at me!"

"Hist!" said Bob Cherry. "There's someone outside!"

"I know there is!" grumbled Bunter. "And he's throwing gravel at me!"

Peter Todd glided to the door. No more gravel was thrown, but as the four gazed the corridor they saw a shadowy figure in pyjamas creep past. The individual went to the landing window, opened it softly, and leaned out. The bright moonlight flooded the passage. The four watchers saw the major assisting two men to enter the house.

"The stuff is all ready," said the bogus major. "Have you got the money?"

"I don't like the look of this at all," muttered Peter Todd, as he saw a wad of Treasury notes pass from the hand of the nocturnal marauders into the palm of Frobsher. "That rotter is robbing poor old Blinkins of his goods. Come on!"

The attack was quite unexpected, though, as we are told the unexpected always happens. Frobsher ought to have been looking for it. But then it would have been expected. Queer thing—what

"Pile in!" shouted Harry Wharton, suiting his action to the word.

The two accomplices retreated in haste. Frobsher turned at bay. He couldn't help it—it was a bay-window.

"How dare you!" he roared.

"You are a rotten thief!" cried Peter Todd, downing him. "Sit on his head, Bunter!"

The prisoner's call for help was choked.

"It is a jolly good job we came here!" said Peter Todd. "It is plain that you have been robbing Mr. Blinkins, and leading him

(Continued on page 16.)

HELPING BLINKINS!

(Continued from page 15.)

III.

"I AM a poor, down-trodden man!" sighed Mr. Blinkins next morning as he entered the kitchen, to find his new friends hard at work.

"Don't be a worm!" said Peter Todd. "Look at that, and take courage!"

Mr. Blinkins stared at Frobsher, who was meekly blacking boots in the scullery.

"What's it mean?" he gasped.

"Only that we are going to put things on quite a different footing," replied Peter, with dignity.

"Blinkins, come here at once and help me!" sounded a feminine voice from the hall.

"Don't stir, on your life!" shouted Peter Todd, as the unhappy man moved to the door. "Stand up for your rights!"

"But I haven't any rights!" bleated Blinkins. "You see how she treats me."

Mrs. Blinkins hurried herself into the kitchen.

"Blinkins, didn't you hear me call you?" she burst out. "Not content with turning my house into a pandemonium—"

"I never did turn it into a harmonium, my love," said Blinkins.

Peter Todd caught the infuriated female by the arm.

"Madam," he said, "take my advice and leave this scene. Your husband is trembling with rage. He will not be answerable for his actions. He has been uttering the most terrible threats, and you had better be very careful. We will do our best to protect you, but once Blinkins gets going there will be no stopping him. Make yourself scarce, and henceforth you would be well advised to address him with the utmost respect. Already he has put the gallant major in his place. Frobsher will clean the boots and see to the chores."

"What, chores?" cried the lady, in a subdued tone, for somehow Peter Todd had awed her.

"Nothing just now, thank you. I had a good breakfast, and don't want anything more just now," replied Peter Todd. "Now go away, and make yourself look pretty if you can; and then decide to behave very nicely to your husband for the future. Never throw things at him any more. He has put up with a rare lot because he was afraid to let himself go. His affection, madam, has made him reluctant to hurt you. But have a care!"

Mrs. Blinkins covered her face with her hands.

"Oy," she murmured between her sobs, "I am truly sorry for all I did!"

Peter Todd led her to the door.

"Go, madam," he said, "and put on your nicest dress. Your husband may condescend to speak to you at dinner if you are very good."

Mr. Blinkins sank into a chair, gasping like a fish out of water.

Bob Cherry closed the scullery door so that Frobsher should not hear what followed. Harry Wharton sprang on to the table, regardless of the fact that Billy Bunter, in a big apron, was busy making a pie.

"Mr. Blinkins," he said, "be a man! You have submitted to tyranny too long. Britons never shall be slaves!"

"Come off the table!" exclaimed the Owl. "You are putting your feet in the pastry, you idiot!"

Peter Todd made a speech at the dinner. The house was full, and nobody grumbled. Frobsher, fearing that the story of his treachery might be revealed, was eager to please and make amends. And Mr. Blinkins rose to the occasion, never to fall again. So

(Continued on next column.)

GREYFRIARS AT THE FRONT!

IX.—WIBLEY, THE HUN!

By GEORGE BULSTRODE

THERE had been quite a lot doing on the British Front for several days. Wibley, who had been in hospital for a short time, came out, to find that the township where he had been quartered, which had bordered on the front-line trenches, was now quite a long way from where the Huns still held sway.

Consequently, in his zeal to rejoin his regiment—and doing things, of course, in the unofficial way—he could not really be blamed for straying past the line and getting into a barn where a crowd of Huns were just getting ready for a last stand.

He discovered this in the pitch blackness. He entered the barn stealthily, thinking that some of our own fellows were there, and found his retreat cut off. Shells were falling all round him, and the Huns were getting ready to make a dash for it as soon as they could.

He just had time to nip into cover behind a sack of gleanings, when the Huns came tumbling down from the loft where their loopholes were situated.

Wibley heard a jargon of German, which he understood pretty well. But there was one Hun—a fellow of about his own height—who spoke a peculiar accent. He had been a waiter in London for years, as it happened, and spoke his native lingo with a Cockney twang.

Wib studied it, and soon found that he could do it to a T, if only he could muster sufficient German. He had improved his knowledge of that musical tongue in France, and he reckoned he could.

So, as soon as the Huns went up into the loft again to get the remains of their German sausages, Wibley nipped out of concealment, to find that the waiter johnnie was alone.

With a tap from his rifle-butt he stunned the Hun, and changed clothes with him. Then, tying him up, he put him behind the sack, and awaited the other Huns.

They were not long in coming down.

"All is lost, brother!" said the first one, in German. "We must escape while we can."

"Bah!" said Wib. "Run from that contemptible little army?"

"Ja! It is only a contemptible little army, truly; but still, we have to think of ourselves."

"Too late, brother!" said Wib. "The shells have just blocked up the door. We must stay."

"Donner und blitzen!" howled the Huns.

"Very likely they will treat us well," said Wib.

"Not them! They are swine-bounds!"

"Certainly they are," said Wib calmly.

"Yah! I spit about them. But we are cut off!"

HELPING BLINKINS (continued).

the four hoped—I don't know! I never saw Blinkins, but I have no faith in him.

"I think we shall stop on here," said Bunter, chewing turkey. "There is plenty to eat, and it will be a jolly fine thing for old Blinkins. Shouldn't wonder if he offers me a fat salary."

Frobsher brought in the pudding. Bunter had really excelled himself with that.

"Ladies and gentlemen," said Peter Todd, rising to his feet. "I—"

But he got no further, for the door opened, and on the threshold he saw his uncle.

"Hallo, you young rascals!" cried the newcomer. "So you are here! I've been hunting the country to find you!"

"My dear," said Mrs. Blinkins, in a very humble voice to her husband, "please ask the gentleman to stay and dine. We have to thank these young friends of his for a lot—at least, I have. I am never going to be disagreeable any more."

Mr. Blinkins rose and offered the invitation.

"You see, you've made a man of him," said Harry Wharton to Peter Todd.

"Oh, I say, you fellows, that won't do!" cried Bunter proudly. "Everybody knows it was my example that did it all!"

Well, of course, everybody knew that! Oh, yes!

[EDITORIAL NOTE.—There is not one single solitary word of truth in this yarn, by the way. Squiff invented it all.—H. W.]

THE END

"We must man the guns!"

And the Huns, desperate in the knowledge that they were caught, started swarming up the ladder again.

Wib thought quickly. He saw that the barn was a strong place if only these fellows cared to hold it. They could do tremendous damage. But what was he to do? He was unarmed.

"Come back!" he shouted desperately.

"Why?" shrieked the Huns.

"Because I just heard the English pass us!" shouted Wib. "If we fire now they will blow this place up!"

The Huns came down with chattering teeth. They gave in to their "brother" when it came to a matter of speaking English.

"What did you hear?" demanded the foremost Hun.

"I heard their voices," said Wib calmly. Of course, he had heard nothing. "They have passed here, and they think it is empty. I'll tell you what we can do. We can man the guns at the back."

"Into our own trenches?" gasped the Hun. "We shall get shot if we do that!"

"Our brothers have gone from there and left us," said Wib quickly. "The English are there now. We can fire into their backs!"

"Ja, ja! Into their backs!" shrieked the Huns. "We knew our brothers in the trenches would desert us!"

They swarmed up into the loft, and moved the machine-guns across to the emergency loopholes in the back of the barn. Then they started firing—amongst their own troops, as Wibley had planned.

Wib, forgotten for the moment, looked through the loopholes towards the front line. Flaring lights were lighting up the whole sky, and he saw the British dashing forward to the attack. The advance was really starting.

Things had gone far enough. Stooping, he snatched up a pistol from the floor.

"Hands up, you Huns!" he roared.

The Huns turned round and gasped. Wib had removed his Hun helmet, and they saw the difference. But there was no way out of it.

"Kamerad!" roared the Huns.

The British troops were coming on rapidly. Wib knew that he was in a dangerous position.

"Say it again!" he thundered.

And the Huns roared:

"Kamerad! Kamerad!"

The sound reached the Tommies, and, knowing that there were some Huns inside who wanted to surrender, they dashed in.

Wib had still got the pistol up, and the Huns had still got their hands up.

The Editor's Chat.

For Next Monday:

"LOOKING AFTER INKY!"

By Frank Richards.

Only last week you had a story in which Hurree Singh and a chum of his own race were concerned. Next week's story is, in a sense, similar; and yet, in another sense, it is as different as a story can be.

Between Koumi Rao, of St. Jim's, and Kuri Din, of St. Jude's, there is a whole world of difference. The St. Jude's fellow is a cunning and selfish rotter. But to Inky, loyal-hearted and forgiving; they both rank as chums; and, though he learns what other fellows think of his St. Jude's pal, he will not give him up until circumstances—helped by William Wibley—show him in his true colours.

Stories of Wibley are always popular, though everyone knows what to expect when told that Wibley plays a big part in a yarn. Wib will surprise us all very much if he ever earns distinction in any way but one, and that the way in which alone he cares to earn it. His ingenuous devotion to the dramatic leaves him caring little about other things, and to it is due his intervention in Inky's affairs. He looks after Inky because

— But next week will tell you of that.

YOUR EDITOR.

22-12-17