

EXTRA-LONG AND EXTRA-SPECIAL STORY OF HARRY WHARTON & CO.
INSIDE.

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HARRY WHARTON'S TERRIBLE ORDEAL!

(A dramatic incident from this week's school story of the boys of Greyfriars.)

In Merciless

They don't think a great deal of William George Bunter at Greyfriars, for he's fat, lazy, greedy, and several other things besides! Yet even Bunter has his uses at times, as this sparkling story shows.

journey to Greyfriars for tea in Study No. 1. For want of a better conversation, they had fallen to discussing their prospects of success against Tom Merry & Co., of St. Jim's, whom they were due to meet on the football ground the following Wednesday week.

"Cross my palm with silver, young gents—"

Harry Wharton & Co. started as that voice fell upon their ears. So engrossed were they in their own thoughts that they hadn't noticed the picturesque figure of a gipsy woman who stepped out right into their path.

But they noticed her now, and they stopped.

"Cross my palm with silver, young gents—"

The old Romany woman flashed a dusky smile on the five Greyfriars juniors and held out an olive-skinned hand. But it was not at the dusky hand or the owner of it that Harry Wharton & Co. looked. Their attention was drawn to a dark, diminutive, impish face that peered out at them over the old woman's shoulder.

"What a bonnie kid!" exclaimed Bob Cherry admiringly.

The gipsy child was certainly attractive as it peeped out inquiringly at the juniors from the large shawl slung at the mother's back. And when its dusky face broke into a grin, showing a row of flashing, white teeth, it was irresistible.

Harry Wharton & Co. smiled back in return.

"That is Miel, my little son," volunteered the gipsy woman, disengaging a dimpled hand from the large earring that drooped from her ear, which the tiny mite doubtless supposed was part of his nursery playthings.

"Jolly little beggar!" said Harry Wharton.

But it was evident that, although the gipsy woman was delighted to think that her baby had effected an introduction, so to speak, her mind was on the business that had brought her in contact with Harry Wharton & Co.

"Cross my palm with silver, young gents," she said in a slightly foreign accent, "and I will tell you what the Fates have in store."

Harry Wharton looked at his chums. None of them held any belief in fortune-telling, being healthy and light-hearted enough to think that at their age the future could take care of itself. But they were prepared to drop a coin into the dusky hand that was outstretched before them, and immediately five hands delved in trousers-pockets.

"Never mind about the Fates," said Bob Cherry, as he gave the gipsy woman a shilling.

"Unless the result of the footer match with St. Jim's comes into them," grinned Nugent.

The gipsy woman smiled as she pocketed the coins the Famous Five handed her, and the juniors made as if to pass on. But the smile on the gipsy's face suddenly faded, and her piercing, black eyes turned on Harry Wharton.

Harry felt himself colouring under that piercing scrutiny, and his chums eyed the old Romany woman curiously.

At last she spoke.

"Stay, young sir!" she said in a tense voice, and her dusky hand reached for Wharton's hand and held it. "For you I have a warning—"

"A warning?" gasped Harry Wharton. "I—I say, I'd rather be going if—"

THE FIRST CHAPTER.

The Gipsy's Warning!

"I'll be a tough game!"

Harry Wharton shook his head to give greater emphasis to his opinion, and his chums looked at each other and nodded.

"The toughness of the esteemed and ridiculous game will be terrific," added Hurree Jamset Ram Singh.

"All the better," said Johnny Bull.

Harry Wharton & Co. had been for a sharp stroll through Friardale Wood, and they were now making their homeward journey.

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Hands!

By
**FRANK
RICHARDS.**



And he made as if to move on; but the gipsy shook her head and detained him.

Wharton looked meaningly at his chums. Not for one moment did he regard the gipsy woman as being a person gifted with second sight, although he had heard tell that gipsies were notoriously clever at reading palms and fortune-telling generally. But he hadn't the heart to be discourteous, for the old gipsy woman looked sincere, at any rate. A covert wink from Wharton's chums decided him. He humoured the woman.

For a long time the old Romany woman gazed at Wharton's palm. Then she looked up into his handsome face.

"There is great danger lying ahead for you, young sir," she said in a low, far-away voice.

Harry Wharton & Co. started.

There was something eerie about the woman at this moment.

"Danger?" said Wharton, with a faint smile.

"Great danger!" averred the gipsy. "And it also embraces someone very dear to you—"

The captain of the Remove looked uncomfortable. Although he told himself that he didn't believe in fortune-telling—that it was all tommy-rot—the mention of someone very dear to him stirred him. Immediately his thoughts flew to his uncle, Colonel Wharton, of whom he was intensely fond. Those thoughts were only fleeting, and he dismissed them immediately. But they were to return.

"I see a tall, military-looking gentleman," went on the gipsy, her dark eyes once more bent over Wharton's palm—"someone very dear to you. He is in danger of his life, and you, young sir, share his fate."

Her voice faded, and she looked up at Wharton's face with a kindly smile.

"It is written," she said. "I, Meloah, never speak false. Young sir, take warning!"

"But—" began Wharton helplessly.

"I speak truth," said Meloah. "You young gentlemen have been very good to me. Why should I deceive you?"

"Ahem!" coughed Johnny Bull.

Of the party perhaps he was the most sceptical, and his face showed that he regarded the woman's words as so much "bunkum."

She turned on him with flashing eyes. "You not believe? You are a friend of this young gentleman?"

Johnny Bull nodded.

"Then take care of him. The danger threatens within seven days, seven weeks—"

"Or seven years, or seventy!" said Johnny Bull in his blunt way. "Come on, Harry! We've had enough of this."

"The enoughfulness of the esteemed and ludicrous fortune-telling is terrific," added Hurree Jamset Ram Singh in his quaint English. "Let us be going gofully!"

Harry Wharton pulled himself together. The words of the Romany woman had disturbed him for the moment, but he dismissed them now. How could she know of any danger that threatened him? he asked himself. The whole thing was ridiculous!

He felt Bob Cherry's arm slipped through his own, and the Co. moved on.

"You will take care, young sir!" The gipsy's words floated after them. "Meloah never speaks the lie to friends!"

"Oh, blow Meloah and all her blessed warnings!" muttered Bob Cherry crossly.

"Hear, hear!" exclaimed Johnny Bull heartily. "The whole thing's a lot of silly twaddle!"

"She gave me the creeps, anyway!" admitted Frank Nugent; and he looked back along the lane, to see Meloah staring after them and shaking her head.

"Phew!" breathed Wharton. "What a silly ass I am to let that footling warning upset me. But—but—"

Indecision stirred in his face as he conjured up a vision of Colonel Wharton.

Johnny Bull, glancing at him and catching that expression, snorted.

"You silly chump!" he said wrathfully. "Forget all about it. If you're going to believe everything a wandering, hard-up gipsy tells you, you'll be running away from your own shadow!"

"Johnny's right!" said Bob Cherry. "Step it out; I'm feeling peckish."

"And I feel that the teafulness would be the proper caper," remarked Inky, with a grin.

The Co. smiled. They were healthy

British schoolboys, and Bob's words reminded them that tea was a trifle overdue. In the circumstances the warning words of Meloah paled into insignificance beside that.

But, for all their scepticism, they were to be reminded of Meloah and what she had told them before many days were past.

THE SECOND CHAPTER.

Bunter Tries It On!

"I SAY, you fellows—"

It was the day after Harry Wharton & Co.'s meeting with the gipsy in Friardale wood, and the chums of the Remove were in the Common-room, when Billy Bunter burst in upon them.

"Don't old fat man," said Bob Cherry. "We know what you're going to say."

Billy Bunter blinked.

"Oh, really, Cherry! How can you know what I'm going to say?"

"Because we've heard it thousands of times before," replied Bob Cherry solemnly.

The Owl of the Remove gazed indignantly at the faces of the juniors around him. Only one person in the Remove ever took Bunter seriously, and that person was William George. Bunter himself.

"You silly ass!" hooted Bunter. "If you know what I've got to say, say it. Yah!"

Bob Cherry winked at his chums.

"You really want me to say it? You really want me to tell the fellows that you're expecting a postal-order? That it's been delayed in the post? That you'd be obliged if someone cashed the postal-order in advance—"

Billy Bunter's fat face crimsoned.

"Why, you rotter!" he roared. "I am expecting a postal-order from one of my titled relations, as a matter of fact, but I wasn't going to talk about that. Yah!"

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I won't tell Wharton now that he's wanted on the telephone——"

"Eh?" ejaculated the captain of the Remove.

Billy Bunter sniffed.

"Or that Colonel Wharton wants to speak to him. Rotten old codger, anyway! Yooooop!"

The Owl of the Remove broke off with a wild howl as Wharton grabbed him by the collar and bumped his bullet head against the wall.

"Better language when you talk of my uncle, old lard-barrel!" said Wharton grimly.

"Grooooooh! You beast!"

"You say I'm wanted on the telephone?"

"No—I mean yes, you rotter!" howled Bunter. "Quech sent me to tell you! Wow! Ingratitude, I call it!"

But Wharton hadn't waited to hear what the fat and fatuous Owl of the Remove called it. If Colonel Wharton wanted to speak to him on the phone it was hardly the thing to keep him waiting. Wharton fairly raced out of the Common-room and along the passage to Mr. Quelch's study.

"Ah, Wharton," said the master of the Remove. "You are wanted on the telephone. Colonel Wharton wishes to speak to you. It is hardly good manners to keep him waiting!"

"Oh, sir!"

While Mr. Quelch delivered himself of that little lecture more precious seconds were being wasted, but the master of the Remove seemed unaware of that.

"You may use the telephone, Wharton," added Mr. Quelch graciously.

"Oh, thank you, sir!"

And the captain of the Remove had reached the instrument in a bound, what time Mr. Quelch rustled majestically out of the study.

"Is that you, uncle?"

"Harry, my boy," came Colonel Wharton's voice, "I thought you were never coming——"

"Ahem! You see, sir——" stammered Wharton; but the colonel broke in again.

"I am telephoning from Courtfield Station, my boy," he said. "I have three-quarters of an hour to wait, and I thought you might care to come over on your bicycle and see me."

"Oh, uncle!" exclaimed Wharton joyously.

"You'll come, Harry?"

"Of course, uncle!"

"Very well, my lad. If you follow the path by the chalk quarry—you know that—I'll walk from Courtfield and meet you."

"Right-ho, uncle! I'll be on the bike in two minutes."

And, with a whoop of delight the captain of the Remove replaced the receiver and bolted out of the study.

Crash!

In his haste Wharton did not trouble to think that someone else might be coming along the passage at that identical moment. And it was rather unfortunate for Horace Coker of the Fifth that he happened to be that someone. Wharton met him in full career just outside Mr. Quelch's study door.

Bump!

"Yaroooooh!"

"Owl!"

Horace James Coker had been carrying a huge pile of lesson-books from the Fifth Form room to Mr. Prout's study, the master of the Fifth having made an inspection of books that morning, and condemned about twenty ancient and dog-eared volumes. The condemned had been entrusted to the charge of

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Horace Coker, whose duty it was to deposit them in his Form master's study.

And thither Coker was proceeding when he met Harry Wharton.

Bump, bump, bump!

As Coker crashed to the floor the volumes shot into the air, and then descended on him like an avalanche.

"Grooooooh! You clumsy Remove fathead! Wow!" gasped Coker, drinking in great gulps of air.

"Yow!" panted Wharton, who, fortunately, had come out of that unexpected encounter with very little damage. "You burbling chump!"

Horace James Coker shook a rugged fist at Wharton, and his rugged face assumed the colour of a beetroot.

"You cheeky rotter! Why, I'll smash you!"

Wharton grinned down at him.

"Some other time, old bean," he answered. "I'm in a hurry now. Ta-ta!"

And he turned on his heel and scudded away to the Common-room.

"Hallo, hallo, hallo!" exclaimed Bob Cherry, as he noted Wharton's flushed, excited face. "What's up? Come into a fortune?"

"Don't be an ass!" said Harry, with a grin. "Nunky wants me to meet him outside Courtfield."

"Oh!" said Bob Cherry. "Then tea at Cliff House is off."

Harry Wharton's face fell.

In his delight at being able to see his uncle and guardian he had entirely forgotten that he and his chums had planned to meet Marjorie & Co., the girls of Cliff House, that afternoon. The programme was for the party to explore the old caves at Pegg and then return to Cliff House for tea with Marjorie & Co.

"I'd forgotten that, for the moment," said the captain of the Remove. "But, in any case, I should have had to postpone it. I don't often see the colonel, and I'm sure the girls will understand."

"But can't you pick us up afterwards?" suggested Nugent. "If the colonel's only got three-quarters of an hour to spare before he catches his train you can look for us at Pegg."

"That's the idea!" said Bob Cherry. "You cut off, Harry, and we'll see you at Pegg."

"Right-ho!" exclaimed Wharton, and he turned on his heel.

Two minutes later he was speeding out of gates, and once on the road to Courtfield his feet fairly made the pedals fly.

The rest of the Co. waved him off from the top of the School House steps, and then, at a leisurely pace, they sauntered down to the gates. There was another half an hour to go before they were due to meet Marjorie Hazeldene and her chums—plenty of time in which to reach the appointed meeting-place.

At the gates a fat figure rolled up to Bob Cherry and his chums.

"I say, you fellows, wait for me!" panted Bunter.

"I'll wait for you with my boot if you come within kicking distance!" growled Johnny Bull threateningly.

"Oh, really, Bull!" said Bunter; but he took good care to keep out of shooting range of Johnny's boots.

The chums exchanged significant glances. They were not prepared to endure the fascinating society of William George Bunter that afternoon—not if they could help it.

"Beasts!" grunted Bunter. "You might have waited a moment for me! You knew I was coming. Marjorie will be awfully disappointed if I don't turn up!"

"Stow it, old fat man!" said Bob Cherry. "You're not coming—and you know it!"

"Oh, really, Cherry," exclaimed Bunter. "There's no need to be jealous! You know how sweet Marjorie is on me. It's my distinguished look, you know!"

"Brrrrr!" growled Bob warningly.

"Really, I'm blessed if I know why Marjorie puts up with you, Bob Cherry," prattled on Bunter; "an untidy, slovenly fellow like you, too! Look at your big feet!"

Bob Cherry's face crimsoned. He hated to be reminded of the fact that he was an outsize, so to speak, at his pedal extremities.

"What's the matter with my feet, you fat ass?" he demanded, coming to a halt.

Billy Bunter smirked.

"They're like blessed tanks!" he said. "Excuse my frankness, old chap, but—Yarooooop! Wow! Hellup! Oh crikey!"

Those big feet of Bob Cherry's were useful then. He applied them to Bunter's nether garments with great vigour, and the fat junior's roars rang out crescendo:

"Stop it, you rotter! Oh crumbs! Whooooop!"

Bob released his hold on Bunter's collar and gave the Owl of the Remove a final kick that sent him sprawling on his hands and knees. Then, feeling that he had seen the last of William George Bunter for that afternoon, Bob hastened after his chums.

"Yah! Rotters!" gasped Bunter, scrambling to his feet. "If they think they're going to shake me off, they're jolly well mistaken. Beasts!"

And he rolled on after the four juniors as fast as he could. With all his faults Billy Bunter was a stickler when he was on the trail of grub. There was certain to be an extra-special tea at the end of that ramble over the cliffs with Marjorie Hazeldene and her girl chums. Bunter wasn't interested in the ramble—that entailed too much exercise—but he had more than a passing interest in the tea, and the tea drew him like a magnet.

THE THIRD CHAPTER.

Out of the Past!

"WELL, Harry, my boy, I shall have to be going?"

There was an expression of regret on Colonel Wharton's bronzed face as he spoke, which found an echo, so to speak, in the countenance of his nephew.

"I suppose you must," said Harry. "Still, I'm awfully glad to have seen you, uncle, short as the time has been."

Uncle and nephew were strolling on the common at Courtfield, Harry Wharton wheeling his bike as he walked alongside the stalwart figure of his guardian. Half an hour they had spent in each other's company, and now the time had come for them to say good-bye.

The colonel pulled out his gold Hunter.

"Just five minutes for me to catch the train, Harry," he smiled. "I've left it rather late, but my old legs are longer than yours, and I can do the distance comfortably."

"Can't I come as far as the station, uncle?" asked Harry.

The colonel shook his head.

"Afraid there isn't time. I'm taking the short cut through the bushes. You'd find it a trifle awkward wheeling your bike through there."

"But I can leave the bike here, uncle," said Wharton.

Colonel Wharton shook his head.

"No; it can't be done. I shall have



The gipsy gazed at Wharton's palm and then looked up into the junior's handsome face. "There is great danger lying ahead of you, young sir," she said in a low, far away voice. "Danger?" said the junior captain, with a faint smile. "Great danger," averred the gipsy, "and it also embraces someone very dear to you!" (See Chapter 1.)

to walk pretty briskly as it is. You get back to your friends, my boy. You told me that you were picking up Bob Cherry and your other friends when you had left me."

"But I didn't mean——"

"Tut-tut, Harry! Good-bye, my boy!"

And the colonel took his nephew by the hand and wrung it warmly.

"Good-bye, uncle!"

The captain of the Remove watched his uncle turn on his heel and head for the clump of bushes beyond which lay the station. The old soldier strode out at a vigorous pace, and Wharton knew that he would not have been able to keep up with him.

A final wave of the hand and the colonel had disappeared from view. In the distance could be heard the faint rumble of an approaching train. Undoubtedly Colonel Wharton had cut it rather fine.

He glanced at his watch as he strode onwards through the narrow footpath lined on either side with thick gorse bushes, and as he did so the bushes parted and a face peered out at him—a face that was evil and morose in its expression.

Next minute the face had been withdrawn from view, and the bushes had closed the gap. And it was towards these bushes that Colonel Wharton strode, all unconscious of the danger that lurked ahead.

"Phew!" muttered the colonel. "This is warm work. I——"

The bushes parted and a tall man leaped out. One savage, triumphant glance he gave the astonished colonel. Next moment a cudgel swept aloft and then descended.

With a low groan Colonel Wharton sank to the ground.

Over him stood his assailant, the

cudgel raised aloft to strike a second blow. Some flickering remnant of consciousness came to the colonel, for he summoned all his rapidly waning strength and opened his mouth.

"Help!"

"Quiet, you hound!"

The cudgel whistled through the air and struck home. It had done its dastardly work well, for, without even a groan, the colonel crumpled up in a heap and lay still.

But that one cry of his had been heard.

Harry Wharton had barely proceeded twenty yards on his journey in the direction of Pegg when that cry, faint and indistinct, reached him.

He halted and wheeled rapidly.

"What was that?" he muttered.

A puzzled look settled on Wharton's handsome face.

"I could have sworn it was a cry for help," he reflected.

And, convincing himself that his ears were not playing him tricks, he began to retrace his footsteps, having lodged the bicycle against a tree.

The common was deserted, save for himself—at least, a careful glance round seemed to indicate that it was. Yet Wharton wasn't satisfied. Into his mind came some peculiar instinct that the cry had proceeded from Colonel Wharton. And the moment it was born the Greyfriars junior became all anxiety.

"Uncle!" Wharton's voice rang out clear and strong. "Uncle!"

The wind carried the cry along, but no answer came. And, unable to account for the fear that took hold of him, Wharton rushed towards the clump of bushes through which he had seen his uncle disappear. As he ran he tried to convince himself that his uncle must by this time be well out of earshot. It wanted barely half a minute for the

train that was to take him to London to be due.

It seemed the only solution, for as Wharton ran through the narrow footpath he saw no sign of his uncle, or anyone else, for that matter.

But someone had seen him. And that was the scoundrel who had felled the colonel to the ground.

"Uncle!"

As Wharton's anxious voice reached him the man stooped swiftly over the inanimate figure of his victim and seized the colonel's collar. Then he dragged him through the opening in the bushes and crouched down beside him.

"Patter, patter!"

Wharton's steps came distinctly to the watcher's ears as he crouched there, his hand gripped tightly about the cudgel. But he need have had no fear, for the bushes screened him from the view of the Greyfriars junior as he rushed past the spot.

Wharton's footsteps grew fainter and fainter, but still the scoundrel did not move. He had anticipated that the boy would return, and he was right.

The captain of the Remove raced down the footpath until he came to an open stretch of common that led directly to the station. There was no one in sight.

Wharton stopped.

"Must have been fancy, after all," he muttered. "Uncle's on the train by this time."

And, with less anxiety in his heart, he retraced his steps along the footpath, passing within a foot of his uncle and the miscreant who had struck him down.

"So that's the nephew, is it?" muttered Colonel Wharton's assailant as the Greyfriars junior passed by. "I'll remember that face. He may be useful to me."

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Wharton's footsteps died away at last, and, save for the twittering of the birds and the sound of the wind in the trees, all was silent.

The man gave Colonel Wharton a careful scrutiny, quite ready, if the expression on his face was any indication, to give his victim another dose of the cudgel should consciousness return.

But Colonel Wharton gave no sign of life. He lay where he had been dragged, an inert, unconscious heap. At last his assailant left his hiding-place. He peered anxiously along the footpath, and listened with ears alert. But he had nothing to fear. That particular stretch of the common was deserted.

With a malevolent, twisted grin on his brutal face the man went back to his victim. Then he stooped and roughly tossed the colonel across his shoulder.

Again the bushes parted, and the scoundrel stood listening. Then, having satisfied himself that the coast was clear, he moved with astonishing agility and speed considering the burden he carried, and, by a circuitous route that afforded him excellent cover, made for a small two-seater car that stood on a grassy bank off the deserted road.

It was the work of a moment to dump the unconscious colonel in the car and to start the engine. The next and the car was driving off in the direction of the cliffs to the north of Pegg village.

At the summit of Black Point—the highest point round about—loomed the remains of a derelict mansion, dark and sinister against the skyline. An uneven track that wound upwards in monotonous winding curves was its only means of access so far as any vehicle was concerned. And up this track, which no motorist who had any respect for his car would have traversed, drove the man who had struck down Colonel Wharton.

The car jolted and bumped over the uneven ground and the springs protested shrilly, but the car still raced on at a dangerous speed.

That the driver knew his way thoroughly was evident. To the inexperienced that headlong rush would have ended in disaster.

Sprawled in the bottom of the car lay Colonel Wharton, his face white as if cut out of marble. And as the car continued that dizzy climb the driver occasionally took his eyes off the winding track ahead to gaze at his unconscious victim, and at such times his brutal face became transformed in demoniacal triumph.

The crumbling remains of the mansion on the summit of the cliff loomed up clear and foreboding. Straight up to them raced the car. Then came a grinding of brakes, and the driver jumped out.

He glanced quickly about him, and then he chuckled.

"Lucky for me they call this the Haunted Manor," he muttered. "That keeps inquisitive fools away."

He stood gazing down at his victim for some moments, deep in thought. Then, as if he had come to a decision that pleased him, he seized the colonel by the collar and dragged him from the car. An improvised gag of cotton waste was made secure round the colonel's mouth, while a couple of lengths of cord served to bind him hand and foot.

Another hurried glance round and the scoundrel had slung Colonel Wharton over his shoulder. Next moment he approached the remains of the portico of the house.

As he stepped over the moss-grown stone a number of birds that evidently made the ruins their home rose squawking shrilly into the heavens. With a

mirthless laugh the man felt his way inside.

A heavy and oppressive air hung about the place, but he seemed unconscious of it as he threaded his way to a stone staircase that gave access to the cellars.

Down below ground level the air was moist and mildewy. Great holes in the roof had admitted the rain of years. Green slime covered portions of the stone flooring which made walking something of a task. But the scoundrel seemed to know his way about, although the dim light that sprang from the small electric torch he carried afforded him but little assistance.

At the end of one cellar was an aperture that had once served as a door. Breathing a trifle heavily, as the weight of his burden became felt, the man passed through. Another six paces he took, and then he set his burden on the ground.

The light from the torch as it swept round the apartment revealed a stone cellar, across which a number of rats scurried in affright at this unexpected intrusion of their domain.

The man chuckled as he saw them. "Friends for you, Colonel Wharton—fitting friends, you rat!"

The colonel stirred, and the movement brought a sudden access of fury to his captor, for he kicked the helpless man in the ribs.

Then he dragged the colonel towards the wall. The light, creeping up its dank surface, revealed a heavy iron ring stapled into it, from which hung a rusty chain.

"We'll see how you like this, colonel!"

As he spoke the scoundrel took a length of rope from his pocket, and, having first made it secure round his captive's waist, tied it to the length of chain.

He had only just completed this task when the colonel's eye opened. From his gagged lips came a meaningless jumble of sound. But there was no mistaking the meaning in his eyes as, by the scant light of the torch, they rested on his captor's face.

"So you recognise me, colonel, do you? You recognise Captain Holstern—the man you sent to prison for twenty years? I swore I'd never die until I had levelled accounts, and I have kept my word. You dog, you are in my power, you hear?"

He bent down and struck the colonel a savage blow in the face, and then, with a chuckle, he tore the gag from his captive's mouth.

"Now talk, Colonel Wharton!" he jeered. "Yell if you like! No one will hear you, you hound!"

But the colonel's head sank back. He was once more unconscious as a result of that sudden blow in the face.

And with a chuckle the man who called himself Captain Holstern vacated the stone cellar and made his way up above.

The car started up, and soon the captain was guiding it down the dangerous cliff path, amusing himself with recollections of how simply his old enemy had fallen into his hands.

THE FOURTH CHAPTER.

A Rift in the Lute!

TING-A-LING!
The whirring of a bicycle-bell brought Bob Cherry and the rest of the Co. to their feet.

Marjorie Hazeldene and Clara Trevlyn smiled.

"That's Harry for a wager," said Bob, gazing along the Pegg Road.

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"Oh, good!" ejaculated Miss Clara boyishly.

But Bob Cherry's surmise proved to be wrong. A cyclist swept round the bend in the road, but it was easy to see that he wasn't the captain of the Remove. Bob's face fell. The party had been together for half an hour, and they had explored the old smuggler's cave. Now they were resting and waiting for Harry Wharton before they recommenced their ramble.

"I say, you fellows—"

The juniors started as that fat voice fell on their ears, and Miss Clara's face assumed an annoyed expression.

"Bunter!" gasped Bob Cherry.

"The cheeky idiot!" growled Johnny Bull, under his breath.

"The fat barrel," said Miss Clara, with refreshing candour. "What's he want?"

"Oh, Clara!" remonstrated Marjorie.

"Well, he is a fat barrel," reiterated Miss Clara. "And a cheeky, fat fool!"

"I say, you fellows—"

William George Bunter rolled towards the party with an ingratiating smile on his fat face. He performed some weird evolution in front of the girls which was intended for a bow, and beamed.

Really the Owl of the Remove considered that he had done well to find the party. True, he had spent an arduous half an hour climbing about the rocks, and he was a trifle breathless. That the Removites thought he hadn't done well in finding them was very evident from the expressions on their faces. It was only the presence of the Cliff House girls that stopped them from falling on the fat junior and smiting him hip and thigh.

William George Bunter, if he saw those grim expressions, took no heed of them.

"Good-afternoon, Marjorie!" he smirked. "Good-afternoon, Clara!"

"Miss Clara to you, Bunter!" replied Miss Clara crossly. "What do you want?"

"Oh, really, Clara—I mean, Miss Clara," said Bunter, with what he thought was a winning smile. "I thought you would be pleased to see me again."

It was on the tip of Miss Clara's tongue to say exactly what she thought, which would certainly not have given the impression that she was pleased to see the Owl of the Remove, but she refrained.

William George Bunter lowered his excessive avoirdupois to the ground as near to the fair form of Miss Marjorie as was possible and smirked.

"Of all the cheek!" muttered Bob Cherry. "Why, I'll burst the fat rotter!"

"I'm sorry I was so late finding you girls," said Bunter, "but these fellows wouldn't wait for me, you know. I hope they haven't bored you, Marjorie."

"Oh!" said Marjorie.

"Bob Cherry's all right in his place," rattled on Bunter, unheeding the danger signals, so to speak, that gathered in Bob's brow. "But he's clumsy, you know. Hardly a ladies' man."

"Oh, shut up!" ejaculated Miss Clara.

"And Nugent's a bit of a milksop," continued Bunter thoughtfully. "While Bull is rather a pig!"

"Brrrrr!"

"As for Inky—well, really he's a bit too thick. A blessed nigger—I say, where are you going?"

At a sign from Marjorie, Clara had risen to her feet. The juniors followed her, leaving Bunter sitting on the ground.

"We may as well be getting a move

on," said Miss Clara. "We'll meet Harry on the road."

"Good egg!"

The party moved off, Bob Cherry lingering behind, after having whispered something into the ears of Johnny Bull.

Bob came up to Bunter with a face that was crimson with wrath.

"You fat frog!" he said.

"Eh?" gasped Bunter, struggling to his feet.

"You cheeky little rotter!" added Bob. "I'm going to give you the hiding of your life!"

"Oh, really, Bob Cherry—I— Yaroooooh!"

William George Bunter's words ended in a muffled howl as Bob Cherry pounced upon him. Before he knew what was happening the fat junior had been whirled over on his face. Then Bob picked up a stick that was lying close handy and began to use it with considerable vigour.

Whack, whack, whack!

"Whooooop! Yaroooooh! Stop it! Ow!"

Whack, whack, whack

"Grooough! Yow! Wow!" roared Bunter.

His yells rang out far and wide, and Miss Clara and Marjorie exchanged a glance.

"What on earth's that?" asked Marjorie.

"Ahem!" coughed Johnny Bull.

"Sounds like a porpoise expiring," said Miss Clara, with a grin.

Then Marjorie's eyes, roaming over the party, missed the sturdy form of Bob Cherry.

"Hallo, where's Bob?" she asked.

"Ahem! He went back—" began Johnny Bull.

"I believe he'd left something behind," added Nugent helpfully.

"Oh!"

The subject of Bob's disappearance was dropped, it wanting but little imagination now to connect those frantic yells with the names of Billy Bunter, the yeller, and Bob Cherry, the yellee, so to speak.

And a moment later Bob Cherry came sprinting up. His face was red, and he was a trifle breathless.

"Sorry—I had to go back," he explained to the girls.

"Oh! Hallo, there's Harry!" exclaimed Marjorie suddenly, as a youthful figure on a bike came whizzing along the road.

Ting-a-ling!

Wharton had evidently sighted the party, for he signalled to them with his bicycle bell. He came up with a rush and dismounted.

"Here we are!" he exclaimed, as he shook hands with the girls. "Better late than never. I say, I've got an idea!"

"Get it off your chest, old scout!"

The captain of the Remove pointed to the Black Point cliff.

"You've all heard of the giddy Haunted Manor," went on Wharton. "What about exploring it?"

Marjorie and Miss Clara looked at each other, then they looked at the crumbling ruins of the manor perched on the summit of Black Point. Silence settled on the party for the moment. Harry's suggestion apparently did not please the girls. They had heard the story of the Haunted Manor and, like the fisher folk of Pegg, they had given Black Point a wide berth.

And as the party stared at the silhouetted ruins that stood out against the skyline William George Bunter softly approached. His podgy face wore an expression of ferocity, and his little

piggy eyes glittered. Bunter felt hurt; he ached all over from his terrible castigation at Bob Cherry's hands, and he was intent upon revenge.

He stood concealed behind a clump of bushes, but he had overheard Wharton's words, and his fat wits at once saw a way to even the score between him and Harry Wharton & Co. Nature had not been very lavish in her gifts so far as the Owl of the Remove was concerned. But he was a born ventriloquist, and here was a chance for a ventriloquist to shine to advantage.

Bunter cleared his throat—a little preliminary that was customary with him before he began his ventriloquism.

"I believe you're a funk, Clara—"

Harry Wharton & Co. jumped, and Miss Clara frowned.

"You what?" she demanded, eyeing Bob Cherry belligerently.

"I—I—I never said anything," stammered Bob, passing a dazed hand over his forehead.

"You did!" rapped Miss Clara. "And if you say I'm a funk, Bob Cherry, I'll dot you on the nose!"

"Oh, Clara!"

Miss Clara turned on Marjorie.

"And so I will."

"But—but I never said anything," stammered Bob helplessly.

"Don't be an ass, Bob," said Wharton uneasily. "We heard you!"

"Of course she is funky, anyway. All girls are!"

That remark, in Bob Cherry's voice, brought frowns to the faces of his chums, whilst Miss Clara looked positively warlike. As for Bob Cherry, he stood there hardly able to credit his own senses. He had heard his own voice, yet he knew he hadn't spoken.

Harry Wharton took him by the arm.

"I say, old chap, what's the matter with you?"

"Eh?" ejaculated Bob dazedly.

"One would think that you are going out of your way to be rude to the girls," said Wharton, a tinge of anger in his voice.

"But I didn't say a word," gasped Bob, his face the colour of a beetroot.

"You're a liar, Bob Cherry, and I hate the sight of you!"

That was in Miss Clara's voice, although she hadn't said it. Now it was Bob Cherry's turn to take offence.

"If that's what you think, I'll be going," he said.

And he turned on his heel and strode off in high dudgeon.

"Bob!" called out Harry Wharton after him, but Bob Cherry heeded not. He felt deeply offended. A moment more and his sturdy figure had vanished from view.

The Removites looked at Miss Clara with faces that spoke of the thoughts that were passing in their minds. Really, Miss Clara might have been a little more diplomatic in her choice of words.

"Clara, I don't think there was any cause for you to say that," remonstrated Marjorie, painfully aware that what had promised to be a jolly afternoon was now going to finish in a quarrel.

And William George Bunter, behind the bushes, chuckled softly at the success of his scheme. That it was a rather low-down trick to play on the girls never occurred to him.

"If you want to squabble say so," said Miss Clara, with some warmth, in reply to Marjorie's words. "You know I didn't say anything!"

Harry Wharton & Co. looked at each other helplessly.

"But, dear, I heard you," said Marjorie gently, "and poor old Bob's gone off in a huff!"

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This time Miss Clara did speak her mind.

"Blow Bob, anyway!" she said. "He was jolly rude to me!"

"I—I don't think he meant it," ventured Harry Wharton.

"Whether he meant it or not, he was rude," declared Miss Clara. "And if that's a sample of Greyfriars manners the less we see of Bob Cherry the better."

"Oh, Clara!"

"I mean it!" said Miss Clara warmly.

"But you were rude to him in return, dear," said Marjorie protestingly.

"I tell you I wasn't!" exclaimed Miss Clara angrily.

"But we heard you," said Wharton hotly. "Didn't we, chaps?"

There was a general nodding of heads. Really the Co. considered it was a bit too thick to take this line, and their faces showed it plainly.

"I don't know what's come over you fellows," retorted Miss Clara warmly. "But I've had enough. I'm going home!"

"But——" began Marjorie.

"I'm going home!" repeated Miss Clara firmly. "One would think that these boys are determined to make a quarrel."

"But, Miss Clara——" began Wharton helplessly.

"Clara, dear——" began Marjorie in bewilderment.

But Miss Clara had turned on her heel, and with her head held high in the air, was striding off.

"I'm awfully sorry this has happened," said Wharton apologetically.

"So am I," returned Marjorie, and, feeling that it was up to her to stand by her chum, she added: "But it was Bob Cherry who started it!"

"Hem!"

"I—I—I must go after Clara," said Marjorie, torn between her loyalty to her girl chum and her regard for the Greyfriars juniors. "Good-bye!"

And she ran after Miss Clara, leaving the Co. staring after her, anger and perplexity in their faces.

"Well, here's a pretty kettle of fish," grunted Johnny Bull.

"I suppose we had better be getting back, too," said Nugent. "But it's a shame."

"The shamefulness is terrific," said Hurree Jamset Ram Singh.

"I'll have something to say to Bob when I see him," said Wharton, with a frown. "I don't see why he should have gone out of his way to be rude to Clara. I always thought that he was particularly fond of her."

"Oh, come on!" growled Johnny Bull crossly. "No good standing here. The afternoon's mucked up. Let's get back and punt a footer about."

That seemed to be the wisest course, and with bitter feelings the juniors began to tramp back to Greyfriars, Harry Wharton wheeling his machine, taking great care to avoid the path the Cliff House girls would follow. They were not in the mood just then to encounter their girl chums again.

And as they started off a fat face grinned out from the bushes, and a fat chuckle floated after them.

"He, he, he!" cackled Billy Bunter. "That's made the rotters sit up! Serve 'em right. Yah!"

He rolled from the bushes and grinned after the juniors, and then, at a leisurely pace, began the homeward trek to Greyfriars. He had suffered a terrific whacking, he had walked more miles that afternoon than he was accustomed to doing, and he hadn't squeezed into the extra-special spread

at Cliff House. But he had had his revenge. There was a rift in the lute, thanks to William George Bunter, and no one was more pleased than the fatuous junior who was responsible for it.

THE FIFTH CHAPTER.

In Durance Vile!

COLONEL WHARTON stared. How long he had lain in that noisome cellar he did not know, for pitch darkness reigned, and the scuttling of rats was the only sound that broke the deathly silence.

He moved his head in an effort to ease the pain that flooded it, but the movement drew a stifled cry from his lips. He licked his dry lips, and tried to pierce the heavy gloom of his prison. But all he saw were the moving pin-points of light that told of the activities of the four-footed rodents that had made the cellar their domain.

Once or twice a rat more daring than its fellows scuttled across his body, and the colonel shivered. But, so far, there had been no real attempt to attack him, helpless as he was.

"Captain Holstern—the fiend!" muttered the colonel. "To think that he should do this!"

The colonel's mind went back to a day twenty years ago when his evidence had convicted Holstern of manslaughter. Holstern had been court martialled, dismissed the service, and handed over to the civil authorities. The trial came back vividly to Colonel Wharton's mind as he lay there, bound hand and foot. Holstern, before leaving the dock, had sworn that on his release from prison he would revenge himself upon the man whose evidence had sent him to a living death for twenty years!

And Captain Holstern had kept his word.

Where he was Colonel Wharton had no idea, except that it was in some exposed spot, for the wind whistled through the various cracks and holes in the ruins above his head and made eerie music. For some moments Colonel Wharton had been puzzled to account for those strange sounds, until it had dawned upon him that he must be in a cellar of a ruined house.

How far away he was from the spot where he had been struck down he had not the faintest notion. It might be yards or miles.

His limbs felt cramped; the cords that held his wrists and ankles fast were biting into the flesh. There was a terrible ache at the back of his head, and he knew that there was a swelling there where the cudgel had struck him.

What was Holstern's intention, he asked himself again and again. Would he come back? Had he been left there to die—first to suffer the pangs of starvation and thirst? The colonel shuddered at the thought, for in his heart of hearts he knew Holstern to be a merciless fiend.

And the rats——

Even now half a dozen pairs of gleaming eyes were turned upon him, and they became larger and larger as the rats advanced. Did it mean that they were going to attack him? Did they know that he was helpless to defend himself? Had they witnessed his ineffectual attempts to burst his bonds with an intelligence that told them this man was helpless—at their mercy?

The colonel shuddered. He had

heard of rats attacking a helpless man before.

Fascinated, he watched the gleaming pin-points of light grow larger and larger and more numerous. Other rats were moving forward behind that advance body. The colonel staggered to his feet and pulled savagely on the chain that held him. Its jangling noise sent the rats scuttling back. But once they had become accustomed to the noise it held no terrors for them. They advanced again, and the colonel knew that ere long he would be fighting for his life. He backed against the slime-covered wall as the rats advanced from three directions.

And then, unexpectedly, there came the sound of heavy footsteps on the stone steps that led to the cellar, and a strong light blazed out.

The rats scuttled back to their holes and corners in the twinkling of an eye as that light blinded them. And as they disappeared a chuckle escaped the lips of the man who held the torch.

It was Captain Holstern.

"So, colonel, your friends don't like the look of me, eh?"

Colonel Wharton braced himself, and his brows came together.

"You scoundrel!" he said. "Heavens, Holstern, if I had my hands free I'd give you the thrashing of your life!"

"If," echoed the captain mockingly. "In this case, my dear colonel, it's you who is going to be thrashed."

As he spoke he drew a dogwhip from his jacket pocket, and flicked the lash viciously through the air.

"See!" he jeered. "They once gave me the cat for being insolent to the prison governor. An experience, my dear colonel, that I intend to pass on to you."

"You cowardly scoundrel!" retorted the colonel. "You know what this means for you? It means another dose of prison!"

"It means a comfortable income for life," returned the captain. "In short, Colonel Wharton, I demand thirty thousand pounds as the price of your freedom. You understand?"

The colonel's eyes blazed.

"You'll never get a penny from me, you rogue! Do you think you can frighten me with your threats? Not a penny!"

Captain Holstern advanced a step and raised the whip threateningly.

"We shall see, you dog! Understand this—you will never see daylight again until I receive thirty thousand pounds!"

Colonel Wharton laughed.

"Thirty thousand pounds! I wouldn't consent if it were thirty pence, you miserable rascal! Do your worst!"

"By Heaven I will! Years have I waited for this! Take that!"

The lash of the dogwhip whistled through the air and struck the helpless colonel full across the face. He winced, but no cry left his tightly set lips, although a vivid weal stamped the spot where the lash had fallen.

Swish! Swish!

Again and again the lash swept across the colonel's body. Holstern now having completely lost control of himself was careless of where the lash descended. All the pent up savagery of twenty years was given full rein, and blow after blow carried with it a maniac's strength and savagery.

For some time the gallant colonel endured that brutal flogging without a sound escaping his lips, but Nature had its way at last, and a vicious lash that curled round his head sent him reeling to the ground, where he lay unconscious. Even then his maddened captor did not



Stretching out a hand, Miss Clara tweaked the podgy nasal organ of William George Bunter. It was only a gentle tweak, but gentle as it was, it elicited a roar from the Owl of the Remove. "Yaroooooh!" "Now buzz off!" said Clara. "And if you play any more tricks, I'll jolly well punch your nose!" (See Chapter 6.)

stop. The lash fell again and again over the colonel's prostrate form, but Holstern's arm was growing weary with the terrific exertion, and he desisted at last from sheer exhaustion.

"There, you dog!" he panted. "That's a taste of what you're going to get three times a day—"

The colonel's eyes opened.

"You hear!" Holstern's voice rose sharp and shrill. "Every day until you consent to give me thirty thousand pounds in exchange for your liberty."

"I'll never consent," said the colonel.

"Then you're doomed to die like a rat," hissed Holstern. "No one will ever think of looking for you here. Thirty thousand pounds—the price of your liberty. And until you come to the right frame of mind there's the cat for you three times a day!"

"You fiend! You shall pay for this!" said the colonel, with blazing eyes.

The other laughed.

"A little mistake, colonel. I have paid. It's your turn to pay now. A little obstinacy is soon cured—wonderful persuasive medicine is the whip, believe me!"

"You can kill me first!" retorted the colonel fiercely. "Do you think I would surrender to a worm, a skunk like you? Bah!"

Holstern raised the whip, and a savage light dawned in his eyes. At that moment he looked capable of killing Colonel Wharton on the spot. But a sudden idea seemed to strike him, for he laughed harshly, as though well pleased with the train of thought it opened up.

The colonel, watching the scoundrel's face, felt his heart heavy within him. Full well he knew that his old enemy had no thought of sparing his life, not even if the thirty thousand pound ransom was paid. Not that the gallant old soldier entertained the idea of paying that ransom for one moment. If he had to die he would show this disgraced ex-officer, ex-convict, how a soldier could die.

Something of his thoughts must have shown itself in his eyes, for Holstern suddenly glared down at his captive.

"Obstinate as ever!" jeered Holstern. "Don't I remember your obstinacy! But I will break it!"

"Never!" exclaimed the colonel, with a curl of the lip. "Not you or a thousand like you could do it."

Captain Holstern laughed harshly. "You have a nephew—" he said insinuatingly.

Colonel Wharton started.

"You have a nephew," repeated Holstern. "Perhaps he won't prove so obstinate as his uncle."

"You despicable hound!" rapped out the colonel. "Leave the boy out of it! What is he to you?"

"Worth exactly thirty thousand pounds!" said Holstern coolly. "I'll wager you'll talk quickly enough when you see that boy sampling a dose of the whip!"

The colonel bit his teeth.

His captor had weakened the position. For himself the old soldier did not worry. He had been in tight corners before, and had always managed to get out of them. If this were to be the last tight corner he would

accept the ruling fate with a soldier's spirit. But Harry—

The thought of his nephew in the hands of this scoundrel, the thought of that threatened flogging, and the barbarian who was to administer it, altered the complexion of matters.

Captain Holstern leered down at him. "Ah, I see the thought interests you!"

"You merciless hound!" exclaimed the colonel contemptuously. "Would you vent your spite on a helpless boy? Am I not old enough?"

"Thirty thousand pounds!" said Holstern softly. "And then—"

"Do you think I'd trust you even then?" blazed the colonel. "Do you imagine I am fool enough to think that you would liberate me? Holstern, more than ever now I see that you were lucky to be arraigned on a charge of manslaughter!"

Holstern's eyes blazed.

"What do you mean?"

"I mean that it should have been murder—it's written all over you!"

"You—you—"

Words failed Holstern, for the colonel's words had driven home. But he recovered himself.

"I swear to you, Colonel Wharton, that I will liberate you, or leave word with someone to liberate you as soon as I have withdrawn thirty thousand pounds from your bank!" he said.

Colonel Wharton's lip curled.

"You do not deceive me, Holstern. Your word is worthless, I know you too well."

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"Then you still refuse to pay your ransom?" snarled Holstern.

"I still refuse," said the colonel quietly.

"Then I'll get the boy and see if you'll change your tune then!" hissed Holstern, and, picking up the lantern, he went out of the cellar, the sound of his footsteps growing fainter and fainter as he mounted the steps to the fresh air above.

Lying there, a prey to bitter thoughts, Colonel Wharton forgot the terrible pains that racked his body. His mind was at Greyfriars, upon Harry Wharton and what he would suffer should Holstern manage to entrap him.

"I'm worrying about nothing," the colonel told himself. "That villain doesn't know Harry, and Harry's no fool to walk into his hands. It's bluff!"

With that he dismissed the matter from his mind, and turned his attention to easing the ropes that bound him. But he was destined to learn, at no distant date, that Holstern's threat was not bluff—that it was terribly real.

THE SIXTH CHAPTER.

The Cause of all the Trouble!

"THERE'S Bob!"

Harry Wharton uttered that ejaculation as he and his chums entered Friardale Lane. Ahead of them was Bob Cherry, and he was walking along with his hands in his pockets, and his head bent in utter dejection.

Poor Bob felt a very injured person indeed. Miss Clara had told him that she hated him. How it had all happened was a puzzle to Bob Cherry. In the first place the remark that had been attributed to him, the beginning of the trouble, had never left his lips. At least, Bob told himself that it hadn't. But he was beginning to think now that perhaps it had. In a moment of mental aberration he had told Miss Clara that she was a funk. At least, all the fellows and Miss Clara herself had said so. And yet—

Bob shrugged his shoulders and began to step out at a livelier pace.

"Bob!" Wharton's voice rang out.

Bob Cherry stopped and looked round, and he looked surprised as he saw his chums. He had reckoned they would continue their ramble with the girls. But as Wharton and his companions drew nearer, Bob saw that something was amiss.

"Hallo, why are you chaps coming back?"

"Miss Clara went off in a huff," explained Wharton. "And so—well, here we are!"

"I suppose you fellows think that I was responsible?"

The juniors looked uncomfortable as Bob turned a troubled face upon them.

"Well, you see—" began Wharton lamely.

"Oh, let's get in!" grunted Johnny Bull. "We've had enough of this discussion!"

The Co. walked on in silence.

Hurree Janset Ram Singh's dusky face wore a thoughtful expression as he tramped along. Suddenly he let out a whoop.

"What's bitten you, Inky?"

"My esteemed chums, may I make a suggestive remark?" asked Inky.

The Co. grinned.

"If you mean a suggestion, old bean, let's have it!" said Nugent.

Hurree Singh smiled.

"Well, then, my esteemed chums, THE MAGNET LIBRARY.—No. 1,053.

before we start the silly quarrelfulness between our worthy selves, would it not be a better planfulness to interview the ridiculous Bunter?"

"Bunter?"

"Blow Bunter!"

"Bless Bunter!"

Evidently Harry Wharton & Co. were not keen to interview William George Bunter.

"But he's a ventriloquist—" began Inky.

"Oh!"

A sudden overwhelming suspicion came to the minds of Inky's chums simultaneously.

"Phew!" breathed Harry Wharton.

"I'd forgotten that!"

Bob Cherry snorted.

"The fat rotter! The scheming toad! I see it all now! It was Bunter who made it appear as if I had been rude to Clara!"

"Bunter!"

"The worm!"

"Of course it was Bunter!"

"The fat cad!"

"The cadfulness is terrific!"

There was no doubt in the minds of Harry Wharton & Co. now. Really, they felt like kicking themselves for not having thought of that explanation of the extraordinary affair before. Bunter's ventriloquial tricks had not been very prominent of late, but there was no doubt about it, Bunter must have been the trickster who had been rude to Miss Clara by imitating Bob Cherry's voice. And it followed that the wily Owl of the Remove had imitated Miss Clara's voice, too!

As the awful truth forced itself in on Bob Cherry's mind, his face blazed with anger and righteous indignation.

"Why, I—I'll burst the fat clam!"

"He'll be sorry for it when we get hold of him," said Wharton grimly.

"Thumping sorry!" said Johnny Bull aggressively.

"The sorryfulness of the unworthy Bunter will be terrific," remarked Inky.

There was no doubt about that. Bunter was booked for a warm time when he fell into the hands of Harry Wharton & Co.

"I say, you fellows," said Wharton suddenly. "We ought to apologise to the girls—or explain to them, at least. Suppose we walk back?"

"Good idea!"

The Co., much more cheerful now, for the rift in the lute that had threatened had been averted, turned and began to retrace their steps. It was rather unfortunate that Billy Bunter was short-sighted for the Co. spotted him long before they themselves were observed.

"There's the fat cad!" breathed Wharton.

"Let me get at him!" roared Bob Cherry.

The Co. broke into a run, and before he was hardly aware of their presence, Billy Bunter found himself surrounded by his late victims. His fat jaw dropped when he saw the ferocious expressions on their faces.

"I say, you fellows," he said feebly, "fancy meeting you here!"

"There won't be much fancy in a moment or two," said Bob Cherry grimly. "You're going to get the ragging of your life, my fat tulip!"

Billy Bunter backed away in alarm.

"Oh, really, Cherry—" he gasped.

"Collar him!" hooted Bob.

And the Co. collared him, with hands that were none too gentle.

"Yoooop! Let up, you beasts!" roared Bunter. "If—if you break my spectacles you'll jolly well have to pay for 'em. Yow!"

"I'll break your silly neck!" roared

Bob Cherry. "I'll teach you to play your rotten ventriloquial tricks on me, you fat barrel of lard!"

"Oh, really, Cherry, I never!" howled Bunter. "I didn't say anything to C-Clara, you know. I—"

"What?"

"If you think I said she was a funk—"

"We know you did, you spoofing rotter!"

"But I didn't, really, Cherry!" gasped Bunter desperately. "I hope you can take my word."

"Liar!" roared Bob Cherry. "You've mucked up the afternoon with your rotten tricks, and now you've to pay the piper."

"Oh, lor'!" groaned Bunter. "It's a mistake! I—I can't ventriloquise, you know I can't, really. I—I expect it was Wharton who told C-Clara that she was a f-funk. In fact, I'm sure it was, old chap. He can imitate your voice like—like anything!"

"You worm!" roared Wharton. "Why, I'll burst you!"

"Well, if he doesn't beat Ananias and the other champion fibbers all wrapped up together!" exclaimed Nugent.

"And now, as I've explained matters satisfactorily, I—I prefer to let the whole thing drop," said Bunter, with some attempt at dignity. "I—Wharrer you doing?"

"Turn him over!" ordered Wharton.

And Bunter was turned over like a fat turtle, yelling and gasping.

"Yaroooh! Lemme gerrup! Grooough!"

"Take my bicycle-pump," said Wharton to Bob Cherry, "and give him three dozen hard!"

"Bet your life!" said Bob, taking the bicycle-pump. "I guarantee Bunter won't venture to play any more of his tricks on us after he's had the licking that's coming to him!"

Whack!

"Yaroooooooh!"

As the first stroke of the bicycle-pump whacked across Bunter's tight trousers he let out a yell that echoed and re-echoed about the countryside. And that was only the first of many. Bob's arm ached by the time he had administered the three dozen, but it was nothing to the ache that Bunter felt. It was certainly a case of its being better to give than receive. The fat junior well-nigh roared himself hoarse during that painful castigation, for it was the severest flogging of his life.

"There, let that be a lesson to you!" panted Bob as he handed Wharton the bicycle-pump. "And now you're coming along with us to explain things to Miss Clara."

"Yow-wow! Ow! Wow!" moaned Bunter, writhing in the grass.

"Groooooough!"

"And if you don't get a move on," said Wharton grimly, "I'll take my turn with the pump!"

"Yoooop! Oh, lor'! Groooooough! Yow!" gasped Bunter, but he was wise enough to scramble to his feet. A further dose of that punishing bicycle-pump was not to be thought of. Already Bunter had an idea that he wouldn't be able to sit down with any degree of comfort for a week at least. Limping painfully and moaning at frequent intervals, he was escorted along the road to Cliff House. Fortunately, Miss Marjorie and Clara were sauntering homewards at a leisurely pace. They hardly exchanged a word all the way, for both of them felt annoyed and upset.

But as they drew near the gates of Cliff House a series of groans in a familiar voice caused them to stop and face about. Then they saw Harry Wharton & Co. and Billy Bunter.

Wharton signalled to them to wait, and Clara was about to turn on her heel and disregard the signal when a sudden thought, started by Bunter's pitiful groaning, made her stop.

Like a flash now she saw the cause of all the trouble in the podgy, woebegone appearance of the Owl of the Remove, for she had heard that Billy Bunter was a ventriloquist.

The girls waited for the Co. to come level with them. Bob Cherry's rugged face was crimson, but there was a happy light in his eyes. He felt sure now that Miss Clara didn't hate him, whilst Clara herself found a blush creeping over her pretty face which was eloquent of the thoughts that swept through her mind. Of course Bob didn't regard her as a funk!

"Now then, Bunter!" commanded Wharton sternly. "Tell the girls the truth, or—"

His meaning was quite clear to Bunter, although the sentence was left unfinished.

"Grooooooh! Yooo! Wow!" groaned the fat junior.

"Speak up, Bunter!" said Johnny Bull, giving the Owl a shake.

And Billy Bunter spoke up, haltingly and groaningly, so to speak. But he made it clear—the Co. saw to that—that he was responsible for the trouble.

The girls listened in silence, but their faces brightened up considerably. It was only when Bunter had finished his halting explanation that Miss Clara's boyish feelings surged uppermost.

"If I were a boy I'd punch your silly nose, Bunter!" she said.

"Oh, Clara!" gasped Marjorie.

"Grooooooh!" moaned Bunter.

"As I'm only a girl," went on Clara, "I'll content myself with pulling your silly nose!"

And stretching out her hand, she tweaked the podgy nasal organ of William George Bunter. It was only a gentle tweak for all Miss Clara's aggressiveness, but gentle as it was it elicited a roar from Bunter.

"Yaroooooh!"

"Now buzz off!" said Clara. "And if you play any more tricks like that on me I'll jolly well punch your nose!"

"Grooooooh!" gasped Bunter.

But he lost no time in obeying the injunction. He rolled off down the road painfully, but quickly, and his groans and moans floated back to the party until he was out of sight. Then Harry Wharton turned to Marjorie and Clara.

"Now that everything's explained satisfactorily," he said, "we'll be getting back. Can't very well start rambling over the cliffs now—too late, you know."

Marjorie smiled.

"But it's not too late for tea—that is, of course, if you would like to have tea with us."

Harry Wharton & Co. accepted that invitation as one man.

"Rather!"

Miss Clara blushed.

"You don't feel any malice, Bob?" she said hesitatingly.

"Of course not, Clara!" said Bob, blushing to the roots of his hair. "You don't h-hate me?"

"Of course not, you silly chump!" laughed Clara.

The party walked in at the gates of Cliff House the best of friends, and, as Bob confided to his chums afterwards, he felt as if he were treading on air.

Tea with the girls was a great success, and conversation ranged over many subjects of mutual interest. Finally, it was Miss Clara herself who suggested that "one of these days" the party should explore the Haunted Manor on Black Point; but although the Co. acquiesced,

each one of them mentally resolved to steer clear of Black Point. After that afternoon's little trouble it would serve as a constant reminder of something they wanted to forget. Little did they know how indirectly they were bound up with the strange events that were taking place at the Haunted Manor, or how directly one of them was to be embroiled in Captain Holstern's revenge. That was of the future—that future of which Meloah, the gipsy, had spoken.

THE SEVENTH CHAPTER.

Missing!

"MASTER WHARTON—"

Trotter, the pageboy, pushed his head round the open door of Study No. 1 in the Remove passage.

"Hallo, hallo, hallo!" boomed Bob Cherry's voice. "Here's old Trotter!"

"Master Wharton," said the page, "which you're wanted in the 'Ead's study immejit!"

Wharton looked astonished, and his chums looked sympathetic. A summons to Dr. Locke's study not infrequently meant a wiggling or a flogging for the junior who was called there. And the captain of the Remove racked his brains for any offence he had committed recently that might have come to the ears of authority.

CUP FINAL THRILLS!

Look out for another
interesting footer article

IN NEXT WEEK'S MAGNET!

"I suppose Loder hasn't sneaked to the Head that it was you fixed that booby trap for him last week?" said Bob Cherry thoughtfully.

"Oh, I hadn't thought of that," remarked Wharton, with a frown. "Just like Loder if he has gone to the Head, anyway. Soon see," he added, turning to Trotter. "Trotter, old bean, was Loder in the Head's study?"

The page grinned.

"Which Master Loder was a-comin' out as I was a-goin' in, Master Wharton."

"Oh!" grunted Johnny Bull. "That means we're for it! Come on!"

"But the Head only wants me," said Wharton. "You chaps keep out of it. If it's a licking, better for one to get it than five of us."

"Something in that," agreed Bob Cherry, with a grin. "Still, as Johnny says, we're all in it. Come on, my merry men."

Rigging a booby trap for the especial benefit of a prefect was a heinous offence that had serious consequences. Though how Loder of the Sixth had discovered that those responsible for the hideous mixture that had descended on him when he entered his study were the Famous Five, was beyond the comprehension of Harry Wharton & Co. Still, it seemed that he had found out. And now it was a case of after the feast the reckoning.

Tap!

It was a very respectful tap that Wharton gave when the Co. arrived outside the Head's sanctum.

"Come in!"

To the surprise of the five Removites Dr. Locke's tone was quite cordial.

"Bless my soul!"

Dr. Locke looked up from the papers on his desk in amazement as he saw five juniors filing into his study.

"Wh-a-at—wh-a-a-at—" ejaculated the Head, peering at the juniors through his pince nez.

"You sent for me, sir," began Wharton quietly.

"I certainly did," answered Dr. Locke. "But what are these other boys doing here?"

"We're all in it, sir," volunteered Bob Cherry.

"All of us, sir," added Johnny Bull.

"If Loder's said that it was Wharton, sir—" began Nugent, and then he stopped as he caught sight of the peculiar expression that had flitted across Dr. Locke's face.

There was a twinge of amusement to be seen at the corners of the Head's mouth as he surveyed the earnest faces of the five juniors.

"And so you were all in it?" he asked.

There was a general nodding of heads.

"How interesting," remarked Dr. Locke dryly. "And may I ask you to what 'it' refers? And why you have entered my study like this?"

"Oh crumbs!" The Famous Five exchanged eloquent glances. So ready were they to share the punishment which they thought was to be Wharton's only, that they had not stopped to think that they might be following the wrong tack, so to speak. It was obvious to all of them now, however, that Dr. Locke was quite in the dark about the little rag on Gerald Loder of the Sixth.

"To what does 'it' refer, Wharton?" demanded Dr. Locke, for the second time.

"A rag, sir!" explained the captain of the Remove. "You see—ahem—"

"I see five young rascals who have had the effrontery to—ahem—rag a Sixth Form prefect," said Dr. Locke coldly, "which is a gross breach of the school rules to which I will attend later. If the four juniors who were not sent for will retire I shall be much obliged!" he added sarcastically, albeit there was a twinkle in his eyes.

And the four juniors promptly retired. Once in the passage they turned on Johnny Bull.

"You silly chump!" hissed Bob Cherry.

"You footling fathead!" said Nugent.

"The chumpfulness of the worthy Johnny is terrific," added Inky.

Johnny Bull snorted.

"What the thump are you talking about?" he demanded.

"It was your idea!" hooted Bob Cherry.

"Eh?"

"If you hadn't been so jolly keen to be included in that summons to the Head," said Nugent, "that little rag on Loder would never have seen the light."

"Of all the burbling idiots!" roared Johnny Bull exasperatedly. "You thought just as much as I did that Wharton was wanted for the rag on Loder!"

Which was, as a matter of fact, perfectly true. But the chums of the Remove did not see it in that light just then. Their idea was that if Johnny Bull had not set their thoughts jumping to the conclusion that the captain of the Remove was to be called over the coals for rigging the booby trap over Loder's study door, all would have been well. As it was, perhaps a flogging awaited them.

Johnny Bull glared round truculently at his chums:

"You're a set of silly asses," he said.

Which was rather imprudent, in the circumstances, for the "silly asses" fell upon him and bumped him, and left him gasping on the passage floor, thinking things over.

Meantime Harry Wharton, left alone with the Head, wondered what on earth was on the tapis. Dr. Locke motioned him to sit down, sure sign, thought the captain of the Remove, that it was nothing against him that had occasioned his presence there.

"Ah, Wharton," began Dr. Locke, referring to an open letter that lay on his desk, "I have just received a communication from Miss Wharton—"

"My aunt!" said Wharton.

Dr. Locke nodded.

"Your aunt seems very worried because she has received no news of her brother, Colonel Wharton for three days—"

The Remove junior started.

Three days—it was three days ago that he had met Colonel Wharton at Courtfield Common.

"There is nothing very disturbing in that, my boy," went on Dr. Locke. "Colonel Wharton is a very busy man, and all manner of business may have kept him absent from home. But what makes your aunt anxious, is the fact that Colonel Wharton telegraphed her two days ago to say that he was seeing you for a short time, and that he would catch the three o'clock train and be home to dinner that night."

Dr. Locke paused, and consulted the letter.

"That would have been Wednesday night. It is now Saturday, and your aunt says that no news of Colonel Wharton has come to hand. She, woman-like, fears foul play, but I think we can dismiss that from our minds."

"Yes!" said Wharton, although, for some reason, he did not say it with any conviction.

"You saw your uncle, I understand, on Wednesday?" asked the Head.

"Yes, sir!"

"And saw him off at the station, I take it," continued the Head. "Which means—"

"But I didn't see uncle off at the station," interrupted the captain of the Remove, and he explained how that had come about.

"Oh!" The Head's brow broke into wrinkles, and he tapped his pince nez on the desk meditatively. "Then I had better make inquiries at the station at once. Your aunt knowing me to be an old friend of your uncle, wrote to me at once. I—"

He broke off as there came a tap at the door.

"Come in!"

"Aunt!"

Harry Wharton bounded to his feet as the door opened to admit Miss Wharton, and Dr. Locke smiled a welcome upon his unexpected visitor.

"Good-afternoon, Miss Wharton."

Miss Wharton sank down into the arm-chair her nephew pushed forward for her. She looked pale and drawn, and there were heavy rings under her eyes that told of a want of sleep. The smiles that had gathered on the faces of Dr. Locke and Harry Wharton faded away. Evidently something of a serious nature had occurred.

"Dr. Locke," said Miss Wharton at length, "it is even as I have thought. Some instinct has told me all along that something dreadful has happened to my brother!"

"What!"

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"I alighted at Courtfield Station—that was the station from where my brother sent the telegram telling me of his plans for the rest of the day—and made inquiries of the station officials."

"Yes, yes!"

"One porter remembered the colonel very well. In fact, this man has in his possession now a small attache-case which my brother had handed to him before he left the station to meet Harry here."

"But why should Colonel Wharton leave the case with a porter?" asked Dr. Locke. "Why didn't he deposit it in the cloak-room?"

"Because the cloak-room was closed, the porter informed me," replied Miss Wharton, who was very much distressed. "And—this is the worst piece of news—the porter was on duty for the rest of the day, and he is convinced that my brother did not return to the station, not even to collect the case. What, Dr. Locke, can have happened to my brother?"

"Bless my soul!"

Miss Wharton was beginning to feel the strain. Her eyes filled with tears; and Harry Wharton put his arm round her and tried to comfort her.

"My dear Miss Wharton," said the Head, obviously moved. "You must not think the worst. Perhaps the colonel went back by car?"

But Harry Wharton shook his head.

"Uncle left me on the outskirts of Courtfield Common, sir," he said. "He had five minutes in which to catch his train. And I saw him start on the way; he took the short cut and—"

A look of horror came into Wharton's face as recollection came back to him of the cry for help he had imagined he had heard on that fateful afternoon. Was it imagination, after all?

Dr. Locke watched his face closely and read there something that had bearing on the case.

The captain of the Remove pulled himself together and attempted to explain.

Miss Wharton and Dr. Locke listened intently, and the latter's face bore an anxious expression when the junior had finished.

"You say you walked back through the path that leads to the station?" asked Dr. Locke.

"Yes, sir," answered Harry Wharton, who was now vastly troubled. "But there was no one in sight when I had passed the last clump of bushes."

"And you took it for granted that your uncle had reached the station by that time, my boy?"

"Of course, sir! Colonel Wharton is a very fast walker."

For a few moments there was silence in the study.

"As the porter at Courtfield is convinced that Colonel Wharton did not return to the station to catch his train, and as the colonel's bag is still unclaimed, we must look for evidence somewhere between the spot where this boy last saw his uncle and the station precincts," said Dr. Locke slowly.

Miss Wharton was weeping silently; and Harry Wharton, who felt a gulp rising in his throat, felt strangely troubled. What had happened to his uncle? Had he met with foul play? Were Miss Wharton's instincts correct? It seemed strange, on the face of things, that nothing had been seen or heard of the colonel for three days; for he was a man who always kept to his plan, and his stated plan was that he would be home at Wharton Lodge for dinner Wednesday night. And here it was nearing Saturday night—and no message from him.

It was evident that Dr. Locke now regarded the mystery as something alarming; for, without another word, he reached for his hat.

"We will proceed to the police station at once," he said quietly. "I am beginning to think that your fears have not been groundless, my dear Miss Wharton."

"May I come, too, sir?" asked the captain of the Remove eagerly.

"You had better, my boy," said Dr. Locke. "Your evidence is valuable, if anything untoward has happened to your uncle."

Harry Wharton slipped his arm through his aunt's and helped her out of the study. A number of juniors chatting at the top of the School House steps watched the little procession with interest. Amongst them were Johnny Bull and Hurree Janset Ram Singh.

They raised their caps to Miss Wharton, whom both of them knew; but she hardly saw them. Her eyes were heavy with tears, and the anxiety in the faces of Dr. Locke and Harry Wharton indicated that something was amiss.

Johnny Bull touched Wharton on the arm.

"Not bad news, is it, old chap?"

The captain of the Remove turned a troubled face to his chum.

"We believe something has happened to my uncle," he said quietly.

"Oh!"

And that was all the chums had time to say; for Dr. Locke's car was waiting in the drive with the engine running.

Hardly a word was spoken on the journey to Courtfield police station; but once there, Harry Wharton had to repeat his evidence to Inspector Grimes.

The inspector turned a cheery face on Miss Wharton.

"Don't get over-alarmed, madam," he said encouragingly. "If your brother has been kidnapped, or—" He left that sentence unfinished. "The police will soon get to the bottom of it, rest assured."

But that was small comfort to Miss Wharton.

"Do you think a reward will induce any person to come forward and give evidence?" she asked the inspector.

"Of course, that may help," answered Inspector Grimes.

"Then I will willingly pay a hundred pounds reward to anyone who can supply such information as will lead to the discovery of my brother's whereabouts," said Miss Wharton bravely.

"Very well, madam," said the inspector. "I will see that posters bearing that offer are displayed throughout the country at once."

And he bowed, with an air of finality that suggested that the interview was at an end.

Shortly after Miss Wharton's departure the telephone-wires were sending the news of Colonel Wharton's remarkable disappearance throughout the length and breadth of the country. If police efficiency could restore Miss Wharton's brother to her then that task was already done.

On the way back to Greyfriars Dr. Locke persuaded Miss Wharton to stay with his wife at the school for a few days, an invitation Wharton's aunt was pleased to accept. As she was in communication by telephone with Wharton Lodge, and as she had left instructions with the servants there to notify her at once of any fresh development in the case, there was no valid reason why she shouldn't stay at the school. Besides, she would be near her nephew.

Harry Wharton was in a very sober mood when he left the Head's study. The inspector had said that he would



"You're a set of silly asses!" said Johnny Bull, glaring at his chums. It was rather imprudent, in the circumstances, for the next minute the "silly asses" charged upon him as one man and left him gasping on the passage floor, thinking things over. (See Chapter 7.)

send out a special squad to search every inch of the footpath, and the bushes that lined it, where the colonel had last been seen. Would they discover anything? Not that night, perhaps; for it was dark, and such a search, to be thorough, would have to be conducted in daylight.

"Cheer up, Harry!"

It was a sympathetic greeting from the rest of the Famous Five, as the captain of the Remove entered the study; and Wharton tried to smile his appreciation. But no smile would come. The thought that his uncle might have met with foul play predominated, to the exclusion of all else.

"Tell us what's happened, Harry?" asked Nugent.

And Wharton told his chums all that had passed. At the end of it Nugent emitted a whistle.

"I say, you fellows, remember Meloah—"

The Co. started. At once their minds returned to Meloah, the gipsy woman—the gipsy who had warned Harry that danger threatened someone dear to him within seven days, or seven weeks; that that same danger threatened him, too.

"I'd—I'd forgotten all about that," said Wharton, licking his dry lips.

"And we called it bunkum and tommy-rot," said Bob Cherry dolefully.

Johnny Bull shifted uncomfortably in his chair.

"And so it was!" he grunted. "If anything—anything has happened to Harry's uncle it's—it's sheer coincidence."

"That's all," said Wharton uneasily.

But Hurree Jamset Ram Singh shook his dusky head.

"In my honourable country," he said slowly, "we pay attention to the words of wisdom and prophecy that float giftfully from the ludicrous mouths of the wise men."

A faint grin settled on the faces of

the Co. as they listened to Inky's remarkable English, but in a moment again the chums were serious.

"Oh, it's rotten!" said Wharton. "But we can't do anything—can't even search the bushes until to-morrow on account of the darkness."

"Cheer up, Harry!" said Bob Cherry softly. "Some news may be to hand by the morning. Perhaps your uncle was taken ill suddenly, and a stranger took him off somewhere—to hospital, or his own home."

"Yes, that's it!" agreed Nugent. "It may not be so bad as you think, old chap."

"But that cry I heard," said Wharton. "That cry—What a fool I was not to investigate it more than I did!"

"Don't be a silly ass," said Johnny Bull softly. "It's no good blaming yourself for that. Nobody would have done more than you did in the circumstances."

"That's so," assented Bob Cherry and Nugent.

But the combined efforts of the Co. did not succeed in chasing the anxiety out of Harry Wharton's face. And when the Remove turned in that night one junior, at least, found sleep an impossibility, while four more found it extremely difficult to court. But at last Johnny Bull, Bob Cherry, Inky, and Frank Nugent dropped off one by one, leaving Harry Wharton a prey to the most disturbing thoughts, staring with unseeing eyes into the darkness of the night—the night that shrouded the fate of his uncle.

THE EIGHTH CHAPTER.

Payment in Advance!

"A HUNDRED pounds reward!" "Shurrup!"

Billy Bunter blinked indignantly at Peter Todd.

"Oh, really, Peter!"

"Brrrrr!"

Peter Todd was busy writing an imposition for Mr. Quelch, and interruptions, especially from William George Bunter, were neither welcome or helpful. It was the day following the startling news that something mysterious had happened to Colonel Wharton, and Peter was filling in an odd half-hour before dinner.

All the school knew now that Colonel Wharton had disappeared. All the school knew that the police had taken the matter in hand; that they had searched every inch of the footpath that led across Courtfield Common to the station without discovering any clues that would help them to solve the mystery.

And Bunter, of course, the most impetuous junior in the Remove, had been one of the first to develop an interest in the fact that Miss Wharton had made an offer of a hundred pounds reward to any person coming forward with information affecting the case.

Bunter had taken a great interest in the case, not from any charitable or sympathetic motives, but for reasons that were peculiar to William George Bunter. A reward of a hundred pounds had been offered. Somebody, like as not, would earn it, why not, therefore, William George Bunter?

The Owl of the Remove sat deep in thought, his podgy brain endeavouring to piece together a theory that would throw light on the affair, and ever and anon he ejaculated the amount of the reward, doubtless with the idea of stimulating his mighty intellect.

"A hundred pounds' reward," he muttered for about the sixth time. "A chap would get a lot of grub for a hundred pounds."

Peter Todd laid down his pen and picked up a ruler.

(Continued on page 16.)

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Vice Versa!

Dicky Nugent



AND GREAT WAS THE FALL THEREOF! Once Dr. Alfred Birchemall was Head of St. Sam's, but now, alas, he's only the porter, and he finds that wielding a broom hasn't half so many advantages as wielding a birchrod!

I

HA, ha, ha! You and me! Little brown jug I don't love thee!

Fossil, the Skool Porter at St. Sam's, sang that ainshunt ditty at the top of his voice. He was sitting in Dr. Birchemall's study, with his feet on Dr. Birchemall's desk, and his right hand clasped round a jug which presumably contained ginger-beer. Fossil was enjoying himself.

Only the previous day, the Grate Change had come about at St. Sam's. The Skool Guvvners, in solium conclave, had decided that Dr. Birchemall was unfit to remain headmaster of a skool like St. Sam's. Consekwently, they redewced him to the rank of Skool Porter. It had been a staggering surprise to the skool. Masters and boys alike had always been under the impression that Dr. Birchemall was a learned and skollerly gentleman. Nobody knew eggactly what he was learned and skollerly at, but everybody had been under the impression that such was the case.

But the Guvvners apparently thought otherwise. Hence their decision.

The surprise of the skool at Dr. Birchemall's degradashun, however, was nothing to the surprise they got when the Guvvners proseeded to appoint Fossil as headmaster in Dr. Birchemall's plaice. It seemed so fishy, that at first they thought it was all cod.

But it was troo enough. And weather they liked it or weather they didn't, he now rained.

While Fossil revelled in his new privileges, the unforchunate Dr. Birchemall was performing meenial duties down at the Porter's Lodge. But Fossil didn't worry about the new Skool Porter. He was much more interested in the welfare of the new headmaster.

"Wot I says is this 'ere," he muttered, after he had finished the song, and the contents of the jug: "I'm goin' to see

'ow these 'ere masters of mine are a performin' of their dooties. I'm 'ead-master now, and 'eadmaster I'll be!"

With that, Fossil put on his predecessor's cap and gown, and sallied fourth, thoughtfully arning himself with a birchrod as he did so.

With a gleeful grin on his dile, the one-time Skool Porter entered the Fourth Form-room.

There was a gasp from the juniors as he entered.

"Oh crikey! Here he is!"

Mr. Lickham the master of the Fourth, swung round and fixed a glare on the newcomer. For a moment he had forgotten about Fossil's promotion.

"Fossil!" he roared. "How dare you enter my Form-room in this ridiculous guys? I order you to— Oh, grate pip!"

Mr. Lickham had suddenly remembered that Fossil was now his souperior. And that recollection made him change his tune a bit.

"I—I mean, how do you do, sir! Good-mourning, Mr. Fossil!" he stammered, fawning like a sicofant. "Welcome to the Form-room, sir! Please take a seat, if you will be so grashus, sir!"

"Sertinly!" said Fossil, obligingly taking Mr. Lickham's seat. "Wot I says is this 'ere: wot are you a-teachin' these boys?"

"Grammar, sir!" replied Mr. Lickham humbly.

"Gran'ma? 'Oo wants to know about your blinking gran'ma?" asked Fossil in surprise.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I'm afraid you don't quite understand, sir," said Mr. Lickham apologettickally. "You see—"

"Ho, don't I understand?" interrupted Fossil grimly. "I s'pose that means you're insinnivatin' that I'm hignorant, like?"

"Not at all, sir, not at all!" gasped Mr. Lickham. "I assure you, sir, have the greatest respect for you. In fact, sir, I was just going to suggest that you might like to take the boys yourself for a little while."

"Ho, no! Carry hon, Lickham, carry hon!" said the new Head jenerously. "I'll butt hin when I want to!"

So Mr. Lickham, in fear and trembling, resoomed his interrupted lesson.

"As I was saying, boys, we were taking the verb 'to biff,'" he said. "I biff, thou biffest, we biff, you biff, they biff."

Fossil's eggsspression as he listened to the conjugation of the verb "to biff" became very pekewliar. Evidently grammar was an unknown science to the new Head of St. Sam's.

"Look 'ere!" he eggscclaimed, as Mr. Lickham pawsed for brèth. "If you can't teach these 'ere bboys somethin' better than that, you and me ain't goin' to be on friendly terms much longer!"

"I beg your padron, sir, I'm sure!" said Mr. Lickham, farelly grovelling before his souperior. "I shall be only too happy to teach them anything you like, your honner!"

Fossil grinned as he saw how Mr. Lickham had nuckled under. He was beginning to enjoy the sensation of being the oppressor, insted of the oppressed.

"Wot I says is this 'ere: it strikes me you don't know much about this 'ere teachin' bizness, with all your swank!" he remarked, with a wink at the boys. "F'instance, just to see what you do know, when did William the Corn-curer land in Old England?"

"I—I think it was on Pancake Day in 1656, sir!" gasped Mr. Lickham, making a wild guess.

"Is that right, boys?" asked Fossil.

"No fear!" shouted the Fourth, grinning all over their diles.

"You'd better 'ave another try!" said Fossil, turning grimly to Mr. Lickham again.

"B.C. 49!" mermered Mr. Lickham, the inspiration standing out in beads on his forehead from the ordeal.

"You're thinking of P.C. 49, sir!" chuckled Jack Jolly.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Well, then, B.C. 55!" said Mr. Lickham desperately.

"That was when Julius Sneezer landed!" grinned Merry.

"Oh crumbs, so it was!" eggscclaimed Mr. Lickham. "I'm afraid you have

caught me napping, sir! I must confess I don't know!"

"Wot, you one of my assistants, and you don't know when William the Corn-curer landed?" gasped Fossil, getting on his feet. "Wot next, I wonder? 'Ere, you, Master Jolly, come out 'ere immediately!"

"Yes, sir!"

The kaptin obeyd the command.

"Wot I says is this 'ere: I ain't so young as I used to be, or I'd do it myself," growled Fossil. "Take 'old of this 'ere birch!"

Jack Jolly, wondering what was coming, took the instrument of torcher. The Fourth looked on with fascinated eyes.

"Now, Lickham," said Fossil, with a triumphant grin. "I'll show you wot I'm going to do with any master in this 'ere skool who displays 'is higgerance. Bend hover!"

"Wha-a-at!" yelled Mr. Lickham, agast.

"Bend hover, I say!"

"I—I—Surely you don't intend—" gasped Mr. Lickham, turning garstly white.

"I intend to 'ave you birched, 'ere and now!" said Fossil feroshusly. "Bend hover, I say!"

Mr. Lickham gazed helplessly round the Form-room for a moment. Never in the days of Dr. Birchmall, had he been subjected to such an indignity as this. Tröö, the old Head had sometimes "gated" him, or given him an impot, or even caned him, in the privacy of his study. But for a Form master to be flogged in front of his Form, and by one of his own pupils—it seemed unthinkable!

Nevertheless, Mr. Lickham did not disobey the order. Indignant as he was, he remembered, with a shudder, the fate of Dr. Birchmall—how the Guvvners, in the hardness of their harts, had redewced him to the rank of skool porter. If he—Mr. Lickham—started scrapping with the new Head, the hard-harted old gentlemen might make him the skool page, or something even worse—a meer housemaid, perhaps.

And so, with a bitter larf, Mr. Lickham bent over.

"Now welt him, Master Jolly!" said Fossil savvidgely. "Lay it on as 'ard as you can!"

"Oh crikey!" gasped Jack.

Having no other alternatiff, the Kaptin of the Fourth gripped the crool birchrod tightly, and brought it down with a terrific thwack on Mr. Lickham's anatomy.

Swish! Thwack!

"Yaroooooo!" yelled Mr. Lickham.

Swish! Swish!

"Yaroooooo!"

Thwack!

"Yoooooop! Help! Murder! Perlice!"

Fossil, with a scendish grin on his dille, counted the strokes. When the score reached fifty, he gave Jack Jolly a rest, and allowed Merry and Bright, and Frank Fearless, and most of the leading lights of the Fourth to have a go—one at a time, of course.

At midday, Dr. Birchmall, in his new role of Skool Porter, wrung the bell for the Forms to dismiss. Then only, did Fossil call a halt.

II.

GROAN! That deep, mellantolly sound issued from the lips of Dr. Alfred Birchmall. The ex-headmaster of St. Sam's, who usually looked in the pink, was now thoroughly in the bloos.

He had just wrung the bell for the dismissal of mourning classes, and he was now crossing the quad, on his way back to the Porter's Lodge, where he had taken up rezidence.

As he trudged along, he looked drawn and pail. As a matter of fact, he had recently drawn a pail of water for cleaning the windows with, which perhaps eggsplained his appearance.

More probably it was caused by the dreadful misfortune which had occurred to him. Only a few hours before, he had been the majestick and dredded Head of St. Sam's. And now, insted of wielding a birchrod, and chewing the mop with distingwished visitors to the skool, he was wielding a birchbroom and using a mop down at the Porter's Lodge.

Dr. Birchmall groaned again, as he observed three cheerful juniors coming towards him. He recognised them as Jack Jolly and his chums, Merry and Bright, and he rightly guessed that they hadn't come to commizerate with him.

"Good-mourning, Birchmall!" cried Jack Jolly, as the heroes of the Fourth drew near him.

The new porter glared.

"How dare you address me in that disrespectful manner!" he barked, in his old scholastic style. "I'll—"

"You'll do nothing!" grinned Jack Jolly. "Your days as a tirant are over now, and don't you forget it!"

"Hear, hear!" chortled Merry and Bright.

The ex-headmaster nashed his false teeth with rage.



The ex-headmaster gave his former assistant a fearful punch on the jaw!

"My giddy aunt!" he hissed. "If ever I do resoom my old position again, I'll mop up the floor with you, mark my words!"

"IF!" said Jack Jolly. "But just now you happen to be the giddy porter, so you'll have to mop up the flagstones insted! And now to bizness! What about that kit-bag of mine that was delivered this mourning? When are you going to take it up to my study, my man?"

Dr. Birchmall choked. To be addressed by a Fourth Form fag as "my man"! It was unpresidented—terrible! He felt that his hewmiliation was complete! But he realised only too well that Jack Jolly was quite within his rights. The position had to be axcepted. So, with a look of anguish on his skollerly dille, he boughed to the inevitable.

"Very well, Master Jolly!" he said, with heavy sarkasm. "I will take the bag up to your study this afternoon."

"Thanks, Birchy!" said Jack Jolly, fishing in his pocket for a tip. "Here you are, my man! Catch!"

Dr. Birchmall caught the penny—on his somewhat prominent nose—and grunted.

"Thank'ee, sir!" he sneered, in the same vain of sarkasm. But he took good care to transfer the coin to his pocket.

By this time a crowd of juniors had arrived on the scene, and they could not refrayne from larfing at the sight of their revered and majestick Head wearing the porter's uniform, and carrying a mop and pail.

"All right, my lads, you can larf!" mermered Dr. Birchmall. "But he larfs last, who larfs last!"

And, with that sinnister remark, the ex-Head turned towards the Porter's Lodge.

But his trubbles were not yet over. For just then, a crowd of masters, grinning all over their diles, came up, and surrounded him.

"Good-mourning, gentlemen!" said the new porter, giving them a suspishus look.

"Good-mourning, Alf!" they corussed cheerily.

Again the ex-headmaster nashed his false teeth. Only twenty-four hours b.A., these cheery individuals had cringed and trembled in his presence, and called him "sir." Now they were looking at him with a patronising air, and calling him "Alf"!

"Well, what's the giddy idea?" asked Dr. Birchmall, with as much dignity as he could muster up.

"We've just brought along a batch of complaints," answered Mr. Tyzer, the master of the Third, with a grin. "First of all, I want to know why you didn't fill up the inkwells in my Form-room this mourning!"

"And I want to know why my copy of 'Comic Snippings' wasn't on my breakfast-table!" said Mr. Lickham.

Dr. Birchmall glared feroshusly at the historical crowd. For a moment he looked as if he intended to wade in. But he couldn't very well do much against the lot of them, and he quickly changed his intention.

"Lemme get out!" he eggsclaimed, trying to cleave a way through the crowd.

"One moment, before you go, my good man!" said Mr. Justiss of the Fifth, in lofty axcents.

"Well?" snarled Dr. Birchmall.

"Why the thump didn't you clean my study window— Whooooop! Yarooooo-oooo!"

Mr. Justiss' humorous remarks ended, in a wild yell, for the patience of Dr. Birchmall had at last become eggshausted. The worm had turned!

The ex-headmaster gave his former assistant a terrific swipo on the nose, and followed that up by a fearful punch on the jaw, and a savvidge dig in the ribs. Mr. Justiss, looking the reverse of humorous, finished up on the ground, howling with anguish.

After that, feeling a little relieved, Dr. Birchmall picked up his pail and mop and returned to the Porter's Lodge, leaving the quad echoing with the mirth of the crowd.

THE END.

(Look out for another amusing yarn of Jack Jolly & Co. in next week's MAGNET, entitled: "WINNING BACK HIS LORRELS!" You'll laugh loud and long over it, chums.)

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IN MERCILESS HANDS!

(Continued from page 13.)

"If I hear you burbling about a hundred pounds reward again I'll dot you on the boko with this!" he said darkly. "How the thump can a fellow scrawl an imposition with you gassing like a cheap gramophone churning out the same record?"

Billy Bunter blinked crossly at his study-mate.

"Oh, really, Peter," he protested, "I think you might show a little more feeling in the matter—"

"What matter?" roared Peter Todd. "Why, you know as well as I do that Colonel Wharton has disappeared—"

A great deal of the wrath faded out of Peter's face as he was reminded of the shadow that hung over a Form-fellow.

"Well, old lard-barrel," said Peter, "is there any further news?"

Billy Bunter sniffed.

"News? Of course there's no news. You know what fatheads the police are. They keep hurrying about with red tape or something, and looking jolly wise and superior, but they don't get on with the job."

"Oh, they don't, don't they?"

"No, they jolly well don't!" said Bunter, with conviction. "What's wanted on this case is a fellow with brains. Me, for instance!"

Peter Todd nearly collapsed.

"You?" he ejaculated. "Oh, my hat!"

"Anyway, I'm going after that hundred pounds reward," said the Owl of the Remove, with a fat smirk.

Peter Todd's face darkened again.

"Oh, so that's where your interest begins and ends in the case, eh?"

"Well, I might just as well have it as anyone else, mightn't I?" hooted Bunter. "But I tell you what, Peter, old chap—"

"Well?"

"If you care to hand me a quid on account of the reward I'll give you five for it when—when I get it!"

And Bunter smirked with the air of one who has made an exceptionally generous offer.

"You footling owl!" said Peter. "You stand as much chance of earning that reward as a red herring!"

"Yah!" retorted Bunter inelegantly. "You're jealous, that's what it is, Peter Todd. I put up with a lot of jealousy in this study what with one thing and another."

Peter Todd rose to his feet.

"And I put up with the company of a cadging, grubby, lying little beast who's a discredit to any decent study! But I'm going to alter that," said Peter, taking a businesslike grip on the ruler. "You're going to get a whacking every time you do anything, or say anything out of place. See!"

"Oh, really, Peter!" said Bunter, eyeing the ruler with a certain amount of apprehension. "But about that reward—Whooooop!"

The ruler whizzed downwards, and Billy Bunter stopped it with his bullet head.

"That's all the reward you'll get, my fat pippin!" exclaimed Peter Todd.

"Yaroooo! You beast! Wow!" groaned Bunter.

"Have another?" asked Peter pleasantly. "Plenty more where that one came from, you know."

"Yow! Rotter!"

Billy Bunter did not stay for any more. One was quite sufficient for him. He fled round the table and raced out

of the study, and Peter Todd slammed the door and resumed his task.

But Bunter hadn't dismissed the matter of the reward from his mind. Where easy money was concerned Bunter was prepared to give it any amount of mental attention.

He rolled down the Remove passage and looked in at Study No. 1.

"I say, you fellows—"

"Outside!"

Five voices roared that command, and the volume of their combined efforts made Bunter jump. But he soon recovered himself.

"I say, Wharton," he said. "Is it true that your aunt is offering a hundred pounds reward for information concerning your uncle?"

"Yes!" said Harry shortly.

"It's a genuine offer?" asked Bunter; and Wharton was so struck by the earnestness in the fat junior's tone that he began to think that Bunter, by some strange means, had really discovered something.

"Of course it's a genuine offer."

Billy Bunter looked relieved.

"Oh, good!" he said. "I thought it might be all spoof."

"Eh?"

"It's all right; keep your wool on," said Bunter hastily. "As long as your aunt's got a hundred quid to fork out I'm your man."

"What do you mean?" said Wharton eagerly. "Have you discovered something?"

And Wharton's chums looked at William George Bunter with renewed interest.

"Well, I won't say I have or I haven't," said Billy Bunter cautiously. "But about the reward. Can I have a bit on account—say a quid?"

"You can have a couple of quid from me on the spot if you've got any information," said the captain of the Remove.

Billy Bunter's eyes glistened.

"Hand 'em over!" he said confidently.

"Let's hear what you've got to tell us first," said Wharton.

"Oh, really, Wharton," replied the Owl, with dignity, "you needn't be so jolly mercenary about it! If it were my uncle I'd be only too pleased to give a chap a couple of quids."

"You would!" muttered Johnny Bull, eyeing the fat junior suspiciously.

"Oh, really, Bull!"

"Get on with the washing!" said Bob Cherry impatiently. "You're like a sheep's head—all jaw!"

"The jawfulness of the ridiculous Bunter is mindfully remindful of the ludicrous sheepfulness," added Inky.

"Oh, really, Inky—"

An impatient look crossed Wharton's face. In his present mood he was irritable.

"Tell me what your information is, Bunter," he said, trying to keep his voice even, "and I'll hand over the two quid fast enough. Now, what do you know?"

"Nothing—at the moment," said Bunter in an amazing burst of truthfulness.

"What!" The Famous Five sprang to their feet.

"N-nothing just yet," said Bunter, a trifle apprehensively. "But it will be all right. To a fellow of my brains and resource a matter like this is simple, you know. You hand over the couple of quid, Wharton, and I promise you I'll spare a little of my time to look into the case. There!" he added in a magnanimous gesture.

"You rotten cad!" hooted Bob Cherry.

"Eh?" gasped the Owl, backing into the passage.

"You awful little worm," roared Wharton, "to come here with that sort of yarn!"

"Oh, really, Wharton—"

"Kick the fat cad out!" growled Johnny Bull; and he rushed at Billy Bunter.

Biff!

Billy Bunter had turned to flee, but he was not quite quick enough. Johnny's hefty boot took him full in the slack of his trousers.

Crash!

The Owl of the Remove sprawled on his hands and knees in the passage, roaring.

"Yooop! Wow! Ow!"

Biff, biff, biff, biff!

One after the other the Famous Five took summary vengeance on the seat of Bunter's trousers. And at each fresh kick a terrific roar escaped the fat junior.

But he had enough wisdom to understand that that particular part of the Remove passage—at the moment, at least—was hardly safe ground on which to linger, and he staggered to his feet and bolted as fast as his little fat legs would carry him.

Bunter, the reward hunter, was not exactly a success. True he had collected free, gratis, and for nothing, so to speak, a collection of hefty boots and a lively thump with a ruler. But that was not the kind of reward which the fat junior hungered after. He flew down the passage and out of the School House as if a thousand demons were on his track. Then, reassuring himself that the Famous Five had not followed him, he came to a standstill and pumped in great breaths of air. If running was to be a feature that would serve a reward hunter well, Billy Bunter was severely handicapped, for his considerable avoirdupois and his lack of condition made exercise in any shape or form something of an ordeal.

THE NINTH CHAPTER.

Trickery!

"EXCUSE me, young gentleman!"

Harry Wharton paused.

He had been down to the village to send a telegram for his aunt, and was making the return journey along the Friardale Lane, in the quietude of the Monday evening, when a tall, broad-shouldered man, with a hard, powerful face, accosted him with that remark.

The man was a stranger to the captain of the Remove, and the junior felt an instinctive distrust of him. His next words made the Removite jump.

"You are Master Harry Wharton?"

The man's tone was quite friendly.

"I am," said Harry Wharton shortly.

"But I don't know you."

"Of course not," returned the stranger. "Plain-clothes detectives are not known to everyone, otherwise their job wouldn't hold them."

"Well, that's true," said Harry, his interest beginning to develop.

If this man were a plain-clothes officer he might have some news of his uncle.

The stranger drew Wharton closer and whispered in his ear:

"I am from Scotland Yard, sent down here specially to investigate the case of Colonel Wharton, you understand?"

The Greyfriars Removite nodded.

"And I think I have discovered something that will lead to the apprehension of the man who has kidnapped him."

"Oh!"

A great hope sprang into Wharton's heart. He felt almost friendly to this tall stranger with the slouch hat.

"I would like you to come along with

me and give me your opinion of this clue," the stranger went on. "It will take us a little time, but surely your master would excuse you in the circumstances?"

"Oh, that's all right!" said the captain of the Remove eagerly. "But why don't you get some of your own men to help you if you feel so confident?"

It was the feeling of distrust, and Wharton felt that he had to voice it.

He watched the man's face closely as he spoke, but he read nothing there.

"Well, to be frank with you, my lad," said the stranger in a confidential way, "there's a reward of a hundred pounds attached to this job, and a hundred of the best is not to be sneezed at."

"You mean there's a chance that you would have to share the reward if the clue you discovered led to anything?" asked Wharton, a trifle contemptuously.

"You've got it, sir," came the reply.

"I'm a poor man. Police officers aren't paid a handsome wage, you know. Apart from that, the job is not too hefty. With a sturdy chap like you with me, I could overpower your uncle's kidnapper."

"Then you're sure my uncle is alive?" asked Wharton eagerly.

"As sure as I am that I'm talking to his nephew," was the convincing reply.

"Of course, if you're afraid of a scrap, I'll have to let on to one of the other officers."

It was a cunningly-chosen phrase, for Wharton would have gone through fire and water for his uncle.

"I'm not afraid," he replied. "But where are we going?"

A hard glint shot into the eyes of the stranger, but the darkness veiled it.

"To the Haunted Manor, Black Point!"

"What?" exclaimed Wharton excitedly.

"To the Haunted Manor, Black Point," reiterated the stranger. "There is nothing to fear. See here, take this revolver, and don't be afraid to use it, if necessary, for our man is desperate."

"I'll use it fast enough," said Wharton, his eyes glinting. "I'm ready, if you are."

And at a brisk pace he began to walk alongside the plain-clothes man.

He sighted a pillar-box on the lonely stretch of road ahead, and the shadowy view of it gave him an idea. So far he had taken this man on trust. True, there were convincing reasons why he should accompany him to the Haunted Manor. Added to which was the fact that he was in possession of a revolver—a handy weapon that the sturdy captain of the Remove would use to the best advantage should there be any foul play. But Wharton was a fellow of resource. With a well-feigned gesture of surprise he halted at the letter-box.

"Oh, I've just remembered I've got a letter to post!" he said, and he pulled from his jacket pocket a stamped and addressed envelope addressed to Frank Nugent of the Remove at Greyfriars.

The stranger made an impatient gesture.

"We must look sharp," he said, glancing about him furtively, "in case our man takes it into his head to move his quarters."

And while he glanced about him Wharton swiftly used the little gold pencil that hung from his watch-chain and wrote in shorthand on the back of the envelope, "Haunted Manor." His action took up a matter of a couple of seconds. And that action was destined to save both his own life and that of his uncle. But Wharton hardly gave any further thought to it. The envelope belonged to Nugent, who was treasurer of the sports club, and whose job it was

to remind certain old boys who made a point of supporting the Lower School sports that their subscriptions were due by apprising them by letter, accompanied by a stamped and addressed envelope.

It was a lucky chance that it happened to be in Wharton's possession. Should everything be above board Wharton could explain to Nugent long before that envelope was delivered at Greyfriars why he had sent it. Should he meet with any foul play, that empty envelope would certainly arouse suspicions in Nugent's brain, especially if he remembered that he had given that same envelope to Wharton the day before. And a close scrutiny of the envelope would naturally, enough, reveal those two important words written in shorthand.

Really it was a masterpiece, and later Wharton was to congratulate himself on his perspicacity. But the moment he

had dropped the envelope in the box it vanished from his mind entirely. He was about to see his uncle once again. Perhaps he would come to blows with the villain who had kidnapped him. There was a certain amount of satisfaction in that, and Wharton looked forward to the meeting with unmingled joy.

And the great thing was—Colonel Wharton was alive. Often the captain of the Remove had feared the worst, for there is nothing like silence in such circumstances to promote that morbid idea.

"We must walk quicker!" rapped out the stranger, pulling his hat well down over his eyes.

"Quick as you like," said Wharton, his hand resting for a moment on the comforting butt of the revolver that reposed in his pocket.

And thereafter in silence the two, man and boy, strode on into the gathering shadows of the night.

"Black Point!" said the stranger laconically, as the towering cliff rose sharp into view before them.

"And there's the Haunted Manor!" whispered Wharton tensely, as the pile of ruins of what had once been a stately building reared its broken outline against the darkened sky.

"Sh-'sh!" said his guide. "We must proceed quietly."

It was a stiff climb, and Wharton was breathing hard when he reached the top, but his companion seemed tireless.

"You have your revolver?" asked the man, when they were within a stone's throw of the ruins.

"Yes."

"Then throw it away!"

"Eh?" exclaimed Wharton, in amazement, and he began to notice the subtle change that came into his companion's speech. "What for?"

"Because it's useless!"

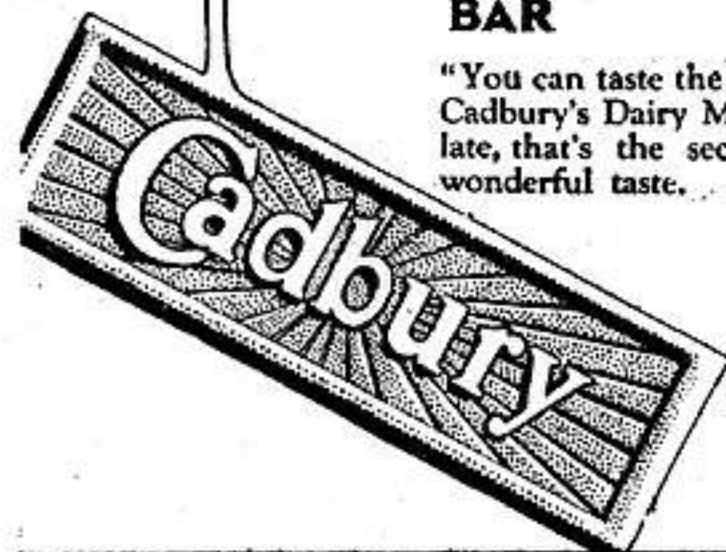
Immediately Wharton's hand flew to his pocket. It came out a second later gripping the revolver firmly.

"What's the game?" demanded the captain of the Remove fearlessly, although his heart was beating fast.

"You're the game, sonny!" came the snarling response. "Put 'em up, or I'll drill you!"

(Continued on next page.)

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From the man's overcoat pocket something flashed in the dim light of the moon that fell across the ruins. As Wharton saw it he knew that he had been trapped.

With rage and sudden despair he raised his own revolver and pulled the trigger. The hammer clicked harmlessly. Of course, the weapon wasn't loaded, the Greyfriars junior knew that by the way the man laughed.

But Wharton wasn't beaten yet. The man who had enticed him there imagined that he had just an ordinary schoolboy to deal with, but at that critical moment the sturdy, plucky captain of the Remove was a little out of the ordinary. He saw at once that the man's game was to kidnap him. Why else had he been lured to this spot? That meant, it was fairly safe to assume, that near at hand was his uncle.

As Wharton stood there, the useless revolver in his hand, he read the truth in the mocking face that towered over him. Then he acted desperately.

With a movement that suggested he was throwing away the revolver he deceived the man, who was, doubtless, congratulating himself on his astuteness, and, instead, hurled the heavy weapon full in his face.

Thud!

With a cry of pain the scoundrel staggered back, his free hand pawing at his face where the revolver had struck. And then Harry Wharton leaped on him and tried to gain possession of the loaded revolver.

"You young cub!" ground out the man, exerting his man's strength against his youthful opponent in a way that promised only one result. "I'll make you sorry for that!"

But Wharton did not speak. He knew he was fighting a desperate battle; the man, although he was half-stunned, was tremendously powerful.

It was an unequal combat from beginning to end, with a grim setting that gave it an eerie, unearthly aspect—a man and a boy engaged in a life or death struggle on the summit of Black Point.

On one side lay the white road that led to Pegg, on another reared the ugly ruins of the manor, through which the wind screeched and whistled; to the east the rolling billows of the Channel; ahead an overcast sky that threatened rain at any moment; and not another sign of human life to witness that grim struggle.

"Ah!" An exclamation of savage triumph escaped Wharton's assailant as he tore the hand that clutched the revolver free. Next minute the butt of the heavy automatic thudded on Wharton's head.

Without a cry the plucky Greyfriars junior crumpled in a heap at the feet of the man who had lured him to that desolate spot.

"Young tiger cat!" grunted his assailant, as he pocketed the revolver. "And he nearly caught me napping!"

How nearly was shown by the huge bruise that had already begun to form on the man's face where the revolver had struck him. Another inch to the left and Wharton would have won that encounter. As it was the Remove captain lay ominously still.

The man stooped and gathered the junior in his arms as if he were an infant. Then he carried him into the ruined manor and down the steps that led to Colonel Wharton's place of captivity.

From a pocket the man took an electric torch and, carrying this before him, he entered the dank chamber. Immediately there was a cry from the far

corner of the cellar as Colonel Wharton recognised the inert form his captor brought in.

"You villain, Holstern! By heavens you will pay dearly for this!"

"We shall see," said Holstern—"we shall see! I have kept my word, Colonel Wharton. Perhaps your nephew's sufferings will help to loosen your tongue and your pocket!"

He laughed mirthlessly, and proceeded to bind Harry Wharton's wrists and ankles together. That done, he gave the Greyfriars junior a kick and faced the boy's uncle.

"When he returns to consciousness that nephew of yours is going to taste the whip!" hissed Holstern. "See here!" He pointed to his damaged face. "He nearly got me, the young savage!"

"I wish to heaven he had, you scoundrel!" said the colonel hotly.

"Wait till you see him squirming under the lash, when you hear him squealing!"

With that Holstern seated himself on the floor and calmly lit a cigarette, and through the smoke-rings that soared towards the roof Colonel Wharton saw the face of a demon unleashed rather than that of a man.

THE TENTH CHAPTER.

Billy Bunter's Clue!

"ANYONE seen Wharton?"

That question was being asked up and down the passages and studies at Greyfriars, for it was nearing bed-time, and the captain of the Remove had not come in.

Nugent, Bob Cherry, Johnny Bull, and Inky wore anxious faces. The same thought forced itself into their minds. Had Harry been smuggled away by the same mysterious agency that had accounted for Colonel Wharton?

Dr. Locke, the venerable Head of Greyfriars, looked haggard. He blamed himself for not having confined the captain of the Remove to school bounds.

A frantic inquiry at the village post office when dusk set in elicited the fact that Wharton had sent off the telegram which had taken him there. But, beyond the knowledge that the boy had started at once for Greyfriars, the post-mistress could give nothing further in the way of information.

The police had been notified without delay. Inspector Grimes, in his official way, had reminded Dr. Locke that it had been a very unwise proceeding on his part to allow Harry Wharton to walk abroad on his own; true enough logically, but of poor comfort in the circumstances.

All traffic had been stopped and questioned, but no one had any recollection of seeing a boy accompanied by a man on the road—the police presuming that if Wharton had indeed been kidnapped, it must have been a man who had kidnapped him.

All lines of inquiry had been drawn blank, and as each item of disappointing news came through on the telephone in Dr. Locke's study Miss Wharton's last signs of courage and composure forsook her. The Head had called in his good wife to attend to Miss Wharton, feeling absolutely unequal to the task of consoling her.

Bed-time came round and still no news.

The Remove, known as the most unruly Form in the School, was very subdued that night. The juniors spoke in whispers, and their conversation, without exception, always began and ended with the same topic. Even Skinner &

Co., the cads of the Remove, felt concerned on Harry Wharton's account.

And sleep did not come very easily to Wharton's chums. They lay awake, tossing from side to side, until far into the night.

Billy Bunter, however, slept as soundly as ever. His unmusical snore echoed unpleasantly the length of the dormitory.

There were heavy-eyed juniors in the Form-room the next morning, but Mr. Quelch, who did not look as if he had slept too well himself, was particularly indulgent to the shortcomings of his class, and lessons were conducted in an air of gloom and despondency.

Even the postman's arrival did not excite the usual inquisitiveness that was customary amongst the juniors, with the possible exception of Bunter. And that fat youth watched the letters being put into their alphabetical order by Trotter, the page, with a frown of annoyance.

There was no letter for William George Bunter that morning, however, although he fingered and scrutinised every letter in the rack to satisfy himself that Trotter hadn't bungled his job. And he was engaged in this inquisitive practice when his fat, grubby hand fastened on a letter addressed to Frank Nugent. He recognised that junior's handwriting, and guessed that it had something to do with the sports funds.

"I'll take it to him," reflected Bunter, detaching the letter from the rack. "After all, there might be money in it, and some dishonest rotter might come along and bone it."

Which train of thought was sufficient to make the impecunious and inquisitive Owl of the Remove hold the envelope up to the light in an endeavour to ascertain its contents.

"Oh, great Scott!"

Bunter's face was a picture of astonishment as he peered at the envelope, for even his short-sightedness could not fail to see that the envelope was empty.

"Well, that's funny!" muttered the fat junior, peering at the envelope a second time. "Thumping funny! What sort of silly ass is it that sends an empty envelope through the post?"

He gazed at the envelope again, and he started so violently that his spectacles nearly fell off his nose.

"Friardale postmark!"

William George Bunter was not blessed with a large size in brains, but even his obtuse intellect saw something extraordinary in an envelope that contained no missive, and was post-marked Friardale.

Another peep at the envelope and his piggy eyes saw the words in shorthand. Bunter was no scholar where speed writing was concerned, but he knew at once that those brief hieroglyphics would, translated, mean something.

Hastily he shoved the envelope in his pocket. Then he rolled away, his fat mind turning over the remarkable discovery he had made. That he had no right to retain possession of an envelope addressed to someone else never occurred to him for one moment, Bunter's conscience being a most accommodating piece of machinery that promised one day to land him behind bars.

He rolled into Study No. 7 and dropped heavily into the armchair. Then he pulled out the envelope and on a piece of odd paper copied those shorthand strokes as nearly exact as an inordinately bad "fist" allowed. For into Bunter's bright brain had dawned the solution of this empty envelope; it was a message for Frank Nugent. And from whom could it have come but Harry Wharton? The postmark was Friardale. Obviously the envelope had been dropped in a pillar-box last night. And it was



With a movement that suggested he was throwing away the revolver Harry Wharton deceived the man and instead hurled the heavy weapon full in his face. Thud! With a cry of pain the scoundrel staggered back. (See Chapter 9.)

known that Wharton was last seen in the vicinity of Friardale. The whole thing worked itself out quite easily, as indeed Harry Wharton had hoped, when he had despatched the envelope. But there yet remained for Bunter to translate the message.

The fat junior was by this time trembling with excitement. If that message led to Wharton's discovery it was fairly safe to assume that it would lead to the finding of Colonel Wharton. And of the two Bunter, in his greed, hoped that at least it threw light on Colonel Wharton's astonishing disappearance, for hadn't Miss Wharton broadcasted a reward of a hundred pounds?

"A hundred pounds!" murmured Billy Bunter. "Phew! A hundred pounds!"

"Hallo, old fat man, still thinking about that reward?" said Peter Todd, as he entered the study.

Billy Bunter raised his podgy frame from the armchair and drew himself up to his full height.

"I'm more than thinking about it, Peter Todd," he remarked, with a fat smirk. "I'm going to earn it—"

"Good for you. It's about time you did something useful," replied Peter.

"Oh, really, Toddy! And when I've earned it you can keep your distance," said Billy Bunter loftily.

"I'll do that fast enough, old porpoise, never fear, once you've settled the odd quids you've squeezed out of me," chuckled Peter, more in jest than anything else.

Bunter sniffed.

"I may have had a few paltry loans from you, Peter Todd," he remarked with dignity. "So paltry that they might have slipped my memory. Still, just name the amount and I'll settle up when I get the hundred quid."

"I'll do that when you get the hundred giddy quidlets, old bean," said Peter

cheerily, "which won't be until Doomsday, I'm thinking!"

"Just you see," said Bunter, with a sniff; and he strutted out of the study and rolled along to Study No. 13. Mark Linley, the scholarship junior whom Bunter despised as a swot, was sitting at the table delving into the hidden beauties of Latin. But for once Bunter was pleased to remember that Mark Linley, the swot, a "low scholarship boy," could be of use to him.

"I say, Linley—" he began affably. Mark looked up and smiled.

"Well?"

"I say, old chap, you spend a lot of time mugging up lessons and that silly rot," said Bunter frankly. "Of course, I know you're only a poor scholarship boy, and—"

He broke off suddenly, realising by the look on Mark Linley's face that this was hardly the way to ask a favour.

"I mean— He, he, he! I was only joking!" cackled Bunter. "But you understand shorthand, don't you?"

"Yes." Bunter drew the scrap of paper from his pocket, upon which he had done his best to reproduce the words that appeared on the envelope addressed to Frank Nugent.

"Can you tell me if I'm going along all right," he said. "I'm taking up shorthand, you know, Linley."

"First I've heard of it," said Mark, with a smile. "Still, I wish you luck. Is that an example of some of it on that paper?"

"Yes," said Bunter. "I wondered if you would be able to read it."

"Shove it over," said Mark.

Bunter's podgy hand placed the scrap of paper in front of Mark Linley, and Bunter's podgy heart beat an excited tattoo against his ribs.

Linley looked long at that amazing effort on Bunter's part.

"I can read it," he said, looking up, "although it's rather crude."

Bunter smirked.

"Well, what have I written?" he asked.

"A very bad combination of strokes that I suppose are meant to represent 'Haunted Manor.'"

"Oh!" Bunter's heart beat faster than ever. "'Haunted Manor'—oh!"

"Hallo, what's wrong?" asked Linley, looking up and seeing the peculiar dazed expression on the Owl's face.

"N-nothing, old chap," said Bunter hastily. "I—I felt a bit faint, you know. Gimme that paper—"

He snatched at the paper rudely and, to Mark Linley's amazement, he rushed out of the study.

"More dotty than ever!" muttered Mark Linley. "Shorthand! What the thump is he starting to learn shorthand for?"

It was a question that didn't trouble the scholarship junior long, for his attention soon became fixed on his books again, and in less than five minutes all remembrance of Bunter's shorthand was gone.

But it hadn't gone from Bunter's mind. He was in a terrific whirl of excitement. "Haunted Manor!" Obviously that meant the Haunted Manor on Black Point. And there, apparently, Harry Wharton had gone. If he were not there now the place surely would provide a further clue to his whereabouts.

"Oh, my hat!" muttered Bunter. "This is luck and no mistake. The hundred quids are mine. And I'll jolly well see that I get 'em, too!"

That decision rather gave free rein to disquieting thoughts. Suspicious himself, Bunter wondered whether someone else would try to bag the reward if he made it known that he held a clue to Harry Wharton's whereabouts.

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"Not if I know it," he declared. "I'll jolly well do the thing-off my own bat."

Which was a very brave statement coming from Bunter in the safety of Greyfriars School, but liable to evaporate once he neared the Haunted Manor on Black Point.

So eager was he to claim the reward in its entirety for himself that even the thought of danger did not drive him to confide in those in authority, people best able to deal with a matter like this.

Never in all his life—if this proved to be a fortunate clue—had he stood to earn so large a sum of money. Vision of unlimited tuck floated before his eyes, so that Bunter's fat thoughts dwelt on grub, glorious grub, during the time he should have been devoting his attention to the pearls of wisdom that fell from the lips of his august Form master. But even the caning that followed did not occupy his mind for long. Bunter was dead certain that the hundred pounds reward was his for the asking, so to speak. And for once in a way Bunter was very near the truth!

THE ELEVENTH CHAPTER.

Wharton's Terrible Ordeal!

HARRY WHARTON groaned and opened his eyes.

There was a terrible ache at the back of his head, where Holstern's revolver had struck him, and he felt sick and dizzy.

He tried to move his hands, and discovered that they were tied; his ankles, too, had been treated in similar fashion.

Then, as his eyes became accustomed to the light that glowed from a torch that stood in the centre of the room, he made out his surroundings.

The dank odour of that underground apartment nauseated him, and he wondered where he was. Then recollection came surging back to him. The meeting with the man who had posed as a police-officer. His journey to the summit of Black Point; his struggle there with his armed assailant, and that savage blow on the back of his head.

Recollection flitted back in less than half a dozen seconds, and suddenly a familiar voice broke in upon the confused thoughts that crowded into Wharton's brain.

"Harry!"

Colonel Wharton pulled at the chain that held him a prisoner, and Wharton at first stared stupidly at his uncle at finding him in such weird surroundings. But a second look brought home to him his uncle's terrible plight. In the light of the lamp he looked pale and worn, and livid weals stood out on either cheek, where Holstern's whip had lashed him.

"Uncle!"

Harry Wharton struggled into a sitting position, and crawled his way over that moss-grown floor to his uncle's side.

"My boy! My dear boy!" The colonel's voice was full of anxiety and emotion. "How are you?"

"A little dizzy, but otherwise all right," replied the captain of the Remove bravely. "But how are you, uncle? How long have you been here?"

"Since Wednesday afternoon—" began the colonel.

A movement from the other side of the cellar made him break off.

"Very touching indeed!"

It was Holstern's voice. And he came swaggering over towards where his prisoners lay, a mocking smile on his hard-bitten face.

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At sight of him Wharton's eyes blazed. This was the man who had enticed him to this lonely spot. This was the villain who had kidnapped his uncle, who had held him here a fast prisoner in durance vile since Wednesday. All the fiery temper that was in Wharton's nature came to the surface then. His eyes fairly glowed at Holstern, as he stood there leering down at his prisoners through a haze of cigarette smoke.

"You scoundrel!" said Wharton thickly.

"Calm yourself, my dear boy," remonstrated Colonel Wharton. "The villain has us in his power. Hot words won't help us now."

But Harry Wharton was not to be denied. He treated his captor to a string of vituperation that fairly opened the eyes of his uncle, to all of which Holstern listened unmoved.

"What are you going to do with us, you villain?" demanded Harry at last.

"First, I'm going to repay the blow you gave me last night with interest," was Holstern's mocking reply.

"You cowardly rotter!"

"Then I'm going to see if I can make you squeal," went on the scoundrel, calmly pulling at his cigarette. "I shall try hard, for the moment I do that, your dog of an uncle might feel inclined to loosen his purse-strings to the tune of fifty thousand pounds!"

"Fifty thousand pounds!" echoed Harry Wharton.

Holstern nodded.

"That is the price of your combined liberty!"

"You're mad!" retorted Wharton, with unmingled scorn. "Do you think my uncle would be fool enough to pay you that sum?"

"I think he will, when I get busy with the whip," was Holstern's cool reply.

And he indicated with his thumb the dog-whip that reposed against the far wall.

"He's had a taste of it himself," he went on. "Ask your dear uncle how he likes it."

The colonel struggled at the end of the chain. He would have given his life at that moment to have been at grips with the cool scoundrel before him for just five minutes.

"You see," said Holstern, with a mocking laugh, "your uncle remembers what it feels like still. Your turn is to come, you brat!"

Harry Wharton felt the blood drain from his face as he saw the cruel cunning of his captor. But his pluck did not forsake him. Like his uncle, some instinct told him that the moment this half madman succeeded in extracting the colossal amount of fifty thousand pounds from Colonel Wharton, he would kill both of them as ruthlessly as he would exterminate a beetle. That was the type of man who stood before them; he had murder written all over his face as he leered down at his prisoners.

"You fiend!" exclaimed Harry Wharton passionately. "And do you think you are safe? Do you think that there is no such thing as retribution?"

"You save your breath for squealing, you young cub!" hissed Holstern. "I don't talk with children."

"Then leave my nephew out of it altogether," pleaded Colonel Wharton.

"He is a boy; he has never done you a wrong in his life. Against me you have a fancied wrong, and you wish to avenge yourself. Do what you like with me, but let the boy go free!"

Holstern laughed mirthlessly.

"I see I hit you on the raw," he chuckled. "For twenty years I have

waited for this day, Colonel Wharton. For twenty years I rotted in a prison where the light seldom enters, where day and night are alike—torture and slow death. But my time has come. He who waits patiently does not wait in vain!"

To Harry Wharton it seemed now that Holstern was a madman, for the Greyfriars junior knew nothing of those days when Colonel Wharton—then a major—and Captain Holstern were brother officers.

And while he lay there Wharton thought of the envelope he had posted to Frank Nugent, and his heart steadied, and then beat with a new hope. Would Franky remember it? Would he see the message on the back in those brief, pencilled shorthand characters? Would he observe the Friardale postmark, and put two and two together? And it cheered Harry Wharton, miserable as was his plight and fearful as was the ordeal which he knew lay in front of him, to think that Frank Nugent and his chums would not let him down. In a short time now—for Wharton knew that it must be early morning—the postman would be arriving at Greyfriars. And in his bag would be the empty envelope that meant so much.

If only he could convey some message of hope to his uncle. But at the moment that was out of the question, for Holstern was within easy earshot.

For a few moments silence reigned in the underground chamber. Then Holstern threw away his cigarette and strolled towards the prostrate figure of Harry Wharton.

"It's your turn now, my beauty!" he snarled.

With a rough grip he hauled the bound form of the captain of the Remove to his feet, and dragged him towards a staple—a few feet away from where Colonel Wharton lay bound—and, with another length of rope, secured the junior's wrists to it.

"Stop!" shouted the colonel, in an agony of suspense and anxiety.

"Well?" drawled Holstern.

"Don't touch the boy!" pleaded the old soldier. "You can do what you like with me—but don't harm the boy!"

"My price is fifty thousand pounds," said Holstern coolly. "Are you willing to pay?"

"Certainly not, uncle!" shouted Harry. "Don't trust the scoundrel! He wouldn't keep his word! Don't give in! I can stand what's coming to me!" he added bravely. "While we are alive we are valuable to him. He won't dare kill us until he sees a chance of raking in the money!"

"Be quiet, you whelp!" growled Holstern.

"Harry, I can't let you endure this torture," said Colonel Wharton brokenly. "I can't!"

"Spoken like a sensible man!" grinned Holstern. "I have here pen and ink. You will write at my dictation, and I will post the letter to your sister."

There was a lurking cunning in the scoundrel's face that made Harry Wharton's blood boil.

"Don't give in, uncle!" he shouted.

"Don't! Don't, for my sake!"

"It is for your sake, my dear boy," said the colonel brokenly, "that I lower my colours to this scoundrel. For my own sake I care nothing."

"Bravely spoken!" jeered Holstern.

"You beast!" exclaimed Harry Wharton hotly. "You low down, despicable worm!"

The taunt struck through Holstern's thick hide, and his face became livid

with uncontrollable anger. With a snarl, he picked up the whip and brought its stinging lash down across the boy's back with all the strength of which he was capable.

Wharton bit his lip until the blood came rather than cry out in the presence of this brute, and his pluck seemed to enrage Holstern to an ungovernable extent.

Lash, lash, lash!

The whip rose and fell with a brutal savagery that brought the gallant old colonel, now helpless to intervene, to his knees.

"Stop, Holstern, I implore you!" he beseeched, in a voice that trembled with emotion.

For a moment the rage-contorted face of Holstern was turned upon the gallant old soldier.

"I'll stop when I've taught this brat of yours a lesson!"

The lash rose and fell with redoubled fury, and Wharton, although not a cry had thus far escaped him, felt his senses swimming.

"Stop! For mercy's sake stop!" implored Colonel Wharton. "I will write the letter. Give me pen and ink!"

"Did you stop to think of mercy?" snarled Holstern. "Did you think of mercy when you gave your evidence; when you sent me to that living death? Bah! Time enough for pen and ink when I've taught this firebrand a lesson!"

And again the whip rose and fell with savage energy.

The captain of the Remove writhed and twisted in agony under that fearful castigation; still not a cry escaped him; and in those agonising moments when Colonel Wharton felt that his very soul was being plucked from him, he could not but help praise Providence for the pluck and grit that was in his brother's child.

But Nature has its limitations, and of a sudden, under that terrific rain of blows, Harry Wharton's body fell limp. He had fainted.

With a snarl Holstern flung aside the whip, breathing heavily from his exertions. Then he turned a face transformed like unto some fiend incarnate on the broken figure of Colonel Wharton.

"That is a taste!" he snarled, and then peering closer at the huddled form of the gallant old soldier, he discovered that Colonel Wharton, too, had fainted. Starved and cruelly beaten as he had been it was no wonder that the old soldier's strength had failed him at last, for the sight of that awful flogging had sapped the colonel of what remaining nervous energy was left to him.

With an imprecation falling from his lips, Holstern turned and picked up the electric torch. Then he mounted the stone steps and made his way into the daylight. He had tasted the sweets of revenge; he knew now that fifty thousand pounds would be his consolation, for the scoundrel was well aware that Colonel Wharton would never be a willing party to such another cruel flogging as his nephew had undergone.

In the morning air Holstern's face relaxed. The savagery died out, and he became master of himself. He moved with caution along a path that was sheltered on either side by rising banks, and made his way to the fisher quarter of Pegg at a leisurely pace. He had hired a room there, his advent causing little comment amongst the fishermen to whom he had alleged himself to be a commercial traveller, working the neighbouring districts in "easy stages."

And as Captain Holstern, ex-convict, ate the meal his landlady immediately

prepared for him, he smiled in anticipation of the good living that was to come his way, after the years of drudgery and meagre fare which had been his lot in prison.

"Easy!" he muttered to himself. "The old fool will shell out, and then, when the money is safe in my keeping"—he laughed mirthlessly—"there will be two Whartons less in the world, and I shall be avenged!"

Which showed that Colonel Wharton's instincts, which had been shared by his nephew, were correct.

But there's many a slip 'twixt the cup and lip, as a certain scribe tells us, and Holstern, now gloating in his triumph, was destined to learn that the scribe had not penned those words in vain. The fates that had played into the scoundrelly hands of Captain Holstern so long were beginning a fickle change, and their messenger was to be the fat and fatuous, and greatly despised member of the Bunter family, known as William George!

THE TWELFTH CHAPTER.

The Reward Hunter!

IT was a half-holiday at Greyfriars that sunny spring day, but unlike most half-holidays, the boys of Greyfriars did not enter into that half-day's freedom with their accustomed lightheartedness.

Seniors and juniors wore woebegone countenances. The mystery of both Colonel and Harry Wharton's strange disappearance had settled like a pall over them. For no news had yet come to hand. True, the police were scouring the country and following all manner of chance clues and fanciful theories, yet their quarry had eluded them at all turns. For all the evidence that was in the hands of the police the earth might have opened and swallowed up the Whartons.

In the circumstances football was off that afternoon. Nobody felt like chasing the leather across the playing-fields that afternoon, and Tom Merry & Co. had been notified over the telephone that, in the circumstances, the match would be cancelled.

After dinner that day seniors and juniors split up into search parties and scoured the country miles around.

And to the surprise of the Remove Billy Bunter was the first to leave the dining-hall, having stated to an astonished Mr. Quelch that he was going to search for Harry Wharton.

"Bless my soul!" Mr. Quelch could not contain his surprise as Bunter asked to be excused. "Bunter," he added kindly, "that is a very worthy spirit!"

The fat junior beamed upon the assembled Remove.

"I'll get the reward—ahem—I mean I'll find old Wharton, sir," he said, with a magnificent gesture. "Leave it to me!"

And he rolled out of Hall with astonishing alacrity.

"That fat idiot's got something up his sleeve," remarked Peter Todd thoughtfully to Frank Nugent, who was sitting next to him at table.

"I suppose he hasn't really discovered anything?" said Frank.

"I don't know," replied Peter Todd. "He's been acting like a fellow with a hundred pounds in his possession all the morning."

Meantime, Billy Bunter had rolled over to the bike shed.

"Quicker on a bike," he muttered.

And making a careful selection of the machines there he finally chose Harry Wharton's. A few minutes later he was

pedalling out of gates with such unaccustomed energy that Gosling, the porter, rubbed his eyes in astonishment.

"Well, my hey!" he ejaculated.

Bunter put all his beef into the pedals and he made fairly good speed considering the load the machine carried. What his plan was exactly he didn't know, which was Bunter's usual way of going about things. What he desired most was to satisfy himself that the clue which had come into his possession was genuine.

And his alacrity in getting out of the school was due to the fact that he had overheard Peter Todd stating his intention of having a scout round Black Point. Billy Bunter shivered at the thought that the reward might slip through his fingers at the eleventh hour.

The thought of the hundred pounds reward spurred Bunter on. He was perspiring freely by the time he had reached the foot of Black Point.

"Groooough!"

He dropped off his bike, panting, and stood gazing up at the cliff top and the crumbling ruins of the haunted manor, and for a moment his courage failed him. If the place really was haunted—

Billy Bunter quaked like a fat jelly. But he found new courage and determination as he reflected that it was daylight.

"Oh dear!"

He started to climb the winding path that led to the top of the cliff and found it an arduous journey. But he kept on, taking a rest here and there, to get a breather. And the nearer Bunter approached that forbidding-looking ruin the more his courage evaporated. Yet to the fat Removeite those crumbling walls meant, possibly, a hundred pounds, a reflection which revived his flagging spirits.

Gingerly, cautiously, he drew nearer the tumble-down portico beyond which lay a blackness that was anything but inviting.

"S-shall I go in and look round?" Bunter asked himself.

Then, unexpectedly, Fate answered for him. To his listening ears came the sound of heavy footsteps. Someone was approaching. Supposing it was Wharton's kidnapper? Supposing—

Bunter glanced about him wildly, his fat heart pounding against his ribs. The nearest cover to hand was inside the ruined manor. There was no time to seek refuge elsewhere, for the footsteps were growing louder and louder.

"Oh dear!" gasped Bunter, all of a flutter.

He made a bound for the ruined doorway and dived through. In blind terror now he plunged into a room—or the remains of what had once been a room—to his left. He was only just in time, for next moment, the footsteps that had terrified him were heard to enter the portico.

Captain Holstern had returned.

The scoundrel stood listening for a few moments, but he seemed satisfied, for he turned on his heel and commenced a descent of the moss-grown steps that led to the cellars below. Bunter, quaking like a fat jelly, crouched down behind the remains of a wooden door that stood propped against the wall.

"Oh dear!" he murmured, licking his dry lips. "I wonder who that rotter was. What's he doing here?"

The fat junior turned the problem over in his brain as he crouched behind the broken door. If indeed this was Harry Wharton's place of captivity it could only mean that the man whose footsteps he had heard was the scoundrel who had kidnapped him. That meant Bunter was

perilously near a dangerous, ruthless character who would not hesitate to capture him if he were discovered.

The fat junior began to wish that he had confided in Peter Todd, even if it meant sharing the reward. To dash out from his hiding-place now was more than Bunter dared to do. At any moment the man who had gone below might return. He would be armed—that went without a doubt! Beads of perspiration broke out on Bunter's podgy brow as he thought of that.

Yet the Owl of the Remove knew that he couldn't stay where he was indefinitely. And as he crouched there in a blue funk, Fate once again decided for him. The sound of footsteps once again came to his ears.

The scoundrel was returning! Bunter's heart gave a great leap. Supposing he should enter that room—

It was no idle supposition, for Captain Holstern did enter that room. There was a smile of triumph on his sinister face that made Bunter quake in his fat skin as he peered out through a chink in the broken door.

Hardly daring to breathe lest it should betray his presence there, the fat junior watched.

Captain Holstern chuckled and drew a sheet of paper from his pocket.

"He's signed it at last! I thought a couple of doses of the whip would do the trick!" he muttered. "Fifty thousand pounds! The old fool of a sister is certain to pay out without making a fuss!"

Billy Bunter shivered.

"And when the money is paid," muttered Holstern, with an evil laugh that made the watching junior's blood run cold, "the rest is easy. Dead men tell no tales!"

He chuckled—a horrible chuckle that sent another shiver down Bunter's spine. Then, to the fat junior's overwhelming relief, the scoundrel turned on his heel and strode out of the room. With beads of perspiration pouring down his face the Owl of the Remove waited until the man's footsteps had died away. Five, ten minutes Bunter crouched there, until he could stand the agony of that cramped position no longer. Then, as quietly as he could, he moved from behind the shelter of that friendly door and cautiously felt his way along the ruined hall.

The danger past, and Captain Holstern constituted the great danger in Bunter's opinion, the fat junior felt his courage reviving. Then, just as he had plucked up sufficient spirit to go below and find and, if possible, liberate the prisoners—for he had no doubt that they were to be found somewhere in the regions below—the footsteps that had struck so much terror into his podgy heart returned.

Like a rabbit Bunter bolted into the room and hid behind the broken door again. A moment later Captain Holstern entered.

"I could have sworn I heard someone moving about," he muttered; and his eyes swept the room with an all-embracing survey, what time his right hand closed on something that bulged in his coat pocket.

Bunter knew what that was, and as the captain made a stride towards the door the fat junior's heart leaped into his mouth. If the villain discovered him he might shoot; in fact, the quaking Owl of the Remove knew instinctively that he would shoot.

As the desperado drew nearer Bunter's wits worked at an alarming rate. In time he remembered that the manor was said to be haunted by a certain cavalier who had fought his last fight in that

manor house in the cause of Charles the First. In time Bunter remembered that the cavalier's name was Sir Humphrey Villemonde, that he had gone down fighting against Cromwell's ironside to the last, taunting them with their cowardice.

Not for nothing was Bunter a ventriloquist. There was a chance—a slender chance that he could pull off this desperate trick, for the setting was in his favour.

Captain Holstern was but a foot away from the door behind which the Owl of the Remove crouched, when an unearthly laugh rising from almost a whisper to a shrill crescendo appeared to come from behind the captain's very back. In a moment he had wheeled, and Bunter saw a glittering weapon in his hand.

"What in the name of thunder was that?" There was terror in Holstern's voice, stark terror in his face, for he was a coward at heart, and at that moment a greater coward than William George Bunter.

"Ha, ha, ha, ha, ha!"

Again that uncanny laugh echoed through the room, this time coming from a different section of it. So unearthly was it that it almost froze the blood in Holstern's veins.

He stood in the centre of the room with levelled revolver, his face the colour of chalk, a picture of terror, and the sight of this man in his true colours gave Bunter a momentary touch of genius.

Throwing his voice to all quarters of the room, he imitated to perfection the clash of steel meeting steel. Groans and knocking laughter were freely intermingled.

"Have at ye, you cowardly knaves! Ho, ho! Another Roundhead the less! Villemonde—Villemonde and King Charles!"

Even nature helped in that extraordinary scene of make believe, for the wind began to rise, and it whistled and shrieked in and out of the crevices in the ruined wall with an eerie music all its own. Then, in addition, a huge piece of plaster fell from the ceiling and landed with a crash no more than six inches away from where Holstern stood.

"Ah!"

The rascal jumped, and a strangled cry left his dry throat.

It was only a matter of seconds that Bunter tried this biggest game of bluff he had ever thought of, but it was vastly successful. Holstern kept turning right and left, left and right as these strange sounds and voices rang out on every side, and his face was the colour of parchment. The hand that held the revolver was shaking, as though its owner had the ague.

Bunter, peering out of the chink in the doorway, thought it high time that Captain Holstern did the disappearing trick, and with consummate skill he threw his voice within a foot of the terrified gaol-bird.

Clash, clash!

"Have at him! Ha, ha! Cleave him to the chine!"

Swish!

The terrified Holstern heard the whistling sound as of steel sweeping through the air about a foot from his head. The close proximity of it seemed to give him back his power of movement, for with a terrified shriek he took to his heels and bolted for the door.

THE THIRTEENTH CHAPTER.

Only a Fiver!

BUNTER gulped in relief as he heard the running footsteps of the scoundrel growing fainter and fainter. Then, when he could hear them no longer, he emerged

from his hiding-place and a fat grin overspread his shining face.

"Phew!" he ejaculated. "That was thumping warm work! He, he, he! Won't this make the fellows sit up!"

But Bunter still had an eye to the main chance. To do the thing properly he had to find the captives. They were below, he knew now. And it was up to him to find them quickly. With remarkable agility he scrambled down the moist stone steps and, striking matches as he went, he entered the cellars.

"Wharton! Wharton! Where are you?" Bunter's voice awoke the echoes, but it was a long time before any answering cry reached him.

The place was a regular honeycomb of cellars that stretched under the entire length and breadth of the house, and Bunter, still striking matches, had almost given up hope of discovering the prisoners when a faint voice, which he recognised as Harry Wharton's, reached his ears.

"Greyfriars! Rescue!"

"Hold on!" bawled Bunter. "Coming, Wharton old fellow!"

At last the fat junior traced the spot whence the voices emanated, and as he appeared in the small glow of light that the match afforded, a gasp of amazement went up from Harry Wharton.

"Bunter!"

"Little me!" said the Owl of the Remove cheerfully. "I'll have you free in a couple of jiffies, old chap!"

Lighting his way over to the bound figure of Harry Wharton—the only figure he could see in the small radius of light that came from each match he struck—Bunter pulled out a pocket knife and began to saw through the ropes that held the captain of the Remove a prisoner. In less than five minutes Wharton was free, but the pain of the circulation returning to his cramped limbs rendered him speechless for the moment.

"Where's the colonel?" said Bunter a trifle peevishly. "There's a hundred pounds reward offered for him, you know."

Which was just like Bunter. Despite the pain that was racking his limbs, Harry Wharton had to smile. Then he indicated with outstretched hand the position where Colonel Wharton was made fast.

Once again Bunter's knife came into requisition, and he slashed away with great vigour at the cords that bound the gallant old soldier. At last the ropes fell away, and, like his nephew, the colonel suffered exquisite agonies as the blood began to circulate through his cramped limbs.

It was a long time before either of the captives spoke.

"Thank Heaven!" It was the colonel who found his voice first. "Thank heavens, my dear boy, you have found us!"

And Harry Wharton added:

"Good old Bunter!"

"I say, colonel," said Bunter suddenly, "I suppose it's all right about the reward?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

That was Harry Wharton's laugh, and it had a wonderful reviving effect upon Colonel Wharton, for his wan face broke into a smile, and he gripped Billy Bunter's podgy hand in a firm grip.

"You shall have the reward, my dear lad," he said. "Rely upon me!"

"But how did you find us, Bunter?" asked Wharton, as he and the colonel massaged their limbs. "Tell us all about it!"

And Billy Bunter did, even to admitting that he had purloined the

envelope Wharton had addressed to Nugent.

"Good job I did, too," added Bunter. "Nugent's a bit soft, you know. I don't suppose he would have discovered your shorthand message for a moment. It wanted a fellow with brains like me to see the clue in it—besides, I wanted the reward—I mean, I was very—very anxious about you, Harry, old chap."

In the darkness uncle and nephew grinned. The principle of bagging another chap's letter was wrong, decidedly wrong, but it had not, apparently, affected the result—except that a reward was now due to Bunter.

"And you actually mean to say that you scared that villain Holstern stiff with your ventriloquism, fatty?" asked Harry Wharton, standing up now and swinging his arms to and fro.

Billy Bunter chuckled.

"He, he, he! It was easy for a chap with my abilities," he said, with that modesty which was typically Bunterish; so to speak. "You should have seen him. I've never seen a man look such a sight in all my life."

Which was true, for it was one of those big bluffs in life that "come off" once and once only.

"But the scoundrel may return," said Wharton suddenly. "Come on, uncle, let's get out of this in case he gets over his fright and returns."

"A sensible idea, my boy," said the colonel, and, with Bunter leading the way, striking matches at frequent intervals, the trio ascended the stone steps that gave entrance to their late prison, negotiated the maze of cellars, and finally emerged into the daylight.

For quite five minutes Wharton and his uncle stood drinking in great gulps of fresh air, what time their eyes smarted painfully in the glare of light which had been denied them for so long.

And while they rested, Bunter, keeping a watchful eye open, saw a shadow moving up the slope, and heard a familiar tread of feet that struck terror into his podgy heart.

Breathing heavily, he dashed back to the room where Harry Wharton and his uncle were resting.

"He's coming back!" he whispered. "He's coming here! Oh lor'!"

Colonel Wharton placed a reassuring hand on the fat junior's shoulder.

"Let him come!" he said grimly. "Harry and I are weak, but we are three to one. If we can take the scoundrel by surprise, he's our prisoner. Quiet!"

In the shadow of the wall the trio waited. Footsteps grew nearer and finally Captain Holstern, with levelled revolver, stood on the threshold of the room. He had evidently recovered from his terror; doubtless reason, in a moment of calm reflection, told him that he had been hoaxed. There was a grim expression on his hardened face as he stood there. Then, next moment, a youthful figure leaped out at him.

The weapon went clattering to the floor as Wharton struck at the scoundrel's arm.

There was a loud imprecation from Captain Holstern, and that was all he had time to utter, for, the fraction of a second later, Colonel Wharton's fist took him full between the eyes and he fell like a pole-axed bullock.

Colonel and Harry Wharton stood ready to strike if the scoundrel showed any sign of renewing the struggle. But for a few seconds Captain Holstern was dead to the world—knocked out.

"Turn him over and bind his wrists, Harry," said Colonel Wharton. "We'll leave him his legs to walk, and I'll take charge of his revolver."



"Now walk, you scoundrel!" said Colonel Wharton sternly. "And remember that this revolver goes off at the first show of trouble." With William George Bunter on one side of Holstern, Harry Wharton on the other, and Colonel Wharton bringing up the rear, the strange procession moved on. (See Chapter 12.)

He picked up the weapon and examined it.

"Loaded!" he said laconically. "It will go hard with Holstern if he attempts any show of resistance. Hallo, where's our fat friend gone?"

"Bunked!" said Harry Wharton, with the ghost of a smile.

"Oh, really, Wharton—"

Billy Bunter emerged from behind a heap of fallen masonry, brave as a lion now that the battle was over. Still, Bunter had played one heroic part that afternoon, and that was something. Harry Wharton could afford to be tolerant in the circumstances.

"We've got the rotter!" he said. "And it's thanks to you, old fat man! Shake!"

He squeezed Bunter's podgy hand in a grip that brought the water to the junior's eyes. But the Owl bore it manfully.

By this time Holstern's senses were returning. His eyes opened, and they blazed bitter hatred at those who a short time since had been at his mercy.

"You—"

A string of vile imprecations sprang to his lips as he gazed with glittering eyes at the trio, but a gesture with the revolver silenced them.

"Our turn now, Holstern," said Colonel Wharton grimly. "Get up on your feet and walk. And remember, you scoundrel, that this revolver goes off at the first show of trouble. You've got that?"

Holstern got to his feet with a snarl. For one moment it looked as if he would

make a bid for liberty, but the muzzle of the revolver pressed against his spine made him think better of it. With William George Bunter on one side of him, Harry Wharton on the other, and Colonel Wharton bringing up the rear, the strange procession descended Black Point.

Then began a trek along the Court-field Road for the police station. The party had barely left the foot of Black Point, however, when voices came to their ears, and at the sound of them Harry Wharton let out a shrill whoop.

"Remove!"

A moment later Peter Todd, Nugent, Johnny Bull, Bob Cherry, and Hurree Jamset Ram Singh burst through the bushes. They nearly collapsed when they saw the very people for whom they had been searching that afternoon.

"Bunter!" exclaimed Peter Todd.

"Oh, my only hat!"

"Bunter!"

William George Bunter carried himself with dignity as befitted the hero of the hour, and as Bob Cherry & Co. dashed forward he treated them to a lofty nod.

But in that moment of reunion nobody had much time to waste on Bunter. It was only when handshakes were over and questions were being asked that the chums of the Remove became interested in Billy Bunter. Even then it seemed a tall story to swallow. Yet here were Harry Wharton and his uncle, and

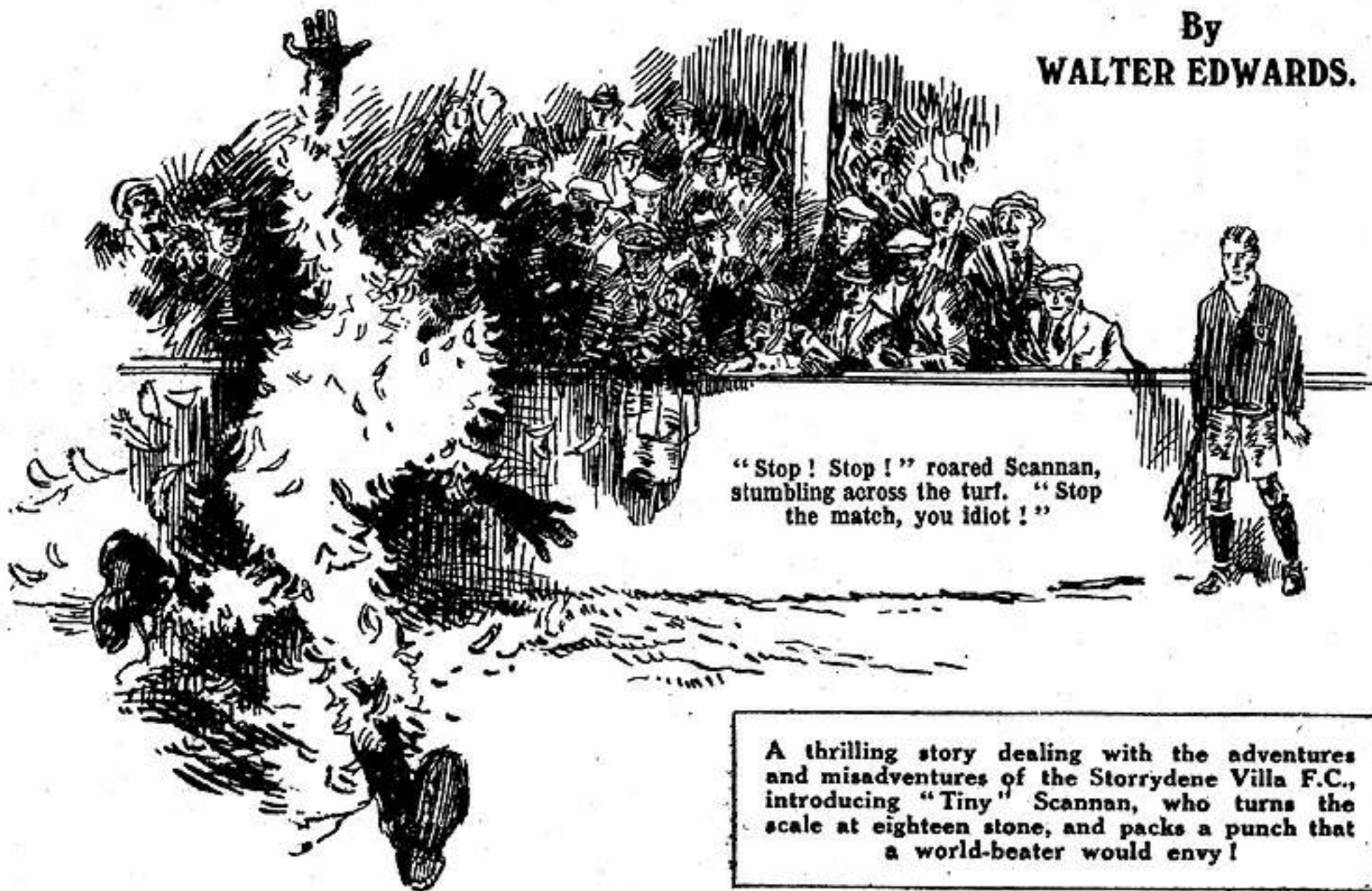
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FALLING FOUL OF THE TEAM'S SUPPORTERS! It's a rare pity Tiny Scannan, the new "Boss" of the Storrydene eleven, hasn't learned the lesson of self-control, for an outbreak of temper on his part lands him into a dickens of a mess with the Storrydene supporters!

THE MAN OF IRON!

By
WALTER EDWARDS.



"Stop! Stop!" roared Scannan, stumbling across the turf. "Stop the match, you idiot!"

A thrilling story dealing with the adventures and misadventures of the Storrydene Villa F.C., introducing "Tiny" Scannan, who turns the scale at eighteen stone, and packs a punch that a world-beater would envy!

The Late Arrival!

AND what about Ailen, Jim?" asked Uncle George. "Hasn't he got anything to say in the matter?"

"Doesn't look like it, does it?" answered Rivett. "Anyway, you can never tell what that fat little greaser's up to! The feller we've got to deal with is Scannan himself, and he's got to be taught that he can't come to Storrydene and throw his weight about. Scannan—"

"Somebody wanting me?" inquired the Man of Iron, wrenching the red plush curtains aside and strolling into the bar-parlour. He grinned round at the company and fixed his little eyes upon Jim Rivett. "I happened to be passing," he explained, "and I noticed that this is the headquarters of your Association, so I thought I'd drop in and give you a final warning. I'm boss of the club now, and I'm not going to put up with interference from anybody, so I advise you to watch your step. Got anything to say to that?"

Uncle George coughed discreetly and stroked his middle chin with a reflective forefinger and thumb.

"Is your name Scannan, me lad?" he asked, his shrewd old eyes studying the big fellow's unlovely countenance.

"That's me," answered Tiny, with an insolent grin. "Anything else you want to know, old relic?"

"Yes," answered Uncle George. "I'd like to know where I've seen you before."

The grin faded out of Tiny Scannan's face as he met the old man's shrewd gaze.

"Guess you've never seen me before," he said, "and I know I've never seen you. And I ain't altogether sorry,

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'cause one look at your face is enough for anybody!" Then, having uttered the insult, he turned to Jim Rivett and changed the subject. "Don't forget that we've still got a bit of private business to settle," he growled, a threat in his tone. "You just missed the hiding of your life this morning; and the same remark applies to your pals!"

It was very obvious that the Man of Iron was out for trouble, and equally obvious that his idea was to strike terror into Jim Rivett and the other members of the Supporters' Association.

"You see," he ran on, "I don't care a snap of the fingers for any of you, and I think this ought to prove it!"

Rivett and his companions were taking their midday meal at a round table in the centre of the room, and no sooner did Tiny Scannan utter his threat than he stepped forward and gripped the edge of the tablecloth; then, wrenching viciously, he swept the cloth away with disastrous effect—plates, knives, mugs, and food scattering in all directions.

"Got anything to say to that?" asked the Man of Iron, standing amidst the wreckage of broken glass and crockery.

Jim Rivett and the others sat stone-still for some seconds, unable to believe that this insane business had really happened; then, acting in unison, they leapt to their feet and rushed straight at the grinning giant who was regarding them with sneering, provocative eyes.

"At him, lads!"

Things began to move swiftly after this, and Scannan, although he did a lot of damage, quickly found that he was no match for the massed attack of the infuriated footer fans; and within three short minutes he was lying flat upon his face, with Jim Rivett squatting in the middle of his broad back and his hands pinned between his shoulder-blades—helpless and beaten.

The Man of Iron had looked for trouble—and found it!

"Anybody seen Scannan?"

"I saw the cat eating something!"

Sir Aubrey Ailen flushed angrily as he turned round and fixed his eyes upon the innocent, unsmiling face of Terry Carson.

"What did you say?" he rasped.

"I mentioned that I'd seen the cat taking luncheon, sir," answered the youngster.

"What's that got to do with Scannan, you young idiot?" demanded the football magnate.

"Nothing, sir, so far as I know; unless it happens to be his cat, or his luncheon!"

Sir Aubrey emitted explosive noises as he glared round at the grinning players.

"Idiots!" he snorted.

Most of the fellows were present, three or four of them in varying stages of undress, and operations were suspended indefinitely as the great man thrust Terry aside and strode up to Hefty Hebble.

"Where's Scannan?" he demanded fiercely.

"I haven't got him, sir," declared the skipper of Storrydene earnestly.

"I don't suppose you have, you maniac!"

"Then, why ask me?"

"I want to know if you've seen him!" rasped Sir Aubrey. "You live in his neighbourhood—"

"What about it?" inquired Hebble. "I'm not Scannan's keeper, although I admit that he ought to have one! Hasn't he turned up?"

"No, he hasn't," fumed the portly baronet, glowering up at the clock; "and he should have been here a quarter

of an hour ago! Do you think anything's happened to him?"

"I don't know, sir, and neither do I care," answered Hefty Hebble truthfully. "But, at a rough guess, I should say that your tame Man of Iron is big and ugly enough to take care of himself!"

"That's a fine way to talk about your skipper!" snapped Ailen. "I'll admit that he's put a bit of life into you lot—gingered you up—but you ought not to sneer at him behind his back!"

Hefty Hebble flushed.

"It isn't a matter of sneering behind his back," he said, with heat, "for the bullying rotter already knows exactly what we think of him! Still, it will be a pity if he's been run over, or kidnapped, or something like that!"

Ailen gave a short, unpleasant laugh.

"Kidnapped—eh?" he said. "And who's going to kidnap Tiny, I should like to know?"

"What about the museum people?" asked Terry Carson. "They will probably stuff him and put him in a glass case. 'The only known specimen of the Mugger-Mugger, which lives on an exclusive diet of gnats' kneecaps and empty sardine-tins!'"

"What are you talking about, you half-witted young idiot?" snapped Sir Aubrey, as a shout of laughter echoed through the dressing-room. "Are you quite sure you're right in the head?"

"No, sir!"

The confession seemed to take the wind out of the great man's sails, for he fumed and fussed as he wandered about the dressing-room and consulted his watch at five-second intervals.

Five minutes ticked away, during which time the rest of the players arrived—that is, they all arrived, with the single exception of Tiny Scannan.

"What can have happened to the fellow?" muttered the baronet, glaring up at the clock as though he hated it. "Hang it all, we kick off in less than half an hour—much less!"

Another ten minutes passed, and still there was no sign or word of the Man of Iron, and Ailen, by this time, was on the verge of wild-eyed hysteria.

"Where can he be?" he demanded, standing in the middle of the room and glaring round at the footballers. "You fellows don't seem to be worrying, confound you!"

"Worrying, sir?" queried Hefty Hebble, poking his head through the neck of his jersey. "Why should we be worrying, sir?"

"W-why should you be worrying, you maniac?" fumed Sir Aubrey, beads of moisture breaking out upon his forehead. "D-do you mean to say that you can stand there and ask me that idiotic question?"

"Sure thing, sir!" nodded Hefty. "Why, I could stand on one leg and do it! Honestly, sir," he added, "I don't understand what's biting you!"

Sir Aubrey almost jumped.

"Biting me!" he cried, in alarm. "And what should be biting me, you idiot?"

"I mean to say," explained Hebble, "I can't understand why you are exhibiting such unmistakable signs of panic!"

"Oh, can't you?" sneered Sir Aubrey. "Then let me tell you something! Without Scannan to put backbone into the side we don't stand an earthly against Bosworth, and it's certain that you fellows will slack your way through the game if you haven't got his eye on you! I don't suppose you lot can understand my point of view, Hebble, but I'm looking forward to the day when we shall win a match!"

"So we're going to have our usual

Saturday afternoon treat, are we, sir?" growled Hebble, a hard expression creeping into his rugged face.

"And why not?" rasped the baronet. "Don't I pay you your wages?"

"Oh, yes, you do all that!" broke in Hefty. "But can't you understand that this Saturday afternoon's outburst of cheap sarcasm is liable to put some of the fellows off their game?"

"Rot! Rubbish!" scoffed Ailen, snapping his fingers under Hebble's ample nose. "Fiddlesticks—fiddle-faddle! You're just bone-lazy, the whole lot of you!"

"You're entitled to your own opinion about that, sir," said Hefty, a grim note in his deep voice. "But if you snap your fingers under my nose again I know I shall muster enough energy to smack your wrist, or something like that!"

There was a warning in the playful remark, and the portly little baronet was not slow to heed it. So he changed the subject.

"Ten minutes to go," he muttered, his gaze upon the clock. "What can have happened to him?" he asked, for the fiftieth time.

"It isn't as though it's raining," remarked Terry Carson, studying the ceiling with wide-open, innocent eyes.

"What's that got to do with it?" snapped Sir Aubrey, jamming his monocle into position and trying to sear the youngster with a fixed stare.

"Well, sir," explained Terry, "rain is wet, so if a Man of Iron gets a soaking it is quite on the cards that his works might turn rusty; in which case—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

A roar of laughter broke from the players and rang through the dressing-room. But the thundercloud upon Sir Aubrey's brow suggested that the great man saw nothing even faintly humorous in Terry Carson's well-reasoned remark.

"This is no time for making a fool of yourself, Carson!" he rasped, taking another glance at his watch. "This business is most serious, for without Tiny Scannan we're as good as lost the game!"

"The little optimist!" murmured Terry, brushing his hair before the cracked mirror. Then, aloud: "What's going to happen if Scannan doesn't turn up, sir? I mean, who will play in his place?"

"No one!" snapped Ailen. "I shall arrange matters so that Scannan can take his place as soon as he arrives! I am convinced that he will turn up, for he is a man of his word! I——"

"You people nearly ready?" asked the referee, popping his head into the dressing-room. "I don't wish to hurry you, of course, but if you'd like me to send for a taxi——"

INTRODUCTION.

After a sequence of wins the boys of Storrydene Villa F.C. strike a bad patch and lose nine matches right off the reel. Dissatisfied with the state of affairs Sir Aubrey Ailen, a purse-proud baronet and chairman of the club, engages "Tiny" Scannan to stop the rot which has set in. "Tiny"—a giant of a man turning the scale at eighteen stone—loses no time in showing the Storrydene boys that he's a bullying tyrant of the worst type. Sir Aubrey's new "find" causes a great sensation among the Storrydene supporters, and when they discover the new boss introducing a dog-whip into his "gingering" methods their indignation knows no bounds.

"We won't stand it!" growls the secretary of the Villa Supporters' Association. "We must let this Scannan know that he's not going to have matters all his own way!"

(Now read on.)

Then the head vanished, and the official was gone.

"You'd better take charge until Scannan arrives, Hebble," said Sir Aubrey; "and you, Grace," he ran on, turning to the right-back, "will drop back into goal for the time being!"

"We're to play a one-back game, sir?" asked Hefty Hebble.

"Looks like it, doesn't it, idiot?" rasped Sir Aubrey Ailen pleasantly. "Hang it all, man, you haven't the brains of a gnat! Get on to the field, all of you, and try to remember that I pay you good wages to win matches!"

It was with this parting remark ringing in their ears that Storrydene Villa trailed across the cinder-track and took the field, and a mighty shout went up from all sides when it was noticed that Hefty Hebble was at the head of the team.

"Good old Hefty!"

"Attaboy!"

And then another shout went up.

"You've lost a man, Hefty!"

"Where's Gordon?"

"What about Ailen's 'find,' Hefty?"

The League champions came out almost on the heels of the local lads, and the thunderous cataclysm of sound that greeted them made it very clear that many thousands of fans had made the long journey from Bosworth.

"Up, the United!"

"Worth! 'Worth!'"

"We are the boys who make no noise! 'Rah, 'rah! 'Rah, 'rah, 'rah!'"

All the gates were closed by this time, and the mighty concourse was swaying gently as the referee blew his whistle and brought the two skippers together in the middle of the field. The fine stretch of turf looked perfect in the watery rays of an April sun, and the black-and-white flag over the clubhouse was fluttering in a light breeze.

It was ideal football weather.

A sudden hush settled upon the ground as the coin was flicked into the air, and no sooner did the visitors' skipper indicate that he would kick with the breeze than a sky-splitting roar went up from the Bosworth fans.

"Worth! 'Worth!'"

"That's the stuff, Smiffy!"

It had long been apparent that the United's supporters were in the best of spirits, their optimism being equalled only by their loud-voiced enthusiasm, and their vocal thunder was swamping the cries of the Storrydene fans when the teams lined up for the kick-off.

"We are the boys who make no noise! 'Rah, 'rah! 'Rah, 'rah, 'rah!'"

Again the deep-throated rumble of voices died down as the referee took a final look round and placed the whistle to his lips, and he was on the point of setting the game in motion when a wild yell from the crowd caused him to turn his head and look across the pitch towards the grandstand.

And then he understood the meaning of the wild outburst of shouts and laughter.

For racing frantically across the turf was a gigantic figure that might have been a man—a big-limbed figure that was human in form, yet covered from head to foot with a mass of snow-white feathers. The hands and face of the strange apparition were pitch black, in striking contrast to the feathers, and the sound that came from the capacious aperture in the face was unmistakably a human voice—the throaty voice of Tiny Scannan!

"Stop—stop!" roared the Man of Iron, stumbling across the turf. "Stop the match, you maniac!"

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The Team Against Him!

TINY SCANNAN looked like something that had escaped out of a nightmare as he waved his long arms in wild fashion and dashed up to the flabbergasted referee.

"What d'you mean by it?" he demanded, his gentle bellow echoing round the ground. "Answer that, you worm!"

The worm, who sported a bristly red moustache, flushed with indignation as he stepped forward and glared up at the Man of Iron.

"W-what do I mean?" he echoed shrilly. "What—?"

"Yes. What do you mean by starting the game without me?" shouted Scannan, his massive form quivering.

"And what do you mean by interrupting the match in this fashion?" rasped the official. "What asylum have you escaped from?" he demanded. "And where's your keeper?"

Tiny Scannan gulped noisily, and for the moment it looked as though he would grip the diminutive referee and hurl him over the grandstand.

"Do—do you think I'm barmy?" he shouted, losing his last vestige of self-control. "Do you think there's nobody at home up here?" He tapped his forehead as he put the question. "Do you—?"

"Yes, I do!" snapped the referee emphatically. "How did you manage to give your keeper the slip, my man?"

"Keeper!" exploded the Man of Iron. "I'm no more mad than you are, you—!"

"Then if this fancy-dress business is your idea of a joke—"

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

"A—a joke!" stuttered Scannan. "Would you call it a joke if you'd been p-painted and feathered and jumped on by a bunch of man-eating cannibals? Would you call it a joke if someone had trod on your face? Would you—?"

The referee waved the question aside. "I decline to discuss my personal likes and dislikes," he said coldly. "Now then, are you going quietly, my man, or do you want me to call the police?"

"What are you babbling about, you little microbe?" shouted the Man of Iron. "Don't you know who I am, you idiot?"

The referee ran his gaze over the apparition, and shook his head.

"No, I don't," he confessed; "for I'm not interested in freaks and curiosities. All I know is that you are holding the game up, and that—"

"But I'm Scannan, man—Scannan!"

A mighty shout went up from the crowd:

"It's the new man!"

"Ailen's latest 'find'!"

"It's time you were shedding your feathers, old bird!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The Man of Iron was almost gibbering as he gripped the referee by the shoulder and shook him savagely.

"Don't you understand, you little worm?" he cried. "I'm Scannan—Tiny Scannan! And I'm skipper of the Storrydene eleven!"

"In that case," said the official, showing no symptom of surprise, "I suggest that you go back and change into your playing rig!" He looked the feathered giant up and down. "This is a football match—not a cock-fight!" he pointed out.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Get a move on, Scannan!"

"Cock-a-doodle-doooo!"

This playful barracking was all

very childish, perhaps, yet it seemed to send the Man of Iron on the verge of insanity. His massive frame was quivering as he glared round at the yelling mass of fans; his features were distorted as he shook a mighty fist in the air.

"Someone's going to pay for this outrage," he shouted throatily, "and I give 'em this public warning! I'll—"

"Get off the field at once, Scannan!" ordered the referee brusquely. "Go at once, or—"

"I'm going," snarled the big fellow, swinging round upon the hard-eyed official, "and I shall be back in about two minutes! And then," he added, glowering at the grinning players, "some of 'em had better look out for squalls!"

Another outburst of laughter and cheers broke from the fans as the Man of Iron turned abruptly and strode across the playing-pitch, and it was the stentorian voice of Uncle George that reached his burning ears as he neared the touchline:

"What are you looking so black about, Scannan, me boy?"

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

"Perhaps he's not so black as he's painted!" added Uncle George, with an infectious guffaw that made the crowd sway with laughter.

Tiny Scannan hesitated for a moment and fixed his ugly gaze upon the old fellow's rubicund countenance; then, shaking his fist in threatening fashion, he raced across the cinder-track and disappeared beneath the grandstand.

The referee, meanwhile, was consulting his watch, and no sooner did the smiling players sort themselves out than he took a final look round the ground and set the game in motion.

Pheep!

The voice of the whistle reached Scannan as he tore off his clothes and plunged into a hot bath, and he muttered fiercely to himself as he scrubbed away with a hard brush and tried to remove the coating of paint and boot-polish that had transformed him into a coal black nigger.

"The hounds! The curs!" he ground out, using large quantities of yellow soap and pumicestone with frenzied energy. "But I'll get even with 'em, by heck—I'll get even with 'em! I'll give 'em Supporters' Association!"

His black brows came together in a vicious frown as the roar of the Bosworth fans announced that the visitors were putting in some good work.

"They wouldn't stand an earthly if I was between the sticks!" he muttered, with his usual modesty. "Yet I've got to stay here—skinning myself alive!"

His rage increased with the passing of minutes, for victory for the United meant that he would be ten pounds out of pocket; also, he was anxious to prove to the local fans that he was a super-man—the finest all-rounder in the country.

"I'll show 'em a thing or two!" he grated, still scrubbing. "If I could only get rid of this filthy paint—"

He became wild-eyed and desperate as the precious minutes ticked away, and still he made scarcely any impression upon the stain, and at the end of half an hour he was in a state bordering upon insanity.

"The hounds!" he muttered again and again.

The voice of the crowd gave him a rough idea of how the game was going

and it seemed to him that things were pretty even.

"If they can only keep 'em out for another ten minutes or so they'll have nothing to worry about," he muttered.

Applying yellow soap and pumicestone with renewed energy, he succeeded in removing the greater part of the paint, and he was in the act of howling himself when the long-drawn-out blast of the whistle announced that half-time had arrived.

"Huh! And they haven't scored!" grunted Scannan, reaching for his playing rig. "Well, there's goin' to be a whole heap of trouble for young Carson and the rest if they don't get a couple next half! What they want is someone to ginger 'em up, and I reckon I'm the feller to do it, by heck!"

His broad countenance was raw and discoloured as he dabbed it gently.

"Guess I'm going to make things hum this afternoon!" he told himself, striding away towards the dressing-room.

"They won't expect to see me now, so there's a pleasant surprise in store for the bone-lazy stiff! And if they give me any lip—" He clenched a mighty leg-o'-mutton fist and regarded it almost affectionately. "I'll smash 'em!" he vowed.

He had worked himself into a state of white-hot rage by the time he reached the dressing-room.

Halting upon the threshold, he glared round.

"Huh!" he grunted.

"Same to you—with aluminium knobs on," murmured Terry Carson, a picture of childlike innocence. Then, aloud: "How's your poor face, old man? It was very careless of you to let that motor-bus run over it—"

A laugh broke from the other players, but there was no trace of amusement upon Tiny's strange collection of features as he turned slowly and glared at the smiling centre-forward.

"I've already warned you, you little rat!" he growled; and his deep voice seemed to well up from the interior of his boots. "I could kill you with one blow of my fist—"

"But wouldn't that be unkind?" asked Terry. "It—it wouldn't be matey, would it?"

The players were chuckling as the lean-limbed youngster walked across the room and gazed up at the scowling giant.

"Look here, Scannan," said Terry, with a change of tone, "why don't you drop this Prussian blood and iron idea and try to become a human being? We believe in discipline and all that kind of thing, you know, but you'll never get the best out of us by grunting and bullying! And you're some grunter, I give you my word! Old Hefty may have been easy going, but we never thought of questioning his orders; yet he never tried any of the rough stuff! You should have a long whip and a bunch of niggers if you want to go in for this Man of Iron business, Scanny; you've certainly come to the wrong shop if you think you can make us jump round the cage by bullying and force!" He smiled up at Scannan, who was striving to articulate. "Think it over, old man! Try it over on the piano when you get home!"

(With all his bullying methods Tiny Scannan doesn't get much change out of Terry Carson, for Terry doesn't know what fear is. Mind you read the continuation of this thrilling story in next week's MAGNET. Order your copy early.)

IN MERCILESS HANDS!

(Continued from page 23.)

according to them the Owl of the Remove had done the trick. Really, as Peter Todd afterwards remarked, "anyone could have knocked him over with a feather."

"No wonder old fat barrel was so keen to cut his third helping at dinner," said Peter Todd. "He was afraid that we should get there before him, because I know he overheard me telling Nugent that we intended exploring Black Point this afternoon. And to think that they were not so very far away, after all."

But for all his banter, Peter Todd was as enthusiastic as any when Bob Cherry called for three cheers for the hero of the hour, namely, William George Bunter. The Owl of the Remove listened to those ringing cheers, his fat face shiny and grubby, but very happy. Doubtless the music of those cheers would linger in his memory for all time.

Bunter's amazing part in the solving of the mystery that had surrounded the baffling disappearance of Harry Wharton and his uncle caused a nine days' wonder at Greyfriars, and the fat junior fairly basked in a sea of limelight.

He had been promised the reward, in fact, Miss Wharton, in her joy at seeing her brother and nephew again, generously doubled it.

From the Head, Billy Bunter received a judicious mixture of praise and advice. Indubitably Bunter had done wrong, first by purloining the envelope that was addressed to Frank Nugent, and secondly by not placing the information he had gained from it before the authorities. Still, even those indiscretions did not detract from his glory.

There was a gigantic spread in the Rag that night in honour of the great occasion, and Billy Bunter was the guest of honour.

The trial of Captain Holstern aroused widespread interest throughout the country—the heavy sentence that was passed upon the scoundrel exciting little sympathy in the hearts of those who had read the full newspaper account of his villainy.

Once again William George Bunter was given an ample share of the limelight, for he had to appear in the witness box to give evidence.

There was only one thing arising out of the whole affair with which William George Bunter considered he had good cause to grieve, and that lay in the question of the reward.

In full view of the school, and accompanied by much handclapping and cheering, he had received a cheque from the fair hands of Miss Wharton for two hundred pounds!

And then, when the assembled school had been dismissed, Mr. Quelch, the master of the Remove, had calmly ordered his fat pupil to hand over that

handsome cheque, with the remark that two hundred pounds was too large a sum of money for a schoolboy to have in his possession to do with as he liked. Reluctantly, very reluctantly, Billy Bunter parted with that cheque, and it faded from his view like a beautiful dream.

Mr. Quelch forwarded the cheque to Mr. Samuel Bunter, with the suggestion that that City gentleman should take care of it until his young hopeful reached such age of discretion as would see the money put to good advantage. Mr. Samuel Bunter readily agreed to take charge of the two hundred pounds, as Mr. Quelch suggested, and in a letter to William George he expressed his admiration of what his son had done, promised to take care of the two hundred pounds, and enclosed in the missive a crisp five-pound note—a sum he considered quite large enough for the needs of Billy Bunter just then.

The fiver went the way of all money that came into the grubby paws of the Owl of the Remove, but long after he had spent the last penny of it, Bunter's heroic deed at the Haunted Manor was talked about the length and breadth of Greyfriars—a poor consolation, in Billy Bunter's opinion, but still a consolation.

THE END.

(Billy Bunter's in the limelight again next week, chums. Don't miss "BUNTER'S PRIZE ESSAY!" next Saturday's topping long story of Greyfriars.)

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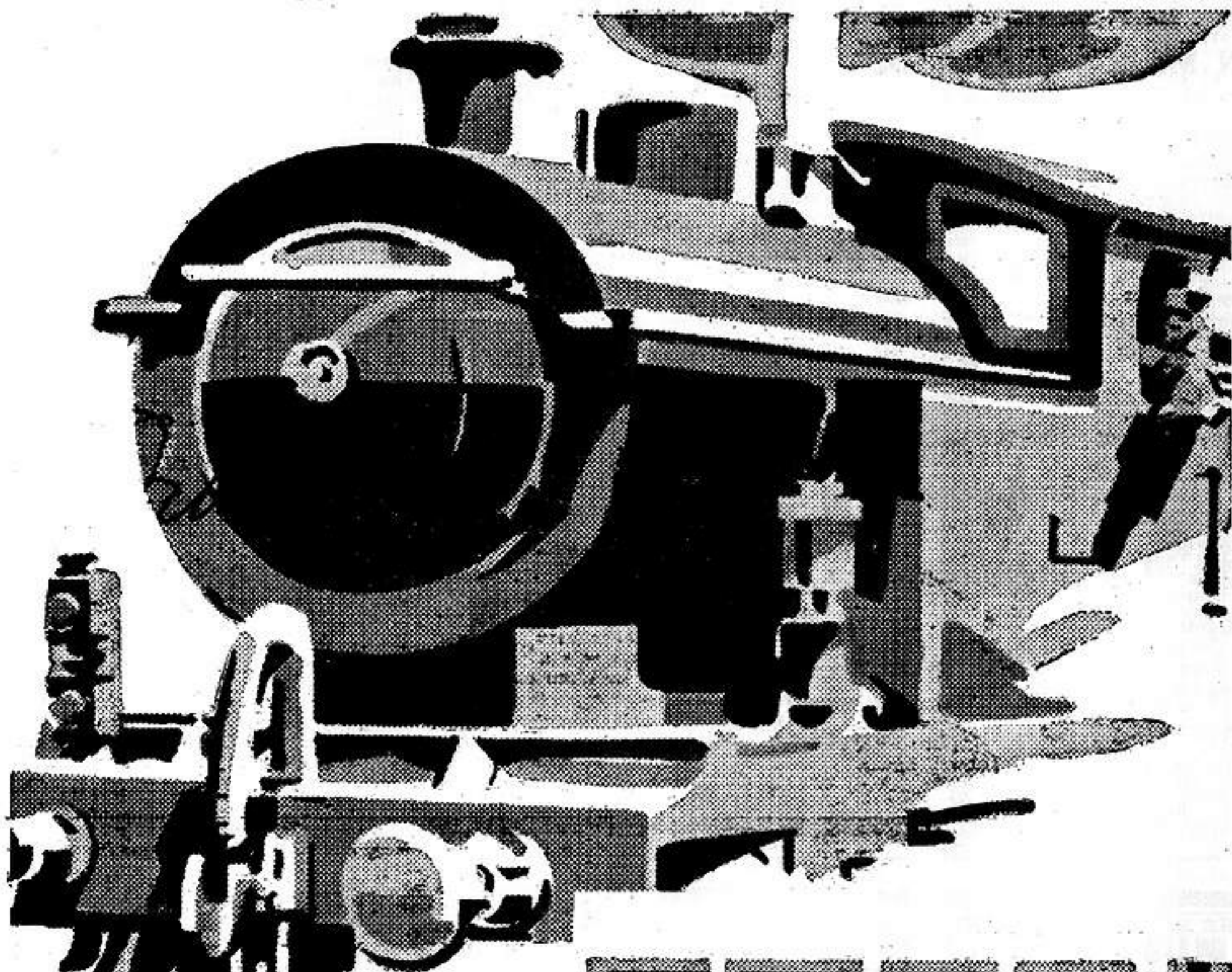
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