

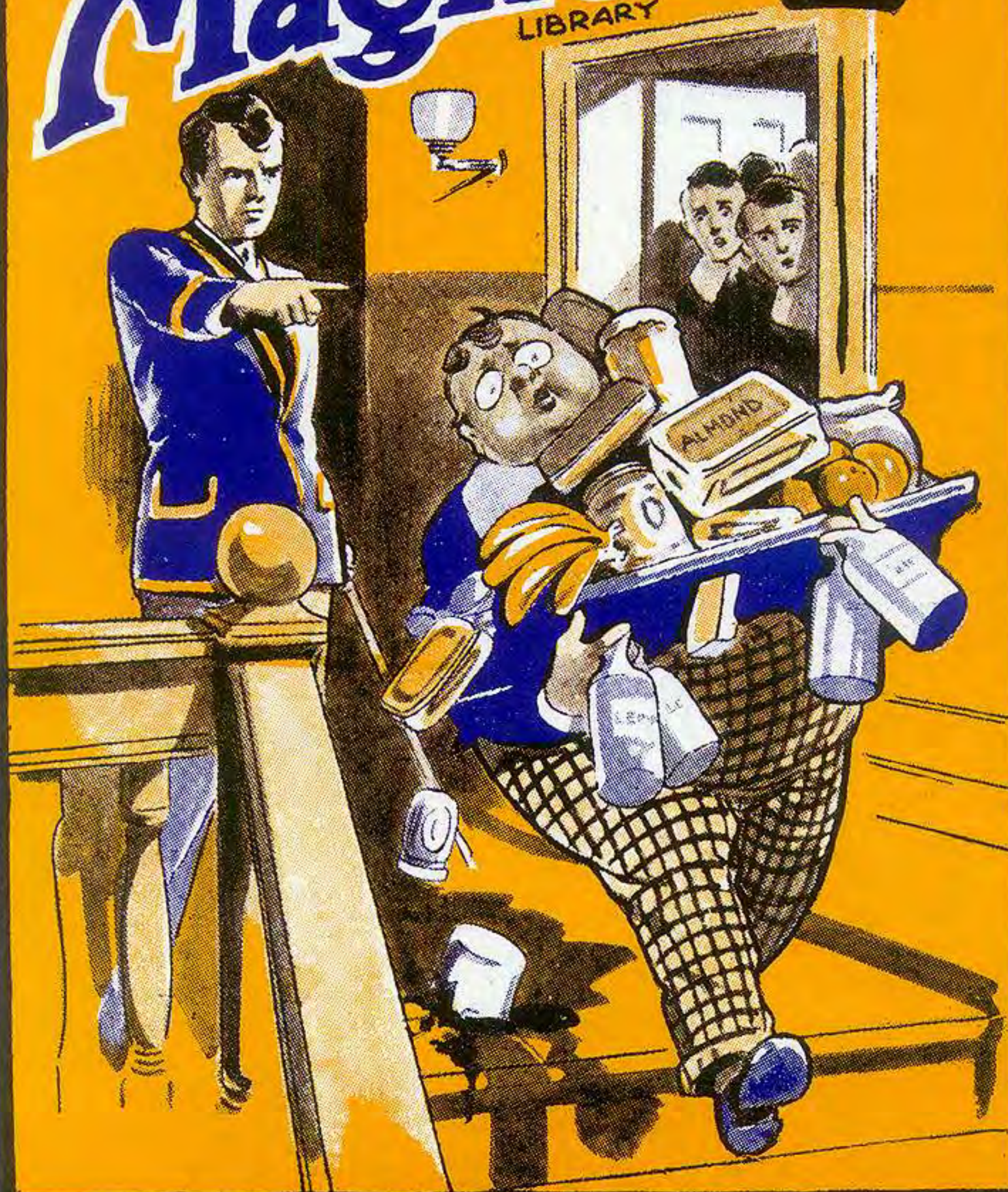
"THE PREFECT'S SECRET!" This week's amazing school story
of the Chums of Greyfriars.

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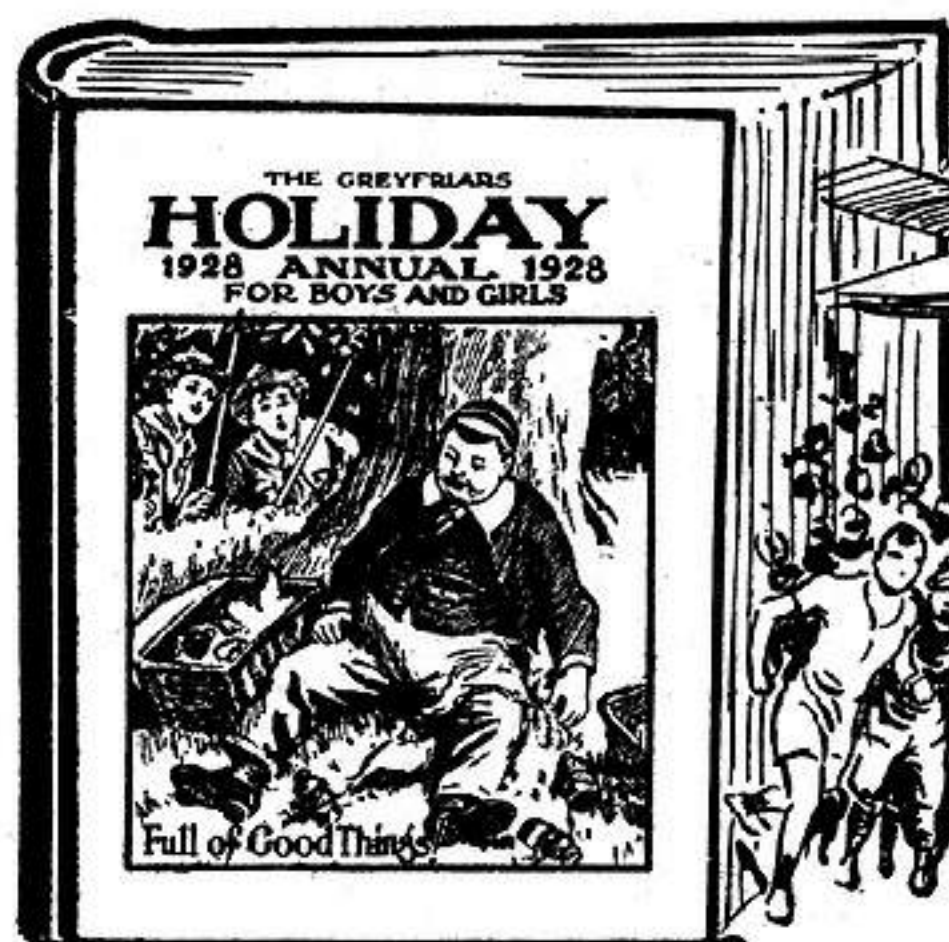
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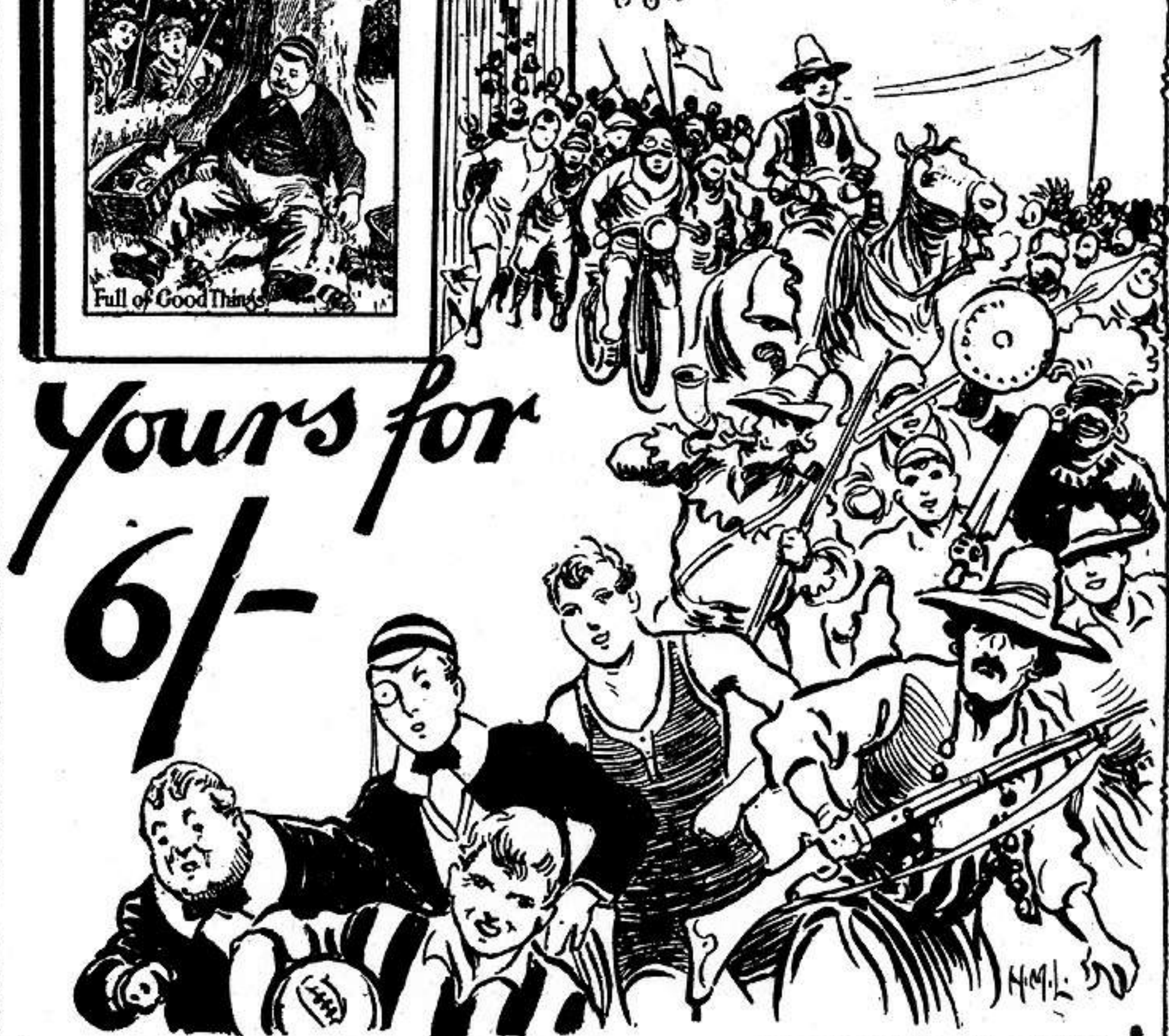


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(See the grand school tale of Harry Wharton & Co.—inside.)

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BROUGHT TO HEEL! For a long time now Gerald Loder of the Sixth at Greyfriars has had it in for the Chums of the Remove, but the tyrannical prefect has to change his tune when Harry Wharton & Co. drop on to one of his shady secrets, for that secret, if it became generally known, would mean expulsion and imprisonment for the rascally Sixth-Former!



An absorbing long complete story of Harry Wharton & Co., the cheery chums of Greyfriars. By FRANK RICHARDS.

THE FIRST CHAPTER.

Loder on the Warpath!

LODER—"Bother Loder!"
"He's coming!"
"Let him come!"

When Billy Bunter blinked in at the door of Study No. 1 in the Remove and announced that Loder was coming, he evidently expected to cause alarm.

Harry Wharton & Co. did not, however, seem alarmed.

There was a feast toward in Study No. 1 in the Remove. An uncle of Frank Nugent's, under the genial influence, perhaps, of approaching Christmas-tide, had sent him two pound notes.

A fellow in the Greyfriars Remove with two pound notes was a rich man.

True, there were fellows in the Form, such as Smithy, who had many pound notes; and there was Lord Mauleverer, who had fivers and tenners. But as a rule, the cash in the Lower Fourth was in the shape of shillings and half-crowns. Ten-shilling notes were not at all common; pound notes were quite uncommon; two pound notes at once were wealth untold.

It was obviously an occasion to be celebrated.

Nugent's chums naturally rallied round him. All his friends were ready to help—indeed, fellows who were not his friends were ready. No. 1 was rather roomy, as junior studies went, but there was no doubt that it would be filled to overflowing for the celebration. Football practice in the keen, wintry air gave all the fellows appetites calculated to do full justice to the spread.

The Famous Five were all in the study, getting ready for the rush of guests. Billy Bunter's eyes gleamed through his big spectacles at the sight

of that big stack of comestibles. Bunter, of course, was coming to the spread. Nugent had forgotten to ask him—or perhaps he had not forgotten not to ask him. But a trifle like that mattered nothing to Bunter.

"I say, you fellows—"

"Dry up, old fat man!" said Bob Cherry. "We're busy."

"Loder—"

"Blow Loder!"

"But Loder of the Sixth—"

"Bless him! Dry up!"

Bunter blinked indignantly.

"You might thank a fellow for coming and giving you a tip," he said warmly. "I can tell you Loder's on the warpath. You couldn't expect him to like a muddy football landed on the back of his neck."

"Oh, my hat! Has somebody been getting a goal on Loder's neck?" asked Bob.

Bunter grinned.

"Of course, it wasn't one of you fellows!"

"No, ass! We've been in the study."

"Well, Loder thinks it was. I've heard him tell Carne he's coming up to this study, and he's jolly well coming, and he's got his ashplant with him."

"Oh!" said Harry Wharton.

The chums of the Remove sat up and took notice, as it were, at last. They had had many little troubles with the bully of the Sixth, and it was not, perhaps, surprising that Loder suspected Study No. 1 of knowing who had landed a muddy football on his neck. But it was disconcerting for Loder of the Sixth to butt in on the very eve of the great spread. Generally, the Famous Five were ready for any trouble that might happen along. But just now they really did not want trouble, with Gerald Loder or anybody else.

"I came up to give you the tip," said Bunter. "Loder's frightfully wild, raging, in fact. He's after you. My advice to you fellows is to clear off till he's had time to calm down. Never mind the tuck. Leave it here, and I'll look after it for you."

"I don't think we'll trouble you to look after the tuck, Bunter," said Johnny Bull, with deep sarcasm.

"No trouble at all, old fellow," said Billy Bunter, affectionately. "I'd do more than that for fellows I really like."

"The disappearfulness of the esteemed grub would be rapid and terrific," remarked Hurree Jamset Ram Singh.

"Oh, really, Inky—"

"Oh, bother Loder!" said Harry Wharton. "Bother his neck, and the rest of him. Let him come!"

"I say, you fellows, he's simply raging!" said Bunter. "You know what Loder is—a bully and a beast—the worst-tempered rotter in the Sixth, the howlingest cad at Greyfriars—yaroooh!"

Billy Bunter broke off his description of Loder of the Sixth as a finger and thumb closed on his ear from behind, with a grip like that of a pair of pincers.

Bunter's yell woke every echo of the Remove passage.

"Yaroooh! Leggo! Yooop!"

Bunter spun round, and his fat jaw dropped as he saw Gerald Loder, of the Sixth Form. He had not heard the prefect approaching from the Remove staircase. Loder had his official ashplant under his left arm. His right hand was busy—his finger and thumb compressed Bunter's fat ear like a vice. The Owl of the Remove wriggled with anguish.

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"Ow! Wow! Leggo, Loder! Oh, dear! Ow!"

"So that's how you speak of a Sixth Form prefect, is it?" asked Loder agreeably, still compressing Bunter's ear.

"Ow! No, not at all! I wasn't speaking of you, Loder. I—I mean, I was only saying what a nice chap you are!" wailed Bunter. "I—I—I don't think you're a bully and a beast, Loder! Ow! I—I've often told the fellows that you're not such a beast as they think. Ow! I'm the only fellow in the Remove who doesn't think you a beastly cad, you know! Yaroooh!"

"Get out!"

Billy Bunter clasped his anguished ear as Loder released it. He staggered across the Remove passage with deep sounds of woe.

Loder of the Sixth looked into Study No. 1.

The Famous Five suspended their preparations for the feed, and looked at Loder.

As a prefect of the Sixth Form, Loder had to be treated with some respect; but his black looks did not scare the juniors in Study No. 1. They looked at him coolly and waited for him to speak. The power of the ashplant was vested in the Sixth Form prefects; but even Loder had to find some excuse for wielding the ashplant. And the Famous Five were, as it happened, guiltless of the offence which had roused Loder's ire. Certainly, they had no objection, in principle, to biffing a footer on Loder's neck. Indeed, they would have liked to do it. Still, it happened that they had not done it.

Loder looked at them grimly, and his eyes wandered to the stack of good things on the table, and he stared a little. Seldom or never was such a handsome assortment of tuck seen in a junior study. Loder's eyes lingered on that generous supply of excellent provender.

"Want anything, Loder?" asked Bob Cherry, politely.

"Yes," said Loder. "Which of you young rascals biffed a footer at me in the quad ten minutes ago?"

"Not guilty, my lord!"

"Nobody here, Loder," said Harry Wharton. "We've all been in the study for the last twenty minutes, at least."

Gerald Loder was quite well aware that if the Famous Five answered him they would answer truthfully. He might not, however, have chosen to take their word on the subject. A muddy footer landing on his neck had been far from improving Loder's temper, never very good, and he had come to the Remove passage for a victim—a guilty victim, if possible, but a victim, anyhow. But the sight of the stack of tuck had caused new thoughts to enter Loder's mind. The ashplant remained under his arm.

"Very well," said Loder, with unexpected mildness. "I did not see who kicked the footer, but I expected to find him in this study. But if you give me your word, Wharton, I accept it."

"Honour bright!" said Harry Wharton, quite astonished by this unusual and amazing mildness. "We never even heard it had happened till Bunter told us."

"Very well; the matter closes," said Loder airily. "But there's another matter I have to speak about. You juniors are allowed to have tea in your studies, and to buy the stuff at the school shop. That's all very well. But you are not allowed to gorge yourselves upon large quantities of unhealthy pastry, and sweets, and such things."

I'm afraid it is my duty, as a prefect, to interfere here."

Harry Wharton & Co. breathed hard. They realised at once why Loder had let the incident of the footer drop. The sight of the tuck laid in for the Remove spread had tempted him. That great spread was to be confiscated.

"Hold on, Loder!" said Harry Wharton quietly. "This stuff is laid in for a spread—we've asked a lot of fellows—"

"I'm afraid I can't allow anything of the kind," said Loder, shaking his head. "I fear that your Form master would be vexed if he knew you were stuffing yourselves like this."

"A lot you care!" snorted Johnny Bull.

"That is not a proper remark to make to a prefect, Bull! You will take a hundred lines!"

Johnny Bull breathed hard and deep.

"This—this mass of indigestible food will be confiscated," said Loder calmly. "That is my plain duty. I shall see that it is conveyed to the House dame's room. If you think over it a little, my boys," added Loder, with an air almost of fatherly kindness, "you will realise that it is for your good. Stuffing and gluttony are bad for the health. Keep yourselves fit. Fitness should be your aim and ambition. Think it over."

The chums of the Remove fairly glared at Loder.

Once in a way they spread themselves a little in the matter of tuck; but the Famous Five were as fit as fiddles, and worked hard and played hard. To be lectured on that topic by the slacker of the Sixth, a fellow who was more than suspected of smoking in his study, and playing banker with Carne and Walker behind locked doors, was rather too much.

"You cheeky ass!" roared Bob Cherry indignantly. "We're fitter than you will ever be, unless you give up slacking and blagging."

"Take a hundred lines, Cherry!"

"Look here, Loder—" said Harry.

"This mass of unhealthy food will be confiscated! You need say no more, Wharton—I have my duty to do as a prefect. Bunter!"

"Ow! Wow!"

"Carry this stuff away for me, Bunter."

"Look here," roared Bob Cherry, "you're not going to bag our tuck, Loder! It's too jolly thick!"

"Silence!"

"I know what you mean by confiscation!" hooted Nugent indignantly. "You're going to take it to your study and wolf it, you beast!"

"Take a hundred lines, Nugent! Another word of impudence, and I will report you to the Head."

"You—you—you—"

"Silence!"

Harry Wharton & Co. glared at Loder as if they could eat him, while Bunter obediently loaded himself with the tuck under the prefect's eye. It was an awfully serious matter to handle a prefect—very serious indeed. But the chums of the Remove came very near it just then. Loder perhaps never knew what a narrow escape he had of being hurled out of Study No. 1 on his neck.

"Let this be a warning to you," said Loder, as Bunter strolled out of the study, almost hidden by parcels. "Moderation in all things, my boys—stop short of gluttony and greediness. It's painful to me, very painful, to have to do it; but duty is duty."

"Not so painful as I'd like to make it!" hissed Bob Cherry.

Loder smiled cheerfully, and followed Bunter from the study. The chums of the Remove looked at one another with feelings that were too deep for words. That gorgeous spread, to which half the Remove had been invited, was gone from their gaze like a beautiful dream. Bunter, weary and heavy-laden, rolled down the staircase, with Loder walking after him, in a very good humour now. On the lower landing Bunter blinked round at Loder.

"Keep on!" said Loder.

"But you said the House-dame's room—"

"You want me to pull your other car?" asked Loder pleasantly.

Billy Bunter rolled on to Loder's study. Loder followed on, smiling cheerily. But in the Remove passage there was wrath unbounded; and if there was not weeping and wailing, there was gnashing of teeth. Indignation in the Remove was at boiling point; and in spite of Loder's cool confidence, it was by no means certain that this exercise of his prefectorial powers would pass unchallenged, and that the bully of the Sixth would get away with it.

THE SECOND CHAPTER.

Corn in Egypt!

JAMES WALKER, of the Greyfriars Sixth, grunted discontentedly.

Walker of the Sixth was in Loder's study.

He had looked in for Loder, to go down to tea in Hall with him.

It was almost unknown for a Sixth Form man to "tea" in Hall. But Walker and Loder, like the seed in the parable, had "backed their fancy" not wisely but too well. They had found the way of the transgressor not only hard but expensive. And for many days Walker and Loder had been in a state of hard-upness that was positively painful. They had "touched" all their friends for little loans; they had "tea'd" in turn with every fellow who would have them to tea; they had, in fact, sponged so extensively on other fellows in the Sixth that fellows began to be almost scared at the sight of them. The limit had been reached, and now it was tea in Hall for the two sportsmen until matters looked up again financially.

Walker, while he waited for his pal, looked through Loder's desk, and the table drawer, and other recesses, in search of a stray cigarette. But he did not find one. Loder was so hopelessly stony that there was not even a smoke in his study.

So Walker grunted discontentedly; and when Gerald Loder appeared in the doorway of the study scowled at him.

"Waiting for you!" he grunted.

"All serene, old bean!" Loder was smiling, rather to Walker's surprise. He did not see anything, in the present circumstances, to cause smiles. "Get in, Bunter."

Billy Bunter rolled into the study, laden with parcels. Walker stared at him in blank astonishment.

"What the dickens—" he ejaculated.

"Corn in Egypt, old bean!" said Loder. "Shove them on the table, Bunter, and get out!"

William George Bunter landed his cargo on the table. Perhaps he forgot to land a bag of tarts, for it was under his fat arm when he turned to the door. Loder did not forget it.



"I will leave you to inquire into this matter, Loder!" said Mr. Quelch. "The good name of the school is at stake!" Mr. Quelch was turning to leave the study when there was a rush of footsteps and a yell in the Sixth-Form passage. The next moment there was a swarm of juniors in Loder's doorway, and the master started back in astonishment.

(See Chapter 2.)

He took Bunter's ear in his finger and thumb.

"Yow-ow-ow!"

"Put that bag on the table, you young rascal!"

"Yow-ow! I forgot—"

"Nothing like pulling a fag's ear to improve his memory," remarked Loder jovially. "Beats all the little grey books, what?"

"Yaroooh!"

Billy Bunter rolled out of the study, yelping. Both his fat ears were burning now.

Loder kicked the door shut after him.

"What do you think of that lot, Jimmy?" he inquired.

James Walker was staring at the stack on the table.

"Ripping! You've had a big remittance?"

"No."

"I thought you'd exhausted your tick at the school shop."

"So I have."

"Then where on earth did that stuff come from?"

Loder chuckled.

"I discovered it in a Remove study. Those guzzling young rascals were going to make themselves ill on it. Of course, as a prefect, I couldn't allow that. That stuff is confiscated."

"Oh, my hat!" ejaculated Walker. "I thought it was for tea. Confiscated stuff has to go to the housekeeper."

"Quite. But I'll send it along to the housekeeper after tea," Loder explained. "By that time there will be less of it to carry."

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Walker.

"In fact, I think there will be very little of it," said Loder cheerily. "Must hand over somethin'—always wise to keep up appearances. But I fancy we're going to have a good tea, and have somethin' left over for a decent supper, what?"

"Corn in Egypt, and no mistake!" said Walker. His face was very cheery now. "They must have been goin' to feed half the Remove on a stack like that. Lucky you dropped on them."

"Very lucky—for us! I hardly think the fags are gloatin' over their luck. But it's impossible to satisfy everybody. Look here—ham and tongue—cakes and biscuits—all sorts of stuff. They must have wasted a lot of pocket-money on this. Extravagant little beasts, you know! This lesson may make them more careful with their money. Sit down, old chap. I don't think I'll call in my fag to lay the table—in the circumstances. We can manage for ourselves."

"Yes, rather!" grinned Walker.

He pulled a chair to the table, and was about to sit down, when there was a tap at the study door. The door opened immediately after the tap, and Mr. Quelch, the master of the Remove, appeared. Walker was very glad at that moment that he had not succeeded in finding a cigarette in Loder's study.

"Loder! You are here?" said Mr. Quelch.

"Yes, sir! Please come in," said Loder politely.

Mr. Quelch had already come in. The two Sixth-Formers remained respectfully standing, wondering what this visit might portend, and wondering whether Mr. Quelch noticed the pile of tuck on the table. If Mr. Quelch noticed it he gave it no heed. It was no business of his if a Sixth Form prefect stacked his study table with tuck. In a Remove study the matter might have been different; but Mr. Quelch had no official connection with the Sixth Form.

"I am here to speak upon a somewhat serious matter, Loder," said Mr. Quelch gravely.

"Yes, sir! Will you sit down, sir?"

"Thank you, but I shall not remain

a few minutes. I have just returned from Friardale, Loder, and in the lane I chanced to meet Mr. Tozer."

"Did you, sir?" murmured Loder. Why the Remove master came to his study to tell him of a chance encounter with P.-c. Tozer was a mystery to Loder.

"Mr. Tozer made a very serious statement to me, Loder. He informed me that two nights ago, while on his beat, he observed a youth leaving the Cross Keys Inn in a surreptitious manner."

Loder's heart stood still.

If there was one fellow at Greyfriars who was aware of the identity of the youth in question, certainly that fellow was Gerald Loder.

"Mr. Tozer saw the youth from a distance, and did not recognise him," pursued Mr. Quelch.

"Oh!" gasped Loder.

"But he states that he is sure—or almost sure—that it was a Greyfriars boy," said Mr. Quelch.

"D-d-does he, sir?" stammered Loder.

"Yes, Loder. And you will realise how very serious the matter is if Mr. Tozer's statement is well-founded."

Loder realised that only too clearly. It was serious enough, and would have been still more serious—for Loder—had Mr. Tozer recognised the youth he had seen leaving the Cross Keys in a surreptitious manner.

"Some—some Lower boy, I presume, sir?" stuttered Loder.

"No, Loder. From Mr. Tozer's description, a senior," said Mr. Quelch. "The youth was too tall to be a Lower boy. I trust, however, that Mr. Tozer was mistaken—I sincerely hope and trust that he was. Nevertheless, the matter is so serious that I cannot dismiss it from my mind. I should have

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spoken to Wingate about it, as he is head prefect; but, as you are aware, he has gone home for a few days. I, therefore, place the matter in your hands."

"I understand," gasped Loder.

"You will inquire into the matter, Loder. I trust that there is nothing in it, but one cannot be too careful in a matter in which the good name of the school is at stake."

"Certainly, sir!" said Loder, quite at his ease now. "But I think, sir, that Mr. Tozer must have been mistaken. I cannot believe that any Greyfriars senior would be guilty of such conduct—such very reprehensible conduct. But I shall, of course, look into the matter very carefully, sir, and speak to the other prefects about it. It is possible that some foolish fellow in the Fifth Form may have been acting recklessly."

"I leave the matter in your hands, Loder."

"Quite so, sir!"

Mr. Quelch was turning towards the study door. But he did not reach it. At that moment there was a rush of footsteps and a yell in the Sixth Form passage, and the next moment there was a swarm of fellows in Loder's doorway, and Mr. Quelch started back in astonishment.

THE THIRD CHAPTER.

Quite a Surprise!

HERBERT VERNON-SMITH, the Bounder of Greyfriars, lounged into the Remove passage, with a grin on his face. He found a crowd of fellows swarming there. A buzz of voices filled the Remove passage; a dozen fellows were talking at once, and they were all emphatic.

"What on earth's the row?" asked the Bounder.

"Loder!" answered three or four at once. "That bully Loder!"

"Loder been up here?" grinned Smithy.

"Yes, rather—the rotter!"

"Has he been inquiring after a fellow who biffed a footer on the back of his neck?" chuckled Vernon-Smith.

"Was that you, then?" asked Harry Wharton.

"Little me!" assented the Bounder. "I'm sure Loder didn't spot me, though, and I wondered whether he would look in on the Remove—"

"You blessed fathead!" growled Johnny Bull. "Why couldn't you leave Loder's beastly neck alone? He came up here—"

"And spotted the spread!" said Bob Cherry.

"And bagged it!" said Frank Nugent dismally.

"Oh, my hat! Is that the cause of the giddy excitement?" grinned the Bounder. "Did you let him get away with it?"

"Can't handle a prefect!" said Skinner.

The Bounder shrugged his shoulders. "I'd handle a prefect fast enough if he raided my study like a fag!" he answered.

"It wasn't exactly like that, of course," said Wharton. "Loder confiscated the stuff as a prefect. The fact is, we had rather a lot. Quelch would have said something if he'd seen it."

"The lotfulness of the esteemed tuck was somewhat terrific," remarked Hurree Jamset Ram Singh; "and the disgusting confiscation was according to law. But the worthy and revolting Loder will keep the tuck for himself, which is robbery pure and undefiled."

"He said it would be sent to the House dame," said Wharton. "That's THE MAGNET LIBRARY.—No. 1,035.

the rule with confiscated tuck. of course."

The Bounder laughed.

"Catch Loder! He will nobble it, of course. I know he's hard up—he tea'd in Hall yesterday, and a Sixth Form man never does that unless he's fairly on the beach."

"That would be rather thick, even for Loder," said Peter Todd.

"Hallo, hallo, hallo! Here's Bunter! Bunter, you fat image—"

"Oh, really, Cherry—"

"Where did you carry that cargo for Loder?"

"Into his study," said Bunter.

"That settles it!" said the captain of the Remove, with a frown. "Loder wouldn't take it to his study if he was handing it over to the House dame."

"Not likely!" grinned the Bounder.

"Loder won't have tea in Hall to-day, with that spread in his study."

"He's got Walker there," said Bunter. "They're going to scoff it, you know. I say, you fellows, let's get it back. I'll keep watch in the passage while you fellows rush the study."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Harry Wharton looked round.

"You men game?" he asked. "Loder's a prefect, and he was within his rights in confiscating the tuck if he handed it over to Mrs. Kebble. But if he's keeping it, that's a horse of quite a different colour. Who's game to rush Loder's study and get it back?"

"Little me, for one!" said the Bounder at once.

"Hurrah! Let's!"

A dozen fellows at least were ready. Loder's high-handed exercise of his powers as a prefect had exasperated the Removites. The certainty that the confiscation of the tuck was only a pretence, and that Loder was keeping it himself, gave their wrath the finishing touch. An invasion of the Sixth Form passage was an awfully serious matter, but a whole crowd of reckless spirits were ready for it.

"Lead on, Macduff!" said Bob Cherry.

"Loder can't report us," said the Bounder. "He can't drag Quelch into it without admitting that he was scoffing the tuck himself. A prefect couldn't own up to that."

"We've got a good case if it comes before Quelch," said Peter Todd.

"Anyhow, let's chance it."

"Hear, hear!"

"Come on!" said Harry Wharton.

And an excited mob of Removites poured down the stairs.

"Quiet, you men!" said Wharton. "Don't make a row before we get to Loder's study. We don't want to wake up all the Sixth. Old Wingate's away now; but a lot of them will be teaing in their studies, and we don't want to fetch them out. Quiet!"

It was evidently good advice. Waking up a crowd of the Sixth meant rather more trouble than the Remove could have hoped to deal with.

Quietly, the juniors went down the staircase, and entered the Sixth Form passage.

From the corner of the passage they could see that Loder's door was open. Quietly, almost on tiptoe, they trod along the passage towards the quarters of the bully of the Sixth.

"Now!" said Wharton.

And as he gave the signal, there was a yell and a rush, and the Removites crowded into Loder's doorway.

"Collar the cad!" roared Bob Cherry.

"Rag him!"

"Rag the study!"

"Give him jip!"

A second more, and the invaders

would have been swarming in the study and Loder and Walker would have been rolling over in the grasp of many hands. That was the programme, and the programme would have been carried out according to plan but for an unforeseen and utterly unexpected happening.

"Boys! What—what does this mean?"

The rush stopped as if by magic.

"Oh, my hat!" gasped Wharton.

"Quelch!"

"Oh dear!"

It was Mr. Quelch!

What their Form master was doing in Loder's study the juniors did not know. They had not the remotest idea that he was there.

But he was there, and he confronted the raiders, his eyes glinting, and thunder in his brow.

Fellows who were fortunate enough to be in the rear scudded away at once, losing not a second, as they heard the Remove master's voice. But six or seven of the Removites were already in the study before they saw or heard Mr. Quelch, and for them there was no retreat. They stood and blinked in dismay at their Form master.

"What does this mean?" thundered Mr. Quelch.

"Oh dear!"

"How dare you rush into a Sixth Form study, and into your Form master's presence in this disorderly and unseemly manner?"

"We—we—we didn't know you were here, sir!" stammered Wharton.

"No doubt!" said Mr. Quelch wrathfully. "No doubt! What was your intention, Wharton, in coming here?"

"We—we—we—" stuttered the captain of the Remove. He was utterly taken aback.

Loder and Walker exchanged a glance. They were perfectly well aware of what the juniors had come for. They realised, too, that Mr. Quelch's presence had saved them from a severe handling.

"Answer me, Wharton!" rapped out Mr. Quelch. "Am I to believe that it was your intention to attack—to assault—a prefect of the Sixth Form?"

"We—we—we—"

"How dare you!"

"We—we were after our tuck, sir," stammered Wharton desperately.

"What—what?"

Wharton pointed to the stack of good things on Loder's table.

"That's ours, sir!"

Loder breathed rather hard.

"That stuff, sir, was found in a Remove study," he said. "I considered it my duty to confiscate it, and it is, of course, to be handed over to the House dame at once."

"Gammon!" roared Bob Cherry. "You meant to scoff it, and you jolly well know you did, Loder!"

"Silence!" exclaimed Mr. Quelch, in a formidable voice. "How dare you attribute such a base intention to a Sixth Form prefect, Cherry!"

"Oh!" gasped Bob.

"Loder, I fully approve of your action in taking away such a mass—such a huge mass of indigestible comestibles. See that it is handed over to the House dame!"

"Certainly, sir!"

"Leave this study at once," went on Mr. Quelch, his eyes glinting at the Removites. "I will deal with you later. Not only have you transgressed all rules with regard to meals in your studies, but you have been guilty of resistance to authority, and of the intention, at least, of assaulting a Sixth Form prefect. Go! I shall deal with you later!"

The hapless Removites retreated, Mr. Quelch turned to Loder.

"It would have been wiser, Loder, to convey confiscated comestibles directly to the House dame. By bringing it here, you gave rise to that ridiculous suspicion on the part of the juniors."

"Oh! Ah! Yes!" gasped Loder.

"Let it be conveyed to Mrs. Kebble without further delay."

"Certainly, sir!"

Mr. Quelch rustled out of the study.

Gerald Loder and James Walker looked at one another with feelings that could not have been expressed in words. There was no help for it now. The confiscated tuck had to be handed over. Now that the matter had come to Mr. Quelch's knowledge, Loder would hardly have dared to retain a biscuit, or a jam-tart. It was altogether too risky.

"Oh!" groaned Walker at last. "What a sell!"

Loder gritted his teeth.

"I'll make those little beasts squirm for this!" he gasped.

"It's tea in Hall, after all!" groaned Walker. "What a rotten sell!"

And it was tea in Hall for the two sportsmen of the Sixth, and they tea'd in Hall with feelings that were absolutely Hunnish.

THE FOURTH CHAPTER.

Mr. Quelch Comes Down Heavily!

"**W**ERE for it!"

The Bounder made that remark.

All the Remove agreed.

There was no doubt whatever that the Lower Fourth were "for it."

The loss of the great spread was bad enough. But the juniors were not thinking very much about that. They were thinking of the vials of wrath that were to be poured out on their devoted heads.

Trouble was coming; and it was all the more serious because it did not come at once. The delinquents had expected to be called to Mr. Quelch's study, or to see the Remove master in their passage. But no summons came, and Mr. Quelch did not appear. The juniors could not hope that Mr. Quelch was allowing the matter to pass, or that he had forgotten it. He was not likely to allow such a breach of discipline to pass; and he never forgot anything. Obviously, he was taking his time to think over the matter, and was not in a hurry to act; and that, as all the Remove knew, meant that the trouble was very serious indeed.

"The fact is," Bob Cherry remarked rather ruefully, "it was a little thick! Dishing a Sixth Form study is—is—is rather—"

"Terrific!" suggested Hurrec Jamset Ram Singh.

"And we've got no excuse," sighed Nugent. "If Loder had scoffed the tuck—but he hadn't!"

"He hadn't had time!" growled Johnny Bull.

"Quelch doesn't know that's the reason. He would never believe that a Sixth Form man would bag our tuck and scoff it."

"He doesn't know Loder."

"The fact is, we've put our foot in it," said Harry Wharton. "From the way Quelch looks at it, we exceeded the speed limit with the tuck, and set out to rag the prefect who confiscated it. We were in the right, of course—"

"Of course!"

"Only a Form master couldn't possibly see it."

"Couldn't possibly!" agreed Bob.

"Well, we're for it, and we've got to stand it," said the captain of the Remove. "Anyhow, Loder didn't get

the tuck, after all. He had to hand it over. That's a consolation."

That was all the consolation the Remove fellows had. It was something; but it was not much. And they waited with great anxiety to hear from Mr. Quelch. They felt that it was hardly fair of their Form master to be keeping them in suspense like this; keeping them on tender hooks, as Hurrec Singh expressed it in his remarkable English. But no word came from Mr. Quelch that evening, and the Removes went to their dormitory with the sword of Damocles still suspended over their heads, as it were.

The next morning, at the breakfast-table, the Removes eyed their Form master with surreptitious glances.

His grim face betrayed nothing.

Some of the more hopeful spirits really began to hope that Mr. Quelch had forgotten an offence for the first time in his career as a Form master.

But even the most sanguine fellows did not pin very much faith to that faint hope.

It was more probable—in fact, certain—that Mr. Quelch took such an awfully serious view of the matter, that he was taking ample time to think out an adequate punishment.

"We shall get it in the Form-room!" Vernon-Smith remarked after brekker.

The Bounder was right.

When the Remove gathered in their Form-room, first lesson did not commence immediately, as usual. That, in itself would not have worried the juniors very much. They were not keen on first lesson, or on second or third. They could have dispensed with the lot with complete equanimity. But they knew that the chopper was about to come down, and they waited in dire apprehension. When Mr. Quelch stood up at his desk, and his gimlet eyes roved over the expectant class, the silence was quite painful. A pin might have been heard to drop in the Remove-room.

"My boys!" began Mr. Quelch.

His tone was not harsh. Indeed, he

spoke more in sorrow than in anger. But that was a bad sign, as the Removes knew from experience.

"I must speak, before lessons commence, of the disorderly outbreak of insubordination in this Form which occurred yesterday."

The Removes looked as contrite as they could. Not a man in the Remove regarded the rushing of Loder's study as a disorderly outbreak of insubordination. But they knew that Form masters had their own way of looking at things, and they knew that a Form master had to be given his head.

"I am shocked, pained, and disappointed," said Mr. Quelch. "All the more so because the head boy of this Form was, apparently, a leader—a ring-leader—of this lawless outbreak."

Wharton turned pink.

"I have given the matter great consideration and thought," said the Remove master; "I have consulted Loder on the subject. I have no alternative but to take drastic measures."

"Lickings all round!" murmured the Bounder.

"In the first place," said Mr. Quelch, "I must refer to the orgy that was intended yesterday, and which was fortunately prevented by a Sixth Form prefect's zealous devotion to duty. You are permitted to take your tea in your own studies, and to this there is no objection, so long as a reasonable moderation is observed. Anything in the nature of gluttony is strictly prohibited, as you are very well aware. Yet in a single study Loder discovered a mass—indeed, a mountain—of food, most of it of an indigestible nature. Loder appears to have been exceedingly lenient, for he simply confiscated this mass of food without administering any punishment. He erred on the side of leniency, doubtless. So far from feeling any gratitude for this, however, you actually made an attempt to attack him and recover the comestibles by force. I am shocked and pained."

The juniors listened in silence. It
(Continued on next page.)

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THE PREFECT'S SECRET!

(Continued from previous page.)

was quite hopeless to think of making Mr. Quelch see the matter as they saw it, and no one thought of making the attempt.

"I am bound to take a serious view of the matter," resumed Mr. Quelch, after a pause to give his Form time to realise how shocked and pained he was. "I am bound to take severe measures."

The Remove waited.

"For the rest of this term," said Mr. Quelch, "the Remove will take their tea in Hall. Meals in the studies are strictly forbidden."

There was a gasp from the Remove at this.

One of their dearest privileges, which made them differ from unimportant fags in the Third and Second Forms, was thus ruthlessly shorn away.

"Had you succeeded in your object, had you assaulted Loder in his study, I should have administered a severe flogging to all concerned," went on Mr. Quelch. "Fortunately, my presence prevented this. The ringleaders in this outbreak—Wharton and Vernon-Smith—will be gated for the next two half-holidays. That is all."

"No lickings!" murmured Bunter.

Bunter, at least, was pleased; but the rest of the Removites sat in dismay.

"We shall now commence," said Mr. Quelch, with dignity.

"If you please, sir—" began the Bouncer.

"You need not speak, Vernon-Smith."

"Mayn't we say a word in our defence, sir?" asked the Bouncer, with sarcastic politeness.

Mr. Quelch compressed his lips.

"If you have anything to say, Vernon-Smith, you may say it—briefly."

"Thank you, sir! All that stuff Loder found in Wharton's study was intended for a spread for a lot of fellows—more than a dozen."

"That makes no difference, Vernon-Smith."

"And Loder was going to keep the stuff, sir—"

"Kindly make no insinuation of that kind, Vernon-Smith!" rapped out the Remove master.

"I'm not makin' an insinuation, sir—I'm statin' a fact," explained the Bouncer calmly.

Some of the Removites grinned. Mr. Quelch frowned.

"If that is intended for impertinence, Vernon-Smith—"

"Not at all, sir. I think you ought to know the facts," said Smithy. "If Wingate or Gwynne had confiscated the tuck we shouldn't have thought of getting it back. We should have known that it had gone to the housekeeper. Loder was bagging it—"

"Nonsense!"

"We all think the same, sir," said Harry Wharton.

"I am surprised and pained, Wharton, to learn that you allowed such a very unworthy suspicion to enter your mind."

"Oh, my hat!" ejaculated Wharton involuntarily.

"It's a fact, sir," said Vernon-Smith.

"So your defence amounts to this," snapped Mr. Quelch; "you defend your lawless action by attributing unworthy motives to the prefect who did his plain duty. That is sufficient, Vernon-Smith. Sit down."

"But, sir—"

"Another word, Vernon-Smith, and I shall cane you," said Mr. Quelch.

"Thank you, sir! All the same—"

"Bless my soul!" Mr. Quelch picked

up the cane from his desk. "Stand out before the class, Vernon-Smith."

The Bouncer bunched out, with as much impertinence in his manner as he dared infuse into it.

"Hold out your hand!"

Swish!

"Now go back to your place, Vernon-Smith, and be silent."

Mr. Quelch laid down his cane and turned his gimlet eyes on the Remove again.

"You have heard my decision," he said. "In the event of my command being disregarded by any member of this Form, the punishment that will follow will be very severe. The matter is now closed."

And the matter being closed, lessons commenced in the Remove-room. After what had happened to the Bouncer, no fellow felt inclined to attempt to make the matter clearer to the Form master.

Lessons that morning went on in a rather electric atmosphere in the Remove Form room.

Mr. Quelch was displeased with his Form, and there was no doubt that the Form were displeased with Mr. Quelch. Anger on one side, and resentment on the other, made things very uncomfortable in the Remove-room. Master and pupils were equally relieved when break came, and the Remove were dismissed for a quarter of an hour.

In morning break the Remove gathered in the quad in excited groups, discussing the situation.

"We're not goin' to stand it!" the Bouncer declared savagely.

"Only we've got to!" said Squiff.

"The gotfulness is terrific," said Hurree Jamset Ram Singh dolefully. "The esteemed and execrable Loder has scored over us terrifically."

"I say, you fellows, it's awful!" groaned Billy Bunter. "Fancy, tea in Hall for the rest of the term. Weak tea and doorsteps—ow! I say, I was going to stand a spread when my postal-order came! Oh dear!"

"That's all right—it won't come," said Bob Cherry comfortingly. "It never does, old fat man."

"Beast!"

"No tea in the study!" grunted Johnny Bull. "Might as well be fags in the Third Form. Blow Loder and blow Quelch!"

Discontent in the Remove was both loud and deep. But there was no help for it; the fiat had gone forth. That afternoon there was an unusual crowd of juniors at tea in Hall—all the Remove were there. The Remove passage was deserted; and at the long table in Hall the Removites devoured the school fare with glum faces. Loder and Walker were at the Sixth Form table, being still in a stony state. They derived some satisfaction from the glum looks of the Remove. But for the Remove there was no satisfaction, and discontent was deep and still deepening.

THE FIFTH CHAPTER.

Back Up!

"YOU'RE captain of the Remove."

"Well?"

"What are you going to do?"

"Nothing."

The Bouncer gave an angry grunt.

It was three days since Mr. Quelch's severe sentence had fallen like a thunderbolt upon his unfortunate Form.

During those three days indignation and wrath had accumulated in the Lower Fourth and intensified, and reached boiling point.

Many of the fellows looked to Harry Wharton to "do" something, as he was captain of the Form.

But what Wharton was to do was another matter.

Certainly he could not rescind the commands of his Form master. He could not make Mr. Quelch see reason. He could not institute spreads in the Remove passage in spite of the Remove master's orders.

So far as Wharton could see, he could only bow his head to the decree along with the rest, and lay plans for "taking it out" of Loder.

Loder was the cause of the trouble; Loder was the enemy, and with luck Loder might be made to sit up. A Form master, of course, was beyond any plans of that kind. The wildest spirits in the Remove never dreamed of making Mr. Henry Samuel Quelch sit up.

Tea in their studies was a cherished institution among the juniors. It demonstrated that they were not fags; the Third and Second had to tea in Hall, though they sometimes indulged in weird feasts in their respective Form-rooms when their Form masters were at a safe distance. Pleasant little spreads took place in the Remove studies, and fellows would ask their friends, and all would be calm and bright.

Wharton and Nugent in No. 1, for instance, often had the other members of the Co. to tea, or they would tea with Bob Cherry and Hurree Singh in Study No. 13, or they would go with those two youths to tea with Johnny Bull in Study No. 14. Lord Mauleverer often stood a magnificent feast in Study No. 12, to which every Remove man was glad to go. In Study No. 11 Skinner and Snoop and Stott liked to smoke cigarettes after tea, which most assuredly they could not venture to do in Hall. In Study No. 7 Billy Bunter loved to spread himself at the festive board, to which, it is true, he seldom contributed anything but a remarkably healthy appetite. For motives good or bad or indifferent, every man in the Remove clung to the privilege of teasing in the study.

And now that privilege was cut off for the rest of the term.

True, the term was drawing to a close, and the Christmas holidays were not far off. Mark Linley advised taking it calmly for the short time that remained. But Mark was accustomed to taking things calmly. The other fellows seethed with indignation.

Mr. Quelch's sentence was, indeed, rather sweeping. Half the Remove had been concerned in the great feast in Study No. 1 which had not come off, and in the attack on Loder of the Sixth. But the punishment fell on all the Remove, sparing none. Mr. Quelch concluded that his whole Form needed a lesson, and he gave them one—and no doubt Loder had helped to influence him. Loder, certainly, was enjoying the discomfort of the Form, especially of those fellows in it whom Loder never could succeed in taming and bullying. So long as his stony state forced Loder to tea in Hall, he derived solace from seeing the long rows of glum and gloomy Remove faces. But financial matters seemed to look up for Loder at last, for he ceased to come into Hall to tea, while the Remove were still compelled to turn up there regularly.

The Bouncer seemed to feel the thing most bitterly. He had a way of giving little spreads in his study, and even when he tea'd alone with his study-mate, Redwing, he always "did" himself remarkably well. These little feeds were things of the past now.

In Hall the Bouncer, with all his wealth and his expensive tastes, tea'd no better than Bunter or Skinner or any

other fellow. It was true that in Hall it was generally allowed for fellows to take in tasty little things to eke out the plain school tea. But Mr. Quelch put a stop to that, for the Remove. The feasts upon which he frowned were not to be transferred from the Remove passage to the Hall table. The school fare—plain and wholesome, certainly—was all that there was for the Remove. They could partake of that, or they could go without: that was their choice.

The Bounder chafed more than any other fellow. Now he had tackled Wharton on the subject.

But from the captain of the Remove there was no help. He could do nothing.

"You're taking this lying down, then?" demanded the Bounder savagely.

"Oh, don't be an ass, Smithy!" exclaimed Wharton. His own temper was rather sore. "What can a fellow do?"

"If I were captain of the Form I'd jolly well do something."

"Rot!"

"The fellows are fed-up, I can tell you."

"Well, if they're fed-up and want a lead, they can elect you captain, and you can go a head!" snapped Wharton. "What's the big idea? Are you going to lynch Loder or make Mr. Quelch bend over and give him six?"

"Carry on!" returned the Bounder.

"How?" demanded Harry.

"Let's all carry on, and blow Quelch's Tea in the studies the same as usual, and if Quelch butts in, bar the end of the Remove passage and keep him out."

Wharton stared at the Bounder.

"Oh, my hat! That's the big idea, is it? You'll have that game all to yourself, I think."

Vernon-Smith compressed his lips.

"The Upper Fourth fellows are chipping us about it," he said. "Temple of the Fourth was saying in the Rag that we're only fags, after all, and now we're put in our proper place."

"You could have punched his cheeky nose."

"I did!" growled the Bounder. "Hard! But there it is—we're treated like rotten fags—like Tubb of the Third, or Sammy Bunter of the Second. I'm not goin' to stand it."

"Nothing doing."

"Something doing in my study, at least. I've tea'd in Hall three days—and to-day I'm going to tea in my study. If Quelch doesn't like it he can lump it."

Wharton's face became very grave.

"Quelch is sure to miss you from Hall, Smithy."

"Let him."

"He will come after you."

"Let him come, and be blown to him."

"Look here, Smithy—"

"Rats! Will you come to tea in my study?"

"Don't be an ass! Of course not, in the circumstances."

"Funk!" jeered the Bounder.



"Will you come to tea in my study?" asked the Bounder. "Don't be an ass!" replied Wharton. "How can we, when it's barred?" "Funk!" jeered Vernon-Smith. Wharton crimsoned. "I'll come!" he said tersely. (See Chapter 5.)

Wharton crimsoned.

"I'll come!" he said, without stopping to reflect.

"Done! We'll tea early, and if the Beak comes up we shall have had the giddy spread anyhow."

And Vernon-Smith, determined to have his own wilful way, went ahead with it. With all his recklessness, however, he was careful. He made very extensive purchases at Mrs. Mimble's little shop in the corner behind the elms; but the good things were taken into the House in small parcels, surreptitiously. That defiance of the Remove master's commands made the other fellows stare when they heard of it. It was probable—it was almost certain, that the affair would come to Mr. Quelch's knowledge, and the Form master's wrath would be, as Hurree Singh declared, terrific. Fellows whom the Bounder asked to tea refused promptly. Even Billy Bunter, for the first time on record, refused an invitation to tea.

But when the members of the Co. learned that Wharton had accepted, they

changed round at once. Sink or swim together was the motto of the Famous Five, and though Wharton urged his chums to keep clear, they did not heed him. Five guests were coming, and Tom Redwing was to be there, though with many misgivings. Redwing was very far from desiring to enter into any defiance of authority; but he felt called upon to stand by his reckless chum.

So half an hour before tea in Hall, seven juniors were gathered in Study No. 4 in the Remove passage, and the table was spread.

Certainly, of all the tea-party, only one was quite at his ease. That one, of course, was the Bounder. Smithy was a fellow who seemed to thrive on trouble—he was "up against"

authority at all times, with or without provocation, and he found entertainment in dragging the captain of the Remove into his rebellious ways.

Smithy's guests hoped that Mr. Quelch would hear nothing of it. They could turn up in Hall at the regular tea-time, to keep up appearances. But that hope was faint. They knew only too well that few things escaped the Remove master's gimlet eye.

The feast was going strong, when there came a tap at the door of No. 4 Study.

There was a general start.

Even the Bounder looked uneasy, for the moment. It was borne in even upon his wilful and reckless mind that it was no light matter for the juniors to be caught in flagrant disobedience of their Form-master's order.

The door opened.

"I say, you fellows—"

There was a gasp of relief from the whole tea-party. It was Bunter. The

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next moment, however, relief changed to wrath.

"You fat idiot!" howled the Bounder.

"Oh, really, Smithy—"

"You fat idiot!" howled the Bounder.

Johnny Bull.

Bunter grinned.

"Did you think it was Quelch?" he chuckled. "He, he, he! I say, you fellows, I've decided to come. I'm not going to take any notice of Quelch! I'm not going to be starved to please him! I'll chance it. I say, did I frighten you, tapping at the door? He, he, he!"

The tea-party glared at Bunter. They had certainly been startled, and they saw nothing whatever of a comic nature in that circumstance. Bunter apparently did. He chuckled a fat chuckle.

"Rather crowded here, what?" went on Bunter. "I'll tell you what, Smithy—I won't squeeze in, with such a crowd. I'll help myself to a snack, old fellow, and get off with it, see? More room for you fellows!"

The Bounder glared at him.

Bunter was cheerfully proposing to join in the spread without joining in the danger. He was going to take his share of the feast to some secluded spot where he could devour it in safety. That seemed an eminently good idea to William George Bunter. It did not seem quite so good to Herbert Vernon-Smith.

The Bounder picked up a loaf from the table

Whiz!

"Yaroooooh!" roared Bunter.

A loaf landing suddenly on his well-filled waistcoat startled Billy Bunter more than he had startled the tea-party.

He staggered backwards through the doorway, and sat down in the Remove passage with a roar.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Yow-ow-ow! Beasts! Yaroooooh! Oh, crumbs! Ow!"

"Have another?" grinned the Bounder.

"Beast!" yelled Bunter.

The Owl of the Remove staggered to his feet. He shook a fat fist at the grinning tea-party.

"Yah! Beasts! I jolly well wish old Quelch would catch you!" he roared.

"Bunter!" rapped out a sharp voice.

"Oh, crikey!"

It was Mr. Quelch!

THE SIXTH CHAPTER.

"Bend Over!"

HENRY SAMUEL QUELCH stared into No. 4 Study.

Seven juniors sat at the tea-table as if turned to stone.

Even the Bounder seemed to have lost his appetite all of a sudden.

The glare of the fabled basilisk was not more expressive than the glance Mr. Quelch cast at the hapless tea-party.

Billy Bunter grinned. He had been refused a share in the spread—but it was evident now that the spread was to come to a sudden end.

The grin died off his fat face, however, as Mr. Quelch, after that one expressive look into the study, turned to him.

"Bunter!"

"Oh, sir! Yes, sir! No, sir!" gasped Bunter, in alarm. "I wasn't, sir! Never thought of it for a minute, sir. I didn't, sir."

"You were speaking of me when I came up the passage," said Mr. Quelch, in a grinding voice. "You alluded to me, Bunter, your Form master, as 'old Quelch.'"

"Oh, no, sir! Not at all, sir! I—I wasn't speaking at all, sir!" gasped Bunter.

"I heard you!" thundered the Remove master.

"I—I mean, sir, I—I was saying I—I was—"

"You will take a hundred lines, Bunter!"

"Oh, yes, sir!" gasped Bunter, greatly relieved to hear that it was not a licking.

And he rolled away before Mr. Quelch had time to change his mind.

Mr. Quelch turned his attention once more to the tea-party in Smithy's study. The seven juniors rose to their feet now, and stood waiting. They all knew that they were "for it." Only in the Bounder's face was a lurking look of mockery and defiance.

"I was informed by a prefect," said Mr. Quelch, in a deep voice, "that my orders were being disobeyed, and that a number of juniors were taking tea in a study here in direct defiance of my commands."

The juniors did not need to be told the name of that prefect. They could guess that Gerald Loder had been keeping a watchful eye upon them.

"I find that this information is correct," said Mr. Quelch. "I find that the head boy of my Form is concerned in this act of rebellion."

Wharton was silent.

It was useless to speak, even if he had had any excuse to offer; and as a matter of fact, he had none. There was no denying that the Removites had gathered to that spread in Smithy's study, in direct defiance of their Form master's orders. They were caught in the act.

"You can scarcely imagine," resumed Mr. Quelch, "that this rebellious conduct will be allowed to pass unpunished!"

"No, sir!" said the Bounder. "Our imagination jibs at that, sir!"

Redwing gave his chum almost an imploring look. It was no time for impertinence.

Mr. Quelch compressed his lips hard.

"I shall send the school page to this study to remove these comestibles," he said. "You will all follow me to my study."

"Now, sir?" asked the Bounder.

"At once!" rapped Mr. Quelch.

"Mayn't we finish tea first, sir?"

"How dare you ask such a question, Vernon-Smith! Follow me instantly!"

The Remove master turned away in great wrath, and whisked along the Remove passage to the stairs. Removites who saw him felt deeply thankful that they had declined Smithy's invitation to tea. The hapless fellows who had not declined it trailed after Mr. Quelch.

"Hard cheese, old beans!" murmured Peter Todd, as they passed.

"Awf'ly sorry, begad!" said Lord Mauleverer.

Mr. Quelch turned his head.

"Did you speak to these juniors, Mauleverer?"

"Oh! Ah! Yaas, sir!" gasped his lordship.

"You were expressing sympathy, I understand?"

"Yaas, sir."

"You will take a hundred lines, Mauleverer."

"Oh! Yaas, sir!"

Mr. Quelch whisked on, and the delinquents trailed after him. No one else ventured to express sympathy as they passed.

The hapless seven arrived with Mr. Quelch at his study. There, the Remove master selected a cane.

"You first, Wharton! I shall punish you most severely, as you are head boy

in the Remove, and should have set an example of obedience to the Form."

Wharton did not speak.

"My fault, sir!" said the Bounder coolly. "Wharton refused to come at first, and I called him a funk; that's why he came."

"Wharton should have been superior to such a petty taunt, Vernon-Smith. You will be silent. Bend over that chair, Wharton!"

Harry Wharton bent over in silence. It was six—and it was a severe six. Wharton made no sound; but his face was set and a little pale as he rose after the infliction.

The other fellows went through it in turn. It was six for the Bounder also; and the rest had two each. Redwing, who came last, had merely a couple of flicks, which looked as if Mr. Quelch's gimlet eye detected how matters stood in No. 4 Study.

The Form master laid down his cane.

"Any further disobedience of this kind will be followed by a report to your headmaster, and a flogging," he said coldly. "From to-day, as I cannot trust you, the school shop will be placed out of bounds for the Remove. I shall inform Mrs. Mimble of this at once. You may go."

The seven juniors went, in silence. Even the Bounder was not disposed for any more impertinence, after six from the Remove master's cane.

At the end of Masters' passage the hapless seven came on three Sixth-Formers in a group—Loder and Walker and Carne.

Loder & Co. glanced at them and laughed.

Harry Wharton's eyes gleamed at Loder. The Bounder clenched his hands. But they tramped past the grinning seniors in silence. Evidently Loder had come there to enjoy their discomfiture. But the heroes of the Remove had had a lesson on the subject of handling a prefect, and they restrained their natural yearning to seize Gerald Loder and mop up the passago with him.

"Ow!" groaned Bob Cherry, when they were out of hearing of Loder & Co. "Wow! What a life!"

"Well, we asked for it!" said Harry.

"The askfulness was terrific!"

"Who's coming to tea in my study to-morrow?" asked the Bounder.

"What?"

"You silly ass!"

"You terrific fathead!"

"Go and eat coke!"

And the juniors wriggled on their way, leaving the Bounder of Greyfriars shrugging his shoulders. Evidently nobody was coming to tea in Smithy's study on the morrow. One tea party, with such an ending, was enough for the chums of the Remove.

THE SEVENTH CHAPTER.

Bunter's Wheeze!

"IT'S awful!"

Thus William George Bunter, not once, but many times.

All the Remove agreed that it was rotten; but it was not merely rotten to Billy Bunter. It was awful, in fact, fearful.

No tea in the study, and the tuck-shop out of bounds! Such a prospect was, to Billy Bunter, not merely awful, but horrific.

If Bunter's celebrated postal-order had come he would not have been able to expend it in refreshments for his inner Bunter. He would have been left with a useless postal-order in his pocket

and a useless yearning for tuck in his plump inside. With actual cash in hand and an enticing array of tuck in Mrs. Mible's shop, Bunter would not have been able to sample a single jam-tart. Perhaps it was fortunate, in these circumstances, that his expected postal-order, as usual, did not come.

The placing of the school shop out of bounds for the Remove was, in Bunter's view, the last straw.

As Bunter had nothing in the nature of cash to spend there, it might not have been supposed a great hardship on him personally, especially as Mrs. Mible knew him too well to allow tick.

But Bunter, if short of cash himself, was a skilful borrower, a persistent butter-in at other fellows' feeds, a snapper-up of unconsidered trifles. But now there were no feeds to butt into, no trifles to snap up. Even Smithy's study, even Lord Mauleverer's study were as desert as the Sahara. No crumbs fell in these days from the rich man's table.

Bunter suffered most severely of all the Remove. Like Rachel of old, he mourned and could not be comforted.

Other fellows certainly missed their cosy little tea parties, their agreeable little spreads in the studies. But chiefly among the Removites there was a feeling of indignation. They had a grievance—Loder of the Sixth had pulled their Form master's leg, and made Mr. Quelch unjust—and the injustice rankled. It was a stigma on the Remove to have to tea in Hall like a fag Form. It was hard for the Remove to bear the superior smiles of Temple, Dabney, & Co., of the Fourth. Nobody else's sufferings were quite so intense as Billy Bunter's, but every man in the Remove was feeling sore and resentful and rebellious.

But it could not be helped. The fiat had gone forth, and Mr. Quelch spoke as one having authority. When he said "Do this!" there was nothing for his Form to do but to do it.

They chafed and raged, and declared that they would not stand it. But, of course, it had to be stood. Even the Bounder did not, on reflection, tea in his study again. The consequences of tea in the study were altogether too painful, and it was not good enough. Moreover, now that the school shop was out of bounds for the Remove it was rather difficult to obtain supplies.

It was from Bunter that the next suggestion came. He rolled into Smithy's study, where Smithy and Redwing were at prep. Often there had been a nice little supper in Study No. 4 after prep. Now, suppers, like teas, were things of the past. Fellows who wanted supper had to go into Hall for simple bread and cheese. Few fellows in the Remove would really have minded that very much, but for the stigma involved. Their freedom had been taken away. They were being treated like greedy fags who could not be trusted to know when they had had enough. There was the rub.

"Smithy, old chap—" began Bunter.

"Get out!" said the Bounder briefly.

"I've thought of a wheeze."

"Go and boil it!"

"Oh, really, Smithy—"

"Shut the door after you."

Bunter's wheezes did not seem highly prized in Study No. 4. But the Owl of the Remove stuck to his guns.

"I've got a wheeze for dishing old Quelch, Smithy."

"Oh!" said the Bounder, with some show of interest at last. Tom Redwing looked up from his prep. Redwing, at

least, was by no means keen on wheezes for dishing his Form master.

"Hook it, Bunter!" he said.

"You're interrupting prep."

"Shan't!" retorted Bunter independently. "You can go and eat coke, Redwing. I say, Smithy, you'd like to dish Quelch?"

"What-ho!" assented the Bounder.

"What about a spread in the dormitory?"

"Oh!" said Vernon-Smith.

"Fellows could cut down to Uncle Clegg's, in the village, and get in the tuck," said Bunter eagerly. "We could feed in the dorm after lights out. Safe as houses, you know. Of course, I'm not thinking about the spread itself. You know I'm not the fellow to care much about that."

"Oh, my hat!"

"But it's a question of the dignity and independence of the Form!" explained Bunter. "Spreads are barred. Old Quelch has let Loder pull his leg, you know, and feeds are barred till the end of the term. We're not going to stand it. Well, if we can't feed in the studies we can have a spread after lights-out in the dorm, see?"

"Good man!" said the Bounder cordially. "You'll stand the feed, of course."

"Of course," assented Bunter. "If my postal-order comes in time I'll stand a spread this very night. If it's delayed you can stand it, and I'll stand the next. See?"

The Bounder laughed.

"It's a good wheeze," he said. "We'll jolly well do it. Don't jaw it all over the House, Bunter, or the prefects will get on to it."

"Trust me!" grinned Bunter. Even William George Bunter could be trusted to hold his tongue when a feed depended on it. And he rolled out of

Smithy's study with a cheery fat face and glorious anticipations for that night in the Remove dormitory.

"Jolly good idea; what, Reddy?" asked the Bounder, with a glance at his study-mate.

Redwing shook his head.

"Better leave it alone, Smithy. It's not long to the Christmas holidays now. What's the good of asking for trouble?"

"It's Quelch who's asking for it," answered the Bounder. "You don't mean to say that we're getting justice from Quelch?"

"No," said Tom. "I think Mr. Quelch has come down too heavy. He's mistaken, that's all. He doesn't mean to be unjust."

"Only we have to deal with what he does, not with what he may possibly mean," yawned the Bounder. "I don't care two straws for a spread in the dorm, but it will be up against Quelch and up against Loder, and we're jolly well going to do it, see? I'll speak to the fellows after prep."

The Bounder did not linger long over prep that evening. Leaving Tom Redwing still at work, he went down to the Rag.

In the Rag the idea caught on at once.

Hurree Jamset Ram Singh pronounced that it was a wheezy good idea, and his chums agreed.

Harry Wharton looked rather thoughtful.

As head boy of the Remove, his Form master certainly would have expected him to be down on any suggestion of the sort. But Wharton was feeling as sore as any other Removite over the present state of affairs.

"You're on, Harry?" asked Bob Cherry.

The captain of the Remove nodded.

(Continued on next page.)

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THE PREFECT'S SECRET!

(Continued from previous page.)

"Yes, I'm on. I dare say Quelch doesn't mean to be unjust, but he is unjust, all the same. We're up against the Beak."

"Hear, hear!"

"Good man!" said the Bounder. "Then we're all in it."

"Every man in the Form," said Peter Todd. "But don't shout it out! There'd be an awful row."

"The rowfulness would be terrific," said Hurree Singh. "But the still tongue saves a stitch in time, as the esteemed English proverb says."

"Good old English proverb!" grinned Bob Cherry. "And I suppose a stitch in time goes longest to the well, what?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"My esteemed idiotic Cherry——"

"It's settled," said the Bounder, interrupting the Nabob of Bhanipur. "Two or three fellows can cut out of the dorm after lights out and scud down to Friardale. I'll go for one."

"Jolly risky!" said Skinner.

"Blow the risk! I'll go," said Wharton.

"And little me," said Bob.

"And I!" said Johnny Bull.

"And I!" said half a dozen other fellows at once.

"We don't want a whole giddy army," said the Bounder. "Three fellows will be enough. A crowd would get spotted. I'll go with Wharton and Bob."

"Done!" said Harry.

"And we'll have a whip-round for the funds," said Peter Todd. "Now, then, Bunter, trot out your postal-orders."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"My postal-order hasn't come," said Bunter. "There's been some delay in the post, Peter——"

"Go hon!"

"I'm standing this spread," said the Bounder. "I've got plenty of tin. It's settled that it's for to-night."

"Hear, hear!"

"We'll jolly well make an institution of it," said the Bounder, with a gleam in his eyes. "Supper in the dorm instead of tea in the study—and we'll jolly well keep it up as long as Quelch does."

"Good egg!"

"Hear, hear!"

There was no doubt that the scheme was popular in the Remove. Some of the fellows declared that they had almost forgotten the taste of a jam tart or a meringue. Billy Bunter fairly gloated on the prospect. The Remove were in a state of great expectancy and suppressed excitement when they went to their dormitory that night.

THE EIGHTH CHAPTER.

Breaking Bounds!

WINGATE of the Sixth saw lights out for the Remove that night. If he observed any signs of excitement in the Remove, he did not take any special note of them. Wingate had been away from Greyfriars for a few days, and he had returned to find the Remove and their affairs in the present parlous state. He did not seem to attach any importance to the matter, however. Probably he did not even realise that there was a crisis in the history of Greyfriars at all. Remove affairs did not loom very large in the estimation of the great men of the Sixth.

Lights were out, and the captain of THE MAGNET LIBRARY.—No. 1,035.

Greyfriars departed. Billy Bunter sat up in bed as the door closed behind him.

"I say, you fellows——"

"Shut up, Bunter."

"Oh, really, you know——"

"Shut up!"

The time was not yet.

Half an hour was allowed to elapse before the Removites made a move. Not till ten o'clock had chimed out from the clock tower, was there a sound of fellows getting out of bed.

The Bounder and Bob Cherry and Harry Wharton turned out, and dressed quietly in the dark. Not even a candle-end was lighted. Only too well the heroes of the Remove knew that trouble would follow in the event of discovery, and they realised very clearly that they could not be too careful. Billy Bunter was wildly impatient; every minute that separated him from the spread seemed an hour to Bunter. But the impatience of the Owl of the Remove was not heeded.

"I say, you fellows, buck up, you know," groaned Bunter.

"Cheese it, fathead."

"You'll run all the way, won't you?" implored Bunter.

"We'll be back in about an hour, you men," said the Bounder. "You can get your beauty sleep while we're gone. Come on."

"Oh dear!" groaned Bunter. "I say, you fellows, I'm hungry! Famished."

Bunter was left to famish.

The three enterprising Removites quitted the dormitory on tiptoe, their shoes in their hands. Outside the dormitory, all was dark. Downstairs there were lights; the masters were still up, and most of the Sixth. But in the junior quarters of the House, all was dark and silent. But the Removites knew their way easily enough in the dark. They groped silently along the passages, and reached the lower box-room.

Not till they were safe in the box-room, with the door closed, did they put on their shoes—rubber-soled shoes specially selected for silence.

"All serene," murmured the Bounder.

He opened the box-room window.

One after another, the trio dropped out on the leads beneath the window, and Harry Wharton drew down the sash after him, leaving it half an inch open so that it could be raised again from outside.

Then the three clambered down from the leads, and cut away under the dim stars in the winter sky.

The House was closed for the night; quadrangle and gardens deserted and silent. As they came into the quad, the juniors looked back at the House, and saw many lighted windows—the Head's window, and Mr. Quelch's, and Mr. Prout's and Mr. Wiggins'—and half a dozen in the Sixth.

"Loder's gone to bed," remarked Vernon-Smith. "His light's out, anyhow. And Walker's."

"All the better," remarked Bob Cherry. "Might be in another study, though. Loder isn't generally an early bird, I believe."

"Or he might be out on the tiles," remarked the Bounder. "Loder breaks bounds at night sometimes, as I jolly well know."

"Bother Loder!" said Harry. "Come on."

The three juniors reached the school wall in a shadowed, secluded spot. Vernon-Smith was helped up first, then Bob Cherry; and they reached down and gave Wharton a helping hand to the top.

They dropped lightly outside the wall.

Wharton and Bob Cherry were in a rather serious mood. But the Bounder's eyes were gleaming with excitement. Breaking bounds after lights out was a very unusual experience for the captain of the Remove and his friends. It was by no means unusual for the Bounder—and his motives were not always so innocent as in the present case.

Whatever their motives might be, the juniors knew well enough how serious the consequences would be if they were discovered. Breaking bounds at night was an awfully serious offence. A Head's flogging was the lightest punishment they could expect.

"Come on," grinned the Bounder.

"Quiet!" murmured Bob.

"Nobody to hear us now."

"Anybody who saw us out of bounds might report us," said Harry. "We want to keep clear of anybody on the road."

"That's so," agreed Vernon-Smith. "Can't be too careful. If we were nailed, the beaks might think we'd gone out pub-haunting."

"Oh, my hat!" ejaculated Bob Cherry.

"Might be the sack!" chuckled the Bounder.

"Oh, cheese it," said Bob uncomfortably. "Let's get on."

The three juniors ran lightly along the dusky road in their rubber shoes. The lights of a passing car glared up, and they dodged into the shadow of a tree till it was gone. Then they turned into the footpath through the wood, which saved a considerable distance on the way to the village.

The wood, stripped of leaves by the winter winds, was dark and damp and desolate. A keen wind came from the sea, and the juniors turned their collars up. They were glad to get out of the wood into the lane again, at a short distance from Friardale, with the lights of the village twinkling ahead of them.

Nearer at hand was that delectable resort known as the Cross Keys. The place was closed, but lights were burning there. The Bounder glanced at it, and then grinned at his companions.

"Like to drop in for a hundred up?" he asked.

"Eh?"

"I'll give you an introduction to old Cobb. I know him, you know."

"Don't be a silly ass, Smithy!" said Wharton gruffly.

The Bounder chuckled.

"Look out!" breathed Bob Cherry.

"What——"

"Cover—quick!"

The juniors had almost reached the side lane which ran down by the buildings of the Cross Keys. Ahead of them a sudden glimmer of light came through the misty night.

They knew what it was, at once. It was a lantern; and it indicated that Police-constable Tozer was on his rounds.

That Mr. Tozer would report them for being out of bounds, if he saw them, was indubitable. He was likely enough to collar them and march them back to the school, and ring the bell at Greyfriars and hand them over to Gosling. But, at all events, it was certain that he would, at least, take their names and report them.

The juniors darted into cover at once.

At the corner of the side lane was a large cart, up-ended, and left for the night. Almost in the twinkling of an eye the Removites were crouching behind the cart.

"My hat!" breathed Wharton. "That was a close shave!"

"Tozer, of course!" murmured the Bounder. "There's a rumour going

about that he spotted a Greyfriars man hanging about here one night last week and reported it at the school. What a catch for him if he saw us! The Head would tip him a ten-bob note."

"Hush!"

Mr. Tozer's glimmering lantern came nearer. Then it turned away and disappeared.

"He's stopped!" whispered Bob.

"Only nosing about; he will come on," said Vernon-Smith. "Keep close."

The juniors remained silent in cover. Police-constable Tozer was apparently "nosing" about at a little distance, doing his duty carefully and sedulously. Mr. Tozer was a dutiful and punctilious officer, though, as a matter of fact, his job was a good deal of a sinecure. Nothing in the way of crime ever happened at Friardale. That quiet village was right off the track of modern progress, and much behind the times.

"Hallo, hallo, hallo!" breathed Bob Cherry. "Listen!"

That thought, however, was dismissed at once.

Had their old enemy, the bully of the Sixth, discovered that they had broken bounds, certainly he would have reported them at once to Mr. Quelch, but it was very improbable that he would have turned out at night to look for them.

Moreover, Loder obviously was not looking for anybody.

He came walking on with his companion, conversing in low tones with him, and it did not take the juniors long to guess his destination. Loder's destination was the Cross Keys.

told Quelch. Luckily, he didn't recognise me. Quick, or the game's up!"

The two seniors groped hurriedly round the cart.

Out in the lane there was a glimmering starlight; but the cart was turned up in the shadow of a great tree, and there it was intensely dark.

The three juniors remained still for a moment, taken aback by this new and unexpected turn of events.

They heard the two Sixth-Formers groping round the cart, with the evident intention of taking cover behind it, as the Removites had done.



"Oh, my hat!"

Footsteps were approaching.

They were not Mr. Tozer's footsteps.

Mr. Tozer was rooting about somewhere at a little distance towards the village. Those footsteps came from the opposite direction—from the direction of Greyfriars.

Peering round the wheels of the big cart, silent and cautious, the three juniors spotted two overcoated figures. In the glimmer of the stars they recognised them at once. They were Gerald Loder and James Walker, of the Sixth Form at Greyfriars.

THE NINTH CHAPTER.

Desperate Measures!

HARRY WHARTON and his companions hardly breathed.

For a second the thought flashed through their minds that Loder had been on the watch and had discovered their absence, and followed them.

Many fellows in the Remove knew, or at least, suspected, that the sportsman of the Sixth was addicted to breaking bounds at night, and that he had extremely undesirable acquaintances outside the school. The three juniors had proof of it now, under their eyes.

They scarcely breathed.

Loder and Walker came easily on till they were passing the upturned cart that hid the juniors.

Then they suddenly stopped.

The juniors knew the cause.

The light of Police-constable Tozer's lantern had glimmered out once more; the plump village constable was coming on.

Loder and Walker spotted that glimmering light ahead, and they stopped, as the juniors had stopped six or seven minutes earlier, at the sight of it. The Removites heard Loder gasp.

"That's Tozer! My hat!"

"Oh!" gasped Walker.

"Quick! Get behind that cart! The old fool saw me one night last week, and

The hapless fellows who had "tea'd" in their study against orders trailed after the Form-master. "Hard cheese, begad!" said Lord Mauleverer as they passed. Mr. Quelch turned his head. "Did you speak to these juniors, Mauleverer, expressing sympathy?" he asked. "Oh! Ah! Yaas, sir!" "You will take a hundred lines, then!" said the Remove master. (See Chapter 6.)

The Bounder was the first to recover his presence of mind.

In less than a minute the two prefects would have been stumbling over them.

Vernon-Smith backed away from the cart and slipped behind the trunk of the big oak.

Wharton and Cherry were only a second behind him.

With beating hearts they backed round the great tree. A murmur of Loder's voice reached them.

"What—what was that?"

"Nothing," muttered Walker.

"I heard something move—"

"Nothing here. Quiet, for goodness' sake! If that idiotic bobby spots us we're done for." Walker's teeth were almost chattering. "We're prefects; it would be the sack for us."

"Quiet!" muttered Loder, in his turn.

The two Sixth-Formers crouched behind the cart, where only a few minutes before the three juniors had been crouching.

The juniors had retreated in time.

They were now eight or nine feet away, with the big trunk of the oak between them and the prefects. Loder,

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Mick had his hand on the reversing lever to back the snow-plough out when he saw that they could not get away in time.

The avalanche seemed to drop on them out of the sky itself, a snow-streaked mass that came down with a terrifying roar. Sammy crashed shut the armoured weather-screen at that side of the cab—and then the thing hit them.

Earth and stones and snow and branches poured in through the open back of the cab as the three chums huddled together by the fireman's seat. The stuff came in with a clattering rattle. There was an instant of suspense as the roaring heart of the avalanche drove at them, then the snow-plough seemed to shudder and cringe as it struck.

It quivered through its whole mighty bulk, heaved on the lines and then settled back. Stuff piled up on it, shutting out the night. The back of the cab and the tender were hidden under a mass of debris. The tail of the avalanche shot over the pile and went thundering and slithering out across the line.

The pounding seemed to last an age, then it died away, and all that was left was the rustling trickle of settling debris and the spluttering hiss of snow melting on the hot footplate.

"Crikey!" gasped Sammy.

The three crouched there in silence for a full minute after that. Then Mick straightened up.

"That's that," he murmured. "Wonder if the others are all right," and he reached for the whistle-cord and pulled it. There was no response. "Whistle's choked by the stuff!" he exclaimed, then looked to the far side of the car.

There was nothing to see but debris and the roots of an uprooted tree which stuck through the opening in the weather-screen.

"Wonder how much is on top of us," said Lanky shakily. "I don't think we were in the middle of it, Mick. We only caught the edge."

"Some edge!" granted Sammy. "What about trying to back out, Mick?"

Mick nodded, and moved to the reversing lever. It would be useless to try and go forward into the heart of the fallen avalanche. If only the fringe had struck them, they might be able to back clear of it.

"Let's have some sand, Lanky!" he called, and the long fellow moved to the sand lever and heaved it over.

It was oddly silent in that choked up cab. No sound came to them from outside, and all they could hear was the noises of the engine and the subdued fluttering of the furnace in the fire-box.

"Here goes!" Mick's voice sounded strangely, then he opened the throttle. They heard the wheels crunch on sand, and the whole engine shuddered as he gave her more throttle, then she started to move backwards.

"Mick, the top o' the cab'll scoop stuff in on us!" Sammy yelled suddenly, and as he spoke a mass of frozen snow was torn from the mass above and crashed to the footplate.

"Got to chance that!" Mick answered. "It'll only be light muck. Climb up into the corners by the look-outs!"

The two obeyed, while he clambered to the driver's seat and worked the regulator handle from there. Slowly the engine went backwards, her choked-up blast roaring and the exhaust melting its own way through the stuff which covered it.

The cab was half blocked up by stuff driven in from above, but they still went back. Snow hemmed Mick in, pressing on his arms and shoulders, growing heavier and heavier as the engine forced its way out. Then, suddenly, she shot clear. They heard stuff pounding off her boiler, and then they were out of it. Mick ran her a few yards farther, and stopped.

He could see only Lanky, hunched up beside him, and together they clawed at the snow, digging themselves out with their hands. They gained the night air, just as Sammy's head appeared from the other side of the cab.

They saw the old Experimental, snowed up to her buffer-beam. From her cab snow was flying as though from an explosion; that was the other two getting out. Men came running along the line from behind, travelling over the part that the plough had cleared. Mick and the rest had climbed out and were on the track beside the engines when the men arrived.

The snow seemed to have eased a little, and the boys looked to where the avalanche had fallen. Great masses of snow and earth, trees and boulders packed the line from side to side and spilled off the slope beyond. It looked as though it ran along the whole of the remainder of the length of the Steeps—close on a quarter of a mile.

"Blocked—absolutely blocked!" Sammy gasped. "The Mail won't go over this line to-night."

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Mick said nothing. He turned as the men came running up. They all carried picks or shovels, and had run from the brake van left down the line. Half a dozen of them started, without any need for instructions, to clear the cabs of the two engines from the debris in them. While they were doing that Mick surveyed the line ahead. He walked forward with his mates until they could peer at the spot where the two engines had been overwhelmed.

It was plain enough that they had caught only the edge of the avalanche, otherwise they would never have been able to back out. The stuff rose in a tight-packed wall over ten feet high, and Mick looked from it to the armoured plough of the engine behind him.

"Look here," he said at last, "the Mail must be pretty nearly due now—not more than fifteen minutes' away, anyhow. I reckon there's just one way we could clear this line, and that's to keep on charging at this stuff. See what I mean? Couple up both engines and rush it for all we're worth. As soon as the engines won't go forward any more, back out and then charge it again!"

"Yes, an' you'll end in coming off the rails," said Sammy. "There's boulders in that lot half as big as a house, Mick!"

"We'll have to chance 'em! And, anyway, we might just as well get derailed trying to smash through, because it can't block the line any worse. Are you chaps game to try it?"

"Course we're game!" Sammy exclaimed. "We'll try any blessed thing if it looks like clearing the line!"

"Righto! Well, we'll have to stoke up both engines until they nearly bust, and keep 'em like that. We'll want all the power we can get. Come on!"

They ran back. Quickly Mick told one of the gang what he intended doing, and the men promised to keep clear of the two engines while they worked. Mick helped Sammy and Lanky to stoke up the snow-plough, while a man volunteered as second fireman on the Experimental.

Soon the two locomotives were coupled up, and then they backed down for a two-hundred yards charging run at the avalanche. With a toot on the whistle, Mick sent the plough forward. The old Experimental's buffers clanged as she made contact behind, then both engines roared down the line.

They picked up speed with amazing swiftness, and were all but rocking on the lines as the armoured nose of the plough crashed at the wall before her. There was a sudden smashing sound, muck sprayed out in a mad fountain all round, the engines jerked on the lines, and then they went boring on, wheels slipping on the rails, getting a grip, then slipping again, until the mass piled up ahead stopped the engines.

In that first wild charge they gained a full thirty yards, and during all the mad plunge stones, splinters of rock, broken branches, and icy lumps of snow smashed into the cab of the plough, leaping and bouncing on the boys who worked there.

Lanky was half dazed by a small boulder which took him at the back of the head. But he grabbed his shovel and tended the fire as, with a toot on the whistle, Mick set both engines backing from the breach they had made.

Once more the plough and the gallant old Experimental thundered down, crashing into the blockage and tearing into it. Snow, frozen to slivers of ice, slashed into the cab; it had edges like glass for sharpness, and the flying fragments gashed the skin.

The engines stopped, backed out, then crashed in again. Time and again they repeated the manœuvre, and Mick's mates worked until their brows and cheeks were running sweat as they tended the blazing maw behind the fire-box door.

They were all beaten and bruised, cut and shaken by flying debris—but they stuck it. Somewhere behind them the Midnight mail was coming, and she'd stop behind unless they could break the way through for her! Nothing had ever stopped the crack flyer before, and nothing was going to stop her now!

Back and forward on the line the two giant engines roared, with debris piling on either side of them, almost as high as their safety-valves. A wild rush, a blundering shock with the engines trembling, and debris spraying with a roar, then a stop—back out, and do it all over again.

Without pause, without a moment of rest, Mick sent the plough at it. He'd lost all count of how much line they had cleared until he came to a bit that was higher and tougher than the rest and into which, at the first plunge, the engines did not penetrate more than ten yards.

He guessed that it marked the end of the Steeps, and a glance out told him that he was right. Again they tackled the patch, and

again it blocked hard before them, stopping the engine quickly. Once they got through it they'd have broken open the line. Mick looked at his watch. A minute to midnight!

In one minute the famous mail would roll into Millington Junction. She was due to pull out with her mail and passengers two minutes later. Unless they got word back by that time, the Mail would be delayed!

As the engine backed out Mick yelled to Sammy:

"This is the last patch. I'm going to chance a long run at it!"

They backed almost the whole length of the Scawdale Steeps. Mick then whistled for wide throttle, and the engines went at it! The watching gang pressed back on either side as the engines stormed past them. Mick, peering through the snowed-up look-out pane, saw the stout wall of debris sliding towards them.

"Hang on!" he yelled to his mates, and then came the shock of impact. They felt the front of the plough buck, then drop down, and it seemed to heave and sway. Stuff slid past the cab with a clattering, pounding bellow. It became filled with flying fragments, and all three were flung half across the footplate as the plough lurched madly—and suddenly surged on. They were through!

Beyond the line stretched with snow lying thinly, sheltered by rising ground which cut off the blizzard. The work of the snow-plough was done. Mick stopped her and backed her through the walls of debris she had cleared. The moment that she was past the shovel gang got busy packing the stuff up so that it could not slip down and block the passage of the Midnight Mail.

Mick could hear them cheering as they passed, then they were clear of the Steeps, and he stopped at the little hut from which the foreman of the permanent way gang was using the emergency telephone. Sammy dropped down and threw the points that would switch the old Experimental and the snow-plough to a short siding near the hut. Mick ran the engines off the main line, then he clambered down and went running for the hut, dragging out his watch as he went.

It was a minute and a half after midnight. In thirty seconds the Mail was due to leave—with signals still against her!

Mick dived into the hut, his mates with him. There was no one there, and he whirled the handle at the side of the little telephone. As he waited for an answer he glanced at his mates. Their faces were cut and scarred, there was earth and snow on their clothing, but their eyes were shining.

Blood trickled down Mick's cheek and there was a bruise above one eye; the back of the hand that had been on the throttle was gashed by a piece of flying ice. But he grinned as he heard Foreman Hayes' voice on the wire:

"Mick, this end. We've—"

"Oh, hallo, Mick! That foreman says you can't do anything. Had an avalanche off the Steeps, or something!"

"That's right, but we've got it away; the road's open now."

"What?" There was amazed delight in the foreman's tone. "You've done it? By heck, boy, I knew you an' your gang 'ud get the Mail through! I'll see the super hears about this! Good boy, Mick! We can let the flyer go, eh?"

Half a minute later lamps in the signal gantry that straddled the lines out of Millington Junction changed from red to green, and the Midnight Mail pulled out. Swiftly she leaped into her stride and went thundering over the viaduct and heading for Scawdale Steeps.

She slowed down, driver and fireman looking out of the near side of the cab. They picked out the great bulk of the old Experimental and the giant snow-plough on the siding, and as they saw it the driver reached for the whistle cord.

Out on the snowy night shrilled the mighty loco's whistle. From the snow-plough and its mate behind came answering blasts. Five grinning, battered faces laughed towards the pilot of the midnight flyer, and through the pounding of the mighty driving wheels the five of them heard the driver roaring:

"Good boys! That's the stuff to give 'em!"

THE END.

(Mick's a bright lad, isn't he? Meet him again in a clinking long complete yarn of railway life, entitled: "The Phantom Engine!" This thrilling story of mystery and Yuletide adventure on the Iron Road appears in the Special Xmas Number of the BOYS' REALM. Out on Wednesday. Price Twopence.)



(Continued from page 13.)

certainly, had heard some sound, but in the darkness he had seen nothing. As he crouched behind the cart he stared round him suspiciously in the wrapping gloom. But he could see nothing, and the Removites made no sound now.

Silent, though their hearts were thumping, they waited and watched, behind the oak. Police-constable Tozer's gleaming lantern was very near at hand now. With a slow and stately tread, calculated to warn any evil-doer at a considerable distance that he was coming, Mr. Tozer advanced upon his way.

His way led him past the upturned cart, and the crouching Greyfriars men waited in feverish anxiety for him to pass.

It was not a flogging that Loder and Walker had to fear if they were discovered out of bounds late at night in the unsavoury precincts of the Cross Keys. They were Sixth Form men, and prefects, and their sentence would have been expulsion, short and sharp. That was what the sportsmen of the Sixth were risking in their blackguardly excursion.

Walker could hardly keep his teeth from chattering. Loder, who had more nerve, was quite pale with anxiety. Feverishly the two black sheep of the Greyfriars Sixth waited for the police-constable's light to pass up the lane and disappear.

But it did not pass.

Police-constable Tozer had halted again.

Possibly he had heard some sound; possibly he remembered how he had spotted a youth leaving the Cross Keys surreptitiously one night the previous week. Possibly he was thinking of performing a service for the headmaster of Greyfriars, and receiving for it something substantial in the way of a tip. At all events, Mr. Tozer, instead of passing on his way, stopped and flashed his light on and round the upturned cart.

Evidently he was suspicious.

Behind the cart, Walker and Loder quivered with terror. Farther back, behind the tree, Harry Wharton, and Bob, and the Bounder suppressed their breathing. The juniors were in no immediate danger of discovery. But the two Sixth-Formers were in great danger—if Mr. Tozer took the trouble to roll round the cart their game was up, with a vengeance. Mr. Tozer, at present, was standing in the lane flashing his light on the cart.

There was a grunt and a ponderous tread.

Mr. Tozer was beginning to move round the cart.

He moved slowly, partly because he was a plump gentleman with a good deal of weight to carry, partly because the patch of ground in front of the Cross Keys was rough and rutty and full of puddles. Mud and puddles surrounded the cart, and Mr. Tozer picked his way among them with some circumspection.

The Bounder suppressed a gleeful

chuckle as he saw Mr. Tozer's lantern gradually circumnavigating the upturned cart. The detection of the two Greyfriars prefects was now assured, or so it seemed. They could not stir without revealing themselves; and if they waited where they were in a few moments more the lantern would be gleaming on them and revealing them to Mr. Tozer's astonished eyes.

Wharton and Bob Cherry could feel a gleam of compassion for the two wretched young blackguards, whose dingy folly had led them to this—to miserable fear and concealment, to terrifying discovery, disgrace, and ruin. The Bounder was only amused. Loder was the prime cause of all the troubles that had fallen on the Remove of late; and Loder was "for it" now, beyond a possibility of escape, so far as the juniors could see.

But the blackguard of the Sixth was not at the end of his resources. There was a sudden whiz of something in the air, and Mr. Tozer's lantern went abruptly out. The juniors heard the crash of a stone. The voice of Mr. Tozer followed, raised in wrath.

"I'll 'ave yer! Throwing a stone at my light, by gum!"

The constable came tramping wrathfully round the cart in the dark, heedless now of mud and puddles.

"My hat!" breathed the Bounder. Bitter as his feelings were towards Loder, he admired his nerve and resource.

Loder had hurled the heavy stone with accurate aim. Mr. Tozer's lantern was smashed and the light extinguished. Recognition of the Greyfriars men was at least difficult now.

Wharton caught his breath.

He knew that Loder must be desperate. It was a pretty serious matter to raise a hand against a police-constable in the execution of his duty. Had that stone missed the lantern it would have given Mr. Tozer a rather severe shock.

In the dark, doubtless the two black sheep of Greyfriars had expected, or at least hoped, to dodge away unseen.

But Mr. Tozer, plump as he was, slow as he generally was, was by no means an inactive police officer. The sudden smashing of his lantern roused his wrath and sharpened his suspicions. Probably he now supposed that he had thieves to deal with. He uttered an angry exclamation and came round the cart with a rush, trampling up mud, and before Loder and Walker quite knew what was happening he was upon them.

"Got yer!" panted Mr. Tozer triumphantly.

Walker panted in sheer terror, Loder gripped the stick he carried with a convulsive grip.

Mr. Tozer had grasped Walker by the collar and Loder by the shoulder. They tore themselves away, but could not get loose. Mr. Tozer had a grip that was like a vice.

"Don't you resist the law, you blighters!" gasped Mr. Tozer. He had ample pluck, but he was rather short of wind. "You come out into the light and let a man see you. Smashing a police officer's lantern, hay! You come—Oh!"

Mr. Tozer broke off with a gasping cry and fell heavily into the mud. A heavy stick had whirled into the air and descended on Mr. Tozer's helmet. Loder, absolutely desperate now, with expulsion and ruin staring him in the face, had struck the policeman down.

With all the force of his arm he had struck, and Mr. Tozer was stretched in the mud, his helmet smashed in and a thousand stars dancing before his eyes. So fierce was the blow that Loder's

stick snapped in halves, though he was not aware of it in the excitement and terror of the moment. Mr. Tozer, almost stunned, collapsed in the mud, groaning faintly.

"What—what—" stammered Walker, with ashen lips, peering round in terror.

Loder gripped his arm.

"Silence, you fool!"

He dragged his companion away. A few seconds more, and running footsteps were dying away in the direction of Greyfriars.

THE TENTH CHAPTER.

Good Samaritans!

HARRY WHARTON felt his heart stand still.

The three juniors remained motionless.

In the darkness they had caught only dim glimpses of what had happened, but they knew. They knew that Loder of the Greyfriars Sixth had struck the village constable senseless, or almost senseless, and fled. They had seen and heard—yet it seemed incredible to the juniors. Not only disgrace, not only expulsion from the school, would be Loder's lot now if he was discovered; the gates of prison were open for one who had struck down a police officer on duty. The three juniors remained fairly spellbound with horror.

"Good heavens!" stammered Bob Cherry.

A faint groan reached their ears.

From the Cross Keys, closed for the night, at a little distance from the spot, came no sound, and there was no other building at hand. No alarm had been given. Already Loder and Walker had vanished, and their fleeing footsteps had died into silence. In the darkness Mr. Tozer lay groaning faintly.

"By gad!" breathed the Bounder. "Who'd have thought it? I say, the sooner we get clear of this the better!"

Wharton made a movement.

"We must help him!" he muttered.

"Help whom?" The Bounder clutched his arm. "Are you mad? Do you want to be reported to the Head?"

"He's hurt—"

"That's his funeral, not ours. You fool! Let's get out of this as fast as we can!" hissed the Bounder. "We can't go on to Uncle Clegg's—no spread to-night. We've got to get back, quick. We've got to keep it dark that we ever were out of the dormitory—"

Wharton shook off his hand.

"We've got to help that constable who's been injured," he answered.

"Oh, you're mad! You want to be flogged or sacked?"

"Dash it all, Smithy, the man's hurt," muttered Bob Cherry. "That villain has injured him—"

"Stop, you fools!"

Wharton and Bob Cherry did not heed. They knew the risk they were running as well as Vernon-Smith knew it, but it was a matter of plain duty. Mr. Tozer had been struck down cruelly and lay groaning, and common decency forced the juniors to go to his help.

The Bounder did not see it in that light, however. Herbert Vernon-Smith was thinking of himself, as he generally was.

"Take your chance, then, you thump-in' fools!" he snapped. "I'm keepin' clear."

"Keep clear and be blowed!" retorted Bob.

"Come on, Bob!" muttered Wharton.

"You bet!"

The two juniors ran forward in the

darkness. Whether Vernon-Smith remained where he was, or whether he fled, they did not know or care.

They reached the fallen constable, who was stirring and groaning. Harry Wharton bent over him.

In the deep gloom he could see Mr. Tozer's plump face faintly—white now—with a streak of red oozing down his bald forehead under his smashed helmet. Loder, in his frantic desperation, had struck harder than he deemed. Mr. Tozer had not been quite stunned, but very nearly so, and countless lights were dancing before his eyes and his head was ringing. Harry Wharton lifted Mr. Tozer's head from the mud and made a rest for it on his knee.

Mr. Tozer's dizzy eyes blinked at them in the gloom.

"Young raskils!" he said faintly.

"What?"

"I know you—you belong to the school," mumbled Mr. Tozer. "This 'ere means chokey for you, this does. Knocking down a police-officer in the hexecution of his dooty."

"Oh, my hat!" ejaculated Bob Cherry, quite taken aback by this unexpected accusation. "We didn't knock you down, Mr. Tozer. We saw you knocked down, and ran up to help."

"Tell that to the Marines, or your 'eadmaster!" said Mr. Tozer. "Oh, my 'ead!"

"We're trying to help you, Mr. Tozer," said Wharton soothingly. "It was not us who touched you."

"Then 'oo was it?"

The juniors did not answer.

Loder of the Sixth was their enemy, their unscrupulous enemy, but they shrank from the thought of betraying him, richly as he deserved punishment for what he had done.

Mr. Tozer dragged himself to a sitting posture, and passed his hand over his aching head.

"Young raskils! I've got you now, anyway!"

"I tell you——" exclaimed Bob Cherry.

"Don't you tell me any lies, young man," said Mr. Tozer. He was fast recovering now. "You give me your names."

Wharton and Bob Cherry backed away.

Mr. Tozer's mistake was, perhaps, natural in the circumstances. He had collared two fellows in the dark, he had been struck down half-stunned, and as his senses cleared he found Wharton and Bob Cherry on the spot. That they were trying to help him was clear, but it was easy to suppose that that was because they were alarmed at what they had done.

By his asking for their names, however, the juniors knew that he was not aware of their identity, though he had guessed that they belonged to Greyfriars.

Mr. Tozer, holding on to the cart for support, dragged himself to his feet.

The two juniors backed farther off.

They were more than willing to risk discovery and punishment to help an injured man; but to be marched back to Greyfriars under an accusation of having caused the injury themselves, was rather too much.

And as they were unwilling to give the name of the fellow who really had attacked Mr. Tozer explanation to the extent of satisfying the constable that he had made a mistake was scarcely possible.

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As Mr. Tozer was unaware of their identity, they sagely decided to leave him unaware of it.

Wharton touched Bob's arm.

There was no need to speak. The less Mr. Tozer heard, as well as saw, the better, in the peculiar circumstances. Bob understood.

As Mr. Tozer gained his feet, and blinked dizzily towards them, while he groped in his pocket for a box of matches, the two juniors darted away.

There was an angry roar from Mr. Tozer.

"Stop, you young raskils!"

The two juniors did not heed.

They fairly raced along the lane in the direction of Greyfriars. Mr. Tozer plunged wildly after them; but his head was spinning, and he stopped, and leaned on the cart. It had been the intention of the juniors to help him home, and he needed help, but in view of his belief that they were the perpetrators of the assault, self-preservation came first. Mr. Tozer had to be left to help himself.

"Oh, my hat!" panted Bob Cherry, as the two juniors flew along the shadowy lane. "What a go!"

"What a howling ass!" said Harry. "Smithy was right, after all, to keep out of sight. But who'd have thought that——"

"There'll be a fearful row, old chap."

"No doubt about that."

"Hark!"

Bob Cherry paused to listen. There was a sound of running feet behind them.

"That's not Tozer; he couldn't shift his big feet at that rate," said Bob. "Smithy——"

"That you fellows?" It was the Bounder's voice behind.

"Yes, Smithy."

The Bounder came breathlessly up.

"Did Tozer recognise you?" he panted.

"No."

"Good for you, if he didn't! I heard what he said. You'll never make him believe that you didn't tap him on the crummet. I warned you to keep clear."

"Oh, rats!"

"We've got to prove a jolly strong alibi," said the Bounder. "If it gets out that we were out of bounds to-night, it won't be any good saying we didn't tap Tozer on the napper. He's sure we did, and you can bet the Head will believe it, too. That means the sack—if we're not taken before the magistrates and charged!"

"Nice sort of comforting ass you are, aren't you?" grunted Bob Cherry. "If it comes to that, we shall have to say who it really was."

"And you think that Loder will admit it?"

"Eh? I suppose he can't deny the truth?"

"Can't he!" snapped the Bounder. "I fancy Loder could deny whole mountains of truths that would get him bunked from Greyfriars."

"But——" stammered Bob.

"Let's get in!" said Harry abruptly. "We were silly asses to have come out! Let's get in!"

The three juniors hurried on.

There was no sign of Loder or Walker in the lane. Evidently the two black sheep of the Sixth had put on speed, and probably were already at the school. The Removites reached Greyfriars in a breathless state, and clambered over the wall. Five minutes later they had climbed in at the box-room window, and were stealing on tiptoe back to their dormitory.

THE ELEVENTH CHAPTER.

No Spread!

"I SAY, you fellows——"

Billy Bunter was awake.

It was unprecedented for William George Bunter to remain awake till eleven o'clock. But the anticipation of the dormitory spread had banished slumber, and Bunter's snore had not yet been heard in the Remove quarters.

The fat junior sat up and blinked round in the gloom, as he heard the soft sound of the door cautiously opening and shutting.

"Got it?" he gasped.

"Go and eat coke, you fat idiot!" snapped the Bounder, hurriedly tearing off his clothes.

"Oh, really, Smithy——"

"Anything happened to you fellows?" inquired Peter Todd.

"Yes, rather!" said Bob.

"Haven't you got the tuck?" asked Hazeldene.

"No. We had to chuck it."

"Well, you must be silly duffers," grunted Hazel, "keeping us awake till this time of night for nothing!"

"Not spotted?" asked Frank Nugent anxiously.

"Not so bad as that," said Harry. "But we ran into old Tozer, and we had to chuck it."

"Rotten luck!" said Johnny Bull.

"The rottenfulness is terrific!" said Hurree Jamsset Ram Singh sympathetically. "But what cannot be cured must go longest to the well."

There was an infuriated howl from Billy Bunter.

"You haven't got the tuck?"

"No, ass!"

"You burbling chumps!" roared Bunter.

"Shut up, fathead!"

"Keeping a fellow awake for nothing!" howled Bunter. "Didn't I tell you I was famished before you started? Beasts!"

"Dry up, you fat fool!" hissed the Bounder.

"Shan't!" hooted Bunter. "Yah! Funks! Foozling duffers! You let old Tozer frighten you! Yah! You ought to be jolly well ashamed of yourselves! Haven't you got any of the tuck? Why, you—you blithering idiots! I've stayed awake for the spread! You—you—you—— Yaroooooh!" roared Bunter, as the Bounder leaned over his bed and smote.

"Now shut up!" snarled Vernon-Smith.

"Yow-ow-ow-ow!"

"Well, you fellows seem to have mucked it up, and no mistake," yawned Skinner. "Tell us what's happened."

"Least said, soonest mended," answered the Bounder. "There'll be jolly serious trouble if it gets known that anybody was out of the dormitory to-night. I'm going to be fast asleep when Quelchy comes round."

"Is Quelchy coming round, then?" exclaimed Bolsover major.

"Most likely."

"Oh, my hat!"

The three juniors plunged into bed. But they did not sleep.

There was a buzz of curious and excited voices in the dormitory, and the Bounder snapped savagely at the speakers.

"Can't you shut up? If Quelchy hears a sound when he comes round he will know somebody's been out of this dorm!"

"Is it so jolly serious as all that?" asked Peter Todd.

"As serious as the sack, very likely."

"Great pip! What have you been doing?"

"Find out, you idiot—and shut up!"
"Must be something jolly serious if the Bouncer's so scared as all that!" chuckled Skinner. "Did you hit Tozer in the eye, Smithy?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"
"Quiet, you fellows!" said Harry Wharton. "For goodness' sake, don't jaw! There will be trouble enough without asking for more!"

"Right-ho, old bean!" said Squiff.
And all voices died away—save Bunter's. Bunter was thrilling with indignation. He had been promised a spread, and there was no spread. He had kept awake till past eleven o'clock, and there had been nothing to keep awake for. William George Bunter was

Form were agog with excitement and curiosity.

Nothing more was said, but the Removites waited in excited expectation for something to happen.

It was some time later that a distant bell was heard to ring. Faintly through the silence of the night some of the Removites caught the sound of an opening door downstairs.

Three fellows, at least, knew what it meant. Mr. Tozer had not left the matter till the morning. He had come on to the school.

It was about ten minutes later that footsteps were heard in the passage outside the Remove dormitory.

The door opened.

was unwilling to admit the possibility that such delinquents belonged to his Form.

"At all events, they are all here," said the Head. "Let us proceed."

The door was closed again.
"Dear old Quelch!" murmured Skinner. "The occupants of this dormitory, my beloved 'earers, appear to be all fast asleep."

There was a chuckle from the Remove beds.

"Appearances are a little deceptive sometimes," remarked Hazeldene. "But what on earth is the row? I suppose you fellows didn't knock old Tozer on the head, did you?"

"A cowardly assault, Quelch said,"



The constable came tramping round the cart, heedless now of mud and puddles. "I'll 'ave yer!" he bawled. Loder and Walker, behind the cart, quivered with terror. Farther back, in the deep gloom of the trees, Harry Wharton, Bob Cherry, and the Bouncer looked on interestedly, for they were in no immediate danger of discovery. (See Chapter 9.)

too wrathful and indignant to keep silent.

"You fozzling fatheads!" he hooted. "I hope you'll get caught and licked! You jolly well deserve it!"

"Will you shut up, Bunter?"

"No, I won't!" howled Bunter. "I think it's a rotten shame! I think those beasts ought to be sent to Coventry! I—I say, wharrer you getting out of bed for, Peter?"

"I'm going to swipe you with a bolster!"

"Beast! Look here—Yaroooh!"
Swipe!

"Have another?" asked Peter.

"Ow! No! Keep off, you beast!"

And even Billy Bunter was silent at last.

Fortunately, sleep came next to eating in the estimation of the Owl of the Remove. As there was nothing to eat, he closed his eyes and dropped into slumber. But he was the only fellow in the Remove who did. The three juniors who had been out of bounds were too anxious to sleep, and the rest of the

A light gleamed in, and Mr. Quelch looked into the long, dark room, and Dr. Locke glanced in over his shoulder.

The Removites lay as still as stone images and made no sound—save Bunter. Bunter's deep and resonant snore echoed and re-echoed through the dormitory. The two masters stared in.

"All the beds are occupied, sir," said Mr. Quelch. "No member of my Form is absent. I may say that I was assured that such would prove to be the case. I am absolutely convinced that no Remove boy would be guilty of the cowardly assault described by Mr. Tozer."

"I trust not, Mr. Quelch. Mr. Tozer seems certain, however, that his assailants belonged to this school."

"Mr. Tozer cannot see in the dark," said the Remove master, with asperity.

"Very true! I trust it will prove to be a mistake. But the boys, of course, have had ample time to return here."

"The occupants of this dormitory appear to be fast asleep," said Mr. Quelch. Obviously the Remove master

grinned Skinner. "I'm shocked at you men! You ought to respect the law too much to hit old Tozer. Besides, he might have burst!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"We never touched him, you silly ass!" growled Bob Cherry.

"Somebody did, from what Quelch says. Somebody seems to have touched him quite hard!"

"If you can't take my word, Skinner, you—" said Bob Cherry in a deep, rumbling voice.

"Of course I can, old bean!" answered Skinner affably. "I only hope the judge will take it, too, when you come before him, charged with—Is it assault, or manslaughter? Not wilful murder, I hope!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Oh, shut up!"

"Cheese it, Skinner!"

Harry Wharton wondered whether there would be another visit to the dormitory that night. But no one came, and the Removites fell asleep at last—three of them, at least, awakening in a very anxious mood when the rising-bell pealed out in the December morning.

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THE TWELFTH CHAPTER.

A Sensation in the School!

GREYFRIARS SCHOOL was fairly thrilling with excitement that morning.

The news spread like wildfire.

Many fellows had awakened when P.-c. Tozer arrived at the school, at a late hour in the night, and wondered what it meant.

Now they knew.

Fellows in all Forms discussed it with bated breath.

Mr. Tozer, the village constable, had been knocked down, stunned, bashed, smashed—and a Greyfriars man had done it, or was supposed to have done it. Exaggerative fags in the Third and Second told one another that they had "heard" that Mr. Tozer had been shot—that he had been riddled with bullets—that his remains had been discovered in a black trunk!

Really it was not so bad as that.

But it was bad enough. There was no doubt whatever that somebody had felled the constable with a stick, and that Mr. Tozer believed that it was a fellow from the school.

Many took the view that Mr. Tozer was mistaken.

Loder of the Sixth declared quite loudly that it was obvious that Mr. Tozer had made a mistake. He was of opinion that no Greyfriars man was capable of such a lawless deed; and he was assured that no Greyfriars man had been out of bounds at night. Mr. Tozer had been knocked down near the Cross Keys public house—a resort which, Loder said he had heard, had a very bad reputation. Some low character who haunted the place had done it, in Loder's opinion—some intoxicated rough.

Was it possible, Loder wanted to know, to believe that a Greyfriars man had been hanging about that low public house late at night? Was it credible that a Greyfriars man, even if he had been there, would have dreamed of knocking down a police-officer? Loder answered these questions in the negative emphatically. He declared that the mere suggestion was an aspersion upon the good name of the school, and considered very decidedly that Mr. Tozer ought to be spoken to very plainly by the Head for suggesting such a thing.

Many fellows agreed with Loder.

Coker of the Fifth declared that it was all rot, and ventured the further suggestion that Mr. Tozer could not have been quite sober—hence his extraordinary suspicion. All the Fifth agreed that if the culprit was a Greyfriars man he did not belong to the Fifth.

Every Form master was assured that the delinquents were not in his Form. The Shell and the Fourth laughed at the idea of a Shell fellow, or a Fourth-Former, performing such a trick. In fact, though Greyfriars thrilled with excitement at the story, almost the whole school repudiated the suggestion that a Greyfriars man could have done it.

Only in the Remove there were doubts.

All the Remove knew that Wharton, Bob Cherry, and the Bounder had been out of the school at the time; that they had given up the visit to Uncle Clegg's shop in the village because they had fallen in with Mr. Tozer; that they had hurried back to Greyfriars in a very disturbed frame of mind.

Nobody, certainly, thought of giving them away, but some of the fellows could not help remarking what it looked like.

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The three juniors kept their own counsel.

So long as they were not given away, they seemed in little danger. Mr. Tozer, was sure, in his own mind, that the two fellows he had seen in the dark belonged to Greyfriars, and that they were juniors. But he had not seen them clearly enough to know them, of course; and he did not think of undertaking to pick them out from some hundreds of fellows. He thought he knew their voices. Both of them had spoken in his hearing—but he could certainly not undertake to identify them by their voices. Dr. Locke, of course, gave the constable's statements his most serious consideration, but he was convinced that Mr. Tozer was mistaken in imagining that his assailants belonged to the school. If they were schoolboys at all, it was much more probable that they belonged to Highcliffe, in Dr. Locke's opinion. Immediate investigation had shown that every member of the Greyfriars community was indoors when Mr. Tozer arrived; there was nothing to indicate that any fellow had been out of bounds, and it was impossible to suppose that a Greyfriars man could have been guilty of such an assault.

That was the Head's opinion, and his staff agreed, and most of the school agreed with the Head and the staff.

Indeed, Mr. Tozer himself was shaken in his opinion, and it appeared that in making his official report of the matter he did not propose to mention his suspicion that the guilty parties belonged to Greyfriars.

Unless further evidence transpired, the assault and battery were likely to be attributed to some person or persons unknown.

In the Remove room that morning Mr. Quelch looked over his class very sharply and keenly.

But he really had no suspicion concerning them; in fact, he scouted the idea that a Removite could possibly have done what had been done, and undoubtedly he was right there.

After class, the Famous Five and Vernon-Smith and Tom Redwing retired to the secluded Cloisters to discuss the matter. Until then the trio had told nothing of what had happened, but now Johnny Bull, and Hurree Singh, and Nugent, and Redwing were let into the secret.

They all agreed that it was wiser to let nothing transpire, if it could possibly be helped.

"Loder is a ruffian and a brute," said Redwing. "He deserves to go to chokey for what he did; but—"

"But he would deny it all," said Nugent, "and I don't see how it would be proved. Tozer never saw him—he only saw two juniors—"

"Good Samaritans!" said Johnny Bull. "Of course, you couldn't guess that Tozer would make such a mistake; but it was unfortunate that you showed yourselves."

"He didn't recognise either of us," said Bob.

"That was lucky."

"The luckfulness is terrific," remarked Hurree Jamset Ram Singh. "But the least said the soonest the pitcher goes to the well. Nobody would be likely to believe that you fellows assaulted and battered the esteemed Tozer, but you were out of bounds at night, and that means a Head's flogging. A still tongue saves a stitch in time."

"Not a word, then!" said Harry Wharton, glancing round at his chums. "Loder ought to be sacked, but it's not our business to get him bunked. Not a word to the other fellows, for if we

mention that it was Loder it will make no end of excitement, and sooner or later it will leak out."

"Sure to!" said Bob. "Not a word about Loder unless we have to speak out to save ourselves."

The Bounder shrugged his shoulders. "Fat lot of good that would be," he said, with a sneer. "Loder would deny the whole thing, and where's the proof?"

"Oh, rot!" grunted Bob.

"I think you're wrong, Smithy," said Harry Wharton quietly. "It's not so jolly easy to deny the truth in a serious matter like this. Even if Loder had the nerve to stand before the Head and tell a lot of lies I'm pretty sure that Walker hasn't. It wants some nerve. And Tozer had collared them when Loder knocked him down, and it may dawn on him that the fellows he collared first were bigger than the two juniors he saw afterwards, and who were trying to help him. I believe that if we told the whole story to the Head he would jolly soon see where the truth was."

The Bounder was silent.

"But if we speak out we bag a flogging for ourselves—and we don't want that," said Harry. "And, brute as Loder is, we don't want to be the cause of getting a Greyfriars man expelled. So we'd better say nothing."

"That's agreed," said Johnny Bull.

"Only," added the captain of the Remove, "I'm not satisfied at Loder getting off without punishment; and Mr. Tozer ought to be compensated somehow for that knock on the head. He was doing his duty, and what Loder did was simply villainous. There's no excuse for him at all; he was out of bounds for a disgraceful reason, and he assaulted a police-officer. I can't say my conscience feels quite easy about that, only, I don't see what's to be done."

"Nothing at present, anyhow," said Redwing. "Least said, soonest mended. We can think it over—and, in the meantime, hold our tongues. Only, no more breaking of bounds."

"No jolly fear!" said Bob Cherry emphatically.

"And what about a spread in the dormitory?" asked the Bounder.

"Oh, rot! Rubbish!"

"The rotfulness is terrific."

"Not that I care a straw about a spread," snapped Vernon-Smith. "But I'm not giving in to Quelchy; and I'm not giving in to Loder. It was Loder who landed us in the soup, and I don't see that you need be so jolly particular about not getting him bunked. In fact, I think it would be worth a licking all round to see that bully bunked from Greyfriars."

"Now, look here, Smithy—"

"Smithy, you ass—"

"We've agreed to say nothing about it, Smithy," said Wharton, biting his lip.

"I'm my own master," answered Vernon-Smith.

And with that the Bounder walked away, leaving the rest of the juniors staring after him, with far from friendly looks.

THE THIRTEENTH CHAPTER.

A Shock for Loder!

TO-NIGHT?

"Why not?"

"Are you mad?" ejaculated Walker.

James Walker stared at Loder across the tea-table in the latter's study. He seemed quite terrified.

Loder's lip curled.

"Funky?" he sneered.

"Funky or not, you won't catch me out of bounds after dark again this term," said Walker, with energy. "I think you must be out of your senses after what happened last night!"

"Safe as houses!" said Loder coolly. "Lightning never strikes twice in the same place, you know. Old Tozer won't be nosing about the Cross Keys again to-night."

"I'm not going."
"Well, I can go on my own," sneered Loder. "I'm in funds, and there are a jolly set of fellows there now. I'm taking the chance."

"More fool you!" said Walker. "What happened last night has fed me up with that kind of thing. Suppose we'd been seen?"

"We weren't seen."
"We might have been. I never knew you'd do such a thing as you did, Loder. It kept me awake all night."

"Would you rather have been collared by Tozer and brought back to Greyfriars with his hand on your collar?" jeered Loder.

"Yes, I would," retorted Walker. "It was a rotten, ruffianly thing you did, Loder, and I can tell you I'm fed up with the game. If it leads to that sort of thing I'm done with it. The whole thing might have come out. I've been shaking in my shoes all day."

"Cold feet!" sneered Loder. "There never was any risk. Old Tozer even believed, for some reason, that the fellows he spotted there were juniors—goodness knows why!"

"Lucky he thought so," answered Walker. "If he'd come here with a tale about two Sixth Form men we might have got it in the neck. Everybody seems satisfied now that no Greyfriars man was mixed up in the affair, but—I shall be jolly glad when the term is over and we get away from Greyfriars for a time. I'm frightfully uneasy."

"Then you won't come to-night?"
"No, I won't; and you won't go if you've got any sense. You looked pretty sick when we got in last night."

"Well, it gave me a start when I found half my walking-stick in my hand," said Loder. "The other half must have broken off when I biffed Tozer."

"What have you done with it?"
"Burnt it."
"Suppose they find the half you left behind?"

"Suppose they do?" sneered Loder. "Nothing in that—a stick that anybody might have carried. Lucky I had it with me. If I hadn't had it, we should both have been sacked by this time—it was a fair cop."

Walker shivered.
"And after that, you're thinking of going again to-night?"

"I've had a tenner from my uncle, and you know that money always burns a hole in my pocket. Why shouldn't I go?"

"Well, I think you're a fool."
"And I think you're a funk!" retorted Loder.

James Walker finished his tea in



"Turn in, you kids," said Loder. "Any hurry?" yawned the Bounder. "We'll take our time, if you don't mind. Go away, Loder, and come back in ten minutes!" (See Chapter 15.)

silence. He had been in a state of almost pitiable terror all through the day; and his conscience was troubling him as well as his terrors.

"Sure you won't come?" asked Loder, as James Walker rose to leave the study after tea.

"Of course I won't."
"Don't, then; I'll ask Carne."
Walker turned back at the door.

"You won't ask Carne?" he snapped.
"What? What do you mean?"

"I mean that if you ask Carne, I shall tell him what happened last night, as a tip to keep clear of you and your rotten games."

Loder stared at him.
"Why, you rotter!" he exclaimed.
"That's enough. I mean it."

And Walker left the study, shutting the door after him with a slam that rang along the Sixth-Form passage. Loder scowled blackly, and threw himself into the armchair by the fire and lighted a cigarette. A few minutes later he jammed the cigarette hastily into the fire, as a tap came at his study door.

"Come in!" snapped Loder irritably, and the door opened.

It was Carne, of the Sixth, who entered. He had an envelope in his hand. He tossed it across to Loder.

"I thought I'd bring it," he remarked. Loder took the letter, and stared at it. His name, "Gerald Loder," was typed on the envelope, which was sealed. Loder blinked at it.

"What on earth's this?" he asked.
"It was in the letter-rack," answered Carne. "No stamp on it, though, and no address, so it didn't come by post. Must be some sort of a message from old Quelch, I think."

"From old Quelch?"
"Well, he's the only man at Greyfriars with a typewriter, I believe," said Carne. "Jolly queer to type you a note instead of walking along the passage, what?"

Loder, in utter amazement, slit the envelope.

A single sheet of notepaper was inside, and he drew it out. His jaw dropped as he stared at it.

His face became so white that Carne stared at him in alarm.

"What's the trouble?" he exclaimed.

Loder did not answer.

He was staring at the typed sheet in his hand, with dilated eyes. The message, every word of which was typed, was brief, but it was very much to the point.

"It's the sack for breaking bounds, and chokey for biffing a bobby! Mind your step!"

That was all; but it was enough to drive every vestige of colour from Gerald Loder's terrified face.

His hand trembled so much that the paper and the typed message danced before his eyes.

"Loder, old man," exclaimed Carne, "what the thump? Are you ill? What's the matter?"

"Nothing!" gasped Loder.

"You look jolly sick over nothing! What on earth has old Quelch got to say to upset you like that?" asked Carne, in utter wonder.

Loder panted.
"Nothing, I tell you! Get out—leave me alone! I—I— It's nothing! But leave a fellow alone for a bit."

"Pleased to!" retorted Carne angrily; and he stamped out of the study and banged the door after him.

Loder did not heed him.
He stared in utter terror at the typed message.

He knew, of course, that it was not from Mr. Quelch. Some fellow had used the Remove master's typewriter, that was clear; doubtless in order to keep his own identity a secret. Had Mr. Quelch known the facts, certainly he would not have sent Loder a message on the subject—and he could hardly have been supposed to express himself in such terms, if he had. The typewriter had been used by some Greyfriars fellow who knew that Loder had been out of bounds the night before—who knew that

he had knocked down Police-constable Tozer outside the Cross Keys.

Loder quaked with terror.

In spite of his assumption of unconcern, in speaking to Walker, he had been feeling terribly uneasy all through the day. But his uneasiness had passed, and his confidence had returned; he had felt secure. And now—

His guilt was known!

The typed message left no doubt upon that point. Some other fellow must have been out of bounds, and had seen him—perhaps more than one fellow! There was a witness—perhaps more than one witness!

Loder trembled as if with the ague.

Who was it?

The letter was obviously written by a junior. It was scarcely possible to suppose that it came from a Sixth or Fifth-Form man. One of the Remove, most likely—a Removee would easily find an opportunity of getting at his Form master's typewriter for a few minutes, while a fellow in any other Form could hardly have had any excuse for entering Mr. Quelch's study. One of the Remove—the Form which Loder had lately exasperated to such an extent—the Form who were even now chafing under a sense of injustice, owing to the bully of the Sixth.

One of the Remove knew what he had done—perhaps more than one—perhaps the whole crew!

Loder shuddered.

His study door opened, and Tubb of the Third came in. Tubb of the Third had the pleasure—or otherwise—of fagging for Loder. He had come in to clear the tea table, which was one of his fag duties. Loder turned on him with a burst of fury born of terror.

"What do you want? How dare you butt in here? Get out!"

Tubb jumped.

"I—I—I came—"

"Get out!" roared Loder. "I'll smash you!"

"D-d-don't you want me to fag?" gasped Tubb.

Loder leaped up, and made a grasp at his ashplant. Tubb of the Third fled as if for his life.

Loder kicked the door shut after him. In the Third Form room, George Tubb confided to Paget and Bolsover minor that the beast, Loder, was going fairly off his rocker. Loder hardly remembered the fag's existence. He sat staring at the accusing letter, his hand trembling, his face as white as chalk. Someone knew of his guilt—someone could betray him if he chose? But who?

Harry Wharton had told his comrades that he was not satisfied to let Loder escape all punishment for what he had done. Had he been able to see Gerald Loder now, he would have acknowledged that Loder was getting his deserved punishment. The way of the transgressor was proving uncommonly hard for the sportsman of the Greyfriars Sixth.

THE FOURTEENTH CHAPTER.

"Get Out, Loder!"

"BEAST!" roared Bunter.

It was a collision on the line. Bunter had been in the Fifth-Form passage. Coker of the Fifth had spotted him there. Whether Bunter was up to any mischief; whether he had designs on Coker's study cupboard. Coker had not stayed to inquire. Horace Coker, of the Fifth, had a short way with fags. Thrice Coker's hefty boot reached Bunter ere the Owl of the Remove escaped from the quarters of

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the Fifth—and the fat junior departed at a speed which looked as if the School quarter-mile would have been simply "pie" to him.

Naturally, Bunter required a clear course when he was going full steam ahead like this. And the course was not clear. Loder of the Sixth was crossing the landing, when Bunter charged out of the Fifth-Form passage in frantic haste. Bunter did not see him—he did not know that the course was not clear until he crashed into Loder, taking him in the flank, with somewhat the effect of a battering-ram.

Loder staggered wildly, and reeled against the balustrade of the landing, where he leaned, gasping. Bunter roared.

"Beast!"

Bunter knew that he had run into somebody. His spectacles had slid down his fat little nose in the shock, and he could see less than ever, but he knew that he had butted somebody over. He supposed that it was some junior or a Fifth Form man, certainly it never crossed his fat mind that it was a prefect of the Sixth. The collision had hurt Bunter, and deprived him of the breath he had left, but he would never have expended that small remainder of wind on calling his victim names had he known that the victim was a Sixth Form man. As he did not know it, Bunter consoled himself with slanging the dim object—dim to his eyes—that was sprawling, gasping, against the balustrade.

"Beast! You dummy! You burbling chump!" spluttered Bunter. "Can't you see where you're going, you dummy? Fathead! Ass! Chump!"

Loder, gasping for breath, glared at him. Bunter groped for his glasses and set them straight on his fat nose.

"You burbling ass!" he hooted. "You footling chump! Oh!"

Bunter broke off suddenly.

His glasses being adjusted, he recognised Loder. The fat junior stood rooted to the floor, fairly petrified with terror at the knowledge that he had applied all those fancy names to a prefect, and that prefect the bully of the Sixth!

Loder gasped. His first impulse was to collar Bunter and give the fat junior the thrashing of his life.

But he checked that impulse. It did not occur to him, for the moment, that Bunter had slanged him in ignorance of his identity. It rushed into Loder's mind that a Remove fag who dared to slang him like this, fairly asking for a terrific thrashing, must be the Remove fag who knew that he had been out of bounds the previous night, otherwise he would never have had the nerve. This was the fellow who knew!

Loder checked at once his impulse to collar Bunter. A fag who knew that he had "biffed" Mr. Tozer was not to be handled.

"Bunter!" gasped Loder. "Sorry, kid! I didn't see you. Sorry!"

Bunter jumped.

Having recognised Loder, the Owl of the Remove had expected instant slaughter. Even a good-tempered prefect like Wingate or Gwynne would no doubt have cuffed him for what he had said, and Loder was the worst-tempered prefect at Greyfriars. Bunter could scarcely believe his fat ears when Loder said that he was sorry.

"Really, sorry, old fellow," said Loder, in a great hurry. "I hope you're not hurt, Bunter!"

"Oh!" stuttered Bunter.

Coker of the Fifth looked out over the landing. He had kicked Bunter three times, but he had another kick for him if he had not got clear.

"Oh, there you are, you fat scoundrel!" said Coker; and he made a rapid advance upon Bunter.

"Yaroooh! Keep off!" roared Bunter. "Stop that, Coker!" rapped out Loder of the Sixth.

"What?" hooted Coker.

"Stop that bullying! I won't allow it!"

"I caught that fat rotter rooting about near my study!" roared Coker.

"Let him alone! Do you hear me?"

Horace Coker gave Loder a glare. He was greatly inclined to give him something more substantial than a glare, prefect as he was. However, he restrained his wrath, and tramped back to his study with a snort.

Billy Bunter blinked after him and blinked at Loder. His fat brain was quite dazed with astonishment. Why Loder was acting in this way was a deep mystery to the Owl of the Remove.

"You rely on me for protection, Bunter," said Loder.

"Oh!" gasped Bunter. "Yes! T-t-thank you, Loder!"

"Not at all. One good turn deserves another—what?" said Loder, with an almost ghastly attempt at affability.

"Eh?"

"Of course, I can rely on your discretion, Bunter?" said Loder, sinking his voice and eyeing the fat junior narrowly.

"Wha-a-a-t?"

"Mum's the word, you know."

"Oh! Ah! Yes!" stuttered Bunter, wondering whether he or Loder was wandering in his mind. It seemed clear that somebody was!

"Was anyone with you out of bounds last night, Bunter?" went on Loder in a low voice.

Bunter almost fell down.

"Out of b-b-bounds?" he stuttered.

"Yes. Were you alone?"

"I—I wasn't out of bounds, Loder!" gasped Bunter.

Loder started.

"You weren't?"

"No. Nothing of the kind. I never went with them," gasped Bunter. "I was fast asleep all the time."

Loder caught his breath.

He realised that he had made a little mistake. Bunter, apparently, was not, after all, the fellow who knew! But he realised, also, that Bunter knew who knew.

"You never went with whom?" he asked softly.

"Oh, nobody!" said Bunter, in a hurry. "Nobody went out of bounds, Loder. There wasn't going to be any spread in the dormitory."

"A spread in the dormitory!" repeated Loder.

He was beginning to understand.

"Nothing of the sort, you know," said Bunter. "Smithy wasn't going to stand a spread, and nobody went out to get the tuck. We were all fast asleep all the time."

Loder drew a deep, deep breath. He was on the track now, and he could see that Bunter knew nothing.

And as Bunter knew nothing, there was no need to placate the fat junior—no need to let him off a thrashing.

Loder had his ashplant under his arm. He let it slip down into his hand.

"Bend over, Bunter!" he said laconically.

"Eh?"

"You mustn't slang a prefect, you know," said Loder grimly. "Bend over!"

"I say—" gasped Bunter.

"I'm waiting for you to bend over!"

Bunter gave the prefect a terrified blink. Then, instead of bending over, he made a wild rush into the Remove passage to escape.

"Stop!" roared Loder.

Bunter flew. The bully of the Sixth rushed after him. The door of Study No. 4 was open, and Bunter rushed blindly in. Vernon-Smith and Redwing, who were in the study, stared at him.

"What the thump——" exclaimed the Bounder.

"Yaroooh! Keep him off!" yelled Bunter.

"Him? Who—what——"

Loder appeared in the doorway.

"Bunter——"

"Yow-ow! Keep off!" yelled Bunter, dodging round the study table.

Vernon-Smith rose to his feet.

"Get out, Loder!" he said.

"What?" roared Loder.

"Careful with that ashplant," said Vernon-Smith coolly. "You might do some damage with that stick. Bunter hasn't got a helmet on, you know."

"A—a-helmet!" stuttered Loder.

"Exactly!"

Loder knew now who knew! He gazed at the Bounder, his face startled and almost white. Smithy smiled sarcastically.

"Get out!" he repeated.

And, to the utter amazement of Billy Bunter, Loder got out.

THE FIFTEENTH CHAPTER!

Brought to Heel!

"I SAY, you fellows——"

"Prep!" said Harry Wharton, without looking up.

"But I say——"

"Prep!" said Frank Nugent.

"Oh, really, you fellows——"

"Prep!" said both the juniors in Study No. 1 together.

"Blow prep!" hooted Bunter. "I say, you fellows, Loder's gone mad!"

Preparation in Study No. 1 ceased all at once. Wharton and Nugent looked up from their work and stared at William George Bunter.

"Loder!" exclaimed Wharton.

"Mad!" repeated Nugent.

Billy Bunter nodded impressively.

"Mad as a hatter!" he said. "I say, you fellows, he may be dangerous! He's raving mad, anyhow!"

"Fathead! What do you mean, if you mean anything?" demanded the captain of the Remove. "What's happened?"

"I biffed into the beast on the landing, and he begged my pardon," said Bunter. "That was queer, to begin with. I expected him to pitch into me, and he said he was sorry, instead! Fancy that! Then he asked me if I was alone out of bounds last night—wandering in his mind, you know. When I told him I hadn't been out of bounds at all, he told me to bend over! I cut into Smithy's study to get away from the beast, and Loder came after me; and Smithy told him to get out—and he got out!"

"Oh!"

"Obedied Smithy's order, just as if Smithy was a prefect and he was a fag!" said Bunter. "Turned as white as chalk, and bunked. Must be absolutely off his rocker—what?"

"Oh!" repeated Wharton.

"Frightened!" said Bunter impressively. "He was frightened of me first, but he got over that. Then he was frightened of Smithy! He didn't get over that—he just crawled away like a dog that's been kicked! Loder, you know—that beastly bully! Frightened of Smithy! I say, you fellows, do you think we ought to tell Quelch? Loder

ought to be looked after, if he's mad, you know!"

Wharton and Nugent exchanged glances.

"Mad as a hatter!" said Bunter. "Look here, it's Loder's turn to see lights-out for us to-night! I'm blessed if I like a lunatic coming into our dormitory! Think we'd better speak to Quelch?"

"Fathead! Better mind your own bizney!"

"But he's mad!" urged Bunter. "Must be right off his rocker! I say, you fellows, I don't feel safe—I don't, really! Look here, what do you think a fellow had better do?"

"Prep," said Harry.

"What?"

"You'd better do your prep."

"You silly ass!" roared Bunter, and he rolled away, to spread the startling news in other studies that Loder of the Sixth was mad.

"So that was Smithy's game," said Harry, when the Owl of the Remove was gone. "He's pulling Loder's leg over that affair of Tozer."

"Serve Loder right!" said Nugent.

"Well, yes; but——"

The chums of Study No. 1 went on with their prep. They had finished when Peter Todd looked into the study.

"What's this yarn of Bunter's about Loder being mad?" asked Peter. "He's telling every man in the Remove that Loder's gone potty."

"He told us so," said Nugent, with a grin.

"Smithy's got some joke on about Loder," went on Peter, who seemed perplexed. "He's told us all to watch him in the dorm to-night when he speaks to him. He says Loder is going to cringe. If Loder cringes to Smithy he

(Continued on next page.)

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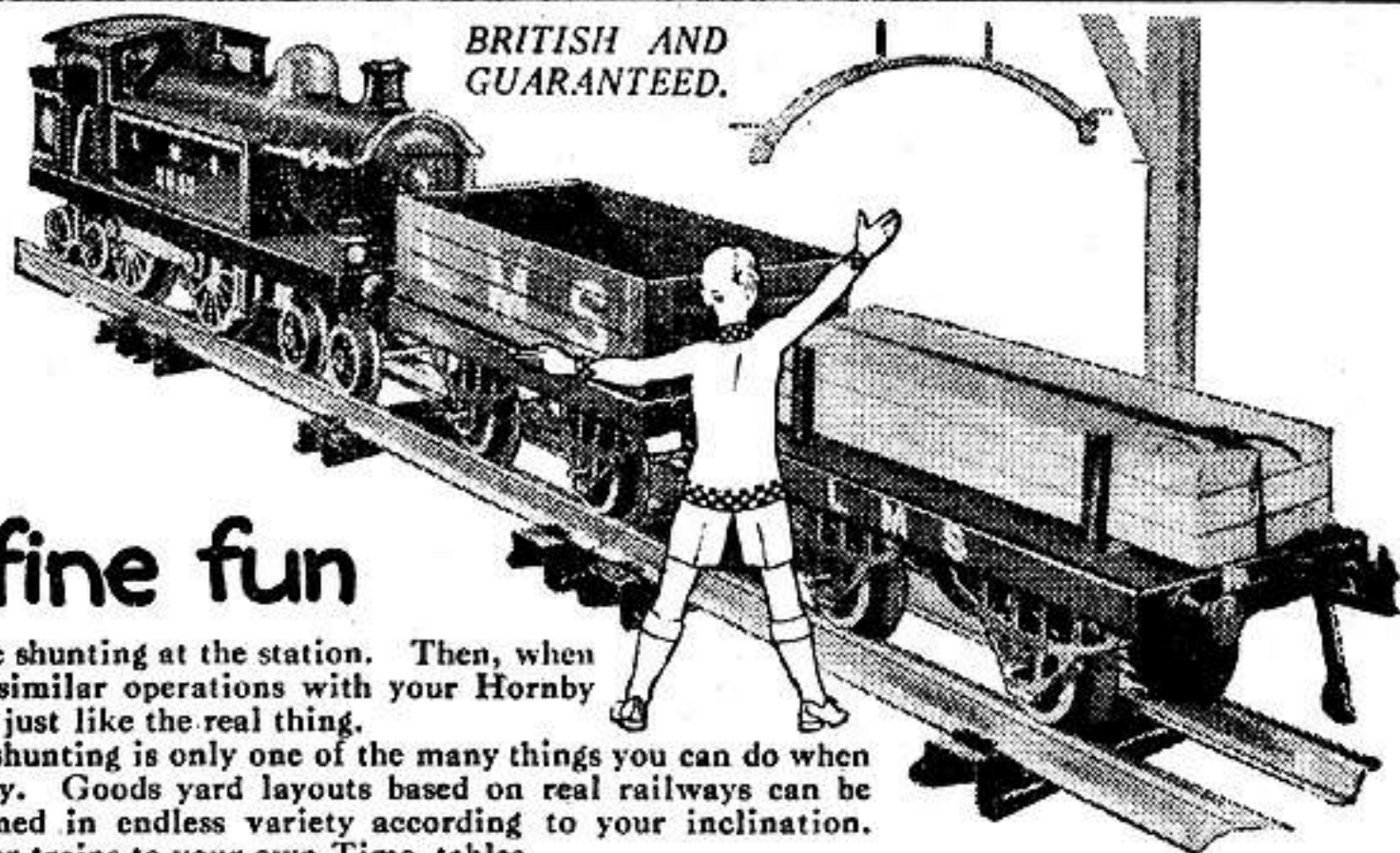
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THE PREFECT'S SECRET!

(Continued from previous page.)

must be potty, as Bunter says. What the thump does it all mean?"

"Better ask Smithy."

And Peter retired unsatisfied from Study No. 1.

That evening, for the first time on record, the Remove were looking forward keenly to bed-time. Loder was to see lights-out for the Lower Fourth, and the Removeites were keenly interested in Loder. According to Bunter, he had become insane; according to Smithy, he was going to cringe. Actually, before bed-time the Remove were ready to start for their dormitory.

They were there before Loder. When the prefect came in, all eyes were turned on him in intense curiosity. Bunter warily backed round a bed.

All the fellows could see that Loder looked pale and worried. But he hardly looked insane. Certainly his bullying manner was quite gone. He was subdued, he did not slang a single member of the Remove, he did not tell the juniors to look sharp, and he did not carry his ashplant under his arm. He seemed to be quite a new Loder in many respects.

"Loder!" called out the Bounder, as casually as if he were a Sixth Form man calling to a fag of the Second.

"Yes, Vernon-Smith," answered Loder civilly.

"Have you lost your walking-stick?"

That simple question had a staggering effect on Loder of the Sixth. Every eye was upon him, and every eye noted that his face became as white as a sheet, and that he seemed scarcely able to breathe. He stared at Herbert Vernon-Smith like a fellow dumb-founded.

"No!" he gasped at last.

"You haven't lost it, Loder?"

"N-n-n-n."

"Then take a tip from me and lose it as soon as you can!" said the Bounder. "I wouldn't keep it about, if I were you."

Loder licked his dry lips.

Harry Wharton & Co., of course, were quite well aware of what was implied by the Bounder's words. But to the rest of the Remove they were Greek. Why such a simple remark should produce such an extraordinary effect on Gerald Loder was a deep mystery.

The Bounder kicked off his boots. He was enjoying the situation. He knew that that typed message, left in the letter-rack for Loder, had "rattled" the nerves of the bully of the Sixth, and that Loder was in a state of absolute terror of exposure.

"Chuck it, Smithy!" said Harry Wharton, rather curtly.

Loder glanced at Wharton! So Wharton knew—he could guess that now! How many of these fellows knew?

"Turn in, you kids," said Loder huskily.

"Any hurry?" yawned the Bounder.

"Oh, no!"

"We'll take our time, if you don't mind," said Smithy. "Go away, and come back in ten minutes."

The Remove fairly gasped. They looked at Loder, expecting to see him hurl himself at the Bounder.

But Loder did nothing of the kind. He turned quietly and left the dormitory.

"Oh, my hat!" ejaculated Peter Todd.

"What on earth's the matter with Loder?" exclaimed Hazeldene.

"He's mad!" squeaked Bunter. "Mad as a hatter! You fellows can see it now for yourselves."

"He's cringing, and no mistake!" said

Bolsover major. "What does it all mean, Smithy?"

The Bounder laughed, and did not answer.

The Removeites, in a state of great wonder, turned in. Loder came back in ten minutes and found them all in bed.

"Loder!" called out Smithy.

"Yes, Vernon-Smith!" panted Loder.

"Will you ask Mr. Quelch to withdraw his order about tea in the Remove studies?"

Loder gasped.

"I—I—I'm afraid he wouldn't take any notice of me, Vernon-Smith."

"I think he might," said the Bounder.

"You can explain to him that you really were bagging that spread, when we came to your study after it. You can tell him anything you jolly well like; but I advise you to get him to rescind that order. Unless Mr. Quelch tells us to-morrow that it's chucked, and that we can tea in our studies as usual, I shall be cross with you, Loder."

Loder hardly breathed.

Again the Remove expected him to hurl himself at the Bounder, and smite him hip and thigh. Again he did nothing of the sort.

"I—I—I'll do my best, Vernon-Smith!" he stuttered.

"You'd better," said the Bounder coolly. "Now put out the light, and go—I'm fed-up with you, Loder."

Loder put out the light and went, without a word. There was a roar of amazed voices in the dormitory when he was gone. Smithy had kept his word—he had made Loder cringe before all the Lower Fourth. But what it all meant passed the understanding of the Remove; and the Bounder gave no explanation.

The next morning, when the Remove were going down, Bob Cherry tapped Vernon-Smith on the shoulder.

"Look here, old man, it's rather too thick," he said. "You'd better let Loder alone."

"When I've done with him," assented the Bounder. "Not before!"

There was a surprise for the Remove in their Form-room that morning. Mr. Quelch had something to say to his Form. It referred to the prohibition of tea in the Remove studies, the order which had caused so much wrath and heart-burning in the Form. Mr. Quelch announced that that order was withdrawn.

The Remove fairly gasped with astonishment.

"I may add, that Loder of the Sixth Form has interceded for you," said Mr. Quelch. "Loder tells me that there was a misunderstanding on the subject, and that, upon reflection, he feels that he was unjust, or at least hasty. 'It was very right and proper of Loder to come to me and tell me this, in a very frank and manly way, and I trust that you will feel properly grateful to him. He has begged me to rescind my order with regard to the boys of this Form taking tea in their own studies, and I have decided to do so. I trust that the lesson you have had will not be lost upon you, and that you will not be insensible to Loder's kindness and sense of justice.'"

That was all; but it brought rejoicings to the Remove.

The ancient and much-prized privilege of tea in the study was restored to them; no longer were they placed on a level with mere fags in the Third and Second Forms.

But if Mr. Quelch expected the Removeites to be grateful to Loder for his intercession, he was doomed to disappointment. The Remove knew very

well to whom they owed that intercession, and all of them looked at the grinning face of the Bounder. Loder had done this because Smithy had told him that he would be "cross" with him if he did not; and, except for the fellows in the secret, the Remove were utterly astonished and mystified.

That afternoon there were many spreads in the Remove studies in celebration of their restored freedom.

Herbert Vernon-Smith stood a tremendous spread in Study No. 4, to which a crowd of fellows came, and the celebration was, as Hurree Jamset Ram Singh justly remarked, terrific.

After tea, when the Bounder was strolling in the quad, he came on Loder of the Sixth. Loder came up to him, with a pale, set face.

"How did you know?" he muttered.

The Bounder did not need to ask to what Loder was referring.

"I was on the spot!" he grinned.

"Alone?" breathed Loder.

Vernon-Smith chuckled.

"No fear! Lots of witnesses."

"Who, then?"

"Never mind who," said the Bounder coolly. "That's my business. Fellows who don't mean to talk, unless they're called up by the Head to do so, when they'd have to. I don't mean to talk, either, if that's any comfort to you. You got us all into a scrape with our Form master, and I've made you undo it—that's all I want—except one thing."

Loder breathed hard.

"Tozer's got to be compensated. Make it a tenner. That ends it, and I'll make it a point to forget all about the matter. I may as well mention that I shall inquire whether the tenner reaches Tozer. Ta-ta, old bean; and take my tip—chuck that worried look, or you'll have all Greyfriars askin' what's the matter with you, and they may tumble, what?"

And the Bounder walked away whistling.

Loder looked after him, breathing hard and deep. He would have given a tenner, or two or three tenners, to have collared the Bounder and given him the thrashing of his life. But that was not to be; the bully of the Sixth was powerless now, and he had to toe the line.

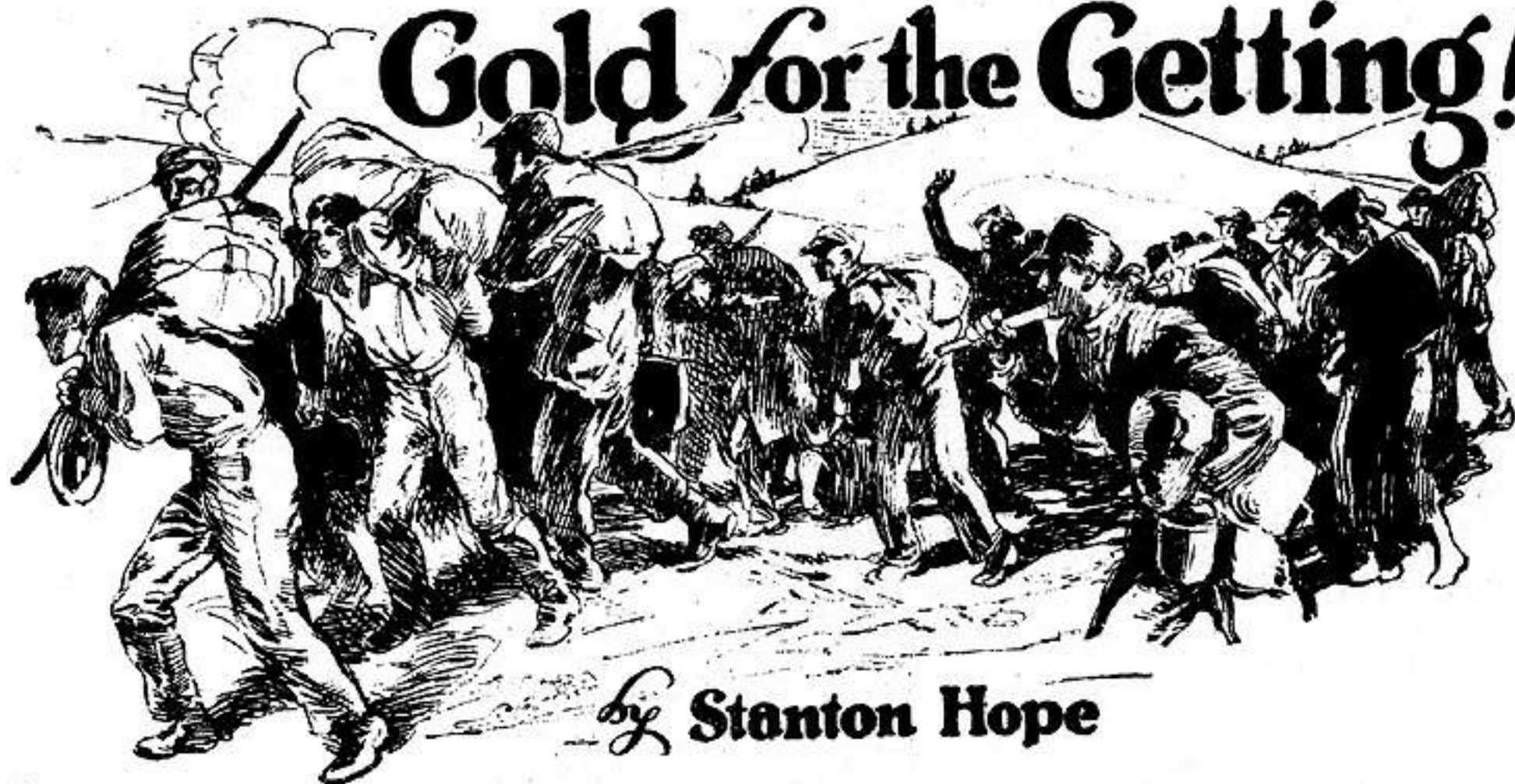
Mr. Tozer never knew who had "biffed" him on the helmet that mysterious night. He never knew who sent him a tenner by registered post; though after much cogitation he was able to connect the two events in his plump mind. Mr. Tozer was satisfied. His head was hard, and he would gladly have been "biffed" again at the same figure. The matter was closed, so far as Mr. Tozer was concerned; and Loder of the Sixth was immensely relieved to find that it was closed so far as the Bounder was concerned. The ancient privileges of the Remove had been restored, and all was calm and bright; and the Bounder was satisfied. And Harry Wharton & Co., if not exactly satisfied with the Bounder's methods, had to admit that the result was satisfactory. And Loder of the Sixth carefully avoided giving offence to the heroes of the Remove for the rest of that term—which was still more satisfactory.

THE END.

(Now look out for next week's grand Christmas Number of the MAGNET, which will contain an extra-special story of Harry Wharton & Co., entitled: "BUNTER'S CHRISTMAS PRESENT!" A glorious Yuletide treat this, chums. So make no mistake—order your copy WELL IN ADVANCE!)

THE DOG DERBY! Nobody thinks young Jack Orchard stands an earthly chance of winning the 400 miles' race across the snow-swept wastes of Alaska, but then they don't know Jack. Meet him below, boys - you'll like him!

Gold for the Getting!



By Stanton Hope

The Story of a Thrilling Gold Rush to the Land of the Midnight Sun!

Mid Snow and Ice!

JACK ORCHARD arrives in San Francisco to find his uncle, Dave Orchard, missing, having apparently absconded with a bag of gold. Jack falls in with Terry O'Hara, a cheery Irish boy, and Clem Hardy, an old prospector, with whom he joins forces in a gold rush up the Yukon. At intervals the trio have trouble with Bull Morgan and Lefty Simons, two shady camp followers. Hardy proves to be none other than Dave Orchard, and is arrested; but he manages to escape again. Later, Jack invests his gold in a team of huskies, which he enters for the great Dog Derby—a race of four hundred miles across the snow-swept wastes of Alaska. At the report of the starter's revolver Jack, a despised outsider, in company with Shorty Gibbs, sets off at a clinking pace.

In Nome the weather was clear and cold; along the sea-coast the conditions were bad, and a strong wind was keening from the north.

With surprising rapidity the weather grew even worse. Soon Jack's garments and the bristly fur of the dogs were white-rimed with powdered snow blown up by the gale.

The "yaller" dog, Ribbons, "ki-yi'd" continuously, upsetting the other huskies of the team. Jack perched himself on the sledge above his tarpaulin-covered provisions, gun, and blankets, and loudly cracked the whip-thong about the animal's ears. But Ribbons plainly had no stomach for a long beat in this vile weather.

Suddenly Skookum took matters in his own hands—or rather, in his own teeth. Without orders from his young master he slowed the pace and swung sharply round, and his slashing fangs struck the "yaller" dog on the neck, tearing through fur and skin.

Ribbons yelped with the pain of it, and yelped yet again as another of the huskies sank his fangs into his hind-quarters!

Then Ribbons decided that he had better put his best foot forward, that he might not merit further punishment. It was a painful lesson, for he could not get his head round to lick the wounds, and the keen frost biting

into his hurts made him heartily wish he had behaved like the other respectable members of the team.

Meantime, Shorty Gibbs was being lost in the snow-swirl ahead. His laughter swept back on the wind.

"Better go back to Dawson, Jack!" boomed his voice. "The fellows there would sure enjoy a dog fight to keep things livened up while the race is bein' run. 'Sides, this is powerful bad weather for a young 'un like you to be on the trail. Sure, the police won't hand you no illuminated address o' thanks if they have to come out and search for ye."

The snow-clouds hid him and his team from view, and Jack found himself in a lonely, white wilderness.

At first he was able to follow the tracks cut by Shorty's steel sledge-runners in the snow, but soon even this guide was denied him. With amazing swiftness the wind erased all marks as it blew the snow about, and Jack had to rely on his compass to keep his bearings.

Though no snow was falling from the sky, the sweep of the powdered drift became such that it was difficult to see ten yards ahead. Using the special compass he had brought with him, Jack strove to keep dead eastward along the coast.

It was difficult—impossible in most parts—to know whether solid land were beneath the snow and ice or whether there was sea. Slowly but surely, in spite of the compass, he was getting too much to the southward.

And then a sudden gust of wind blew dogs and sledge skimming across the glassy, snow-swept surface of a stretch of ice.

"Good heavens!" gasped Jack.

For as he swept after the dogs, clinging to the reins, he found his outfit at the very edge of a deep, black pool of water, which revealed only too plainly that he was south of Cape Nome, and out on the frozen Behring Sea!

To get back again meant almost a dead beat up against the biting wind. Jack plodded along by the side of his sledge; the dogs, their red tongues lolling out, and their breath coming in short, white clouds, strained every fibre of their muscular frames.

Swirling wreaths of the white snow-powder were in the air, and all about

lay a frozen world of steel-blue and white. Only the wheet of the wind and the sweet crunch of the sledge-runners through the ice broke the silence.

The weather fast became far worse.

Jack had seen the type of killing weather for which the Northland was notorious, but hitherto he always had been able to remain in the security of a cabin or the underground workings of a mine.

Usually, when "the bottom dropped out of the thermometer" there was a stillness in the air which helped to make conditions just tolerable. Now the high wind, combined with the cold, made his thick garments like mere strips of canvas. The wind slashed through his heavy furs and cut him to the bone. He bowed his head and kept his face covered, yet at times had to turn sharply sideways to catch his breath.

His progress was slow, and, owing to the formation of ice and snow, both on land and sea on that low-lying bit of coast, he had not the foggiest notion when he left the sea-ice and reached the shore. That he had done so he was made aware by the appearance of a log cabin, of which he could catch occasional glimpses through the clouds of flying snow crystals.

As he drew nearer he recognised the place. It was Thirty-mile Cabin, a shack built by a prospector named Cornish.

Around the cabin were several dog teams, half buried in trenches they had made for themselves in the snow. There they were huddled for warmth, and it was apparent that some, if not all, of the racing teams which had left Nome before Jack had taken shelter at the cabin against the vile weather.

As Jack mushed his team towards the shack the door opened, and he saw a group of drivers, which included a couple of Indian mushers, a Finn, the Englishman known as "Lord Chawles," and Jock McLennan.

"Bai jove, it's the kid!" cried the Englishman. "That loses me my bet with you, Jock. I'd have had another hundred on that he wouldn't have got so far." To Jack he called: "Beastly weather, what? Come out of the cold and have some cocoa, old man!"



With a mad impulse to carry on Jack cracked his long whip-lash in the air above the ears of his dogs. "Can't stop, Jock!" he called out cheerily. "I'm in a hurry! See you later in Candle, or maybe in Nome!" (See this page.)

Well did Jack know that these men all believed he had no chance whatever in the race. If he now stopped at the cabin and turned his hand in altogether none of them would be surprised. The mad impulse occurred to him to do just what those mushers themselves had shrunk from doing—to go on into the storm and beat his way through, or die in the attempt.

All the dogs of the other teams bristled in their snow trenches as Skookum and the rest of Jack's huskies swung up.

"Leave the dogs where they are, boy!" Jock McLennan called out. "Only Kloo, the Indian, Shorty Gibbs, and Bull Morgan have gone on."

The fact that Jock took it absolutely for granted that he was going to stay brought back again that mad impulse of Jack to carry on. He cracked his long whip-lash in the air above the ears of his dogs.

"Can't stop, Jock!" he called out cheerily. "I'm in a hurry! See you later in Candle, or maybe in Nome."

A murmur of surprise rose among the mushers at the cabin door.

"I—I say, y'know," bellowed Lord Chawles, "you'll get frozen stiff, dear boy! Pack up, and come inside for a mug of cocoa, I say!"

Jack's only response was a wave of the long whip, and his astounded rivals stared hard after him as he and his team drove on through the whirling snow screen.

"Crazy as a jack-rabbit!" grunted Jock McLennan, turning back into the warmth of the cabin. "Better keep our eyes skinned for him when we go on, and the one who finds the poor stiff can disqualify himself from the race and take his carcass to the nearest post."

It is said that where ignorance is bliss 'tis folly to be wise. There is little truth in this often enough, and by all the laws of chance young Jack should have passed on into that snowstorm, became lost, and died miserably of frost-bite. But truer still is the adage which says: "Fortune favours the brave." And fickle Fortune smiled.

The change in Jack's luck occurred when, after a bitter hour's struggle against the biting wind and swirling snow across a low range of hills, he suddenly discovered himself in calmer weather.

In the clouds of powdered snow he had lost his bearings, and must assuredly have gone under had he been forced to brave such wild weather much longer.

Yet though the wind was blowing great guns on one side of the low range, the weather was icy calm on the opposite slopes. This is a curious feature of Alaskan weather, but it is by no means the usual thing. So Jock and the others had been perfectly justified in remaining at the cabin, believing that the wind-storm was general, and it was a rare bit of luck for Jack that he was so favoured.

He called the dogs to a halt, and vigorously massaged his cheeks and nose with handfuls of snow, taking the white bite of the frost out of them. Then on he went towards Fort Davis, which he could see in the distance, hot on the trail of Shorty and those other mushers who were ahead.

The United States soldiery at Fort Davis cheered him lustily on his way, and at Soloman he also got a royal welcome.

Here he heard that Shorty Gibbs, Bull Morgan, and the Indian had gone on with Gibbs already in the lead. Anxious though he was to go in pursuit of them, Jack stopped and had a hot meal and gave his dogs some meat before setting out again.

Between Soloman and Council he made good progress, and thanks to the energy of Skookum, even the "yaller" dog Ribbons pulled his weight. Towards evening Jack shot a white ptarmigan on the outskirts of a spruce wood, and after pitching camp and lighting a fire, he cooked the bird for his supper.

The weather, though bitterly cold, remained quite good. He saw none of the three leading teams, and nor did any of those behind him catch him up, which suggested that Jock McLennan

and the others had been considerably delayed at Thirty-mile Cabin.

His rest by the spruce wood was brief, only sufficient indeed to put new life into his dogs. Under the stars he hit the trail again, and travelled on until dawn.

During the following day he passed Kloo, the Indian, whose dogs had been kept rather too much on the starved side and now showed marked signs of "blowing up."

After another rest, Jack pushed on hard, determined to reach Candle before midnight on the second day if he possibly could. He achieved his object with half an hour in hand, and found the place gay with lights and alive with people awaiting the arrival of the teams.

Much to his disappointment, both Shorty Gibbs and Bull Morgan had already left on the return journey, though he had seen neither of them in the night. Morgan, however, had not gone long before his arrival, and Jack himself was well up to the time he had scheduled for himself.

He fed his dogs and rested them, made a meal himself, and got in a short sleep. Within three hours of his arrival, hours before dawn would break in the east, he was ready to hit the white trail again on the long homeward stretch back to Nome.

The Dash Back to Nome!

THE populace of Candle gave him a great send-off. Just before he hit the trail again he was told that two or three other competitors, including Jock McLennan and Lord Chawles, had arrived, and all were resting before beginning the grim battle back to the winning-post, over two hundred miles away.

The leadership of Skookum was magnificent. His strength, his intelligence, and keenness were an inspiration, and until the grey day dawned all the dogs strained every muscle and sinew at their task. The sledge behind them ripped through the white snow, and the

speed was so good that often Jack was forced to ride when, owing to the cold, he would sooner have run on snowshoes beside it.

It was after a halt for breakfast that Jack's first real set-back occurred.

The "yaller" dog, Ribbons, attempted to steal the meat of the animal just ahead of him after he had wolfed his own. A battle-royal would have ensued, but Skookum, springing round, gave the wronged animal a sharp nip of warning, and afterwards struck the would-be robber a slashing blow on the flank with his fangs, bowling him over.

The "yaller" dog wrinkled his black nose, showed his fangs in a vicious snarl, and growled with baffled rage. Skookum yapped twice at him, plainly warning him in doggy language that he had better behave.

Although Jack was armed with a whip, he stood aside, knowing well that the splendid Skookum could settle this matter far better than he himself. So it was, for Ribbons lay down in the snow again and sulked and sulked.

He was still sulky when the team got moving again, and after a time, because he behaved so badly, Jack had to shift his position to a place in the team just ahead of a dog which was lightning quick to bite any laggard in front of him.

Thus, every time the "yaller" dog revealed his sulkiness by hanging back, he got a sharp bite in the hind quarters which speeded him on with a yelp. Yet his lack of heart in the race was spoiling the speed of the whole team, and, what was worse, reducing the morale of the other dogs, who, with the exception of Skookum, were getting more tired.

While Jack was in the throes of his troubles, he heard the distant yapping of dogs behind him, and saw another

dog team come swinging into view round the base of a hill. It proved to be Jock McLennan's outfit, and the old prospector fairly "burned the wind" as he passed Jack. For Jack knew only too well that he had lost much time.

"Keep a-going, son!" bellowed Jock. "You're sure doing fine!"

Jack waved his whip in cheery acknowledgement of the good old sportsman's encouraging words. He knew, however, that with the sulky Ribbons now a complete drag on his outfit, he would never make the fast time back to Nome that he had to Candle.

Even had he wished to do so cruel a thing as to turn the dog adrift—which he did not—the rules of the race forbade it. Unless a competitor brought back all the dogs he set out with, he was automatically disqualified—a wise regulation, too, for it prevented any sick or injured dogs from being deserted on the trail by a callous driver.

Ribbons was a great trial, but Jack was not the only musher by any means who was having trouble. Despite the "yaller" dog's bad performance, Jack gradually overhauled one of the leading teams. As he came level with it at about two hundred yards distant down a sloping piece of ground, he saw that it was Bull Morgan's outfit.

By the vicious use of the whip, Morgan had driven his dogs at a clinking speed thus far in the race. But the pace and the bad treatment had told heavily on the strength of his huskies. Their red tongues were lolling out of their dripping mouths as they panted on to the urge of the caribou-gut whip with its twenty-foot thong, wielded by their unfeeling master.

At the sight of Jack and his team forging ahead, Bull Morgan found further outlet for the bad temper that

hitherto he had inflicted on the dogs. He remembered the various episodes in which Jack and Terry O'Hara had got to windward of himself and Lefty Simons. Particularly he remembered how Jack had saved the money of the young American, Washington K. Gelli-brand, and the flogging which he himself got from the belts of the miners.

Red murder flamed in his heart and he bellowed invective across the snow. But Jack, not wanting further trouble with the crook, wisely edged his racing huskies at a tangent from Morgan's sledge.

From the corner of his eye he saw Morgan, who was seated on his sledge, place down the whip at his side, fumble among the furs he wore, and produce a large Colt revolver.

"My hat!" gasped Jack. "The crazy galoot!"

He sent his whip cracking over his dogs, urging them on faster in the effort to get out of range, for the murderous intention of his old enemy was only too apparent.

Out here in the desolate snow wastes, Bull Morgan was going to get his revenge, unseen and unheard by any living soul except their two selves and the straining huskies!

"I guess," came the thick voice of Morgan, "this'll about wipe out old scores, y' whelp!"

He dare not stop his own sledge lest Jack should get out of range, but he took deliberate aim.

(Don't miss the follow-on of this magnificent adventure serial, chums, which will appear in our Grand Christmas Number on sale next Saturday. There is sure to be a great demand for this bumper issue, so Magnetites should step in and order their copy right away.)

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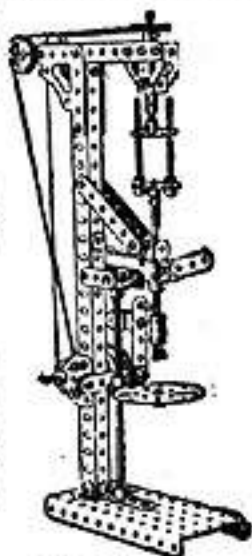
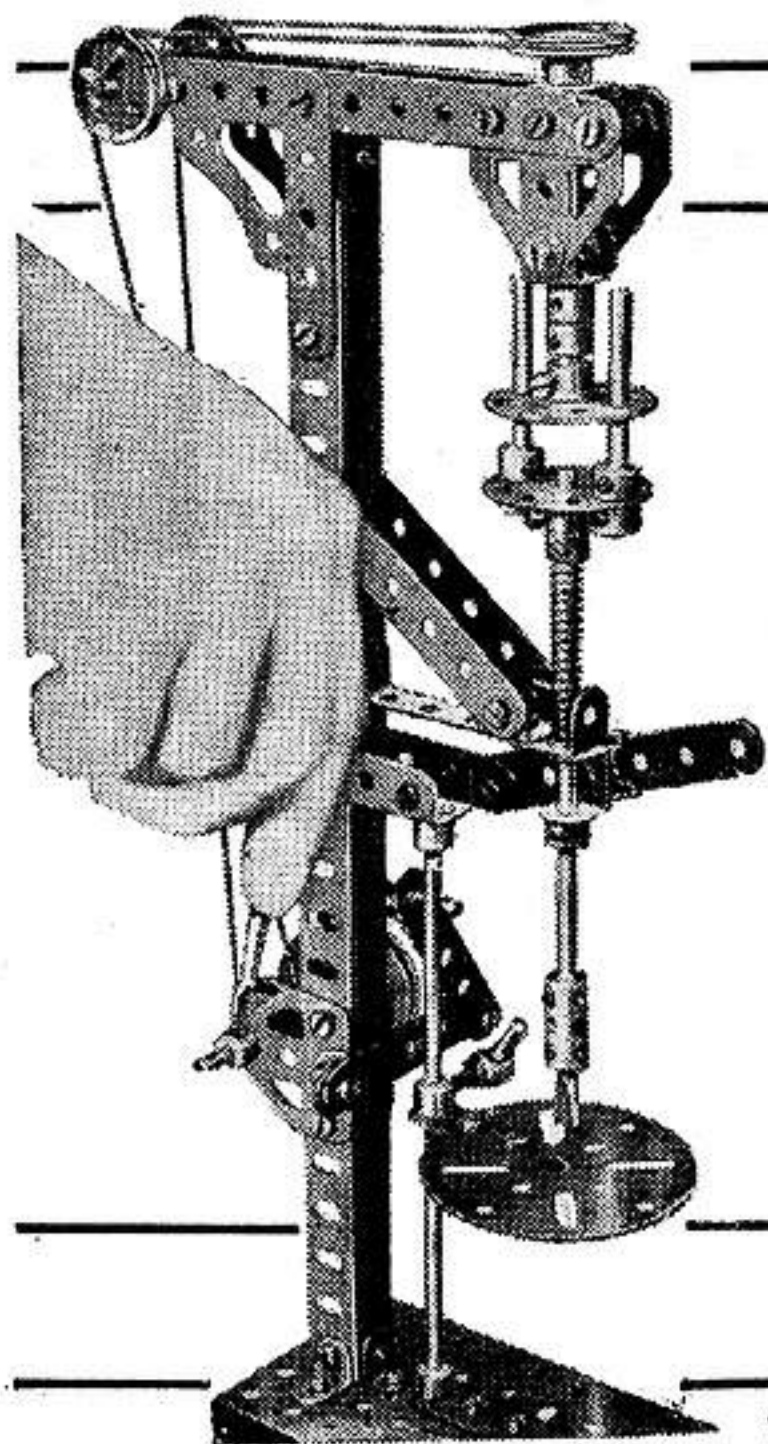
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JIMMY SILVER & CO.!

QUITE a number of readers have been asking after our cheery chums of Rookwood, so it is not amiss for me to mention here that Jimmy Silver & Co. are now appearing regularly in our splendid Companion Paper, the "Gem." In this week's issue of the "Gem"—a bumper Christmas number, by the way—you fellows interested in Uncle James & Co., of Rookwood, will find a delightful yarn entitled: "His Own Enemy!" Valentine Mornington, the dandy of the Fourth, is the central character, and Owen Conquest draws his complex character with such charm and understanding that the success of this yarn is a foregone conclusion. Magnetites are strongly urged to get a copy of this week's "Gem Library"—on sale Wednesday, price twopence.

A TREAT IN STORE!

Perhaps I ought to have opened this

believe me, boys! There's a special "Bunter" story to kick off with, and you know just how entertaining Frank Richards can make the fat Owl of the Remove. Then there's a scream of a yarn from the active pen of Dicky Nugent. That there will be another instalment of our popular serial goes without saying, and in addition to these features there's a topping Christmas article dealing with ghosts, and an interesting nutshell history of Preston North End, the famous Second League football club.

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Chat with a reference to our own Christmas Number, for it will be in your hands next Saturday. And you chaps will find that it is well up to standard, and full of Christmas flavour. As our office-boy remarked, next week's MAGNET is like a Christmas stocking, because it's full of good things! It is, too,

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"BUNTER'S CHRISTMAS PRESENT!"
By Frank Richards.

An enthralling story of the chums of Greyfriars.

"GOLD FOR THE GETTING!"
By Stanton Hope.

Another trenchant instalment of this splendid yarn of the Yukon.

"SANTA CLAWS AT ST. SAM'S!"
By Dicky Nugent.

A mirth-provoking tale, with a Christmas flavour.

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A breezy article of topical interest.

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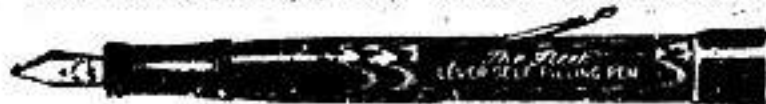
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Fifteen minutes to go before the Midnight Mail is due, and the line blocked by an avalanche of snow that looks as if it'll take fifteen hours to shift! But young Mick and his pals aren't clock watchers—fifteen minutes is enough for them to do the trick!

MICK O' THE MIDNIGHT MAIL!

A Stirring Long Complete Tale of Adventure on the Railway.
By ALFRED EDGAR.

THE FIRST CHAPTER. Snow on the Line!

It was warm and comfortable in the locomotive foreman's little office, and the snow which dappled the shoulders of Mick Kennedy's oil-smeared blue overalls melted in the heat.

Through the steamy windows it was possible just to glimpse the monstrous shapes of locomotives which stood in the running shed. One of them had a foot high pile of snow on its cab roof; the stuff had drifted through a break in the smoke-smudged glass above.

The little office was about the only really comfortable spot in the whole of Millington Junction. Everywhere else was being lashed by driving snow. It was even piling into the platforms, all of them busy with the rush of Christmas traffic.

"Hallo! Yes, sir—Foreman Hayes speaking," and he bent closer to the telephone. "What's that, sir? A blizzard out on the moors? I know that, sir. It's been snowing here pretty well all day, and we're getting the edge of the blizzard now. I should say, Eh? Ten foot drifts! Yes, I'll have the plough made ready. I've got our own permanent way men watching Scawdale Steeps and yes, I'll promise you that, sir. We'll keep the line clear for the Midnight Mail, if we don't do anything else. Thank you—bye, sir!"

Foreman Hayes replaced the receiver, and turned to Mick. The foreman was a short man, with cheerful red features and hair that was turning grey.

"That was the local superintendent," he said, and he grinned a little as he added: "You're going to have a rough night of it to-night, Mick!"

The boy nodded slowly. Mick Kennedy was in charge of No. 4 cleaning gang in the running shed, but he had the steady, keen, quick-seeing grey eyes of a born railwayman. It was Mick's ambition that he would one day drive the Midnight Mail, the line's most famous express train.

Mick's father had driven it until he had retired. He had always brought the mail in dead on time, and it was the great boast of the Millington Line that nothing ever stopped the Mail. The road was always cleared for it; nothing must hold it up.

"They're getting ten-foot snowdrifts on the far end of the moors," the foreman went on. "That means we shall be getting them on our side. If the snow piles up at the foot of Scawdale Steeps, it'll take some shifting. Get the snow plough all ready to move, Mick. Stand by her with your gang."

Mick twitched the door open and stepped out into the cold air of the running shed. He went trotting for the open end, and the lights within the shed shone out on a perfect screen of falling snow, already so deep that it formed a smooth carpet on the rails over which engines had not recently run.

Mick turned the corner at the end of the shed, and through the streaming snow, he glimpsed the lights of the station. Porters were busy with brooms, and a little gang of men was sweeping the lines between the platforms and sending them.

Just at the side of the running shed there was a roofed-in section of line, and here stood two engines which were under Mick's care. One was a strange, powerful-looking engine, with its front a mass of armour-plating. The lower part almost touched the rails, and then sloped backwards and upwards; at the top, heavy steel juttied forward like the prow of a battleship. More plating swept from this through along the side of the boiler and formed side-shields for the engine crew in the cab.

This locomotive was a snow-plough, and behind it stood another engine—a monstrous, ten-wheel-drive affair known as the old Experimental No. 8. She was about the most powerful loco that had ever come out of the works; she was also the most unsteady and

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was now only used in emergencies. When ever she went out of the shed, something happened. The railwaymen said that she was "hoodoo," and Mick was one of the few who could humour the engine sufficiently to make it behave.

He checked round the corner, and made for the snow-plough. Wind-driven snow smacked into his face and filled one ear, then he caught voices slinging from the cab of the engine. He recognised the tones of his mates and he grinned as he heard them roaring "Good King Venesians!"

The four of them were grouped in the warm cab, their faces lit by the ruddy glow from the fire-box. Fat Sammy Buckle was beating time with a crowbar on the fireman's shovel and Lanky Long was bringing in clanking variations by double-kicking on the water-bucket.

The carol stopped as Mick climbed into the cab. The gang grinned at him cheerfully; they were all wearing sprigs of holly in their caps. These four were the toughest and most daring cleaners in the shed, and when as the result of averting a train smash—Mick had been promoted to charge of the gang, he had had to fight each one of them separately, and then all the lot together before they would admit that he was boss.

They were all as game as banians, and they liked Mick as much as he liked them.

"Got steam up in the old puff?" Mick asked.

"Pretty nearly," grunted Lanky Long. "Don't say she's going out on a night like this."

"She is," Mick answered. "The line's getting snowed up on the moors and we've got to stand by with her. There's ten foot drifts out there!"

He glanced at the gauges, then turned to his mates. "Tell you what, we'd better get steam in the old Experimental too. The plough's all right if the drifts aren't too long. But if we had to rush one, we'd want more weight and—"

"What do you mean—we?" asked Sammy. "We're not being sent out with her, are we?"

"Looks like it," Mick answered. "You see, everybody's doing overtime through the Christmas rush, and the line's stiff with traffic. There's nobody else who can—"

"Mick!" Foreman Hayes, roasting voice suddenly came to their ears, and the little gang jumped to look over the armour-plated side of the big cab. "Mick! I've just had word through that snow's piling up at Scawdale Steeps, and they're afraid it'll block the line for the Mail—she's due in three-quarters of an hour. The down line's fairly clear, but they're switching up traffic to go through Flawley until we're sure the road's open for the Mail."

"You may need the old Experimental for a booster, and you'll have to take charge of both engines, Mick. Your gang can go as yourselves into trouble. I'm going to round up a shovel gang, so hitch on a brake wagon for them to ride in."

The foreman turned and went racing away, while Sammy Buckle let forth a grunt of delight. "Hooley! Got to keep the road open for the Midnight Mail!" he exclaimed. "There'll be some fun at the Steeps, Mick, the snow doesn't half pile up there."

Scawdale Steeps was formed by a cutting through one side of a hill. The Steeps towered high above the line, almost sheer. They caught the wind and sent snow swirling down to the line. Sometimes, snow settled on the Steeps themselves and then there was always a danger of it sliding down and blocking the road completely.

got steam up in no time. They backed her to the breakdown train which stood on the line just behind and hooked up the forward brakevan. Both engines were ready to move as a score of men with shovels came running out of the night—snow caked on their shoulders and hats.

They piled into the brake wagon, just as Foreman Hayes came racing up again. "All ready, Mick? Then get up there as quick as you can. Snow's packing on the Steeps, and you're afraid it's going to slip. If it does, you've got to clear it somehow. The Mail's got to go through!"

THE SECOND CHAPTER.
The Avalanche!

WITH Mick at the throttle of the snow-plough, and the old Experimental and the box wagon hitched behind, the snow-fighters clattered and clanked over snow-choked points and gained the main up line.

The Experimental was running free, with two of Mick's gang on her footplate, firing her until her safety valve was screaming under the pressure of steam.

Snow fogged Mick's look-out pane, so that he had to peer around the side of the cab to see ahead. Everything was ghostly white.



The avalanche seemed to drop on them out of the very sky itself; earth and stones and snow and branches poured down on the two locos in a terrifying deluge! (See Chapter 4.)

and the rails stretched ahead until they were lost in the whirling screen.

Now and again the scoop of the plough ripped into a drift and over the whole engine half-frozen snow shot in a hissing shower. In a little while they were running past the Viaduct goods yard, where wagons stood snowed up to their tarpaulins.

On the great Viaduct itself, snow was frozen to ice, and down the valley the blizzard roared with terrific force. The snow no longer fell, it was blown in almost horizontal lines and the engine, travelling in mid-air along the viaduct, got the gas fairly. The wind screamed into the cab like something solid.

"Hang on, Lanky, else you'll get blown away!" gasped Mick, then he claved at the steel screen on that side of the cab. Sammy had to come to his aid ere he could draw it across and out of the wind.

They could hear the tearing roar of the blizzard above the noise of the engine. The wind and sent snow swirling down to the line. Sometimes, snow settled on the Steeps themselves and then there was always a danger of it sliding down and blocking the road completely.

They cleared the viaduct, and a few minutes later landmarks showed Mick that they were approaching the Steeps. The plough was driving into drifts now, and snow shot up

like a continuous wave. It curled up along the armoured sides and hissed away on either hand.

There was nearly a mile of that, and all the time Mick peered anxiously along the line, watching for the permanent-way men who should be there. These men were in telephonic communication with the junction, and their duty was to send warning when the snowdrifts became too heavy for the traffic to pass.

The down line was completely blocked out, the snow forming one level expanse which allowed only the tops of the signal-wire posts to be seen. Beyond these, the rolling moor stretched, bleak and bare and misted by the driving snow.

Suddenly, dead ahead, Mick saw a red lamp bobbing. It was blotted out as the engine charged into a big drift. The snow smashed back, covering Mick's head and shoulders, then it dropped away as the plough broke through and Mick saw the red blob of light again.

It coloured the snow around until it was the line of blood, and it seemed to Mick as though the lamp was suspended in the air. The permanent way man who held it was completely obliterated by the snow, and he was still barely distinguishable when Mick cautiously braked the snow-plough to a stop.

The man came clambering up the tread plates to the cab, snow showering off him as he came.

Steeple! the man exclaimed. "Three of us chased him, but we lost him in the snow. We don't know where he is now. It's mad enough to have the snow to fight, without that crazy devil hanging around!"

"There's twenty men with shovels in the brake-van behind," said Mick grimly. "If Scammell starts any tricks, he'll get all he's asking for. What's the line like in front?"

"There's a damned great drift all the way along the foot of the Steeps," the man answered. "It's worse at the far end. One of our chaps fell into it, and it took half an hour to dig him out—nigh suffocated, he was! You've got two engines here, but it'll be as much as you can do to get through!"

"We'll have a shot at it, anyhow," Mick said. "We'll do—"

He broke off. Another lamp came bobbing out of the driving snow, and a second man rushed up.

"I'm foreman of this permanent way gang, driver! Get these engines moving. The Mail's due up in twenty-five minutes and—"

"Stand away—y-y-y!" A distant voice boomed out of the snow ahead. Mick, peering through the mist, glimpsed little black figures towering wildly over the snow-blinded line. Into the night there came a rushing, slithering roar that sounded through the whine of the blizzard, and high on the slope of Scawdale Steeps a mighty mass began to move downwards.

The dreaded avalanche had started!

THE THIRD CHAPTER.
"Scammell!"

PELBOUNDED, Mick and his mates watched from the cab of the snow-plough.

The Steeps showed but dimly, but at the snow-misted top the moving bulk was plain. It shifted slowly and monotonously, a ponderous mass that ripped giant boulders clean from the earth as it moved. The sides of it were slicked by the black streaks of flying earth and spinning debris as it gained momentum. Then, very suddenly, the fore-part slowed. The avalanche piled up behind, rising in a mountainous bulk that toppled, steadied, lurched, and then became still.

"It's caught on a ridge!" The foreman's voice was awed. He peered through the slashing snow for a moment, then he said: "It's liable to come down any minute—the last thing it'll shift is. It'll block the line for a week when it does drop. You'll have to stop where you are with these engines—it's too risky to try and clear the line with that lot waiting to fall on you!"

Mick and his mates stared at him. "Eh?" grunted Mick. "What d'you mean—stop where we are?"

"What I say!" growled the foreman, under a thumb that those engines underneath that!" and he stabilised a finger to the threatening avalanche. "Can't we?" said Mick grimly. "Our orders are to clear this line for the Midnight Mail, and we're going to clear it!"

"No, you're not, my boy!" the foreman said definitely. "It's a long sight too dangerous. My orders to you are to stop where you are!"

"And we don't take orders from permanent-way foremen," said Mick. "We're not going to have the mail held up just 'cause there's a big snowball on the Steeps. Sammy, unblock that brake-van, and then tell Joe to boost me up with the Experimental as hard as he knows how!"

"Steady on!" The foreman lifted a protesting hand. "I don't want to quarrel with you, young 'un, but you can't do it! It's too risky!"

"That'll be all right!" Mick answered cheerfully, as Sammy dropped out of the cab and went plunging back through the snow. "You think of the Mail full of Christmas presents an' things! She's got to go through with 'em. Hop off our footplate, and let's get at it!"

The foreman tried to protest some more, then he decided to telephone to the junction and report the situation; they'd give him authority to stop Mick taking chances. With this in his mind, he descended from the cab, the other man going with him.

Sammy returned, then Mick lifted his hand to the whistle-cord, gave a foot to let his mates on the engine behind know that he was moving, and then he sent the snow-plough forward.

Away she went, with a plume of masonry-white spurting up from her nose, her blast roaring certain.

"We saw him by the other end o' the Steeps!" the man exclaimed. "Three of us chased him, but we lost him in the snow. We don't know where he is now. It's mad enough to have the snow to fight, without that crazy devil hanging around!"

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hollowly and the big drivers biting on to the rails. She was butting into four-foot drifts now, with the snow lifting in hummocks which, at times, reared almost to the top of her knife-like prow.

At the back, the old Experimental boosted the plough up, shoving her on when her wheels slipped on ice and helping to drive the armoured ram up to the white waste.

Nearer and nearer they came to the tottering bulk of the avalanche. Through the whirling snow they could see the black mark it had scored in the hillside before it checked.

"If somebody dropped a pea on to that, it'd come over!" Sammy yelled. "It'd—"

He caught Mick's arm, and pointed over the side and towards the Steeps. A little, black, figure was running and scrambling up the slope, slipping and sliding on the snow, bounding where the wind had blown the steep earth clean.

Behind him, two other figures were tearing in pursuit, with snow flying in little furies from their feet, occasionally slipping full-length, and then forging on.

Down at the side of the line a man showed, buried almost to his thighs in snow as he ploughed towards the hillside. He turned as the engine came level. Mick glimpsed his face through the screen of snow that the plough was flinging back. The man shouted wildly, and pointed up the slope. Only one word did they catch:

"Scammell!"

"It's Scammell!" Mick gasped, and stood staring at the leading figure, half recognising him now that he knew who he was. "What's he after?"

Scammell was going up the slope at a slant, and he seemed to be making for the piled-up mass looming above. He was travelling half as fast again as the men behind, moving in a kind of frenzy. The half-crazed railwayman was plainly after something and—

Mick's thoughts switched back as a mass of snow suddenly slid over the top of the cab and smothered down on him. The engine had butted into a particularly deep drift and she slowed perceptibly. He reached for the whistle cord, and jerked it three times in a signal for full throttle from the old Experimental.

The two giant engines bored on, speed increasing now, and the snow rising like a bow-wave before the plough's scoop. Mick dared a glance up the slope. Scammell was ahead of them and level with the side of the mass marked on the ridge. He claved his way onwards, then showed as a dim-seen figure scrambling over the black mark that the slide had left.

"What the dickens is he up to?" Sammy asked.

"Look at him!" Lanky Long yelled the words. Scammell had stopped and was heaving down. They could see him but faintly through the snow, but he was plainly struggling with something.

"It's a boulder and—gosh!" Mick gasped as he saw the man's intention. He was working on a boulder already loosened by the fall. It meant to slam it down on the rocking pile, and it would be more than enough to start the avalanche smashing down to the line.

Even as Mick realised it, he saw the boulder move—and they were almost in the path of the avalanche! He pulled on the whistle-cord and the whistle screamed in a long blast as a signal to stop. In the same moment, he closed the throttle and the plough came to a slithering halt.

Up above, the great boulder blundered down towards the pile. The two railway men at the side saw what was coming and flung themselves desperately clear. High above, Scammell showed, standing upright and his mangled laughter could be heard.

Then his figure was blotted out by a spray of earth-streaked snow as the boulder smashed down. The head of the pile tipped over with a rush, dropped, and then the whole mass started to move.

Over the edge of the ridge that held it the avalanche came, heaving down the slope with a hollow, snatching roar and crashing fall to the engines on the snow-blocked line beneath!

THE FOURTH CHAPTER. Mick Does the Trick!

THE avalanche came down with a mad, monstrous rush, dropping with amazing swiftness. Small trees and bushes were torn out, boulders jumped and leaped clear. The great mass gathered snow as it dropped, flinging debris far out into the air.

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