

AMAZING NEW DETECTIVE STORY STARTS TO-DAY!

No. 902. Vol. XXVII.

Week Ending May 23rd, 1925.

The Magnet

EVERY MONDAY.

Library of Complete School Stories



HARRY WHARTON & CO BANISHED FROM CLIFF HOUSE!

(A dramatic incident from the magnificent extra-long story of Harry Wharton & Co., inside.)



Your Editor is always pleased to hear from his chums. Write to him when you are in trouble or need advice. A stamped and addressed envelope will ensure a speedy reply. Letters should be addressed—**"The Editor," THE MAGNET LIBRARY, The Amalgamated Press (1922), Ltd., The Fleetway House, Farringdon Street, London, E.C.4.**

"SPORTS WEEK AT GREYFRIARS!"

By Frank Richards.

NEXT Monday's magnificent story of the Greyfriars chums is bound to make a big hit with my thousands of readers, for it deals with sport—and Magnetites, sporting fellows themselves, are certain to be interested in the doings of Harry Wharton & Co. in this direction. The central figure in this coming treat is a certain young lady who is energy personified. That sounds strange, doesn't it, when the story deals with Greyfriars sport? But it's a fact. The young lady in question is a

COUSIN OF LORD MAULEVERER!

The possibilities are already opened up to you, I'll wager. Mauly and laziness, his cousin with her unlimited energy, make a splendid contrast, and friction is inevitable. Mauly is made to realise that there are other things in life than comfortable sofas. It takes a lot of knocking home, but Miss "Jimmy" cheerfully undertakes the task. Don't run away with the idea that the Greyfriars sports sink into the background when cousin Jimmy comes along. Not a bit of it; they come out particularly strong. What is more, Mauly shows to advantage on the running-track. Surprising, isn't it? You naturally would say "Yes." But I say "No." For, you see, Mauly runs for his life, knowing that the moment he slacks a dogwhip is going to whistle round his shoulders. Yes, cousin Jimmy is certainly determined. You'll be just as sorry as Mauly was glad when you have come to the end of

"SPORTS WEEK AT GREYFRIARS!"

The next item on the programme is the second instalment of our brilliant new detective serial. That it is full of "meat" goes without saying; you have sampled enough of Mr. Scott's work to know that he never allows his interest in the story to flag—which means, too, that the reader does not get bored. By this time you have met, or are about to meet, Monty Manners, the Society swell, the detective, the cricketer. With Monty, Dr. Fourstanton, and Ferrers Locke filling the principal roles, a baffling mystery is unravelled. Into the picture comes, of course, Pyecroft, of the C.I.D. at Scotland Yard, and young Jack Drake. No "Ferrers Locke" serial would be complete without these two fascinating characters. I'm not going to tell the author's story in front of him by giving you tit-bits from next week's instalment, but you can take it from me it's simply great. Mind you read

"THE SPORTING DETECTIVE!"

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"SWIMMING" SUPPLEMENT!

The supplement for this week deals with "Swimming"—a seasonable topic, you will admit, all the year round, but more so than ever now that summer—unless the clerk of the weather lets us down—is playing up trumps. Some wag wrote to me last year from abroad, saying that he was coming to England for the summer. He went on to say that he arrived on the Thursday, and as summer fell on the Wednesday he found his wardrobe entirely unsuitable. He was evidently a cynic, and as such must not be taken too seriously. But to the point—swimming is one of the most popular sports at Greyfriars, and the coming supplement is absolutely a labour of love. That you'll enjoy it I have not the slightest doubt. Look out, then, for our grand

I would like to remind my readers that Nos. 3 and 4 of the "Schoolboys' Own Library" are now on sale. I have moved heaven and earth to get this handy volume on the market, as so many thousands of my loyal chums have asked continually for "4d. book length school yarns." Now, it's up to you to do your little bit, boys. You must give this new venture your full support, by ordering these two volumes every month. And if you want to help still further, get your non-reader pals to sample the "Schoolboys' Own Library." They will not regret it—YOU KNOW THAT!

RESULT OF "PUZZLE-PARS" COMPETITION No. 3.

In this competition **THE FIRST PRIZE OF £5** has been divided between the following two competitors, whose solutions, each containing two errors, came nearest to correct:

JOHN GILL.

188, Earlsfield Road,
London, S.W. 18.

MISS WILDSMITH,

12, Brunswick Street,
Leamington.

THE TWELVE CONSOLATION PRIZES OF POCKET-KNIVES for the next in order of merit have been awarded to the following:

Dan Coker, Normanton, Rayleigh, Essex; Caroline Edwards, 8, Hawthorne Terrace, Leek, Staffs; Thomas Egan, 23, St. Mary Street, Port Talbot; A. H. Howland, 16, Prince John Road, Eltham, London, S.E.; Sidney Huke, 43, Salisbury Road, Lowestoft; Gordon Jopling, 36, Boswall Drive, Edinburgh; G. L. Mitchell, 37, Gothic Street, Rock Ferry, Cheshire; J. Parker, 41, Milward Road, Hastings, Sussex; William Sinclair, 18, Vine Street, Hunslet, Leeds; H. P. Smith, 202, Clarendon Place, Dover, Kent; L. Wallis, 14, Egerton Road, Bishopston, Bristol; N. Wildsmith, 12, Brunswick Street, Leamington.

The correct solution was as follows:

"One a penny, two a penny hot cross buns." How many boys will hear the cry this year? Not many will do so for the old rhyme has almost disappeared. Yet the practice of eating buns is as popular as ever, and in most homes a plate of hot buns will be on the table. Do not eat too many on Good Friday, pals, or you will not enjoy your Easter eggs.

Your Editor.

BOOKS OF SPORT, SCHOOL, AND ADVENTURE. Bright Long Yarns for Long Dark Evenings.

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NOW ON SALE!

PRICE FOURPENCE EACH!

WHEN FRIENDS FALL OUT! 'Tis said that the very best of friends quarrel at some time or another, but surely no quarrel produces such bitterness as that which marks—



A Magnificent, New, Long Complete Story of Harry Wharton & Co., introducing Marjorie Hazeldene & Co., of Cliff House.

By
FRANK RICHARDS.

THE FIRST CHAPTER.

Licked to the Wide!

"PULL in here, Snoopey!"

Harold Skinner of the Remove was the speaker.

A boat, containing Skinner, Snoop, and Stott, came gliding along one of the pretty reaches of the Sark. Snoop was rowing, and the other two were taking things easy.

It was Wednesday, a half-holiday at Greyfriars; the weather was lovely and the river glorious. Most of the Remove had been attracted to the river that afternoon, and there had been a great demand for boats at the Greyfriars boathouse.

The fresh green of summer was on the woods that clothed the banks of the Sark, and the gently-rippling waters glistened in the afternoon sunlight. Skinner & Co. had no thought for the rural beauties of the river, however. The dingy young "blades" of the Remove had rowed a good way upstream, far from the madding crowd, in order to find a quiet spot where they could partake of certain little pleasures, which were peculiarly their own, without risk of being seen.

Skinner & Co. preferred smoking, and playing nap, and "spotting" winners in pink, sporting papers, to the more healthy pastimes favoured by Harry Wharton & Co. and the other boys, and were wont to spend their half-holidays in the surreptitious indulgence of their unwholesome pleasures. Smoking and gambling were strictly taboo at Greyfriars, and Skinner & Co. would have been visited with instant expulsion had Dr. Locke been aware of their "sporty" little ways.

Snoop leaned on his oars as the boat drew in gently to the rush-covered bank. Stott attached the painter to a stump of tree that jutted out, and the boat remained gently swaying on the rippling water.

Skinner produced a highly-coloured packet of cheap cigarettes. These were handed round, and the young blades lit up.

Snoop made a wry face.

"Grooogh!" he said. "These are rotten fags, Skinner. Where did you dig 'em up?"

"Bought 'em in Friardale!" said Skinner airily. "They're a bit strong, but you have to be a seasoned smoker to appreciate 'em. Anyway, what do you expect for threepence for ten?"

The three young rascals puffed away in the full conviction that they were enjoying themselves, and the air in that region soon became hazy with tobacco-smoke.

"How about a round of nap?" said Skinner. "We'll make it penny points to start with, as none of us are flush."

"Right-ho!"

Out came a pack of cards, and Skinner shuffled and dealt them. The centre-seat of the boat was used as a table, and smoking and gambling went on apace.

The game had not progressed far when the splash of oars sounded on the river, and Skinner & Co. looked round in alarm.

A boat was coming towards them, containing three girls. They were Marjorie Hazeldene and her chums, Clara Trevlyn and Phyllis Howell, of Cliff House. The vivacious Miss Clara was rowing, whilst Marjorie steered.

Skinner, who had momentarily paled, heaved a deep sigh of relief.

"Oh! It's only the Cliff House girls!" he gasped. "No need to throw your fags away, you chaps."

"Oh, good!"

Marjorie & Co. looked very pretty and charming in their river attire. They gave Skinner & Co. glances of disfavour as their boat drew closer. The cards of the Remove were well known to the Cliff House girls, and were by no means popular with them. Miss Marjorie had special reason to dislike Skinner, for it was mainly owing to Skinner's influence that her brother, Hazeldene of the Remove, had been led into bad ways.

Skinner knew the contempt and dislike that Marjorie & Co. had for him, and in his vengeful soul he bore a deep, unreasoning animosity towards the girls. Knowing that he was disliked, he did not scruple to make himself further obnoxious to them.

He stood up in the boat and, raising his cap, bowed low with mock gravity.

Marjorie & Co. tried not to notice him.

"Good afternoon, Miss Marjorie!" said Skinner loudly, his thin, narrow face wreathed in an unpleasant grin. "Would you and your friends care to join us? We have some ripping smokes. I'm sure we should be greatly honoured by your company—wouldn't we, chaps?"

"He, he, he! Rather!"

Marjorie Hazeldene went red, and Phyllis Howell tossed her golden head contemptuously.

Miss Clara gave a sniff—a very emphatic sniff.

"Cheek!" she said. "I'd like to dot that horrible Skinner on the boko!"

"Oh, Clara!" said Marjorie, mildly shocked at the slangy expressions which her chum had picked up from the Greyfriars boys.

"I mean it!" said Miss Clara. "Skinner's face always gives me a pain!"

Harold Skinner blew out a cloud of tobacco-smoke in the direction of the Cliff House boat.

"Would you care for a few lessons in rowing, Miss Clara?" he inquired facetiously. "I should be delighted to show you how to handle your oars."

Miss Clara flushed angrily, and gripped her right oar in a manner that implied a burning desire to handle that oar—on Skinner.

Miss Marjorie darted her a quick look.

"Row on, Clara," she said hastily. "Those insolent scotaps are not worth bandying words with."

Miss Clara's blue eyes gleamed, and her pretty face took on a very grim look.

"Master Skinner wants to give me a few lessons in rowing, does he?" she said. "I'll give him a chance, then, the cheeky young bounder!"

"Oh, Clara!"

"Don't say 'Oh, Clara!', or I shall say 'rotter' next!" said Miss Clara, with a toss of her thick curls. "He is a bounder, so there! And I'm going to

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teach him a lesson. Steer me over to their boat, Marjorie, there's a dear." She pulled manfully at her oars, and Marjorie, greatly wondering, steered the boat towards Skinner & Co.'s craft.

The eads of the Remove opened their eyes wide in wonder as the girls drew close to them.

"Here, what's the game?" exclaimed Skinner. "If you try any larks, we'll bump you over—"

"Here, cheese it!" said Stott in alarm. "If we bump their boat, we'll have Wharton and his gang after us later on. I—"

Bump!

The girls' boat drew alongside and bumped against Skinner's craft.

Skinner was standing up, and he glared at the girls.

Miss Clara shipped her oars and stood up.

Before Skinner realised quite what was happening, Miss Clara reached out and snatched his cap from his head. She handed the cap quickly to Phyllis Howell, and then, sitting down and taking up the oars again, she rowed away to the centre of the river.

Skinner glared after the girls and roared:

"Hi! Come back! Gimme my cap, you cheeky little cat!"

"Rats!" was Miss Clara's emphatic rejoinder. "Come and fetch it, Skinner! This is where you get a lesson in rowing, you horrid boulder. Try and catch us if you can! If you beat us, you can have your cap!"

Marjorie and Miss Phyllis laughed heartily at Skinner's flabbergasted expression.

Stott gave a growl.

"Hurry up and catch 'em, you ass!" he exclaimed. "If they get away with your cap they'll crow no end over it, and we shall be the laughing-stock of Greyfriars when they tell Wharton. After 'em, Skinner!"

Harold Skinner ground his teeth with rage. Snoop hastily undid the painter, cards and money were scooped off the centre seat, and Skinner sat down and commenced to row.

The boat shot away from the bank at top speed. Miss Clara, who had ceased rowing for the purpose of allowing Skinner & Co. to draw up, waved the cap which she took from Phyllis.

"Come on, Skinner!" she cried. "Now's your chance to give me a few lessons in rowing!"

Skinner pulled desperately at his oars, and as the boat drew up to the Cliff House boat, Miss Clara tossed the cap to Phyllis and began to row.

The vivacious Miss Clara propelled the boat through the water at a fine rate, timing each stroke nicely, her shapely arms pulling at the oars with surprising strength.

Skinner rowed hard and desperately, but he found that he could not gain on Miss Clara. In fact, before they had gone very far, he realised, to his chagrin, that the girls' boat was gaining on him!

The race developed into a very exciting affair. Miss Clara maintained her lead easily, rowing with powerful, steady strokes. The boats soon reached the more crowded part of the river.

The Famous Five's boat was the first to appear. Harry Wharton & Co., in fact, were on the look-out for the Cliff House girls. They gasped when they saw Marjorie & Co. coming along at full speed, with Skinner & Co. in desperate chase.

"Hallo, hallo, hallo!" roared Bob Cherry. "What's the giddy game? Are

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those rotters up to any of their larks, Clara?"

"It's a race!" cried Miss Marjorie, as the boat went past. Her pretty face was red with excitement. "Clara took Skinner's cap because he was impertinent, and now Skinner's trying to get it back!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Bravo, Clara!"

Harry Wharton & Co. took in the situation at once, and they roared. Skinner, looking hot and furious, rowed past them, his eyes glistening and perspiration standing on his brow.

The Famous Five's boat turned and followed up the race.

"Go it, Skinner!" roared Bob Cherry. "Dip 'em, you boulder! My word, he's getting groggy! Ha, ha, ha!"

Loud roars of laughter and cheers came from the other fellows on the river when they saw that exciting boat race between Skinner & Co. and Miss Marjorie & Co. The cheers were for Miss Clara, who showed no signs of distress, and the derisive laughter was hurled at Skinner, who was rapidly losing.

"Row, Skinner, row!" sang out Peter Todd, who was in a boat with Tom Brown, Russell, and Vernon-Smith. "Put a spurt on, man!"

"What are the odds on Skinner, Smithy?" roared Bolsover major from another boat.

"Hundred to one against!" shouted back the Boulder promptly.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Skinner's strokes became fewer and weaker. He was leaning forward, gasping for breath. Smoking and lack of exercise had ruined his wind and robbed him of stamina, and the violent exertions of the race were telling on him.

At last he gave it up. The oars dangled limply from the rowlocks and Skinner sank forward, his face almost green and his breath coming in short, stabbing gasps.

"Skinney's done!" exclaimed Frank Nugent.

"Whacked to the wide!" said Johnny Bull.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Skinner's boat was soon surrounded by other craft, all containing Greyfriars fellows. Withering remarks and derisive laughter were hurled at him, and he sat there scowling and panting, tenderly clasping his blistered hands.

Miss Clara had turned her boat, and the other boats made way. Cheers rang out for her splendid display of oarsmanship and her pretty face flushed with pleasure.

"Here's your cap, Skinner!" she said, tossing the rascally Remove's headgear into the boat. "Next time you wish to give me a few lessons in rowing, just let me know, will you, and I shall be most pleased!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Ripping, Miss Clara!"

Skinner put on his cap in a very shamefaced manner, and crawled to the stern of the boat. Stott, looking as red and humiliated, almost, as his leader, took up the oars and rowed away as quickly as he could in the direction of Greyfriars.

The return journey was by no means a pleasant one for Harold Skinner & Co.

They were treated to scathing remarks and facetious inquiries all the way down the river, and were glad when at last the boathouse was reached and they were able to put the boat away and slink off to hide their diminished heads.

THE SECOND CHAPTER.

Polly's Escapade!

"HOW do you feel, Miss Clara?" asked Bob Cherry anxiously.

The Famous Five and the Cliff House girls had rowed to the island together, following Skinner's departure, and the boats were now tethered at the bank. A tuck hamper had been taken out of Harry Wharton & Co.'s boat and preparations were well in progress for a tip-top picnic on the green sward.

"Oh, I'm as right as a trivet!" laughed Miss Clara brightly. "I'm very keen on rowing, you know, and my hands aren't even sore. Cliff House isn't easily beaten, old sports—not even by Greyfriars boys!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Well, you taught Skinner a lesson, and no mistake, Miss Clara," said Harry Wharton admiringly. "Your rowing was wonderful!"

"Oh! I hope you don't think it's extraordinary for a girl to be able to do something?" said Miss Clara, with some warmth.

"Clara's our champion athlete, you know," said Phyllis Howell, with a smile.

"And is there any reason why a girl shouldn't be as good at sports as any boy?" demanded Miss Clara, with a challenging look at Bob Cherry.

"Ahem! There is no reason at all, of course," said Bob. "We think you're a real brick, Miss Clara, anyway."

"Hear, hear!"

"The brickfulness of the esteemed and charming Miss Clara is truly terrific," said Inky.

The picnic was a great success, and laughter and merrymaking became the order of the day. It was quite a festive scene under the shady trees, and by the time tea was finished the sun was sinking and the river rolled crimson in the sunset. It was time to return.

"Well, that was ripping!" said Miss Clara brightly. "You chaps know how to make a spread, and no error. We'll show you what we can do to-morrow."

"My hat! To-morrow!" exclaimed Harry Wharton.

"Rather!" said Miss Clara. "To-morrow is Phyllis' birthday, and Miss Primrose has given us permission to have a big tea-party in the class-room at Cliff House. What's more, she says we may invite Hazel and his friends, so all you chaps will be coming, of course?"

"What ho!"

"Thanks awfully, Miss Clara!"

Marjorie Hazeldene laughed.

"We shall be ever so glad to see you to-morrow," she said. "It's going to be a nice party, and I'm sure you'll have a good time!"

"We always do when we come to Cliff House," said Harry Wharton gallantly.

"Yes, rather! Our joyfulness to attend the esteemed tea-party is great, esteemed miss," said the Nabob of Bhanipur.

Harry Wharton & Co. repacked the hamper in great spirits.

The prospect of tea at Cliff House with Marjorie & Co. was always a joyous one. Miss Penelope Primrose, the principal of Cliff House School, made them welcome in her sweet, old-fashioned way and encouraged the firm friendship that existed between her pupils and the chums of Greyfriars.

The Famous Five rowed to the Cliff House landing-stage with Marjorie & Co., and, having put in the girls' boat, prepared to return along the Sark to Friardale.

All of a sudden Phyllis Howell gave a little shriek.

"Oh, Marjorie, look! There's Polly up in that tree!"

Harry Wharton & Co. and the girls looked up into the tree that Miss Phyllis indicated. Staring down at them with its big round eyes was a large, brightly-coloured parrot. All recognised the bird at once as Polly, Miss Primrose's pet and the pet of all her pupils.

"Goodness gracious!" exclaimed Miss Marjorie. "How ever did Polly manage to get here?"

"He must have escaped from his cage!" exclaimed Miss Clara. "You know what an artful bird Polly is! I always did say that one day he would escape from that crazy old cage. He's evidently broken out and flown here!"

"Oh dear!" said Marjorie in distress. "What ever will Miss Primrose say? We must take Polly back."

"Polly wants sugar!" croaked the parrot. "Poor Polly!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Harry Wharton & Co. felt that perhaps they ought not to laugh, as the girls looked so distressed at Polly's escape; but the solemn look on the bird's face was really too funny for words.

Polly was not a great talker, but to Miss Primrose Polly was a wonderful creature, and, to her idea, no nobler bird ever existed. He was supposed to be very old—older, indeed, than the raven at the Three Fishers, at Pegg, and some even went so far as to hazard that Polly was nearly as old as Miss Primrose herself. Rumour had it that Polly had been a gift from someone connected with a romantic episode of Miss Primrose's youth. Whether that was true or not, the fact remained that Miss Primrose "doted" on the bird.

"Ha, ha, ha! Poor old Polly! Kiss—kiss!" said Polly.

At that moment Miss Primrose herself came into sight, her old-world bonnet set awry on her head, and a look of deep distress and concern on her face. Harry Wharton & Co. raised their caps respectfully.

"Oh dear! What am I to do?" cried Miss Primrose, wringing her hands. "Polly has escaped from his cage and has flown away! I think I saw him go this way! Oh dear! Where is Polly?"

"He's here, ma'am," said Harry Wharton. "Look—up this tree!"

"Gracious me!" Miss Primrose's eyes opened wide as she looked upward into the tree where her runaway pet was ensconced. "Polly! So there you are, you naughty bird! Come down at once!"

Polly gave a defiant whistle and fluttered its wings.

"Polly!" said Miss Primrose in anguished tones. "Come down, there's a nice Polly! Sugar, Polly!"

The bird, however, would not be beguiled into descending. Miss Primrose and Marjorie & Co. called to him and did their best to coax him from the tree. Harry Wharton & Co. made valiant attempts to trap Polly, but they failed hopelessly and received numerous sharp pecks from Polly for their trouble. Finally the parrot gave a shrill whistle of defiance and flew away high over the tree-tops.

Miss Primrose gave a cry of despair.

"Oh, how shall I get Polly back again?" she wailed. "He will get lost, or perhaps be killed by wicked boys with catapults! It is getting dark, and the poor bird will be homeless! Oh, goodness gracious me!"

"We'll keep a look out for him, ma'am, on our way down the river," said Harry Wharton. "Polly flew in the direction of Friardale, and he's



Bump! The Cliff House girls' boat bumped against Skinner's craft. The cad of the Remove was standing up, and he glared at the girls. "What's the game?" Before Skinner knew what was happening, Miss Clara reached out and snatched his cap from his head. (See Chapter 1.)

bound to keep to the river. Perhaps we shall be able to catch him."

"Please do try!" said Miss Primrose, greatly distressed. "I really don't know what I shall do without Polly!"

"Rely on us, ma'am."

"We'll keep a careful look-out for him."

"The look-outfulness shall be terrific, esteemed ma'am."

Harry Wharton & Co. took their fare-well of Marjorie & Co. and hurried back to the boat, leaving Miss Primrose with the girls, who did their best to comfort her.

Daylight was drawing in rapidly now, and the shadows of evening were gathering on the murmuring river. The juniors watched the trees and the banks very closely for signs of Polly as they rowed back towards Friardale. The Greyfriars' boathouse was in sight when Johnny Bull gave a sudden shout.

"Look, chaps! There's Polly—sitting on the fence!"

The juniors looked, and there, sure enough, was Miss Primrose's parrot, perched on a fence by the towing-path, blinking at the darkening heavens with a wondering and disconsolate air.

Harry Wharton discovered some chocolate in one of his pockets, and he told Johnny and Bob to row to the bank. The boat was secured to a post, and the Famous Five jumped out on to the towing-path.

Polly blinked solemnly at them as they approached.

Harry Wharton walked up to the bird with the chocolate held out temptingly, whilst Bob Cherry, Johnny Bull, Nugent, and Inky crept up from either side.

"Good old Polly!" said Harry persuasively. "Have some chocolate, Polly?"

Polly croaked with pleasure and reached out its beak for the chocolate.

At the same instant Inky made a quick grab, and Polly was his prisoner.

"That's nabfully got you, esteemed and ludicrous bird!" he said.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Good old Inky!"

Polly struggled and tried to flutter his wings, but the chocolate soon appeased him, and he suffered himself to be carried into the boat.

It was quite dark by the time the boats had been put away and the juniors commenced to walk back to Greyfriars.

"We shall have to hurry," said Nugent. "It's close on locking up time. We can't take Polly back to Cliff House now."

"No," said Harry Wharton thoughtfully. "We'd best take him on to Greyfriars and tell Mr. Queleh. Miss Primrose could be rung up and told that Polly is safe, and we'll return him to-morrow."

"Good egg!" said Bob. "We'll keep Polly at Greyfriars. What fun!"

The Removites hurried back to Greyfriars, but the gates were locked when they arrived. Gosling grumblingly opened them in response to Bob Cherry's terrific tugging at the bell.

"Nice goings hon!" growled the school porter. "Which you're ten minutes late, and Hi've reported yer! Wot I says is this 'ere— Oh, my heye! A—a parrot!"

Harry Wharton & Co. left the astounded porter to relock the gates, and they took Polly straight up to Mr. Quelch's room. Fellows they met on the way stared in surprise and amusement at the bird.

The Remove master was clicking away at his typewriter, hard at work on his famous "History of Greyfriars," when the five juniors came in. He peered at them grimly over the rims of his eyeglasses, and he gave quite a jump when his astonished eyes beheld the parrot.

"Bless my soul! Boys, you—you have the audacity to bring a parrot into the school!" he exclaimed.

"This is the Cliff House parrot, sir," said Harry Wharton. "Miss Primrose's parrot, you know. He escaped this afternoon, and we happened to catch him a little while ago. That accounts for our being late, sir. Miss Primrose was very upset at the loss of the parrot, and we—we spent some time in chasing the bird."

Mr. Quelch's stern features relaxed.

"Dear me!" he said. "It is certainly very fortunate that you succeeded in recapturing the bird, Wharton. It would probably have got lost during the night, or caught cold and—ahem!—perished. The parrot will have to—ahem!—remain at this school for to-night, I suppose. I will ring up Miss Primrose immediately, and assure her that her bird is in safe keeping."

Polly winked solemnly at Mr. Quelch. "Poor old Polly!" he croaked. "Scratch Polly's poll!"

"Bless my soul!" said Mr. Quelch. "I shall do no such thing—I mean—ahem! Boys, there is no occasion for laughter. Take the bird away and deliver it into the matron's charge."

"Very well, sir," said Harry.

"And—er—Wharton, as I am very busy, you may use the telephone in the prefects' room and ring up Miss Primrose for me," said Mr. Quelch. "Tell her that her pet shall have every care, and will be returned to her to-morrow."

"Yes, sir."

The juniors left the study, Polly gaily whistling "The March of the Men of Harlech" as he went. Harry hurried away to the prefects' room to telephone Miss Primrose, whilst the others bore Polly triumphantly downstairs, gathering a throng of excited followers as they went.

When Harry Wharton went down to Mrs. Kebble's kitchen later on, he found the room crowded with juniors. Some were endeavouring to teach Polly to talk, and perhaps it was as well that Polly lacked the propensity to pick up things quickly, otherwise the bird might have learnt a few sayings that would have startled Miss Primrose's ears. Polly was offered all manner of sweets and other delicacies, all of which he accepted with great willingness, croaking and whistling between times.

"Well, what did Miss Primrose say, Harry?" inquired Nugent.

"Oh, she was awfully bucked when I told her that we had recaptured Polly!" laughed Wharton. "I assured her that he would be as safe as houses here, and

that we'd look after him well. Miss Primrose said we need not trouble to make a special journey to Cliff House to-morrow, but may take back Polly when we go over to the tea-party in the afternoon."

"Good egg!"

"That's first-rate!" said Bob Cherry breezily. "It's rather fun to have a giddy parrot in the school—what?"

"Ha, ha! Rather!"

Polly, comfortably installed in a large birdcage in the matron's kitchen, was the centre of attraction at Greyfriars. He was fed with nuts and knobs of sugar and sweets in large quantities by the enthusiastic juniors, and, altogether, he had the time of his life!

THE THIRD CHAPTER.

Bunter the Dandy!

DIRECTLY lessons were over the next day, Harry Wharton & Co. made haste to prepare themselves for the tea-party at Cliff House.

Sunday toppers were brushed and polished with loving care; Trotter, the page, made a small fortune in emoluments paid him by the Removites for pressing their trousers and polishing their shoes to burnished brilliance; brilliantine was much in demand in the Remove dormitory, and gleaming white collars and the "stunningest" of neckties were put on in honour of the great event.

The Famous Five and Hazeldene, "arrayed in their best bibs and tuckers," as Bob Cherry put it, sallied forth into the quadrangle at a quarter to five, looking dazzlingly resplendent.

Frank Nugent carried the birdcage in which Polly was incarcerated. The bird whistled and croaked in a blithesome manner, and it was evident that his stay at Greyfriars had had no damping effect on his good spirits.

Temple & Co. were on the steps as the Removites passed. Cecil Reginald was quite a dandy, in his way, but Harry Wharton & Co. out-dandied him on this occasion. The Upper Fourth-Formers blinked, and shaded their eyes.

"Help!" said Temple faintly, grasping Fry for support. "Hold me up, or I shall drop! Are they real, or is this a dream?"

The Removites glared, and Bob Cherry showed Temple his brawny right fist.

"See that, Temple?" he said. "That's real enough! And I'll dot you on the boko with it if you don't mind yourself! We stand no cheek from mere Upper Fourth fatheads!"

"Why, you silly set of tailors' dummies—"

"You chuckle-headed Upper Fourth coons—"

"I say, chaps, look what's coming!" bawled Johnny Bull, interrupting at a very opportune moment.

All eyes turned, and all eyes opened wide when they beheld what was coming.

It was William George Bunter. But what a Bunter!

The spectacle of Billy Bunter was verily a sight for gods and men and little fishes!

If Harry Wharton & Co. were resplendent, they paled into insignificance beside Billy Bunter!

As a rule, the Owl of the Remove was the most slovenly junior at Greyfriars, with the possible exception of his minor Sammy. His hands were seldom clean, his collar was never free from smudges, his hair was always untidy, and his clothes always needed brushing. It was only by dint of painstaking and painstaking efforts on the part of Peter Todd

and Bob Cherry that Bunter was ever persuaded to wash his neck, and he seemed to have a perfect genius for picking up inkstains and for getting shiny elbows and baggy knees.

But Billy Bunter's slovenliness had vanished now; it was gone from the gaze like an unlovely dream.

He was a revelation of neatness and cleanliness. His coat had been thoroughly brushed, likewise his trousers, which garments had been pressed carefully and the innumerable grease and ink spots cleaned off. He wore a handsome fancy waistcoat, which, though fitting very tight on his plump form, was very striking and glorious to behold. His collar—wonder of wonders!—was spotlessly clean, and his necktie was new, of a nice pattern, and was neatly tied. His boots glistened in the sunlight, and his scintillating topper vied with them in sparkling brilliance.

Billy Bunter, in fact, was a vision of wondrous splendour. Verily, Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like William George Bunter that afternoon.

Bunter's sumptuous get-up was complete with the beautiful carnation he wore in his buttonhole, the canary-coloured gloves that adorned his fat hands, and the gold-knobbed cane which was tucked in the approved Burlington Bertie fashion under his arm.

Harry Wharton & Co. and Cecil Temple & Co. and all the others in the quadrangle who saw him blinked at him dazedly, and marvelled at the sight.

"Mum-in-my hat!" ejaculated Wharton. "Is that—that Bunter?"

"Oh, help!" gurgled Bob Cherry, in a faint voice. "Do I sleep? Do I dream? Do I wonder or doubt? Are things as they seem, or is visions about?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Oh, really, you fellows—"

"Bunter!" roared Peter Todd. "What's the game? Are you going out to mash somebody? Who's the girl?"

Billy Bunter elevated his snub nose with an air of lofty scorn.

"Really, Toddy, I regard that remark as most objectionable," he said.

"Ye gods!"

"But what's the idea, Bunter?" demanded Harry Wharton, in wonder. "Are you going to tea with the Head?"

"Blow the Head!" snorted Billy Bunter.

"Where did you dig up that waistcoat, Bunter?" yelled Trevor.

"It's Mauly's!" roared Bob Cherry. "Oh, my giddy aunt, that's Mauly's new fancy waistcoat. I saw him trying it on yesterday. You've boned it, you fat thief!"

"Oh, really, you know, I—I've borrowed it," stammered Bunter. "You needn't—ahem!—mention it to Mauly. I—I believe he was asleep when I took it, and he might be waxy."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"How on earth did you manage to get into it, Bunter?" grinned Frank Nugent. "Don't bend down, for goodness' sake! The buttons will burst!"

"Why, he's got my best boots on!" roared Dick Rake suddenly. "Take 'em off, you little burglar!"

"Ahem! I—I say, Rake, I really meant to have asked you. Yow! Keep off! Mine are awfully shabby, you know, and—"

"Where did he get his purple socks?" yelled Ogilvy. "I've seen 'em on Temple!"

Temple's face was a study as he looked down at Billy Bunter's feet.

"Oh, crumbs! My socks!" he ejaculated. "Bunter, you fat rotter—"

"Oh, really Temple—"

"He's got my tie on—my new tie!"

howled Bolsover major. "Lemme get at him!"

But Billy Bunter had already made tracks for the gates, with Temple and Rake in full chase.

Fortune was in his favour, for just as he pounded through the gates the village carrier's cart drew in, thus blocking the avengers' path for several minutes.

By the time Temple, Rake, Bolsover, & Co. reached the road the wily Owl was nowhere to be seen.

He had disappeared, wearing Rake's boots, and Temple's socks, and Bolsover's tie, and Mauleverer's fancy waistcoat, and, as it afterwards became known, taking with him Russell's gloves, and Bulstrode's gold cuff-links, and Hoskins' cane, and wearing a carnation raided from the Head's conservatory.

Harry Wharton & Co., chuckling with mirth at Bunter's borrowed plumes, left Greyfriars and hurried on to Cliff House.

Nearly twenty minutes later, as they were passing along the Redclyffe Lane, almost within sight of Cliff House, they heard a pattering of heavy footsteps behind, and a gasping voice hailed them:

"I say, you fellows—Groooooogh!"

"It's Bunter!" yelled Bob Cherry.

The Removites halted in sheer astonishment, and the breathless Owl came puffing up.

His plump face was red and perspiring, and he mopped at his brow with a handkerchief bearing Micky Desmond's initials—a beautiful handkerchief made of real Irish linen.

"Groooooogh! Yah! Wait for me, you fellows!" he gasped. "I've—wooooo—run all the way from Friardale—ger-rugh! It's jolly hot! My hair's untidy, too. Can any of you fellows—grooooo—lend me a comb?"

"Where the dickens are you going, Bunter?" demanded Harry Wharton.

"Eh? Where am I going? To Cliff House, of course!" said Bunter.

The Removites nearly dropped.

"To Cliff House!" gurgled Bob Cherry.

"Yes, I'm going to the Cliff House tea-party, you know," said Billy Bunter. "Miss Phyllis will be frightfully disappointed if I don't turn up, and so—gerrooooo—will Miss Marjorie."

"My hat!" exclaimed Wharton. "You haven't been invited, you fat clam!"

"Oh, really, Wharton—"

"You're not going!" roared Bob Cherry ferociously. "Marjorie and Phyllis don't want a greedy cormorant at their tea-party!"

"Really, Cherry, I can only attribute your words to petty jealousy," said Billy Bunter loftily. "You know what a hit I am with the girls—"

"Why, you—you—you—"

"Oh, let's slaughter him!" said Bob in exasperation. "He'll hang on like grim death unless we slaughter him, and we can't have him barging into the girls' party, scoffing all the grub he can lay hands on, the greedy little pig! If the corpse is found, and we get hauled over the coals for the murder, we shall be able to plead justifiable homicide."

"Yarooooogh! Help! Gerraway!" howled Billy Bunter, as Harry Wharton & Co. closed round with grim looks on their faces. "Leggo, you beasts! Oooooogh! I won't be murdered! Ow-wow-wow! Stop it! Help! Fire! Murder! Police! Yah! Oooooop!"

Bump!

Billy Bunter smote the dust of the road with a mighty smite, and as he struggled in the Removites' grip there was a rending sound from under his jacket.

Rip! Rip!

"There goes Mauly's waistcoat!" grinned Frank Nugent. "The buttons must have been jolly strong. It's ripped up the back!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Yarooooogh! Yah! Yow! Wow! Leggo! Help! Yarooooogh!" wailed the luckless Owl.

Harry Wharton & Co. gave him no quarter.

They were grimly determined that, come what may, Billy Bunter should not insinuate himself into the Cliff House tea-party. The mystery of his wondrous "get-up" was now explained, and they made up their minds to nip the Owl's wheeze in the bud, so to speak.

They bumped him on the hard, unsympathetic road, and rolled him in the dirt, and finally shot him through a hedge into a turnip field beyond. There Billy Bunter lay among the turnips, raising the balmy echoes with his loud lamentations.

"Ow-wow! Yow!"

Harry Wharton & Co., laughing heartlessly at Billy Bunter's plight, went on their way, leaving the luckless Owl in the turnip field, shaking his fat fists and alternately moaning and gasping and bawling his lot.

THE FOURTH CHAPTER.

Billy Bunter's Ruse!

TEA was almost ready at Cliff House when the chums of Greyfriars entered the wide, green, old garden. Marjorie & Co. came out to greet them, looking very pretty and charming.

"Hurrah!" exclaimed Miss Clara when she saw the bird-cage which Nugent carried. "So you've got Polly? That's ripping! Won't Miss Primrose be pleased?"

Quite a crowd of girls had gathered in the garden, and they all gave Harry Wharton & Co. bright smiles. A moment later Miss Primrose came out of the ivy-covered porch, and her sweet old face beamed as she saw Polly and heard his welcome whistle.

"My dear boys! So you have brought Polly back to me!" she cried. "Darling Polly! You might have got lost, you naughty bird. How can I thank you, sweet boys, for saving Polly?"

"Oh, don't mention it, ma'am!" said Harry Wharton, blushing a little. "We are only too pleased that we were able to—ahem!—return Polly."

"The pleasurefulness is great, esteemed ma'am!"

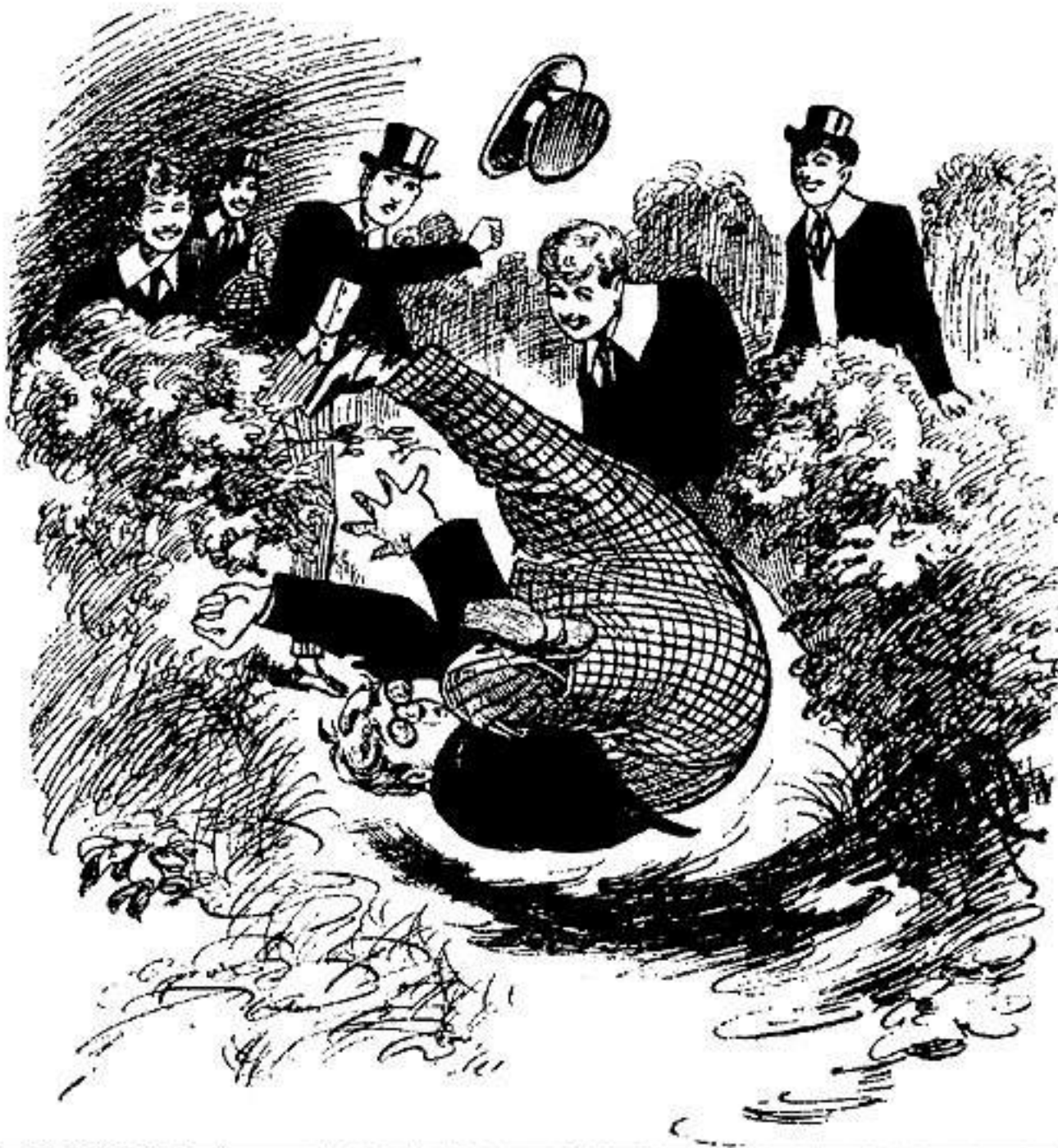
"Poor old Polly!" said the parrot.

"Polly wants sugar!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Miss Primrose took the cage and bore her pet away, her face wreathed in happy smiles.

"We're having tea in the school-room," said Miss Marjorie brightly. "Clara and I have made a cake, and



"Yarooooogh! Yah! Yow! Leggo!" Bunter's roars rang out crescendo. Harry Wharton & Co. bumped him in the dirt, and finally shot him through a hedge. "Yarooooop!" howled Bunter. "Now keep off the grass!" said Bob Cherry. "You're not wanted at Cliff House." (See Chapter 3.)

Wilhelmina iced it. I think it's turned out a lovely cake."

"It's a corker!" said Miss Clara.

"Oh, Clara!"

"A real corker!" said Clara enthusiastically. "I reckon we shall do you chaps really well this afternoon. Phyllis had a whacking cheque from her aunt in London, and we've heaps of tuck!"

"Good egg!"

Miss Wilhelmina Limburger and Bessie Bunter were preparing the good things for the birthday party, and the Removites' eyes glistened with appreciation when they looked in through the classroom window and saw the festive board.

The large bay windows were open, and the pretty curtains pulled aside to admit the warm afternoon breeze, and the interior of the room could be seen from the garden.

The table was heavily laden with all manner of luscious edibles, and it had been laid daintily by Marjorie & Co. In the centre was the huge birthday cake which had been made in honour of Phyllis Howell. It really looked, as Miss Clara had put it, a "corker," with its gleaming white icing, and pretty, tasteful ornaments.

Marjorie & Co. led the way into the school-room, and when they arrived they saw Miss Primrose and Polly. Polly was in his old cage, which the gardener had repaired, and Miss Primrose hung the cage on a hook in the window.

"There!" she said. "Polly can enjoy the lovely fresh air from the sea. I don't think he will escape again, the naughty bird!"

The girls asked Miss Primrose to join the party, but the good lady shook her head and smiled in her quaint, old-fashioned way.

"No, dear. I have some work to do, and you must enjoy yourselves with your friends," she said. "I will look in later and play the piano for you. Don't over-feed Polly, whatever you do. He is getting so greedy for sugar."

It was a great tea-party. Marjorie & Co. made much of the chums of Greyfriars, and those youths readily complied with Miss Clara's invitation to them to "pile in."

Shortly after the festivities began, a forlorn figure rolled up to the Cliff House garden gate, and a pair of round spectacles glimmered from behind the shrubbery.

Billy Bunter gazed into the school-room window at the happy scene within. He blinked and blinked again, and his plump form trembled.

"Beasts!" he growled. "They've swindled me out of that feed! Rotten jealousy, that's all it is! My word, what a cake! Two tiers, and covered with icing! Oh, my word!"

The Owl of the Remove, concealed behind the shrubbery, leaned on the fence and gazed at the tea-party, which, although so near, was yet so far from him. At first he gazed longingly, and then his longing turned to wrath and indignation.

In the midst of the light ripple of talk that reached his ears through the open window there came a cackling voice from the parrot's cage.

"Polly wants sugar! Poor Polly!"

Billy Bunter blinked at the parrot, and gradually the wrathful look on his face gave place to a grin. The Owl of the Remove, struck with a sudden idea, chuckled softly.

"My word, that's a good wheeze!" he muttered to himself. "I'll muck up their rotten tea-party. I'll pay the beasts out for their petty jealousy. My ventriloquism is just the thing! He, he, he! I'll make the parrot talk and show

'em up! That will put the damper on things, I reckon! He, he, he!"

The more Billy Bunter thought of his great idea, the more he chuckled. He managed to scramble over the garden-fence and hide himself in the midst of the thick shrubbery, out of sight from either the school-room or the road.

He chuckled again and again at his idea, and awaited a favourable opportunity to put it into practice.

The tea-party was proceeding merrily, and Polly, having been appeased with several offerings of sugar and cake, was resting on its perch and blinking solemnly at the sparrows hopping in the trees in the garden.

Suddenly, through the merry laughter of Marjorie & Co., and their Removite guests, there came Polly's rasping voice:

"Ha, ha, ha! Silly giggly girls! What a lot! Ha, ha, ha!"

The Cliff House girls ceased their laughter and gay chatter, and looked at one another, astonished. Harry Wharton & Co. stared blankly at the parrot. They could scarcely believe that it was the bird that had spoken.

"Ho, ho, ho! My hat! Clara thinks she's clever! Cheeky cat! You're right, Bob! Ha, ha! You're right, Bob! Cheeky cat!"

Bob Cherry gave a jump, and Miss Clara's pretty face went crimson.

A dreadful hush immediately settled on the tea-party. Marjorie & Co. looked in amazement at the parrot, whilst Polly continued to blink solemnly at the sparrows. The Greyfriars juniors could only sit and stare at the parrot, wondering vaguely whether they had heard aright. The voice certainly seemed to have proceeded from the cage, and there was no mistaking Polly's cackling tones.

"Ho, ho!" said Polly's voice shrilly. "Poor old Polly! Bird's a fathead! Wring its neck, Harry! Ho, ho! Wring its neck! Giggly girls! Silly lot! Ha, ha, ha!"

Harry Wharton looked dazedly at Frank Nugent.

"Wh-what the dickens—" he began.

"Ha, ha! Yah! Who wants their rotten tea? Cliff House is a rotten show! Rotten show! Ha, ha, ha! Marjorie can go and eat coke!"

The Removites sat there frozen with horror. That it was Polly actually speaking they had no doubt. As for Marjorie & Co., they were astonished at the bird's new and wonderful gift of speech, and their pretty faces took on looks of anger. They, too, believed that Polly was the speaker.

"I—I say, Miss Clara—" began Bob, on catching a grim look from that young lady, but the parrot's voice again interrupted:

"We'll go to please Hazel! Ha, ha! Be on your best behaviour, boys! Silly cats! Ha, ha! My hat! Clara thinks she's clever! Whew-ew-ewww! Ha, ha, ha! The catfulness is terrific!"

Hurree Singh's dusky face took on a look of utter stupefaction. He could not, for the life of him, remember ever having uttered such an expression.

"Polly wants sugar! Rats on Cliff House! Yah! Rats, and many of 'em!" croaked Polly's voice. "Blow the birthday party! Ha, ha! Might as well go, Harry! It's a free feed, anyway! Ho, ho, ho! Rats on Cliff House! Rotten show! Ha, ha, ha!"

Harry Wharton & Co. and the Cliff House girls had risen to their feet now. The girls were angry, and the juniors utterly dumbfounded. At that juncture the class-room door opened, and Miss Primrose looked in, smiling benignly.

"Hallo, hallo! What an old cat!"

Miss Primrose gave quite a jump.

"My goodness gracious! What is that?" she exclaimed.

"Yah! Rats! Go and eat coke! Rats, and many of 'em!"

"Bless my soul!" cried the startled Miss Primrose. "It is Polly speaking! Goodness gracious! I have never heard Polly speak like that before!"

Miss Primrose looked round bewildered at her red-faced and angry-looking pupils, and at the flabbergasted Greyfriars juniors.

"What ever is the matter with Polly?" she asked.

"I'm sure I don't know, Miss Primrose," said Marjorie Hazedene in distress.

"Poor Polly!" said Miss Primrose, looking distressfully at her pet. "Is there anything the matter, Polly?"

"Rats! Go and fry your face!"

"Polly!" said Miss Primrose faintly.

"Yah! Awful old frump! Have you seen her bonnet? It keeps her front hair on! Ha, ha, ha!"

Miss Primrose sank helplessly into a chair.

There was an awful silence in the class-room. Polly only was unconscious of any excitement.

"B-b-bless my soul!" murmured the principal of Cliff House. "Polly must be ill!"

"Polly isn't ill, Miss Primrose!" exclaimed Clara Trevlyn, her shapely lips quivering with anger. "He has been taught to say these awful things—or, rather, I should say, he has picked them up at Greyfriars!"

"Dear me!"

"Ho, ho!" croaked the parrot's voice. "Blow their tea-party! Ring off, Harry; the bird can hear. Ha, ha! Rats! The rotten bird can't speak! Silly ass of a bird! Ought to have its neck wrung! Rats on Cliff House! Cheap girls' seminary! Ha, ha, ha!"

Miss Primrose's face was a study.

"This—this is amazing!" she said, in a faint voice. "I have never heard anything like it! Polly—"

"Scraggy old bird! Can't talk for toffee! Ho, ho! Tea with a gang of girls! What rot! Rats! Whew-wewww!"

Miss Primrose arose from her chair, her usually kind old face stern and set with anger. She swooped round on Harry Wharton & Co.

"You wicked boys! You have been teaching Polly to say those terrible things!" she cried.

"No, we haven't, ma'am!" exclaimed Harry Wharton. "I assure you we know nothing—"

"The bird has picked up those sayings at Greyfriars, and that's certain!" exclaimed Clara Trevlyn, her eyes flashing angrily. "You boys may not have intended Polly to repeat them. I suppose you thought him incapable of learning to repeat what you said!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" croaked Polly's voice from the cage. "Can't talk for toffee! Ring off, Harry; the bird can hear! Rats! Go and eat coke! Poor Polly! Yah!"

Harry Wharton & Co. looked from one to the other helplessly.

Horried, condemning looks were cast at them by the girls.

"Ha, ha! Miss Primrose wants her bird! Have you seen her bonnet? Awful old frump! Ninety if she's a day! Rats! Yah! Ha, ha, ha!"

Miss Primrose beckoned to a maid whom she saw listening outside the door.

"Take Polly away to the kitchen," she said. "Take him at once!"

"Yes, ma'am!"

The cage was lifted down from the hook in the window. Polly seemed to

object, for he rustled his wings and cackled—genuinely this time.

"Take him away at once!" commanded Miss Primrose, on whose kind old face thunderclouds had now gathered.

Polly was taken right away, and he could be heard whistling and cackling below from the kitchen.

Miss Primrose turned angrily to the Greyfriars juniors.

"So this is the result of my allowing Polly to remain at Greyfriars overnight!" she exclaimed, in a voice that trembled with anger. "You wicked boys have been talking about my pupils and myself behind our backs, and now you have been shown up in your true colours!"

"But, ma'am, it isn't true!" cried Wharton. "There's a trick behind this somewhere! I—"

Miss Primrose raised her mittened hands.

"Do not seek to excuse yourselves by falsehood and deceit!" she said. "You have deceived us all very wickedly as it is. Until now I have held you boys in great esteem, and regarded you as exemplary young gentlemen. It seems, however, that I was mistaken. Polly would not lie. He is a very clever bird, and you did not think him capable of learning the wicked things you have been saying. I did not dream that boys of Greyfriars could be so vulgar and wicked as to use such expressions. You have ingratiated yourselves here with the young ladies who are my pupils and have posed as young gentlemen, when all the time you have been acting like serpents in the grass! I am shocked and disgusted at this terrible revelation, but am glad to have found you out for what you are! You will leave Cliff House at once, and don't any of you dare let me see you here again!"

Harry Wharton & Co. looked at each other in helpless dismay.

"But, ma'am, we've done nothing wrong!" cried the Remove captain, in an urgent, ringing voice. "I assure you your parrot has learned nothing from us! Someone else must have taught it to say those things. It's a trick—"

"The trickfulness is terrific, esteemed ma'am," said Hurree Singh. "Our respectfulness to your sublime self and the charming misses is truly great, and the ludicrous parrot has learnfully picked up the unworthy sayings from some otherful source."

Miss Primrose elevated her head, and pointed majestically to the door.

"Go!" she said. "I shall consider whether to place the matter before Dr. Locke. I have never felt more insulted or shocked in all my life! I will not tolerate you wicked boys here any longer. Go at once!"

The Removites turned to the girls.

Marjorie and Phyllis avoided their glances, but the others looked at them angrily and scornfully, their lips curling with contempt. Clara Trevlyn's blue eyes flashed at them as the juniors hesitated near the door.

"You horrible, contemptible, low-down cads!" she exclaimed. "So you have deceived us all this time."

"Clara!" rapped Miss Primrose, in horror. "Goodness gracious, you forget yourself! You must not make use of those unseemly expressions! Girls, you will kindly retire. I forbid you to associate with any of the Greyfriars boys in future!"

Marjorie & Co. fled from the room, without another word to Harry Wharton & Co. Their looks, however, spoke volumes for their feelings of anger and contempt.



Bob Cherry saw the ball coming, and, unable to resist the temptation of a catch, he drove hard at the pedals, judging his distance to a nicety. Smack! The ball landed fair in the centre of his palm. (See Chapter 7.)

Miss Primrose turned magisterially to the juniors and pointed to the door.

"Once again, will you leave Cliff House?" she said. "Your presence here is obnoxious!"

There was nothing for it but to go. Harry Wharton & Co. realised that numbly.

They left Cliff House, dismayed and downcast.

That happy birthday-party had been quite ruined. The cake and most of the other good things on the table lay untouched.

THE FIFTH CHAPTER.

Bunter's Alibi!

MEANWHILE, Billy Bunter had left the garden, unseen and unsuspected.

His wily ruse had worked better than even he had anticipated. The Owl of the Remove was a remarkably clever ventriloquist. It was the only accomplishment he had, with the exception of eating and the telling of falsehoods, and he had made full use of that gift in order to avenge himself on Harry Wharton & Co.

He chuckled to himself as he scuttled through a short cut between the fields, en route for Friardale Wood and Greyfriars.

"He, he, he! That's done the rotters in the eye! That's messed up the tea-party properly! My word, I reckon they must be feeling small! Serves 'em jolly well right, the jealous beasts! The girls won't have anything to do with 'em now! He, he, he! I'm a cute card, I am! I—I hope they don't suspect me, though. They might do. They're such suspicious beasts, the artful rotters!"

This thought caused the grin to fade somewhat from Bunter's face.

He plunged on through the fields, and took the path that led through a large spinney near the wood. Through the foliage a voice came suddenly to his ears:

"Orl right, young gents! You shall 'ave the tip straight from the nosebag."

"My word!" murmured Billy Bunter. "This isn't such a lonely spot as I thought. I wonder what's on?"

The Owl's inborn curiosity overcame his desire for complete secrecy. He peeped through the bushes, and he drew a deep breath.

Standing in the centre of the spinney were Loder, Carne, and Walker, the three rascally prefects of the Sixth. Facing them was a man dressed in somewhat "loud" attire, with a coarse face and a decidedly "horsey" appearance. Billy Bunter recognised him at once as Mr. Jeremiah Hawke, one of the shady frequenters of the Cross Keys public-house at Friardale, and a tout for Mr. Cobb, the landlord there.

Mr. Hawke had a grey bowler hat on the back of his well-oiled head, and a fat cigar was held between his discoloured teeth.

"You'll let us have advice first thing in the morning, then," said Loder.

"Rely on your 'umble, Master Knox," said Mr. Hawke with a grin. "I'm goin' right off to Epsom now, and directly I get the information from my old pal at the stables I'll write off to you. Not a word to Cobb, mind."

"No fear!" said Walker.

Mr. Hawke pushed his grey bowler a little farther back on his head, blew out a cloud of blue smoke, gave Loder & Co. an affable nod and disappeared.

The rascals of the Sixth regarded each other with pleased grins.

Their sporting proclivities were well known at Greyfriars, though not to the masters, and the backing of "gee-gees" with Mr. Cobb of the Cross Keys was one of the branches of "sport" which Loder & Co. particularly favoured.

"Well, that's first-rate!" chuckled Carne. "Hawke is off to Epsom now, and he'll get first-hand information at the stables. He'll write and tell us what horses to back to-morrow, and we shall get our revenge on Cobb."

"Rather!" said Loder with relish. "Hawke's bound to keep his word, as there's money in it for him. We'll look out for his letter in the morning, and then—"

"Hark!" exclaimed Walker suddenly. The crunching of a twig behind the bushes close by had sounded, and the seniors were on the alert at once. Billy Bunter had inadvertently trodden on a loose branch and thus revealed his presence.

He heard Loder & Co. coming, and started to run, but the seniors pounded on him in a trice.

"So you've been spying on us, you little rotter!" snarled Loder, clapping a heavy hand on Bunter's shoulder and whirling him round.

"Yaroooh! Leggo! I wasn't!" yelled the Owl, wriggling. "I never saw Hawke—really I didn't! Yarooooh! Don't sh-sh-shake me like that, Loder—my g-g-gig-glasses will f-f-fall off! Wow-wow! I haven't heard a word! I don't know that you're expecting a letter from Epsom in the morning! Yow-wow-wow!"

Loder & Co. looked at each other in dismay and rage.

"Oh crumbs! That's done it!" muttered Walker, shifting uneasily. "The fat rotter will blab the yarn all over the school. If it gets to the Head's ears he'll look out for the letter in the morning, and then the game will be all up."

Gerald Loder panted with fury. He knew that what Walker said was true.

Billy Bunter was the scandalmonger of Greyfriars, and could no more keep secrets than he could money. Loder turned fiercely to him.

"If you dare say a word about what you have heard, you spying little toad, I'll flay you alive!" he hissed. "You've got to keep your mouth shut, do you hear?"

"Oh, really, Loder!" expostulated Billy Bunter, who had ceased to yell and whose little round eyes were now gleaming artfully behind his spectacles. "I'm not so sure that I ought to keep your rotten secrets, you know. As a strictly honourable chap, my duty is to go straight to the Head and lay the facts before him."

"You—you—you—"

"However, I might be able to keep mum to oblige you, Loder," went on the Owl. "Mind, I shall want you to oblige me, too. Hark! There's half-past five striking from the church clock."

"What's that got to do with it, you little sweep?" said Loder, between his teeth.

"I may have a reason for wanting to be here at this time, and I may not," said Billy Bunter with a knowing look. "I say, you chaps, if Wharton or any of the others ask you, you might say that you saw me at—at the old mill on the river, at a quarter-past five, or five o'clock."

Loder & Co. stared hard at the fat Removite.

"My hat!" said Loder. "What's the idea?"

"Oh, nothing!" said Billy Bunter airily. "I may have a reason, and I may not. Anyway, I shall expect you chaps to bear me out that you spoke to me by the old mill between five and a quarter past. I should like you to say that you spoke to me about my condition. You can see that somebody has been knocking me about."

"Yes, I can see that," growled Loder. "But what—"

"Please don't ask any questions, Loder!" said Billy Bunter. "And kindly release me! You can rely on me to keep mum about what I know, so long as you do as I say, you know."

Loder & Co. looked at each other, and finally Loder released the Owl.

Bunter promptly scuttled to a place of safety.

"Mind, if anybody asks you, you chaps spoke to me by the river soon after five!" he said, setting his eyeglasses straight on his nose. "Don't let there be any mistake about the time, Loder, or I shall consider it my duty to tell the Head of your dealings with that rotter Hawke. Mind that!"

Billy Bunter disappeared into the spinney, and Loder & Co. regarded each other in amazement.

"What's the little cad's game, I wonder?" said Carne nervously. "Do you think he's pulling our legs, Loder? He may go straight back and spread the news about us—"

"Bunter's too artful for that," said Loder in a low voice. "The young rotter has some axe to grind, and he'll keep to his bargain if we tell lies for him. Anyway, we'll do as he says, and if he goes back on us we'll break every bone in his body. After to-morrow he can say what he likes; once we've had Hawke's letter and destroyed it, we can deny everything. Bunter's as crafty as a wagon-load of monkeys, and I think we're safe enough."

And, feeling relieved on that score, Gerald Loder & Co. tramped on to Friar-dale discussing racehorses, betting odds, and form, and other matters relative to the Sport of Kings.

THE SIXTH CHAPTER.

Most Mysterious!

"WELL, it licks me properly!"

Bob Cherry spoke in exasperated tones.

Harry Wharton & Co. were making their way back to Greyfriars, looking a most unhappy and disconsolate group. They could scarcely realise what a horrible thing had happened. The tea-party had been progressing so merrily, and everyone had been so gay and happy; and now they had been sent away from Cliff House in disgrace, and Marjorie & Co. had turned their backs on them.

It seemed impossible that anything could sever their long and staunch friendship with the Cliff House girls, yet now there was a decided rift in the lute. The Removites felt dismayed and humiliated.

"Who the dickens could have taught the parrot to say those things?" said Frank Nugent savagely. "It was evidently a put-up job. The blithering bird didn't pick up that talk from us."

"No fear!"

"I'm blessed if I can understand it," said Harry Wharton, wrinkling his brows in perplexity. "We've been at Cliff House often enough, and that was the first time Polly has ever spoken more than half a dozen words. I never knew the bird could speak like that. Why, only last evening a lot of the fellows

were trying to teach it to say different things; but Polly wouldn't talk."

Johnny Bull gave a growl.

"Somebody must have found out how to make the bird talk, and that somebody set out deliberately to muck up the tea-party, and cause bad feeling between the girls and us!" he said.

"It was a rotten, cowardly trick, and I'd like to find the chap who did it!" said Bob Cherry, clenching his fists. "The girls believe that what the parrot said came from us, and that means they won't have any more to do with us."

His chums nodded a lugubrious assent. Wharton's eyes gleamed.

"It seems very remarkable that the bird should choose that particular time and place to repeat what he had picked up, supposing that it was Polly who was talking," he said.

Nugent shot him a quick look.

"What do you mean, Harry? It must have been the parrot talking—"

"I don't believe the parrot said a word. We all know that bird, and we know that all it can say, or ever will say, is 'Poor old Polly,' 'Polly wants sugar,' and a few things like that. The voice certainly sounded like the parrot's, and it seemed to come from the cage; but that doesn't prove that it was the parrot actually speaking. You chaps have forgotten Bunter."

"Bunter!" shouted Bob Cherry. "Why, Bunter, of course! He worked that trick with his rotten ventriloquism—"

"Great Scott! I hadn't thought of Bunter!" exclaimed Johnny Bull.

Bob Cherry's usually sunny face took on a grim look, and he set a faster pace.

"Come on!" he said. "We'll find Bunter, and have it out with him. We'll drag him back to Marjorie & Co. by his ears, and make him confess!"

"Rather!"

The Chums of the Remove hurried on, and reached Greyfriars in record time. They inquired of Gosling whether Bunter had come in, and on being informed that the Owl had just gone indoors, they made a rush across the quad.

Billy Bunter was discovered in the bath-room, where he was making attempts, with a frugal quantity of water, to remove the traces of his recent rough handling.

"Here's the fat fraud!" roared Bob Cherry, charging into the room, and clapping a heavy hand on Billy Bunter.

Bunter's head at that moment was in the basin, and a wild gurgle arose.

"Yerrooooh! Yah! Gug-gug! Leggo! Ooooooh! I—I nearly swallowed the soap! Grooooooh! Ow-wowow! I've got water in my eyes! Gerrrugh! Lemme go!"

"Now, you rotter, confess!" bawled Bob, shaking the Owl until the water flew from his face in all directions.

"Ooooooooh! I'm ch-ch-choking! Stoppit! Wow-wow-wow!" wailed Billy Bunter.

Harry Wharton & Co. allowed him to dry himself, and wipe the soapsuds out of his eyes, and then they surrounded him.

Billy Bunter groped for his eyeglasses, stuck them on his little snub nose, and blinked round nervously.

"I—I say, you fellows—"

"Confess!" roared Bob.

"C-c-confess to wh-what?"

"You followed us to Cliff House and worked your rotten ventriloquism on Miss Primrose's parrot, to get your own back on us!" exclaimed Harry Wharton angrily. "You've landed us into the dickens of a fix, Bunter, and you've got to own up."

Billy Bunter wriggled. "Yow! Leggo my collar, you beast!"

"I deny doing any such thing!" he said. "You must be suffering from a delusion, Wharton! Orough! I haven't been to Cliff House!"

"Oh, let's bump the truth out of the little rotter!" exclaimed Frank Nugent impatiently. "What's the use of expecting Bunter to tell the truth otherwise? You know what an awful little liar he is!"

"Yarooogh! Leggo! Hands off, you beasts!" yelled Billy Bunter, as the Removites closed in on him. "I'm telling the truth, I tell you! I can prove it, too!"

Wharton looked hard at him.

"What! You say you can prove it, Bunter!" he said incredulously.

"Yes!" gasped the Owl. "I went back through the wood and down by the river, and never touched Cliff House at all. I can prove it, because some fellows saw me by the river."

"My hat!" exclaimed Wharton. "Who were the fellows?"

"Loder, and Carne, and Walker!"

"Great pip!"

Harry Wharton & Co. were somewhat taken aback at that.

"You say Loder, Carne, and Walker saw you by the river, Bunter?" said the Remove captain.

"Yes," said Billy Bunter eagerly. "just by the old mill, you know. I went that way so as to avoid being seen by anyone—I looked such a sight after you beasts had ragged me—and when I least expected it, I ran into Loder and the others. They saw me, too, and started chipping me about my appearance. There, you suspicious rotters! I hope you are satisfied now!"

Harry Wharton knitted his brows.

"We shall speak to Loder, Carne, and Walker, and ask them if you are speaking the truth," he said. "You may have seen them by the mill, but you would have had time to work that rotten trick at Cliff House, and then go down to the river."

"That's it!" said Squiff. "You'll have the question of time to prove, Bunter. It was five o'clock when we started tea at Cliff House, and it's past six now. You've got to give a satisfactory account of your whereabouts between five and a quarter past, before we'll be convinced that it wasn't you who made the parrot talk. Let's find Loder."

Billy Bunter was dragged away from the bath-room, just as he was, and the Removites took him along with them in their search for Loder, Carne and Walker.

Those fellows were seen to be just coming in at the gates, and Harry Wharton & Co. ran out into the quad to meet them.

Loder, Carne and Walker halted and stared in astonishment when they saw that small crowd of Removites, with Billy Bunter yelling and struggling in their midst.

"Here, what the dickens—" began Loder. "Let us pass, you little sweeps!"

Loder & Co. had no kindness in their hearts for Harry Wharton & Co.—quite the opposite, in fact.

"I'm sorry to bother you, Loder, but I should just like to ask you something," said the Remove captain respectfully. "Did you see Bunter down by the river this afternoon?"

Loder did not reply at once. He gave a look of surprise, and glanced quickly first at his companions, and then at Billy Bunter.

The Owl of the Remove had ceased to struggle, and he gave Loder a significant blink.

"Yes, didn't you see me this afternoon, Loder?" he piped. "You've got to admit that you did, you know."

Loder gave a shrug.

"Well, what if I did see him?" he said.

"Then you did see him?" said Wharton.

"Yes," said Loder, going a little red.

"Where?"

"On the towing-path, near the old mill, I think," said the rascally prefect.

"There you are!" said Billy Bunter triumphantly. "Carne and Walker saw me, too—didn't you?"

The two seniors thus addressed, nodded.

"How long ago was this?" asked Wharton.

Loder & Co. looked at one another.

"About—about five o'clock," said Loder, with a gulp.

It was a new experience for him—and by no means a joyous one—to be telling falsehoods for Billy Bunter.

The Removites all started.

"Five o'clock!" ejaculated Harry Wharton.

"Over an hour ago!" gasped Bob Cherry.

"Between five and a quarter-past," said Loder in a low voice, catching another warning blink from Bunter. "What's the fuss about, anyway?"

"We believe that Bunter was in the neighbourhood of Cliff House between five and a quarter-past," said Harry Wharton, between his teeth. "Are you certain, Loder, that it was as long ago

as five o'clock that you saw Bunter by the river?"

"It was just a quarter-past five when I stood by the mill talking to Loder," said Billy Bunter loudly. "I remember distinctly Loder saying to Carne as the church clock struck, 'There goes a quarter-past five. We'd better be getting along to tea.' Isn't that so, Loder?"

"Yes," gulped Loder.

Harry Wharton & Co. looked at each other. They were floored.

Loder & Co. walked on, and Billy Bunter gave a triumphant whoop.

"What did I tell you, you beasts?" he cried. "I'm jolly glad I happened to run into those chaps. If you touch me now I shall place the whole matter before the Head!"

The others looked to Harry Wharton. The young Remove captain's face was flushed, and his brows were knitted in perplexity.

"Let the fat bounder go," he said at length. "He seems to have cleared himself, but—but— Anyhow, we shall have to make inquiries."

Billy Bunter was released, and he scuttled away. When he had reached a safe distance he stopped and glared round at Harry Wharton & Co.

"Yah! Beasts! Go and eat coke, you suspicious rotters! Beasts! Yah!"

Bob Cherry made a movement as if to go after him, and the Owl turned with alacrity and bounded indoors as fast as his fat little legs would carry him.

GREYFRIARS CELEBRITIES. No. 6.

CLAUDE HOSKINS, the Musical Genius.



Harry Wharton & Co., more mystified than ever, went round to make searching inquiries. They called on the matron, and asked her whether Polly had been taken from the kitchen during his brief stay at Greyfriars, but the good dame assured them that the cage had remained in the kitchen all the time. She also said that, to the best of her knowledge, nobody had had secret access to the kitchen. The Removites explored every avenue of possible evidence that might give a clue to the mystery of how the parrot learnt to talk, but no clue, nothing of a suspicious nature was found.

Skinner & Co. were closely questioned, as being possible plotters, but Harry Wharton & Co. soon saw that neither of the black sheep knew anything of the matter.

That evening the Famous Five gathered in Study No. 1 to hold a discussion. They were thoroughly baffled and, as Bob Cherry expressed it, "knocked into a cocked hat."

"We can't have Marjorie and her friends thinking us a set of cads and rotters," said Wharton desperately. "I shall have to write and ask her to believe that it was all a trick, and that we know nothing of what the parrot said. That's the best thing to do in the circumstances, don't you chaps think so?"

"Rather!"

"The writefulness is the esteemed proper caper, my worthy chum," said Inky.

So Harry Wharton sat down and wrote to Marjorie, his chums more or less ably assisting him in the task. The letter was duly posted, and the chums of the Remove expressed fervent hopes that their appeals to Marjorie & Co. to believe them would not be made in vain.

THE SEVENTH CHAPTER.

Clara & Co. Mean Business!

"LETTER for Wharton!"

Tom Brown made that announcement in Hall after lessons next day, and Harry Wharton & Co., who happened to walk in just then and hear him, made a simultaneous dash to the letter-rack.

"Who's it from, Harry?" said Frank Nugent eagerly, as Wharton took the neat blue envelope from Brown.

"It's from Cliff House, kids," said Bob Cherry. "I know the notepaper. My hat! That's Miss Clara's fist!"

The envelope was addressed to Harry Wharton in Clara Trevlyn's clear, bold handwriting. The Remove captain opened it with an air of perplexity.

His frown deepened as he read the missive the envelope contained. He gave a gasp of dismay.

"Oh crumbs! Read that, you chaps!" he exclaimed, and handed the letter to Bob.

The others gathered round, and this is what they read:

"Master H. Wharton.—Your letter addressed to Marjorie Hazeldene has been received, and Marjorie wishes me to say, on behalf of herself and all the girls in Cliff House School, that your excuses are very paltry and lame, and the letter, which appears to be a concoction of falsehood and would-be deceit, has been treated with the contempt it deserves. If, as you say, you are the victims of a plot, it should be an easy matter to discover the perpetrator. You do not substantiate your plea of innocence with the slightest atom of proof, THE MAGNET LIBRARY.—No. 902,

and, frankly, we do not believe you. Miss Primrose is still very upset over the affair, so much so that she has sent her parrot away to a friend's. As for ourselves, we can see now how we have been deceived into thinking you to be boys of honour and gentlemanly instincts. You do not have the decency even to apologise for the disgraceful way you have insulted us. You Greyfriars bounders seem to have a very exalted opinion of yourselves. How you must look down on our 'rotten show' of a 'cheap girls' seminary.' Perhaps it would interest you to know what a 'gang of giggly girls' can do. We mean to make you modify your opinion of Cliff House, so look out! When you read this you will probably laugh and say, 'Rats on Cliff House!' again, but it won't be long before you will laugh on the other side of your faces. Meanwhile, you can go and eat coke, you bounders!"

"(Signed) CLARA TREVLYN."

The Removites gazed at this letter in dismay.

"Oh, my only hat!" groaned Bob Cherry. "Then the girls have properly got their backs up! They won't believe us!"

Wharton thrust the letter into his pocket and made a weary gesture.

"I suppose they can't be blamed, in a way, for thinking as they do of us," he said. "The things the parrot said were absolute insults, and—and we have no proof that we didn't say them. Oh, I wish I knew who worked that trick with the parrot!"

"The rotter ought to be boiled in oil!" said Frank Nugent. "We must do something, Harry. Marjorie & Co. think us a precious set of cads."

Wharton set his teeth grimly.

"We'll go over to Cliff House after tea and see the girls," he said. "They are very sensitive, of course, but perhaps we can talk them into believing us."

"That's the worst of dealing with girls," groaned Bob Cherry. "Once they get an idea into their heads, wild horses won't make them believe otherwise. Clara means business, too. I suppose she reckons on making us look pretty small potatoes."

"We couldn't look much smaller than we look now," said Johnny Bull lugubriously. "It's rotten to be at loggerheads with the Cliff House girls. Let's do as Harry says, and run over to see them."

"The rottenfulness is terrific," said Hurree Singh with a sad shake of the head. "The esteemed misses have what you call a bee in the ludicrous bonnet, but a stitch in time saves ninepence, as your English proverb puts it, and if we popfully run over we may pour the oil-fulness on the troubled waters."

"That's the ticket!"

The Famous Five hurried over their tea and then set out on their bicycles with Hazeldene for Cliff House.

Hazel had had a very curt letter from his sister, and he, too, wanted to talk to the girls with the object of re-establishing friendly relations.

It seemed so unnatural and out of all reason for the chums of the Remove to be on bad terms with Marjorie & Co. All the Greyfriars juniors were deeply concerned in the matter with the exception of Harold Skinner, and Snoop, and

Stott, and a few of a like kidney. These fellows looked upon the affair as a huge joke, although they were as mystified as Harry Wharton & Co. as to the origin of the parrot's defamatory words.

The six Removites cycled swiftly to Cliff House. As they passed up the leafy lane at the side of the girls' school they saw Marjorie & Co. in the playing-field adjoining Cliff House. A single-wicket game of cricket was in progress. Miss Clara was standing at the wicket, her bat held in a businesslike manner, and Molly Smith was bowling.

Harry Wharton & Co. pedalled slowly alongside the railings that bordered the Cliff House playing-field. So far Marjorie & Co. had not seen them; the girls' attention being wholly occupied by the game.

Molly Smith took a run and sent down a swift ball. Miss Clara ran out at it, and there was a merry sound of willow meeting leather.

Click!

It was a fine hit, and eager, girlish cries arose from Clara's side as she commenced to run. Meanwhile, the ball sailed high in the air, speeding towards the railings where Harry Wharton & Co. were watching.

Lowering in its speedy flight, the ball came spinning right over the railings. Bob Cherry saw it coming, and, unable to resist the temptation of a catch, he drove his machine forward, and then, judging the distance to a nicety, he reached out with one hand and caught the ball deftly.

Smack!

"Well caught, Bob!" chirruped Frank Nugent.

"Oo-oooogh!"

That astonished cry rose from a score of girls' throats from the playing field.

Miss Clara, who had been taking another run, halted abruptly in the centre of the pitch and stared at the Removites. Marjorie Hazeldene and the other girls stared, too.

Harry Wharton & Co. dismounted by the open gate, and, leaning their machines against the railings, raised their caps respectfully.

Marjorie Hazeldene, who was standing nearest the gate, caught Wharton's glance and gave him a stony stare.

"Miss Marjorie—" began the Remove captain, advancing through the gate.

But he broke off as he saw Clara Trevlyn running towards him, an angry look on her pretty face.

"Keep out, you bounder!" cried Miss Clara. "Don't you dare come into this field! We bar all Greyfriars cads!"

Wharton halted, and the others, who were following close on his heels, came to a standstill, too. They looked in dismay at the girls, their faces flushing.

The girls of Cliff House met their looks with hostile glances.

"I—I say, Miss Clara," stammered Bob, breaking an awkward silence. "Here's your ball, you know."

"Ugh! I don't want to touch it!" exclaimed Miss Clara, shrinking away as Bob extended the ball. "You can throw it down, Cherry. I suppose you feel awfully bucked at having caught me out?"

"Look here, Miss Clara—"

"Get out of here, you horrid creatures! We wish to have nothing to do with you!" said one of the Cliff House girls.

Harry Wharton turned appealingly to Marjorie Hazeldene.

ANSWERS
EVERY MONDAY—PRICE 2s

"Miss Marjorie, won't you listen to what we have to say?" he cried. "We are very sorry indeed for what happened yesterday, but I assure you that none of us taught the parrot to say those things. There has been a terrible mistake—"

"Then how did Polly get to know all that he repeated?" retorted Marjorie Hazeldene. "Surely, if some other boys taught Polly to repeat those insulting words you could have found out who they were!"

"We have tried, Miss Marjorie, but we cannot discover anything," said the young Remove captain despairingly. "We have done our absolute best, so far, to solve the mystery, and I'm sure we shall clear ourselves soon, but—"

"Oh, bosh!" broke in Miss Clara. "You're trying to play on Marjorie's soft heart, I know. Polly was only at Greyfriars a day, and you clever chaps could easily bowl out the so-called culprit—if there happened to be one. But you can't take us in with your weak excuses. The fact of the matter is you imagined that Polly couldn't pick up anything he heard, and you had rather a shock when he unexpectedly repeated snatches of what you had been saying about us."

"I don't believe for a moment that somebody taught him to say those things. If they had been dinned into him Polly would have repeated them again and again, long before he was brought back to Cliff House, and you would have heard him. As it was, Polly just happened to recollect a few things he had heard, and they came out suddenly. We're not exactly green, you know, even though we may be mere silly, giggly girls!"

Harry Wharton was silent. Clara's argument was sound, and how could he dispel it?

"So you've nothing to say!" said Miss Clara scornfully. "It's no use you horrid bounders coming here with your excuses; we have our opinions, and we shall stick to them. And, what is more, we mean to teach you a lesson!"

"You are mistaken!" burst out Harry Wharton desperately. "Miss Marjorie, do you really believe we could say such things about you behind your backs?"

"I agree with what Clara says," replied Marjorie Hazeldene. "You have deceived us wickedly, and I don't wish to speak to you again."

Wharton's brain seemed to reel.

"Marjorie! Do you really mean that?" he cried.

"Yes, Please go!"

"But I can't! I can't, Marjorie! You must believe me! I will get at the truth and prove it to you—"

"That's enough!" interposed Miss Clara. "You bounders deserve a ragging, and now you'll get it! This is where the silly, giggly girls throw you out. Buck up, girls, and drive them from our field!"

Miss Clara commenced operations by jabbing energetically at Johnny Bull with her cricket bat. Johnny staggered back with a yell. The other girls, fired by the spritely Miss Clara's enthusiasm, grasped cricket bats and stumps and bore down firmly on the Removites, using their weapons with great effect. The blows were not hard, and not many hit home, but the determined assault wrought dismay and consternation among Harry Wharton & Co.

Whack! Whack! Whack! went the bats and stumps, and the luckless juniors had to dodge hither and thither. They did not dream of hitting back, of course,

and the capers they cut were neither graceful nor dignified.

Clara & Co. attacked warmly.

"Oh, scissors! Stoppit! Yow-ow!" roared Bob Cherry, who found himself hounded round the field by a trio of lusty girls. Gerraway! Don't play the giddy ox, you know—yah! I'm going—really!"

Bob went, and so did the others! They bolted from the field with great precipitation, with Clara & Co. in chase.

They just had time to scramble on their machines and pedal out of the danger zone for all they were worth. Their feet fairly flew round, and the girls of Cliff House sent up peals of merry laughter after them.

The Removite slowed down when the Redclyffe Lane was reached, and they gazed ruefully at each other.

"Ow! That was awful!" gasped Frank Nugent. "I got a nasty biff on the nose from Miss Limburger. Fancy the Cliff House girls setting about us! It's time for the skies to fall—Yow!"

"They won't listen to reason!" groaned Johnny Bull. "They're up in arms against us now. Isn't it the limit?"

"What did I say?" said Bob Cherry. "You can't argue with girls—they beat you every time. Oh dear! Clara's got the laugh of us now, and no giddy error! I—I'd rather row with lions than with girls."

Harry Wharton gritted his teeth.

"We can't remain on fighting terms with Cliff House—it's impossible!" he said. "Marjorie and Clara will have to listen and believe what we say. Once we can convince them that we're not the rotters they think us, the other girls will fall in line. They all follow Marjorie and Clara."

"Clara especially, it seems!" growled Nugent, tenderly caressing his nose where a cricket-stump, wielded by the exuberant Miss Wilhelmina Limburger, had struck him.

Harry Wharton & Co. pedalled on, and returned to Greyfriars feeling—and looking—very ruffled indeed.

THE EIGHTH CHAPTER.

The Kidnapping of Clara!

THREE days passed, and relations remained very much strained between Harry Wharton & Co. and Cliff House.

Marjorie & Co. simply would not have anything to do with the Removites. Several times Wharton and Hazeldene attempted to plead with the girls, but they refused to listen. They were piqued and angry, and they remained firm in their determination to make the Removites "sit up," as Miss Clara so boyishly put it.

Still no clue to the mystery of the parrot was forthcoming, and it seemed that the estrangement between the two schools would continue indefinitely.

Harry Wharton & Co. missed their girl chums badly, and felt miserable and exasperated. They could think of no way out, until Bob Cherry hit on a desperate ruse one evening when the Co. were at prep in Study No. 1.

He brought his fist down on the table with such sudden force that the inkpot gave a jump, and a flood of blue-black fluid surged all over Nugent's exercise-book.

"You fathead, Bob!" roared Nugent, jumping up in wrath. "Look what you've done to my book! You—you lunatic! You—you—"

"Oh, bother your exercise-book! Quelchy won't see it!" said Bob carelessly. "Look here, chaps, I've got a wheeze to bring the Cliff House girls to reason."

Frank subsided at that, and all looked with great interest at Bob.

"Well, get it off your chest, Bob," said Johnny Bull.

"My wheeze is to kidnap Clara—"

"Eh?"

"We'll kidnap Clara—treating her awfully gently, of course, and letting her wallop into us as much as she likes. She's bound to raise a bit of a shindy over being kidnapped!"

"Ha, ha! I should think she would!" laughed Wharton. "But what's the idea of kidnapping Clara?"

"To give her a good talking to!" said Bob. "So far, we haven't been able to talk over things thoroughly with the girls. They're so jolly wild with us; the silly chumps—ahem!—won't give us a chance to talk. They think they're in the right—"

"We can't blame them for that," interposed Harry Wharton quietly. "We should be just as huffy if that sort of thing had happened to us."

"Yes, but we've got sense enough to listen to reason, I hope," said Bob. "The girls simply won't give us a hearing. I reckon, if we got hold of Miss Clara on her own, and talked to her like Dutch uncles, and pointed out to her how impossible it was for us to have taught the parrot to say those things, we might change her point of view. We'd bring up the giddy past before her and remind her of the happy days of old. We'd make her see that we aren't the rotters she thinks us. Clara's a jolly decent girl—in fact, I'm rather fond of Clara—ahem—"

"We've noticed that before, Bob," grinned Frank Nugent.

Bob coloured deeply.

"Hum! Never mind that, anyway," he said gruffly. "The point is, we've got to kidnap Clara and make her believe what we say. Kidnapping's the thing!"

"Oh, scissors!"

Harry Wharton & Co. did not seem greatly struck by the notion of kidnapping Miss Clara.

"How the dickens can we kidnap Miss Clara, anyway?" growled Johnny Bull. "We'd have the rest of the girls round us like hornets—"

"Oh, I've thought it out!" said Bob. "I heard a little bit of information from Billy Bunter that put the wheeze into my head. Bunter still sees his sister, Bessie, of course, and it appears that Bessie told him that Miss Clara is going over to Latcham this afternoon to see an aunt of hers who is staying there. Miss Primrose gave her special permission, provided Clara returns by the train that arrives at Friardale at five-ten. The arrangement is that Clara reaches Friardale Station at five-ten, and takes the cab straight for Cliff House. Now, do you see how we can kidnap Miss Clara?"

"I'm hanged if I do!" said Nugent. "If you suggest holding up the giddy cab and abducting Clara, you must be off your rocker. It's a busy road, and Clara's bound to scream, and—well, the whole wheeze would fizzle out!"

"Keep your wool on, Franky!" grinned Bob. "That's not my wheeze. I know we don't stand a chance of kidnapping Clara on the main road. But supposing we get the cabby out of the way, and substitute another giddy cab to meet the five-ten train, with myself as cabby? I'd drive Clara off the main road, to a quiet side turning, where we

could surround her and talk to her gently. Now do you see the wheeze?"

"Great pip!"

Harry Wharton laughed.

"Right-ho! We'll try your wheeze, Bob!" he said. "I can't say that I fancy playing that trick on Clara, but she's a sport and won't mind afterwards. We shall have to take care to treat her gently, of course, when she struggles. It would certainly help matters if we could get Clara on her own and reason with her. I'm sure that if she'd give us a chance to speak we could convince her that we've told the truth about that horrible parrot affair. Once we get Clara on our side, she will soon influence the other girls in our favour."

"Then we'll do it!" said Bob. "It will cost a few bob, but we happen to be rolling in filthy lucre, so that's O.K. You chaps can engage the station cab and keep it out of the way, and I'll see old Trotman at the village stables and arrange for the hire of a horse and cab. We've got the necessary traps among our Amateur Dramatic Society things for my disguise. Clara doesn't often come to Friardale Station, so she won't have any suspicion. When you fellows have got the cab out of the way, hide down Briar Lane, and I'll bring Clara down there. That's a nice lonely little spot, and we shall have Clara all to ourselves to give her a good jawing to."

"Good egg!"

The Famous Five eagerly grasped at this desperate ruse as a possible means of clearing up the misunderstanding that existed between themselves and Marjorie & Co.

They took the necessary grease-paints, wig, whiskers, and other materials of masquerade from the Dramatic Society box, and set out for Friardale.

Johnny Bull, Inky, and Nugent chartered old George's ancient hack and drove away in the direction of Courtfield. Harry Wharton and Bob hid themselves into the village jobmaster's, where cabs, and all manner of vehicles, ancient and modern, could be hired.

Certain coin of the realm passed between Bob Cherry and Mr. Timothy Trotman in the stable, and from that moment all was plain sailing. Whilst the stable-boys harnessed a horse between the shafts of a decrepit cab, Harry Wharton assisted Bob in the task of "making-up" as a cabby. For this purpose an aged set of livery was unearthed by the obliging Mr. Trotman, and within a very short space of time Bob Cherry was transformed into a plump, red-faced, and somewhat whiskery-looking cabman.

"You look ripping, Bob!" chuckled Harry Wharton, surveying his chum with great satisfaction. "Now I'll pop off to join the others at Briar Lane, and you can fetch Clara along. Mind how you go!"

"Trust little me!" grinned Bob, clambering up into the driver's box of the cab.

Wharton hurried off, and Bob drove his gothic steed out into the High Street. It was nearly ten minutes past five when he took his stand in the station yard. The appearance of the new cab and cabby was noticed by not a few of the townsfolk, to whom Old George, the traditional Friardale cabby, had become a landmark. But nobody questioned Bob, and he settled himself on the box to await the coming of the five-ten train—and Miss Clara.

The train, as usual, was late; but it arrived eventually, and Bob's heart

gave a bound when he saw the charming form of Miss Clara come tripping out of the station.

Clara looked round, and, catching her eye, Bob touched his old tarred topper in the approved cabman manner.

"Cab, miss?" he croaked. "I've got a good hoss, miss."

"Yes; drive me to Cliff House School, please," said Miss Clara.

Bob bustled down and opened the door for her. He shut it with a bang, and chuckled to himself as he clambered back into the driving-seat.

"Good egg! That's got Clara safe and sound so far. Now for the giddy abduction! Gee up, Dobbin!"

He whipped up the horse gently, and the cab creaked away. Once out of the High Street Bob urged his steed to a faster pace, and the old vehicle rattled and bumped along the Redclyffe Road.

At length Briar Lane hove in sight, and Bob thrilled with expectation. He felt another sort of thrill, however, when he beheld four elegant schoolboy-figures strolling down the Redclyffe Road towards him.

The four were Cecil Ponsonby, the knut of Highcliffe, and his satellites, Monson, Gadsby, and Vavasour.

The sporty dandies of Highcliffe grinned when they saw the cab rattling along the road with its red-faced and bewhiskered driver urging the horse to deeds of valour.

"Looks like a Marathon—what?" said Ponsonby. "Queer-looking cove, that cabby!"

"Oh, absolutely!" said Vavasour.

Pon glanced down, and, seeing in the gutter a turnip that had probably fallen from some passing farm-cart, he picked it up, and grinned at his merry companions.

"Watch me pot the cabby's topper!" he said. "Look out!"

Pon took aim with the turnip as the cab came up. Bob Cherry saw what was imminent, and he ducked his head. But too late!

Biff!

The turnip struck his aged topper amidships and sent it flying.

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared the Highcliffians.

"Right on the wicket, begad!" chuckled Ponsonby. "I—Oh, great Scott! Wh-what the dickens—"

He broke off, and gazed at the "cabby" in amazement. His companions, too, had ceased their mirth, and were gazing at Pon's victim like boys in a dream.

The topper in coming off had dragged Bob's wig down one side of his head, and his whiskers, which were attached to the wig, went right out of position.

Bob's curly head and well-known features were revealed unto the world!

"Oh, jeminy!" gasped Bob. "You—you bouncers! I—"

"Why, it's Cherry of Greyfriars!" shouted Ponsonby. "Dressed as a cabby, by Jove! And he's got Clara Trevlyn in the cab! My word! There's something behind this, and we'll jolly well find it out! Stop that cab!"

"What-ho!"

The four Highcliffe juniors ran out and grabbed the reins. The aged horse was only too willing to stop!

"Buzz off, you rotters!" roared Bob Cherry, glaring down in dismay from the box. "This is no business of yours and—"

He broke off as he saw Miss Clara looking out of the cab window.

Clara's pretty face took on a look of great astonishment when she recognised Bob, bereft of his disguise.

"My goodness! Cherry!" she cried,

and she hurried out of the cab immediately. "You—you horrid bouncer! So you dressed up as a cabman, and waited for me at Friardale! Oh dear! To think that you deceived me like that. You thought you had me in your clutches, you bouncer!"

"I—I—I—" gasped Bob.

Ponsonby smiled serenely. He had heard of the rift in the lute between Harry Wharton & Co. and the Cliff House girls.

"So, Miss Clara, we saved you from falling into the hands of those Greyfriars cads," he said. "Had we not intervened, you would have been in for a ragging. What a rotten trick to play on a young lady!"

"Oh, absolutely!" sniggered Vavasour.

Miss Clara's cheeks went crimson with indignation.

"Yes, I can see the plot now!" she exclaimed. "Wharton and the others are probably waiting somewhere for me, and Cherry would have run me right into their hands! Thank you, Ponsonby, for bowling out this horrible bouncer!"

"Don't mention it, Miss Clara," said Pon. "Now we've got him, we'll give him somethin' of a raggin'—what?"

His cronies grinned with glee.

Bob jumped, up whip in hand.

"Clear off, you Highcliffe rotters!" he exclaimed. "This was only a harmless jape on Miss Clara, and we intended to do her no harm. If you dare come up here I'll give you a taste of this whip—like so!"

"Yaroooooop!" roared Ponsonby, as the stinging leather curled round his shoulders.

The Highcliffians fell back, whilst Bob brandished the whip threateningly.

"Ow! Grab him, you fatheads!" moaned Pon. "We can't let him go and—"

"Hold on!" cried Miss Clara, stepping forward. "Let me deal with Master Cherry. This is my affair, and I mean to give him a jolly good licking!"

"Great pip!"

Miss Clara, her bright eyes gleaming determinedly, looked up at Bob.

"Cherry," she rapped, "drop that whip immediately, and come down here!"

"Look here, Miss Clara—"

"Will you come down, you rotter, or shall I come up and fetch you?" cried Miss Clara.

"Oh crumbs!" moaned Bob. "I—I'll come down, Miss Clara; but—"

"Hurry up, then! I want to have this out with you, Master Cherry!"

Bob laid down the whip and clambered down.

The nuts eyed each other significantly.

They were very much "up against" the Famous Five of the Remove, and an opportunity to rag their enemies did not often come the way of Pon & Co. Usually the boot was on the other foot—Harry Wharton & Co. ragged the Highcliffians—and Ponsonby saw here a chance to give Bob Cherry a thorough ragging by means of retaliation.

They did not care a jot for Miss Clara. At the best of times they were not held much in favour by the girls of Cliff House, and Pon did not intend that Miss Clara should have Bob all to herself.

As soon as Bob reached the ground the Highcliffe juniors swooped forward on him, and Miss Clara was thrust rudely aside.

"Hold him!" panted Ponsonby, as Bob commenced to hit out. "We'll give the cad a tousing and— Yoooooop!"

The Highcliffe knut let out that dismal howl as Bob's hefty fist struck him on

the nose with the force of a battering-ram. The champion fighting man of the Remove lashed out to right and left, and fought his way to freedom.

Then Bob made tracks for Briar Lane. He left the cab to look after itself. He knew that if he could decoy Pon & Co. to where Wharton and the others were waiting, the tables would be turned with a vengeance. So, shedding his wig and whiskers, he dashed down the narrow, leafy lane, and Ponsonby & Co., little dreaming what was in store for them, pounded after him.

Pursuer and pursued having disappeared down Briar Lane, Miss Clara turned away and walked on to Cliff House.

Meanwhile, the wily Bob kept on down Briar Lane.

His ponderous clothing did not allow him the full use of his limbs, and Pon & Co. gained on him. But Bob did not care. He let the Highcliffians pounce on him, and then he let up a lusty, deep-throated shout:

"Rescue, Remove!"

Swift to the summons, Harry Wharton, Frank Nugent, Johnny Bull and Inky came dashing to the scene. Ponsonby & Co. were taken completely by surprise. They had not expected these reinforcements. Before they realised quite what was happening, they found themselves being whirled over on the green sward at the side of the leafy lane, and sat on.

They roared, and kicked, and struggled wildly, but all in vain. The weedy knuts were no match for Harry Wharton & Co.

"Got you, my beauties!" gasped Bob, standing up and mopping his nose, which had received an accidental clump from Monson's boot. "I was the spider, and you were the giddy flies, you know!"

"Gerooooooch!" said Pon. "Geroff my chest!"

Harry Wharton, who was sitting on Pon's chest, looked in amazement at Bob.

"What does this mean, Bob?" he demanded. "Where's Clara?"

"These rotters spoiled the whole show!" said Bob ruefully. "Clara's well on her way to Cliff House by now. We shall never catch her!"

Bob explained what had happened, and his chums gave snorts of wrath and disappointment.

"Never mind," said Bob. "We've got these blighters, and that's a consolation. We'll give 'em a high old time now—what!"

"Hear, hear!"

"Rag the ludicrous rotters bald-headedly, my worthy chums!"

Pon & Co. had a decidedly "high old time" during the quarter of an hour that ensued. They were bumped, and their caps were stuffed down their backs, and they were rolled in the road, and the Removites finished up by hurling the luckless knuts one by one into the ditch that ran along the side of the lane.

There they left Pon & Co. squelching and gurgling in two feet of muddy water and slime, and went back to the Redclyffe Road to retrieve the horse and cab and return to Friardale. Bob resumed his seat on the box, and the others crowded into the interior of the cab, and in this manner the Famous Five returned to Friardale, baffled in their scheme of kidnapping Miss Clara.



"I'm waiting," said Miss Clara grimly. "Come on, Bob Cherry!" "Don't play the goat, Miss Clara!" said Bob. "I'm not going to fight you—"
Tap! Miss Clara's fist landed on Bob's nose and he staggered back. "Ha, ha, ha!" roared the juniors. "Go it, Bob!" (See Chapter 9.)

THE NINTH CHAPTER.

Bob Cherry is "Knocked Out!"

"CHERRY! He, he, he! Where's Bob Cherry?"

Billy Bunter dashed through the Hall door of Greyfriars next morning, fairly bubbling over with excitement and mirth.

The Removites who were standing in the Hall stared in astonishment at the Owl.

"What's on, Bunter?" demanded Bolsover major.

"He, he, he! Oh, this is rich! Where's Cherry? Has anyone seen Cherry?"

"Hallo, hallo, hallo!" said Bob's cheery voice from the direction of the stairs. "Do you want me, Bunter?"

"No! He, he, he! I don't want you, Cherry, but—he, he, he!—someone else does! He, he, he!"

Bob walked in with Harry Wharton and the rest of the Co., and behind them came Squiff, Tom Brown, and the Bounder.

All looked at Billy Bunter in surprise. "What's the fat oyster 'he-he-he-ing' about?" asked Bob. "Is there a joke on?"

"I'm blessed if I know," said Bulstrode. "What's the idea, Bunter?"

"He, he, he! Oh, it's a good joke! Miss Clara's come to fight Bob Cherry!" roared Billy Bunter.

"Wha-a-a-at!"

Bob almost fell down.

"Miss Clara's come to fight me!" he said dazedly.

"Gammon!" said Micky Desmond. "Faith, an' it's ather pullin' our legs ye are, entirely!"

"I'm not!" gasped Billy Bunter. "There's Miss Clara, out in the quad. She's looking for Cherry—to fight him!"

"Oh, jeminy!" The Removites looked out of the Hall door, and there, sure enough, was Clara Trevlyn standing in the quadrangle, surrounded by a grinning group of boys.

Harry Wharton frowned, and Bob's look of stupefaction deepened.

"Come on, Bob!" said the Remove captain. "We'll see what Miss Clara wants."

"My word! She looks properly wound up, doesn't she?" exclaimed Dick Rake.

Harry Wharton & Co. and the others went out to Miss Clara.

She met them with flashing eyes, and when she saw Bob Cherry she took a step forward.

"So there you are, you bounder!" she exclaimed. "I've come to challenge you to a fight!"

"Oh, lor'!" gasped Bob. "Look here, Miss Clara—"

"You must be joking!" exclaimed Harry Wharton.

"I'm not!" retorted Miss Clara. "I've come to avenge the honour of Cliff House and to pay him out for that horrid trick he played on me yesterday! We may be only girls at Cliff House, but we can stick up for ourselves as well as

any boys. Bob Cherry deserves a jolly good licking, and I'm going to give him one if I can!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared the crowd.

"I—I—I say, Miss Clara—" stammered Bob.

"Will you have the gloves on—or off?" demanded Miss Clara.

"Eh?"

"Will you have the gloves on—or off? Don't stand there like a dummy, Bob Cherry! I'm going to lick you!"

"Wh-wh-what!"

"I do believe the boy's stupid!" said Miss Clara. "I've come to challenge you to a fight, Bob Cherry. This is an affair of honour, and I'm going to lick you, or else you're going to lick me. Catch on?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Look here—" gasped Bob bewilderedly.

Miss Clara gave him a tap that would not have hurt a fly.

"That's the coward's blow!" she said. "If you won't fight me, Bob Cherry, you are a coward!"

The crowd, and even Bob's chums, were highly amused. This was a decidedly novel situation, and the look on Bob's face, as Bulstrode was heard to remark to Russell, was "worth a guinea a box."

Harry Wharton stepped forward.

"I say, Miss Clara, you can't fight with Bob, you know," he said. "It's impossible—unheard of! Of course, we admire your pluck, but—"

"Oh, ring off!" said Miss Clara, with a toss of her head. "I'm dealing with Cherry now. Are you ready, Cherry?"

Miss Clara assumed an attitude of defence that almost made the juniors shriek. Bob fell back, his face crimson. Skinner sent up a howl of derision.

"He's running away!"

"Yah! Funk!" screeched Billy Bunfer.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You fatheads!" roared Bob, whirling round. "You know I can't fight a girl; but I'm willing to smash anyone here!"

"You've always fancied yourself as a lady-killer, Cherry, so now's your chance!" grinned Bolsover major, and there was a fresh outburst of mirth.

"I am waiting!" said Miss Clara impatiently. "Come on, Bob Cherry!"

"Don't play the giddy goat, Miss Clara! I'm not going to—"

Tap!

Miss Clara's fist landed on Bob's nose, and he staggered back, blinking. The crowd roared, and Miss Clara assumed a scientific pose of attack.

"Now put up your fists, you boulder!" she said.

"Go it, Miss Clara!" came the shout.

"Wipe up the floor with him!"

"Go in and win!"

Bob raised his arms to plead with the aggressive Miss Clara; but Clara thought that he had started at last, and she ran round Bob and tapped him on the chest, and then on the shoulder, and then on the chin.

Bob scarcely felt the blows, but staggered about in bewilderment, and Miss Clara warmed to her work. The juniors, highly tickled, gave her encouraging shouts and words of advice.

"Use your left, Miss Clara!"

"One for his boko with your right!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Bob wanted to turn and flee, but he knew what a ridiculous figure he would cut, so he dodged about as Miss Clara attacked, and put up his arms to ward off her determined blows.

Biff!

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Miss Clara struck Bob smartly on the nose, and, staggering back, he lost his balance and fell down with a crash.

Choking with laughter, Frank Nugent bent over the prostrate Bob and counted swiftly.

"Nine—ten—out!" he said. "Bravo, Miss Clara! You've won!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Cherry's counted out!"

"Miss Clara's licked him!"

The crowd simply shrieked. Miss Clara stood over Bob, her fists still clenched and her eyes flashing with the light of battle.

"Well, Cherry, have you had enough?" she demanded.

"Yow!" gasped Bob, who had hurt his funny-bone in falling. "Ye-es, I'm done! I give you best, Miss Clara! Grooooooh!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Miss Clara looked round grimly.

"There!" she said. "I've licked Bob Cherry, and I'm ready to fight any chap who cares to stand up to me!"

There was a fresh roar of laughter at this challenge.

Miss Clara was in deadly earnest, but the boys of Greyfriars could not help being amused. They simply could not take Miss Clara seriously.

The champion of Cliff House looked round with a sniff.

"Yes, you can laugh, you bounders!" she said disdainfully. "I thought I should be made fun of. That's really all I should expect from Greyfriars boys!"

"Oh, I say, draw it mild, Miss Clara!" exclaimed Frank Nugent. "We—we're not making fun of you, really! Ha, ha, ha! I mean—"

"Ugh!" said Miss Clara. "You horrid, sniggering little blighters! I have licked Bob Cherry, so I have nothing further to stay here for! I'm going, but before I go I warn you fellows to watch your step in future! We mean business at Cliff House, and we're not going to be made fun of by a silly parcel of brainless and mannerless boys!"

Wharton ran forward as Miss Clara walked away to the gates.

"Don't go, Miss Clara! We want to speak to you—to explain—"

"Let me pass, Wharton!" exclaimed Miss Clara. "I refuse to discuss anything with you! You are a horrible, two-faced, conceited boulder!"

"Oh crumbs, you must listen to us! You're labouring under an awful misunderstanding, and—"

"Boys! What is the meaning of this commotion?"

It was the stern voice of Dr. Locke, and next minute the Head himself came striding on the scene. He looked in surprise from the excited juniors to the warlike Miss Clara.

"Miss Trevlyn, is there anything the matter?" he asked.

"No, Dr. Locke, only that I wish to go," replied Miss Clara. "I have to return to Cliff House immediately."

"Wharton, you must not detain Miss Trevlyn, as she desires to go!" said the Head sternly. "It is not polite to a guest to contravert expressed wishes."

"Oh, my hat!" gasped Nugent.

Harry Wharton stepped aside, and Miss Clara walked on, bidding Dr. Locke a respectful "Good-morning!"

The Head turned to Wharton with a slight frown.

"Wharton, there is a strangeness in Miss Trevlyn's manner," he said. "I hope you have not been—er—quarrelling?"

"No, sir, we have not quarrelled with Miss Clara," replied Harry Wharton, in

a low voice. "We—we had a difference of opinion."

The Head regarded him gravely over the rims of his eyeglasses.

"You should always give in to a lady, Wharton," he said. "I trust you will speedily and amicably settle this difference."

"We shall do so as soon as we can, sir," replied Wharton quietly.

The Head walked away, and Bob Cherry was quickly surrounded by a laughing crowd. Poor Bob took his "defeat" very much to heart. He dispelled the crowd by threatening to punch the head of the first fellow who checked him, and he strode indoors with his chums, looking very red and wrathful.

Skinner, Snoop, and Stott walked into the cloisters together, chuckling at the events that had just passed.

When they were alone in the old ruined chapel Skinner passed cigarettes round, and the young blades lit up.

"I suppose that cheeky cat will go to Cliff House and make out she licked Bob Cherry," grinned Snoop. "Won't the girls crow over it?"

Skinner's eyes gleamed.

"I'd like to make the little minxes sit up!" he said, between his puffs of smoke. "I haven't forgotten the way they showed me up on the river!"

"What can we do to make 'em sit up?" said Stott. "If we start ragging them, Wharton and his crowd will rag us."

Skinner snarled.

"What business is it of Master High-and-Mighty Wharton's, anyway?" he said. "He's too jolly interfering! I'm blessed if I can understand him sticking up for the girls after the way they've been going for him lately. He can go and eat coke! I mean to get my own back on Marjorie Hazeldene and Clever Trevlyn."

"Better keep off the grass, Skinner," said Stott. "It's too risky!"

The three young rascals smoked in silence for some minutes, until, all of a sudden, Skinner gave an exclamation:

"My hat! I've got it!"

Snoop and Stott regarded their leader in surprise.

"Got what?" asked Stott.

"An idea!" Skinner's sallow face took on a crafty look. "We can make the Cliff House girls sit up, and get Wharton and his gang into more hot water at the same time."

"How?" said his cronies eagerly.

"To-night," said Skinner, with a chuckle, "we'll break bounds, cut over to Cliff House, and play ghost!"

"Great Scott!"

"A ghost, prowling about the grounds of Cliff House at dead of night and shrieking would create a bit of a sensation, I reckon!" went on the cad of the Remove. "The girls would be scared stiff, and it would be a fine joke."

"Rather!" said Stott. "But it's a bit risky, Skinner. If we were caught, we'd catch it hot—"

"We needn't get caught!" grinned Skinner. "All the girls and Miss Primrose would be too frightened to chase us, and we'd be able to get away. Besides, I've thought of the risk. We can safeguard ourselves by shoving suspicion on Wharton and his pals. I suggest that you and I work the trick, Stott, and we'll wear Wharton's and Cherry's boots. It's been raining, and the ground is muddy, and we'll get plenty of mud on the boots and leave footprints in the grounds of Cliff House. That will make it a cinch for Wharton and Cherry. Everyone knows that

Cherry wears the biggest boots in the Form, and it will be thought that he and Wharton played ghost at Cliff House to get their own back on the girls. Snoop can keep cave in the dormitory. We've broken bounds many a time before, and I think the trick can be worked. What do you chaps say?"

"I'm game," said Stott, "but you'll have to be the ghost, Skinner."

"All right!" chuckled Skinner. "Then it's settled. To-night the Cliff House girls will get the fright of their lives. We'll make it midnight at Cliff House—that's the hour when ghosts usually walk."

"He, he, he!"

Skinner & Co. proceeded with the smoking of their cigarettes, and discussed the details of their projected "joke" on Cliff House that night.

So engrossed were they with this topic that they did not hear the soft chuckle that sounded now and again from behind one of the large stone buttresses in the chapel.

Their cigarettes finished, the three young scamps departed, and the secret chuckler came out of his hiding-place.

It was William George Bunter.

"He, he, he!" chuckled Billy Bunter, rubbing his fat hands with delight. "So that's their wheeze, is it! My word, isn't Skinner deep! But I'm deeper, I reckon! He, he, he! How lucky I happened to follow those rotters in here to get a cigarette! I know the whole scheme, now, and Skinner can go ahead. But he had better look out, that's all. It won't pay him to kick me or pull my ear next time I ask him to advance something on a postal-order, I know! I'll make Skinner sorry for the way he has treated me, the beast! He'll have to show me some respect now. He, he, he!"

And, thus chuckling to himself, the Owl of the Remove rolled out of the ruined chapel and passed unnoticed into the quadrangle from the cloisters.

THE TENTH CHAPTER.

A Cowardly Jape!

"SHUSH-SH-SH!" said Skinner hoarsely.

He had just clambered down from the lower box-room window, and Stott was following.

Half-past eleven had boomed from the old clock-tower but a few moments ago. All was still and dark, and silent as the grave. Not a light gleamed in the whole of Greyfriars, and not a sound disturbed the darkness, except the occasional sighing of the wind in the old elm-trees in the quad.

Skinner carried a rolled-up sheet under his arm, and both he and Snoop had a pair of boots slung round their necks, tied together by the laces. The boots did not belong to them. Skinner had Bob Cherry's, and Stott had Wharton's.

They stopped to put on the boots, and then they scurried away in the darkness. Keeping well within the shadows, they reached the school wall. Long use had made them adept in getting over the wall from the old oak-tree that grew near it.

Once in the Friardale Lane, Skinner and Stott felt safe.

Keeping a sharp look-out for P.-c. Tozer, they made their way swiftly towards Cliff House.

It was a dark night, the moon being obscured by large masses of black cloud that came up from the sea. The two marauding juniors did not meet a single soul during the whole course of their journey to Cliff House.

"Here we are!" chuckled Skinner, as they came up to the pretty garden gate. "Everyone's asleep, I suppose. Now, Stott, your job is to keep a sharp look-out while I'm working the trick. For goodness' sake don't let anyone see you."

"All right," mumbled Stott. "Hurry up, Skinner; it's c-c-cold."

Skinner vaulted over the fence, and, screened by a large bush, he draped himself in the white sheet he carried.

There was just sufficient moon showing to relieve the intense blackness of the night. Skinner, as he moved about the garden of Cliff House, presented a truly eerie and terrifying figure. Even Stott could not help shuddering as he looked at him.

Skinner walked on the grass, waved his arms, and uttered a blood-curdling shriek.

The cry rang out horribly in the stillness of the night, re-echoing from the school walls, and then dying out gradually, until deadly silence again reigned.

The white-clad figure in the garden moved slowly, arms waving and head drooped forward. Again Skinner uttered a piercing yell that seemed to be a hundred times louder for the darkness and the silence it disturbed.

There were sounds of rustling blinds and creaking windows, and girls' voices, raised in startled tones, proceeding from inside Cliff House.

To and fro Skinner walked, uttering shriek after shriek.

Girlish screams rang out from Cliff House. Lights danced in the windows, and the shadows of swiftly-moving figures were cast on the blinds.

Stott, watching the windows, saw faces appear—girlish faces stricken with terror as they gazed at the white-clad figure in the school garden.

"Skinner!" he cried, as loud as he dared. "Walk behind this bush, and then we'll go! I can hear doors being opened already!"

The ghostly figure passed from the girls' view behind the bush, and was seen no more. Skinner hurriedly dragged off the sheet, threw it down, and bounded over the fence. He and Stott lost no time in making their escape. The sounds they heard from Cliff House told them that their cowardly trick had been successful in casting terror among Miss Primrose's pupils. They ran as hard as they could, and did not slow up until they had put a considerable distance between themselves and Cliff House, and they were panting for want of breath.

"Whew! There's no need to hurry now," gasped Skinner. "We're safe enough, I reckon. I hope the coast is clear at Greyfriars."

The grand old pile of Greyfriars loomed up at last out of the darkness. Skinner and Stott climbed over the wall and hurried round to the back of the building, to the lower box-room window.

Snoop was at the window, and he pronounced that all was clear.

The two marauders clambered up the water-spout, and Snoop assisted them in.

"Well?" he whispered eagerly. "How did it work?"

"A treat!" replied Skinner, with a grin. "You should have heard the girls screaming! I don't reckon they'll get much sleep to-night!"

"He, he, he!"

Skinner & Co. returned to the Remove dormitory, and hastily commenced to undress. They almost swooned with dismay when a soft voice broke through the darkness:

"I say, you fellows!"

Skinner clutched his bedpost for support.

"Bunter!" he ejaculated hoarsely.

"Shush-shs-sh!" said Billy Bunter. "Don't make that row, Skinner, or you'll give the game away, you know."

Skinner licked his dry lips.

"What do you mean, Bunter?" he muttered. "What game do you mean?"

"He, he, he! Your little game at Cliff House, of course. I knew all about it, Skinner—in fact, I've known all along. Mind you put Cherry's boots back where you found 'em."

Skinner's face was livid in the dim light of the moon that shone in through the dormitory window.

"Bunter, you—you spying cad! If you dare breathe a word about what you know, I—I'll limb you!" he hissed.

"Oh, really, Skinner, if you think you can frighten me with your threats, I shall wake Wharton and ask for his protection," said Billy Bunter.

"Oh, crumbs! Look here, Bunter, why don't you go to sleep?" muttered Skinner thickly. "I—I'll talk to you in the morning!"

"All right," said Billy Bunter. "Mind, I shall expect you to treat me as a pal, Skinner. You can rely on me to keep a pal's secrets."

"Hold your row!" gasped Skinner. "Can't you wait till the morning? We can't talk now."

"Well, don't forget what I say!" grunted Billy Bunter.

A few minutes later Bunter's discordant snore burst forth.

Skinner, Snoop, and Stott regarded each other miserably in the gloom.

"So Bunter's spied on us. He knows the truth!" moaned Snoop. "We're done for, Skinner, and—"

"I said it was risky, Skinner!" muttered Stott, whose hands trembled as he untied the laces of Wharton's boots. "Bunter will make the most of this, if he keeps the secret at all. You know what he is. Oh dear, I—I wish I hadn't gone!"

"It was your idea, Skinner," said Snoop. "I'm going to deny having had anything to do with it."

"Oh, hold your row, you fools!" snarled Skinner. "Can't you leave the jaw till morning? We shall have to arrange things with Bunter, that's all. It's bad luck, but it can't be helped."

The three young rascals finished their undressing and crawled into bed, feeling far from happy. The funny side of their great joke on the Cliff House girls had vanished from their vision now, and they saw the serious side instead. The knowledge that Billy Bunter shared their secret filled their minds with apprehension. Skinner fervently wished that he had never conceived that brilliant scheme, and Snoop and Stott just as fervently wished that they had never given him their backing. They looked forward to the morning with foreboding, and dawn had cast its first grey streaks in through the Remove dormitory window before sleep came to Skinner & Co.

THE ELEVENTH CHAPTER.

A Shadow on the Form!

"WHAT'S up?"

That question was on nearly everybody's lips at Greyfriars next morning.

There was something certainly "up."

Miss Primrose had arrived in her carriage almost before the juniors were dressed, looking very grave and agitated.

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and Trotter had escorted her to the Head's study and gone off to find the Head.

Dr. Locke, also looking very grave, had hurried to his study to see his visitor, and after that the Form masters were called to the Head's study. There they remained for some time, until all came out, with the exception of Mr. Quelch. He remained with the Head and Miss Primrose, engaged in discussing—what?

That was the burning question. Why had Miss Primrose driven over so early from Cliff House, what was the reason for her agitation, why had the masters been summoned to the Head, and what was the significance of the fact that only Mr. Quelch, the Remove master, remained in the Head's study now?

The Removites were all concerned, of course. They felt instinctively that Miss Primrose's early morning visit to Greyfriars meant trouble for someone in the Form. That it had some bearing on the recent trouble between Harry Wharton & Co. and the girls of Cliff House they had no doubt. But why had Miss Primrose come so early, and in such a state of agitation? Was anything serious the matter?

The juniors conjured up all manner of theories, both possible and wildly improbable, but it was not until the school assembled in Hall for morning call-over that the mystery came out.

Dr. Locke, his usually kind old face very grave and set, stood up on the dais and faced the school.

"Boys, I have news of most serious import to announce," he said. "During the night a boy, apparently from this school, entered the grounds of Cliff House, and, wrapped in a sheet, posed as a ghost with the intention of intimidating the young ladies in Miss Primrose's charge."

A bombshell, bursting in their midst, could not have amazed the boys of Greyfriars more. A buzz of astounded, incredulous voices arose.

The Head motioned for silence.

"I need hardly say that the news came as a great shock to me when I heard it, and that I take the gravest view of the matter," he went on. "There is no doubt that a boy from this school was responsible for the outrage; in fact, it is believed that there were two, the other an accomplice, who waited outside Cliff House to keep watch. Footprints have been found, and the sheet which the young scoundrel dropped in escaping is one taken from the linen cupboard in the Remove dormitory."

Again there was a buzz in Hall. All eyes were turned towards the Remove ranks.

"The motive for the outrage is apparent," continued the Head, in a low, quiet voice. "It seems that some friction has arisen between certain boys of the Remove and the Cliff House pupils, owing to those boys teaching Miss Primrose's parrot to repeat uncomplimentary remarks concerning herself and her girls. I myself had evidence yesterday that something in the nature of a quarrel existed between the boys of the Remove and one of the young ladies from Cliff House, but I did not attach any importance to it. It seems, however, that one or two boys of the Remove bear towards the pupils of Cliff House a vicious malice, which led them to perpetrate this abhorrent outrage last night."

"No doubt they looked upon it as a joke, and did not realise the seriousness of what they did. I hope I am correct in that conjecture. The results of the

affair might have been very serious indeed, perhaps reaching to tragedy. I am happy to hear from Miss Primrose, however, that her pupils received nothing worse than a severe fright when first being awakened by the intruder, most of the young ladies being too enlightened and level-headed to believe in ghosts.

"That, however, does not lessen the seriousness of the affair. It is a disgrace and a blot on the good name of Greyfriars, which has always stood for manliness and chivalry, that such an outrage should have emanated from here. I call upon the culprit, or culprits, to come forward immediately and own up."

The Removites all looked at one another, but nobody spoke or made any movement.

"It is certain that the offenders will be found in the Remove," said Dr. Locke grimly. "Further proof has been revealed to me by Trotter, who states that when he took the Remove boots down this morning to be cleaned he noticed that two pairs had fresh mud on them, as if their owners had recently been out. It is most unfortunate that the boots have now been cleaned, and Trotter is unable to remember which boots bore the mudstains."

"Oh, my only aunt!" groaned Peter Todd. "Who are the rotters? Why don't they own up?"

Dr. Locke's grave eyes swept along the ranks of the Remove.

"Once more I call upon the culprits to confess!" he said. "I need hardly remind you that the longer it takes to elucidate this matter the more severe shall be the culprits' punishment."

There was a tense silence in Hall.

Would the culprits confess?

Skinner & Co. put on an elaborate air of carelessness when Harry Wharton looked at them. Billy Bunter's plump visage was wreathed in a knowing grin, but this vanished when he saw Vernon-Smith's keen eyes fixed on him.

There was not a stir from the Remove ranks.

It was evident that the offenders did not intend owning up.

The Head's look became graver.

"Very well," he said at length. "The culprits will be unmasked eventually, and then their punishment shall be most severe. Meanwhile, the whole of the Remove Form shall be kept within gates until the mystery is solved, or the perpetrators of the outrage confess their guilt. I trust the young rascals, whoever they are, will consider their folly. No Remove boy will be allowed to leave the school premises until this affair is settled. School will now dismiss."

The Removites trooped from the Hall in a foment of excitement.

Words of wrath and dismay sounded from all sides.

"Gated!" ejaculated Russell. "The whole Form gated until the culprits own up! Oh crumbs! That's a bit thick!"

Harry Wharton and his chums went to the Common-room, where a crowd of Removites had already gathered.

All eyes turned to the Remove captain when he entered the room.

"Now, then, Wharton, it's up to you!" exclaimed Bulstrode. "The whole Form's gated, and the rotters who played that trick at Cliff House last night have got to be found out. You're Form captain, and it's your job to clear the matter up."

"Hear, hear!" chorused the other Removites.

Wharton's face was clouded.

"I wish I could clear it up," he said. "It was a rotten, cowardly trick to play

on the girls, and the cads who are responsible ought to be kicked out of Greyfriars. Goodness knows what the Cliff House girls must be thinking of us now!"

Bolsover major strode forward, a grim look on his rugged face.

"I suppose you don't happen to know who the culprits were, Wharton?" he asked meaningly.

Wharton flushed.

"If I knew, Bolsover, I should go to the Head at once," he retorted. "What are you driving at, anyway?"

"Oh, nothing!" said Bolsover dryly. "Only I happened to spot a couple of pairs of muddy boots in the dorm early this morning when Trotter was doing his rounds. One pair came from your bed, Wharton, and the other pair from Cherry's."

"You lie!" shouted Bob fiercely. "My boots weren't muddy! I never went out at all last night!"

"Don't you think I know your boots, Cherry?" said Bolsover, with a grim laugh. "Why, they're the biggest in the Form. I say that your boots and Wharton's were muddy. Now, how do you account for that?"

Wharton's breath came sharply, and he clenched his fists.

His eyes blazed at Bolsover.

"You cad! If you dare accuse Bob or me of having anything to do with that affair at Cliff House—"

"I wasn't accusing you," said Bolsover evenly. "I just wanted to know how your boots became muddy, that's all."

"But they weren't!" exclaimed Wharton passionately. "Neither Bob nor I left the dormitory last night after we had gone to bed—that I'll swear!"

Bolsover's words, however, made a deep impression on the Removites.

Dark, suspicious looks were cast at Harry Wharton and Bob, and low mutterings went on.

Was it possible, the juniors asked themselves, that the Remove captain and his chum had perpetrated that grave outrage at Cliff House during the night, as a cowardly means of retaliation on Marjorie & Co.?

Such conduct was so unlike Wharton and Cherry. Many of the Removites, indeed, scouted the suspicion at once. Yet Bolsover maintained that the muddy boots he had noticed in the dormitory that morning belonged to Wharton and Cherry. Bolsover was not on particularly friendly terms with the Famous Five, and there were traits in his character which left much to be desired, yet it was not probable that Bolsover would go to the length of telling deliberate lies to incriminate Wharton and Cherry in such a serious matter.

Soon the whole Lower School was talking about Bolsover's revelation, and the cloud of suspicion hung over Wharton and Bob Cherry.

Skinner, Snoop, and Stott breathed more freely when they saw how suspicion had been detracted from themselves.

The three young rascals were seated in Study No. 11 that morning when a tap sounded at the door, and Billy Bunter insinuated his fat form into the room.

Skinner & Co. gave him most unwelcome glares.

"What do you want, Bunter?" growled Skinner.

"Oh, really, Skinner, that isn't the way to greet a pal, you know," said the Owl. "I just popped in to see whether you could advance me something on a postal-order I'm expecting from one of my titled relations. Ten bob would do for now, old chap."

Skinner scowled.

"You—you rotten toad, Bunter! You've come to screw money out of us, you mean!"

Billy Bunter blinked indignantly through his round spectacles.

"Really, Skinner, if that's the way you look at it, I shall refuse to accept the loan!" he said, with considerable dignity. "Of course, my pal Wharton would oblige me. If you would rather I went to Wharton, Skinner——"

"Stop! Come back, you fat cad!" cried Harold Skinner, jumping up as the Owl turned to go. "Don't go to Wharton! I—I think we can manage it for you!"

Billy Bunter turned back into the study, and Skinner interposed himself between him and the door.

"Now, Bunter," he panted, "let us have an understanding! You spied on us yesterday, and I suppose we shall have to pay you hush-money. We'll pay you what we can to keep your fat mouth shut, but you won't have things all your own way."

"Wh—what do you mean, Skinner?" said the Owl nervously, for there was a threatening note in Skinner's voice.

"I mean, that you aren't entirely in safe water yourself, you fat rotter!" hissed Skinner. "It was you who worked that trick with the parrot at Cliff House, and started all the trouble. It was your rotten ventriloquism, Bunter, and you can't deny it!"

Billy Bunter went quite pale.

"I—I say, Skinner, you've got no proof of that, you know," he stammered. "I've got proof that it wasn't me. Loder and Carne and Walker saw me at the mill at the time the parrot was talking and——"

"Bosh!" snapped Skinner. "That won't wash with me, Bunter. I know Loder as well as you do, and I've been watching you these past few days. I had my suspicions from the first that Loder was telling lies for you, and I kept my eyes open. I'm pretty pally with Loder, you know, and I often run down to Friardale to get fags for him. I've seen you skulking round him, trying to borrow money, and I guessed that something was in the wind. What's more, I happened to run into Jerry Hawke yesterday, and he told me of certain dealings he had with Loder that afternoon when Loder was supposed to be down by the river. Loder, Carne, and Walker never went near the river, and neither did you, Bunter. You have been telling lies for each other."

Billy Bunter blinked at Skinner in dismay.

"Oh crumbs! Look here, Skinner, if you tell Wharton that——"

Skinner interrupted with a sneering laugh.

"I shouldn't have told on you, Bunter," he said. "In fact, I rather enjoyed seeing Master High and Mighty Wharton cut by the Cliff House girls. But I've got the hold over you, and you'd better mind how you go. Mark my words, if you breathe a word about last night I'll put Wharton on the track of the truth about the parrot!"

"Oh dear!" gasped the Owl of the Remove. "You—you've got no proof, Skinner——"

"Wharton wouldn't have much trouble in getting proof, though!" retorted Skinner. "So that's nipped your little game in the bud, Bunter. You'll have to be content with half-a-crown for now, and let me warn you not to come sponging on us or claiming friendship in front of the others. Once Wharton gets suspicious, the game's up."

"All right!" growled Billy Bunter. "Gimme the half-crown, Skinner."



The white-clad figure in the garden moved slowly, arms waving and head drooped forward. Again Skinner uttered a piercing shriek that seemed to be magnified a hundred times. There were sounds of rustling blinds, and creaking windows, and girls' startled voices from inside Cliff House. (See Chapter 10.)

You're a low-down, mean rotter, but half-a-crown will do."

Skinner tossed him the half-crown, and the Owl rolled from the study, growling.

He thrust the coin into his trousers-pocket as he went down the passage. And Vernon-Smith, happening to glance out of his own study and seeing Bunter emerge from Skinner's room, nodded significantly to himself and smiled.

THE TWELFTH CHAPTER.

The Bounder Thinks It Out!

GATED!

The Remove, to a man, were furious over the Head's edict.

Gosling had orders to prevent all Removites from leaving the school, and the prefects were told to keep a strict watch for breakers of bounds.

To the high-spirited boys of the Remove, their confinement within school walls was almost like being in prison. They chafed at the restriction on their liberty, and Harry Wharton found his position in the Form becoming increasingly difficult.

A day passed, and the mystery of the midnight outrage at Cliff House remained as deep as ever.

The Famous Five were hit particularly hard by the affair.

They went about the school with miserable, woebegone expressions. Half the Remove, believing them to have some

knowledge of the mystery, shunned them.

The Co. were discussing matters in Study No. 1 the following evening when a tap sounded at the door. Vernon-Smith came in.

"You fellows look blue, I must say," he remarked.

"Can you wonder at it?" snapped Bob Cherry crossly. "The whole of Cliff House and half Greyfriars look down on us. The worst of it is, we're quite innocent of anything. You're a cute card, Smithy. Can't you do something to clear up this horrible business?"

"That's just what I have been doing," said the Bounder quietly. "I've been watching points, and I'm convinced that Bunter knows more about the affair than he chooses to tell."

"You don't mean that you suspect Bunter of playing ghost at Cliff House at midnight?" exclaimed Harry Wharton. "You're offside there, Smithy. Bunter wouldn't have the nerve!"

"I don't think Bunter had anything to do with that, but I do believe he knows who the culprits are," said the Bounder. "He and Skinner have been as thick as thieves just recently. Yesterday morning, when the Head told us in Hall what had happened, I spotted Bunter grinning, as though he knew something. His expression changed when he saw me watching him. Soon after that I saw Bunter leave Skinner's study putting some money in his pocket."

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I followed Bunter, and he went straight to the tuckshop and blued half-a-crown in tarts and ginger-pop. Now, ten minutes previous to his visit to Skinner Bunter was broke. The question, then, arises—why did Skinner give Bunter money? It's not usual for Skinner to be liberal with cash—especially to Bunter. There's something underhanded going on in those quarters."

The Famous Five looked eagerly at the Bounder.

"My hat! Then you think, Smithy, that it was Skinner who went to Cliff House to play ghost, and Bunter knows all about it, and Skinner is paying him to keep it dark?"

Vernon-Smith nodded.

"That's about the size of it, I reckon," he said. "Bunter's in the know, and he's working hand in glove with Skinner."

Bob Cherry jumped up, clenching his big fists.

"Let's find Bunter!" he roared. "We'll larrup the fat rotter till he confesses! We—"

"That won't do, Bob," interposed the Bounder, in a quiet voice. "You'll have a job to lay hands on him, and I don't think thrashing him will do much good yet. What we want is proof—something to justify us in thrashing him. Now I've got an idea that may work a confession out of Bunter."

"What is it, Smithy?" asked the Co. eagerly.

"We'll send Bunter a letter from one of his supposed rich relations," said Vernon Smith, with a chuckle. "The letter will contain an invitation to Bunter to meet the imaginary relation at Courtfield, to have a feed and receive some tin. That will do the trick! Bunter will nearly burst with excitement when he gets that letter. But before he has time to show it to anybody, I'll sneak it from him and destroy it. Bunter will apply to the Head for leave to go to Courtfield to meet a rich relation who is going to give him some money. He won't have the letter to show, and the Head will think he's romancing as usual, and, of course, he won't allow Bunter to break the gating. Bunter will get desperate then. He'll do anything to get over to Courtfield to meet this rich relation he has never heard of. And then I'll put it to him that if only the culprit would confess, the gating would be cancelled, and he would be free to go to Courtfield and rake in the shekels. I reckon that will make Bunter blow the gaff on Skinner—what?"

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Harry Wharton & Co.

They were greatly smitten by the Bounder's deep scheme.

They set to work at once, and composed a letter to Billy Bunter. Vernon-Smith wrote it in a disguised hand, and afterwards gave Dicky Nugent half-a-crown to cycle over to Courtfield and post it.

Thus it came about that the following morning Billy Bunter received the surprise of his life.

Vernon-Smith saw him under the elm-trees, and hurried up, holding the letter which he had taken care to abstract from the rack as soon as the postman had arrived.

"Letter for you, Bunter!" he said.

"Oh, good!" said the Owl. "I expect that's my postal-order. Gimme it, Smithy!"

The Owl ripped the letter open, and blinked at it. Vernon-Smith, watching

his face, saw it undergo a variety of expressions as he read the following:

"Dear Billy,—Perhaps you have never heard of your Uncle Theodore, the third Earl of Bunter. The earldom is not a well-known one. I am very anxious to see my nephew Billy, and should like you to come to Courtfield Station tomorrow afternoon (Wednesday) at 3.30. We can have a feed together, Billy, and you wouldn't object to accepting a hundred pounds or so, I suppose, from a long-lost uncle? Do not fail to come to Courtfield, or you may not hear from me again.—Your affectionate,

"UNCLE THEODORE."

Billy Bunter's little round eyes opened wide as he read this.

He drew a deep breath.

"Mum-m-my word!" he gasped. "What ripping luck! The third Earl of Bunter—my Uncle Theodore! He's going to give me a hundred pounds or so this afternoon! Oh, my word! This will open the chaps' eyes! It'll make 'em look small! They've made fun of me and my rich relations, but they'll laugh the other side of their faces when I tell 'em about this! I say, Smithy!"

"Hallo!" said the Bounder, edging very close to the Owl.

"This is from the Earl of Bunter—my uncle, you know!" said Billy Bunter proudly.

"Go on!" said Smithy, looking impressed.

"Yes, and I've got to meet him at Courtfield this afternoon at 3.30, and he's going to stand me a whacking feed and a tip of a hundred quid or so!"

"Whew!" whistled the Bounder. "That's rotten luck for you, Bunter!"

Billy Bunter blinked. "Rotten luck?" he said. "I reckon it's jolly good luck!"

"No. I think it's hard cheese on you, Bunter," said Vernon-Smith, with a sad shake of the head. "You won't be able to meet your uncle, after all. The Remove's gated, you know."

"Oh, crumbs!"

Billy Bunter looked alarmed.

"I say, Smithy, do you think the Head will let me go?" he said.

The Bounder shook his head again.

"You can bet your boots he won't, Bunter!" he said. "I'm afraid it's good-bye to your hundred quid or so!"

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"Oh, we shall see!" said Billy Bunter, who was simply quivering with excitement. "I'm jolly well going to meet my uncle this afternoon, Smithy! Why, he expressly states in his letter that if I don't turn up this afternoon, I may never hear from him again. I must go!"

Billy Bunter thrust the letter into his pocket and walked away.

Vernon-Smith hurried to his side and linked arms with him.

"What about a few tarts, Bunter?" he said affectionately. "I'd like to hear more about your rich uncle."

"No, I can't stop for tarts now," said Billy Bunter recklessly. "I want to see the Head, to get his permission to go to Courtfield this afternoon. Leggo my arm, Smithy; I'm in a hurry!"

The Bounder released Bunter's arm and strolled away, whistling.

Little did the Owl dream that the letter from his "long-lost uncle" had been deftly extracted from his pocket, and was now back again in the possession of Herbert Vernon-Smith!

THE THIRTEENTH CHAPTER.

All Clear!

THE Owl of the Remove dashed straight indoors. He ran full tilt into Bob Cherry and a number of other Removites at the top of the steps.

"Hallo, hallo, hallo!" said Bob. "What's all the excitement over, Bunter? Have you come into a fortune?"

"Yes!" gasped Billy Bunter. "I've got an appointment to meet my uncle, the Earl of Bunter, this afternoon. He's worth millions, and he's going to look after me!"

"Gammon!"

"Tell that to the Marines, Bunter!"

"It's true, I tell you!" exclaimed Billy Bunter. "I've got the letter to prove it! Look!"

He groped in his pocket, and a look of surprise crossed his face. Juniors were gathering round interestedly.

"Well, where's the letter, Bunter?" asked Johnny Bull.

"I—I've lost it!" gasped Billy Bunter, when he had turned out all his pockets. "Oh dear! I must have dropped it!"

He dashed back the way he had come, blinking about in all directions for the letter. But of that letter there was no sign! Billy Bunter searched desperately, and almost tearfully enjoined the assistance of his schoolfellows, but all to no purpose.

The letter had vanished like a glorious dream!

"Well, that settles it!" said Bob Cherry, with a grin. "Bunter's been trying to spoof us! That letter was bluff!"

"It wasn't!" howled Billy Bunter wildly. "I received a letter from the Earl of Bunter, I tell you, asking me to meet him at Courtfield Station at 3.30 this afternoon. The wind must have blown it away."

Harry Wharton & Co. shook their heads disbelievingly.

"It's no go, Bunter!" said Frank Nugent. "You can't spoof us! You might try it on the Head, but I don't think you'll spoof him, either."

"Oh, dear! Where's that letter? Oh, dear!"

Billy Bunter, giving up all hope of finding the letter, went up eagerly to see the Head. He emerged from the Head's

(Continued on page 27.)

CONVICT NO. 839 The booming of a signal gun denotes that a desperate man has made a bold bid for liberty. The warders, rifles in hand, are scouring the countryside, but the fugitive is too clever for them. Who is that man?



The SPORTING DETECTIVE

THE FIRST CHAPTER.

Under cover of the Storm!

BOOM! Between the intermittent crashes of thunder that shook the island to its foundations, made more hideous by the vicious flashes of lightning that lit up the countryside for miles round, rolled the deeper, more significant note of the signal-gun from Parkhurst Prison.

Every inhabitant of the Isle of Wight who heard its reverberating note involuntarily shuddered. Well they knew its meaning; well they knew that some poor fellow with a brand upon him had made a reckless bid for liberty.

Boom!

The vivid flashes of lightning revealed hurrying figures in the region of the massive walls that encircled Parkhurst Prison. From the lookout-tower beamed a powerful searchlight that swept its circular way the entire boundaries of the prison. In the occasional lull of the storm that swept the island like a devastating cyclone came the hoarse voices of the warders, as, rifles in hand, they spread out fanwise, their trained eyes searching every bit of cover for the fugitive.

Boom!

It was surprising now how the feelings of the people who heard that oft-repeated message from the signal-gun underwent a change. With few exceptions, they were hoping that the fugitive would make good his escape. Anyone, anything, that could live out of doors that wild night deserved to go free.

The trees bent to the force of the gale, their branches quivering at every fresh crash of thunder. Straining at their roots in protest, they contributed to the prevailing din on that never-to-be-forgotten night.

It was colossal, terrible, awe-inspiring!

And through it all, with clenched teeth, strained face, and failing energy, struggled Convict 839. Bent almost double, he panted along, content to run with the wind at his back. His hands were bleeding from several superficial cuts, his face was smeared with daubs of crimson, as, ever and anon, he swept his hand before his eyes to shut out those searching, terrifying flashes of forked lightning.

Whether he was going he knew not; where he was he knew not either. That he must now be at least a mile and a half from those hated prison walls was the main thing. And to pile up mile

after mile on that good start was his purpose.

He smiled grimly as he forged on in the cover of a hedge that lined the road for a considerable distance. He would cheat them—he would cheat these representatives of the law if it killed him. Never would he go back to that living death they called Parkhurst.

And the elements seemed to favour this tall, gaunt fugitive. Thunderous crashes from the heavens above took a lot of the keenness out of the warders, as they trudged the countryside, the rain streaming off their uniforms unceasingly. How they cursed Convict 839, how they cursed the night, the darkness, the lightning—everything.

Calling to each other at frequent intervals, they forged on, knowing in their innermost heart that Convict 839 had been too clever for them. He had at least half an hour's start, and the frenzy of the storm to shelter him. Their footsteps flagged with every passing minute: it was like hunting for a needle in a haystack to seek this fugitive. The morrow would bring him back exhausted, repentant mayhap, for few indeed had ever dwelt within the walls of Parkhurst Prison who had escaped and lived to enjoy their freedom for any length of time.

And Convict 839—what of him? He plugs on determinedly, a growing feeling of confidence, of thankfulness, taking root in his breast. The night was in his favour. Not a living soul did he pass; he was alone with the storm and his freedom.

Now he was better able to fix his bearings: he was racing almost parallel with the river—the Medina—and towards its mouth. He eased up a bit and dug his left hand into his ribs to quell the insistent protests of an over-worked heart. The lines of pain in his face gradually smoothed out, the throbbing of his temples abated; his eyes cleared, the fear of the hunted fugitive was dying out.

He grimaced to himself as his eyes ran over his tell-tale uniform. He must rid himself of that at the first possible chance. The booming of the signal-gun growing fainter now seemed to amuse him. He laughed, actually laughed, as if the whole thing were a good joke.

"Seven years' penal servitude," he growled. "Seven weeks of that living death was enough for me. I'll never go back—I'd sooner die first! I'm a desperate man!"

He dwelt on the latter words harshly. He was a desperate man. He had tasted liberty—was tasting it.



Still the storm raged on. The thunder grew in volume whilst, strangely enough, the lightning abated. It was for all the world like a partnership between them to help this man to escape. Occasionally came the crackle of a rifle-shot, as a warder loosed off at the flickering shadows which he took to be Convict 839.

But the hunters were far in his rear. Suddenly there loomed up a large brick-built bungalow, its lighted windows speaking eloquently to Convict 839 of the comfort that reigned within, of the disinterestedness of its occupants whether one or a dozen convicts escaped from gaol that night.

"Up late!" murmured the fugitive. "Perhaps they are waiting for me."

He laughed unnaturally, and made for the bungalow, keeping within cover of the trees that lined its immediate vicinity. That movement saved him from capture, did he but know it.

He had been traversing a parallel path with the river which meant the railway as well. Already the news of his escape had been flashed along the telegraph-wires, and police were watching the railway at various likely points—watching in vain.

With infinite caution the fugitive approached the bungalow, becoming conscious now of the cold eating into his bones, of the hunger that was racking him. One window attracted him more than any other—a long, french window, that gave admittance on the one side to a small stretch of lawn.

He approached it like some grim shadow. His hands clutched the wall of the bungalow as he moved along in its shelter, listening, listening.

From within occasionally came a muttered voice as of a man speaking his thoughts aloud. Peering through the half-inch gap between the blind and the

window-frame, the fugitive saw a grey-haired individual seated at a table, pen in hand.

"A vicar, by all the saints!" muttered the fugitive. "Writing his sermon for Sunday, I'm bound. A vicar—ho, ho!"

Something tickled his sense of humour as he crouched there, for he could not restrain his laughter. Then that gaunt, hungry-looking face became grim and calculating. It was borne in on him that he was still a wanted man, with a hall-mark for every one to see in those broad arrow-marked garments.

His hand reached out and tried the knob of the french window. Wonder of wonders, it turned to his pressure! Softly, inch by inch, the window was drawn open. The man at the desk continued to bite the end of his pen and matter to himself, for the moment unconscious of the near presence of another.

But a sudden gust of wind lifted the papers on the table, and it was then that he looked up in the direction of the window.

"What—what—"

He rose to his feet uncertainly, his eyes wide open in astonishment, his mouth agape. There, framed in the window, stood Convict 839, a tattered, drenched, mud-bespattered relic of humanity in the tell-tale broad-arrow suit!

"O-o-oh!"

The ecclesiastical gentleman, for his cloth proclaimed him such, might have been gazing upon a vision.

The fugitive by the window advanced a pace, shut the window carefully behind him, as carefully drew the blind. Then, with studied insolence, he threw himself into a cosy armchair before the hearth, and held out his frozen hands to the blaze.

The clergyman still remained on his feet, but his astonishment was gradually forsaking him. Anger was fast taking its place.

"How dare you?" he rapped out at last, and his hand wandered towards a bell-push.

"I shouldn't give the alarm, if I were you," said the fugitive in the armchair quite casually, "otherwise your congregation will never hear that sermon you've been preparing."

Quite casual, and yet what a world of hidden meaning in the words! The vicar's hands shook in rage and affright. His will already was subservient to this unannounced visitor. He must temporise.

"My dear man, you look half-starved," he said, with a forced smile. "Let me get you some food."

He made a movement towards the door, but something in the glance his visitor gave him warned him that he was treading dangerously.

"I shouldn't bother," said the fugitive. "I'll have those sandwiches there on the sideboard, and a glass of something."

"Yes, yes, of course," murmured the vicar, retracing his steps. "You look positively ill."

He handed over a plate of sandwiches and shakily poured out a glass of wine. The convict ate the sandwiches with relish, occasionally looking up at his host with a cynical smile.

"Vicar, you're here on earth to rescue humanity, are you not?" he asked at length, and not waiting to hear his host's reply, he rattled on. "Well, you're going to help me. You're going to be the good Samaritan. You're going to lend me a suit of clothes, a

pair of decent shoes—oh, and one of those sky-pilot collars—"

"I shall do nothing of the kind, my man," returned the vicar hotly. "You are an escaped convict, and it is a criminal offence to assist you. My clothes, indeed! Get you ready to be handed over to the authorities. And—here, what—what—"

He broke off into a startled gasp as the fugitive bounded from the chair and seized him roughly.

"You do as I ask, or," growled the convict, as he shook the terrified clergyman like a rat, "there'll be no sermon on Sunday. Savvy?"

The vicar was obviously afraid, as well he might be, for Dr. Worsfold was a meek and mild gentleman, little used to the savagery of a man in circumstances such as now enveloped Convict 839.

He allowed himself to be stripped of his coat and trousers without a cry of resistance, and had the doubtful pleasure of seeing his visitor don his garb before the crackling fire.

Ten minutes later there emerged from the french window a tall figure in clerical attire that was a trifle on the small side to be a perfect fit. In the room beyond sat Dr. Worsfold, in his underclothes, securely tied to his own armchair, and ineffectually trying to dislodge an improvised gag that had been forced into his mouth.

The thunder rolled across the heavens, the lightning crackled with renewed ferocity, still determined it would seem to shelter this fugitive in lamb's clothing.

A more vivid flash than any of its predecessors lit up the pierhead at Cowes half an hour later. It showed distinctly enough the silhouetted figure of a man in clerical attire clambering aboard a powerful motor launch, that rocked idly with the lap of the waves. Another flash showed that same figure cutting the painter, while a third saw the motor launch heading out to sea, en route for Southampton.

Then darkness settled like a gigantic curtain over the whole scene.

Convict 839 had found his liberty!

In Lamb's Clothing!

"HUM!" The silence of the cosy sitting-room at Ferrers Locke's chambers in Baker Street was rudely disturbed by that ejaculation. It proceeded from Jack Drake, Locke's clever boy assistant, who had buried himself behind a copy of the "Evening News."

"Time you were off to bed," said Ferrers Locke, pulling away at his favourite briar and treating his assistant to an amused smile. "You'll be missing your beauty sleep."

"But Drake was too intent upon studying the paper to pay heed to his chief's remarks or to the fact that the clock on the mantel signalled the hour at half-past twelve.

"Hum!"

For the second time that ejaculation seemed to burst out from the very depths of the armchair.

"Which means?"

Ferrers Locke blew out a curl of blue smoke and gazed across the hearth.

"Another feather in the cap of Monty Manners—"

"Ah!"

Ferrers Locke's finely-chiselled features took on a new expression at mention of the name. Gone was the tiredness,

natural after a hard day's work, for Montague Manners—to give him his full name—had become a serious rival for honours in the highly skilled and dangerous profession of crime detection.

"Regular splash about him in the paper to-night," said Drake from the depths of a comfortable armchair. "They're making an awful fuss of him just because he was lucky enough to recover Lady Mondane's necklace."

He tossed across the paper as he spoke, which Locke dexterously caught. From the print stared out a photograph of a young man of about twenty-eight, whose well-oiled hair, his "toothbrush" moustache, his large, mischievous-looking eyes, were in striking contrast to the determination conveyed in the mould of the chin and the mobile mouth—a mouth which gave the double impression of strength and weakness, according to the fancy of the owner.

Montague Manners! The name was underneath the photograph. This seemed hardly the face of a man well versed in crime detection—in criminology. And yet Manners' record, brief though it was, was one which many a professional detective engaged at the game all his life had strived to achieve, and yet hadn't come within a mile of.

A Society man—that was how the newspaper scribes referred to him—a cricketer of exceptional ability, immensely popular with the people that counted, and a man born to achieve great things. Montague Manners, to those outside his circle, Monty—plain "Monty"—to those within it.

"Nice-looking fellow!" The compliment came through Locke's lips spontaneously as he gazed at the picture. "He's got a wonderful future before him."

"You'll have to look to your laurels, guv'nor," said Drake slyly. "The papers are already hinting that this Monty-merchant will oust you from popularity."

"Tut, tut, my boy!" smiled Locke indulgently. "The tree of success is large enough for us all. Good luck to him! I must make it my business to meet him."

"Expect you'll meet him much sooner than you think," muttered Drake, not knowing what prompted him to voice the words.

"Well—"

Locke's remark remained unuttered, as the telephone bell whirled its shrill note. Drake jumped to his feet and took hold of the instrument.

"Hallo! Hallo! Oh, that you, Pycroft? Hold on a minute!"

The boy detective motioned to his chief.

"Inspector Pycroft wants a word with you, guv'nor!"

Ferrers Locke took up the receiver and conversed for three minutes or more with his colleague at Scotland Yard. There was a serious expression in his intellectual features as he faced Drake again.

"Bad news, my boy!" was his laconic remark. "Convict 839 has escaped from Parkhurst."

"Who the thump is Convict 839?" demanded Drake, with a laugh.

"An old friend of yours, Jack—Dr. Fourstanton!"

"Eh?" gasped the detective's assistant. "Did you say Fourstanton?"

"I did," said Locke grimly. "He escaped from Parkhurst prison at half-past eleven to-night—or rather, last night, for it is morning now. The authorities reckon that he's got away to the mainland, as there's a fast motor-launch missing from Cowes Pier."



Dr. Worsfold rose to his feet uncertainly, his eyes wide open in astonishment, his mouth agape. There, framed in the window, stood Convict 839, a tattered, mud-bespattered relic of humanity in the tell-tale broad arrow suit. (See page 22.)

"But the old scoundrel has only been in quod a few weeks," exclaimed Drake. "Escaped—"

"Oh, there's no mistake, my lad," said Locke grimly. "He had the storm in his favour, too. Pyecroft reckons it was one of the quickest get-aways ever known."

"The clever old dog!" said Drake grudgingly. "I really thought we had seen the last of Dr. Fourstanton for a few years. Seems as if we shall have all the trouble over again. There's no other cracksman like him in this country."

"Yes; once he's shown the police his heels Fourstanton will need a devil of a lot of catching," muttered Ferrers Locke reflectively. "You'll have to 'ware Fourstanton, my lad; he swore he'd do for you when you put him in the dock at the Old Bailey."

Drake laughed.

"Shan't lose any more beauty sleep on that account," he chuckled. "I've had all the praise for putting a stop to the notorious motor bandits, and of capturing their leader, and now I shall have to take the other side of the picture."

Ferrers Locke did not reply. He was examining a pile of newspaper cuttings and reading the report of the famous criminal case in which Dr. Fourstanton had figured a few weeks back.

"I see, from this cutting," he remarked at length, "that Fourstanton swore he'd get even with Justice Barling—"

"That's the merchant who sentenced him to seven years' penal servitude," said Drake.

"Hum! Strange! Strange—"

"What's strange, guv'nor—"

"Why, the fact that Lord Justice Barling is celebrating his sixtieth birthday

to-night, and to-night Dr. Fourstanton—the man who had sworn to get even with him—takes it into his head to escape."

"You don't imagine that there's connection between the two events, surely, guv'nor?"

"Not for one moment!" was Ferrers Locke's reply. "And yet the coincidence is an interesting one."

He replaced the file of newspaper cuttings, reloaded his pipe, and settled himself in one of the armchairs. That his active mind had fastened on some fresh train of thought Drake could see, for the boy had learned to read the signs, as it were, where his master was concerned.

It was quite on the cards that Ferrers Locke would remain in that armchair all night long, pulling away at his briar and thinking—thinking. On such occasions Drake was wont to leave his chief severely alone, and now, as he caught the look on Locke's face, the lad rose to his feet and moved across to the doorway.

"Good-night, guv'nor! I'm after getting some of that beauty sleep."

"You need it!" muttered the sleuth, with a faint grin at his own joke.

The door slammed, and the famous detective was left alone with his thoughts—and his pipe. One o'clock, two o'clock, chimed out, three o'clock, and the figure in the armchair never moved save to replenish the bowl of his briar.

Dr. Fourstanton's escape was causing Ferrers Locke some uneasiness; though why it should do so puzzled no one more than it did Locke himself.

At exactly twenty minutes to three a high-powered limousine drew up at No. 77A, Eaton Square. Everyone in the

district knew the famous old Georgian mansion to be the residence of Lord Justice Barling. Indeed, anyone passing at that early hour in the morning would have recognised the man at the driving-wheel of the car to be Randolph Chertsey, the famous criminal judge's favourite nephew.

His companion in the car was a tall, thin-faced individual in clerical attire.

"Here we are!" said Chertsey, pulling off his driving gloves. "Better late than never. The old man will be pleased to think that I've not forgotten it's his birthday to-day."

His companion of the clerical attire beamed upon him and then looked interestedly at the old house from which came a blaze of light and the occasional strains of music.

"I must thank you for the lift, my dear sir," he said at length. "It was most fortunate—most fortunate that I should run into you at Southampton. Otherwise I should have had to wait until the morning."

"Oh, don't mench!" said Chertsey good-naturedly. "We were bound the same way, and I was jolly thankful for your company, I assure you. Your friends in the Square will be delighted to see you before time, as it were, eh?"

"Indeed they will!"

"But won't you come in and partake of a little refreshment before you go?" asked Chertsey, swinging his arms to restore his circulation. Motoring from Southampton in the small hours of the morning was cold work. "You look a trifle blue with the cold."

"You are very kind," answered the clerical gentleman, with a hard gleam in his eyes, however. "If I am not intruding—"

"Tut-tut!" laughed Chertsey. "Come THE MAGNET LIBRARY.—No. 902."

in and meet the old man—Barling—Lord Justice Barling, the Johnnie who gives people umpteen years' hard labour or something. Expect you have heard of him."

"Oh, yes!" replied the clerical gentleman, and the gleam in his eyes was more pronounced than ever. "Everyone knows him—by repute, at least."

He followed the stalwart figure of Randolph Chertsey up the massive stone steps of the house. A slight smile played at the corners of his mouth which would have puzzled Chertsey could he have seen it.

Lord Justice Barling himself came forward to welcome his nephew.

"This is an unexpected pleasure, my dear boy," he said, warmly shaking his nephew by the hand. "I've a whole house full of guests. All night dance, you know. But how is it—"

"Oh, I got special shore leave from my ship," explained Chertsey, anticipating his uncle's question. "Instead of waiting until the morning and—"

He broke off as his uncle's glance dwelt inquiringly upon the tall gentleman in clerical attire who stood at a respectful distance from them both.

"Oh, let me introduce you to a friend!"—Chertsey hastened to break the uncomfortable silence. "The Reverend—er—er—"

"Worsfold," said that individual himself with a benevolent smile.

"Oh, ah, yes, Worsfold—this is my uncle, Lord Barling!"

The famous old criminal judge glanced at his nephew's companion and extended a hand.

"How do you do?"

"Pleased to meet you," said Worsfold suavely. "I fear that I am intruding—"

"Not a bit of it," Lord Barling hastened to put his nephew's companion at his ease. "Come in. Any friend of Randolph's is most welcome, I assure you."

The trio walked into a cosy study, and his lordship ordered some refreshment for his visitors. He wondered why it was Randolph's ecclesiastical friend forgot to remove his hat, and he put it down to absentmindedness. Had he known that that particular hat sheltered a close-cropped head of hair that had prison barbering written all over it, he would have understood several things that were to puzzle him within the next half-hour.

For one, how came it that the Reverend Worsfold's suit was three or more sizes too small for him? How was it that his hands were coarse and rough? And the stubby beard—

Lord Justice Barling, who was politeness personified, checked his inordinate desire to ask these questions of his nephew, and instead turned all his attention to discussing shipping news.

The "Reverend Worsfold"—who was none other than Convict 839—meantime looked about him with interest, noting the expensive pieces of ivory that stood upon ebony plinths at intervals in the room, the cabinet full of antique Chinese silverware, the old bronzes, the oil-paintings by famous old masters that graced the walls.

And strange as it may seem, he felt no fear of the imposture he was playing, of the big risk he was running with every passing second. In his daring brain a plan was taking root. He would get even with the man who had sent him to a living death of seven years' penal servitude.

Fate seemed to play into his hands. THE MAGNET LIBRARY.—No. 902.

Randolph, with a laughing remark, rose to his feet and closed the door of the study, remarking that the noise of the band made conversation difficult. A few minutes later he pulled a serviceable-looking revolver from his pocket and passed it to his uncle.

"You're an expert in crime, uncle," he smiled. "You will observe that five of the six chambers contain live bullets—the sixth contains a spent cartridge. I picked it up out East—near Alexandria. Wonder what sort of history it would reveal could it talk?"

His uncle smiled indulgently.

"You youngsters are too imaginative," he remarked. "Don't you think so?" he added, glancing in the Reverend Worsfold's direction.

"Yes, and no," replied that gentleman evasively, at the same time bestowing a look upon the revolver that prompted the judge to pass it to him. "Some young men are fools. Ah!" His hand closed upon the revolver. His voice became hard and dry. "And now I'll trouble both of you to put your hands up."

He fingered the revolver menacingly, his steely blue eyes hardened, his air of benevolence had departed.

"What—" began Randolph sharply.

"My dear sir," remonstrated Lord Barling. "If this is your idea of a joke, then I must say that I disapprove strongly—"

"'Tis no joke, you old scoundrel!" rapped the clerical gentleman harshly. "Put your hands up, or I'll drill you both where you sit. Put them up!"

Slowly, ever so slowly, Lord Barling's hands went above his head. His nephew with a hopeless glance followed suit.

"Ah, thank you!" rapped Worsfold. "In that position you will stop until I give you permission to shift. And, having you there, I am able to dispense with this cursed imposture."

He growled out the latter words grimly.

"What's the game?" demanded Randolph Chertsey, as his late companion moved across the room, still with the revolver levelled, backed against the door and turned the key in the lock.

"You're the game," came the sibilant reply. "Your accursed uncle sent me to gaol for seven years. At the time he passed sentence I swore I'd be avenged. I'm here to fulfil my word at last."

"Then you're not—"

"My name is Fourstanton—Dr. Fourstanton," said the arch-criminal proudly. "Take a closer look at me, Lord Barling. See what seven weeks in one of your accursed prisons does for a robust man. Do you recognise me now?"

Lord Barling peered closely at the gaunt face, and then started.

"Dr. Fourstanton—the motor bandit chief," he muttered thickly. "I recognise you, you scoundrel!" He turned a sorrowful face upon his nephew. "So this is the type of man you chum up with, eh?"

"But you surely don't believe that I knew this rogue's identity, uncle?" said Randolph wildly. "I only met him down at Southampton a couple of hours ago. I took him for what he represented himself to be—a hard-up vicar visiting some sick friends in Eaton Square, and anxious to get to London before morning."

"You shall not misjudge your nephew, Lord Barling," came the escaped convict's mocking voice. "It is even as he has said. For your enlightenment, let me inform you that I escaped from Parkhurst Prison at half-past eleven last night. At the time, I didn't know that your lordship was celebrating his

sixtieth birthday; neither did I dream that I should have the good fortune to bump into his nephew and get a free lift to town. But Fate, once so unkind to me, has now turned in my favour!"

"You scoundrel!" Lord Barling trembled with rage. "You shall go back to Parkhurst—and without delay!"

"Don't raise your voice!" hissed Dr. Fourstanton. "I'm a desperate man. Sooner than go back to that living death I'd swing for it! Do you hear? If there's any opposition from either of you I'll make the swinging worth while! You've got everything to lose; I nothing. Keep a still tongue, I beg of you!"

The judge's mouth opened, as if to make some remark, but he closed his lips in a thin, straight line and waited. He knew he was dealing with a stick-at-nothing character, and resistance would serve him little.

"I want money," said the escaped convict harshly. "I want all the money you have about you. Come, out with it!"

Reluctantly Lord Barling drew a well-filled wallet from his pocket and tossed it to Dr. Fourstanton. His nephew, after hesitating a few seconds, emptied his pockets.

"Many thanks," smiled the escaped convict. "This little lot will tide me over a few days. Ah! What is there of interest in that corner?" he said banteringly, as he followed Lord Barling's gaze. "A safe, by all the saints! Really, I shouldn't have thought it, your lordship!"

Still with the revolver levelled at his prisoners, the desperado walked across the room and studied a clever piece of carving that seemed to be part of the wall. That it was the secret opening of a large safe of some sort he saw at once, for this particular piece of panelling was not flush with the rest of the wall. Evidently his lordship had been busy in that corner of the room only a short time back, for Dr. Fourstanton saw a small ashtray on a stand in which reposed the still smouldering remains of a cigar.

With a sudden movement he pulled at the edge of the panelling. It moved to the touch, revealing a large cavity behind it in which were stacked bundles of papers—apparently stock and share certificates.

"Ah, a haul!" said Dr. Fourstanton softly. "This is luck indeed! I'm sorry to relieve you of a few negotiable shares, my lord, but my needs are more pressing than your own at the moment!"

"You scoundrel!" retorted Judge Barling. "You shall pay dearly for this!"

Dr. Fourstanton laughed grimly.

"You have but to call your servants," he said mockingly. "And we'll make a pretty tableau for them. Why don't you risk it?"

"I am not a fool!" rapped Lord Barling. "I know you for a murderous rogue. Take what you will now, but there will be a reckoning later!"

He shook his head vigorously at his nephew, who was tempted to make a fight for it, bullet or no bullet. One could lose stocks and shares and make them up some other way, but life is only given once, and there is no compensation.

"Kindly come this way," said Dr. Fourstanton mockingly. "I don't want to take away a lot of useless stuff. Perhaps you will be good enough to sort these bundles for me?" As he spoke his hand closed upon the butt of a revolver that lay on one of the shelves of the safe. Stealthily and unobserved, he slipped it into his hip-pocket.

Lord Barling bit his lip, winked slyly at his nephew, and walked towards the



Unsuspectingly, Lord Barling stepped forward. Even as he did so, Dr. Fourstanton gave him a push that sent him staggering. Next moment the hinged door of the safe slammed to. Lord Barling was a prisoner in his own safe!

(See this page.)

safe. He was going to take a chance. He remembered now that he had left a revolver on one of the shelves. If he could but lay his hands upon it, he would turn the tables on this impudent rogue yet. Aware that something was "on," Chertsey followed his uncle.

Dr. Fourstanton stood behind the hinged panel of the safe, and invited his lordship to enter. He knew what was passing in his mind, and thanked his lucky stars that he had spotted the revolver in time.

Unsuspectingly, Lord Barling stepped forward. Even as he did so Dr. Fourstanton gave him a push that sent him stumbling forward. Next moment the hinged door of the panel had been slammed to.

Lord Barling was a prisoner in his own safe!

"You scoundrel!" Randolph Chertsey started forward, only to fall back again as the shining muzzle of the revolver rested within a couple of inches of his heart. "You cunning hound!"

"Thank you for the compliment!" smiled Dr. Fourstanton. "He'll be safe there for a couple of hours or more, I'll be bound."

"But he'll die of suffocation!" cried Chertsey.

"He'll do nothing so rash," smiled Dr. Fourstanton. "There's a small ventilator grille at the back of the safe—enough air passes through that, I reckon, to keep even a judge alive!"

From within the safe now came the muffled sounds of someone calling; but unless one were listening for such sounds, they would pass unnoticed.

For a moment Dr. Fourstanton's eyes lingered gloatingly on the outer door of

the safe, and in that moment Randolph Chertsey allowed his pent-up rage an outlet. With a savage spring he clutched the escaped convict round the throat, sending the revolver spinning, and all but choked him. Taken off his guard as he was, Fourstanton, however, soon had the upper hand. His muscles were like whipcord. Chertsey, although a muscular young man, was as putty in his hands.

With a savage coolness the escaped convict forced his adversary on the floor of the room, giving him a buffet that knocked him senseless. Then, with a jerk at a curtain, which came down in a rush from the window, Dr. Fourstanton proceeded to tear it into strips and bind his captive.

He went about his task calmly and coolly. He smiled grimly as the soft strains of the music from the big ball-room beyond floated through the interstices of the door.

He rose to his feet at last, and stood staring down at the bound and gagged figure of Randolph Chertsey. Then, aiming a playful kick at the young man's prostrate figure, the escaped convict proceeded to fill his pockets with the valuable pieces of ivory and silver with which the room abounded. That done, he moved towards the door, listened against the panels for a moment or so, and then unlocked it.

The passage beyond was for the moment deserted. With a grim chuckle Dr. Fourstanton relocked the door and moved towards the hall. He halted by the cloak-room, and, seeing that the attendant was away from his post, he slipped out of his clerical's overcoat, which was uncomfortably small for him, and helped himself to a large grey overcoat.

"A fair exchange," he chuckled.

And while the fun in the ball-room was at its height Dr. Fourstanton, alias the Reverend Worsfold, took his departure unnoticed.

And he went as he came—in Randolph Chertsey's motor-car!

Rivals!

FERRERS LOCKE was still pulling away contentedly at his briar as the clock on the mantel struck the hour of four a.m. He frowned as he noticed how long he had sat in the armchair meditating. And yet, late though the hour was, he had a foreboding that sleep would be denied him that night.

Something untoward was in the air, of that he felt certain.

The tiny hands on the dial of the clock had moved to five past four, when the silence of the study was broken abruptly by the discordant shrieking of the telephone-bell.

Ferrers Locke discarded his pipe and rose to his feet, a glitter in his steely, blue eyes.

"Hang that bell!" he grunted. "It's pitched on a very unpleasant note. Sounds like a cheap bicycle-bell."

He gripped the receiver in his strong, slim hands as he spoke, and cut short the "remarks" of the offending bell.

"Hallo? Yes, yes, Ferrers Locke speaking. Who's that?"

For the space of the next few seconds the world-famous sleuth contributed only monosyllables to that telephonic conversation. But there was a tightening of his lips and an unusual glitter in his eyes as he replaced the receiver on the hook and crossed the room.

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"So my premonition was well-founded," he reflected, as he slipped into an overcoat. "Dr. Fourstanton has visited our old friend Barling. Confound the man! He's going to give me a lot of trouble, I feel sure!"

Leaving a scribbled note on the table for Drake's benefit, the detective donned his hat and trod silently down the stairs to the street below. Hailing a belated taxicab, he ordered the driver to drop him at Lord Barling's house in Eaton Square.

Fifteen minutes later the sleuth was walking up the steps of the grand old house, to be met by Lady Barling.

"My dear Mr. Locke," exclaimed her ladyship, almost tearfully, "I am so glad you have come—so glad! It has been terrible!"

Ferrers Locke smiled kindly at Lady Barling, and his assurance had the effect of soothing her ruffled nerves.

"I am yours to command, Lady Barling," said the world-famous sleuth gallantly. "I gathered from your phone conversation that Dr. Fourstanton, who escaped from Parkhurst, had the audacity to visit this house and rifle it."

"Yes. And the arch-villain had the audacity to imprison my husband in his own safe!"

Ferrers Locke's eyebrows elevated a trifle.

"Indeed!"

"And render my nephew unconscious, whilst he rifled the house of all the jewellery and articles of value that he came across."

"The scoundrel!" It was policy for Locke to make such a remark. It fitted in so well with her ladyship's obvious distress and anger. Usually, though, the world-famous detective spared himself and others those superfluous remarks. They lead to nothing, after all.

"My husband is being attended to now," went on her ladyship. "And Randolph—that's my nephew—who has recovered from his attack, has sped hot-foot after this—this Dr. Fourstanton in a fast motor-car."

"Hum! I'm afraid your nephew will be wasting his time," remarked Ferrers Locke. "I take it, then, that Dr. Fourstanton escaped by car, too."

"Yes. The villain had the unparalleled audacity to help himself to Randolph's car!" said her ladyship, wringing her hands. "What—what on earth are we to do, Mr. Locke?"

"For the moment," said the sleuth gravely, "nothing, except think."

"Think," said Lady Barling scornfully. "You detectives are all like that. Oh, I beg your pardon, Mr. Locke," she hastened to add. "But this terrible affair has thoroughly unhinged me!"

"I understand," came the genial response. "By the way, my lady, am I officially engaged to handle this case, or—"

"You mean, you think it strange that I, instead of my husband, should ask you to come over and help us?" broke in Lady Barling. "To tell you the truth, my husband has engaged Monty Manners, but I have all a woman's distrust of Monty Manners' business intellect," she added, under her breath. "He's a very likeable young man, a delightful cricketer, and all that, but as a detective—" She shrugged her shoulders, more expressive of her opinion than words.

Ferrers Locke smiled.

"I shall respect your confidence and your opinion, Lady Barling," he said, with a twinkle in his eye. "So it really comes to this—that I am opposed to

Montague Manners in this case concerning Dr. Fourstanton. It will be rather interesting to see who gets this arch-criminal first. I have yet to sample the merit of London's latest detective."

There was a slight sneer in the latter words that rang strangely from a man like Ferrers Locke. A woman would at once have said that he was jealous. Well, Ferrers Locke was no ordinary man, but he certainly felt a tinge of ordinary jealousy when Montague Manners' name was mentioned.

"And now I should be pleased if you would give the details of the affair as you know them, and some idea of the articles stolen, your ladyship," said Ferrers Locke.

Forthwith, Lady Barling acquainted the detective with the facts concerning Dr. Fourstanton's advent at the house, and the manner of his meeting with Randolph Chertsey.

"And you say he rifled the contents of the study?" said Ferrers Locke, as Lady Barling concluded.

"Yes. And then apparently he went all over the house, taking whatever he fancied."

"And where were all the servants?" asked Ferrers Locke.

"They were either in bed or attending to the guests in the ball-room," explained Lady Barling. "We have kept the affair secret from the majority of the guests. They are dancing in there"—she indicated the ball-room—"oblivious, thank heavens, of what's been going on."

"And who first raised the alarm?"

"My butler. I sent him up to the master's room for something or the other," said her ladyship. "When he returned, it was to say that the room had been turned inside-out. Immediately, I rushed upstairs with Lady Wentley, and to our horror we found every room in a similar state—ransacked."

"And was not the absence of Lord Barling noted during all this time?"

"Apparently not," said her ladyship. "But the moment I had seen things for myself, I sent for him. The butler returned to say that the door of the study was locked, and from within he could hear noises like someone groaning."

"We forced open the door, and there, as you know, we found my nephew. A moment later and my husband, who was well-nigh exhausted, was taken from the safe."

"Hum!" ejaculated the sleuth, more to himself than aloud. "Tell me, Lady Barling, have any of the guests departed?"

"Up to the present no one has left," explained her ladyship. "Although a Colonel Jameson wanted to leave at half-past three."

"And why didn't he leave?"

"He couldn't find his overcoat," said Lady Barling. "It's got mislaid in the cloak-room, and, rather than make a fuss, the colonel decided to stay until the finish. We breakfast at five," she added, with a smile.

"Quite so," agreed the detective. "Will you kindly conduct me to the rooms upstairs?"

Lady Barling turned on her heel and led the way up the main staircase. Each room that had been ransacked was carefully examined by Ferrers Locke. It was in Lord Barling's room that he finally came to a halt. For some minutes he stood staring at a tiny silver clock, the glass face of which was

cracked in several places. The hands of the clock pointed to a quarter to four.

For some minutes the sleuth gazed hard at it, until Lady Barling's voice broke in.

"We picked that clock up off the floor by the door," she explained. "Evidently the thief dropped it in his anxiety to get away. You can see it has stopped, and that the glass is broken."

"Quite," returned the sleuth, and there was a gleam in his eye. "I see it stopped at a quarter to four. Was that clock recording the correct time, do you know, before it happened to smite the floor, Lady Barling?"

"It was a good timekeeper!" retorted her ladyship. "There is no reason to suppose that it was either fast or slow, if that's what you mean. I—ahem!—gave that clock to my husband myself."

"Then it would be a good timekeeper, I'm sure," smiled Locke. "Hum! A quarter to four. Tell me, what time did your butler discover that the place had been ransacked?"

"Exactly five minutes to four," said Lady Barling. "But why—"

"I'll explain later," smiled the sleuth easily. "I would like to interview your cloak-room attendant, if I may?"

"Most certainly."

Lady Barling led the way downstairs to the hall, where, at the far end, was a fairly large alcove set apart as a cloak-room. A liveried footman was in attendance there. He rose to his feet as the detective approached. Lady Barling left the detective and the footman in conversation.

"And have you found Colonel Jameson's coat yet?" asked the sleuth pleasantly.

The footman's face clouded for a moment.

"I can't find it anywhere," he returned. "It seems to have disappeared entirely. Yet the strange fact remains that I have a spare coat here."

Ferrers Locke looked up with interest. "A spare coat?" he repeated. "What exactly do you mean?"

"Why, sir, Colonel Jameson's coat was a grey one, and the spare coat is a black one, like a clergyman favours—"

"Ah, go on!"

"And it hasn't a label on it," continued the amazed attendant. "I always pin a ticket, with the name of the guest, on each garment, to prevent mistakes."

"Then if you have a coat without a ticket on it, my man, it means that someone has left it there without your knowledge," said Ferrers Locke through half closed lids.

"Exactly, sir!"

"Which means that you have left your post during the morning, eh?" asked Locke sharply. "Come, come! It's obvious, isn't it? That coat is not a magic carpet to float in without being seen."

"Well, I did leave this room to get a drink," said the footman, crimsoning.

"And do you happen to remember the time you did that?"

The footman considered for a moment.

"A quarter past three, sir," he answered. "I remember now, I came back a couple of minutes before the half-hour."

"I'd like to have a look at that coat," said Ferrers Locke.

The coat was handed to him. A glance at the "tag" inside the collar revealed the name of a firm of well-known tailors in the Isle of Wight.

"I suppose you saw Mr. Chertsey's

(Continued on page 28.)



(Continued from page 20.)

study ten minutes afterwards, looking almost frantic.

The Famous Five were waiting for him at the end of the passage.

"Well, Buntie," grinned Nugent, "did the Head swallow your yarn?"

"No, he wouldn't believe me!" moaned the weebegone Owl. "He—he gave me five hundred lines for impertinence. Just think of it! He said I was impertinent to expect him to believe such a trumpery story!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I won't stand it!" howled Billy Bunter wrathfully. "I'm telling the truth, and if I don't go to Courtfield this afternoon I shall lose hundreds of pounds! The Earl of Bunter is—ahem!—so eccentric, you know."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"If the Head won't give me permission to go, I shall break bounds!" said Billy Bunter darkly. "I jolly well mean to be at Courtfield by three-thirty!"

"It's no use trying to break bounds, Buntie," said Bob Cherry. "The whole Remove is gated, and we shall see that you stay in with the others."

Billy Bunter blinked at the Famous Five in dismay.

"You—you mean that you'd stop me, you rotters!" he gasped.

The chums of the Remove nodded solemnly.

"If you try to break bounds against orders, Bunter, it will be our duty to stop you!" said Harry Wharton.

"The stopfulness will be terrific!"

"Look here, I'll give you chaps a quid each to help me escape!" said Billy Bunter desperately. "I don't mind a licking when I get back, but I must go to Courtfield. It may mean thousands—or even millions—to me!"

The Co. shook their heads.

"Tempt me not, corrupt mortal!" said Bob Cherry severely. "We scorn your bribes, Bunter!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I say, you fellows—"

"There's only one hope for you, Bunter, if you want to get out of Greyfriars this afternoon," said Harry Wharton.

"Eh—what's that?" said Billy Bunter eagerly.

"Find the chap who played ghost at Cliff House the other night, and denounce him!" said the Remove captain solemnly. "Once the mystery of that affair is cleared up, the Head will call off the gating, and you will be free to meet your alleged uncle this afternoon, and rake in the giddy shekels."

Billy Bunter started.

"Is that—is that the only way, you fellows?" he gasped.

"It is the only way, Bunter," said Harry Wharton. "And you'll have to buck up, too, if you are to denounce the culprit. Get your mighty brain to work and solve the mystery."

Billy Bunter's eyes gleamed with the light of desperation. He was ready to go through fire and water to get to Courtfield that afternoon to meet the "Earl of Bunter." He would stop at nothing—not even the safety of Harold Skinner and the hazard of a flogging himself. In his mind's eye Billy Bunter

imagined his "long lost uncle" simply rolling in wealth, and eager to lavish it upon him. Visions of unlimited tuck, untold tarts, and unnumbered doughnuts came before him. What did it matter if Skinner did set Harry Wharton & Co. on the track of the truth of the parrot business? What did the wrath of Skinner & Co. and Harry Wharton & Co.—and even the whole of Greyfriars—matter, beside those glorious prospects of paradise on earth?

He turned and walked back towards the Head's study.

"Where are you going, Bunter?" asked Harry Wharton.

"I'm going to tell what I know!" said Billy Bunter. "I've known all along who worked the ghost trick at Cliff House. It was Skinner!"

"Great Scott!"

"I heard Skinner, Snoop and Stott plotting it between them!" said Billy Bunter. "Skinner put on Cherry's boots, and Stott wore Wharton's, and they went down to Cliff House that night, while Snoop kept cave in the box-room. I know, because I watched 'em go, and saw 'em come in. I've been shielding Skinner so far, but now I consider it my duty to make the facts known. I'm going to the Head now!"

The Owl of the Remove tapped at the Head's door, and entered.

Harry Wharton & Co. and the other Removites exchanged glances.

"Then it was Skinner all the time!" exclaimed Bulstrode. "Oh, the rotten cad! Let's find Skinner!"

"Skinner! Where's Skinner?"

An infuriated throng set out to hunt for Harold Skinner & Co.

Those youths were discovered in their study, indulging in a quiet game of nap. It seemed to them that an earthquake had taken place, when the avengers swarmed into the room.

"Now we've got the rotters!"

"Rag them baldheaded!"

"Spillicate the cads!"

"We'll teach 'em to play tricks like that on girls!"

"Here, what the— Yarooogh!" howled Skinner, as he found himself whirled over in many hands. "Leggo! You chaps are mad! What's the game?"

"Bunter's confessed!" roared Bolsover major. "He's given you away, Skinner! We know the truth, now, and we're going to make it hot for you!"

Skinner's face went almost green.

"What? Bunter has—has given me away!" he stuttered. "It isn't true! The fat rotter was lying! I—Yow! Yah! Hands off! Yarooogh!"

The angry Removites gave Skinner & Co. no quarter. They could tell, from Bunter's manner that he had for once spoken the truth. They proceeded to rag Skinner & Co. baldheaded.

The ragging was at its height when Wingate looked in.

"My hat! What are you little sweeps up to?" he exclaimed. "Where's Skinner?"

"Yarooooogh! Yar! Gerooogh!" came Skinner's voice, in muffled accents from beneath a pile of juniors.

"Let Skinner go!" said Wingate sternly. "The Head wants him, and Snoop and Stott."

The Removites stood up, and the three black sheep were revealed, sprawled on the floor in a dishevelled and battered state.

A grim smile played round the school skipper's mouth.

Skinner & Co. limped after Wingate, gasping.

Great was the sensation throughout Greyfriars. Billy Bunter had revealed the truth of the midnight affair at Cliff House. The Remove, especially, felt

gratified. It was Wednesday and a half holiday, and the Head was bound to rescind the gating immediately.

Harry Wharton thrilled when Trotter came up to him in the Hall, and announced that the Head wished to see him at once.

Skinner & Co. and Billy Bunter were with the Head when the Remove captain entered the study. Dr. Locke regarded him gravely over the rims of his eyeglasses.

"Ah, Wharton, you will be glad to know that Skinner has confessed to having perpetrated that outrage at Cliff House," he said. "In the circumstances, I shall withdraw the order I made prohibiting the Remove from leaving gates, and you may convey that intimation to your Form-fellows."

"Oh, thank you, sir!" exclaimed the Remove captain jubilantly.

"That is all, Wharton. Skinner and Snoop and Stott, who acted as his accomplices, shall receive the punishment their wicked conduct merits. Bunter, also, shall receive a caning for having shielded them with the intention of defeating the ends of justice."

Harry Wharton left the Head's study, and imparted the glad tidings to the crowd of Removites who were waiting outside. Sounds of a swishing cane, proceeding from Dr. Locke's dread apartment, came to their ears soon afterwards, and these sounds were followed by the mellifluous voice of Billy Bunter, raised in accents of woe.

A few minutes later Bunter appeared. He was gasping and moaning, and his hands were tucked tight beneath his armpits. Nobody felt the slightest sympathy for the suffering Owl; indeed, Bolsover major and a few others said that for two pins they would take Bunter out and duck him in the fountain in the Close.

Skinner, Snoop, and Stott followed Bunter some minutes after. They, too, were uttering doleful sounds, and they seemed to fold themselves up in the manner of penknives. The caning Dr. Locke had given them had evidently been very severe.

But Bunter's troubles did not end with a caning. He discovered that his uncle, the earl, was an imaginary being—as, indeed, were all of Bunter's aristocratic uncles—and that there was no "hundred quid." But if there wasn't a hundred quid for Bunter, there was certainly a record ragging, for Skinner, having now no further use for Bunter's silence, promptly gave him away.

Then the fat was in the fire with a vengeance. Polly's talkativeness was now fully explained.

Without loss of time Harry Wharton & Co. rushed Bunter over to Cliff House, and forced him to explain matters to Miss Primrose. There were profuse apologies on both sides, and Marjorie Hazeldene and her girl chums were soon on the old friendly footing with Harry Wharton & Co.

When the Removites got to know the full extent of the plot, Bunter and Skinner & Co. were ragged unmercifully. It was a lesson they were not likely to forget in a hurry.

The next day Harry Wharton & Co. prepared an extra special feed in Study No. 1 in honour of some extra special visitors—the visitors being Marjorie & Co. It was a feed of reconciliation, and marked the end of the Feud with Cliff House.

THE END.

(Now look out for "Sports Week at Greyfriars"—next week's topping school story, boys.)

THE SPORTING DETECTIVE!

(Continued from page 26.)

companion—the reverend gentleman?” said Locke casually.

“Oh, yes!”

“Has he left the house yet?”

“Not to my knowledge,” replied the attendant.

“Did you hear a car drive off in the region of four o’clock?”

“No, sir—only when Mr. Randolph dashed out at ten past four.”

There was a thoughtful smile on Locke’s face as he returned the coat. Then, with a few pleasant remarks to the footman, the sleuth rejoined Lady Barling. Her ladyship was the centre of a small group

His lordship shook hands warmly with Ferrers Locke, and then he hastened to introduce Montague Manners.

“You haven’t met Mr. Manners, have you, Locke?” he asked, smilingly. “Mr. Manners—Mr. Locke. Both of an honourable profession, eh?” He chuckled at his own wit. “You mustn’t be offended, Locke, because I’ve given a ‘case’ to this hardworking detective, you know. After all, you’re a busy man.”

“But I’ve engaged Mr. Locke, too,” broke in Lady Barling, womanlike. “A lot of my jewellery is missing, you know,” she added, with a smile.

“Monty—we always call him that”—explained Lord Barling, “was just

theorising the whole robbery over again.”

“Indeed,” said Ferrers Locke, with a twinkle in his grey eyes.

“Yes, he reckons that Fourstanton was about ten minutes turning out the place after he had laid out my nephew. Monty reckons, too, that the scoundrel left by the back of the house—”

“And what is your theory?” said Lady Barling, turning to Ferrers Locke.

“With all due respect to Mr. Manners,” said Locke quietly, “my theory is that Dr. Fourstanton has had nothing to do with this robbery at all. He certainly hasn’t been in the rooms upstairs—of that I am positive!”

(Don’t miss next week’s instalment of this fine mystery story, boys.)



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