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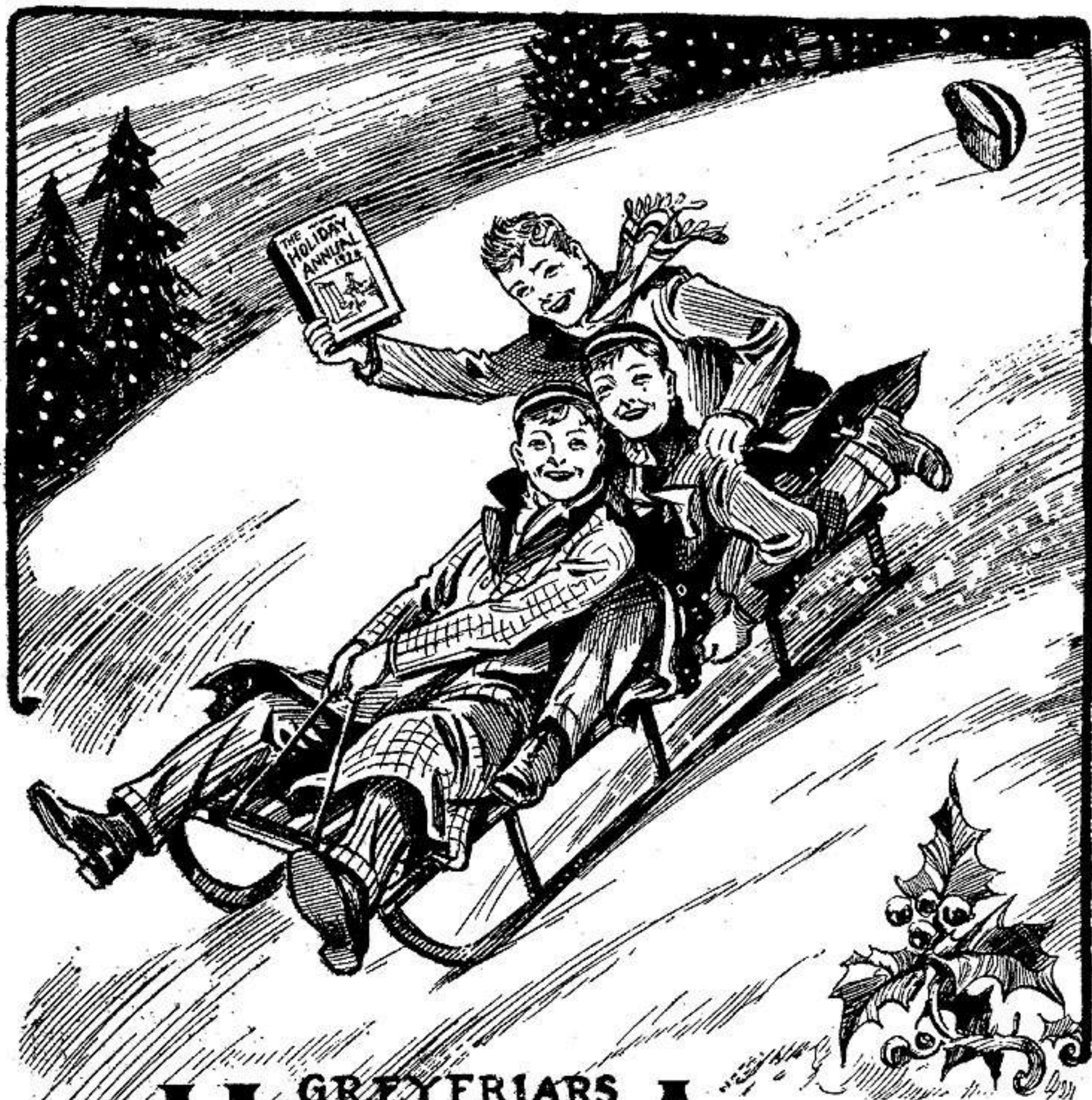


WHEN "GHOST" MEETS "GHOST"!

(A thrilling incident from this week's ripping story of Harry Wharton & Co., inside.)

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The Wraith of Lochmuir!



A Splendid Long Complete Story of Harry Wharton & Co., of Greyfriars, related by FRANK RICHARDS.

in at the frosty casement, Wharton shuddered to recall the happenings of the night—the shadowy figure, half-seen in the gloom, the icy hand that had touched him, like the touch of the dead.

According to the legend of Lochmuir, the old mansion was haunted by its ancient laird, the MacDermid, who had fallen long years ago on the field of Culloden.

And Harry Wharton, in spite of his strong common-sense, was almost inclined to believe that the legend was true.

In that strange old house, by the silent waters of the loch, embosomed in the lonely hills, the legend did not seem so incredible as it would have seemed at Greyfriars or at home.

Bob Cherry rubbed his sleepy eyes and blinked. Frank Nugent awoke and yawned.

"Hallo, hallo, hallo!" exclaimed Bob, in less hearty tones than was his wont. "You fellows feel like brekker?"

"Thank goodness it's daylight!" said Nugent. "I say, I don't feel much inclined for another night here. What price clearing out of Lochmuir to-day?"

"I was thinking of that," said Johnny Bull.

Hurree Jamset Ram Singh looked up from the fire.

"The thankfulness of my esteemed self has also been terrific," he remarked. "The ghostfulness of this excellent mansion is too much of a good thing!"

The sound of the Greyfriars juniors' voices awoke Maurice Angel—Harry Wharton & Co.'s host at Lochmuir, whom they had once known at Greyfriars as Mick, the gipsy schoolboy.

"Hallo! I've been asleep, I think!" said Mick.

"I think you have," grinned Bob.

"Where's Angel?" asked Nugent suddenly.

Bob Cherry whistled. He had forgotten the existence of Aubrey Angel, of the Fourth Form at Greyfriars.

When the alarm had been given in the night by Harry Wharton, his chums had gathered in his room, and they had watched for the remainder of Christmas night—watched till the grey dawn put

an end to their vigil. But Angel of the Fourth had not joined them.

"I suppose he's in his room," said Bob. "Blest if I hadn't forgotten all about him!"

Mick coloured a little.

"I hadn't forgotten him," he said quietly. "I called him, when we turned out in the night. But he wouldn't turn out."

"What did he say?" asked Johnny Bull.

"He said it was all rot."

"H'm!"

Harry Wharton compressed his lips.

Angel of the Fourth was a late arrival at Lochmuir; and, so far, he had seen nothing of the uncanny apparition that haunted the ancient house.

His mocking disbelief had considerably nettled the Remove fellows.

Phantom or no phantom, they had seen it; trick or no trick, it was, at least, no trick of the imagination. Angel of the



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THE FIRST CHAPTER.

The House in the Highlands!

CHRISTMAS night had worn away; a dim, misty dawn was rising over the Highlands. Harry Wharton stood at his window, in the old house of Lochmuir, and looked out. Frosty, frozen trees, snowy hillsides, and the misty stretch of the loch met his eyes. Not a living thing was in sight; only in the distance a thin spiral of smoke rose from the chimney of Sandy Bean's cottage in the glen.

Harry Wharton shivered a little.

His face was pale—pale with watching through the wild night. He turned from the window, and looked at his comrades.

Bob Cherry rubbed his eyes and grinned faintly. Johnny Bull rose from his chair by the fire and stretched himself and yawned. Nugent sat with his head bent forward—he had dozed off. Hurree Jamset Ram Singh was huddled by the fire. Mick Angel had thrown himself on the bed—he was fast asleep.

It had been a strange-enough Christmas for the chums of Greyfriars, in the haunted house in the Highlands.

Even now, with the daylight stealing

Fourth preferred to take the view that it was "nerves"—that the Remove fellows had been scared by some shadow in the old house, and fancied the rest. That view was not likely to please Harry Wharton & Co.

Bob Cherry rose.

"Well, we'd better get down and get some brekker," he said, "We can talk afterwards about what we're going to do."

"It's been a pretty rotten Christmas for you fellows," said Mick ruefully.

"Well, it's been exciting, at least," grinned Bob. "Let's go and call Angel, and get down."

The Famous Five and Mick went along to Aubrey Angel's room. Bob Cherry thumped on the door, and turned the handle. He flung the door wide open and shouted:

"Hallo, hallo, hallo!"

"What—"

Aubrey Angel sat up in bed. He stared sleepily at the group of juniors in the doorway of his room.

"What the thump—" he growled.

"Seen anything in the night?" asked Bob.

"What was there to see, you ass?"

"The giddy ghost!" Bob Cherry's spirits were rising; it was seldom that they were depressed for long. "The jolly old spook who jizzes around in the night-time."

"What rot!"

"Well, Wharton saw something in his room—"

"Bosh!" snapped Angel.

"I did," said the captain of the Remove quietly.

"You got scared again?" sneered Angel. "My hat! You Remove fellows really ought not to go about without your nurses!"

"Why, you cheeky ass—" exclaimed Bob Cherry hotly. Then he suddenly remembered that he was speaking to Mick's brother and stopped.

Aubrey Angel laughed.

"Well, I'm not afraid of ghosts," he said. "I leave that sort of thing to you fags. What the thump are you turnin' out so early for?"

"We've been watching all night."

Angel stared.

"Watchin' all night!" He burst into a roar of laughter. "Ha, ha, ha! That takes the cake! Afraid to go to sleep!"

"We weren't afraid," said Johnny Bull angrily. "But after what Wharton told us—"

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Angel. "I'll tell them about this when we get back to Greyfriars next term! It will be a toppin' yarn to tell in the studies! Ha, ha, ha!"

The Famous Five looked at Angel. They were greatly inclined to collar him and bump him out of bed, as a reward for his mocking laughter. But for Mick's presence they would certainly have done so. But Mick was their host, and they could not handle his brother.

"Oh, let's get down!" said Bob angrily.

And the Famous Five and Mick went downstairs, leaving Aubrey Angel to turn his head on his pillow and sink into slumber again.

THE SECOND CHAPTER.

To Go, or Not to Go!

"ARE we going?"

Bob Cherry propounded that query after breakfast.

A keen and bitter wind whistled round the old house, and swept the snow from the battlements of the

ruined castle of Lochmuir. From the old hall window the loch could be seen, a sheet of glimmering ice. In the huge stone fireplace of the oak-panelled hall a great log fire roared and crackled.

"Are we going?"

That was the question the juniors had to decide. Their Highland Christmas had been strangely different from what they had anticipated. Sir Philip Angel, almost at the last moment, had been prevented from coming to Lochmuir by political affairs in London; the Christmas gathering at the old Highland mansion was not, after all, to take place. That would have troubled the Greyfriars juniors little, perhaps; they were, so to speak, sufficient unto themselves.

But the ghost scare had frightened away the servants; there was not a soul in the house but the juniors themselves. Every preparation had been made for their coming; but, in the midst of plenty, they were practically camping out.

There was a certain amount of attraction in that novel and adventurous way of passing Christmastide. But on top of the rest came the affair of the ghost.

Whatever might be the explanation of the strange apparition of Lochmuir, the incident was unpleasant and unnerving. Billy Bunter had been with the party, and he had gone.

And undoubtedly the rest of the Greyfriars party felt a strong inclination now to follow Bunter's example.

They were cool-headed enough, and had plenty of nerve; but they looked forward to the ensuing night with something very like apprehension.

"The gôfulness seems to my honourable self the proper caper in the esteemed circumstances!" remarked Hurree Singh.

Mick looked rueful.

"Nothing for you fellows to stick it out for," he said. "I fancied we were going to have a jolly Christmas up here, but it don't seem to have worked out like that! That ghost business beats me!"

"It beats us all!" said Johnny Bull. "It's trickery of some sort—that stands to reason—"

"In the daylight!" grinned Bob Cherry. "But at jolly old midnight things don't stand to reason somehow!"

"I must say I feel rather fed!" remarked Nugent.

Harry Wharton did not speak.

His brows were knitted in thought. All his comrades looked at him; they felt that it was for the captain of the Remove to decide.

"Give it a name, old man," said Bob at last. "You've got the casting vote, you know."

"Well, I'm against going," said Harry Wharton quietly. "In the first place, we can't let Angel or anybody else say that we were frightened away. We don't want to be laughed at in all the studies next term!"

"Something in that," admitted Bob Cherry, rubbing his chin thoughtfully. "I can fancy what the fellows would say. Fancy the old Bounder hearing a ghost story!"

"The griffulness would be terrific!"

"But that isn't all," said Harry. "We fixed up to stay here till the New Year, and it's a bit difficult to make fresh arrangements now. Even the post takes days from here. This isn't the Christmas holiday we were looking for! Still, it's a jolly old place, and lots of things to do, and camping out for ourselves is rather fun! And then—"

"Then what?"

"Well, it stands to reason, as Johnny said, that the ghost business is trickery

of some sort," said Harry. "My opinion is that we ought to get to the bottom of it, and give the ghost a high old time when we lay hands on him!"

"Hem!"

"That's my idea," said Mick. "Nothing I'd like better, if you fellows are game to stick it out!"

"Oh, we're game!" said Bob at once.

And the Nabob of Bhanipur declared that the gamefulness was terrific. Johnny Bull and Frank Nugent nodded assent.

"Then we're staying," said Harry. "And I propose, as a first step, searching the house from top to bottom, and from end to end. We've searched it before, but not thoroughly. We've got to find out where the ghost comes from, and where he vanishes to. It seems to me pretty certain that he can't wander about the place without leaving some sign or other behind him."

"Unless—" said Nugent, and stopped.

"Unless what?"

"Well"—Frank Nugent coloured—"unless he's a real ghost, you know! Of course, I don't believe it. But—"

"We'll chance that," said Harry. "The figure I touched last night was solid enough, anyhow!"

"It's a go!" said Bob Cherry.

Aubrey Angel came yawning into the hall as the juniors arrived at that decision. He was very late for breakfast; but Mick had it all ready for him.

"You fellows packin' and clearin'?" asked Angel, as he sat down to breakfast before the fire.

"No; we're staying."

"Stickin' it out—ghost and all?"

"Yes!"

"You'll have another fright to-night!" grinned Angel.

"Rats!"

"Perhaps you'll get the next fright!" growled Johnny Bull.

Angel of the Fourth chuckled.

"Not likely! I'm not nervous, you know!"

"Let's get out," said Bob abruptly. "We've got to go down to Muirland to-day for some supplies; we can search the house afterwards."

"Good! Are you coming, Angel?" asked Wharton.

"I'm coming if you're leaving Lochmuir. I shall be jolly glad to get out, if Mick will come!" returned Angel. "But I'm not lookin' for a tramp in the snow otherwise."

"You don't mind remaining here alone?"

"Why should I?"

"Oh, all right, then!"

And six juniors put on coats and caps and scarves and left the old house, leaving Aubrey Angel to finish his breakfast, and then to smoke cigarettes, and to ponder over a list of "gee-gees" in a sporting paper he had brought with him from London.

But as the party tramped down to the gates Mick paused.

"I don't like Aubrey being left alone, you fellows," he said. "He don't believe in what we've seen; but we've seen it, all the same. I think a fellow isn't safe alone in that house!"

And with a nod to his comrades the gipsy schoolboy walked back to Lochmuir.

He found his brother smoking before the fire, with his brows wrinkled in thought. Angel started a little as he came in.

"Back already, Maurice?"

"I ain't leaving you alone, Aubrey," answered Mick. "It ain't safe here alone!"

"What rot! Still, I'm glad of a

chance to speak to you without those fellows," said Angel, throwing his cigarette into the fire. "Look here, Mick! I want you to come away with me. We can get to Kenney's place and have a good time for the rest of the vac, though we've had a rotten Christmas!"

"But the other fellows—"

"They can look after themselves, can't they?" said Angel irritably.

"I asked them here, old man, and I can't go back on them," said Mick, with a clouded brow. "I—I thought you'd made friends with them."

"I've tried," grunted Angel—"I've really tried! But oil and water can't mix!"

"I—I suppose not!" muttered Mick.

"Don't look down in the mouth, old chap!" said Angel, his hard face softening. "I'll stand your friends if you won't leave them, and I'm civil enough to them, I think. They can't expect me to keep serious when they talk rot about seeing spooks—that's too thick! But we'll manage to pull together all right if you make a point of it."

"You're jolly good to me, Aubrey, old man!"

"I try to be," said Angel.

And he spoke sincerely enough. In his false nature there was one thing that was sincerity itself, and that was his affection for his young brother, the gipsy schoolboy who had been so strangely lost and found.

"But if you want to go, Aubrey, I won't keep you, though I did want to have the holidays with you," said Mick.

"I'm not goin' without you!" said Angel.

"I'm bound to stay, Aubrey."

"Then I stay as long as you do!" Angel's eyes gleamed in a peculiar way. "Perhaps your friends will be willin' to go when they've seen a few more spooks. The jolly old ghost may butt in again and settle the matter. Aren't you goin' after your friends?"

"I'd rather stay with you, Aubrey."

Angel smiled genially.

"Then let's get our skates and get out on the loch! It's frozen hard! We can get some good skatin' here, if there's nothin' else!"

"Good!" said Mick cheerily.

And the gipsy schoolboy's face was very bright as he left the house with his brother.

THE THIRD CHAPTER.

Unexpected!

HARRY WHARTON & CO. tramped cheerily down the snowy path to the side of the loch, where the road ran steeply down to the village of Muirland. On their right lay the loch, a sheet of glimmering ice. On the left the hills rose, ridged with snow. Back from the path, backing against the hillside, lay the cabin of Sandy Bean, the piper. The wild strain of the bagpipes was heard as the juniors approached the lonely cottage.

It was a wild, melancholy strain—the dirge of the dead-and-gone MacDermid. But the pipes ceased as the juniors came abreast of the open doorway, and the figure of the old piper appeared there—a stately figure, tall and gaunt, in Highland kilt and plaid and bonnet. The old man was still erect, his eyes full of fire, though at least eighty years had whitened his hair and his flowing beard. The keen winter wind, freezing from the snowy hills, struck full upon him as he stood, but he did not shrink from it. He seemed unconscious of it. His bright, strangely gleaming eyes were fixed on the Famous Five of Greyfriars.

He touched his bonnet in salute, and the juniors capped him politely. There was something impressive about the strange old man who lived so strange and solitary a life in the bosom of the wild hills, dreaming of past days, mourning for a clan long forgotten, of which he was the last survivor.

"Top of the morning, Mr. Bean!" called out Bob Cherry in his cheeriest tones.

The old man did not smile. He gazed gravely, fixedly at the juniors.

"You are going?" he asked.

"We're going down to Muirland for some things," answered Harry Wharton.

"You are not going—away?"

"No."

"Have you seen nothing in the House of Lochmuir that should warn the stranger away from the hall of the MacDermid?" said the old piper sternly.

"Lots!" answered Bob Cherry, with a grin. "We've seen a jolly old spook!"

"Is that how you speak of the spirit of the ancient Laird of Lochmuir?"

"That's just how!" replied Bob Cherry, with undiminished cheerfulness. "You see, we don't believe for a minute that it's an ancient laird. We believe it's a modern japer. And we're jolly well going to give him beans somehow or other!"

The old man's face darkened.

"Since the day of Culloden the spirit of the Laird of Lochmuir has haunted his old hall," he answered. "For generations he has been seen, and strangers who

have taken possession of his land have never dared to stay. For generations the old house has been left to the bat and the owl. Who are you to disturb the repose of one who is not of this world?"

"But the house belongs to Sir Philip Angel now," said Harry Wharton mildly, "and we are his son's guests there."

The old man made a gesture of scorn. To his mind, dwelling in the past, amid the forgotten glories of the clan of Dermid, the Angels were newcomers, intruders, trespassers on the domain of the ancient laird.

He turned away, with a black and moody brow, and stared at the silent hills with so intent a gaze that it seemed as though he saw something there more than the ridged snow and the frozen firs. Possibly, to his mind, shaken by solitude and long brooding, the desert hill was peopled by plaided figures, and he saw again the gallant clansmen who, with target and claymore, had followed their laird to the fatal field of Culloden, to perish under the banner of Prince Charlie.

The juniors pursued their way, and when they glanced back they saw the figure of the old piper, still as if graven in bronze, against the background of the hills.

It was a long tramp down to the village, the rocky path winding by the side of the frozen loch. They reached the village at last, and they noted that the few inhabitants who were to be seen in the wind-swept street looked at them



Whiz! A snowball flew through the air and landed on Wharton's nose. "Groo-ugh!" gasped the captain of the Remove. "Somebody's playing japes," said Bob Cherry. "I'll jolly well jape him." He picked up a handful of snow and looked round for the enemy. "He, he, he!" came in a well-known cackle. Harry Wharton & Co. looked up. From a window of the inn the fat face of Billy Bunter looked down. He had another snowball in his hands, scooped from the window-sill. (See Chapter 3.)

with curiosity. The fellows who were passing Christmas at the haunted house of Lochmuir were objects of interest to the Muirland folk, none of whom would have ventured to pass near the old mansion after the dusk of night had fallen.

"Here we are again!" said Bob Cherry cheerfully, as they stopped before the inn. "Hallo, hallo, hallo! What's that?"

"That" was a snowball which caught Bob Cherry's cap and whirled it from his head.

"Ow!" ejaculated Bob.

"Why—what—who—"

Whiz!

Another snowball flew and landed on Harry Wharton's nose. The captain of the Remove gave a gasp as the snow squashed over his face.

"Hallo, hallo, hallo! Somebody's going in for japes!" exclaimed Bob Cherry. "I'll jolly well jape him!"

He grabbed up a handful of snow and looked round for the enemy. But there was no one to be seen save the ruddy-faced Highland innkeeper standing in the porch of the inn, and an ancient inhabitant plodding sedately along the snowy street.

"Where the thump—" ejaculated Bob.

Squash!

"Oh, my hat! Groooogh!"

"He, he, he!" came in a well-known cackle.

It was the fat cackinnation of William George Bunter of the Greyfriars Remove, and it came from above. Harry Wharton & Co. looked up.

From a window of the inn the fat face of Billy Bunter looked down, clothed in a fat grin. He had another snowball in his hand, scooped from the window-sill.

"Bunter!" roared Bob Cherry.

"He, he, he!"

"Then he's not gone!" exclaimed Nugent.

"Is Bunter ever gone?" growled Johnny Bull.

"The gonefulness of the esteemed and disgusting Bunter is not terrific—Yaroooooh!" roared Hurree Jamset Ram Singh, as the fresh snowball flew and squashed in his dusky face.

"He, he, he!"

Billy Bunter chortled with great enjoyment. But his fat chortle came to a sudden termination. Bob Cherry kneaded a snowball rapidly and hurled it up with unerring aim.

Squash!

It landed fairly in the middle of Bunter's fat face, which disappeared from the window with remarkable suddenness. A heavy bump was heard from the window, and a loud yell:

"Yoooooop!"

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

"Yow-ow-ow! Groooogh!"

Harry Wharton & Co. went into the inn. The sight of Billy Bunter there was a surprise to them, and yet not wholly a surprise. Billy Bunter had shaken the dust of Lochmuir from his podgy feet and departed; but that he was really, wholly, and actually gone seemed, as Bob Cherry remarked, too good to be true.

"I say, you fellows—"

William George Bunter came down the narrow, dusky stairs. He grinned feebly at the Greyfriars party.

"Buzz off, Bunter!"

"Oh, really, Bull! I say, you fellows, it's jolly decent of you to call and see me," said Bunter. "I've a jolly good mind to punch your head for chucking that snowball at me, Bob—"

"Punch away!" grinned Bob.

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"Well, I'll let you off, as it's Christmas-time," said Bunter. "I say, how did you know I was staying on here?"

"We didn't know, ass!"

"But you've come to see me—"

"Not at all. We've come to get some eggs and milk from the inn-keeper. Seeing you is just a stroke of bad luck."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Beast!"

The juniors proceeded to get the supplies they had come for. Billy Bunter hovered round them. He had greeted the party with snowballs from his window; but he was evidently bent on being very cordial now.

"Better stay here to lunch, you fellows," he said. "They do you a jolly decent feed here. I've had some."

"We're getting back to Lochmuir," answered Wharton.

"Rot! I'll stand the lunch," said Bunter. "The salmon they give you here is just ripping! Come on—it's my treat!"

"Bow-wow!"

"Why haven't you gone?" demanded Johnny Bull. "You left Lochmuir for good—or you said so."

"Well, I was hungry, you know," said Bunter. "I stopped here for some grub, and the chauffeur wouldn't wait; he said he had to get his car back. I ordered him to wait, and he took no notice. Cheeky cad, you know. Said I'd have to pay for the car if he waited."

"Awful cheek!" said Bob sarcastically.

"Yes, wasn't it? So I treated him with contempt and let him go," said Bunter. "I've been jolly comfortable here—the grub's really good, and there's plenty of it."

"And now you're going on?"

Bunter coughed.

"Well, not exactly, you know. You see, I've run out of money, and I shouldn't be able to pay my fare home this distance."

"Then you're staying here?"

"Well, I don't know whether the inn-keeper will let me stay, if I don't pay my bills."

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Bob. "I think probably not. I believe it's not very easy to diddle a Scotsman."

"If you fellows can lend me a fiver—"

"Good-bye, Bunter!"

"A couple of pounds—"

"Fare thee well, and if you ever, all the better, fare thee well!" sang Bob Cherry; and the juniors walked out of the inn.

Billy Bunter blinked after them through his big spectacles.

"I say, you fellows, I—I was relying on you, you know!" He toddled after the Greyfriars juniors. "I say, I shall be stony when I've settled my bill, and—and that innkeeper won't let me go without paying. I can see it in his face."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Well, what am I to do?" demanded Bunter.

"Whom are you to do, you mean?" chuckled Bob. "Do the innkeeper, if he'll let you. You've done us already."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"But I—I say, you fellows—"

"Send a man down to Dingwall to telegraph to some of your titled relations," suggested Nugent. "Either the duke or the marquis ought to play up, at Christmas-time."

"Beast!"

"You can come back to Lochmuir, if you like," said Harry Wharton, laughing. "Mick won't mind."

"Well, as you're so pressing, old chap, I'll come, if you can get a conveyance," said Bunter. "There's no car to be had

here; but you might be able to get a trap or something, if you pay for it—"

"Go hon!"

"I don't mind what it is, so long as it's quite comfortable," said Bunter. "I say, you fellows, don't walk away while a chap's talking. What about that trap?"

"You're not catching us in any trap!" chuckled Bob. "We're going back on Shanks' pony, and so are you, if you come."

"Do you think I'm going to walk three miles on dashed hills in the blessed snow?" roared Bunter. "I'm jolly well not!"

"Good-bye, then!"

"Beast!"

The chums of the Remove, chuckling, started on their return to Lochmuir. Billy Bunter did not follow them. The long tramp uphill to Lochmuir did not appeal to him; and perhaps he still nourished a faint hope of "diddling" the Muirland innkeeper. The last the Greyfriars juniors saw of him he was standing in the porch of the inn, glaring after them through his big spectacles and shaking a fat fist.

THE FOURTH CHAPTER.

In Direst Peril!

AUBREY ANGEL slowed down, as he glided along the smooth ice on the loch, and stared at a plaided figure on the bank. Mick, with a ruddy face, his scarf flying in the wind, shot alongside his brother.

"That's old Bean," he said.

"Oh, the piper!" said Aubrey. "I remember seeing him when I came up here in the summer with the pater. I believe he's more than half-potty!"

"Poor old chap!" said Mick. "I suppose he isn't quite right in the upper story—living all alone in the hills, with no company but his bagpipes. I believe he doesn't like us being here."

"Why not?"

Mick laughed.

"He looks on this land as still belonging to the MacDermid, and he thinks that the ghost of the laird ought to be given a free run," he answered. "He believes in the ghost, of course—all the country people in this place do."

"What utter rot!" said Angel. "If I were in father's place I'd have him turned off the land. He pays no rent for his cottage."

Mick's face clouded a little. Every time he had a glimpse of Aubrey's hard, unfeeling heart it came as a shock to him. His affection for his brother was so strong that, in spite of his own reason and common-sense, he was determined to think well of Angel of the Fourth.

"You don't mean that, old fellow," said Mick at last. "It would kill the old fellow, I think, to be turned off; and his little cottage can't be worth much in the way of rent. Old Bean has always lived here; his ancestors lived here centuries ago; he was the hereditary piper to the MacDermid clan."

"Well, there aren't any MacDermids left," said Angel carelessly. "And the land is ours. It's about time the old duffer woke up to the fact that we're in the twentieth century now, not the eighteenth. But what's he up to now?"

The two juniors slowed down still more, their eyes turned curiously on the old piper.

Sandy Bean was standing high on the rocky bank, looking down at them, with sunken eyes that glowed and burned under his shaggy grey brows.

His right arm was raised, throwing

back the thick folds of the plaid, and extended towards the brothers.

He was speaking, and his voice was carried to their ears on the keen wind; but though they heard the words they did not understand, for the old man was speaking in the Gaelic tongue.

Of that old musical tongue the Angels, naturally, understood nothing. To the old Highland piper it was his mother-tongue; and English came only with difficulty to his lips.

Loud and clear and ringing, the voice of Sandy Bean rang across the frozen loch, while his extended right arm seemed to be threatening the brothers, if not invoking a curse upon the heads of the intruders on the domain of the MacDermid.

"Let's get out of this!" growled Angel. "I believe the old fool is cursing us in that lingo!"

"Sounds like it!" said Mick, with a shiver.

They wheeled round, turning their backs on the piper, and skated away towards the centre of the loch.

Mick glanced over his shoulder as he went.

Sandy Bean's arm was still raised, as in denunciation, and a strange and terrible expression was on his wrinkled old face. He was silent now, but he was watching the brothers with a curious, grim intentness.

There was something in his look that struck a chill to Mick's heart. It was threatening, grim, boding. He slowed down, with half a mind to turn back and speak to the old man.

Aubrey Angel shot ahead of his brother.

"Come on, Mick!" he called out.

Crash!
"Oh! Help!"

Mick was looking back at the figure on the shore; but at that cry he spun round towards his brother.

Aubrey Angel was through the ice!

The frozen loch was treacherous. To the eye the ice seemed thick and firm, but where hidden currents lurked and whirled it was thin, and it was across one of the danger-spots that Aubrey Angel had glided unsuspectingly.

"Oh, heavens!" panted Mick, his face white.

Then he knew what that look on Sandy Bean's face had meant. The piper had known that the brothers were going into peril—he knew the loch and all its secrets—and he knew that death awaited them when they left the zone of safety. Had not Mick lingered he would have shot through the broken ice with his brother.

"Help!"

Aubrey Angel was shouting huskily. For a second he had vanished in black swelling water; now he was up again, holding on desperately to the broken edges of the ice.

"I'm coming!"

Mick kicked off his skates and ran towards his brother. The peril was terrible; and he did not hope for help from the half-mad old piper. He cast one wild glance round in the faint hope of seeing something of Harry Wharton & Co. But the Greyfriars fellows were far away in Muirland.

Angel, his face white and desperate, clung to the broken ice, with the freezing water chilling his limbs. His eyes were on his brother, and he released one hand to wave him back.

"Go back! Go back!"

"I'm coming!"

"Go back!" shouted Angel. It was at that moment that the cad and black-guard of Greyfriars vanished, and all that was best in Aubrey Angel came to the surface. "Go back! You can't



Aubrey Angel had glided, unsuspectingly, over a thin patch of ice. Crack! "Oh! Help!" Mick spun round as he heard his brother's cry, and was just in time to see him disappearing in the black swelling water. "Help!" "Hold on!" yelled Mick, flinging off his skates. "I'm coming!" (See Chapter 4.)

help me! Maurice, you fool, keep back!"

Mick did not heed.

That he could save his brother was little likely, but he was going to make the attempt. It was better to perish with him than to desert him.

The ice cracked under his feet. Angel gave a last shriek of desperate warning.

"Go back! You can't help me! Save yourself, Maurice!"

Crash!

Mick was crawling to the broken edge to reach his hand to his brother now. But the ice cracked and parted under him, and he struggled in welling water.

"Oh, Maurice!" panted Angel.

"Sink or swim together!" panted Mick. He was swimming beside his brother.

Angel's wild glance swept the ice. A hundred yards separated them from the bank where the plaided figure of the old Highlander stood. Suddenly, like a wraith, the figure of Sandy Bean vanished from sight. He was gone.

"He has left us to die!" groaned Angel. "He was cursing us, the villain! He knew of this danger, and he wanted us to drown, the wretched mad-man!"

Mick set his teeth.

"Keep up, Aubrey, old man! We've got to get out of this!"

Angel groaned. He knew that there was no hope. The edges of the ice-gap cracked and crumbled as he clutched them. Once he almost climbed out, but

the ice gave, and he rolled back, splashing, amid floating fragments. Mick's strong grasp on him dragged him up again, panting, dazed, and despairing.

"Help!"

Mick shouted frantically.

His voice rang over the frozen loch and echoed back from the wild hills.

"Help! Help!"

But only the echoes answered.

"It's all up!" groaned Angel huskily. "Oh, Maurice, old man, if you'd kept back—"

"He's coming!" panted Mick.

"What—who?"

"Sandy Bean!"

The plaided figure had reappeared. With whatever intentions the old man had watched the juniors go into danger, it was evident that he meant to help them now. Doubtless, to his crazed mind, that peril had seemed a judgment upon the strangers who had taken possession of the lands of the MacDermid, whose presence in the House of Lochmuir disturbed the wanderings of the old laird's wraith. But the sight of the two boys struggling in the water had cleared the mists of brooding superstition from Sandy Bean's brain. The evil spell was gone, and the old Highlander was himself again. A long pole was in his hands as he came out on the ice, gliding along to the gap with amazing swiftness.

"He's coming to help us!" almost sobbed Mick.

"Help!" panted Angel huskily.

No word came from the old piper. THE MAGNET LIBRARY.—No. 830.

But in a matter of seconds he was within the pole's length from the gap.

The end of the pole was thrust within reach of the struggling juniors.

"You first, Aubrey," whispered Mick. His voice came only in a whisper through his numbed lips, and he helped his brother to a hold upon the pole.

Aubrey Angel grasped it, and held on convulsively. He was almost at the end of his tether.

With a strength that was amazing in one so old and wrinkled, Sandy Bean dragged him from the water.

The ice cracked and crumbled under him for several yards as he was dragged, but Angel held on, and at last he was landed on thick and firm ice.

There he sank down, exhausted; and the pole was thrust out again to Mick.

The gipsy schoolboy grasped it with numbed hands. The bitter cold numbed and dazed him, but he held on tenaciously.

He was dragged out, and fell beside his brother. Sandy Bean threw down the pole and stood looking at them. He spoke to them now, but, unconsciously, the words came in Gaelic, and they did not comprehend. They guessed that he was telling them to hurry to the house; but they were too exhausted to move. And they lay, panting feebly, with the bitter cold closing on them like the grip of an enemy.

The piper muttered something under his breath, stooped, and lifted the two schoolboys, one under either arm, and carried them towards the bank. As if they had been infants, he bore them up the bank and then up the path to the house. Their weight seemed nothing to the powerful old Highlander.

"I—I can walk now!" panted Mick.

Sandy Bean did not heed.

Without a pause, with the long, tireless stride of the mountaineer, he carried the two juniors onward, and in at the open door of the house of Lochmuir.

There, he set them down before the log fire that still blazed and crackled in the ancient chimney of the hall.

Aubrey Angel sank down on the rug, almost fainting. Mick stood unsteadily, his eyes on the grim old piper.

"You've saved our lives, Sandy Bean," he said faintly.

The old Highlander doffed his bonnet.

"I crave the pardon of my laird that my hand has served the stranger in this hall," he said, in a deep voice. His eyes were fixed on the portrait of the Laird of Lochmuir that looked down from the wall, glowing in the firelight. It was as if he were speaking to a living man. Mick shivered. The light of almost insanity was in the old man's eyes again.

For some minutes Sandy Bean stood, with doffed bonnet, his eyes on the portrait. Then, without a word to the juniors whom he had saved, he turned and strode away. He vanished, and his footsteps died away in the snow.

THE FIFTH CHAPTER.

The Laird!

HARRY WHARTON & CO. came tramping cheerily up the drive two or three hours later.

They found Mick in the hall, his face a little pale, but otherwise showing no sign of his late ordeal.

"Hallo, hallo, hallo!" boomed Bob Cherry. "Seen any giddy ghosts while we've been gone?"

Mick smiled faintly.

"Worse than that," he answered.

"Why, what's happened?" asked Wharton quickly.

Mick told of what had happened on the loch.

"Aubrey's gone to bed," he said. "I made him turn in. He felt it more than I did. I grew tough among the gipsies, you know. But for old Sandy Bean you fellows would never have seen either of us again!"

"Good man!" said Wharton.

"But all's well that ends well!" said Mick cheerily. "Aubrey will come down for dinner. And I've been doing the cooking. I've got the grub ready for you fellows."

Angel came down and joined the juniors at dinner. He was looking pale and very subdued. The terrible peril he had been through had left its mark on him.

But he did not share Mick's feeling of gratitude towards the man who had saved his life.

"The old madman knew we were goin' into danger, and let us!" he said. "He's as mad as a hatter!"

"Surely not!" said Harry.

"I know it!"

"I think Aubrey's right there," said Mick reluctantly. "The poor old chap is half potty, you know. He thinks we're strangers and intruders here, and disturbing the jolly old laird. But he played up like a little man and got us out, so that's all right. He can't help being a little bit off his rocker!"

"The sooner he's cleared off this place the better!" growled Angel.

"Well, you'd have gone into the danger anyhow, it seems," said Bob Cherry, "and if Bean hadn't been there you'd never have come out of it alive."

Even Aubrey Angel had to admit that. He grunted and was silent.

After dinner Aubrey Angel smoked cigarettes before the fire, and Harry Wharton & Co. proceeded to carry out their search of the old house—to unearth, if possible, a trace of the haunting wraith. Angel smiled cynically as they started, and did not offer to help.

The juniors had searched the house before, more than once, but on this occasion the search was very thorough.

The deep, dungeon-like cellars were explored, and every rambling old passage and recess, and every room. There were several passages that led into the ruined part of the old mansion, and they were closed by thick oak doors, barred and bolted. It seemed impossible that anyone could obtain access from without. But it was more than probable that the ancient building contained secret ways of ingress and egress, dating from the days when feuds raged in the Highland country, when any morning might have seen a Highland chief's dwelling surrounded by hostile tartans. But if there was such a secret way the juniors failed to find it.

But they made at least one discovery. In one of the upper rooms were old presses packed with relics of ancient days—old Highland costumes, kilts and plaids and sporrans and plumed bonnets. And one of the presses had been disturbed recently and its contents disarranged.

"What does that mean?" said Bob Cherry. "There's been a shake-up here since we looked into this room last."

"Some of the things have gone, I fancy," said Nugent.

"Blessed if I can make it out!" confessed Harry Wharton. "I'm sure there's some trickery at the bottom of it all, but it beats me! But it looks as if some spoofer is at work, and he's borrowed some of this Highland rig for his stunts!"

"It looks like it!" said Johnny Bull.

"But who—"

"That's a giddy mystery!" "There can't be anybody hidden in the house, surely!" said Frank Nugent, with an uneasy glance round.

Wharton nodded thoughtfully.

"It looks to me like it! There may be a dozen hiding-places in a rambling old house like this. They needed such places in the old days—their lives may have depended on it sometimes. It looks to me as if somebody is hidden in the house, trying to frighten people away!"

"But why?"

"Goodness knows!"

"The whyfulness is terrific!" said Hurree Singh, shaking his dusky head. "But the probability is great! That is how the esteemed servants were scarefully frightened off! If there is not a genuine spook, there is some hidden japer!"

It was an uneasy thought to the juniors that the old roof sheltered some secret and hidden enemy. They looked about them with uneasy glances as they moved along passages and rooms with the lamps. The winter darkness had closed in now, and the House of Lochmuir was wrapped in gloom.

"Found anything?" It was Aubrey Angel's mocking voice. He joined the search-party, with a glowing cigarette between his lips. "Roused out the jolly old spook?"

"Not yet."

"About time we chucked it!" said Bob. "I'm getting ready for supper!"

"Same here!"

"I'll cut off and get the kettle on!" said Nugent.

He left the party and went downstairs. To reach the kitchen he had to cross the old hall, lighted now only by a glimmer from the red, glowing logs in the ancient chimney.

From the wall beside the fireplace the portrait of the old laird, life-size, in the garb of a Highland chief, looked down, his hand on his claymore. The grim face under the Highland bonnet caught the glow of the firelight, and the eyes gleamed as if with the light of life.

Nugent's glance fell upon it carelessly. Then he gave a sudden start.

The figure moved.

Nugent stopped stone dead, his heart throbbing, the blood racing in his veins. His eyes almost started from his head.

Was it a wild fancy in the playing firelight? Was it a dream? Or was he mad? His staring eyes fixed on the old laird. And the figure of the Highland chief moved in the dim shadows.

A loud shriek broke from Frank Nugent, ringing through the dusky hall. He covered his face with his hands and staggered back.

There was a shout from above. Nugent's wild cry had reached all his comrades.

In a moment there were thudding feet on the stairs.

"Frank!" shouted Wharton.

"Nugent, what—"

The lamps gleamed in the hall. Wharton caught Nugent by the arm.

"Frank, what is it?"

Nugent was shuddering from head to foot. His face was like chalk. He gripped Wharton's arm convulsively.

"It—it's alive—"

"What—"

"The laird!" said Nugent faintly.

"The portrait?" exclaimed Harry Wharton.

"It—it moved—"

"Frank!"

"It moved, I tell you!" panted Nugent.

Harry Wharton ran towards the portrait. The great canvas fixed in the huge frame was motionless. The old laird looked down from it, still as ever. In

the lamplight his eyes seemed to catch the junior's, gleaming back the light.

Wharton ran his hand over the surface of the painting. His heart was beating strangely.

"Frank, old man, see for yourself! It's only a painting! How could it move?"

"It moved!" said Nugent

"But—"

"It was the light from the fire, old chap," said Bob. "Firelight plays all sorts of tricks."

Nugent shook his head.

There was a low laugh from Aubrey Angel. Nugent flushed crimson, and gave Angel of the Fourth a dark look. Then he went into the kitchen, without speaking.

"By gad! This is gettin' thick!" yawned Angel. "Spooks of old Highlanders and walkin' portraits—by gad! You fellows want a nerve rest."

Nobody answered Angel of the Fourth. In silence the Greyfriars juniors prepared their supper; and it was in a subdued mood that they sat down to it.

THE SIXTH CHAPTER.

A Baffling Mystery!

NIGHT, black and impenetrable, cloaked the old house in the Highlands. Not a star glimmered in the dark heavens; the mountain-tops were hidden in the black void. Round the old house moaned the winter wind, bearing fluttering snowflakes. Silence lay on the house, silence and darkness—save in the old oak hall, where a fire still burned, of logs stacked under the wide old chimney.

But the Greyfriars juniors were not sleeping.

They had gone to their rooms and turned in, and lights were all out. But as midnight drew near Harry Wharton and Bob Cherry quietly left their rooms,

in felt slippers, making no sound. They met in the old railed gallery that ran round the hall, on the level of the landing at the top of the great staircase. Only a faint whisper passed between them as they met.

"You, Harry?"

"Yes."

That was all.

Standing by the carved oak rail, above the great space of the hall below, the two juniors watched and waited.

If the ghost of Lochmuir walked again that night they were prepared for it. Each of the two juniors carried a golf-club in his hand. It had been agreed that the rest of the Co. should remain in bed, ready, however, to rush on the scene if an alarm should be given. Nothing had been said to Aubrey Angel on the subject. The mocking sneers of the Fourth-Former did not encourage the Co. to take him into their confidence.

Below, in the hall, the firelight flickered and glimmered, casting strange lights and shadows on the walls, adorned with trophies of Highland weapons and of the chase, and tall portraits of dead-and-gone MacDernids. But hardly a glimmer of light reached to the landing above, only now and then a ruddy gleam as the firelight leaped.

An hour passed.

There were many sounds in the silence of the night—the creaking of ancient wood, the scuttling of a rat, the moan of the wind in the frozen trees without.

Another sound came at last to the ears of the watchers.

It sent a strange thrill to their hearts.

Wharton set his lips.

There was trickery in the haunted house; he was assured of it. But in the darkness and eerie silence of midnight, he was conscious of a superstitious thrill. He remembered the touch of an icy hand on Christmas night, and the memory brought a shudder with it.

In the deep gloom there was a faint

rustle, as of a heavy plaid that brushed by the dark walls and corners.

Wharton heard his companion draw a deep, quick breath. He touched Bob's arm in the darkness encouragingly.

The sound came nearer.

Something was there—something in the darkness. It was in the passage opening off the gallery, in which were the bed-rooms occupied by the juniors.

The fire in the hall below leapt up in bright blaze, and for a second there was illumination.

In that second the juniors sighted a figure—such a figure as they had seen before in the house of Lochmuir—a Highland figure, in kilt and plaid, bonnet and sporran, with a claymore by its side.

The next second it was swallowed in darkness, as the blaze died, and was gone from their sight.

"Oh!" breathed Bob Cherry half-audibly.

Wharton, gripped his golf-club. His heart was beating almost to suffocation. But his purpose held firm.

"Come on!" he breathed.

The two juniors, with thumping hearts, trod into the dark passage where the figure had for a moment appeared.

They trod softly, silently.

There was the sound of an opening door ahead. It was the door of Nugent's room, opened from without; for the next moment Nugent's voice was heard, with a shake in it:

"Who's that?"

A light glimmered. Nugent, with a quivering hand, had struck a match and lighted a candle by his bedside.

The flickering light glimmered on a figure in his open doorway—the figure of a Highland warrior, the face almost hidden in a fold of the plaid.

Nugent sat bolt upright in bed, his eyes almost starting as he stared at it.

"Now!" breathed Wharton.

Harry Wharton and Bob Cherry were behind the figure in the doorway.



"You first, Aubrey," whispered Mick through his numbed lips, and he helped his brother to a hold on the pole. Aubrey grasped it, and held on convulsively. He was almost at the end of his tether. With a strength that was amazing in one so old and wrinkled, Sandy Bean dragged him from the water. (See Chapter 5.)

Throwing aside concealment now, they rushed on.

Evidently their footsteps were heard, for the "ghost" spun round suddenly towards them.

"Down with him!" panted Bob.

He struck right at the phantom figure with his club. The Highlander made a quick leap aside, and the club struck the wall with a crash.

That the "ghost" was of living flesh and blood was fairly clear now. Wharton sprang at it as it darted away.

"Stop, you scoundrel!" panted the captain of the Remove.

The glimmer of Nugent's candle from the door did not penetrate far. The "ghost" was swallowed up in the darkness of the winding passage.

A door opened and shut.

"It's gone into Angel's room!" shouted Wharton; and his voice rang and echoed through the old house. "Come on!"

"Buck up, Greyfriars!" roared Bob Cherry.

Nugent was out of bed now, and rushing into the passage with the candle. Johnny Bull and Hurree Singh stayed only to light lamps, which were in readiness, before they emerged, and Mick was quickly after them with an electric torch.

Wharton grasped the handle of Angel's door and turned it.

The door did not open.

"It's locked!" exclaimed Bob.

"It can't be locked! The thing went in here—"

"But it is locked," said Bob, feeling the door. His voice was startled.

"Wharton, are you sure—"

"I know it went in here. The door opened!"

Bob hammered on the panels and shouted:

"Angel! Angel! Wake up, Angel!"

There was the sound of a yawn within.

"What's the row?" asked the voice of Aubrey Angel of the Fourth.

"Let us in!"

"Oh, leave a chap alone! I'm sleepy!"

"The ghost—"

"Rot!"

"It came into your room!" shouted Wharton. "It's not a ghost, but some spoofing trickster! Let us in!"

"Rats!"

"Do let us in, Aubrey old man!" said Mick, through the keyhole.

There was an impatient exclamation from the room.

"Oh, all right! Wait till I get a light."

Aubrey Angel was some minutes getting the light. Aubrey remembered, as he waited, that there was another door to Angel's room, opening into a disused bed-room. He ran into the further room and found Angel's door on that side locked also. He rejoined his comrades in the passage.

"Buck up, Angel!"

"Sha'n't be a minute," yawned Angel.

"If you're afraid of ghosts, you'd better go back to bed, and put your silly heads under the blankets."

The juniors made no reply to that. A light glimmered at last, and Aubrey Angel, in his pyjamas, opened the door, yawning and derisive. The juniors crowded into the room.

They looked round in the light, but certainly there was no sign to be seen of the Highland wraith.

Angel of the Fourth watched them, with a mocking grin.

"What did you fancy you saw this time?" he asked.

"A figure of a Highlander—the same

that we've seen before," answered Bob Cherry.

"What a state of nerves to be in!"

"It came into this room," said Harry.

"Through a locked door!" chuckled Angel.

"I thought I heard the door open," said Harry Wharton doubtfully.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Look here, Angel—"

"Perhaps ghosts can open locked doors!" chuckled Angel. "But I should have thought that a spook could get through the keyhole! I say, you fellows can't possibly realise what a silly crowd you look!"

The juniors crowded out of the room, leaving Angel of the Fourth laughing. They moved back, lamp and candle in hand, to the gallery over the old hall. The firelight below leaped out, and Bob, glancing over the rail, gave a shout:

"There it is!"

"What?"

"Look!"

Leaning over the oaken rail, the juniors stared down. In the gleam of the firelight stood the figure of a Highlander in kilt and plaid and claymore.

"Come on!" shouted Wharton desperately.

He raced down the stairs, his comrades at his heels. They tore down into the hall. With lamp and candle they searched it, in every shadowy recess. But it was vacant, and as they searched farther they found no sign of what they had seen. The spectre Highlander had vanished.

THE SEVENTH CHAPTER.

Only Bunter I

HARRY WHARTON & CO. had thoughtful faces at breakfast the next morning. They were utterly puzzled and perplexed.

That the phantom of Lochmuir was a thing of flesh and blood they could not doubt now. And yet—

Wharton could have sworn that it had passed into Angel's room; but Angel's door had been found locked, and no trace of it had been seen in his room. And immediately afterwards it had been seen in the hall downstairs—and if it had been near Angel's room it could not have reached the staircase unseen by the juniors to descend. If it was of flesh and blood, how had it made the transit from the upper passages to the hall below unseen, unheard? And where had it vanished to?

It was a strange problem; but, perplexed and a little alarmed as the juniors were, their resolution remained fixed. Aubrey Angel asked them that morning if they had decided to leave, but a general shaking of heads was the response.

"We're getting to the bottom of this before we go!" said Bob Cherry.

"Yes, rather!"

Angel knitted his brows. It was evident that he had expected the apparition to have the effect of scaring the Greyfriars party away.

"You believe it's a ghost?" he demanded.

"Well, no," said Harry.

"You say you saw it down in the hall after it had vanished through the door into my room?"

"We all saw it."

"Then how did it get there if it's flesh and blood?"

"I don't know," said Harry frankly. "It seems impossible. But if it didn't go into your room, it went past your room, and that's directly away from the hall. Yet we saw it in the hall soon after, and it never passed us again."

Angel shrugged his shoulders.

"If you saw it in the hall, it's a ghost," he said.

"Well, we did see it."

"Blessed if you're not makin' me feel creepy!" grunted Angel of the Fourth. "It seems to me that the sooner we get out of this show the better!"

"Not till we've got to the bottom of it," answered Harry.

"Oh, rot!" snapped Angel.

Wharton smiled faintly. It seemed that even the mocking Angel was beginning to feel the eerie influence of the haunted House of Lochmuir.

That morning the juniors searched the house again with great thoroughness, but there was no result. After dinner they set out for a ramble on the moorland, and, rather to their surprise, Angel of the Fourth decided to accompany them. Apparently the Fourth-Former no longer cared to be left alone in the old house.

The winter dusk was falling when the juniors turned back to the House of Lochmuir. Their path led them past the cottage of Sandy Bean. There was no light in the cottage; but the old piper was evidently there, for the strains of the bagpipes floated out on the wind. The dirge of the MacDermid rang and echoed weirdly through the mountain dusk.

The juniors hurried on, with that wild and melancholy wailing still echoing in their ears.

"Enough to give a fellow the creeps!" growled Angel sulkily.

"Hallo, hallo, hallo! The fire's still burning!" exclaimed Bob Cherry, as they tramped up through the snow on the drive to the old house.

A ruddy gleam of firelight from within played on the frosted panes of the hall windows.

The great door had been left on the latch. Harry Wharton pushed it open, and it swung back on its ponderous hinges.

Within was deep gloom, broken only by the gleam of the fire.

"Hark!" breathed Bob Cherry.

A strange, low, rumbling sound came to their ears. Whence it proceeded they could hardly tell, but certainly it was from somewhere within the old hall.

Angel started violently.

"Wha-at's that?"

"Listen!"

The sound ceased for a moment, and then it was renewed—low and rumbling like the stertorous breathing of some huge animal.

The juniors stood quite still. Angel's face had become pale. There was no trace of mockery about him now.

"What—what can it be?" muttered Johnny Bull.

They looked about them uneasily, peering into the shadows. Bob Cherry set his teeth and struck a match. Candles had been left ready on the table, and Bob lighted one after another until a dozen were burning.

The old hall was illumined now, save for dusky corners where the shadows lurked.

And still that strange, rumbling sound was heard, echoing strangely in the hall.

"It—it's something in here!" muttered Bob.

"Some animal—"

"How could an animal get in with the door shut?" muttered Johnny Bull.

"What, in the name of goodness, is it?"

It—it seems to come from near the fire!"

"Come on!" said Harry.

He strode towards the great chimney and stirred the log fire to a leaping blaze. Then he gave a shout:

"Bunter!"

"What?" roared Bob Cherry.

Harry Wharton pointed to an armchair that was drawn up before the fire.

In the depths of the huge chair reposed a fat form—that of William George Bunter, the Owl of Greyfriars.

Bunter was fast asleep, and, to judge by the traces on his fat face and hands and on his well-filled waistcoat, he had disposed of a hearty meal before falling asleep.

He had, in fact, fed not wisely, but too well. Now he was reposing, with his extensive mouth wide open, and his deep, resonant snore rumbling forth.

The juniors gazed at him for a moment or two in silence. Then there was a roar of laughter.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The cause of the peculiar rumbling sound was clear now. It was the snoring of William George Bunter.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Even Aubrey Angel grinned.

Bunter's round eyes opened. He blinked up in surprise, and then he bestowed a fat grin on the Greyfriars juniors.

"I say, you fellows, you were out when I got here! I've had a snack. Did you fellows leave all that stuff in the kitchen ready for supper?"

"Yes."

"There was nearly enough for me!" said Bunter.

"Oh, my hat!"

"You fellows going to get a fresh lot ready?"

"I suppose so," said Wharton, laughing.

"Good!" Bunter curled up in the chair again. "Call me when it's ready. I'm getting hungry!"

And the Owl of the Remove went comfortably off to sleep again, and once more the rumbling sound—no longer mysterious—filled the old hall of Lochmuir.

THE EIGHTH CHAPTER.

Not Wanted.

BILLY BUNTER woke up again by the time supper was ready. One supper, however ample, made little difference to the Owl of the Remove; he was always ready for another. As they found the fat junior at Lochmuir, the Greyfriars party supposed that he had returned to stay; and though his company was not yearned for he was made welcome. But it soon transpired that that was not Bunter's intention.

"I say, you fellows, this ham is good," he said. "I'll have some more! Shove it this way, Johnny, old chap! I could do with a few more eggs! But we mustn't lose time!"

"What's the hurry?" asked Bob.

"Well, you fellows don't want to be too late getting back."

"Getting back!" repeated Bob. "We have got back, haven't we?"

"I mean, getting back to Muirland."

"We're not going to Muirland this evening, fathead!" said Johnny Bull.

Bunter blinked across the table at him.

"I suppose you fellows are walking down with me?" he said. "I couldn't possibly walk it alone at night!"

"My hat!" ejaculated Nugent.

It was clear now that the Owl of the Remove had not returned to stay. He was planning to get back to the



"Down with him!" panted Bob Cherry. He struck right at the phantom figure with his club. The Highlander made a quick leap aside, and the club struck the wall with a crash. "Stop, you scoundrel!" yelled Wharton. But the "ghost" was swallowed up in the darkness of the winding passage. A door opened and shut. "Quick!" panted Wharton. "It's gone into Angel's room!" (See Chapter 6.)

hospitable inn at the village that evening. The chums of Greyfriars chuckled. They were not likely to tramp three miles down the hill to see an uninvited guest home, and three miles back up-hill in the darkness of a winter night, when the said guest could walk home perfectly well by himself if he chose.

"If you're going back to Muirland you'll go by your jolly old self, Bunter," grinned Bob Cherry. "I've done about ten or twelve miles on the hills to-day, and I'm done walking!"

"Oh, really, Cherry—"

"Why can't you walk back alone?" demanded Nugent.

"Well, it's a lonely path, and jolly dark!" said Bunter. "And there's that potty old piper wandering about, looking like a madman! I passed him coming up, and he glared at me! Besides, there's something else. You see, I parted on rather bad terms from the innkeeper at Lochmuir!"

"Diddled him?" chuckled Bob.

"I disdain to answer that question, Bob Cherry!" said Bunter, with dignity. "I trust that I am incapable of acting dishonourably towards a social inferior! There was a misunderstanding."

"There often is where you and money are concerned!" said Johnny Bull, caustically. "Did you make a mistake about the bill—forget that it had to be paid, or something of that sort?"

"The man's a beast!" said Bunter. "A little more of that ham, please! And a couple more eggs. And some coffee. Thanks! You see, it's up to you fellows. You fairly dragged me up to this place for Christmas! I gave up

my old pal, D'Arcy, of St. Jim's, to come with you. And Lord Mauleverer, and Jimmy Silver, of Rookwood, too! I met him early in the vac, and he begged me, almost with tears in his eyes, to come home with him for the holidays. I put all these intimate friends aside to come up here with you fellows!"

And Bunter shook his head reproachfully at the Greyfriars party. They chuckled.

"Then there was that ghost business, and so on, and I cleared," said Bunter. "I got landed at that inn. And I must say I had a fairly good time there! The grub was good, and there was plenty of it! There was some fun, too! I kissed lots of girls under the mistle-tōe!"

"Any casualties?"

"Beast! But I ran out of money," said Bunter sorrowfully. "You see, the postal-order I was expecting hasn't come on here. For some reason—"

"I wonder what the reason could have been?" said Bob Cherry gravely.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Blessed if I see anything to cackle at! The money's run out!" said Bunter crossly. "I've had just enough to square my bill to this morning! Even then I had to take off ten shillings. The innkeeper grumbled. Innkeepers do keep on grumbling; I've noticed that. He said he would keep my watch if I didn't pay in full. I'd mentioned that my splendid gold watch was a present from General Bunter, of the Life Guards! But, after looking at

it, he said I could keep it. It was clear that he didn't know its value!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" yelled the juniors.

"Oh, leave off cackling! The man makes out that I owe him ten shillings," said Bunter. "Of course, I don't! But I can't haggle over money matters with a low person. I shall pay him!"

"Good!"

"One of you fellows will lend me the money!"

"Oh!"

"That will be all right. But, you see, it's quite probable that he won't let me stay on at the inn unless I pay my bills, and he knows I've no money left. So you fellows can come with me, and see me through! He will trust you!"

"Great pip!"

"I'm prepared to remain at the inn as long as you fellows remain here," said Bunter. "Then I can travel south with you when you go home. You see, I shall want you to pay my fare. And there's grub on the journey to be thought of, too!"

"The thoughtfulness is terrific!" chuckled Hurree Singh

"I'll have a little more ham. And you can cut that cake ready for me, if you like, Wharton. It was pretty rotten for me," continued Bunter. "After my argument with that innkeeper I couldn't hire a vehicle to bring me up here, and I had to walk."

"Awful!"

"Frightful!" said Bunter. "I'm accustomed to travelling in comfort! What's the good of being wealthy if you don't have some little comforts? All very well for you fellows with straitened means! Shove that cake this way! I say, you fellows, this is rather good cake! Now, when will you be ready to walk down to Muirland with me?"

"This year, next year, some time, never!" said Bob.

"I shall be ready when I've finished this cake! Of course, any cash that you expend for me will be settled later, when—when I receive my postal-order!"

Billy Bunter rose, and brushed the crumbs from his fat waistcoat. He was the last to finish supper, but he had finished at last.

"I may give you a look in another day," he said. "But I shall expect somebody to be at home. You were all out when I got in this time. Luckily, you had left supper ready in the kitchen. You fellows ready to start?"

"Ha, ha! No! We're not going out again to-night!"

"How am I to get back, then?" demanded Bunter.

"Just lie down in the snow, and roll down the hill like a barrel!" suggested Bob Cherry.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Beast! I'm not going alone! Besides, as I've said, I want you fellows to speak to the innkeeper, and explain that you'll be responsible for the bill run up—"

"I can see us doing it—I don't think!" chuckled Bob. "You can roll off on your own, or you can stay here, which you like, Bunter!"

Billy Bunter looked alarmed.

"I say, you fellows, I can't stay here, you know. I'm not going to be woke up by those thumping spooks!"

Harry Wharton & Co. chuckled. William George Bunter had evidently taken a great deal too much for granted in paying his visit that day to the House of Lochmuir. It did not seem to have occurred to his fat mind that the chums of the Remove would not regard him and his affairs as the most important and pressing business in the wide universe.

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"I say, you fellows, are you coming or not?" hooted Bunter.

"Not!"

"The notfulness is terrific."

"I can't stay here!" howled Bunter.

"Roll away, then."

"The innkeeper won't take me in unless you fellows come along to foot the bill—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Look here, lend me a tenner, then—"

"I don't think!"

"Make it a fiver!" howled Bunter. "I can do for a couple of days on a fiver."

"Anybody want to spend fivers in helping Bunter to burst his waistcoat?" asked Bob Cherry.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Beasts!"

William George Bunter realised that there was no escort for him that night, no tenners and no fivers to be borrowed. It was borne in upon his fat brain that he was landed in the haunted house for the night. It was exasperating to William George. For ten minutes he stood before the fire and told the juniors what he thought of them—what time the Greyfriars party chuckled.

"Well, I'm not going to sleep alone!" he growled at last. "I'll share your room, Wharton."

"Not unless you leave your snore downstairs."

"Beast! I'll bunk in with you, Johnny."

"You'll bunk out again fast enough, if you try it on," said Johnny Bull.

"Rotter! Angel, old chap, I'll come to your room—"

"Come before I take my boots off, then," said Angel of the Fourth.

"Yab! I say, Mick, old fellow—"

"Bow-wow!" said Mick.

"Is that how you treat a guest?" roared Bunter. "This isn't the kind of hospitality I'm accustomed to at Christmas, I can tell you."

Bob Cherry yawned.

"Bed-time, you fellows."

The Greyfriars party went off to bed. Bunter, grumbling loud and deep, followed their example.

THE NINTH CHAPTER.

A Fight with a Phantom!

"WHAT—what's that?"

Harry Wharton sat up in bed. Each of the juniors had locked his door before turning in, and Wharton was awakened by the sound of a hand fumbling at his door.

He leaped out of bed, and hurriedly threw on his clothes. He lighted a candle, and as the light glimmered under the door a voice came from without:

"I say, Wharton—"

"You silly ass!" gasped the captain of the Remove. It was the voice of William George Bunter.

"I—I say, old chap, lemme in! I've heard something—"

"Yourself snoring, most likely!" growled Harry; but he unlocked the door.

Billy Bunter rolled into the room and blinked at Wharton in the candle-light.

Wharton frowned at him.

"I—I say, Harry, don't be a beast—"

"Bother you!" snapped Wharton.

"You can bunk in here if you like, you funky barrel!"

"It—it isn't that."

"What is it, then, fathead?"

"I'm hungry."

"Wha-a-a-t?"

"I don't want to go down alone," mumbled Bunter. "I want you to come

down with me, to get some grub, you know."

Harry Wharton fairly glared at the Owl of the Remove. It was for this important purpose that Billy Bunter had awakened him at midnight.

"You—you fat idiot—" gasped Harry.

"Oh, really Wharton—"

"I've a jolly good mind—"

Harry Wharton broke off suddenly.

His eyes fell upon a figure that passed the open doorway—a gliding figure, in Highland costume, claymore belted on over kilt. Only for a moment was the figure visible, passing the doorway; then it vanished.

Wharton caught his breath.

There was a howl of terror from Billy Bunter.

"Ow! The g-g-ghost! Ow! Wow! Help!"

The Owl of the Remove plunged frantically into Wharton's bed, and buried his head under the blankets.

Wharton sprang to the door.

The end of the passage gave on to the circular gallery round the old hall, and there was a glimmer of light. Before retiring the juniors had banked up the fire in the hall with logs, and it was burning brightly. In the glimmer Wharton saw the gliding figure ahead of him.

"Wake up, you chaps!"

Wharton's voice rang along the passage.

"Hallo, hallo, hallo!"

Bob Cherry was the first out of his room. But the other fellows followed fast. Angel of the Fourth did not appear; but Mick and the Famous Five were quickly gathered.

"I've seen it!" panted Wharton.

"Where—"

"It's gone towards the stairs."

"Come on!" breathed Bob Cherry.

The juniors ran quickly down the passage and reached the old oak gallery. Below, in the hall, the log fire blazed and crackled, shedding a ruddy light as far as the gallery from which they looked down.

The Highland figure had descended the stairs. As the juniors reached the oaken rail and stared down a sudden and startling sound came to their ears.

Clash, clash, clash!

It was the clash of ringing steel.

"What—" panted Nugent.

"Look!" yelled Bob Cherry, in amazement.

There were two figures below in the hall, clear in the ruddy light of the fire. Both of them were in Highland costume, one of them towering high over the other.

Clash, clash!

Each had his claymore in hand, and they were fighting.

The juniors gazed on the wild scene, spell-bound.

Clash, clash!

Steel rang on steel, echoing through the ancient house. Wild and grotesque the figures looked in the dancing light of the fire.

Clash!

"Help!"

It was a wild yell from one of the fighting figures. The juniors, as they heard it, wondered whether they were dreaming. For the voice was the voice of Aubrey Angel.

"Angel!" breathed Wharton dazedly.

"Aubrey!" panted Mick.

Clash, clash!

The shorter of the two figures was backing away towards the stairs, defending himself desperately. Steel rang on steel with echoing clash.

"Come on!" shouted Wharton.

(Continued on page 18.)



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New Year Resolutions!

(Collected by Bob Cherry.)

BILLY BUNTER:

I've made a New Year resolution, and I mean to keep it—as the pauper said when he picked up a purse! In future, I shall only have six meals a day instead of eight. I've been in the habit of having two brekkers, two dinners, two teas, and two suppers, and I foolishly agree that it was a greedy, gluttonous habit. I have therefore decided to knock off one brekker and one supper. By reducing my meals to six a day I shall just be able to keep the spark of life flickering in my plump body. I'm going all out to keep this resolution!

(An excellent resolve, Billy; but I bet you'll break it by January 2nd!—Ed.)

HAROLD SKINNER:

My New Year resolution is not to make any at all, and then there will be no chance of my breaking 'em!

BOLSOVER MAJOR:

I'm going to turn over a new leaf in 1924. I mean to be meek and gentle, and as harmless and docile as Alonzo Todd! If I should be smitten on the cheek, I shall say to the smiter: "Now have a go at the other!" If I am insulted I shall simply smile my sweetest smile at the fellow who insults me. I shall become known as "Patient Percy"—the boy who is slow to anger and who always turns the other cheek. Never again shall I indulge in a brutal bout of fisticuffs!

(A worthy resolve, old man; but I'll wager you have a dozen fights on your hands by the end of this week!—Ed.)

FISHER T. FISH:

Guess I'm going to give up swindling my schoolfellows. I'm not going to form any more schemes or wheezes, except with the object of putting money into other people's pockets. In fact, I sorter calculate that I shall become a large-hearted philanthropist!

(Can the Ethiopian change his skin, or the money-grabber his profiteering habits?—Ed.)

LORD MAULEVERER:

Like Bolsover major, I'm goin' to turn over a new leaf. Matter of fact, I've just come to the end of the page of the book I happen to be readin'!

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DICK PENFOLD:

I've formed a New Year resolution to hold a public execution! For Billy Bunter's bagged my cake—a shocking crime, and no mistake! Bring forth the block, and then the axe! I'll give old Bunter heart attacks! I'll strike one blow with might and main, and he will never steal again!

HARRY WHARTON:

My New Year resolution is to make the good old "Greyfriars Herald" better and brighter than ever, by giving all the Greyfriars fellows a chance to write for it, and by introducing many novel features. Thanks to the loyal support of all my reader-chums, I shall have no difficulty in keeping this resolution!

HORACE COKER:

I have made a rezzerlution never to travel on my motor-bike at a speed exceeding two miles an hour!

POTTER AND GREENE:

Our New Year resolution is never to travel in Coker's side-car!

"BEAUTY" ADS!

GUESS YOU ALL WANT TO BE HANDSOME LIKE ME? Guess you'd rather look like a Matinee Idol than a prizefighter? Very well, then. Try my wonderful Vanishing Cream. Peerless for the complexion. Removes all face blemishes like magic. Rub a little on your chivvy each night before turning in. It works wonders! Only a bob a bottle. Hustle around to Study No. 14, and buy one before I sell out.—FISHER T. FISH, THE GREYFRIARS BEAUTY SPECIALIST.

YOUR beauty will never "fade away" so long as you "dye." We have some wonderful dyes in stock. If you are afflicted with ginger hair, let us dye it black for you, and you will cease to be called "Carrots!" or "Ginger!" by your schoolfellows. Call at once, and let us dye your locks at a moderate fee.—J. DYER & SON, High Street, Courtfield.

A HIDEOUSLY UGLY FIFTH-FORMER wishes to know how he can gain manly beauty and an attractive appearance. At present he is shunned by all his schoolfellows on account of his ugliness. Nobody loves him; nobody will have anything to do with him. He will cheerfully pay a fat fee to any Beauty Specialist who will transform him into a handsome Adonis.—Write to HORACE COKER, Fifth Form, Greyfriars School.

EDITORIAL!

By
HARRY WHARTON.

EXIT 1923! Enter 1924, with a fitting flourish of trumpets!

The Old Year, with all its joys and sorrows, its triumphs and disasters, its pains and pleasures, has gone for ever. And we now stand on the threshold of a New Year, bright with possibilities.

Father Time is said to be an old man, with a flowing beard; but, by Jove, how he gallops along! He makes a year go flashing by before you can realise it.

I'm not going to say anything about the year which has just fled. I believe in looking forward, not backward over my shoulder. It is up to everybody to look ahead instead of looking back. The latter is a sheer waste of time.

I feel confident that 1924 will be a prosperous year for our little paper. I feel equally confident that it will prove a prosperous year for Greyfriars so far as sporting achievements are concerned. Of course, there will be a few setbacks and disappointments; but if life always ran smoothly and without a hitch of any sort, what a tame affair it would be!

The old, old question of New Year resolutions has to be discussed at this period. Some fellows say there's no sense in New Year resolutions—because, like promises and pie-crusts, they are made to be broken. True, only a very few ever succeed in keeping their New Year resolutions. Many of us fail by about January 3rd. But, slightly to misquote Tennyson,

"'Tis better to have tried and failed
Than never to have tried at all."

From which you will gather that I am all in favour of New Year resolutions. I think most of us make the mistake of aiming too high, and setting ourselves too big a task. Better to make a few resolves and keep them than to make a whole heap of resolutions which we know it will be impossible to carry out.

One little resolution I would like each of my loyal chums to make is to enlist a new reader under the glorious banner of the old MAGNET—the boys' paper which has stood the test of time and is still going strong.

Here endeth my little "sermon." And now I must wish prosperity and joy and radiant health to all my reader-chums in the New Year!

HARRY WHARTON.

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Nothing But The Truth!

The Story of a New
Year Resolution

By Micky Desmond

EVERYBODY makes New Year resolutions. It's quite a craze at this period. Even my study chimney made a resolution—to stop smoking! And my kettle decided to stop singing, because its voice had broken.

I, therefore, made up my mind to be in the fashion, and to form a New Year resolution. Moreover, I meant to keep it, if humanly possible. It's no use making resolutions on December 31st if they're going to be scattered to the winds on January 1st.

What form should my resolution take? Should I resolve to give up eating? No; that wouldn't be possible. Should I resolve to give up strong drink? That, again, wouldn't be possible, for they always serve a cup of very strong tea in the dining-hall at breakfast-time.

Should I give up my pipe? No; that would be setting myself too big a sacrifice. For I'm very fond of playing tunes on my pipe—especially "Tipperary" and "When Irish Eyes Are Smiling."

At last a flash of inspiration came to me. I would follow in the footsteps of George Washington, of hallowed memory, and never tell a lie!

"That ought to be fairly easy," I told myself. "I won't tell any more whoppers. I'll always speak the plain, unvarnished truth!"

I entered this resolution in my diary. No sooner had I done so than Bolsover major looked in.

"Hallo, Desmond!" he roared, in his boisterous way. "I've been hunting for you everywhere!"

"What's wanted?" I asked.

Bolsover advanced into the study, and produced a roll of manuscript from his breast-pocket.

"I've just written a boxing-yarn," he said, in tones of pride. "I intended, first of all, to give it to Wharton, for publication in the 'Greyfriars Herald.' On second thoughts, though, I consider it's much too good for the 'Herald.' It's the greatest yarn of its kind since 'Rodney Stone.' I think I'll send it to one of the big weekly papers. Before I send it off I'd like you to read it, Micky, and give me your candid opinion."

Bolsover tossed the manuscript on to the table. I picked it up, and settled myself in the armchair, in order to read the thrilling narrative.

Thrilling it certainly was; but when you had said that, you had said everything.

There was precious little plot in the story; the incidents were wildly impossible; the dialogue was heavy and crude; and no self-respecting editor would have dreamed of accepting such a story.

Bolsover major paced to and fro in the study, with his hands in his pockets, THE MAGNET LIBRARY.—No. 830.

awaiting my verdict. He had great faith in my ability as a literary critic. Perhaps this was due to the fact that I had always told him his stuff was first-rate and top-hole! Had I told him otherwise, I should have been asking for trouble; for Bolsover has a painful habit of punching people's noses when they say anything to annoy him.

On this occasion, however, I should simply have to tell the truth, or break my New Year resolution.

It was a terrible ordeal, having to read Bolsover's balderdash. But I endured it to the bitter end. Then I handed him the manuscript.

"Well," he said, "what's the verdict?"

"Ahem!"

"Great yarn, isn't it?"

"No!"

True to my resolve, I had told the truth. Bolsover glared at me in amazement and anger.

"What!" he roared. "Do you dare to tell me that my story's a dud?"

I rose to my feet, backing nervously away from the furious Bolsover. But my resolution did not fail.

JUST MY LUCK!

By Dick Penfold.

My name went down upon the list
To play for the Remove Eleven;
Old Wharton I'd have hugged and kissed
For I was in the seventh heaven!
And then my stupid Uncle Sam
Called me away by telegram!

Invited to a study feed,
I fairly danced with jubilation;
I'm not a glutton, full of greed,
And yet I love a celebration!
Just as I started on the ham
I got an urgent telegram!

One day I reached the final stage
Of the Remove's big boxing tournament;
I flew into a royal rage
And smashed up every study ornament.
How could I feel just like a lamb
When called away by telegram?

We gave a concert in the spring,
I'd planned to render "Annie Laurie";
But when my turn arrived to sing,
I had to rise and say, "I'm sorry!"
My aunt's run over by a tram:
She's summoned me by telegram!

But when I'm brought before the Head
For some gay schoolboy misde-
meanour,
Anticipating, with grim dread,
A stinging "sixer," or a "tenner"—
At such a time I never am
Summoned away by telegram!

"Do you call that a story?" I said. "Why, it's the most trashy piffle I've ever set eyes on! It's got no plot, point, or purpose. In a word, it's a wash-out!"

It needed some courage to say that to Bolsover. He's nearly a head taller than me, and his fists were clenched ready for action.

There was a sort of muffled rumble from Bolsover, as if an earthquake was going on inside him.

"You—you—" he spluttered. "I'll teach you to cheek your superiors, you Irish whelp!"

Biff!

Straight from the shoulder Bolsover's hefty fist shot out. I tried to jump clear, but I was too late. The knuckles of the Remove bully crashed upon my nose, reducing it—so it seemed—to a pulp.

I hit the floor with a sickening thud, and lay blinking up at a maze of stars.

"Ow-ow-ow!" I moaned feebly. And then, as in a dream, I heard Bolsover major stamp out of the study, and slam the door furiously behind him.

The only crumb of consolation I had in that moment of anguish was that I had kept my New Year resolution. And I continued to keep it—with disastrous results!

It's funny how people never like to be told the painful truth.

Johnny Bull asked me if I thought he was good-looking. In the ordinary way I should have flattered him, and called him an Adonis; but remembering my New Year resolve, I frankly told him that he'd never have a hope in a male beauty contest. "Your features," I said, "are ugly in the extreme. Repulsive, in fact."

Then the Bull began to bellow, and once again I measured my length on the floor. My left eye was closed, and I had no doubt that it would be beautifully black by bedtime.

Doggedly I stuck to my New Year resolution; but the climax soon came.

Next morning, in class, I happened to murmur some uncomplimentary remarks about Mr. Quelch, to the fellow sitting next to me.

Instantly Quelch's eagle eye was upon me.

"Desmond," he roared, "what were you saying to Russell?"

"Ahem!" I told him, sir, that you were the biggest tyrant and tartar since Nero!"

That fairly did it, of course! I was called out before the class, and given such a terrible lamming with Quelch's cane that my New Year resolution melted away.

"Nothing but the truth" is an excellent maxim; but it would take a braver fellow than me to live up to it, be jabbers!

[Supplement ii.]



"Old Bore's Almanack"

Compiled by Tom Brown For 1924.

JANUARY.

It will rain some time during the month. The 13th will be a very unlucky day, and schoolboys are warned not to go skating on thin ice, or sliding down banisters, or playing pranks on a master. The 17th will be a bitterly cold day—unless it happens to be warm—and the weak-chested should take precautions. Somewhere in the world there will be a big fire on the 25th. There will also be a street accident in London on the 29th. Greyfriars will do well at footer during the month—provided Tom Brown retains his place in the Remove eleven.

FEBRUARY.

I predict that there will be twenty-nine days in this month instead of the usual twenty-eight. By a very mysterious process I have discovered that this is a Leap Year. Consequently, Hop Hi of Greyfriars will win the high jump! There are indications of strife and unrest at Greyfriars. Studies will be wrecked and raided, eyes will be blackened, and punches on the proboscis will be frequent. Those with sensitive nasal organs are cautioned to beware. There will also be an epidemic of bad colds at Greyfriars, and somebody somewhere in England will get influenza.

MARCH.

There will be a big storm during the month. Those born on the 32nd should not travel by land or air or water, for grave danger will attend them. On or about the 25th there will be an epoch-making event at Greyfriars. Billy Bunter's postal-order will arrive! Every day during this month the sun will rise in the morning and set in the evening. A keen east wind will blow on the 13th, and those subject to toothache are advised to wrap their faces in flannel.

APRIL.

Unless anything unforeseen happens, Easter will come during this month. I also predict that there will be a Bank Holiday, and that a billion hot-cross buns will be consumed on the 18th. Billy Bunter will be in danger of a bilious attack. Those who dislike having their legs pulled should be careful not to venture out on the 1st. The weather during April will be fair, cloudy, wet, fine, warm, and dull. There will be an epidemic of practical joking at Greyfriars early in the month.

MAY.

A tiny shaft of sunshine may be expected some time between the 1st and the 31st. Bathing will commence at Greyfriars, and everything will go swimmingly. People born on the 13th should beware of injury by firearms, and should keep at a respectable distance from Mr. Prout! Cricket will start, and ducks' eggs should be excluded from the daily diet. By carefully studying the

horoscope I have discovered that the month will end on the 31st. This information is imparted free of charge to all my readers.

JUNE.

The English summer having started, there will be heavy snowstorms in various parts of the country. Cricket matches will be postponed at Greyfriars, and snowfights will take place instead. All the brainy boys will have a holiday on the 9th, for it happens to be "Wit" Monday. The 20th will be the longest day. Gosling, the porter, will ring the rising-bell at 3 a.m., and we won't go to bed till midnight!

JULY.

This is a lucky month. Those born between the 1st and the 12th will make centuries at cricket, break bounds without being spotted, win all their fights, and have a happy escape from lines and lickings. Those born on the 13th will receive fat remittances from home. (Billy Bunter had better begin borrowing now, on the strength of his expectations!) Those born from the 14th onwards will be very successful in all their undertakings. The Greyfriars Remove will win every single cricket match—so long as Tom Brown is in the team.

ODE BY BILLY BUNTER.

To the Girl of his Choice.

Your face is like an apple-pie,
'Tis so divinely sweet, that's why.
Your rosy cheeks are sweeter far
Than Mrs. Mimble's doe-nutts are!

Your eyes are bullseyes, I declare,
For black and white both mingle there.
Your lips possess the ruddy hue
Of storberry ices, fair to view.

Your auburn hair resembles carrots,
Your mellow voice is like a parrot's.
The dimples in your dubble chin
A fellow fairly revels in!

Your mouth is like a chocolate-mould,
Your teeth are lovely to behold.
Your finger's dainty, slim, and slender.
Your smile is always sweet and tender.

I like you very much indeed—
Yes, even better than a feed!
And I could never give you, miss,
A greater kompliment than this!

I hope you'll like the rimes I've written,
For I am very badly smitten.
And all the charming things I wish you
Would very nearly fill this issew!

When next in Mrs. Mimble's shop,
I'll drink your health in jinjer-pop.
Don't think me stupid, soft, or silly:
I am, your own devoted BILLY.

AUGUST.

Looking into the horoscope, I see distinct indications of a Bank Holiday on the 4th. There will be a boating calamity on the River Sark, and Coker of the Fifth will be involved. His life will be gallantly saved by a couple of Removites. Harry Wharton will be one of the rescuers; modesty forbids my mentioning the name of the other! The weather this month will be extremely cold, and no deaths from sunstroke will be recorded, for there will be no sunshine.

SEPTEMBER.

This is an unlucky month, especially for people with ginger hair or warts on their noses. Great precautions should be taken by everybody. Do not walk under ladders, or smash mirrors, or spill the salt, or conceal hedgehogs in your Form master's desk. Do not set snares for your enemy in the form of booby-traps, etc., or they will recoil on your own napper! You must walk very warily during this month if you want to be still alive and kicking at the end of it.

OCTOBER.

There will be several big fires at Greyfriars—in the various study grates! Football will be in full swing. Those born on the 11th must take great care of their feet while playing, for there is grave danger of toe-maine poisoning. The Old Age Pension will be increased this month, and Gosling, the porter, will buy a motor-car on the strength of it. November fogs will appear a month in advance.

NOVEMBER.

A month of fire, flame, and fury. There will be loud explosions on the 5th, and huge fires will break out all over the country. Bob Cherry will receive five hundred lines for making an effigy of Mr. Quelch. Lord Mauleverer will wake up for the first time this year, owing to his schoolfellows exploding jumping crackers behind him! Many japes and practical jokes will be played this month, and there will be "a certain liveliness" at Greyfriars!

DECEMBER.

Christmas Day will fall during this month, but it will soon find its feet again. There will be many scraps in the gym on "Boxing" Day. Summer weather will commence in England, and there will be numerous casualties owing to the heat wave. After close and careful study of all the signs and portents, I have come to the conclusion that the year will come to an end on the 31st of this month. Then I shall have to get busy writing my "Old Bore's Almanack" for 1925!



Sporting Chat!

By H. Vernon-Smith
(Sports Editor)

WHATEVER the shortcomings of the year 1923, it was a great sporting year for Greyfriars—quite one of the best we have had! Brilliant performances have been achieved; old records have been beaten, and new ones set up; and the Greyfriars Remove has good cause to look back upon the Old Year with pride.

What was the greatest sporting feat of the year? Opinions will differ; but I think I must award the palm to the great tussle for the "Coker Cup." Some really thrilling footer matches were played, and I shall never forget the sensational defeat of the Sixth Form by the Fifth! But even that mighty feat paled into insignificance when the Fifth met the Remove in the Final! It was the stiffest task we had ever been set, for the Fifth were a much-improved side. However, we threw ourselves into

the fray like Trojans; and the "Coker Cup" is now the property of the Remove for one year!

Another great sporting event of 1923 was the Remove Boxing Tournament. Never was such enthusiasm, such excitement, such keen and deadly rivalry! For it is the crowning ambition of every fellow who can use his fists to become the boxing champion of the Remove. There were many thrilling duels, and a crop of surprising results; but it was Bob Cherry who bagged the honours at the finish. Bob is undoubtedly a great boxer. His footwork is fast and tricky, and his blows are delivered with the force of battering-rams. But Bob had to fight every inch of the way to secure the championship. He will have cause to remember 1923 with the keenest pleasure!

On the running-track many fine performances were accomplished. Mark Linley lowered the record for the mile; and Bob Cherry, not content with his boxing triumphs, made history by doing the hundred yards in ten and four-fifths seconds. Another record was broken by Frank Nugent, whose high-jumping feats caused the spectators to stand spellbound. And when it came to throwing the cricket-ball, nobody could get anywhere near Johnny Bull's mighty throw of eighty-eight yards!

So much for the sporting successes of 1923! Now for the New Year! Will the Remove succeed in keeping its end up, and going from strength to strength? Yea, verily! The outlook is very bright, and I have no doubt that the record-breakers will soon be busy again, and that many new successes will have to be recorded. The footer eleven, under Harry Wharton's captaincy, is winning matches regularly; the boxers and runners are keeping themselves in fine fettle; and we are waiting for the rival schools to challenge us to a great sports tournament. Without wishing to be cocksure or conceited, I think we shall hold our own against all comers, and worthily uphold the high traditions of the greatest sporting school in the land, bar none!

(Bravo, Smithy! Nothing like a spirit of optimism to start the New Year with! And you seem to be almost as big an optimist as Bob Cherry. In fact, no long-faced pessimist could breathe the same air with you!—ED.)

NEW YEAR CHIMES!



By DICK PENFOLD.

We've done with Nineteen-twenty-three,
And I am jolly glad!
It was a beastly year for me,
It nearly drove me mad.
It didn't pay the game at all,
It brought misfortunes sore;
May better, brighter times befall
In Nineteen-twenty-four!

Last year I wrote a million lines
For various brutes of masters;
I suffered penalties and fines
And dozens of disasters.
In every cricket-match I played
I always failed to score;
I hope a century may be made
In Nineteen-twenty-four!

I never won a prize for Greek,
Or history, or grammar;
I was a failure, so to speak,
Although a fearful "crammer."
But Nineteen-twenty-three is dead,
And victories galore
Will rain upon my learned head
In Nineteen-twenty-four!

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"Ring out the old, ring in the new"
('Twas Tennyson who said it.)
"Ring out the false, ring in the true,"
(Again that hard I credit.)
Ring out the dark, dull, dreary days
That dogged my path of yore;
And loudly, proudly sing the praise
Of Nineteen-twenty-four!

IT IS RUMOURED—

By Frank Nugent.

THAT Billy Bunter intends to commence the New Year with a week's fast!

THAT certain daring spirits in the Remove will assemble in the school tower at midnight on the 31st, in order to see the Old Year out and the New Year in. Johnny Bull will sound the "Last Post" on his bugle.

THAT Mr. Quelch's New Year resolution is to administer no more lines or lickings!

THAT Gerald Loder has decided to mend his ways, and Horace Coker to mend his motor-bike!

THAT a good many New Year resolutions will "go West" on January 1st!

THAT Tubb of the Third will take up kite-flying in the New Year; and that the kite will probably "take up" Tubb!

THAT the year 1924 will be a very lucky one for the Greyfriars Remove, and a very disastrous one for all their enemies!

THAT the "Greyfriars Herald" will continue to go great guns, and add fresh laurels to its reputation.

THAT we're glad to see the back of 1923, and pleased to extend a hearty handshake to 1924!

THAT the banquet and fancy dress ball on New Year's Eve will be a stupendous success.

BEAUTY HINTS FOR BOYS!

By Tom Brown.

Face cream may be procured at the chemist's in Friardale. Don't do as Billy Bunter did, and use chocolate-cream—unless you want your chivvy to resemble a nigger minstrel's!

A moustache does not improve school-boy beauty; so Coker of the Fifth will be well advised to have the solitary piece of fluff removed from his upper lip!

Billy Bunter is a Paul Pry, with a notorious reputation for peeping through keyholes. Billy evidently believes in having "good looks."

Hurree Janset Ram Singh, the dusky nabob, desires to know how his beauty may be improved. We suggest he commences operations with a pail of white-wash!

Bolsover major was never an attractive fellow to look at; but we understand that a severe swishing from his Form master has "made him smart!"

"The Greyfriars Herald" is quite a handsome concern. "Why?" you will ask. Because of its attractive "features," of course!

Experts tell us that the morning bath is a great aid to beauty. In this event, Tubb of the Third must be growing dreadfully ugly. He hasn't "tubbed" for three weeks!

[Supplement iv.

TOPSAIL TONY!

A Rattling Tale of the South Seas.

By DAVID GOODWIN.

CHAPTER 1.

Tony Seeks a Tall Ship!

"**W**OW! Ain't it cold an' miserable!"

A small but stockily-built boy of sixteen shivered, and drew his ragged coat round him as a rain-squall swept over the dock-heads and blew inland to make Newcastle wetter than it was already.

The siren of a steamer roared through the mist. Outside the dock-heads the Tyne was ruffled by yellow waves streaked with coal dust. Half a dozen "keels" were ploughing up river behind a fussy little tug, and the chill December rain drizzled over the quays.

Tony Bunting saw none of these things; or, at least, he tried not to see them. He was leaning on a bale, staring seaward through the mist, and in his mind's eye he saw something quite different. What he saw was not the rain and grey sky, but a sort of vague vision of great blue rollers breaking white on a coral beach, and palm trees bending in the hum of the trade wind. Gulls and frigate-birds crying and wheeling over the gap in the reef, and a white schooner heeling as she steered for a lagoon. And in the lagoon were sharks, and turtle, and pearl-oysters.

This was all the more curious, because Tony had never seen any of these things. He had had a single trip on a small coaster as far as the London River, and that was all. Nor was Tony much of a reader, but he had heard so much of the South Seas and the Line from sailormen who blew ashore in Tynemouth, that he had got the picture in his head. And he never told anyone how he longed for the real thing. There seemed about as much chance of that as there was of seeing the North Pole.

All the same, every ocean-going ship that sailed from Tynemouth Docks was a thing of wonder and romance to Tony, especially if she were south-bound. A waif of the quays, living on odd jobs, his life would not have been thought worth living by many people.

"Gurh-r-r-r-r!" said Tony, and dashed the rain out of his eyes. His spirit came back to the dock-head.

"All clear aft! Cast off that quarter-fast!"

Tony became alert in a moment. A rusty 4,000-ton steamer was moving out of the East Dock. The hawsers of the s.s. Cygnet were cast loose, and only the quarter-line remained fast ashore to keep her stern in while her bows pulled round. The mate roared furiously to have it loosed.

There happened to be no one near the shore end of it just then, and a wharfman hurried towards it, but Tony was before him. He rushed ahead of the wharfman, and deftly threw the rope off the bollard.

"All clear!" he cried.

They were much too busy on the ship and the wharves to pay any attention to him. The steamer hauled across and headed for the open dock-gates. The

boy, unnoticed, scuttled round eagerly to the dock-head, and hid behind a pile of empty sacks. He was very ragged, and his eyes shone with excitement. As the Cygnet glided past the dock-head, and out into the dark waters of the Tyne, he glided forward, made a deft spring, and caught one of the ship's davits. He hung there for a moment, looked sharply right and left with his head just level with the rail to see if anybody observed him, then, swinging himself over the rail, he dived behind a ventilator.

"See that!" exclaimed a sharp-eyed stevedore ashore, grinning, "there's a kid jumped her."

Nobody on board the steamer noticed the intruder, except one man—and that was the mate. He had forty things to look after at once, but being on the



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ALL SPORTS

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foredeck the youthful boarder did not escape his eye.

"Are you all asleep there, forward?" he roared. "Turn off that pier-head jumper! Off with him!"

The bo'sun caught sight of the boy at that moment, and shouting "Aye, aye, sir!" made a rush. The bo'sun was a big burly man with a savage eye, and the job was exactly to his taste. Pier-head jumpers—who are generally people in a hurry to leave the country for its good, and anxious for a free passage—were not wanted on the Cygnet, and as they never have any friends, anybody can kick them safely. Tony, seeing himself discovered, bolted for the fore-castle.

He was headed off by a deck-hand, and scudded aft again. The bo'sun gave chase. As the boy passed the gap in the rail where the gang-plank had been when she lay in dock, the bo'sun caught him and lashed out a seventeen-inch

kick that sent him flying through the gap.

"Try that, ye dirty little free-passage tyke!" said the bo'sun cheerfully.

Tony soared through the air and downwards towards the turbid waters of the Tyne. But if his luck was out upon the Cygnet it was certainly with him now. A string of lighters loaded with hay and sacks of compressed fodder were heading in towards the dock, and shoving the steamer closely. Tony alighted like a spread-eagle among the hay on the second lighter, and rolled over in it with no worse damage than the wind knocked out of him. There was a roar of laughter from the men on the quay.

"Ah'll be the death of a shillin' if it ain't Tony Bunting at it agen!" cried a dock-porter.

"Aye, so it is. There's nothing 'ill cure him of it," said the stevedore, coiling down a hawser, "the brazen little tyke."

"Cure him. If a gradely kick like yon don't cure him, Ah reckon he's a chronic case. He's Leen fashin' every skipper in port for a berth this month past!"

"What shocking brutality!" exclaimed a gentleman in spectacles, shuddering, "the boy might have been killed!"

"It'd take a main sight more'n that to kill Tony," grinned the stevedore. "If ye kenned him, mister, ye'd say so."

They are always too busy around the East Dock at tide-time to concern themselves for long over a little incident like Tony Bunting's pier-head jump. Two more ships came bustling out, and by the time they were through the boy had been landed.

The men on the hay lighter did not add to his troubles; indeed, they were so entertained by his method of boarding them—a keelman's life being rather monotonous—that one of them brushed him down and gave him twopence. Tony was put ashore, and, not being anxious to meet anybody, he sneaked away to the river front and sat on the steps of a jetty, at which two or three boats were moored. And there he dropped his face in his hands and groaned aloud.

"I shall never get a ship!" he said dismally. "Might as well give it up!"

He sat there for some time perfectly motionless, till roused by a hearty voice just above him.

"Now then, you! Suicides ain't allowed off this jetty. If you want to drown yourself you must take a boat an' do it outside the three-mile limit!"

Tony Bunting glanced up and saw a tall, sun-tanned youth in the uniform of a Merchant Service apprentice—called at sea a "brass-bound beggar."

"What are you sitting there like a graven image for?" added the newcomer, for Tony looked the picture of misery. "Hallo! Why, it's the kid that tried to jump the steamer! You're beggin' a life of crime early, me lad, to be dodging the police at your age!"

"I wasn't dodging the police!" growled Tony. "I wanted a berth on that ship. I'd have taken on as cabin-boy, deck-hand, cook's help—anything. But they wouldn't have me. So I jumped her; an' if they hadn't found me till they were well on the way, they'd ha' had to shove me into a job o' some sort to pay for my keep."

(Tony is a determined young fellow, and he means to go to sea. That his adventures are thrilling goes without saying with such a celebrity as DAVID GOODWIN at the helm. Get a copy of the "Boys' Friend" to-day, and, hand in hand with Tony, explore the romantic South Seas!)

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THE WRAITH OF LOCHMUIR!

(Continued from page 12.)

The juniors ran for the stairs and swarmed down. At the same time the slighter Highland figure suddenly dropped his claymore and fled up the stairs, yelling with fear.

Crash!

The figure crashed into the juniors hurrying down. It rolled on the stairs, the juniors falling over it. Mick caught it by the arm and dragged it up.

"Aubrey!"

"Help!" shrieked the disguised Fourth-Former.

"You're safe now——"

"Help!"

Angel of the Fourth seemed almost out of his senses with fear and horror. He clung to his brother, shrieking.

Harry Wharton picked himself up and ran down the rest of the winding staircase into the hall. He had lost only a minute, but that minute had been enough for the phantom of Lochmuir.

The hall was empty. The firelight glimmered only on Harry Wharton as he stared round in search of the figure that had vanished.

THE TENTH CHAPTER.

Enough for Angel!

"AUBREY——"
"Angel, you fool——"
"What——"

Aubrey Angel groaned. He was shaken to the very soul by his terrible experience. Mick helped him down the stairs, and he sank down on an oak settee in the hall, shivering in every limb. His face was chalky white, his eyes staring.

The juniors gathered round him. Angel was in Highland costume, evidently dressed up to play the part of the phantom of Lochmuir. It was clear now who had ransacked the old presses for the Highland relics. It was Angel, planning to trick his companions in the haunted house.

He had paid dearly for his trickery. He clung to his brother's arm, shaking from head to foot. Mick's face was kind, though puzzled; but the Famous Five looked very grimly at Angel.

"You dummy!" said Bob Cherry.

"So you've been playing ghost!"

"Is it gone?" moaned Angel.

"It's gone."

"You—you saw it?"

"We've seen it before!" growled Johnny Bull. "I suppose you believe now that we've seen it, as we told you?"

Angel shuddered.

"I think I catch on now," said Harry Wharton very quietly. "It was you that I chased last night, Angel. I knew that the thing I saw went into your room. It was you, and you kept us waiting at the door while you were getting out of this rig."

"Rotten trick!" said Nugent.

"Aubrey, old man!" murmured Mick, ashamed for once of his brother. "What——what did you do it for, Aubrey?"

Angel stared wildly round the hall before he replied. The terror of the apparition was still strong upon him.

"I—I wanted to get out of the place!" he muttered. "I wanted you to leave! I—I thought the ghost would scare these fellows away! They believed in it and I—I didn't——then!"

"And how often have you played ghost?" demanded Wharton sternly.

"Only last night and to-night—I

swear!" panted Angel. "I—I meant to scare you away from the place so that Maurice would come away with me——"

"I understand that!" said Harry contemptuously. "It's pretty clear now, you fellows. It was Angel I chased along the passage, and the figure we saw in the hall afterwards was the fellow who has played ghost all along."

The juniors nodded. That was clear now. One mystery, at least, had been explained.

"I—I never believed in it!" groaned Angel. "I—I got myself up like this to scare you! I saw that fool Bunter at your door, and—and let you see me! I was going to let you follow me, and dodge through the kitchens and back to my room by the back staircase! But—but here——" He broke off, shivering.

"What happened before we came?" asked Bob.

"I—I hardly know! It seemed to me that the laird was stepping down from the picture-frame——"

All eyes turned on the picture of the Laird of Lochmuir where the firelight played on it on the wall.

From the great frame the pictured laird looked down on the juniors, the firelight giving a lifelike gleam to the painted eyes in the grim old face.

"Then——then it came at me!" gasped Angel, shivering. "I—I thought I must be mad for a moment! But it came at me, and I struck at it with my claymore, hardly knowing what I was doing! Then the——the thing drew its claymore and attacked me. I—I was fighting for my life!"

He stared wildly round the hall.

Outside, the wind howled and moaned, echoing in the crannies of the ancient house.

"Where did it go?" breathed Angel.

Wharton shook his head.

"It was gone when I got down from the stairs," he answered. "Goodness knows how or where!"

"Do you——do you believe it is a ghost——what the Highlanders call a 'wraith'?"

"No! How the thump could a ghost handle a claymore?" said the captain of the Remove. "It was real enough——solid flesh and blood! It's somebody trying to frighten us away from the place——just as you were doing!"

"But——but why?"

"I can't even guess that!"

Angel rose from the settee. He was still trembling, and he leaned heavily on his brother.

"I'm going to-morrow!" he said. "I won't pass another night in this house! Maurice, come to my room with me!"

"Yes, Aubrey," said Mick in a subdued voice.

His face was flushed as he looked at the juniors. His brother's wretched trickery had cut the gipsy schoolboy deeply.

"It's all right, old man!" said Bob Cherry, with a rather forced grin. "Fellows have played ghost before and no harm done!"

"All serene!" said Wharton.

"The serenity is terrific, my esteemed Mick!"

"I'm sorry!" said Mick simply.

And he led his brother away up the staircase. Aubrey Angel was in no state to be left to himself, and Mick remained in his room with him.

The Famous Five stayed in the firelit hall, discussing the strange affair in low tones. Harry Wharton stood before the tall picture of the laird, a strange expression on his face.

Strange thoughts were passing in his mind.

He turned away at last and rejoined his comrades.

"Let's get back to my room," he said in a low, altered voice.

Bob Cherry looked at him quickly.

"What——"

"Say nothing here," whispered Harry. "Let's get away."

Bob Cherry nodded, and asked no questions. The Famous Five ascended the staircase. In silence they made their way to Harry Wharton's room, and Wharton set his lamp on the table.

"Ow! Yow! Help!" came a sudden howl from the direction of Wharton's bed.

"What the thump——"

"Ow! Keep off!"

"Bunter!" gasped Bob.

Two fat feet were visible, sticking out of the bed. The rest of William George Bunter was hidden from sight under the blankets.

"Keep off!" came a muffled howl. "I haven't done anything—— Yow-ow! Keep off! Don't you come haunting me! Ow! Ow!"

Bob Cherry burst into a chuckle. He grasped the blankets and jerked them off the Owl of the Remove.

"Yooooop!" roared Bunter.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Bunter sat up, jammed his spectacles on his fat little nose, and blinked at the Famous Five.

"Oh, it's you fellows!" he gasped.

"Little us!" grinned Bob. "Did you take us for spooks, you dummy?"

"Oh dear!" groaned Bunter. "I—I say, you fellows, I thought it was that beastly ghost come back! Oh dear! Ow!"

"That beastly ghost was Angel dressed up in Highland rig!" grinned Bob Cherry. "We've bowled him out!"

"Honest Injun?" gasped Bunter.

"Yes, you ass!"

"Oh!" Bunter rolled off the bed.

"Of course, I wasn't frightened!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"The fact is, I—I knew it was Angel all along!"

"Oh, my hat!"

"Just the kind of rotten trick he would play!" said Bunter. "I really suspected him from the beginning! Of course, you fellows didn't! I've got some brains!"

"You spoofing ass!" roared Johnny Bull. "You never suspected anything of the sort!"

"Oh, really, Bull——"

"Get out!"

"I—I say, you fellows, I'm hungry!"

"Buzz off, for goodness' sake, Bunter!"

"I want you to come down with me to get some grub!"

Bob Cherry grasped his golf-club and made a rush at Bunter. The Owl of the Remove leaped into the passage.

"Beast! I say——"

Crash! The golf-club smote the wall a foot from Bunter's head, and the fat junior, with a howl, fled along the passage. A minute later his door was heard to lock.

"Beasts!" yelled Bunter through the keyhole. "Yah! Beasts!"

And then the dulcet tones of William George were heard no more. Billy Bunter had gone back to bed, resigning himself to the awful prospect of passing the rest of the night without a further supply of "grub."

THE ELEVENTH CHAPTER.

At Last!

HARRY WHARTON closed his door after Bunter was gone. The lamplight glimmered on his face, showing it grave and thoughtful, and his chums looked at him curiously. They could see that the



Bob Cherry set his teeth and struck a match. Again the peculiar rumbling sound echoed strangely in the hall. "What—what can it be?" muttered Johnny Bull. The Co. looked about them uneasily, and then as Wharton reached the fireplace he gave a shout: "Bunter!" There in the depths of a huge chair reposed a fat form—that of William George Bunter. His extensive mouth was wide open, and his deep resonant snore rumbled forth. "Ha, ha, ha!" yelled the juniors. (See Chapter 7.)

captain of the Remove had something to say, and they wondered whether he had at long last solved the strange mystery of the haunted house of Lochmuir.

"Give it a name, old chap!" said Bob, with a faint grin.

"I think it's beginning to get clear," said Harry, in a low voice. "I wouldn't speak downstairs—I think I might have been overheard."

"By whom? The giddy ghost?"

"By the man, whoever he is, who plays ghost to keep strangers away from this house."

"But how—"

"You remember, Frank, last night you told us that you saw the laird move in the picture in the hall?"

Nugent shivered.

"I did see it," he said. "I—I've tried to think that it was only imagination—a trick of the firelight—but it wasn't! I don't pretend to explain it; but I did see the figure move."

"I think it may be explained," said Harry; "for to-night Angel says he saw, or thought he saw, the old laird stepping down from the frame of the picture."

"That was his fancy," said Bob. "He was in a blue funk, of course?"

"He was afterwards," said Harry. "But when he went down into the hall he was playing ghost and laughing at us in his sleeve."

"Yes, that's so."

"Well, what are you thinking of?" asked Johnny Bull, as the captain of the Remove paused.

"I think we may have hit on the way that man—whoever he is—is able to get in and out of the house at his own will," said Harry, in a low voice. "We've hunted for a secret door, and we've not found one! But the picture—"

Bob Cherry whistled softly.

"The picture moves!" breathed Nugent.

"Doesn't it look like it? You thought you saw the Laird moving, but the

light was uncertain. It was the picture that moved. Angel thought he saw the laird stepping from the picture. Again, it was the picture that moved!"

"By Jove!" muttered Johnny Bull.

Hurree Jamset Ram Singh nodded his dusky head energetically.

"My esteemed chum has hit the right nail on its excellent head!" he exclaimed. "The picture moves! That is the secret door by which the disgusting ghost enters!"

The Greyfriars juniors looked at one another, their faces full of excitement now.

In every mind there was the conviction that Harry Wharton had hit upon the truth.

"By gum! We're on the track at last!" muttered Bob.

"The trackfulness is terrific!"

"When Nugent thought he saw the laird move," went on Harry, "it's likely enough that the trickster was about to enter; but he heard Nugent shout and stopped. And when Angel thought he saw the laird getting out of the frame the rascal was actually coming in. And he did come in. And he went the same way!"

"It looks like a cert!" said Bob.

"Jolly likely, anyhow," said Johnny Bull. "We'll jolly well keep a watch on that picture, and if he comes the same way again—"

"That's the idea!" said Harry Wharton. "My belief is that it is some madman who is playing these tricks! There's no motive that I can see for a sane man to want to frighten people away from Lochmuir. But, mad or sane, we're going to stop him!"

"Yes, rather!"

"Are you fellows game to watch?"

"To-night?" asked Bob.

"Yes. There's no reason to suppose that the man's cleared off. He was interrupted in his prowling round by coming on Aubrey Angel, and Angel's going for him with his claymore. We have seen the wraith more than once on

the same night while we've been here. My idea is to watch till morning, and every night till we hook him. We can get sleep in the daytime."

"That's so."

"Let's!" said Bob.

"If we don't land him to-night, we may to-morrow night, or the next," said Harry. "The man, mad or sane, may be dangerous. He may only have defended himself with his claymore when Angel attacked him. But goodness knows what would have happened if we hadn't come on the scene! He's got to be nailed, and we're going to nail him!"

"Shall we call Mick and Angel?"

Wharton shook his head.

"Angel's in a blue funk, and Mick's looking after him," he said. "The five of us can handle any man in the Highlands, I should think!"

"Especially with a golf-club apiece!" grinned Bob. "Come on!"

"Not a sound!"

"What-ho!"

The lamp was extinguished, and the juniors left the room quietly. They stayed only to put on some warm clothing and soft slippers, and then crept along to the gallery over the hall.

The fire was dying down in the old stone chimney, and faint flickers of blaze cast strange faint lights and shadows. From the oaken rail the juniors looked down on the tall portrait on the wall in the hall below.

Till the last flicker of the fire had died away they remained in the upper gallery watching. When the fire was gone, and all was darkness below, they crept silently down the staircase.

In deep gloom, feeling their way, they crossed the old hall to the wall where the tall portrait of the last Laird of Lochmuir was now hidden in darkness.

Wharton ran his hand over the lower part of the huge projecting frame.

It was firm to the touch—as firm, as THE MAGNET LIBRARY.—No. 830.



Harry Wharton gritted his teeth and sprang at the dim figure. There was a startled cry, as his sudden grip fell on the folds of a heavy plaid. "Back up, you fellows!" panted Wharton. But he had no need to call. Five pairs of hands grasped the Highland figure almost at the same moment. Crash! The "ghost" descended to the flagged floor with a bump. (See Chapter 11.)

immovable, as if built solidly into the wall.

But the captain of the Remove was almost convinced that, on some secret hinge, the great picture moved like a door. That was what remained to be proved. And the chums of the Remove were prepared to watch that night and following nights till it was proved. If the wraith appeared in the house while they were watching the picture it would prove that Wharton's theory was incorrect. But if the captain of the Remove was right, the next time the phantom came he would step fairly into the arms of the watchers.

There was an eerie thrill in the thought, convinced as they were that they had to deal with a being of flesh and blood.

But their nerve did not fail them.

Silent and watchful they waited, while the weary minutes crawled by on leaden wings.

The moan of the wind was heard without ceasing, and all the eerie sounds of an old house on a windy night. But suddenly, through the moan of the wind, another sound came to their ears. It was a low, indefinable sound, and it came from the picture.

The juniors started and thrilled.

Their eyes were so accustomed now to the deep gloom that they could see dimly and faintly. Faintly, dimly, they could make out the massive frame of the tall picture.

A slight sound, low and faint, and something moved in the darkness close at hand.

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Wharton set his teeth. He heard the deep-drawn breath of Bob Cherry at his side.

Like a moving shadow in the darkness the great picture swung out from the wall, and stood open like a door, almost touching the watching juniors as it moved.

From the opening in the wall came a cold, icy breath of air, as from a charnel-house.

Dim, faint, in the opening stood a tall figure—a figure in kilt and plaid and plumed bonnet, with sporran and claymore.

The juniors hardly breathed.

There was a step—and another! The Highland figure stepped from the opening. With a slow, stately stride it came, moving freely, as if accustomed to the darkness, with the stately stride of a Highland chief of old.

For a second more the juniors hesitated, spell-bound. What was this strange figure, that came like a visitant from another world—who was this man, clad in the garb of old Gaul, pacing the deserted hall of Lochmuir in the darkness of the winter night?

But the hesitation lasted only a moment. Harry Wharton pulled himself together, and gritted his teeth, and sprang at the dim figure.

There was a startled cry as his sudden grip fell on the folds of a heavy plaid. "Back up!"

Wharton panted out the words.

But he did not need to call. His comrades were backing him up. Five pairs of hands grasped the Highland figure almost at the same moment. Crash!

With a heavy crash the figure went down, dragged to the flagged floor by the sudden attack, and the juniors piled on it desperately.

There was a cry again—a cry in words that the schoolboys did not understand. But they knew that it was the Gaelic. Then, with the five figures clinging hard and fast, the powerful frame upreared itself, struggling up in spite of the heavy odds. For a moment the dim form was upright, struggling, panting, crying out in wild Gaelic. And then the united efforts of the Five pulled it down again, and it crashed to the floor.

There was a thud!

The plaided form lay still. The head had struck with terrible force on the stone flags, and the phantom—the man, the madman, whatever he was—lay stunned and senseless.

Wharton staggered to his feet.

"A light!" he panted hoarsely.

Hurree Singh turned on his electric torch. The plaided figure lay still, silent, at the feet of the juniors. They turned it to see the unconscious face.

And then, as they recognised it, a cry broke from all the Famous Five.

"Sandy Bean!"

It was Sandy Bean, the ancient piper, the last survivor and mourner of the vanished clan of MacDermid, who lay senseless at the feet of the strangers in the old hall of Lochmuir.

THE TWELFTH CHAPTER.

A Mystery No Longer!

HARRY WHARTON left the House of Lochmuir at the first gleam of dawn, and tramped down through the snow to Muirland village. Thence the innkeeper's son, mounted on a shaggy, swift Highland pony, rode at a gallop by breakneck paths to the nearest town to summon a doctor. But it was late in the day when the doctor arrived at Lochmuir.

Sandy Bean, stretched in a bed in the old house, was conscious, but he was a sick man.

The juniors had taken all the care of him that was possible. The discovery that the old piper was the "ghost" of Lochmuir, that he had played the part of the old laird's wraith, had come as a stunning shock and surprise to them.

Yet when they reflected upon it their wonder lessened.

The old man, half crazed by solitude and by incessant dwelling on the past, was scarcely responsible for what he did.

Indeed, from the few words he spoke as he lay on the bed of sickness, his bruised head carefully bandaged, it seemed that he had no recollection of what had passed that wild night.

Half consciously or unconsciously the old man had played the part of the Highland wraith, governed and deluded by his ruling passion—the desire to keep strangers and intruders away from the old hall of the MacDermid.

From his youth, spent in rambling about the old house, then abandoned to the bats, he had known the secret of the moving picture, and doubtless had used the secret door many a time. Possibly in those days he had played ghost, for it was said that earlier tenants of the old house had been scared away, and for long it had stood untenanted. Doubtless old thoughts had stirred in Sandy Bean's dazed old brain when he learned that the owner of the place was preparing for occupying it. All Sir Philip Angel's preparations must have seemed a kind of sacrilege to him.

For old Sandy was a firm believer in
(Continued at foot of next page.)

FOOTSTEPS IN THE NIGHT!

By JOHNNY BULL (of Greyfriars).

HARRY WHARTON sat bolt upright in bed and peered into the inky blackness of the Remove dormitory at Greyfriars.

It was well past midnight. But for the heavy snores of Billy Bunter, the whole dormitory was silent and still.

Yet, something had disturbed Wharton—something had awakened him from sleep. He had awakened hearing sounds—curious sounds—as of someone beating a rapid tattoo on the wall with a cane.

Wharton was frankly startled. It was unlikely that a master would be prowling about at that time of the night—certainly not armed with a cane. And it was equally unlikely that it could be a burglar. Burglars—even comic-opera burglars—don't usually announce their coming with a subdued and quick-fire sort of postman's knock.

Who—or what—could it be, then?

For some seconds Harry Wharton sat motionless, his ears keenly alert for the faintest sound. Then:

Tap, tap, tap, tap, tapity-tap!

There was no mistake about it. He heard it plainly this time—coming from the passage outside the dormitory. The curious sounds passed the door, grew fainter and fainter, until finally they ceased altogether.

Wharton caught his breath. Stealing softly from his bed, he crossed over to Bob Cherry.

"Bob—wake up, Bob!" he whispered, shaking his chum's shoulder. "Wake up—quick!"

Cherry was not a heavy sleeper, and in a moment he was blinking up sleepily at Harry. "Wassermarrer? What—that you, Harry?"

"There's someone moving about in the passage, Bob," whispered Harry quickly. "I've heard the sounds twice now—jolly queer sounds."

"My hat! Think it's a burglar?"

"Blest if I know. Sounds like some silly ass tapping the panels with a stick. I'm going to investigate, anyway. Are you game, Bob?"

"Right-ho," mumbled Bob, not very enthusiastically. "Expect it'll be Coker, or some other champion ass, searching for the Greyfriars treasure. Here goes, though!"

And Bob tumbled from his bed. Slipping trousers and coats over their pyjamas, they stole softly from the dormitory. In the passage they stopped, and listened intently for a repetition of the strange sounds Harry had heard.

But for some moments they heard nothing; all was silent in the sleeping building.

"I'm certain there's someone prowling round, though," muttered Harry, in a puzzled tone. "I heard it dis— Hark! There it goes!"

Tap, tap, tap, tap, tap, tap—

From along the dark passage came the queer, rapid tapping, and it was Bob Cherry's turn to catch his breath. The tapping seemed to be some distance from them; but it was coming nearer rapidly to the waiting juniors.

"In here, Bob!" whispered Harry quickly. "Shush!"

Harry dragged his chum into the blackness of a nearby doorway. The curious noises were quite close now and distinct. Suddenly they stopped.

With straining eyes the juniors peered into the blackness, eager to catch a glimpse of the intruder. But they could see nothing.

"Better make a rush, Bob," whispered Harry. "Ready?"

Bob nodded in the darkness. Next instant they dashed together towards the spot from whence the sounds had come.

But it was no burglar—or practical joker, either. Instead of a burly form, or a form of any kind, their eyes beheld nothing. There followed the uncanny, rapid tattoo of retreating footsteps, but nothing else.

"My hat!" breathed Harry Wharton, as they halted, bewildered, at the head of the stairs. "I can't understand this, Bob. It couldn't be some silly chump acting the goat—couldn't have vanished so quickly. Think it was a cat, or something?"

"If it is a cat," grinned Bob, "then it must be Puss-in-Boots come to life again. A cat's paws couldn't make that noise, you ass! It's nothing human, Harry!"

"You don't mean to say you believe in ghosts?"

"N-nunno, but—oh, blow it! Come on, Harry, we're looking into this."

And with Wharton at his heels, Bob led the way down the stairs.

They reached the bottom, and were moving softly along the passage below when they stopped suddenly again. From some yards ahead of them came a queer scuffling noise. It stopped, and again came the sounds:

Tap, tap, tap, tap, tap!

The sounds stopped a short distance away from them. Bob Cherry gripped his chum's arm tensely. From the darkness a pair of bright, luminous orbs suddenly became visible.

"What on earth—" began Harry, in a tense whisper. "Why—"

With a sudden exclamation he broke off, and fumbled for a match. As the light flickered up both juniors gave a simultaneous gasp—a gasp of mingled amazement and relief.

Crouching on the floor was Mrs. Minble's black cat. It blinked up at the startled juniors, half-afraid, half-appealingly.

"Well, my only hat!" mumbled Wharton

in disgust. "So it's a blessed cat after all. What asses we—"

Harry broke off, and stooped suddenly over the cat. He lifted one of its paws, and then he understood. On each of the animal's four paws was tightly fastened a half shell of a walnut.

The mystery of the queer tapping sounds was solved.

But the juniors did not smile, or grin. Bob ceased to chuckle, and Wharton's face darkened as he watched the unfortunate animal's vain attempts to free itself. The shells were fastened with cruel tightness, and the cat's struggles only tightened the shells under the expansion of its paws.

"What a rotten trick!" hissed Wharton angrily. "I'd like to get my hands on the brute who did this, Bob."

"We'll make it our business to find that out," said Cherry grimly.

The juniors quickly released the luckless animal, and hurried back to their dormitory. To their surprise they found several of the fellows awake, while a candle was burning. As they entered the room Skinner met them with a chuckle.

"Where have you chaps been?" asked Frank Nugent. "Skinner says you've been out ghost-hunting."

"In a way we have," said Wharton grimly. "But we've laid it, now."

And Wharton told them what had taken place. The juniors listened with grins at first, then as Harry told about the cat, the grins faded—with the single exception of Skinner's grin. That junior appeared to find something very humorous in the recital. His grin became a chuckle, and then a gurgle of mirth.

"See anything funny in it, Skinny?" asked Bob Cherry suspiciously. "Because I'm hanged if I can."

"Funny," chortled Skinner. "Of course it's funny. I've managed to pull your august legs a bit—though I never expected you'd be the chaps to be taken in. Anyway—"

"You—you mean to say that you were cad enough to play a rotten trick like that on a dumb animal, Skinner?" gasped Wharton.

Skinner looked a little uneasy then.

"I—I—it was only a joke—nothing rotten about—about it as far as I can see," he stammered sulkily. "Can't you take a joke—"

"Yes, we can," said Wharton. "But I'm afraid what we're about to give you won't be a joke from your point of view, you cad! Collar him, you chaps."

"Yes, rather!"

"Here, I say—"

But Skinner's protestations were unavailing. Cherry yanked him out of bed, and as he dropped with a bump to the dormitory floor, Wharton set to work to bring the back of a hairbrush into play.

Whack, whack, whack!

Skinner dared not yell; but he made up for the lack of yells with a continuous succession of moans and groans. Wharton wielded the brush until he was tired, and by that time Skinner was tired, too—painfully tired.

And when at last Wharton released him, the unscrupulous practical joker crawled limply into bed, feeling that life was not worth living, and heartily wishing he had kept his mouth shut with regard to the author of his little "joke."

THE END.

THE WRAITH OF LOCHMUIR!

(Continued from previous page.)

the wraith of the Highland laird, in spite of the fact that he had played the part himself.

Harry Wharton & Co. understood that the old man was half-crazed, and they had only sympathy for him. Even Aubrey Angel was heard to mutter a word of compassion.

By the doctor's orders, old Sandy was removed from the House of Lochmuir and taken to the hospital in the town; and as soon as Sir Philip Angel could

be communicated with, instructions came from him that the old man was to receive every care.

It was not long before old Sandy was himself again and back in his cottage by the loch. But the picture of the laird in the old hall of Lochmuir was securely screwed up, and if the uncanny fancy of playing ghost came again into the old piper's mind, he found his way barred.

The juniors saw him again several times during the remainder of their stay at the house; but he spoke no word of what had happened, and they doubted whether he remembered it.

There were, of course, no more mysterious happenings in the House of Lochmuir. The ghost had been laid for good. Even Billy Bunter had no more apprehensions. Indeed, he told the other fellows that he never had heeded the ghost at all, and had suspected all along

that it would turn out to be old Sandy. At which Harry Wharton & Co. chuckled.

When the time came to leave Lochmuir, the car containing the Greyfriars party rolled down the path by the loch and passed old Sandy's cottage. From that cottage came the melancholy wailing of the pipes, and the juniors caught their last glimpse of the old man as the dirge of the MacDermid floated out and echoed across the waste waters of the loch.

Old Sandy, in his Highland solitude, was still dreaming of other days.

THE END.

(There is another magnificent story by your favourite author in next Monday's MAGNET, entitled "The Greyfriars Newspaper!" Be sure and read it, chums.)

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A Marked Man!

by
Hedley Scott.

A Thrilling Serial Story of
Ferrers Locke, the World-
famous Detective, and his
Young Assistant, Jack Drake.



From Pro. to Managing-Director!

"TO my nephew, Ronald Swiveller, I leave an annuity of one hundred pounds, and trust it will be a lesson to him to quit his present extravagant mode of living."

Martin Fentlesniff, Mornington Hardacre's lawyer and man of affairs, paused in his reading of his late client's will, and gazed at the assembly over the rims of his tortoiseshell spectacles.

Ronald Swiveller turned a sickly white. He gripped his fists until the nails bit into the flesh, and the glance that he bestowed upon Jim Blakeney was bitter in the extreme.

"And that, ladies and gentlemen," went on the droning voice of the old lawyer, "is all. The will of Mornington Hardacre is quite in order, for both Dr. Dyson and myself witnessed the drawing-up and signing of the codicil leaving the major portion of Mornington Hardacre's property and moneys to Mr. James Blakeney. Thank you, ladies and gentlemen!"

Three ladies well past their prime, accompanied by half a dozen gentlemen in the same category, rose to their feet in disgust.

"Mean!" snapped the foremost lady. "He's left me nothing!"

"Base ingratitude!" grunted one of the elderly gentlemen, reaching for a dusty silk hat. "James Blakeney—never knew he was a member of the family!"

"He's not a Hardacre!" snapped the lady again, almost bellowing the words into the ear of her male companion, who was afflicted with deafness. "He's only just a hanger-on, they tell me!"

Jim Blakeney smiled slightly as he heard the fierce "whisper" of the distant relative who had travelled far with her spouse for the hearing of Mornington Hardacre's will. He had partially recovered from his own surprise. When the lawyer had summoned him to the Myrtles for the reading of the will, the Rangers' centre-forward had little dreamed what portion of this world's goods and chattels would be his upon leaving the stately old mansion. To say he was astonished and bewildered when Martin Fentlesniff's droning voice had made known the codicil in the will which revoked all previous bequests and now left everything to him, with the exception of the annuity to Ronald Swiveller, would be a very poor description of his feelings. But there it was in black and white!

"My boy," came the droning voice of the kindly old lawyer, when the assembly.

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had dispersed, "allow me to congratulate you!"

Jim Blakeney started slightly as Martin Fentlesniff approached him and seized his hand in a warm grip. He suffered the handshake, however, although his eyes were on the vengeful and disappointed countenance of Ronald Swiveller, who was disappearing round the door.

"E-er—er—thanks very much!" Jim managed to blurt out. "It really seems too good to be true!"

The old lawyer permitted himself to

HOW THE STORY OPENS.

JIM BLAKENEY, the eighteen-year-old centre-forward of the Middleham Rangers, who is a nephew of

TIGER SLEEK, a notorious criminal, who has thus far escaped the dock;

MORNINGTON HARDACRE, the late managing-director of the Rangers, a great friend of Blakeney's, and the inventor of a secret wireless ray.

RONALD SWIVELLER, the inside-left of the Rangers, and nephew of Hardacre. Jealous of Blakeney's rapid strides into favour, Swiveller has committed a series of crimes in his endeavour to get Blakeney hounded out of Middleham. Hovering in the background, ready to encourage Swiveller's underhanded methods, is Tiger Sleek. Each attempt to mar Jim's good name, however, has been thwarted by

FERRERS LOCKE, the world-famous detective. The sleuth, by a strange and thrilling series of events, throws in his lot with Blakeney, and becomes his firm friend.

JACK DRAKE, Ferrers Locke's young and capable assistant.

By a cunningly-worked plot, evolved by Tiger Sleek, and put into practice by Ronald Swiveller, Jim Blakeney is arrested as the murderer of Mornington Hardacre, who is found dead in the library at the Myrtles. So damning is the evidence against Blakeney, who is discovered by the butler in the deceased man's presence, that the police have no other course but to believe him guilty. Ferrers Locke, however, throws his wits into the scale, and proves conclusively that Jim has been lured to the Myrtles by a forged letter. Moreover, he proves that someone else was present in the library between the hour Hardacre was last seen alive and the time of his death. Again, the famous sleuth discovers that Tiger Sleek has had a hand in the plot, and the police are quick to take the hint. Blakeney is acquitted, without a stain on his character, and the local police make a sudden raid on Tiger Sleek's stronghold. The master-criminal's agents, however, warn him in advance. Just as the police are about to force the door of the Tiger's den the whole place is blown sky-high. In the ensuing confusion Sleek and his gang of scoundrels make good their escape.

(Now read on.)

smile—a weakness he seldom gave way to when dealing with his clients.

"It's true enough," he said kindly. "Good luck to you, sir!"

Once again Jim Blakeney mumbled his thanks. Then he tried to pull himself together. He was the owner of the Myrtles; he was the possessor of a banking account that went into six figures; he was the principal shareholder in the Middleham Rangers Football Club! And a week previous he had been in a prison cell as the suspected murderer of the man who had left this vast fortune to him. No wonder, then, was the young man a trifle unbalanced.

"Without desiring to be presumptuous, sir," said the lawyer, at length, "may I ask what arrangements you intend to make with regard to your affairs when the will is granted probate?"

"Oh, I—I'd be pleased if you would continue to manage my affairs, as you did for my late benefactor, Mr. Fentlesniff!" replied Jim Blakeney, somewhat vaguely.

"Thank you, sir!"

The lawyer rubbed his hands with satisfaction, after the manner of his class, at having achieved something noteworthy, and walked over to his portfolio. Gathering together his papers, he reached for his hat and prepared to depart.

"Might I make a suggestion, sir?" he said suddenly. And then, lowering his voice to a whisper: "I would advise you, sir, to steer clear of Master Ronald—he's very sore at being left only a small annuity; he had counted on inheriting the bulk of my late client's estate. I—ahem!—think he's not to be trusted—ahem!"

"Thank you for the warning," smiled Jim Blakeney. "I'll abide by it. But these other people, Mr. Fentlesniff—they appear to be very disappointed at not being left anything by Mornington Hardacre. Do you—I mean, could I do anything for them?"

The old man of affairs pursed his lips.

"I wouldn't recommend it, sir," he advised. "You see, most of them are second or third cousins, or something just as distant, and if my late client had had any affection for them, his will would have shown it in a substantial manner. No; these people you have met here to-day have never been near the place for twenty years—sufficient proof that they were hardly interested in Mr. Hardacre until his enormous wealth and tragic death became public property, as it were, eh?"

"Yes, I suppose so," muttered Jim. "Still, I'd like to— No, I won't, though. After all, you've lived longer

than I have, and should know human nature better. Thank you very much, Mr. Fentlesniff!"

The kindly old lawyer smiled and withdrew, leaving the new master of the Myrtles gazing at the wonderful pieces of bric-a-brac that abounded in the cosily appointed sitting-room—his sitting-room!

There came a discreet tap at the door, which Blakeney failed to hear. It was repeated a trifle louder, and the young man turned.

"Come in!" he said.

The aged figure of Jenkins, the butler, entered the sitting-room. He approached the new master of the house with an air of trepidation that was not lost upon Jim Blakeney. Both were thinking of an occasion when a certain inspector had pompously arrested Blakeney as the murderer of the late Mornington Hardacre. The butler, too, had been loud in his denunciations of the man before whom he now stood; and both, in the fullness of time, had learnt their grave error. The inspector, under the shadow of the huge organisation for which he worked, had made his amends: Jim was a free man. But to the butler no such opportunity had been presented, and he now felt that Jim's time had come to exercise his new powers—to sack him!

He cleared his throat and fidgeted nervously.

"Er—will you be requiring my services after—after this week, sir?" he managed to blurt out at length.

"Most certainly, Jenkins," smiled Blakeney. "You are a very devoted servant, you are thorough, you are trustworthy—what better?"

"Then—then, sir," said Jenkins, in wonderment, "you don't bear any malice for my hasty words on—on—"

"Certainly not," Jim said quietly. "Why should I? Your statements on that occasion were quite justified, in the circumstances. But you don't believe in them now, do you, Jenkins?"

"Great heavens, no, sir!" replied Jenkins, with warmth.

"Then if you still care to make the Myrtles your home, by all means do so."

"Thank you, sir!" replied the butler, in a shaky voice, making for the door.

"And, Jenkins," suddenly called out Blakeney, "tell the other servants that they may remain, just as if nothing had happened—that is, of course, if they wish to."

"Yes, sir, thank you, sir!"

"So far so good," muttered Jim, when the door had closed upon the butler. "I wonder how some of the Rangers' directors will take to this new state of affairs?"

Such a reflection opened up a vast field of mental controversy. There were two people at least on the Board who had always veiled their dislike of Jim Blakeney on account of Mornington Hardacre. And now—

"Managing director of the club," muttered Jim, half aloud. "Sounds like a novel—'From Pro. to Managing Director!'"

But before the curtain rang down on the changed fortunes of the Rangers' centre-forward, the old saying that truth is stranger than fiction was to be proved yet again in a sensational manner.

Enter Mr. Kettleton!

"YOU must resign, Mr. Blakeney!" Mr. Theodore Kettleton banged his fist upon the office table to give his words emphasis, and glared round at his fellow-directors for support.

"Hear, hear!"

A low hubbub of conversation broke out in the ranks of the Middleham Rangers' management committee, and sundry heads were jerked in the direction of Jim Blakeney, who occupied the chair. At length the noise died down, and the young man rose to his feet.

"Gentlemen," he said quietly, and everyone present hung on his words, "I have heard your decision; and my answer is to the point—I refuse, flatly refuse!"

Again the uproar broke out, to be quelled again as the burly figure of Mr. Kettleton rose from his chair, his red cheeks more scarlet than usual.

"Mr. Blakeney, the idea is preposterous in the extreme. How can we grown men—each old enough to be your father—sit on a board of management with you as chairman and managing-director? The thing is absurd! Be sensible, Mr. Blakeney—agree to our proposal, and let us buy you out. You can still play for the Rangers—"

"You seem to forget, Mr. Kettleton," replied Blakeney, a trifle heatedly, "that



The crossbar snapped asunder like the breaking of a twig; and the two jagged ends crashed on the unguarded head of the goalkeeper even as his outstretched fingers clutched the ball. (See page 25.)

the decision either way rests with me, and me alone. Of course, I shall play for the Rangers. And, moreover, I shall endeavour to act with or without your support as managing-director. The late Mornington Hardacre wished it, and he evidently thought me quite capable of fitting the job, otherwise it would not have been written so in his will. No, gentlemen, for the last time, I am not going to resign!"

A cry of shame from a bewigged gentleman in a frock-coat was immediately taken up on all sides. Blakeney's ears tingled as he listened to it, and he dearly would have loved to have taken one or two of the most objectionable gentlemen present by the scruffs of their necks and silenced them.

"Very well, Mr. Blakeney," said the bull-throated Mr. Kettleton, having first whispered a few words to his colleagues. "Then we resign!"

Jim Blakeney shrugged his shoulders, and waved his hands expressively.

"Then there's nothing more to be

said," he made answer. "I will wish you good-day, gentlemen!"

The members of the Board stared after the fast-disappearing form of their managing-director, as if they would like to fall upon him and rend him hip and thigh. Ever since the will of the late Mornington Hardacre had been granted probate, these same directors had slept uneasily of a night in anticipation of the first Board-meeting over which Jim Blakeney would preside.

The young man was smiling grimly as he left the Board-room. He had acted according to the instructions of Ferrers Locke, the great detective. The celebrated sleuth himself was the first person to meet Blakeney as he reached the hall below.

"Well, my lad?" he queried. "How did they like it?"

"They didn't like it at all," grinned Jim. "The whole blessed lot of them has resigned."

"Ha, ha!" chuckled Locke. "They'll climb down fast enough. You've a match on Saturday, haven't you?"

"Yes. The secretary and minor officials of the club are standing by me, so everything should be quite in order for the match."

"And what about Swiveller? Are you still going to play him?"

"No! He's already applied for a transfer, and he can go with pleasure," returned Jim stoutly. "Between you and me, Mr. Locke," he added, in a whisper, "that fellow is capable of any villainy. I feel convinced somehow that he had a hand in the murder—"

"Maybe you're right," interrupted Locke quietly. "I was suspicious of him myself until I visited his quarters. If he has had any hand in the affair, then all I can say is he arranged his alibi like a master-criminal—there's not a flaw in it. The Tiger's flight from Middleham, too, also points to the fact that Sleek had something to do in it—something more than the mere writing of that mysterious letter. But time will prove. The cheque Hardacre made out just before he met his end has not yet been cashed, and until it is I am afraid the law will go begging for its victim. There is no other clue to follow."

The detective and Blakeney walked down the steps of the office building and entered the Hawk, which purred its steady note at the kerb. Jack Drake was at the wheel.

"Where now, guv'nor?" he asked.

"The Myrtles," said Blakeney, before Locke could reply. "You're coming to have some lunch with me. I want to talk to you about one or two things."

"Right-ho!"

The nose of the Hawk was slewed round, and the trio departed for the Myrtles. Inside five minutes Jim and his two friends were seated at the massive oak table in the dining-room, whilst the respectful Jenkins hovered around them with the different courses. The meal concluded, the party made an adjournment to the lounge, where chairs were drawn up before the fire and cigars were lighted.

"And now, Mr. Locke," said Jim, at length, "has it not struck you as peculiar that Mr. Hardacre made no mention in his will of the secret wireless ray he had invented?"

"It certainly has, Jim," returned Ferrers Locke, blowing a cloud of smoke ceilingwards. "Most peculiar! Have you looked for it at all?"

"Can't say I have—not a great deal, at any rate," answered Blakeney. "Where could one look, anyway?"

"Ah, there are innumerable hiding places in an old house of this description,"

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"I'll wager," said Locke quietly. "Have you sounded the walls?"

"Only in the library and the study," replied Blakeney. "I've been frightfully busy with other things to give the matter much attention. I was wondering whether you'd care to stay with me for a bit—you, Drake, as well, of course!"

"It so happens that business is slack for the moment," said the sleuth at length. "So I think we'll accept your invitation, Jim—eh, Jack?"

"Bet your life!" grinned Drake, from the depths of his comfortable armchair. "This suits me down to the ground!"

"Very well. The Myrtles is at your disposal—make yourselves thoroughly at home."

The remainder of the day passed with little outstanding excitement. The rooms on the ground floor were all carefully sounded by Locke, Blakeney, and Drake, but no secret hiding-places came to light. The mystery of Mornington Hardacre's wireless ray was still as far off solution as it had been days ago.

"Better turn it up now," suggested Ferrers Locke. "There's nothing behind these panelled walls."

Blakeney was about to make some reply when Jenkins appeared. On the silver tray which he carried was a letter. Murmuring his apologies, Jim slit the edge of the envelope and drew out the contents. Then he started back with a cry of amazement.

"What's wrong?" exclaimed Locke. "Read that!" said Jim, thrusting the letter into the detective's hand.

The world-famous sleuth scanned the contents of the letter, and whistled quietly.

"Dear Nephew,—Accept the congratulations of your dear uncle upon your unexpected good fortune. I might say that but for me you still would have been mere Jim Blakeney—a paid professional football player. However, good luck to you. I still have a greedy eye upon the wireless ray—remember, it's worth a million of the best to me. What about our sharing the proceeds—eh? Germany will give twice as much as your own country for the ray. Place it in my hands, and I'll effect a sale without anyone in Middleham, or England, for that matter, being the wiser."

"If you want to talk business you can

phone Bantle 43311 five minutes after you receive this letter—that is reckoning you'll receive it by eight o'clock p.m.—the usual time the postman reaches the Myrtles.

"Your affectionate uncle,
"TIGER."
"P.S.—Don't play me false. I shall be in Bantle for exactly five minutes—useless for any clever police johnny to try to make a capture in that time."

"He certainly seems assured of himself," muttered Locke. "He's quite right, though. It would be useless trying to run him to ground in that time. It would take three minutes to learn from the supervisor where and who Bantle 43311 is, another three minutes to inform the local police, and about half an hour before any attempt was made to raid the place. By that time the Tiger would be miles away again, Jim. I should advise you to ring him up—no, no! Better still, leave it to me."

The great detective reached for the telephone instrument and asked for the required number. In a few moments the voice of the operator echoed over the wire:

"Bantle 43311—you're through!"
"Hallo, Jim!" came a gruff voice. "You've got my—"

"You've made a mistake, Tiger," said Ferrers Locke coolly. "This is Locke speaking. Listen! I've sworn to get you, Sleek—sworn to place you in the dock! It's going to be a battle between us, and, so far, the advantage rests on your side—"

"Curse you!" hissed the angry voice of Tiger Sleek. "What fool's game is this? Where's Jim?"

"Jim's here," returned the detective. "And he sends his compliments. Oh, and he tells you to go to Halifax with your proposals, and stay there!"

There sounded an angry bellow of rage over the wires, and then the conversation came to a close. The Tiger had evidently rung off.

"So much for that!" chuckled Ferrers Locke. "I rather think I surprised our dear friend Sleek. He didn't imagine that I would be here—eh, Jim?"

"I'll bet he didn't!" chuckled Jim.

"And now to bed!"

In cheerful spirits the trio turned in

for the night, and all thoughts of Tiger Sleek were relegated to the backgrounds of oblivion.

Ronald Swiveller drained his glass of refreshment and called over the counter to the attendant to replenish it. Since the reading of the will the late Mornington Hardacre's nephew had walked about like a man in a dream. The whole universe seemed to be topsy-turvy to him.

"An annuity of one hundred a year—phew!" he muttered. "Who'd have thought it?"

He glared about him in the half light of the tap-room he had visited as if expecting someone to spring out at him. His whole appearance was dejected. His sharp features wore a hunted expression, the more emphasised by the expression of fear in his narrow eyes. Other frequenters of the tavern stared at him in surprise, for not a few of them recognised him.

"Who knows!"
The words escaped Swiveller's thin lips unconsciously. His harassed brain was recording another picture of the night of the tragedy—the room in the Myrtles, the sleeping man, the sandbag poised aloft, the still, silent heap on the floor of the library.

"Merciful Heaven!" muttered Swiveller, passing his hands before his eyes. "I shall go mad! I shall—"

He tottered blindly out of the tap-room, leaving untouched his glass of liquor, and felt the cool air of the night beating against his throbbing temples.

"A murderer!" he muttered. "The sandbag was weighted—a murderer!"

Throwing a fearful glance over his shoulder, he buttoned up his coat and hurried away down the street as if a thousand demons were at his heels. Once clear of the town his senses began to return. He was able to view things in a calm light. No one knew yet—that was certain. Already, despite the fact that he hated him, Swiveller was glad that Jim Blakeney had been cleared and acquitted of the charge laid against him. But the Tiger—

He ground his teeth with rage as he thought of the tall, burly figure that always lurked in the background.

"He knew—he knew the sandbag was weighted!" hissed Swiveller. "He never intended me to stun the old man. He meant me to—to— Great Heaven! What have I done?"

But it was too late for remorse now. The deed had been done. The law demanded an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth, and it was that dread reflection which quenched Swiveller's remorse—genuine though its short life might have been—on the instant.

"I must get out of Middleham!" muttered Swiveller, as he paced along restlessly. "I must get out of the Tiger's way. He would hold this above my head and drive me to something even worse! He still holds the whip-hand, burn him, although the police have fastened the writing of the invisible letter on to him. He's sure to wield his power. I must go—go to-night! The transfer can go to hang. It would tell anyone—the Tiger—where to find me. No! Ronald Swiveller must start again—start miles away from Middleham. After all, he has an annuity. Ha, ha, ha!"

He concluded with an unnatural outburst of laughter that would have made any passer-by who had chanced to overhear him "certify" him as insane. Then, recovering, he walked on to his lodgings and quietly entered. Five minutes later a shadowy figure, carrying a well-packed suitcase, could have been seen emerging

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from the house of the respectable Mrs. Buttrix like a thief in the night.

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In reality, it was a hunted fugitive of the law and its own conscience seeking to bury the sins of the past in a neighbourhood that lay miles westward of the sleeping inhabitants of Middleham.

The Hand of an Enemy!

"HERE they come!"
"Come on, the boys!"
The cheers rang out from the packed enclosure of the Middleham Rangers' Football Club in one unending bellow.

The Rangers, in their spick and span black-and-gold jerseys, had doubled on to the pitch, eager for the tussle with their old League rivals, the Hackpool Wanderers. As the stalwart figure of Jim Blakeney came last into view the cheering died down, and all eyes were turned in his direction.

The forthcoming match was the first since the tragic ending of Mornington Hardacre to be played on the ground of the home club, and thousands of people were agog to see for themselves the young man who had been arrested as the murderer of Mornington Hardacre, had been acquitted without a stain on his character, and now ranked as one of the most wealthy men in the town.

Many of them still believed that he was the guilty party, for the police had failed to arrest anyone else. And the fact that the young man now inherited the late Mornington Hardacre's vast fortune gave the notion wild support. There was something decidedly fishy about the whole affair—that was the general impression of the crowd.

A certain portion of the spectators began to hiss, and nasty remarks floated across the playing-field which made Jim Blakeney blush and clench his fists.

"Yah! Who did the old man in?"

"Who 'erited his money, eh?"

The situation was saved by the appearance of the visiting eleven. They looked a fine body of men as they trooped out on to the pitch to a storm of applause from their own supporters and the sportsmen amongst the Middleham faction.

"Play up, Wanderers!"

"Pop it across 'em, Hackpool!"

"Allo! They're kicking with the wind!"

The latter remark followed the tossing of the coin in the centre of the pitch and the visitors' captain signalling to his men to line up with the wind at their backs.

A moment later and the ball was in motion, and, in the general excitement that reigned, Jim Blakeney, as the suspected murderer of Mornington Hardacre, was displaced by the nimble and clever centre-forward of the Rangers. Such is the nature of a footballing crowd.

The Hackpool Wanderers soon made their superior weight felt. They steadily began to wear down their opponents, and within fifteen minutes of the commencement they had opened the scoring.

"Come on, Rangers!"

"What about it, Jim?"

The cries from the crowd urged the home club to greater efforts from the restart. The forward line fell into movement with something of their accustomed dash and skill. Ronald Swiveller's place had been taken by a young reserve man who had the makings of a fine forward. Strangely enough, it was he who passed the ball to Jim Blakeney when that worthy, unmarked, was within fifteen yards of the goal-mouth. Without hesitation, Jim took the ball first time and



Mr. Kettleton seemed on the verge of indulging in physical violence. He made a dart at Jim Blakeney, a massive fist upraised. But the loyal Mr. Wirtle saved him from such indiscretion by hauling on his coat tails. "You wait, Mr. Blessed Blakeney," roared the incensed ex-director. "You'll sing small yet!" (See page 26.)

slammed it to where the visitors' custodian was hopping up and down like a Jack-in-the-box.

The goalkeeper made a frenzied leap to stem the oncoming shot. The ball thudded against the cross-bar, and then fell sharply. He caught it and arrested its passage. Then a singular thing happened. The cross-bar above him snapped asunder like the breaking of a twig, and the two jagged ends crashed on the unguarded head of the goalkeeper, sending him reeling to the ground.

Immediately the referee's whistle shrilled out, and players and spectators came rushing to the spot. The injured goalkeeper was speedily attended to by the first-aid men in attendance. But his was a case for stitches, and he was perforce obliged to retire from the field, amidst the sympathetic murmurings of the crowd.

Jim Blakeney walked over to the damaged goal-post, and began to examine the jagged ends. Then he started violently.

"Look here, chaps!" he exclaimed. "This post has been tampered with. I can plainly see marks of a saw on this wood. Great Scott!"—as he looked closer—"it has been sawn half-way through!"

It was true enough. The marks of a saw were plainly visible on one side of the cross-bar—marks that were made in the wood to the depth of an inch.

"Dirty work!" muttered one spectator—a remark that was freely echoed by twenty more.

"It is dirty work!" said Jim grimly. "I'd like to lay my hands on the merchant responsible for it!"

The major portion of the spectators were disgusted, and said so without

choice of words. The whole thing seemed to lack a motive; and yet it was obviously done carefully. The bar would have remained throughout the whole match in its usual position had it not been for the fact that the ball had thrummed against it and weakened what little strength there was left in it. But, as everybody knows, few matches indeed passed from commencement to finish without the ball striking the cross-bar at least once during the game.

The whole affair was a mystery.

A new cross-bar was hurried out from the groundsman's shed and speedily erected, and the game continued. During the lapse the cross-bar at the other end of the pitch had been examined, but it appeared to be intact.

With one man short, the Wanderers fell to defensive methods, hoping to retain the single goal lead they had achieved; but they were doomed to disappointment. The Rangers' forwards were passing in and out smoothly, and with a precision that left the opposing half-backs baffled. Until the remainder of the first half it was almost a game of "shots at goal"—a game that brought the home club two points!

When the half-time whistle sounded there was a strange lack of enthusiasm from the home crowds round the touch-lines. The affair of the cross-bar had spoiled their appetites, as it were.

In the dressing-room Jim Blakeney inquired of Jeff Dunstan, the trainer, if he could throw any light on the mystery. But the dour old fellow shook his head negatively. As a matter of fact, he was more puzzled than the rest of the players, for he had witnessed the men rigging the nets about three hours before

the match was due to be played, and everything had seemed in order then.

The Rangers discussed the matter between themselves, but no one present could find a solution to the mystery. The damaged cross-bar could not have been arranged for the benefit of any particular individual, for, in the first place, it was only likely that the two goalkeepers would be pacing up and down beneath it. Then, again, the person responsible for the dastardly scheme was not to be aware which goalkeeper would occupy that particular goal-net during the first half.

The referee's whistle put an end to the discussion in the players' dressing-room, and once again they took the field.

The second half of the match began fiercely enough, but it died a sudden death. With their goalkeeper out of the way the Wanderers seemed like a dazed pack of schoolboys. Their right-back had taken up a position between the sticks, a half-back had dropped back to fill his position, whilst a forward had been detailed to play a half-back game.

Before another ten minutes had elapsed the Rangers were once more taking shots at goal. This time it was the reserve man in place of Ronald Swiveller who netted the third point.

"Come on, Wanderers!"

"What's come over you, Wanderers?"

The shouts of the visitors floated across the field in a piercing bellow. They urged, they beseeched, and finally fell to reviling their eleven. But all to no avail—the Wanderers were a beaten side.

It would be a merciful thing to draw a veil over the remaining minutes of play, for goals mounted up like runs in a cricket match. When, finally, the visiting team crawled off the field, they had been soundly beaten to the tune of eight goals to one.

The Fall of the Rangers!

THE evening papers made a stir about the whole affair, and called upon Jim Blakeney to make an explanation. In his eagerness to get to the bottom of the matter, the young owner of the Myrtles caused several glaring posters, bearing a promised reward of a hundred pounds to any person able to throw light on the sawn crossbar affair, to be pasted up over the town.

Two days went by, but no solution to the mystery presented itself. Even Ferrers Locke had to admit himself baffled. There was such a strange lack of direct motive about the whole affair that puzzled him. It looked for all the world as if it had been perpetrated merely to mar the good name of the club.

This theory seemed to gain in strength during the next fortnight, for during that time the Rangers played two matches at home, and on each occasion something peculiar happened.

In the first match the referee seemed to favour the home club in all his decisions, and arguments both loud and long waged round the touchlines. The Rangers won the match, but it was a bloodless victory, for their opponents, seeing that the ref. gave everything against them, began to sulk, and in consequence their attack and defence fell to pieces.

In the second match three of the home players "went off" the field apparently hurt, although it was obvious to everyone present that there was nothing the matter with them. Once off the field of play these "footballers" remained off, and watched their side beaten to the tune of four—nil.

It was useless for Jim Blakeney to storm and abuse these players—their contracts were up. They handed in their resignations and retired gracefully into the background. But the unkindest cut of all was when Mr. Theodore Kettleton and his colleagues announced their intention of "selling out."

"It's no use, Mr. Blakeney," said the bull-throated Kettleton the following morning. "My colleagues and I couldn't possibly work with you. There's no alternative but to sell out. We've come here to give you the opportunity of buying us out personally. Failing that, we shall, of course, sell in the open market—first come, first served!"

"I'll buy you out, quick enough," replied Jim hotly. "You're a lot of worms, anyway. I can see your game. If I don't buy you out you'll sell to any Tom, Dick, or Harry. No, thanks; I'm not having anyone in the company. Name your price and we'll call it a deal."

Mr. Theodore Kettleton rubbed his

big hands with satisfaction. Things were working out very well. He would show this young upstart that he could not browbeat Mr. Theodore Kettleton, owner of the largest mill in the town! He named his price—a price far in excess of what the shares were worth, and smiled with satisfaction as Jim Blakeney forthwith sat down and penned a cheque for the equivalent amount.

"Thank you, Mr. Blakeney," purred Mr. Wirtle, a bewigged, shifty-eyed looking individual who echoed all the remarks of the great Mr. Kettleton.

"I want none of your thanks," rapped Jim curtly. "You've got your money, gentlemen—there's the door!"

Mr. Kettleton seemed on the verge of indulging in physical violence. He made a dart at Jim Blakeney, a massive fist upraised; but the loyal Mr. Wirtle saved him from such indiscretion by hauling on his coat tails and dragging him back.

"You wait, Mr. Blessed Blakeney," roared the angry Mr. Kettleton. "You'll sing small yet!"

And shaking his fist at the cool figure of Jim Blakeney standing beside the desk, and suffering himself to be led gently to the door by Mr. Wirtle and his colleagues, the great Mr. Kettleton took his departure.

"Thank heaven that's over," muttered Jim Blakeney, with a sigh of relief. "I can't quite get the hang of the affair, but there's something deep on here, I'll be bound!"

And he was right. The very next morning the town was buzzing with the rumour that the Middleham Rangers Football Club was no longer a private limited liability company—that it was, in fact, now solely in the hands of Jim Blakeney. That Mr. Kettleton and his colleagues had already started to form a rival club, and that they had already purchased a site in the next meadow to their old club!

By twelve o'clock that same day it was no longer a rumour—it was actual fact. Three more players from the Rangers tendered their resignations—their contracts having expired. And Jim Blakeney was left in his office staring moodily at their formal resignations, while those same players were signing on under the management of Mr. Kettleton and his precious associates.

With a stiff upper lip Jim Blakeney decided to weather the storm. He moved up six more players from the reserve eleven and hoped for the best. Harold Digby, Spadger Jennings, and Tony Williams vowed their allegiance to the old club and stood firm.

The first match played under these altered conditions resulted in a terrible defeat of the Rangers. With their tails between their legs, figuratively speaking, the eleven emerged at Middleham Station to the accompaniment of a storm of hisses and booing from a noisy crowd that had assembled outside.

To Ferrers Locke Jim Blakeney turned a weary head.

"Look at them," he said brokenly. "They've already lost their enthusiasm for the old club. It's hard, Locke."

"I know, I know," said the detective sympathetically; "but you must stick it, Jim. You must buy some material from better clubs—your reserves are hopelessly out of the picture. Hunt up the transfer list and pay the prices asked. It's your only chance."

"Haven't I tried?" groaned Jim. "There's no one on the transfer list worth having at present. This is the

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wrong time of the year for transfers—with the Cup looming ahead. By heaven, that fellow Kettleton and his crush ought to be slaughtered!"

"Yes, they've done you incalculable harm," replied Ferrers Locke quietly. "I can see lots of things now. The broken crossbar, for instance, was the first trick. It was done, I feel perfectly convinced, with the idea of starting a bad name for the club. The referee business in the next match was a deliberate affair, too, I'll wager. The fellow was bought over by Kettleton and his crowd to give false decisions. The next match, in which those timid merchants of yours walked off apparently injured, was another deliberate thrust—"

"But why, why?"

"Quite easy to see that—now," replied Locke grimly. "The idea was to make the usual crowd that attended the Rangers' matches discontented and fed up with the very name of the club. And it succeeded all too well, I'm afraid. You'll see for yourself on Saturday. I only hope I'm wrong, but—"

He broke off and shrugged his shoulders expressively.

And on the following Saturday his words came true. The match was against Treverton—an inferior team well amongst the "also rans" at the foot of the league table—and should have resulted in an easy victory for the Rangers.

But the small crowd that had assembled seemed to discourage the home champions right from the outset. They could do nothing right. It was useless for Jim to nurse his forwards up to the goalmouth. Shots went wide every time anyone tried to score. Even Jim himself suffered in the general atmosphere of depression. Twice he "muffed" shots that, on any other occasion, he would have turned to account.

And the concourse, meanwhile, was not slow to jeer and boo. It looked for all the world as if a certain portion of them had journeyed to the ground with that sole intention, for from the opening of the match boos and catcalls rang out incessantly. As a matter of fact, these rowdy spirits had been bribed to play their part in the beginning of the Waterloo intended for the Rangers, and it must be said that they did their part well—and earned their money.

Long before the interval hundreds of spectators had departed for their homes, fed up and disgusted with the whole game and the inferiority of the eleven they had once delighted to watch in the black and gold jerseys of the Middleham Rangers Club.

At full time, when the teams came off the field, having managed nothing better in the way of a score than to draw—a single goal draw at that—the pent-up feelings of the remaining spectators found a vent.

"Booo!"

"Call yourselves footballers!"

"Can't play for toffee!"

"Go back where you came from, Blakeney!"

"You ought to be in the museum, Rangers!"

The above was but a sprinkling of the caustic remarks that made the ears of the players tingle. Sticks were waved in the air, and threatening fists were raised against the Rangers' eleven by the indignant spectators.

Harold Digby walked over and took Jim Blakeney by the arm.

"Keep your pecker up, Jim," he said. "We'll show 'em yet!"

"By heaven!" exclaimed Jim, with anger and determination freely blended. "I'll wean them back to the club—I'll



As the whistle sounded for full time and the Rangers came off the pitch, the pent-up feelings of the spectators found a vent. Sticks were waved in the air, and threatening fists were raised in the direction of the weary eleven. "Booo!" "Call yourselves footballers!" "Go back where you came from, Blakeney!" "Booo!" (See this page.)

wean them back if it costs me every penny I've got!"

"That's the spirit, Jim," chimed in Ferrers Locke, who had walked over to the players; "and I'll wager my reputation you'll win through, too!"

The hands of the two men met. In each face grim determination and an unquenchable spirit showed strongly. Between them—this pale-faced young man of nineteen, managing director and player of the Middleham Rangers, and the older, more worldly man, who was known as England's most successful detective—they made a solemn pact to put the Middleham Rangers' Football Club on its old and popular footing.

It was to be an uphill struggle, with difficulties bristling on every side, but the climbers were tenacious and forceful—and the battle was to the strong!

Good News!

THE animated buzz of conversation taking place in the spacious and well-appointed sitting-room at the Myrtles ceased abruptly as the butler entered with the evening's post.

Murmuring his apologies, Jim Blakeney commenced to open his correspondence, whilst Ferrers Locke and Jack Drake sank deeper into the comfortable armchairs—the former puffing contentedly at his favourite briar, the latter devoting his attention to a study of the local paper.

For fully five minutes complete silence reigned, and then came the grating sound of a chair being pushed back, followed by an exclamation that caused Ferrers Locke and Jack Drake to sit bolt upright.

"Hurrah!"

Jim Blakeney leaped to his feet, his face and eyes aglow with excitement. In his hand he waved a single sheet of notepaper. In his exuberance of spirit he executed something in the nature of a war-dance. Both the detective and his young assistant regarded their host in amazement.

"What the thump's bitten you?" demanded Drake curiously.

Ferrers Locke asked the same question, only he was more particular in his choice of words.

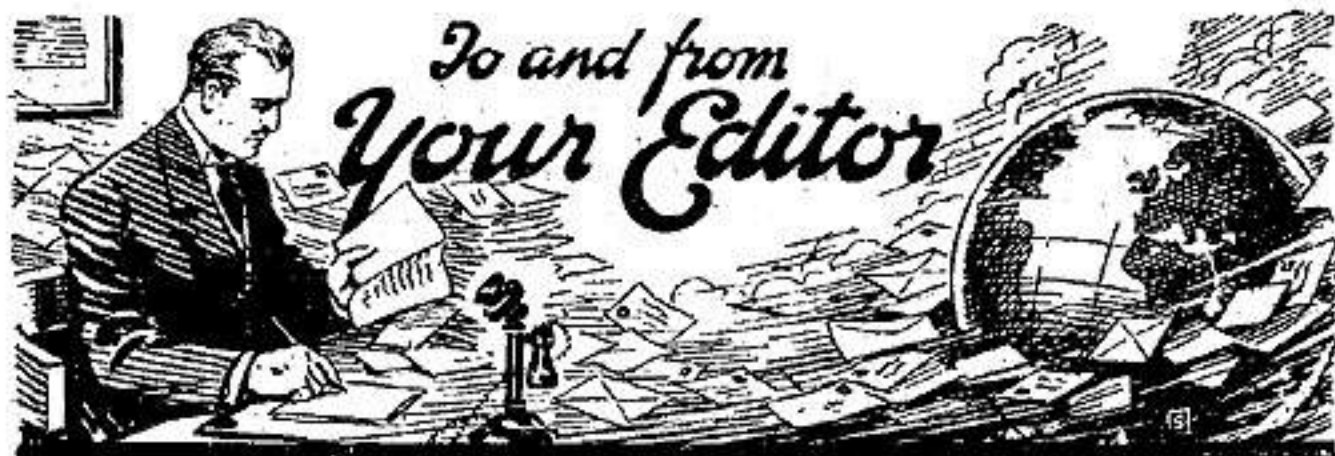
"Look, Mr. Locke! And you, Jack!" exclaimed Jim Blakeney. "Look at that letter—to play for England!"

He handed the sheet of notepaper to his visitors and waited expectantly. They, too, caught something of his excitement as they perused the contents. For the letter intimated that the International Selection Committee had decided to play Jim Blakeney as centre-forward in the forthcoming match with Scotland.

"Bravo!" exclaimed Ferrers Locke at length. "Congratulations, Jim, my lad!"

(In the general excitement it looks as though one of Jim's greatest ambitions is to be realised. But in the background, like some sinister shadow of evil, lurks Tiger Sleek. Jim has been selected to play for England but—will he play?)

THE MAGNET LIBRARY.—No. 830.



THE NEW YEAR.

GOOD luck to it! The young, vastly inexperienced newcomer has come in with a glorious racket, but that's natural. May the sporting youngster of 1924 bring tons of money and lots of happiness! Having expressed these sentiments, which will find an echo in the hearts of all, I can speak of the MAGNET programme for the New Year. This, in a sense, is Programme Week. The meekest fellow has his own programme—a regular star bill packed with big turns, and such noble resolutions that it is almost enough to make the tears of envy pelt down to think of them. Well, of course, the MAGNET is not the paper to be left out of a good thing. Take note, please, that its programme for 1924 is immense. I have no space for details, but the new yarns which will appear as the year rolls on will beat anything yet.

THE "GREYFRIARS NEWSPAPER!"

By Frank Richards.

That merchant of imagination, Fish, thinks out a newspaper boom next week. The yarn is terrific. So is the newspaper which the American boy hatches with matchless cleverness. You feel sometimes that Fish is a point or two too brilliant; he dazzles the optics. But his new press stunt will delight all MAGNET readers. A fellow with ideas ought to be slapped on the back—not too hard—for ideas want finding. Fish thinks out a paper which he feels will be worthy of Greyfriars. It is not one of those papers which trip you up, and leave the patient reader drowning in a sea of headlines. Exactly what it is you will see next Monday, when the bright young fellow from the land of the Star Spangled Banner gets going.

THRIFT!

There you have it! The trump card for the year! Save the giddy pence and the happy-go-lucky bobs and tanners will take care of themselves. It is the prime ordinance of the miser to pare his cheese, but no need to go as far as all that!

THE GREYFRIARS HERALD.

Thrift is the subject for the Supplement next week. Hence the foregoing remarks. We are glad to have the Herald back again. It has been missed, but its memory is green. The same colour is absent altogether among the members of the staff. Harry Wharton and his trusty lieutenants have handled the subject with discretion. Read the next issue. It will do you good. As the proverb has it, "Save, and the world spends the cash for you." But the whole philosophy of this entertaining business will be found, with extras, in the MAGNET for next Monday.

"A MARKED MAN!"

By Hedley Scott.

Kettleton stoops to conquer in the meanest manner in the next instalment of our grand football and detective serial. Will this conspirator's crooked policy bear other than rotten fruit? The sequel shows, and the sequel touches high-water mark of drama and romance.

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