

HARRY WHARTON & Co. ON THE FILMS! SEE THE NOVEL
STORY INSIDE.

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The Magnet

EVERY
SATURDAY.



BUNTER AND THE BURGLAR!

(A dramatic incident from this week's schoolboy adventure story featuring Harry Wharton & Co., the chums of Greyfriars.)



Come Into the Office, Boys!

Always glad to hear from you, chums, so drop me a line to the following address: The Editor, The "Magnet" Library, The Amalgamated Press, Ltd., Fleetway House, Farringdon Street, London, E.C.4.

NOTE.—All Jokes and Limericks should be sent to c/o "Magnet," 5, Carmelite Street, London, E.C.4 (Comp.).

How's this for a clever Limerick, chums?

Said Skinner, by way of a joke,
Giving Bunter a nice, friendly poke:
"Are you hungry, old bean?
Really famished, I mean?
Well, then, buzz off, and go and eat
cake!"

A pocket wallet has been forwarded to: Sydney Stanley, 194, Stapleton Hall Road, Stroud Green, N.4, for this limerick.

PUT on your thinking caps, chums! Here's a real teaser for you, which has been sent along by one of my readers. Is it possible, he asks, for a person to be born and never have another birthday, even though he lives to a ripe old age? The answer is: "Yes!" How do I make that out? I'll explain. It's a bit tricky, so—stand by!

When a ship crosses the 180th meridian, which divides the Western from the Eastern hemisphere, it has to add or subtract a day from its reckoning, according to the direction in which it is proceeding, because there is a day difference in the times of the two hemispheres. One leap year a vessel crossed this meridian, and had to add a day to its reckoning. It crossed on February 29th, and the extra day, therefore, became February 30th. A boy happened to be born aboard the ship on that particular extra day, which means that his birthday is February 30th, and he will never have another birthday, unless he should again cross the 180th meridian on that particular day!

THE MISSING DAY!

This puzzling astronomical fact has served many authors and poets as a peg upon which to hang fantastic or humorous stories and poems. Bret Harte wrote a poem about a Spanish ship which crossed the meridian and had to drop one day. As this day happened to be the feast day of the ship's particular saint, the ship's captain decided to cross the meridian in the opposite direction, and thus get two saint's days to make up for the one which he lost. But he couldn't do that until the following year—and then the weather prevented him from doing so. According to the poem, that skipper is still trying to cross the 180th meridian on one particular day!

ASTRONOMY AND ASTROLOGY!

Talking about astronomy gives me an opportunity of answering a question from Frank Hunter, of Cambridge, who wants to know what is the difference between astronomy and astrology. Astronomy, of course, is the science of the heavens, whereas astrology is a theory that the heavens have something to do

with our destinies, and everything we do is mapped out for us in the heavens. Believers in astrology claim that they can foretell the future, but astrology is not taken seriously by scientists.

HOWLERS!

No, this has nothing to do with those oscillating fiends who do their best to make us jump on our wireless sets! It refers to what are generally known as "schoolboy howlers." Jim Philips, of Liverpool, is very indignant at the implied slur upon schoolboys. "What about 'grown-ups'?" he demands indignantly. "I'm always coming across howlers which they make. For instance, take the song which says: 'I shall come home when the ebb-tide flows!' Even a born idiot ought to know that an ebb-tide is an out-going tide, and a flood tide is an incoming one! Quite so, Jim. I'm afraid some song-writers and poets make a regular hash of it when they start on nautical matters.

What about the poem which says: "Away the good ship sails, and leaves old England on the lee?" The lee being the opposite direction to that from which the wind is blowing, this absurd line apparently means that the ship is sailing in the teeth of the wind direct for England!

WHO IS "JIMMY THE ONE?"

is the unusual query that comes from H. Mc. Donald, of Aberdeen. "Jimmy the One" is naval slang for the first lieutenant aboard a warship. And, while I am about it, let me give H. M. a few other examples of the expressive slang used in the Navy. The captain is known as "the owner," the commander is "the bloke," "Tanky" is the navigator, and "Torps" the torpedo lieutenant. The midshipmen are known as "Snotties," and the Chaplain as "Holy Joe," or "The Devil dodger." The Master-at-arms is called the "Jaunty," and the ship's corporals are "Crushers." A soldier is a "grabby," a marine is a "jolly" or "bullock," and the marine officer is "Joey." But I could fill a volume with naval slang.

WHICH IS THE HIGHEST MOTOR ROAD

in Europe? is the question which another reader has put to me. This distinction belongs to the Stelvio Pass in Northern Italy. It rises to a height of 9,050 feet, and twice a day in summer an automobile mail service, run by the Italian Government crosses it. In the winter, the road is impassable. Many tourists flock to the Stelvio Pass, for the crossing of it provides one with a wonderful panorama of scenery—and there are

any amount of thrills, for the road ascends and descends in a succession of hairpin bends, with a mountain on one side, and a sheer precipice on the other. Before the War the top of the pass marked the frontier between Italy and Austria. Now, however, Italy owns the land on both sides of the pass.

I feel my "Chat" would not be complete this week if I failed to mention the fact that our splendid companion paper, the "Gem," is giving away a marvellous series of picture cards, in full colours, dealing with mechanical mysteries and

MARVELS OF THE FUTURE!

This set of "Peeps into the Future," consisting of sixteen pictures, the like of which the world has never seen before—is really worth having. Picture No. 1 which was presented FREE with last week's issue of the "Gem" depicts a mid-Atlantic aerodrome of the future. This week's FREE picture card is even better still—a Trans-Continental Coach.

Pop round to your newsagent now, chum, and ask him to reserve you a copy of next Wednesday's issue of the "Gem" containing "Marvels of the Future" No. 2.

Here is

A CHUCKLE TO FINISH

this chat of mine. It earns a MAGNET pen-knife for Sidney Mead of 7, Windsor Court, Moscow Road, Bayswater.

"Jest fancy," exclaimed Bridget. "According to a paper I've been reading, when a man loses one of his senses another gets more developed. For instance, a blind man gets more sense in hearing and touch."

Put thought the matter over long and anxiously.

"Sure, and it's quite true," he remarked learnedly, after a while. "O've noticed it myself. When a man has got one leg shorter than the other, begorra, the other's longer!"

Next week's issue of the MAGNET will be a bumper one I can assure you, chums. The outstanding feature of the programme is undoubtedly the splendid long complete story of Harry Wharton & Co. entitled:

"FAREWELL TO THE FILMS!" By Frank Richards.

For some weeks now you have been thrilled by the amazing adventures of your old favourites in Los Angeles. But their tour has come to an end at last, and home again is the order of the day.

Next comes the final story in the St. Sam's series dealing with the trouble between Dr. Birchmell, the rascally old Head, and Monsure Froggay, the French master:

"A DUEL TO THE DETH!"

Here you'll find young Dicky Nugent at the top of his form.

And last, but by no means the least, is another gripping instalment of famous Carney Allan's dirt-track serial:

"SPEEDWAY PALS!"

Make sure of this bumper issue, chums, by ordering it well in advance. Meet you again next week, cheerio.

YOUR EDITOR.

FUN AND DRAMA IN THE FILM CITY OF LOS ANGELES!



ALL THROUGH BUNTER!

Another lively schoolboy adventure yarn featuring Harry Wharton & Co. By FRANK RICHARDS:

THE FIRST CHAPTER.

Beastly for Bunter!

"He, he, he!"
Thus William George Bunter.
Bunter had been silent for ten minutes or more. That was unusual for Billy Bunter. His fat brain had been working. That was still more unusual.

As a rule, Billy Bunter's conversation resembled the little brook that went on for ever. On the rare occasions when he was silent he was not suspected of thinking. Indeed, it was doubted whether Nature had supplied him with the necessary apparatus for that process.

"He, he, he!"
Bunter had not only been thinking, but he seemed to have arrived at a satisfactory solution of the problem that had worried his podgy intellect.

His fat cackinnation awoke the echoes of the patio in the old rancho at Jack-Rabbit.

The other fellows had not noticed that Bunter was buried in thought. They had noticed, of course, that he was silent. Never did silence seem so golden as when Bunter was silent.

Breakfast was over on the Perfection location at Jack-Rabbit. Harry Wharton & Co., sitting under the trees, were discussing the morning's work while they waited for Mr. Van Duck to call them to their daily task of facing the cameras. The great school film for which the chums of Greyfriars had come out to Los Angeles was approaching its completion, and their days on the Perfection location were numbered. In a few days more they were to return to Hollywood for the final scenes in the Perfection studio there.

"He, he, he!"

Evidently Billy Bunter was entertained by the result of his unusual mental efforts.

His fat face was irradiated by a fat

grin, and his squeaky cackinnation was thrice repeated.

Bob Cherry glanced round with a puzzled look.

"Have you got an alarm clock in your pocket, Bunter?"

"Eh? No."

"Then what's making that weird noise?"

"Beast!"

"The cackfulness of the absurd Bunter does not resemble the music of the esteemed spherics," remarked Hurree Jamset Ram Singh.

"I say, you fellows——"

"I knew it was too good to last!" said Frank Nugent, with a sigh. "Give your chin another rest, Bunter."

"I've thought of a wheeze," said Bunter, blinking at the Famous Five

would stand all the expenses. But he's stingy! I can't even hire a taxi without having to pay the driver myself."

"Awful!" said Harry Wharton, laughing.

"The awful-fulness is——"

"Terrific and preposterous!" chuckled Bob Cherry.

"I say, you fellows, don't jaw so much," said Bunter. "You're like a sheep's head, you know—nearly all jaw. As I was saying, old Fish is mean. But an agreement is an agreement. If he won't pay my bill at Long Beach Boarding-House I'm justified in making him."

"Eh?"

"What?"

"I think I'm fully justified!" said Bunter.

"Oh, my hat!" said Bob. "I shouldn't worry so much about the justification as the possibility! I can't see Mr. Fish paying bills he doesn't want to pay!"

The juniors chuckled.

Mr. Hiram K. Fish certainly had undertaken to pay the expenses of the Greyfriars party at Los Angeles, in return for their services in the studio. But Mr. Fish had a very keen appreciation of the value of money, and there was no doubt that he had kept those expenses down with considerable care. Orpheus with his lute drew iron tears down Pluto's cheek; but had he been set the task of drawing dollars from Mr. Hiram K. Fish he would have given it up in despair. How Billy Bunter proposed to do it was a puzzle.

"I'm not going to tell you fellows," said Bunter cautiously. "If Fishy got hold of it he would give me away. He knows what a wonderful ventriloquist I am. He told old Schootz about my imitating his voice—what he calls a voice—on the telephone. Schootz laid into me with a stick. I'd have thrashed the fellow, only——"

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"The onlyfulness is terrific."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Look here, you fat duffer," said Harry Wharton. "You've been licked for playing tricks on Schootz's telephone. Serve you jolly well right. Don't do it any more. It means another licking."

"That wouldn't be any good," explained Bunter. "It was Mr. Fish who made the arrangements at the boarding-house for us. The boarding-house people know his voice. If he telephoned from here, giving instructions for me to be taken in and treated well, they'd play up, of course. They'd put it down on his bill."

"But he won't!" said Nugent.

"He, he, he!"

"You fat chump," said Bob. "If you're thinking of telephoning in Mr. Fish's name—"

"He, he, he!"

"Look here, you chump—" said Harry.

"I'm not going to tell you fellows anything about it," said Bunter. "A still tongue shows a wise head, you know. I may be going to telephone when Van Duck's gone out of his office. I may be going to make old Fish pay my bills, as he's agreed. On the other hand, I may not. I decline to take you fellows into my confidence on the subject."

"Oh, my hat!"

"Least said, soonest mended," said Bunter sagely. "You needn't expect to see me here when you come back after doing your rather poor stunts on the films. I shall be gone. Whether I'm going back to the boarding-house at Hollywood or not, I decline to tell you. As for that stingy old scarecrow Fish—"

"Shut up!" breathed Bob Cherry.

From the arched entrance of the old ranch-house two figures came in sight—the short and podgy figure of Mr. Schootz, director of Perfection Pictures, and the tall and bony figure of Mr. Hiram K. Fish.

As Bunter had his back to them, naturally he did not see them. Bunter had no eyes in the back of his head.

As for shutting up when he was told, that was not in Bunter's line. Mr. Schootz and Mr. Fish came strolling into the patio, while Bunter ran on regardless.

"That stingy beast old Fish—"

"Shut up!" hissed Wharton.

"Shan't! I'm the fellow to say what I think," said Bunter, "and what I think of old Fish is this—that of all the stingy, mean, miserly, grinding old blighters old Fish takes the cake."

Mr. Fish was seen to give a convulsive start as Bunter's dulcet tones fell on his ears.

Leaving Mr. Schootz, who was grinning, Mr. Fish strode towards William George Bunter. He was not grinning. He was frowning—thunderously. His sharp eyes were glinting.

"Like father, like son!" went on the happily unconscious Owl of the Remove. "You fellows know that Fishy is the meanest, stingiest outsider at Greyfriars. I thought he was the limit, till I saw old Fish! But young Fish isn't a patch on old Fish, when it comes to real stinginess! Old Fish is the ugliest, meanest, close-fistedest blighter even in the United States, which is saying a lot, and all I can say is— Yaroooooooh!"

A finger and thumb that closed like a vice on Bunter's fat ear, caused him to end his remarks in that surprising manner.

He jumped.

"What?" roared Mr. Fish.

"Whooop! Leggo! Yaroooooh!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

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Instead of letting go, Hiram K. Fish compressed his grip on Bunter's ear. He seemed bent on making finger and thumb meet through it. A yell of anguish awoke the echoes of Jack-Rabbit Canyon.

"You fat mugwump!" roared Mr. Fish.

"Yow-ow-ow! I—I wasn't speaking about you!" roared Bunter. "I—I—I was speaking about some other Fish—"

"You pesky, pie-faced jay!" hooted Mr. Fish, putting on more pressure, till Bunter wriggled like a fat jelly.

"Yarooooh! Leggo! I—I—I—Yoop! I—I was only joking!" shrieked Bunter. "Can't you take a jug-jug-jug-joke? Yoop! What I really meant to say was— Yarooooooop!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I guess you blow off your mouth a little too much, you pesky slab-sided mutt!" hooted Mr. Fish, still gripping Bunter's ear.

"Yarooooh! Leggo!"

"Git!" snorted Mr. Fish.

He spun Bunter round by his ear. Then he released the ear, at the same moment planting a boot on Bunter's tight trousers.

"Whooop!"

Bunter "got." In fact, he flew! He vanished in the distance, an anguished howl floating back. Then the voice of Mr. Van Duck, the assistant director, called to Harry Wharton & Co., and they went out of the rancho, chuckling, to their morning's work before the cameras.

THE SECOND CHAPTER.

The Shot from the Hill!

"POLK!"

"Br-r-r-r-r!"

"What the thump does he want?" growled Coker of the

Fifth.

No member of the Greyfriars party was pleased to see Myron Polk, the Perfection star. Why the "handsomest man in Hollywood" was on the scene no member of the party could understand. But he was there!

It was to be a busy morning for Harry Wharton & Co. Several scenes of the great school film were to be "shot." The scene was pitched up the canyon, at a considerable distance from the rancho. All the schoolboys were there, and Mr. Schootz had come along, as well as Mr. Van Duck; and Hiram K. Fish, for once, was honouring the filming with his presence. There were a number of movie men and movie girls, who were wanted in the various scenes, as well as a small army of scene-shifters. Nobody had expected Myron Polk to appear. That day there was nothing doing in the "Lord of the Desert" film, in which Polk figured as the sheikh.

Often enough Mr. Schootz had insisted upon the juniors watching Mr. Polk in his scenes, to pick up tips from his excellent acting. But Mr. Polk had never hitherto shown any desire to watch the Greyfriars fellows at work. He was not likely to suppose that he could learn anything from them, and certainly he took no friendly interest in the school picture or the players therein.

Ever since Harry Wharton & Co. had arrived at Hollywood there had been bitter blood between them and the Perfection star, so why he had come to the location now was rather a mystery. On this occasion, at all events, he did not seem to be looking for trouble. He took no notice of the juniors, carefully avoiding them in fact. Only once his glance rested on Harry Wharton, and for that moment his eyes glittered.

Mr. Schootz was obviously surprised

to see the star there. But his fat face wore a smile as he greeted him. Perhaps he took Polk's presence as a sign that the film star had forgotten his feud with the Greyfriars party. That feud had caused the Perfection director a great deal of worry and trouble. He did not believe—or, at all events, was determined not to believe—that Polk had been at the bottom of the attack the gang of bootleggers in the Santa Monica hills had made on Harry Wharton & Co. But the continued friction had interfered with business. And to Mr. Schootz, as to Mr. Fish, business was the beginning and end of all things.

"You moseyed in to see the shooting, Polk?" he asked affably.

The Perfection star nodded.

"Yes; I haven't seen much so far of these wonderful recruits of yours," he answered. He could not keep a sneer out of his voice.

"Oh, they're worth seeing!" said Mr. Schootz, disregarding the sneer. "I guess they'll never get the film fans rubbering like you do, Polk; but they're sure good, now I've licked them into shape. Specially Wharton," added Mr. Schootz, a little maliciously. "He's sure some film actor."

Polk's lip curled.

"I guess Wharton must be the real goods, as you figured that he was good enough to take my place," he sneered.

"Only when you gave it a miss," said Mr. Schootz. "I guess I'd rather you'd played up. But you wouldn't! And nobody will know that it was the kid playing them two scenes in the 'Lord of the Desert.'"

"It's the talk of Hollywood, since the boy gave the show away," answered Polk.

"I guess he never spilled anything about it," said Mr. Schootz. "It was some other guy. He's told me he never said a word about it."

"You can hardly expect me to believe him," said Polk, with a shrug of the shoulders. "But I haven't come here to raise that question again. I just want to look on and see how the thing goes."

"That's O.K.," said Mr. Schootz, in great relief. "What's the good of trouble? It ain't business."

"Quite!" agreed Polk.

The handsomest man in Hollywood loafed about near the cameras, with his hands in his pockets, looking on, and Mr. Schootz took up his megaphone and devoted his attention to business.

Harry Wharton & Co. elaborately took no notice of Polk.

They, at all events, did not want any more trouble with the Perfection star. His presence there surprised them, and certainly did not please them, and they did not, like Mr. Rigg Schootz, take it as a sign that the star was getting into a more amicable and reasonable frame of mind. The least suspicious member of the party could not help feeling that Polk had something up his sleeve, and that he had not come there simply to look on at the filming of the schoolboy actors whom he detested.

"The esteemed and ridiculous Polk is up to something," Hurree Janset Ram Singh murmured in Wharton's ear.

"I've no doubt of that," answered Harry. "But what?"

The nabob of Bhanipur shook his head. "The knowfulness is not terrific; but the suspectfulness is great," he said. "But you may bet your esteemed boots that there is something on."

Harry Wharton was assured of that. But as Polk had not apparently come there for a shindy, it was difficult to guess what purpose he had to serve by coming. That his enmity was as bitter



The report of a rifle rolled echoing down the canyon. It was echoed by a sudden shriek from Myron Polk, and the Perfection star staggered and fell with a crash to the earth. "Great John James Brown!" spluttered Mr. Fish. (See Chapter 2.)

as ever, the captain of the Greyfriars Remove did not doubt for a moment.

"I guess you're talking out of the back of your neck, Inky," said Fisher T. Fish. "I'll say you galoots ought to be bucked, when a guy like Polk takes the trouble to give you a look-in."

"The buckfulness is not great, my esteemed Fishy."

"Why, that guy is getting fifty thousand dollars for acting in the 'Lord of the Desert,' picture," said Fisher T. Fish.

The juniors grinned. Evidently, in Fishy's opinion, a man who received fifty thousand dollars for a picture could do no wrong.

Dollars, like charity, covered a multitude of sins, in Fishy's valuable opinion.

There was a roar from Mr. Schootz's megaphone.

"Say, you guys, you figure that you've come here to chew the rag!" roared Mr. Schootz.

And the discussion stopped suddenly.

The schoolboy actors had no time to bother about Polk, in fact. And as they proceeded to form the scene, they almost forgot that he was there. Bright sunlight streamed down into Jack-Rabbit Canyon. Except for the Perfection company, the place was utterly solitary. In the distance, on either side, the rugged walls of the canyon rose to a great height, clothed in trees, for the most part. Save for the film party, the canyon and its surrounding hills were as solitary as in the old days when California was a Mexican province, and the native Indians lurked in the rugged passes of the Santa Monica mountains.

In the "set" that was now being

fixed, Harry Wharton was taking the star part. Wharton had shown considerable gifts as a cinema actor, and Mr. Schootz had pronounced more than once that he was the "goods." It was Wharton, who, in the guise of an Arab sheikh, had twice played Polk's part in the "Lord of the Desert" film—in stunts for which the Perfection star had lacked the necessary nerve. In a school scene, of course, Wharton was more at home.

The set represented a corner of a school quadrangle. Leonora, the movie girl, artistically fixed up as the headmaster's pretty daughter, was taking part in it. The schoolboy was lingering in the quad talking to the school-girl, when Coker of the Fifth was to rush on the scene, fall over some obstacle, and roll at their feet. Coker, to his intense indignation, was always selected for parts of comic relief.

At the opening of the scene, Wharton was standing alone, the other fellows in the distance.

"Shoot!" grunted the director.

Mr. Schootz was addressing the camera men.

But there came a very unexpected response.

From the high wood upon the side of Jack-Rabbit Canyon, a puff of white smoke curled from the trees.

Wharton gave a violent start.

Something—he did not realise that it was a bullet—passed whizzing within a few inches of him.

It struck a rock close at hand and ricocheted.

The report of a rifle rolled echoing down the canyon. It was echoed by a

sudden shriek from Myron Polk, and the Perfection star staggered, and fell with a crash to the earth.

THE THIRD CHAPTER.

Hoist By His Own Petard!

"GREAT John James Brown!" spluttered Mr. Fish.

"Snakes!" gasped Mr. Schootz.

Instantly all was confusion.

The camera men, instead of grinding, stared round about them in amazement. All eyes were turned on Myron Polk.

"That—that was a shot!" stammered Mr. Van Duck.

"Gee-whiz!"

Wharton put his hand to his cheek. He had felt the wind of the bullet as it passed.

He knew that the shot had been meant for him. But it was upon the Perfection star that all eyes were fixed.

Myron Polk lay on the earth, gasping and shrieking, with blood running down his face. The handsomest face in Hollywood was almost unrecognisable.

"Polk—he's been shot!" stammered Mr. Schootz.

"Great John James Brown!"

"What the thunder—"

Leonora was the first to reach the fallen man. She raised Myron Polk's head from the ground.

The rest of the company gathered round. For the moment no one thought of the danger of another shot from the hill.

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But the unseen rifleman, whoever he was, did not fire again. Harry Wharton, at whom he had aimed, was lost in the crowd now.

Myron Polk, utterly unnerved, was still shrieking. For some moments the general impression was that the Perfection star was badly hurt. Only Wharton knew that he must have been struck accidentally by the glancing bullet, which certainly had not been intended for him.

"I guess it's only a scratch, Mr. Polk," said Leonora reassuringly. "Jest a scratch, Mr. Polk."

The Perfection star sat up, his head resting on Leonora's knee.

His face was white as chalk, save where the blood streaked it. On his cheek was a gash where the bullet had grazed.

His eyes were dilated. "The fool!" he gasped. "The fool!"

His hand went to the cut on his cheek. His fingers came away crimsoned.

"You ain't badly hurt, Mr. Polk," said Leonora. "You sure ain't. It's jest a scratch."

"A scratch!" repeated Polk. A scratch on the face of the handsomest man in Hollywood was a serious matter.

Mr. Schootz on one side, Mr. Van Duck on the other, raised the Perfection star to his feet. He was utterly shaken, and trembling from head to foot.

"Only a scratch!" said Mr. Schootz, in great relief. "I guess we better get you to the rancho, Polk. Gee-whiz! What ornery guy's been loosing off shots like that? Might have killed somebody!"

"Give me a glass," said Polk hoarsely.

"He knew that he was not hurt now; though for a moment or two he had been badly scared. He was thinking of his good looks. Myron Polk's face was his fortune.

"A glass!" repeated Mr. Schootz blankly.

"Yes, yes! Confound you—quick!"

"Gee-whiz!"

Leonora produced a pocket mirror. Polk snatched it, held it up, and looked at his bleeding face.

A ringing curse broke from his lips.

"Disfigured!" he said huskily.

"Disfigured!"

"I guess it will be all right; you see a surgeon," said Mr. Schootz comfortingly. "You'll have jest a scar—"

"A scar!" groaned Polk. "A scar on my face!"

"You've sure been lucky," said Mr. Fish. "That pesky shot might have gone through your cabeza."

"It sure might," said Mr. Schootz.

"I guess I want to know what locoed jay is blazing away yonder. This sure is the elephant's hind leg!" He shouted to his men. "Hyer, some of you go up the hill yonder, and get hold of that pesky lunatic who's been loosing off a gun!"

Some of the movie men were already running towards the distant side of the canyon, whence the shot had come—a distance of not less than four hundred yards.

Polk pressed his handkerchief to his cheek. But for the shock, he was not hurt. But the bare thought of a scar being left across his cheek infuriated the handsomest man in Hollywood. His eyes turned on Harry Wharton, in the crowd that surrounded him, with a blaze of fury and hatred. In his passionate rage he forgot caution.

"You—you—I'll make you suffer for this!" he snarled.

Wharton gave him a contemptuous look, full in the eyes.

"You've got what you asked for," he said icily.

"Say, what's the kid got to do with it, Polk?" exclaimed Mr. Schootz, in astonishment. "You're sure dreaming!"

Polk did not answer that question. He realised that he was in danger of

betraying himself. But Wharton answered it.

"The bullet was intended for me," he said quietly.

"Shucks!" said Mr. Schootz.

"It passed close by my head," said Harry. "I felt it pass."

"Gee-whiz! Then how did it hit Polk, who was a dozen feet away from you?" snapped Mr. Schootz.

"It glanced from a rock. It hit Polk by sheer accident," said Harry. "It might have hit anybody."

"Shucks!" repeated Mr. Schootz.

"Can't you see for yourself?" exclaimed Harry impatiently. "Mr. Polk's left cheek has been scratched by the bullet. He was standing with his right side towards that hill where the shot came from. He could only have been struck by the bullet glancing off something."

"I dessay it glanced," said Mr. Schootz grudgingly. "It was jest a random shot—some locoed jay loosing off a gun on the hill. Hyer you, Van Duck, let's get Mr. Polk to the rancho."

Polk, with another bitter look at the captain of the Greyfriars Remove, moved off with the two directors.

"Shooting" was off for that morning, after what had happened. The Perfection company, excitedly discussing the startling episode, broke up. Most of the men went towards the rugged side of the canyon, to look for the unknown rifleman who had fired. The general impression was that the shot had been an accident. But the Greyfriars fellows did not share that impression. The Famous Five gathered in a group, with serious faces. They looked for the spot where the bullet had struck, and found it—a chipped track on the slanting surface of a rock at a little distance from where Wharton had been standing. From the position of the rock, it was obvious that the bullet must have passed very close to Wharton before it struck there. The captain of the Remove had had a narrow escape, owing, doubtless, to the long range of the shot.

"It was meant for me, you fellows," said Harry quietly. "I felt it pass, without knowing, for the moment, what it was. Of course, it was a sheer accident, its grazing Polk after it glanced. Polk was about the last man it was intended to touch."

Bob Cherry whistled softly.

"You think—" he began.

"I know!" answered Harry quietly.

"The knowfulness is terrific, my esteemed chums," said Hurree Janset Ram Singh. "I wonderfully surmised why the esteemed Polk was here this morning. It is the first time he had honoured us by watching our ridiculous acting. The execrable Polk knew that that shot was coming, and he was here to prove that he had nothing to do with it. It was an absurd alibi, his coming here this ludicrous morning."

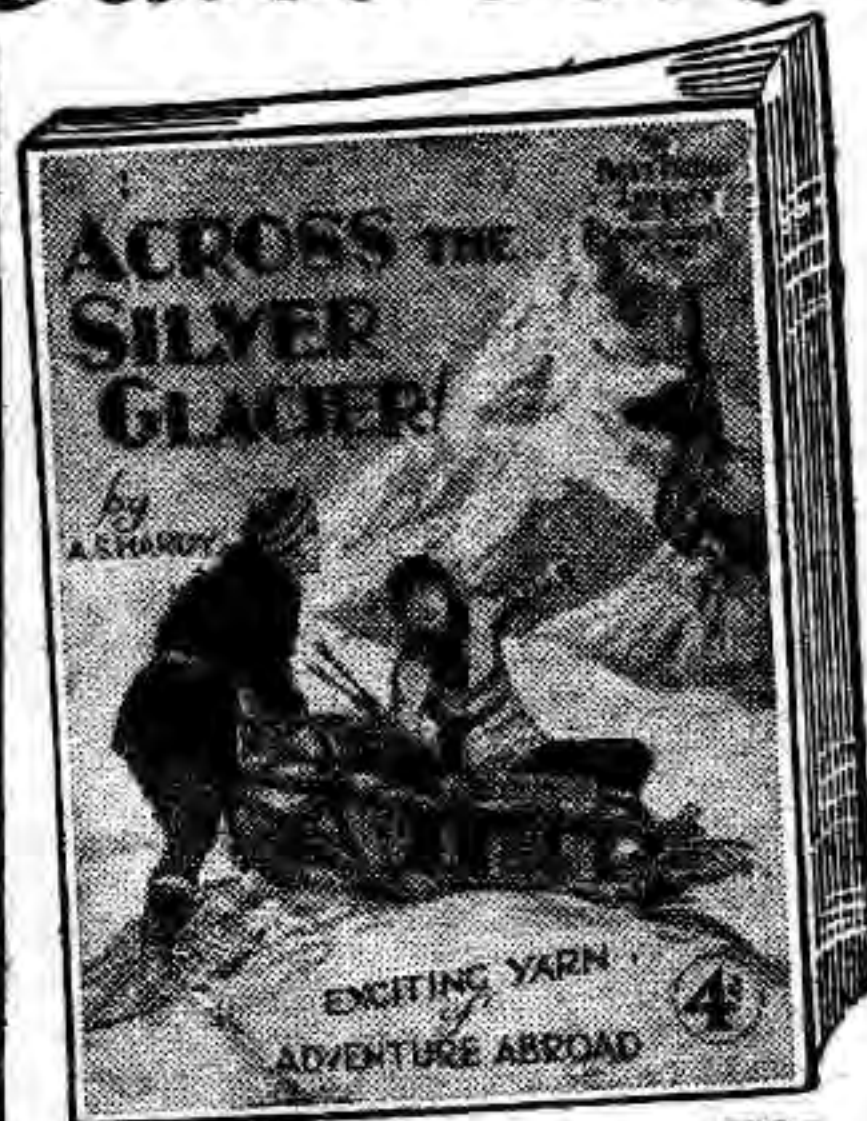
"That's it," said the Bouncer, in a low voice. "After what's happened already, even Schootz would suspect Polk, if Wharton was picked off by a bullet from the hill; only, Polk being here, on the spot, he had his alibi already clear."

"That's why he came," said Lord Mauleverer, with a nod. "Begad! Of all the sneakin' reptiles—"

"It's plain enough," said Harry, setting his lips. "They kidnapped Bunter the other night by mistake, because the fat idiot had taken my room, and they took him for me in the dark. This is Polk's next move. One of that boot-legging gang fired the shot, and if the range had been a little less, or the man had allowed for the wind down the canyon—"

He broke off.

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THE FOURTH CHAPTER.

Bunter Works the Oracle!

A FAT and fatuous grin wreathed the plump countenance of William George Bunter.

Bunter was going strong.

Quite unaware of the exciting incident occurring half a mile up the canyon, Billy Bunter was putting into execution the wonderful scheme that had been hatched in the depths of his fat intellect.

The adobe rancho was almost deserted.

There was a stenographer in Mr. Schootz's office; but Mr. Van Duck's office was vacant, and it was in that apartment that the Owl of the Remove had entrenched himself.

The door closed and locked, Bunter sat down to the telephone.

He rang up the Hollywood exchange, and asked for the number of Long Beach Boarding-House on Sunset Boulevard.

Grinning cheerily, he waited for Mr. Coot, the proprietor of that establishment, to reply.

So far as Bunter could see, there was no drawback to his wonderful wheeze.

Tommy Thorpe, of 4, Bolton Road, Wednesfield, Staffs, supplies a BIG LAUGH this week, chums, and incidentally wins a useful pocket-knife.

NO BOUQUETS!

Pat, a builder's mate, arrived home from his work with his chest almost bursting the buttons of his jacket. "Biddy," he exclaimed, excitedly, "O've been promoted, and now O've a number of men working under me." "H'm!" muttered his wife, dubiously. "O expect ye are working on the scaffolding, now!"

A penknife will be awarded to all "Magnetites" whose jokes are published.

The imitation of Mr. Hiram K. Fish's sharp, nasal voice was easy to the Greyfriars ventriloquist. Trickery of that kind had already landed W. G. Bunter into trouble on the Perfection location, and now he was cheerily hunting for more trouble. Bunter was fed-up with the location. The "grub" there was not, in Bunter's opinion, as good as it had been at the boarding-house in Hollywood—a serious matter. Nobody had come round to his opinion that he was the best cinema actor in the Greyfriars party. Once Mr. Schootz had given him a trial with some comedy stuff; but he declined to "star" Bunter, and he remained blissfully ignorant of the obvious fact—obvious to Bunter—that since W. G. B. had arrived, Myron Polk was no longer the handsomest man in Hollywood.

Bunter had, as it were, woke up from his dream of starring on the movies. It began to look as if he would return to Greyfriars, after all, without having placed his classic features and dulcet tones on permanent record on the "talkies." Looking on, while inferior fellows did inferior things, naturally, did not please a superior fellow like Bunter. He was fed-up, and he was going. Only a stringency in the financial line had prevented him from going back to Hollywood long ago. Now his fat brain had evolved a way out—an infallible method of making Mr. Fish foot his

bills, which was Mr. Fish's duty, and ought to have been his pleasure.

"Hello!"

It was the voice of Mr. Coot, or "Colonel" Coot, as he preferred to call himself. The proprietor of Long Beach Boarding-House was one of the innumerable "colonels" who form so large a part of the population of the United States.

"Hello!" responded Bunter, in so skilful an imitation of Mr. Hiram K. Fish's saw-like voice that Fisher T. Fish, had he been present, would have sworn that it was his popper speaking, unless it was somebody grinding a saw.

"Hello, Coot! That Coot speaking?"

"Yep!"

"I guess I'm speaking from Jack-Rabbit, Coot."

"I get you, Mr. Fish."

Bunter grinned over the transmitter. Without even the mention of Mr. Fish's name Colonel Coot had taken his caller as Mr. Fish. He knew that saw-like voice well. Mr. Coot had no doubts.

"I'm sending one of the boys back to you, Mr. Coot."

"Yep!"

"I want you to look after him well. It's young Bunter. I guess he's going to stay in Hollywood for a spell; and you sure want to look after him rather specially, Coot, and do him up to the queen's taste." Bunter had quite assimilated the American language by this time. "You'll put down all expenses to me, Coot, and you want to let that guy have anything he chooses, within reason."

"Sure!" said Mr. Coot.

"I've a special reason for treating that guy well, Coot. No limit in the way of extra meals, and anything of that kind. You get me?"

"I get you."

"He may want to hire a car. That goes. Book any seats he may want at the theatre for him."

"Yep."

"If he requires pocket-money you can fix him to the extent of, say, a few hundred dollars. The fact is, Coot, I guess I better put you wise. That guy is rather valuable to us, and I'm oneasy about some other party getting him away. I want him nursed. You catch on?"

"I sure do, Mr. Fish!" answered the colonel from Hollywood. "You can rely on me, sir."

"You won't lose on the deal, Coot. I guess that guy, Bunter, is worth a whole heap of dollars to us, and Perfection can't afford to lose him. I don't mind telling you that that galoot, Darius Honk, of Magic Films, is after him, and we have got to keep him safe. I can trust you?"

"You bet, Mr. Fish!"

"That's O.K., then. Send up a car to send him down. I shan't be coming down to Hollywood for a spell. Send a good car, and tell the man to ask for Bunter, at the rancho, here. Send it at once."

"Yep!"

"By the way, send up a box of chocolates in the car, and a basket of fruit. The best that money can buy. We got to keep that guy satisfied. You might put in a cake, as well—one of the best cakes from the Las Palmas shebang."

There was a chuckle from Mr. Coot.

"O.K.!" he answered.

"That's the whole heap, then. Good-bye!"

Billy Bunter rang off.

He rose from the telephone with a contented grin on his fat face. Those instructions, which Colonel Coot believed

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Bob Cherry clenched his fists.

"Let's get after the skunk, whoever he was!" he said.

"Nothing doing. He's cleared off long ago," answered Harry. "There's a dozen men looking for him now; but they won't find him. You can bet he never stayed long after firing."

"And Polk," began Nugent, his eyes blazing, "he fixed it up, and came here to see it done, and to fix an alibi. It's plain enough. What are we going to do about it?"

Wharton shrugged his shoulders.

"We can do nothing. It's no use accusing Polk, any more than accusing him of the kidnapping. He's too cute for us."

"But we're not going to stand this sort of thing!" exclaimed Johnny Bull wrathfully. "You might have been killed!"

"Oh, forget it, you guys!" broke in Fisher T. Fish angrily. "I guess you're loco about that man Polk. A guy that gets fifty thousand dollars for a picture—"

"Shut up, Fishy!" snapped Bob.

"You sure get my goat!" hooted Fishy. "Nobody was to be shot; it's all guff! It was jest some careless gink let his gun go off by accident—"

"Fathead!"

"Oh, go to bed and dream again!" snorted Fisher T. Fish; and he stalked away in great annoyance.

The juniors looked at one another.

"I fancy most people will agree with Fishy," said Wharton. "We know what was intended, but proving it is another matter. We can't get Polk. That detective chap, Carter can't let him; he's too cunning. But"—the captain of the Remove smiled grimly—"he's got something for his trouble. He fancies his good looks; and, with a scar across his face, he won't be the handsomest man in Hollywood, I imagine!"

Bob Cherry chuckled.

"It's jolly old poetical justice," he said.

From that reflection the Greyfriars fellows derived some little satisfaction.

Again and again the Perfection star had plotted, and every time he had failed. But every time he had covered his tracks so successfully that even Mr. Carter, the Los Angeles detective, had been unable to "cinch" him.

Had that shot from the hill struck down Harry Wharton, Polk's presence on the location would have proved his innocence of the deed, and what chance would there have been of proving his secret connection with the gunman who had fired? His alibi would have been unquestionable.

But his cunning, at long last, had over-reached itself. He had not allowed for accident.

The unexpected result of the dastardly scheme was that the handsomest face in Hollywood was scarred. Polk's face was his fortune. His good looks made him the darling of the film fans, the adored of the "In Love with Myron" Society. The chance ricochet of the bullet intended for Harry Wharton had punished him as severely as the conceited star could possibly be punished. It was, as Bob had said, poetical justice. He had been hoist by his own petard!

"The sowfulness of the esteemed wind leads to the reapfulness of the ridiculous whirlwind," remarked Hurree Jamset Ram Singh.

"It do—it does!" chuckled Bob Cherry.

"As honourable and execrable Shakespeare remarkably observes, it is the absurd sport to behold the ridiculous engineer hoist by his own preposterous petard, my esteemed chums!"

And the juniors grinned, and agreed that it was so.

that he had received from Hiram K. Fish, would be carried out to the very letter. It looked as if the Owl of the Remove was on to a good thing.

Bunter opened the door an inch and peered out. The coast was clear, and he slipped out of Mr. Van Duck's office.

He rolled out of the rancho and blinked up the canyon in the direction of the film party. There was no sign yet of any of that party returning to the rancho. Bunter had plenty of time.

He rolled back to the patio, ascended the steps to the wooden gallery on which the rooms opened, and got busy. He had little packing to do for his journey, so far as his own property was concerned. Still, he was going to do some packing. He could not go back to Hollywood merely in what he stood up in.

Bunter had "hooked on" to the Los Angeles party, without making any extensive preparations for a tour in the United States. He had relied on borrowing from the other fellows anything that he might require. That was William George Bunter's usual system. Of course, it had led to some trouble. Selfish fellows objected to Bunter bagging their clothes. Indeed, Bob Cherry had once squashed his own hat on Bunter's head, and the Bounder had wrathfully and vigorously kicked his own best trousers, what time they enclosed the fat form of Billy Bunter.

Troubles of that kind were not infrequent in Bunter's fat career. Even Mauleverer, the easiest-going member of the party, had groused about Bunter bagging his best silk pyjamas. But Bunter was used to selfishness and ingratitude. He declined to allow such things to affect him. When Bunter wanted anything, obviously, Bunter ought to have it. That, to Bunter, was as clear as anything in Euclid. If other fellows groused, all that Bunter could do was to let them grouse. If they derived any consolation therefrom he was not the fellow to grudge them such consolation.

So Bunter, in making his preparations for the trip down to Hollywood, did not bother about going into his own room. There was nothing in that apartment to attract him.

He started in Lord Mauleverer's room. A handsome suitcase was his first prey. Into that suitcase he packed a good many things that belonged—or had belonged—to Lord Mauleverer. They belonged to Bunter at present. But he did not take all Mauleverer's things. One suitcase would not have held them all. Besides, Bunter only wanted the best. Moreover, he was not neglecting the other fellows. He dropped into each room in turn, helping himself to whatever he considered he might need. He rather liked the Bounder's silk socks. They were expensive, and rather bright in pattern—just in Bunter's taste. Mauleverer's were a little better in quality, perhaps, but not so bright. Wharton's evening clothes were useful. The waistcoat could be slit up the back.

Bunter considered it rather moderate on his part to take only one packed suitcase. Like Lord Clive, in the Indian treasure-house, he stood astonished at his own moderation.

Still, he felt that he had better not overdo it. As the other fellows had work to do at Jack-Rabbit, they could not very well follow him down to Hollywood. But it was wiser to be on the safe side. It was only judicious to leave them a few things.

So Bunter satisfied himself with packing the big suitcase as full as it would hold, and then, changing his clothes, re-arranged himself in a selection of the

very best. His own garments had suffered a good deal of wear and tear. Such as they were, he generously left them for the Famous Five. They could whack them out, if they liked. Bunter could be generous.

By the time he had finished dressing and packing it was about time for the car sent by Colonel Coot to arrive at Jack-Rabbit. Bunter called one of the peons and told him to carry the suitcase down. It was much too heavy for Bunter to negotiate. As an incentive to the servant to exert himself Bunter rattled a bunch of keys and a three-penny-piece in the pocket of Wharton's trousers. That metallic jingle seemed to promise reward, and the peon shouldered the heavy bag cheerfully and carried it down, across the patio, and out of the rancho. Bunter followed him with a fat, cheerful face.

Outside the rancho he blinked up the canyon again. Some of the filming party were coming back towards the rancho. He discerned Mr. Schootz, Mr. Van Duck, and Myron Polk walking between them. A shade of anxiety came over Bunter's fat visage. He had expected the "shot" to take much longer, and he was quite unaware of the other shot that had interrupted the camera shooting. Bunter did not want any trouble with a lot of carping, selfish fellows just as he was about to start for Hollywood.

Fortunately, the director and the assistant director were too concerned about what had happened to Myron Polk to have any heed for Bunter. They went into the rancho with the Perfection star and disappeared, much to the fat junior's relief.

He blinked down the canyon towards the road. The car from Hollywood was not yet in sight.

The peon had just set the suitcase down, and he was standing and looking very inquiringly at Bunter. Bunter blinked at him. The man apparently expected a tip. Bunter would have been willing to tip him, but it was useless to present him with a bunch of keys or a bad threepenny piece as a gratuity.

"That's all right," said Bunter, in an off-hand way. "You can cut, my man."

The peon gave him a long, expressive look, and cut.

"Cheek!" murmured Bunter. "If that cheeky menial expects me to pay him, he's going to be disappointed. I suppose he gets his wages. Cheek!"

Dismissing the peon from his mind, Bunter watched the road anxiously for the car. Fisher T. Fish came down the canyon, and he stopped to stare at Billy Bunter and his suitcase.

"You hitting the horizon?" he queried.

"I'm going back to Hollywood," answered Bunter loftily.

"Mauleverer lend you that suitcase?" grinned Fisher T. Fish.

"I suppose my friend Mauleverer can lend me a suitcase if he likes," answered Bunter.

"Sure!" agreed Fisher T. Fish.

"Does he know he's lent it you?"

Bunter disdained to reply to that question.

"Did Smithy lend you that tie?" continued Fisher Tarleton Fish.

"Oh, really, Fishy—"

"How are you getting to Hollywood?" asked Fish curiously. "Walking, with that grip?"

"A friend is sending a car for me," explained Bunter.

"I should smile!" said Fisher T. Fish. Which cryptic remark implied that he doubted Bunter's statement.

"You'll see!" said Bunter.

He blinked uneasily up the canyon,

No warning honk announced that the car from Hollywood was at hand. Delays were dangerous. Bunter was anxious to get off before the Co. returned to the rancho. Mild as Lord Mauleverer's temper was, his lordship might get a little excited when he discovered that he had lent Bunter that suitcase. Smithy was certain to be a beast if he saw his necktie on Bunter. Bob Cherry was likely to make nasty remarks about his hat, now on Bunter's head. Wharton might recognise his trousers and kick up a fuss. In the circumstances—and in the garments—it obviously behoved Billy Bunter to get started as soon as possible. If he was to go, he had to go while the going was good.

Honk, hank, hank!

The honking of a motor-horn was not a musical sound, but the music of the spheres would not have pleased Bunter so much at that moment.

From the direction of Hollywood, a car swung into the canyon, and whizzed on to the rancho.

Bunter's fat face beamed.

"Waal, I swow!" ejaculated Fisher T. Fish, in astonishment.

The car halted, and the chauffeur glanced round. It was a large and handsome car. Bunter stepped forward.

"Mr. Bunter?" asked the chauffeur.

"Yes. Put my baggage on. I'm taking only a suitcase," said Bunter.

"Sure!"

"Well, this hyer is the grasshopper's whiskers," exclaimed Fisher T. Fish, greatly amazed.

Mr. Hiram K. Fish came on the spot, and he stopped to glance at the car, and to glance at Bunter.

"You beating it, you fat clam?" he inquired.

Bunter blinked at him.

"I'm going!" he answered loftily.

"Good! How'd you dig up an auto?"

Bunter grinned involuntarily. He could not help wondering what Mr. Fish would have thought had he known that he—Hiram K. Fish, was supposed to have ordered that handsome automobile—and was booked to pay for it. Something in the nature of an earthquake would surely have happened had Mr. Fish been wise to that. Fortunately for Bunter, he was not wise to it.

"Oh, a friend sent the car for me," said Bunter carelessly.

"Gee-whiz!" said Mr. Fish.

"You see, I'm going to stay with him in Hollywood," said Bunter airily.

"He's sure welcome to your company!" answered Mr. Fish, and he went into the rancho.

The suitcase was put on. Bunter stepped into the car. A party of juniors arrived at the rancho at the same moment from up the canyon.

"Hallo, hallo, hallo!" ejaculated Bob Cherry.

"Quick!" gasped Bunter. "Start! Quick!"

The chauffeur blinked at him.

"Hurry up! Not a second to lose! Quick!"

"You've said it," said the chauffeur. And he started up. The car backed and turned.

"Hallo, hallo, hallo!" roared Bob.

"You off, Bunter?"

Bunter did not reply. The chauffeur was moving swiftly; but it seemed to Bunter that he never would get going.

Harry Wharton & Co. came up to the car as it turned. Bunter blinked at them from the window.

"I say, you fellows, get back. Mind you don't get run over!"

"You're really going?" asked Harry, Bunter sniffed.

"Yes. I'm fed-up with this show—"



Garment after garment was ruthlessly shorn from Billy Bunter, and then Bob Cherry tossed a blanket towards him. Laden with their recovered property, Harry Wharton & Co. left Bunter to himself. Clad gracefully in the blanket and a pair of spectacles, the Owl of the Remove gazed after them as they went. "Beasts!" he yelled. (See Chapter 6.)

and fed-up with you! You can go and eat coke, the lot of you!" The car was gliding away down the canyon now, and Bunter was safe. He leaned from the window to utter his farewells. "I say, you fellows, you can go and eat coke! Got that? I despise the lot of you! If I had time, I'd jolly well lick you all round before I left! Yah!"

"Oh, my hat!" ejaculated Nugent.

"Yah!" roared Bunter.

And the car rushed on out of the canyon, into the motor-road, and vanished. Billy Bunter was gone, leaving the chums of the Remove staring.

THE FIFTH CHAPTER.

Leaving the Location!

"ANYBODY seen my hat?"
"Anybody seen my trousers?"

"What the thump—"

"What the jolly old dickens—"

"My esteemed chums—"

"Bunter!"

"The fat fraud!"

"The fat villain!"

It was quite a chorus. After seeing Bunter off, Harry Wharton & Co. had gone to their rooms in the rancho. Then the chorus began.

Bunter had sorted out the various things he needed, but he had not had time to pack away the things he did not need. Or if he had had time, he had lacked inclination.

Garments of all sorts were strewn right and left in the juniors' rooms. Bags lay open, their contents scattered. Boots and shoes, jackets and trousers, coats and waistcoats, pyjamas, and all sorts and conditions of things, lay about where Bunter had left them. Some were on the beds. Some were on the floor. A few were outside the rooms, in the gallery. Bunter, of course, could not be expected to look after other fellows' things. He had taken what he wanted. What happened to those he did not want did not concern Bunter.

It concerned the fellows to whom the things belonged. Excitement reigned in the quarters of the Removites.

"I'll smash him!" roared the Bounder.

"The smashfulness will be terrific."

"The fat brigand!"

"The podgy burglar!"

"Begad, he's gone, at any rate!" remarked Lord Mauleverer. "Thank goodness he's gone, anyhow."

"The gonefulness is an esteemed boonful blessing. But the fat and ludicrous villain has taken my pyjamas."

"And my bags—"

"And my hat—"

"And my collars—"

"And my ties—"

"I'll scalp him!"

"I'll slaughter him!"

"I'll burst him!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Fisher T. Fish. "That fat guy is sure some rustler! I guess he's made a clean-up of it, he sure has!"

Fisher T. Fish found it entertaining. Bunter had not bothered to take any of Fishy's things. They were not good enough for Bunter, when he had such a wide selection of goods. Fishy did not spend much on clothes. He did not spend much on anything. Bunter's contempt for Fishy's apparel was not flattering; but it was gratifying in other respects. Fisher T. Fish found the whole thing amusing.

"Look here, we're going after him," howled the Bounder. "We'll jolly well go after him and strip him!"

"The stripfulness is the proper caper," agreed Hurree Jamset Ram Singh.

"Can't," said Wharton. "We're wanted this afternoon."

"And that fat villain knows it," growled Johnny Bull. "We can't go after the fat villain."

"Ha, ha, ha!" yelled Fisher T. Fish.

"Oh, shut up!" hooted Bob Cherry.

"There's nothing to cackle at."

"Ain't there?" chuckled Fisher T. Fish.

"I guess this is some jest! But where did he get the car he went in? He's done somebody for the car! Who's he done for the auto?"

Bob Cherry's frowning face cleared, and he burst into a chuckle. He could guess whom Bunter had done for the auto. There was nobody but Fishy's popper whom he could have done for that.

Evidently, the Owl of the Remove had carried out the scheme at which he had hinted that morning, and had gone

back to Long Beach Boarding-House. He was incurring expenses in the name of Mr. Hiram K. Fish. That was a pleasant discovery that awaited Mr. Fish.

"He's done somebody," argued Fisher T. Fish. "He can't pay the chauffeur himself. That was a car from Sunset Garage. I knew the man. I guess it costs something to send a car up here to fetch Bunter. Twenty-five miles by train—thirty by taxi. Who's going to pay?"

"The who-fulness is terrific!" grinned Hurree Jamset Ram Singh.

"I kinder guess and reckon and calculate that it will be somebody of the name of Fish!" chuckled Bob Cherry.

Fisher T. Fish jumped. "How's that?" he demanded, becoming grave all of a sudden.

"Hallo, hallo, hallo! Why don't you cackle?" asked Bob. "Isn't that just as funny as Bunter bagging our clobber?"

"Ha, ha, ha!" But Fisher T. Fish did not cackle. The bare possibility of that little bill coming home to the Fish family was enough to sober him.

"I guess the fat mutt couldn't plant it on the popper!" he exclaimed, in alarm.

"Guess again!" "Where's he gone?" demanded Fishy. "Guess!" grinned Bob.

"He can't have moseyed back to the boarding-house. Coot sure wouldn't take him in without instructions from the popper."

"Ha, ha, ha!" "Look here, you guys, where does the cackle come in?" exclaimed Fisher T. Fish, greatly annoyed. "What are you getting at?"

"Go on guessing!" answered Bob. Mr. Van Duck came up to the gallery from the patio.

"You guys want to pack," he said. "Pack!" repeated Harry.

"Yep! We're hitting Hollywood again this afternoon," grunted the assistant-director. "Schootz's orders!"

The juniors stared at him. They were aware that the location was to be left that week, but this was rather sudden.

"You see, there'll be no more shooting, so far as Polk is concerned, for some time to come," Mr. Van Duck explained. "I guess he's going to lie up at his bungalow and nurse himself a whole heap. He's sure afraid of having his beauty spoiled." Mr. Van Duck's tone was sarcastic. "I guess all the surgeons and nurses and beauty doctors in Los are going to have a high old time now. They sure are."

"Oh!" said Harry. "So the location's going to be broken up because Polk can't act any more at present?"

"Jest that!" agreed Mr. Van Duck. "Ain't he the salt of the earth? Ain't he the big noise, and the elephant's hind leg? Search me! If he gets a scratch, ain't it time for the pesky universe to sit up and take notice? Yes, sir! I'll tell a man!"

And the assistant-director walked away, evidently in a state of considerable annoyance.

Harry Wharton whistled. "Bunter will see us sooner than he expected," remarked Nugent. "We shall be at the boarding-house again to-night."

"Can't say I'm sorry," remarked Wharton. "I hope I've not got cold feet, but I can't say I like the idea of open-air acting, with Polk's precious friends taking pot-shots from the hills."

"Forget it!" snorted Fisher T. Fish.

"Ain't I told you Polk never knew thing about it, you jay? That guy's fifty thousand dollars for a picture."

"Shut up, Fishy!" "Fifty thousand dollars!" said Fisher T. Fish, "and you pesky jays figure that he—"

"Shut up!" roared Johnny Bull.

"After all, we were on location chiefly on Polk's account," said Bob. "It was the Lord of the Desert film that was the big business. All the same, Schootz is no fool, and I fancy he guesses pretty clearly that that shot was intended to hit, and he doesn't want it to happen again. I fancy that's got something to do with breaking up the location so suddenly."

"Most likely," agreed Wharton. "Anyhow, I'm not sorry to be getting back to Hollywood."

"The sorrowfulness of the esteemed Bunter will be terrific!" grinned Hurree Jamset Ram Singh. "The sight of our esteemed and ludicrous faces will not be a boonful blessing to the idiotic Bunter."

"The fat villain has taken my suitcase!" said Lord Mauleverer. "What am I goin' to pack in?"

"That's all right," said Bob. "He hasn't left you much to pack!"

"Oh, gad!"

"For the first time in history, I shall be glad to see Bunter!" remarked Johnny Bull.

WHAT NAME?

The following letters have been jumbled together purposely. Put in their proper order, they spell the name of a well-known junior at Greyfriars.

AMLRDREOVELREU

Who is it? The answer will appear in next week's MAGNET.

Last week's solution was—
Horace Coker.

And the juniors chuckled. William George Bunter had laid his plans with great astuteness. So long as the juniors were at work on the location, they could not follow him down to Hollywood. Like the daw in the fable, Bunter was at liberty to strut in his borrowed plumes. But the best-laid schemes of mice and men, as the poet has told us, gang aft agley. The sudden change in Mr. Schootz's arrangements, owing to the episode of the morning, completely gave the "kybosh" to Bunter's astute scheming. His borrowed plumes were likely to be stripped from him. The property of the Co. was, so to speak, not lost, but gone before.

There were busy scenes that day on the location. Harry Wharton & Co. were packed and ready early in the afternoon. A motor-bus came to bear them and their baggage back to Hollywood. In the golden sunset of Southern California, the bus rolled out of Jack-Rabbit Canyon, and took the road above the sea-shore for the film town.

They were smiling cheerily when the bus rolled into Sunset Boulevard at Hollywood, and stopped before Long Beach Boarding-House. For the first time in history, as Johnny Bull had remarked, they were anxious to see Billy Bunter. They expected to derive satisfaction, for once, from meeting the Owl of the Remove. But it was certain that the satisfaction would be all on their side. Bunter was not in the least likely to share it.

THE SIXTH CHAPTER.

A Blanket for Bunter!

"H E, he, he!" Billy Bunter chuckled. If ever a fellow had reason to chuckle with sheer glee, William George Bunter had.

Bunter was in his old room at Long Beach Boarding-House.

It was getting towards dinner-time. They dined at seven at Long Beach Boarding-House. Bunter was dressing for dinner.

For dinner itself, he was not so anxious as usual. He had had several substantial snacks that afternoon.

Mr. Coot, carrying out the supposed instructions of Hiram K. Fish, had welcomed Bunter back to the boarding-house in the most impressive and hospitable manner. A person whom a Perfection director delighted to honour, was sure of Mr. Coot's good graces. During the previous stay in the boarding-house, Mr. Coot had not treated Bunter with the respect that the fat junior considered he deserved. All that was changed now. Having received special instructions to make much of Bunter, Mr. Coot made much of him.

There was no tea in the afternoon at Long Beach. But as Bunter was to have anything he wanted, Mr. Coot had sent round specially to Las Palmas tea-shop for supplies. In the car, Bunter had found a cake, a basket of fruit, and a box of chocolates. They were inside Bunter when he reached Long Beach. But he had ample room left for lunch. After lunch, he had still space for a snack or two before tea, and he disposed of a special tea that was large, lengthy, and luscious.

Bunter was enjoying life. For the first time since he had arrived in the United States, things were exactly as they should have been all along.

Future prospects were blissful.

Hiram K. Fish was at Jack-Rabbit. And even if he returned to Hollywood, he was not likely to butt in at Long Beach Boarding-House. He was booked to remain in blissful ignorance of the handsome account that Bunter was running up in his name. He would discover nothing until the whole party came back from the location. What would happen then, Bunter did not know. Neither did he give it much thought. Bunter was not the fellow to meet trouble half-way. For the present he was like a pig in clover; and the present was good enough for Bunter. Whatever might happen it was absolutely certain that Bunter would not pay the bill he was running up. Unless a threepenny-piece would settle it, he couldn't. And it was certain that a threepenny piece wouldn't.

With so many snacks packed away within the extensive circle of his circumference, Bunter was not so keen about dinner as usual. Still, he was ready for it. Nobody had ever heard of a time when Bunter was not ready for a meal. Probably he would not eat so much as usual. Enough for two or three fellows would be enough for Bunter.

Standing before the glass in his room Bunter looked on his reflection, and saw that it was good.

The glass reflected—to Bunter's eyes, at least—a handsome, well-set-up, well-dressed fellow, whose glasses rather added to his distinguished appearance than otherwise.

Undoubtedly, he was, at least, well-dressed. Having taken his choice from seven wardrobes Bunter had been able to do himself remarkably well in the way of clobber. Not a thing that was

his own had accompanied him back to Hollywood. Bunter was not the fellow to do things by halves. He went the whole hog, having, indeed, a natural predilection for the manners and customs of that attractive animal.

"Ha, he, he!" Bunter chuckled, and was happy. After dinner he was going to the theatre. Mr. Coot had already phoned for the best seat in the best theatre in Hollywood, and had ordered a car to take Bunter there. It was going to be a pleasant evening. After the theatre there was going to be a little supper at Las Palmas. The necessary cash was going to be borrowed from Colonel Coot, on Mr. Fish's account. There was no reason for Bunter to stint himself. Mr. Fish was certain to raise Cain if he found that he had to pay a single dollar. He could not do more, if he found that he had to pay a hundred dollars. The more he had to pay, in fact, the better, from Bunter's point of view. Bunter was going to get value for the money, and it would be a lesson to Mr. Fish not to be stingy. Bunter hoped that it would do him good.

Having surveyed himself in the glass to his complete satisfaction Billy Bunter strolled to the window, to gaze out on the boulevard where the pepper-trees glowed in the sunset while he waited for the dinner-gong.

Then he gave a sudden jump.

"Oh, crikey!" Outside the garden gates of Long Beach Boarding-House a motor-bus had halted.

From the bus descended a crowd of Greyfriars juniors.

Bunter stared at them from the window, his round eyes goggling in horror behind his big spectacles.

"The beasts!" he gasped. "They—they—they've come back! Oh, crumbs! Oh, crikey! Oh dear!"

He gazed at them in horrified dismay. The baggage piled on the bus showed that they had come back to stop. No doubt Mr. Coot had been apprised by telephone of their coming. Bunter had not seen Mr. Coot since tea. He had been taking a well-earned nap. His exertions that day, in the gastronomic line, had been considerable, and he had needed a rest.

"The awful beasts!" gasped Bunter.

Evidently, there had been a change of plans at Jack-Rabbit. The location was broken up. The Greyfriars party had returned. And Bunter could not help feeling that something was going to happen.

He was justified, of course, in what he had done. On that point he was not troubled with any doubts. Bunter never did anything against his fat conscience. He had a remarkably accommodating conscience, which he could rely upon not to bother him. But he felt instinctively that the other fellows would not see eye to eye with him in this matter. He had a premonition that they were going to be beasts.

"Oh dear!" groaned Bunter.

There was a tramp of footsteps on the stairs in Long Beach Boarding-House. Footsteps tramped along the passage. Billy Bunter listened, quaking.

Crash! The door of his room burst open.

"Hallo! Hallo! Hallo!"

"You fat villain—"

"You esteemed and ridiculous scoundrel—"

"Here he is!"

Harry Wharton & Co. crowded into the room. Billy Bunter blinked at them. His fat jaw dropped.

"I—I—I say, you fellows!" he gasped.

"He's got 'em on!" exclaimed Frank Nugent, staring at the fat junior.

"That's my collar he's got on."

"My trousers!" exclaimed Wharton.

"My socks!" roared the Bounder.

"I—I say, you fellows, I—I—I'm glad to see you!" gasped Bunter. "Fancy you fellows coming back like this! Fuf-fuf-fancy, you know! I—I—I'm jolly gig-gig-glad to see you, you know!"

"You look it!" remarked Johnny Bull.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Begad, you don't look exactly joyful, old fat bean!" remarked Lord Mauleverer. "But perhaps your jolly old looks are deceptive—what?"

"I—I say, you fellows, I—I hope you're not going to be beasts, you know!" gasped Bunter. "I hope you're not going to kick up a row."

"What a hopeful nature!" remarked Bob Cherry.

"The hopefulness is terrific; but the disappointment is going to be preposterous," said Hurree Jamset Ram Singh. "We are going to kick up a ridiculous and terrific row, my esteemed fat Bunter."

"Oh, really, Inky—"

"Take 'em off!" said Vernon-Smith.

"Oh really, Smithy—"

"Off with them!" said Bob. "Buck up! Every jolly old rag!"

"Oh, really, Cherry—"

"Sharp's the word!" rapped out the Bounder. "If I have to help you—"

"I—I say, you fellows, have you brought my things from Jack-Rabbit?" gasped Bunter. "I—I left them there, you know."

"No fear!"

"How can I change if you haven't brought my things?" howled Bunter.

"We're not asking you to change. We're asking you to take our clobber off," grinned the Bounder.

"You silly ass!" shrieked Bunter. "Do you think I can go down to dinner like a South Sea islander?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You can go down any old how you like, so long as you don't go down in my trousers," said Harry Wharton, laughing.

"Look here—"

"Collar him! Have 'em off!"

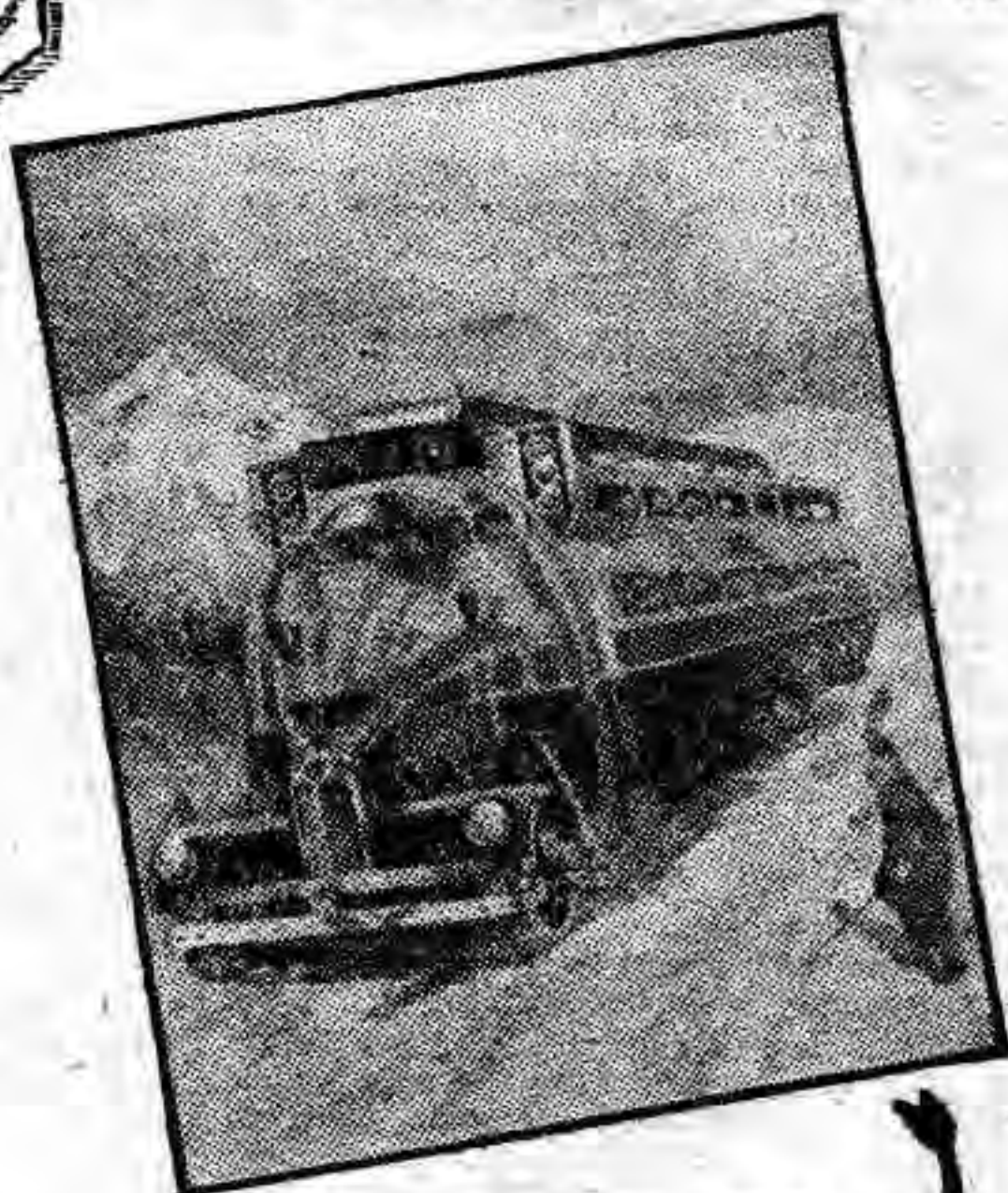
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"Yaroogh! Leggo! I say, you fellows! Oh, my hat! Beasts! I say, I'll pay for these things, if you like! I'm expecting a postal-order! Yooop!"

It had taken Bunter quite a long time to dress. It did not take him so long to undress, with the active assistance of seven pairs of hands. Garment after garment was ruthlessly shorn from the Owl of the Remove. Bob Cherry jerked a blanket from the bed, and kindly tossed it to Bunter. In California the days were hot, but the nights were cold. Bunter was glad of the blanket.

Laden with their recovered property Harry Wharton & Co. left Bunter to himself and the blanket.

Clad gracefully in a draped blanket and a pair of spectacles, Billy Bunter gazed after them as they went.

"Oh, crumbs! I say, you fellows—"
Slam!

The door closed after the departing juniors.

"Beasts!" yelled Bunter.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Harry Wharton & Co. were gone. William George Bunter was left on his own. From below came the boom of the dinner-gong. Perhaps it was fortunate that Bunter had taken so many substantial snacks that day. They were not over-particular at Long Beach Boarding-House, how a fellow dressed for dinner. But it was obvious that a line would be drawn at a fellow going down for dinner dressed in a blanket and a pair of spectacles. That was quite beyond the limit. Bunter heard the other fellows going down. He thought he heard them locking their doors before they went. He knew they were quite beasts enough to lock their things out of his reach. Their footsteps died away on the stairs.

Below, all the boarding-house was at dinner—with the exception of Billy Bunter. Bunter, in a state of utter dismay and a blanket, remained in his room. Dinner was not for him. It was gone from his gaze like a beautiful dream. The daw had been stripped of his plumes, and, as Hurree Jamset Ram Singh remarked, the stripfulness was terrific.

THE SEVENTH CHAPTER.

A Precious Pair!

MYRON POLK lay back on heaped silken cushions, on a settee tapestried in blue and gold. The handsomest face in Hollywood was half-hidden by bandages. The half that could be seen was white, drawn, almost haggard. His eyes had a sunken look as they glittered over the bandages. The Perfection star's hurt would not have kept a schoolboy out of a game; but it was enough to lay him up with all the paraphernalia of severe injury. The pain was not severe; Polk could have borne that. But he looked forward with dread to the possibility of permanent disfigurement.

Since he had rushed back from Jack-Rabbit in his purple auto and telephoned all over Los Angeles for help, the film star had had a busy time. Doctoring and beauty-doctoring, the best that money could buy were at his disposal. All the long afternoon he had been under expert hands more or less. Hope was held out to him that the wound—he did not think of it as a scratch—would heal without leaving a scar. But Polk could not believe in such good luck. He felt an inward dread that the smooth pink cheek was going to be marked for

ever—marring the face that had made his fortune.

It was a dismaying, enraging thought to the effeminate man who was wholly wrapped up in his looks. And, with utter unreason, he thought of Harry Wharton with the bitterest rage and hatred, attributing the whole disastrous happening to the Greyfriars juniors. His vendetta against the schoolboy was at white-hot heat now. As he lay bandaged on silken cushions, surrounded by effeminate luxury, his distorted mind was revolving scheme after scheme against his enemy—the schoolboy whom he was determined to consider his enemy.

Wharton had ridden in the scenes as the sheikh from a sense of adventure and a desire to oblige Mr. Schootz, whose plans had been upset by Myron Polk backing out. But to the star's incensed and suspicious mind, it was a scheme to cut him out at his own work.

That Wharton, if he liked, could remain with the Perfection Picture Syndicate, and achieve success and fame on the movies, Polk knew—and he was sure that that was the schoolboy's ambition—and that he had used Polk as a stalking-horse. With that in view he had acted in Polk's place, and then told everyone who would listen what he had done. That belief was fixed in the star's mind.

He could never have understood that a fellow who had fame at his feet on the films would leave such chances behind him and go back to school again, thinking no more of the matter.

That was incomprehensible to Polk, to whom the movie world was the whole universe.

He was quite certain that Wharton was at Hollywood to stop—that he aspired to film fame and fortune, and that he had made cunning use of the star in carrying out that ambition.

Harry Wharton would have been greatly astonished had he known of what was in the film star's mind.

He disliked Polk, and was not surprised that Polk reciprocated the feeling; but he could not understand the passionate hatred and revenge that actuated the star.

It never occurred to him that Myron Polk regarded him as a rival—and a dangerous rival—in his own profession—a rival of whom he was determined to be rid, at the cost of any crime.

Had Polk comprehended that the trip to Los Angeles was only an episode to the schoolboy, that in a few weeks he would be gone again, never to return, and that he thought more of a good score at cricket than of any imaginable success on the films, no doubt the star's feelings would have been different.

But Polk did not understand that, and would not have believed it had he been told. The little movie world in which he lived and moved and had his being, was all the world to him—in his thoughts, Hollywood filled up the whole horizon, and there was nothing beyond.

Most human bitterness and hatred is founded on misunderstanding. That was lamentably so in the case of Myron Polk. In his folly and obstinacy, his conceit and arrogance, he had set up an imaginary enemy, and was fighting a shadow.

But it was all real enough to his distorted mind, and he was prepared for any dastardly deed that would rid him for ever of his supposed rival and supplanter.

At first, in confederacy with the bootleg gang, Polk had schemed to kidnap the schoolboys, to spoil the taking of the school picture, and make the Greyfriars visit to Hollywood a failure. But on the downward path every successive step

is easier than the last. From one crime it is easy to slip to another and a darker one. Kidnapping the schoolboys, and imprisoning them for a time in some desolate spot, was no longer in the star's thoughts. Indeed, in his hatred of Wharton he had almost forgotten the offences, or supposed offences, of the others. All his venom was now concentrated on Wharton—and it was the darkest of all crimes that he was thinking of.

When the door of the room opened, and the silent-footed Japanese servant showed in Slick Wilson, Polk sat up-right on the couch, his eyes glittering at the rum-runner.

"You fool!" was his greeting.

Slick stared at him.

"You laid up, Mr. Polk?" he asked.

"Fool! Fool! It was your doing!" hissed Polk.

"I guess you've got me beat!" said Slick in astonishment. "Give it a name, boss."

Polk's hand went to his bandaged cheek.

"You blundering fool, your bullet struck me!" he snarled.

"Gee-whiz!"

"You imbecile! You told me you were a crack shot," said Polk bitterly. "This is the result."

"I don't get you," said Slick in amazement. "I saw you standing in the canyon, along with the movie crowd, and you was more than a dozen feet from the kid, and you wasn't in a line with him. You're sure dreaming. If that ball didn't hit the kid, it never went nowhere near you, Mr. Polk, if it missed him."

"Fool! It glanced from a rock."

Slick whistled.

"If that's all, you can't be hurt much," he said. "A spent ball wouldn't hurt you."

"Fool! Fool! My face is scarred—I may be marked for life!" hissed Polk. "It cut along my cheek!" He choked with rage.

"Waal, carry me home to die!" ejaculated the bootlegger. "I guess nobody would have been able to guard agin a thing like this. It was jest an unlucky chance. I tell you, if there hadn't been a wind in Jack-Rabbit Canyon, that kid would have got his. If it missed, it went close enough for him to feel it pass; I'll bank on that."

"What good was that?" hissed Polk.

"Sure—a miss is as good as a mile," agreed Slick. "But one swallow don't make a summer. I'll get him next time."

"There will be no next time. The location is broken up, and the whole crowd's come back to Hollywood. I suppose you're not figuring on potting him in the Perfection studio on Sunset Boulevard!" said Polk savagely.

The bootlegger grinned.

"Waal, nope; I reckon that ain't in the picture," he admitted. "If the guy's in Hollywood agin, I guess gun-play ain't no use. But I reckon I could cinch him any time you wanted. You was going to put him in the Pacific that time we got the fat gink by mistake. I guess an auto would run him down to Santa Monica beach any time, and getting hold of the guy is as easy as pie."

"You call it easy!" sneered Polk. "You called it easy to pot him in Jack-Rabbit Canyon! Gomez called it easy to break his neck on the Hair-trigger path! Gomez is in prison now, and you—you've failed, and I've more than half a mind to send you where Gomez is now for your blundering!"

"Aw, forget it, Mr. Polk," said the bootlegger. "I guess you don't want me to talk about this to all Los. I guess you're handing out plenty dollars

to fix things for Gomez, to keep him from spilling too much to the cops."

Polk snapped out an oath. His threat was an idle one; he dared not carry it out. The bootlegger knew too much for that.

"Guess agin, Mr. Polk," said Slick coolly. "What's the matter with cinching the guy, running him down to the beach in an auto, and putting him on the motor-boat? I guess he can be dropped over the side a dozen miles out to sea, and when he's washed up there won't be nothing to show what happened to him. That's safer than gun-play."

"If you could do it—without blundering again—" snarled Polk.

"Where's the guy located now?"

"Long Beach Boarding House."

"Jest pie," said Slick. "I guess I can walk in and out of a shebang like that whenever I want."

"So you said when you tried that game at the rancho; but you got that fat fool by mistake."

"How was a galoot to know they'd changed rooms?" growled Slick. "I got the guy that was in the room you told me in the dark."

"I can't tell you his room at Long Beach. I've never been in the place."

"I guess I'll find the room, easy. And I won't take chances in the dark again. It was through you telling me—"

"Oh, out that out!" snarled Polk. "Try it on at Long Beach. Try it on to-night, if you've got the sand. Get him on the motor-boat in the bay, and you can ask me for five thousand dollars as soon as you like."

Slick's eyes glistened.

"Now you're talking!" he said emphatically. "I'll phone you from Santa Monica. I guess I'll put it that a friend is going on a cruise. Can't be too careful on the phone. You can expect a call early in the morning, Mr. Polk."

"That goes!" growled Polk.

And when the bootlegger was gone Polk threw himself on his cushions again, in a rather less savage and restless mood. He derived solace from the thought of what was to happen to Harry Wharton that night.

Slick Wilson left the bungalow on the hill, and loafed away by the path down to Hollywood. After he had gone, a figure detached itself from the shadow of a pepper-tree near the gate and followed. Mr. Carter, the Los Angeles detective, was also going to be busy that night.

THE EIGHTH CHAPTER.

Awful!

"I SAY, you fellows!"

"Hallo, hallo, hallo!"

"I say, old chaps!" pleaded Billy Bunter.

The door of Bunter's room at Long Beach Boarding House was a foot open, and from the opening the Owl of the Remove blinked through his big spectacles, gracefully draped in a blanket.

Dinner was over at Long Beach. Harry Wharton & Co. were going to a picture-house that evening, and they had come to their rooms to get ready. They stopped in the corridor as Bunter hailed them, and smiled.

Bunter, in the blanket, was enough to make anyone smile.

"Anything we can do for you, old bean?" asked Bob Cherry affably.

"I'm hungry," said Bunter plaintively.

"Is that all?"

"Beast!"



Crouched behind the palm, Bunter's wide-open, terrified eyes were fixed on the landing before him. In the faint starlight from the window he saw a burly form, the face hidden by a black mask. The Owl of the Remove remained dumb, motionless, spellbound with fear! (See Chapter 9.)

"I hear that Mr. Coot has booked a theatre ticket for you this evening, fatty," said Johnny Bull. "Are you going like that?"

"Lend me some clobber, old chaps."

"The lendfulness is not going to be terrific, my ridiculous fat Bunter," smiled Hurree Jamset Ram Singh.

"I say, you fellows, you might have brought my clothes from Jack-Rabbit. I—I brought yours, you know," said Bunter. "One good turn deserves another."

"Oh my hat!"

"I can't stay here!" said Bunter. "You can see that! I can't go down and feed like this! Now, can I?"

"Well, if you ask me, I should say not," said Harry Wharton, laughing. "Still, it's a free country, and you can do as you like."

"Lend me some clothes—"

"No fear!"

"Beast!" roared Bunter.

"You see, it's time you had a lesson," explained the captain of the Remove. "You've wanted a lesson for a long time. Now you've got it."

"The gotfulness is terrific."

"You asked for this, you know," remarked Nugent.

"I say, you fellows, don't be beasts, you know," urged Buter. "After all I've done for you, too! I say, Manly—"

"Yaas?"

"You're not such a beast as those other beasts, old chap. Will you—"

"But I am, old bean," answered Lord Mauleverer. "Worse."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"It will do you a lot of good to miss tiffin, old fruit," said Bob. "I hear from Coot that you've nearly made a famine in Hollywood to-day. You've got enough on board for weeks."

"Oh, really, Cherry—"

"You fat mugwump," said Fisher T. Fish, coming along the passage and giving Bunter a glare like a basilisk. "I guess I'm wise to your little game now. I've got it from Coot."

"Oh, really, Fishy—"

"You jay!" said Fisher T. Fish. "Coot thought he was phoned up from the location by my popper. You've been running up bills here for popper to pay! He won't pay a cent! Got that?"

"Look here—"

"He's cancelled that theatre ticket, and he's cancelled the car for the theatre. I've put him wise that he'll have to pay for them himself. That was enough for Coot."

"Beast!"

"And I guess he will be dogging you to pay for that auto from the location. I've told him the popper won't."

"Yah!"

"And if you don't shell out, you go out of this shebang in the morning, at the end of Coot's boot!" said Fisher T. Fish. "Put that in your pipe and smoke it, you slab-sided mutt!"

(Continued on page 16.)

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I.
THE fact is, Lickham, I am in a giddy fix—or, as the vulgar would express it, I am on the horns of a dilemma!"

Dr. Birchmell, the revered and majestic Head of St. Sam's, took a savidge bite from a chunk of toffy as he spoke, and glared up inkwiringly at the Fourth Form master for his opinion.

Mr. Lickham rubbed his chin reflectively.

"It certainly seems so, sir," he mormered. "Of course, you must admit, it's your own fault. If you hadn't been such a silly ass—"

"What!" roared the Head.

"If you hadn't been such a silly ass as to fix that booby-trap for Monsure Froggay, it wouldn't have happened," said Mr. Lickham, undawnted. "But you did it, and now you've got to face the consequences."

Dr. Birchmell shuddered.

"But a duel, Lickham—think of that! A duel cannot be faced with equa—equa—"

"Equanilibrium," finished Mr. Lickham. "Eggsactly! I must admit I should feel a little worried at the prospect, myself, so it must be a grate deal more worrying to a cowherd like yourself."

"You silly ass!" hooted the Head furiously. "I've told you a thousand times that I'm not frightened of that frog-eating forriner. What I object to is the loss of prestige I shall suffer."

"Ha, ha! Yes, of course, there's that!" sniggered the master of the Fourth. "But you won't feel that so much as a dig in the bread-basket from Froggay's rapier."

"Yaroooo! Stoppit, you idiot!" groaned Dr. Birchmell, turning a sickly green. "I shall refuse point-blank to allow Monsure Froggay to do anything of the kind. Something must be done, Lickham. And you've got to help me in my dreadful dilemma."

Mr. Lickham shrugged.

"It's difficult to see what can be done, sir. Froggay has challenged you to a duel to the deth, and if you don't axsept, you'll have the finger of skorn pointed at you for the rest of your life. But there's one hopeful featcher about it. As you are the challenged party, you have the choice of weppons—"

"Fat lot of comfort there is in that!" snorted the Head.

"If you don't fancy your luck with swords, or pistols, why not choose a weppon with which your superior hite and reach will have full play?" suggested Mr. Lickham. "For eggssample, the lance is a jolly useful sort of implement—"

"The—the lance?" stuttered Dr. Birchmell, breaking out in a cold sweat.

"Then again, you mite find yourself more at home with a battle-axe," remarked Mr. Lickham brightly.

"B-b-battle-axe?" shrieked the Head.

"With a long reach like yours, you ought to be able to do grate eggsecution with a battle-axe, sir."

"You—you utter idiot! Do you imagine for one moment that I intend indulging in a duel with battle-axes?" roared Dr. Birchmell. "For goodness' sake dry up, and listen to me. I've got a wheeze."

Mr. Lickham groaned. When the Head had a wheeze Mr. Lickham was usually the one who had to work it.

"What is the wheeze, sir?" he asked, doing his best to look enthewsastic.

"It's a desprit wheeze, Lickham. But desprit diseases rekwire desprit remedies, and I'm prepared to go to any length to stop this duel."

The Head sank his voice to a thrilling whisper.

"What about kidnapping Monsure Froggay and keeping him a prisoner until he agrees to render me an appology and call off the duel?" he said.

Mr. Lickham started.

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"Impossible, sir! The very idea of kidnapping one of my own colleags is repugnant to me, and if you want my opinion—"

"Hush! The walls have ears, Lickham!" hissed Dr. Birchmell. "Look here now, let's get down to brass tax. Are you willing to help me to kidnap that French rotter after tea to-day?"

Mr. Lickham's lips set grimly.

"I cannot do it, sir. It would go against my principuls altogether."

"I'll give you sixpence, if you'll assist," said the Head, almost beseechingly.

"Quite impossibil, sir!"

"A shilling, then!" almost groaned Dr. Birchmell.

Mr. Lickham's face broke into a grin.

"Ah! Now you're talking, sir. For a shilling, I am willing to throw my principuls to the winds. I'll help you."

"Thank Hevvan!" gasped the Head.

"How do you propose to set about committing this fowl deed, sir?" asked Mr. Lickham.

Dr. Birchmell furroed his brow with thought.

"Listen, Lickham. After tea every day, Monsure Froggay is in the habit of taking a stroll to the pond at the back of Fossil's lodge for the purpuss of catching frogs for his supper."

Mr. Lickham nodded eagerly.

"This evening I propose that we follow Froggay on this eggspedition, armed with gags and a plentyful supply of rope. While he is engrossed in his loathsome task, we can sneak up behind him, and fell him to the ground, then bind him hand and foot before he has a chance to show fight."

"Good egg!" chuckled the master of the Fourth.

"Having secured him, we must then carry him off to the Cloisters, beneath which there is a secret cell I wot of. Once we get him in there he will never be discovered, for the eggssistence of the cell is unsuspected by anyone but myself."

"My hat! You're a downy bird, and no mistake, sir," said Mr. Lickham admiringly.

Dr. Birchmell smirked.

"Anyway, Lickham, that's my wheeze. I think you will find that Monsure will soon get fed up with being a kaptiv in a secret cell, and before bed-time, unless I'm gratefully mistaken, I shall be able to dictate terms to the rotter."

"I should certainly imagine so, sir," grinned Mr. Lickham. "I'll assist you to the best of my abillity, anyway."

"Thank you, Lickham. And now, for the prezzent, you may buzz off, and I will resoom my litterary studies."

Mr. Lickham obediently "buzzed," and Dr. Birchmell, feeling decidedly more easy in his mind, settled down to the latest number of "Comic Snippings."

II.

DR. BIRCHEMALL mite not have felt quite so easy in mind had he known that his conversation with Mr. Lickham had been overherd.

Yet such was the case. Unbeknown to the two conspirators, Tubby Barrell, the porpuss of the Fourth, had been applying his fat ear to the keyhole of the Head's study. He faredly gasped at what he herd.

When Tubby herd Mr. Lickham bid the Head adioo, he made a bolt for the Fourth passidge, and succeeded in turning the corner before the master of the Fourth made his eggssit.

Skuttlng into the Fourth passidge, he bashed violently into Jack Jolly & Co., the heroes of the Lower Skool at St. Sam's, who were coming along arm-in-arm, grinning all over their diles in their usual cheery fashun.

The cheery chums were shot all over the passidge as Tubby Barrell's twenty stone cannonned into them.

"Yarooooo!" they yelled, as they picked themselves up again. "Where the dickens do you think you're going?"

DR. BIRCHMELL



"I say, you fellows, is old Lickham coming after me?" gasped Tubby Barrell.

"Of course not, you fat chump!" snapped Jack Jolly.

"Oh, good! I say, you fellows—he, he, he!—I've just herd something really rich!" cackled the fat Fourth-Former.

"Been Eve's dropping again?" snorted Frank Fearless.

"Certainly not! I've simply been listening at the keyhole of the Head's study," replied Tubby indignantly. "I say, what do you think of old Birchy as a kidnapper?"

"What?" howled Jack Jolly & Co.

"Fact!" said Tubby. And then he told them what he had herd.

Needless to say, our heroes were disgusted at the Head's trechery.

"The fact of the matter is, the old buffer is frightened out of his wits at the idea of having a duel with Froggy," said Jack Jolly. "We all know what an awful cowherd he is at hart."

"Oh, rather!"

"It's simply disgusting," remarked Merry. "What are things coming to when the headmaster of a grate public skool funks a duel with a blessed French master? It's a bit thick, you know."

And the rest of the Co. agreed that it was.

"Personally, I think it's up to us to butt in," said Jack Jolly. "After all the Head can't punish us for rescuing one of our own masters from the klutches of

BIRCHEMALL'S



DICKY
NUGENT

DILEMMER!

An awful coward at heart, Dr. Birchermall is frightened out of his wits at the thought of having to fight a duel with Monsure Froggay. No wonder our downy old bird is prepared to go to any length to stop the fight!



kidnappers—even though he does happen to be the leading kidnapper himself."

"Eggsactly!"

"So I vote we follow up the Head and Licky, and chip in. All agreed?"

"Yes, rather!" corussed the Co. hartily. And they adjerned to their study to talk it over.

After tea that day, Monsure Froggay, in accordance with his usual practiss, strolled down to the back of the porter's lodge carrying the big butterfly-net which he used for catching frogs.

The Head and Mr. Lickham sneaked down the Skool House steps a cupple of minnits later carrying coils of strong rope and gags with which to stifle the cries of their innoesent viktim—when they got him!

Whether they were going to get him or not was a matter of conjeckture, though they didn't know it. For hot on their track were Jack Jolly & Co., their faces grim and Ernest as they tramped across the quad.

With stelthy, sinnister movements, the two desprit kidnappers shadowed the unsuspecking French master down to the skool gates, and sneaked round the bushes at the back of Fossil's lodge.

"Hurry up, you fellows," mermered Jack Jolly, as they disappeared from view.

And the Co. continewed the chase at the dubble.

They were not a moment too soon. Just as they came in sight of the pond where Monsure Froggay was in the habit of hunting his frogs, a sudden cry of alarm rang out.

"Ah moi! Ah moi! Yarooooo! Assistance!"

"Monsure Froggay!" cried Jack Jolly.

The Co. farely raced to the sucker of the French master. As they ran they saw the unforchunit gentleman struggling furiously in the hands of Dr. Birchermall and Mr. Lickham.

"Tie up his feet, Licky!" they herd the Head say. "I've gagged him, and I'm just about to secure the rotter's arms!"

"I, I, sir!" muttered Mr. Lickham, bending to his task. "I think I can mannidge him easily enuff—yooooop!"

The master of the Fourth gave a mizzerable yelp as one of Monsure Froggay's feet lashed out and caught him a terrifick bash on the nose.

"Hurry, you footling dummy!" hissed Dr. Birchermall.

"Whad about by dose?" roared the master of the Fourth in aggermy.

"Bother your blessed nose! Get on with the job!" snorted the Head.

Mr. Lickham had another go. But before he could suxxeed in his fowl desine, there was a rush of feet, and Jack Jolly & Co. appeared on the scene.

"Down with the kidnappers!" shouted Jack Jolly. "Rescue, St. Sam's!"

"What-ho!" grinned his followers, and they waded in hartily.

Dr. Birchermall gave a yell of alarm.

"What the thump—woooop! Oh crikey!"

"Sock it into 'em!" yelled Frank Fearless.

Thump! Crash! Bang!

For a minnit, Dr. Birchermall and his comrade in crime imajined that an earthquake and a hurricane rolled into one had suddenly hit them. It was merely Jack Jolly & Co. farely letting themselves go. They hit out right and left—in fact, on severral occasions they hit each other by mistake. But it was all in the game, and our heroes didn't heed trifles like that.

"Duck the rotters!" ordered Jack Jolly, when the kidnappers had been licked to a frazzle.

"Oh crikey!" gasped the Co.

But they didn't hezzitate to obey their trusted leader, and eggssactly one second later, Dr. Birchermall and Mr. Lickham were flying through the air, to finish up in the muddy waters of the pond.

Splash!

"Oooooooh!" yelled the kidnappers.

And Monsure Froggay's rescuers joined with Monsure Froggay himself in a yell of larfter.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The two conspirators, cuvvered in mud and slime, splashed their way out farely howling with rage.

"You—you villains!" hooted Dr. Birchermall. "I'll smash you! I'll spifficate you! I'll—"

"Well I'm blessed!" eggssclaimed Jack Jolly in pretended surprise. "If it isn't the Head!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Who would have thought of you and Mr. Lickham kidnapping Monsure Froggay?" said the captain of the Fourth blandly.

"You—you—I'll birch you black and bloo for this, bust me if I won't!" hooted the Head savvidgely.

"But you can't birch us for rescuing Monsure Froggay from the klutches of a cupple of kidnappers, can you, sir?" asked Jack Jolly in surprise.

Dr. Birchermall nashed his teeth with rage. Only too well did he know that Jack Jolly was right. To flog the juniors for rescuing his intended viktim would have been courting publissity, which was the last thing the Head wanted in connection with this unforchunit affair.

"Very well, then!" he said harshly. "Buzz off, all of you!" And Jack Jolly & Co. buzzed off.

Dr. Birchermall turned to Monsure Froggay.

"Monsure," he said, "you understand, of corse, that Lickham and I were merely playing a praacktical joke on you? We didn't really intend to kidnap you, did we, Lickham?"

"Groooo!" groaned Mr. Lickham.

"No fear, sir!"

But Monsure Froggay wasn't taken in so easily as that.

"Buzzoffez-voo! I vish not to argew viz such villains!" he said. "You are afraid! You get ze veend up! Bah!"

"Look here, Monsure, can't we call that duel off?" asked the Head, pleadingly.

"Pah! Certainment not! I've made up ze mind. You fight me to ze deth! Bong soir!"

With that, Monsure Froggay turned on his heel, and trotted back towards the Skool House. Dr. Birchermall, however, made a bee-line to the nearest bath-room to clean himself up, and to moan and groan at the thought that all his plotting and planning had been in vane.

THE END.

(Make sure you read the final story in this amusing series, entitled: "A DUEL TO THE DETH!" It will send you into fits of laughter, chums!)



(Continued from page 13.)

And Fisher T. Fish stalked away. "I say, you fellows," pleaded Bunter, "go and tell Coot that I want some dinner sent to my room. Nobody answers my bell."

"My dear man, Coot won't send any grub upstairs," said Bob, "only on special terms—extra charges. I'm afraid your credit isn't good enough in this boarding-house."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You fellows can pay——"

"I don't think!"

"Lend me——"

"Good-bye!"

"Yah! Rotters!" roared Bunter, as the Greyfriars fellows went along the corridor.

Bunter retired into his room again, and groaned.

The astuteness with which he had laid his plans that day, had been a sheer waste of brain power. Bunter's last state was worse than his first.

The Greyfriars fellows had made up their minds that William George Bunter needed a lesson. Bunter himself did not see it, but it was quite clear to everybody else. Now he was getting the lesson. He might derive instruction from it, but satisfaction it was impossible to derive. The fat junior was in a dismal frame of mind.

At Long Beach Boarding-House, if a fellow did not turn up for a meal he missed that meal. Bunter had missed dinner, and all the king's horses and all the king's men could not have provided him with one. Had Colonel Coot remained under the delusion that Hiram K. Fish had committed Bunter to his special care, regardless of expense, the matter could have been arranged. But the iniquitous Fishy had put the colonel wise on that point. There was nothing doing.

Bunter understood now why his bell had not been answered. He was no longer a guest whom the colonel delighted to honour. He was, in fact, a guest whom the colonel would be delighted to boot, unless somebody paid the bills he had already incurred. Never had a masterly scheme been so completely kyboshed.

If only those beasts had stayed at the location! But they hadn't. Instead of living on the fat of the land, regardless of expense, Bunter was reduced to what he stood up in—and what he stood up in was a blanket and a pair of spectacles!

In dismal spirits, the Owl of the Remove heard the juniors crowding downstairs and departing for the evening.

By this time the pangs of hunger were afflicting him seriously.

He had eaten enough for only six or seven fellows that day. So the prospect of going to bed unfed was appalling.

He rang the bell again at last. He guessed now that the beastly Coot must have given orders for his bell to remain unanswered. He was a sordid beast! A mere question of money made all this

difference! Only that afternoon he had been prepared to bow down and worship; now he wasn't prepared to stand Bunter a single meal on tick. Likely enough he was feeling irritated at the way his leg had been pulled, now that that other beast, Fishy, had put him wise. But Bunter was getting desperate. He rang and rang and rang again.

There was a footstep at last. The door was flung open, and Colonel Coot appeared in the doorway.

"Say, you gink!" he snorted.

"I—I—I say, Mr. Coot!"

Mr. Coot glared at him.

"I'll say you're some crook," said Mr. Coot. "I been on the phone to Mr. Fish. He allows he never phoned me this morning, like young Fish said. What you got to say?"

"I'm hungry!"

"I ain't kicking you out to-night," said Mr. Coot; "but if your bill ain't paid bright and early in the morning, out you go, on your neck! Got that?"

"I'm famished——"

"What you fixed up like that for?" demanded Mr. Coot.

"Those beasts have taken away my clothes," wailed Bunter. "I say, if you'll lend me some clothes——"

"Lend you nothing!" snapped Mr. Coot. "You touch that bell again, and I'll hoof you out on the boulevard, jest as you are! Chew on that! Mr. Fish allows he ain't paying for that car from Jack-Rabbit. You paying?"

"Certainly!" gasped Bunter. "I—I'm expecting a postal-order——"

Slam!

Colonel Coot retired, slamming the door after him, without waiting to hear particulars of the remittance that Bunter was expecting.

Obviously, he was in a state of great annoyance. Perhaps that was not to be wondered at, in the circumstances. Hiram K. Fish had stated, with great emphasis, that he was not going to pay any bills that Bunter had run up. Mr. Coot had a rather natural disinclination to pay them himself. Bunter could not pay them. Mr. Coot was not in business as a boarding-house-keeper merely for his health. The bare idea of being "done" was exasperating to Mr. Coot. The prospect of losing money was enough to get the goat of any citizen of the United States.

Bunter groaned.

He was not worrying about Mr. Coot's possible loss. That was a matter solely for Mr. Coot to worry about.

Bunter was worrying about dinner and supper. These were matters of the first importance, concerning Bunter himself.

But there was nothing doing. He did not venture to ring the bell again. Coot was beast enough to do as he threatened; and being hoofed out on the boulevard in a blanket would not have improved matters for the Owl of the Remove.

Fortunately, Bunter was a fellow of resources. Eating was his seventh heaven, but sleeping was his sixth. As there was nothing to eat, Bunter decided to take it out in sleep.

So he went to bed.

Within a very short space of time the Owl of the Remove was fast in the arms of Morpheus.

When Harry Wharton & Co. came back from the pictures they heard a sound resembling distant thunder as they passed Bunter's door. It was a sound with which they had been familiar in the dormitory at Greyfriars. Bunter was sleeping.

So they went to bed, and left him to it.

THE NINTH CHAPTER.

In the Small Hours!

BILLY BUNTER awoke.

The hour was late.

A glimmer of starlight came in at his window. The boarding-house was silent and still. Now that Bunter was awake, no sound disturbed the stillness. Previously there had been the voluminous sound of Bunter's hefty snore.

Now all was silent.

Bunter sat up in bed.

The stillness was disturbed by a deep, dismal groan.

Bunter was hungry.

For long hours he had forgotten his woes in sleep. But the inner Bunter was not to be denied. Within Bunter's wide circumference there was an aching void.

Sleep was banished.

Romantic fellows have been kept awake, watching the weary hours, by the pangs of unrequited love. But the pangs of unrequited hunger were much more severe. Bunter was famished. Sleep was impossible. Bunter could have eaten anything; but there was nothing to eat! It was awful!

He rolled out of bed at last.

Something had to be done. If there was grub within the four walls of Long Beach Boarding-House, Bunter was going to scoff that grub. Bunter had reached the limit of human endurance.

His fat mind was made up. He knew where the pantry was. Bunter had an unfailing eye for such things. If it was locked he would have to burgle it. If those beasts thought he was going to perish quietly of famine, those beasts were jolly well mistaken.

Even those beasts had left him his pyjamas. But the night was cold, and Bunter took a blanket from the bed and draped it round his tubby form. Then he opened his door and listened.

All was still. At half-past one in the morning all was, naturally, still. The coast was clear.

If there was a row about it next day Bunter couldn't help that. He was not going to famish—not if Bunter knew it.

He crept out of the room and closed the door softly. It was necessary to be cautious. If he awakened Colonel Coot there was no doubt the colonel would be a beast.

Bunter crept away to the stairs.

At the head of the stairs—Bunter paused to listen again. It seemed to him that he heard a creak from below.

But the sound was not repeated, and the Owl of the Remove crept softly on tiptoe down the stairs.

Half-way down there was a turn in the staircase, with a landing. In the angle stood a large pot, containing a palm, on a wooden stand. On the landing, Bunter paused to listen again.

Creak!

He started and shuddered.

There was no doubt about it. That creak was unmistakable. Somebody was moving about below, with steps as cautious as Bunter's own.

With his fat heart throbbing, Bunter listened.

Creak again, and a soft sound as of some moving form brushing against some article of furniture. Bunter suppressed his breathing. He did not think, for the moment, of burglars. His thoughts were fixed on the pantry, and what he feared was that Mr. Coot had suspected his design, and perhaps guessed that he had left his room in search of provender.

Stealthily footsteps were approaching the staircase. Whoever it was that was creeping in the darkness below was approaching the stairs, with the evident

intention of coming up. Coot, of course, coming up to see if Bunter was there! The beast had heard something and woke up. Bunter stood in terror of seeing the electric light flashed on and of beholding the wrathful countenance of Colonel Coot.

But the light did not flash on, and there was a faint creak as a stealthy foot was placed on the stair.

Billy Bunter shivered.

It was borne in upon his fat mind that this could not possibly be Coot. Coot would have turned on the light.

But if it was not Coot, who and what was it?

Bunter's podgy heart almost died within him as he realised what it was—what it must be.

It was a burglar; it could only be a burglar who was creeping up the staircase in that stealthy manner.

At that awful moment Bunter forgot even that he was hungry. It was all he could do to suppress a squeak of terror.

He stood transfixed.

Had he gone on his way downstairs he would have walked right into that stealthy intruder.

He shuddered.

Instinctively, for he was too terrified to think, he backed out of the way. There was a window on the landing, through which a gleam of starlight came. But Bunter remembered the palm-stand in the corner, and slipped behind it, his bare feet making no sound.

Between the palm and the angle of the landing he crouched back against the wall, his fat heart pounding like a piston.

He was filled with dread that the stealthy intruder might hear it. But the creeping footsteps came on and up; the intruder heard nothing.

Crouched behind the palm, Bunter's wide-open, terrified eyes were fixed on the landing before him.

In the darkness something darker moved.

Bunter stilled his breathing.

In the faint starlight from the window he saw a burly form, the face hidden by a black mask.

The shadowy figure passed within a yard of him as it crept by. The fat junior tried not to breathe.

The shadow flitted by.

Bunter remained dumb, motionless, spellbound with fear. From the bottom of his fat heart he wished that he had remained in bed. Even supper was not worth this.

He strained his fat ears to listen. If the masked man should see him, hear him, suspect that he was there! Very likely he had an automatic!

It was all Bunter could do to keep back a howl of terror.

But the masked man passed him undiscovered, unsuspected. Faint sounds, only to be detected by ears strained in terror, told that he was creeping up the upper stairs.

He was gone.

Evidently he had reached the upper landing, and the corridor upon which opened the bed-rooms of the guests in Long Beach Boarding House.

Bunter was safe.

He breathed again.

His fat heart was still pounding. He tried to think of what he had better do. To get back to his room was impossible—the masked man was above. To give the alarm was possible; but if Bunter thought of that he thought also of a possible automatic! Not for the whole world would he have risked drawing the masked man's attention upon himself.

Evidently Bunter's cue was to understudy Brer Rabbit, and lie low and say nothing.

That was the best thing for Bunter; and the best thing for Bunter was, of course, the best thing imaginable. The burglar might have cleared out the whole of the boarding-house, without Bunter worrying very much about it. He was not likely to bag much loot in Bunter's room, at all events.

Bunter remained still. All he wanted was that the burglar should go! He might carry off all the valuables in Long Beach House, so far as Bunter was concerned, so long as he would only go.

With shivers running through his fat limbs, Bunter hugged the dark corner behind the palm, and waited and listened.

He could hear nothing.

Bunter became conscious of a cold draught that was playing round his fat legs. The blanket that gracefully draped his fat figure did not defend his lower extremities from it; and Mauly's thin silk pyjamas were not much of a protection. With horror and alarm Bunter realised that he was going to sneeze.

He struggled desperately to control it.

He must not sneeze! He dared not sneeze! A sneeze in the dead silence of the night would alarm the burglar; he could not fail to hear it.

Billy Bunter fought against that sneeze. But he fought a losing fight!

(Continued on next page.)



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The more he strove to sneeze, the more he felt that he had to. Once, twice, thrice it nearly came, and with desperate efforts he checked it. Again it strove to burst forth, and again he drove it back.

Some slight sound, some suppressed gurgle must have escaped Bunter in his wrestle with that unsuppressable sneeze. For in the dark above there was a suddenly caught breath, a brushing sound as of someone leaning over the balustrade to look down the stairs. The sneeze had not yet escaped, but the masked man had heard some faint sound.

Then—all the more powerful because of its long strenuous suppression—that sneeze fairly took the bit in its teeth and bolted.

It burst forth almost like the blast of a foghorn.

"Atchooooooooooh!"

It was a Gargantuan sneeze! It was a Brobdingnagian sneeze! It awoke every echo of the staircase of the hall below and the corridor above. It almost roared.

"Atchoo, atchoo! Atchooooooooooh!"

THE TENTH CHAPTER.

Mr. Carter's Capture!

BUNTER sneezed! For the moment he did nothing else. He was conscious only of the happy release of that long and painfully-suppressed sneeze. Forgetful even of the burglar Bunter stood and trumpeted like an elephant.

But the next moment he remembered.

He was still sneezing when there was a sudden step on the stairs above him, and a concentrated beam of light shot from the darkness.

It was the flash of an electric torch.

It flashed on the mid-stair landing, on the palm in the tub, and on the fat figure wrapped in the blanket behind the palm, on the fat face convulsed by that Brobdingnagian sneeze.

Behind that sudden beam of light was the masked intruder; but Bunter saw nothing but the dazzling light. If he had been terrified before, he was frightened out of his fat wits now. For he was discovered—in a moment or two the grasp of the desperado would be upon him, or the bullet from the automatic would be crashing out. Bunter made a wild leap to escape.

Crash!

Over went the palm-stand—over went the tub and the palm! And Bunter flew.

The wooden stand crashed on the landing. The palm-tub rolled down the lower stairs.

Bump, bump, bump!

Another bump on the landing followed, and the electric beam was shut off. Had Bunter been listening to the sounds behind him he would have guessed that the masked man had stumbled over the fallen palm-stand and tumbled over.

But Bunter was not heeding or listening. He was fleeing for his life.

Accompanied by the rolling tub and the crashing palm, Bunter flew down the lower stairs into the hall.

All was dense darkness there, but Bunter had no time to stop and grope his way. Terror was behind him.

He rushed on in the darkness.

The hall-way at Long Beach Boarding-House extended through the building, from the porch in front to french windows opening on the garden at the back. Rooms and passages opened on it on both sides. Bunter knew the lie of

the land of course. He rushed right down the long hall-way, his only idea being to place the greatest possible distance, in the shortest possible time, between his fat person and the masked man on the stairs.

A bamboo table, supporting a jar of shrubs, adorned the hall-way, and Bunter crashed into it in full career.

Bump. Crash! Smash!

Long Beach Boarding-House, so silent a minute ago, was echoing with wild uproar now.

Bunter staggered for a moment, recovered himself, and dashed on.

Voices could be heard upstairs; lights were flashing in various rooms; doors were opening. A tenth part of the uproar caused by Bunter's wild flight would have alarmed the house. Bunter was making uproar enough to alarm all the boulevard.

"Hallo, hallo, hallo!"

"What the thump—"

"Who—"

"What—"

"Look out—"

Shouting voices and opening doors and flashing lights! But Billy Bunter was unconscious of it all. He rushed on down the dark hallway in frantic flight.

A cold gust of wind struck him, and he realised, half consciously, that the french windows at the end of the hall were open. That was a godsend to Bunter. Instantly he rushed out to gain the open garden.

Crash!

He rushed into something in the dark.

For the moment he did not realise that it was a human figure that had been lurking in the gloom by the open window.

But he realised it the next moment, when strong hands closed on him and grasped him.

"Cinched!" said a panting voice.

Bunter's senses whirled.

He could not speak. He could not struggle. He could only gasp in utter terror.

His wrists were seized and dragged together. He was hardly aware of it. Terror overmastered him, and he was barely conscious of what was happening.

Click!

Bunter was helpless. His fat wrists were fastened together by something that had a cold, metallic contact. He was pushed back into the house, lost his footing, and rolled over on the floor, gasping. A shadowy figure followed him in, and the french window was shut.

Mr. Carter, grinning with glee in the darkness, groped along the hallway for a lighting switch.

Upstairs, Long Beach Boarding-House was already flooded with light.

Every occupant of the house was awakened now. The Greyfriars juniors, in their pyjamas, were all out of their rooms; Harry Wharton had switched on the light in the corridor; Bob Cherry had turned it on at the head of the stairs. Colonel Coot's voice could be heard shouting; the powerful tones of Coker of the Fifth were bellowing. The landing window was wide open—the cold wind blew in on the stairs.

"What's the row?" roared Johnny Bull. "Is it burglars?"

"Come on!" shouted Coker of the Fifth. "I can see somebody—there's somebody downstairs—"

Coker had a heavy stick in his hand. Gallantly he led the way down the stairs. On the mid-stair landing he stumbled over a palm stand, barked his

shins, and bellowed more loudly than before.

"Yaroo!"

"Is that the burglar?" gasped Potter of the Fifth. "Have you got him, Coker?"

"I—I think he's got Coker!" gasped Greene.

"Whoop! Yooop! What silly idiot left this idiotic thing on the stairs?" roared Coker. "What blithering cuckoo—"

He scrambled up, kicked the palm stand aside, and charged on down the lower stairs. He had heard somebody moving there, and spotted a shifting shadow.

"Come on!" roared Coker.

"Say, what's this gol-darned rookus?" yelled Colonel Coot. "Say, what's up? What's all this dog-goned rumpus?"

"Burglars!" roared Coker.

There was a sudden blaze of illumination in the hallway below. The shadowy figure there had found the switch and turned it on.

Coker sighted him, rather dazzled by the sudden light, and rushed at him with stick upraised.

"Here he is! At him!" yelled Coker. "Don't resist, you scoundrel! I'll brain you—"

"Search me!" ejaculated Mr. Carter. "You pesky jay! Keep that stick away! Forget it, you benighted bone-head!"

"It's Carter!" yelled Bob Cherry from the stairs.

"Carter!" gasped Coker.

"The jolly old detective!" exclaimed Nugent. "What the thump is he doing here at this time of night?"

"Carter!" repeated Horace Coker. Fortunately he had realised the detective's identity before braining him. "Look here, what do you mean by this? What the thump—"

"What's this game, you Carter?" shouted Colonel Coot, hustling down the stairs, half dressed and wholly excited. "What—"

"Burglary!" said Mr. Carter tersely. "Worse than that, I reckon, if I hadn't chipped in. But I've got the galoot!"

"You've got him?" exclaimed Potter.

"Sure!"

Mr. Carter grinned with satisfaction. "But who—what—what—"

Colonel Coot.

"I guess I'll put you wise," drawled the Los Angeles detective. "I been shadowing a galoot, for reasons I needn't mention. And I sure shadowed him to this here shebang, and watched him getting in at the french windows at the back of your hallway."

"Search me!" gasped Mr. Coot.

"I was jest coming in after him when he seemed to get the alarm, and came bolting out!" explained Mr. Carter. "He ran right into my arms, and I had the bracelets on him before he could say 'no sugar in mine.' Yes, sir! I got him dead to rights; and he's here—lying at the end of the hallway, with the handcuffs on! This way."

"You got him?"

"I sure got him!"

"Oh, good!" exclaimed Bob. "You're some detective, Mr. Carter."

Mr. Carter smiled complacently.

"I guess I've got my eye-tooth cut!" he agreed. "This way, if you want to see the pesky galoot I've cinched!"

Mr. Carter strode back along the long hallway, to where he had left his handcuffed prisoner sprawling in the dark. It was light now; and the sprawling figure, gasping in the blanket, was in full view. The whole crowd followed Mr. Carter, eager to see the prisoner he had so effectively cinched.



"This way," said Mr. Carter, "if you want to see the pesky galoot I've cinched!" A fat face and a pair of spectacles emerged from the folds of a blanket, and Billy Bunter blinked at the advancing crowd. The detective stared at him—petrified, while from the Greyfriars fellows came a yell of astonishment. "Bunter!" Mr. Carter had not captured the escaping burglar after all! (See Chapter 10.)

The prisoner regained his feet.

A fat face and a pair of spectacles emerged from the folds of a blanket, and Billy Bunter blinked at the advancing crowd.

"Wow!" said Bunter.

Mr. Carter stared at him—petrified! From all the Greyfriars fellows came a yell of astonishment:

"Bunter!"

THE ELEVENTH CHAPTER.

Only Bunter!

"**B**UNTER!"
"Billy Bunter!"
"The Bunterfulness is terrific!"

"Oh, my hat!"

Mr. Carter did not speak. He could only gaze at his capture. It was borne in upon him that the rushing figure he had met in the French window was not, after all, the escaping burglar. Mr. Carter, of course, could not see in the dark. He was a detective, not a cat. Evidently, he had made a little mistake in the dark. Sherlock Holmes himself could not have foreseen that Billy Bunter would be bolting out of the doorway, by which the burglar had entered, at the moment Mr. Carter reached it. Nobody could have guessed that. Mr. Carter was not to blame. Still, it was rather unfortunate.

He stared at the Owl of the Remove with eyes that nearly bulged out of his astonished head.

"Bunter!" said Bob Cherry blankly. "Is—is—is this your prisoner, Mr. Carter? Have you kik-kik-caught Bunter?"

"Oh crumbs!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Still Mr. Carter did not speak. Still he only gazed at William George Bunter blankly, like a man paralysed.

"Bunter!" said Coker of the Fifth. "What was Bunter doing downstairs? What have you handcuffed Bunter for, Mr. Carter?"

"I say, you fellows—"

"Did you take Bunter for a burglar?" asked Coker.

"Ow! I say, you fellows, make that beast take these things off me!" wailed Bunter. "I ain't a burglar!"

"Ha, he, ha!"

"Carry me home to die!" ejaculated Mr. Coot. He grasped the petrified detective by the shoulder, and shook him. "Say, you Carter, what does this mean, anyhow? Spill it!"

"Search me!" gasped Mr. Carter, finding his voice at last.

"I say, you fellows—"

"What was that fat gink rushing out of the house in the dark for?" roared Mr. Carter. "'Course I took him for that galoot beating it in a hurry."

"Oh, crumbs!"

"I say, you fellows—"

"Was there really anybody?" asked Coker. "Was there any burglar at all?"

Mr. Carter woke to action.

He had captured Bunter—which meant that the masked man was still at liberty. Mr. Carter jerked his automatic from his pocket.

"The galoot's still here—here in the house," he rapped out. "I tell you, I shadowed him to that window, and watched him—I was coming in to cinch him when that benighted gink bowled into me, and I thought—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"The galoot's still at large," roared Mr. Carter. "This ain't a time for cackling, it sure ain't. The man's in the house, and I guess he's got a gun. I got to find him."

Harry Wharton pointed to the open landing window.

"If he was here, he's gone before now," he said. "That window was open when we came down—"

Mr. Carter gritted his teeth.

He would not admit that he was beaten, if he could help it. He rushed up the stairs, and began a search of the house. All the guests of Long Beach Boarding-House willingly lent their assistance. If there was a burglar in the house, everybody was anxious to root him out.

But there was no burglar.

It was only too clear that, as soon as the alarm was given, the masked man had forced open the landing window, swung himself out, dropped into the garden, and decamped. The uproar Bunter was making in the hall-way below, had prevented him from going back the way he had come. Slick Wilson had taken the quickest and shortest way out the building—and he had disappeared into the night, in the very moments that Mr. Carter was clapping the handcuffs upon the hapless Bunter.

Until the search was over, nobody heeded Billy Bunter further. But when it was demonstrated that the unknown intruder was gone, the fat junior was released from the handcuffs, which Mr. Carter slipped back into his pocket very hurriedly, as if anxious to get them out of sight. Then Bunter was called on to explain.

His explanation made the matter clear.

Mr. Carter looked at him as if he could have bitten him. He had counted on a capture as a certainty. Certainly, he had made a capture, but not the one he wanted.

Smiling faces surrounded Mr. Carter. Really, he was not to blame. But undoubtedly there was something a little ludicrous in the detective shadowing a 'thug,' and arresting a fat schoolboy. Mr. Carter took a rather hurried departure, leaving the juniors grinning, and Mr. Coot chuckling. There was only one serious face. That was Billy Bunter's.

"I say, you fellows! I'm hungry!" said Bunter.

"You fat cormorant," said Bob. "If you hadn't come down, Carter would have got his burglar."

"Rot! He's a silly idiot," said Bunter peevishly. "Fancy taking me for a burglar—"

"What were you rushing out of the house for, you fat chump?"

"You'd have rushed out of the house, if you'd had a burglar behind you," snorted Bunter.

"But he wasn't behind you—he was scooting from the landing window," chuckled Bob. "You frightened him as much as he frightened you."

"Of course, I wasn't frightened—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I say, you fellows, I'm—"

"You guys get back to bed," grunted Mr. Coot. "I guess there won't be any more burglars, anyhow. I guess it's got me beat what the galoot came up the stairs for. The safe's downstairs, and he could have found it easy. You guys get back to bed."

Colonel Coot turned to Bunter, with a glint in his eyes.

"So you was coming down for grub?" he demanded.

"I'm hungry—"

"Get back to your room, you dog-goned gink," growled the colonel. "I guess I'm going to lock you in."

"But I'm hungry!" wailed Bunter.

"Git!" roared Mr. Coot, in so ferocious a voice that Bunter 'got' without further delay.

Mr. Coot turned the key of his bedroom door on him, and then went to bed. The pantry was safe from William George Bunter now.

The chums of the Remove went back to bed. Long Beach Boarding House returned to slumber and quiet, and Harry Wharton, for the present at least, did not dream of the narrow escape he had had that night.

THE TWELFTH CHAPTER.

At Last!

"I SAY, you fellows!"

"Good-morning, old bean!"

"I say—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Harry Wharton & Co. were in the sunny garden of Long Beach Boarding House, taking a stroll before breakfast, when Billy Bunter hailed them from his window. It was a bright and cheery morning, and the April sunshine fell in a flood on the boulevards of Hollywood. The chums of the Greyfriars Remove were in cheery spirits that morning, quite a contrast to William George Bunter. The fat face that peered down at them over the folded blanket was full of woe.

"Coming down, old fat man?" called up Bob Cherry.

"How can I come down in a blanket?" howled Bunter. "I say, you fellows, I must have some clobber!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You won't have any of mine," grinned the Bunder.

"I guess you won't cinch anything of

mine, you fat gink!" chuckled Fisher T. Fish. "Not on your life."

"I say, you fellows, I must come down to breakfast," howled Bunter. "I'm famished! Starving! Ravenous! I suppose you don't want me to expire of hunger, do you?"

"My dear old bean, you can expire any way you like," answered Bob. "It's your own funeral."

"Beast! I say, lend me some clothes!" pleaded Bunter. "I—I—I forgot to bring my own from Jack-Rabbit, you know. I must come down to brekker. That beast Coot won't send any up to my room. You know he won't! He's making a lot of fuss about that bill he makes out I owe him. He's mean—as mean as old Fish!"

"You pesky mutt! I guess you've got to pay that bill, or Coot will scalp you," said Fisher T. Fish. "The popper won't! Not a single continental red cent."

"I say, you fellows, do bring me some clobber! If I miss brekker, it will be serious! I want to get old Fish on the phone, too. He owes Coot some money, and Coot wants to be paid."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You can get the popper on the phone, but I bet you can't get him on paying your bills!" chuckled Fisher T. Fish.

"Wharton, old chap! Think how often I've saved your life—"

"Oh, my hat!"

"That burglar last night might have got you, you know, if I hadn't gone down to handle him—"

"Great pip!"

"After all I've done for you, I think you might be pally," urged Bunter. "Lend me some trousers at least."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"The trouserfulness is terrifically indispensable," remarked Hurree Jamset Ram Singh. "Perhaps the lessonfulness to the esteemed and ludicrous Bunter has been enough, my worthy chums. We might sort out some of our oldest and most execrable garments—"

"Oh, really, Inky! I think you might let me have something decent, after all I've done for you."

Colonel Coot put his head out of the porch.

"Say, Mr. Wharton, wanted on the phone!" he called out.

"Right!" answered Harry.

He went towards the porch, his comrades following him. There was a yell from Billy Bunter's window.

"I say, you fellows—"

But the fellows disappeared into Long Beach Boarding-House. The Owl of the Remove was left to waste his sweetness on the desert air.

"Oh dear!" gasped Bunter. "Beasts! Oh, jiminy!"

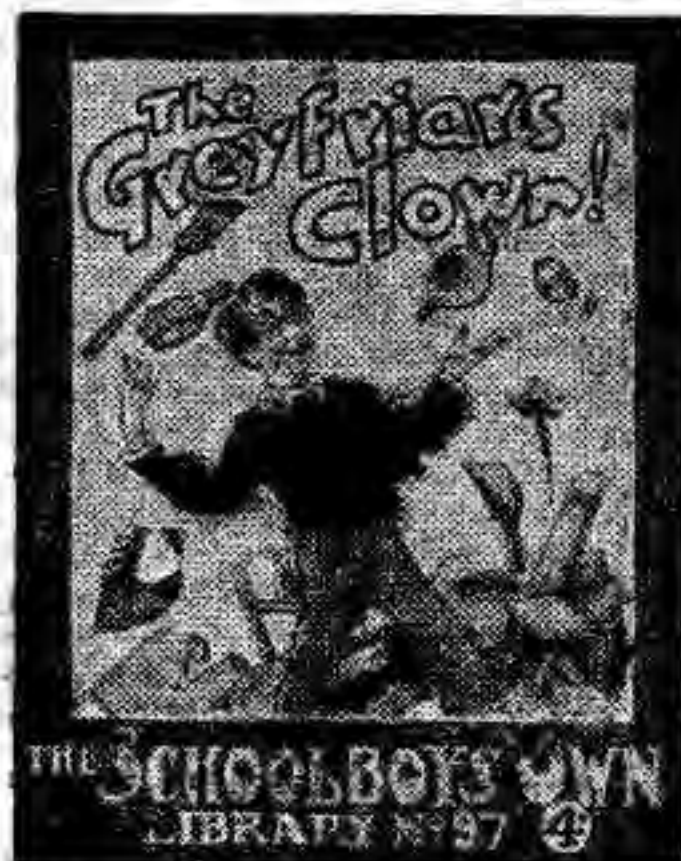
Bunter had turned out that morning in a doleful mood. Troubles had fallen on the fat Owl as thick as leaves in Vallambrosa. Breakfast was the most pressing necessity. And it was certain that Bunter could not go down to breakfast in pyjamas and a blanket, and still more certain that Mr. Coot would not send any to his room. Indeed, unless Mr. Coot's bill was paid, Bunter was booked for the "boot" that morning.

In a single day Bunter had run up an account of seventy dollars. Of course, Mr. Hiram K. Fish had to pay that. It was up to him. The trouble was that he had refused to do so, and seemed to be in deadly earnest about it. Still, that was not the most pressing worry. Breakfast came first. And the question was whether breakfast would come at all. Bunter was not merely hungry now; he was ravenous. He was

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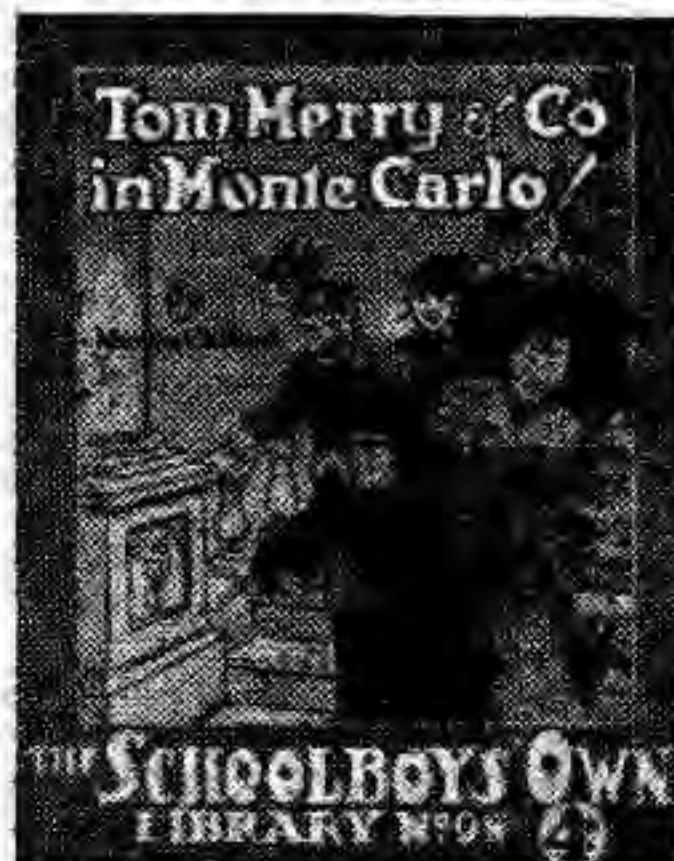
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getting into a state that was positively dangerous. And the juniors had strolled cheerily into the house just as if it didn't matter.

The receiver was off the telephone in the hall, and Harry Wharton went to it.

"Call from Mr. Fish at the Grand," said Colonel Coot.

Wharton nodded and picked up the receiver. He wondered what Mr. Fish had to say to him specially. Mr. Fish had his quarters at the Grand Hotel in Hollywood. It was much more expensive there than at Long Beach Boarding House. That was the excellent reason why Mr. Fish had located the Greyfriars party at the boarding-house.

"Hallo!" called Wharton.

A sharp, staccato voice that he had not heard before came back.

"That Mr. Wharton?"

"Yes, Wharton speaking," answered Harry.

"Mr. Fish's stenographer speaking from Grand Hotel. Mr. Fish wants you to see him at his hotel before going over to the studio. Sending a car for you at nine-thirty."

"Right!"

Wharton's interlocutor rang off, and Wharton put up the receiver.

"You seeing Mr. Fish?" asked Colonel Coot.

"Yes, he wants me to call at his hotel before going to the studio," answered Harry.

"I guess you'd better put it to him about that gink, Bunter. That gink run up seventy dollars yesterday. I guess I ain't losing it," said Mr. Coot. "Mr. Fish allows he's going to pay the fat guy's board here same as before. But what about them seventy dollars?"

"Blessed if I know!" said Harry. "You'll have to screw it out of Bunter somehow."

"Has he got any dust?" demanded the indignant Mr. Coot.

"Not that I know of."

"The dustfulness of the esteemed Bunter is not terrific," remarked Hurreb Jamset Ram Singh, shaking his dusky head. "The esteemed threepenny-piece is the limit of his financial resourcefulness."

"Then where do I come in?" demanded Mr. Coot.

But the juniors had no answer to that question. They could not tell Colonel Coot where he came in. Indeed, it looked as if he was not going to come in at all.

Leaving the colonel in a very morose frame of mind the juniors went upstairs to sort out something for Bunter. The Bouncer was determined not to contribute. And, as for Fisher T. Fish, he could hardly be expected to part with anything. Parting was always painful for Fishy. But the Famous Five and Lord Mauleverer made a collection of such garments as were indispensable to permit Bunter to appear in public, and took them to his room.

"I say, you fellows——"

"Here you are, fatty!" said Harry Wharton. "Breakfast is in ten minutes, so you'd better buck up!"

Bunter blinked disparagingly at the articles offered for his acceptance.

"Those ain't your best trousers, Wharton," he said accusingly.

"Go hon!"

"That's a crummy old jacket, Nugent."

"Dear me!" said Nugent.

"If you think I can wear those old shoes, Bull——"

"Take 'em or leave 'em!" suggested Johnny Bull.

"Beast!"

Bunter decided to take them. He dressed at last in an assortment of garments that certainly were not so nobby as those in which he had arrived at Long Beach Boarding House the previous day. Still, there was no doubt that they were better than a blanket. Breakfast was close at hand, and Bunter had no time to wash as well as dress. That, however, was a minor trouble that the fat junior could bear with fortitude. He contented himself with dressing. Washing could wait.

Bunter was not late for breakfast. At the breakfast table, presided over by Mr. Coot, Bunter received the grimmest of marble eyes from the proprietorial gentleman. But marble eyes did not bother Bunter. Marble eyes were nothing to him, so long as he was allowed to eat. That was the important matter. He ate and was comforted.

THE THIRTEENTH CHAPTER.

Put Wise!

BILLY BUNTER rolled out into the piazza of Long Beach Boarding House after the other fellows. Bunter had not left the breakfast table till the ultimate moment. He lingered till the remains of the foodstuffs were cleared off. Then

Here's a clever limerick which earns for Cyril Palmer, of 54, Nuttall Street, Edge Hill, Liverpool, a handy pocket wallet.

*Billy Bunter to Hollywood came
With visions of dollars and fame,
But alas for his hopes,
He knew not the ropes;
He had far too much "waste"
round his frame.*

There are more wallets waiting to be won, chums. Put your thinking caps on and get busy right away!

there was nothing more to linger for, and the Owl of the Remove followed the juniors. Mr. Coot had requested him to step into his office. So Bunter went out on the piazza. He had no yearning for an interview with Mr. Coot. He was sure that Coot was only going to raise some sordid question of money.

A rather lean gentleman came up the garden from Sunset Boulevard, and the juniors greeted Mr. Carter with a general smile.

They could not quite help smiling over Mr. Peter Carter's exploit of the previous night.

It was not a smiling matter to Mr. Carter, however. He was frowning.

"Morning, bub!" he remarked. "Good - morning, Mr. Carter," answered Harry Wharton. "You didn't get that burglar, I suppose?"

"I sure did not," answered Mr. Carter. "He beat it all right. But I guess I've come to put you wise about that. I——"

"I say, you fellows——"

"Shut up, Bunter!"

"Shan't! I say——"

"You got a few minutes to chin, I guess?" said Mr. Carter to Wharton, after giving Billy Bunter a freezing glare.

"Yes, certainly," said Harry. "I've got to get to Mr. Fish's hotel at half-past nine. I'm waiting for the car to come. Fifteen minutes yet."

"Good! Now, I guess——"

"I say, you fellows——"

"Will you dry up, Bunter?" roared Bob Cherry.

"No, I won't! You needn't bother about listening to Carter," said Bunter peevishly. "Carter doesn't matter. I want to know what's going to be done about my bill."

"Go and eat coke!"

"As you're going to old Fish, Wharton, will you put it to him, and explain that he's simply got to pay. Tell him that honesty's the best policy."

"Oh, my hat!"

"You see, that beast, Coot, will kick me out if he isn't paid! He's sordid. He thinks only about money," said Bunter scornfully. "I'm quite willing to let the matter drop. But he isn't."

"Buzz off, you fat fly!"

"Shan't! He's going to kick me——"

"So am I!" remarked Bob Cherry.

And he did.

"Yaroooh!"

Billy Bunter rolled into the house again. For some reason, inexplicable to Bunter, the Famous Five wanted to hear what Mr. Carter had to say, and did not want to hear what Bunter had to say.

Bunter rolled to the telephone in the hall. Nothing remained but a personal appeal to Mr. Fish.

What was going to be done, if Hiram K. Fish did not pay, was a painful problem.

Mr. Coot, no doubt, was going to be done! That seemed inevitable, if Mr. Fish did not square. It would not have mattered, of course, but for the results for Bunter. As matters stood, it mattered a lot.

Bunter rang up the Hollywood Grand Hotel, to make a desperate attempt to induce Mr. Fish to realise that honesty was the best policy!

He asked for Mr. Fish, and was put through to that gentleman's suite. A sharp nasal voice that Bunter did not know came through.

"Hallo!"

"Bunter speaking from Long Beach Boarding-House. Please ask Mr. Fish to come to the phone. Tell him it's important—fearfully important!"

"Can't be did! Mr. Fish ain't here."

"What?"

"I guess I can take a message. I'm Mr. Fish's stenographer."

"Look here, how long will Mr. Fish be?" demanded Bunter.

"Search me!" was the reply.

"I suppose he will be back by half-past nine, anyhow," said Bunter.

"He sure won't; he's gone to Santa Monica for the day."

"But he's seeing Wharton at half-past nine."

"Eh?"

"Isn't he sending a car for Wharton at half-past nine?"

"Nope! I'll say he ain't!" answered the voice. "Seeing that he left here at eight this morning, and ain't hitting home till to-night, I'll say he ain't, bub!"

"Gammon!" hooted Bunter.

"What?"

"You can't pull my leg, you beast!" Bunter snorted into the telephone. "I know he told Wharton he was sending a car for him at nine-thirty this morning. Look here, tell Mr. Fish I'm on the phone."

"Gee! I keep on telling you he ain't here. If you like to give me a message, I'll hand it on to Mr. Fish to-night."

"Beast!"

"Eh?"

"Yah!"

Mr. Fish's stenographer hung up.

THE MAGNET LIBRARY.—No. 1,106.

Apparently he had had enough of Billy Bunter's polished conversation over the wires.

In great exasperation, Bunter rolled out into the piazza again. He had no doubt that the man on the phone had been putting him off because Mr. Fish did not want to hear from him.

"I say, you fellows—"

Bob Cherry lifted his boot again, and Bunter backed away, and was silent. Mr. Carter gave the fat junior a glare. He seemed to have taken one of those unreasonable dislikes to Bunter, to which the Owl of the Remove was not unaccustomed.

Bunter grunted, and waited for him to finish. It was absurd for his important affairs to be kept waiting while the Los Angeles detective talked. But Bob Cherry's boot left him no choice in the matter.

"Nary burglar," Mr. Carter was saying. "I guess I spotted him, coming away from Polk's bungalow last evening, and he was a guy who was often around with Gomez. I'm telling you, I piped that galoot, and watched him sneaking around this shebang. He wasn't going upstairs among the bed-rooms looking for loot. He sure was not. I reckon there ain't a whole heap of loot in this here boarding-house, anyhow; but what there is, ain't in the rooms above. No, sir!"

"You think—" said Harry.

Mr. Carter interrupted.

"I don't think—I know!" he said. "If he hadn't been interrupted, he would have found your room. I reckoned on getting him there, and I'd sure have got him if that fat gink hadn't been horning in. No good trying to get the goods on Polk; he keeps clear, as usual. But I'd have got that thug!"

"My hat!" said Bob, with a whistle.

"I guess I've nosed around to warn you," said Mr. Carter. "Keep your door locked at night. Take care where you go in the day-time, if you go alone. I'm keeping tabs on Polk—but you never know! You want to watch out, kid. That's what I came to tell you."

"Thanks!" said Harry. "I never guessed—but it's clear enough, I suppose. I'll keep on my guard."

Mr. Carter lighted a cigarette. From along Sunset Boulevard came the honk of an approaching motor. Wharton looked at his watch.

"Half-past!" he said, and he rose from his chair.

"I say, Harry, old chap—"

"Can't stop now, Bunter; cheese it!"

"I'm coming with you, old chap."

"Fathead!"

"Look here, I can't get old Fish on the phone!" howled Bunter. "His man says he's gone to Santa Monica for the day—"

"What?"

"The beast says old Fish left at eight this morning, and isn't coming back till to-night!" hooted Bunter. "Just a trick to put me off, you know, because old Fish doesn't want to pay his bills—"

Wharton stared at him.

"So I'm coming with you," explained Bunter. "Old Fish won't be able to say he isn't there when I see him face to face. See? I can come all right, as there's a car. Of course, I couldn't walk it—and that beast Coot wouldn't phone up a taxi for me, if I asked him. But as there's a car—"

Mr. Carter broke in.

"Who answered you from the Grand Hotel, say?"

"Old Fish's stenographer—"

"And he allowed that Mr. Fish was out for the day?"

"Just gammon, to put me off—"

"You fat gink!"

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There was a glint of excitement in Mr. Carter's keen eyes. He turned to Harry Wharton.

"You sure it's straight about that car coming for you from Mr. Fish?"

"I—I never thought. It was Mr. Fish's stenographer who rang up to make the appointment—at least, so he said—"

Wharton's face was startled.

"And now he allowed Mr. Fish is out for the day! I guess you don't want to step into the car till I've been through to the Grand!" said Mr. Carter tersely. "Wait here."

"Oh, my hat!"

Mr. Carter went into the house. The chums of the Remove looked at one another. Outside the gates of Long Beach, a closed car had halted.

"Is it possible—" breathed Nugent. Wharton set his lips.

"It looks—but we shall soon see. Carter will get the facts."

In a very brief time, Mr. Carter rejoined the juniors in the piazza. His eyes were gleaming.

"I been through to Mr. Fish's rooms at the hotel. His stenographer never rang this shebang this morning, and never made any appointment. Mr. Fish left for Santa Monica at eight, in Mr. Schoutz's car."

"Then—" breathed Wharton.

Mr. Carter grinned.

"I guess it's a plant! If you'd stepped into that car, kid, you'd never have landed at the Grand Hotel. I guess you'd have landed somewhere where you'd never have come back from."

Harry Wharton breathed hard.

"I reckon that's the car," said Mr. Carter, with a nod towards the distant

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You Get It!

gate. "It's on time. Now, look here—you go down to the gate, as if you was going to take the car—but don't you step into it, on your sweet life. Your friends go with you as if they was going to see you off. Keep the man talking till I get on the scene by the other gate. I guess if I walked right out now, and he saw me, that car would hit the horizon like it was putting in for first prize on the Speedway. You get me?"

"Yes," said Harry.

"Get busy, then," drawled Mr. Carter.

The detective slipped quietly from the piazza, and vanished among the pepper trees and giant geraniums in the garden. Harry Wharton & Co. walked down to the gate.

THE FOURTEENTH CHAPTER.

Cinched!

"MR. WHARTON?"

The chauffeur had stepped from the car, and had touched his cap as Harry Wharton & Co. came out on the boulevard, and crossed the side-walk to the road.

"Yes," said Harry.

"Mr. Fish sent me, sir."

The chauffeur opened the door of the car.

Wharton watched him.

The man was dressed like an ordinary chauffeur, and Wharton, so far as he

knew, had never seen him before. He had a large dark patch over one eye, as if that organ had received some injury, and his cap was pulled rather low over his forehead. A thick ginger-coloured moustache covered his upper-lip, and drooped over his mouth. But those details certainly would not have excited suspicion, had not Wharton been placed on his guard. Had he not been warned, undoubtedly he would have stepped into the car, of which the man held the door open for him, never doubting that he was to be driven to the Hollywood Grand Hotel. But as it was now absolutely certain that the car had not been sent by Mr. Fish, it was certain that its destination was not Mr. Fish's hotel. Once the junior was inside and the car started it would have been driven at a speed that would have made it impossible for him to jump out—whither? To somewhere, as Mr. Carter had said, whence he was not likely to return.

Wharton's eyes gleamed. The trick was a simple one—its very simplicity made it unsuspected—and very nearly successful. Had not the fat and fatuous Owl of the Remove rung up Mr. Fish's hotel after breakfast—

"Hold on a minute," said Wharton, speaking as casually as he could, "I've got to get my hat."

"Sure!" answered the man.

"I say, you fellows—"

"Here, Bunter—cut in and get my hat!" said Harry.

"Oh, really, Wharton—"

The chauffeur, who was standing by the car, shifted his position a little, so that his face was turned from Bunter. But the movement was quite casual, and an observer would hardly have suspected that he desired to keep his face away from the fat junior's notice. Not that Bunter would have been likely to recognise the man he had seen at the rum-runner's den in the Santa Monica Mountains in his present outfit. But Slick Wilson was a wary "guy."

"Buck up, Bunter—it's on the peg in the hall," said Harry.

"Oh, really, you know," argued Bunter. "it's rather a long way back into the house, old chap. Why can't you go yourself?"

"Too tired?" asked Bob Cherry.

"Yes—exactly—"

"Like to sit down?"

"Look here, you beast— Yaroooh!" roared Bunter, as Bob sat him down on the side-walk. "Yooop! I say, you fellows—ow!"

"Now are you going to fetch that tile?" demanded Bob.

"Ow! Beast! No!" roared Bunter.

"Bump him!"

"Yaroooh! I'll fetch it!" yelled Bunter. "Leggo! I—I want to fetch it! Beast! I'm just going! Yah!"

Bunter rolled back to the gate.

Whatever Slick Wilson thought of that little scene he certainly did not suspect that the juniors were using up time to allow Mr. Carter to get on the scene from the other gate.

Mr. Carter had had time now. A lean figure came whipping along the side-walk. The chauffeur glanced round, and at the sight of Peter Carter made a movement to get back into his seat.

Mr. Carter genially intercepted that movement.

"You from Mr. Fish?" he asked.

The chauffeur nodded. His one eye that could be seen had a hunted gleam in it. But Mr. Carter was between him and the car, and the juniors were gathering round in a ring.

"Now, ain't that funny?" said Mr. Carter, still genial. Mr. Carter was, in fact, in a very cheery mood, and almost bubbling with satisfaction. "I call it real funny, feller."



A murderous gleam came into the thug's eyes as he realised that he was trapped, and he reached for his hip-pocket. Crash! Mr. Carter moved like lightning, and his fist struck the man on the point of the jaw. The ruffian went over on his back as if he had been shot! (See Chapter 14.)

"What you mean?" grunted the man. "Seeing that Mr. Fish hit the road for Santa Monica at eight this morning and ain't due home till night, it's real funny that he should be expecting a visitor at the Grand," explained Mr. Carter. "Don't it strike you in that light, just a few, feller?"

The man caught his breath. "You sure you was going to hit the Grand Hotel in this auto?" pursued Mr. Carter. "Or was you aiming to hit the high spots for the coast, where you got friends waiting real anxious to see Mr. Wharton? What?"

The man cast a hunted look round him. He was surrounded, and he knew now that all was known, and that he was trapped.

A murderous gleam came into his eye, and he reached for his hip-pocket.

Crash! Mr. Carter moved like lightning. His fist struck the "thug" on the point of the jaw, and the ruffian went over on his back as if he had been shot.

As he sprawled dazed on the sidewalk, Mr. Carter bent over him, and whipped the half-drawn automatic from his hand.

"Not this time, boy!" drawled Mr. Carter coolly.

"Collar him!" roared Bob Cherry. "The collarfulness is terrific."

Hands grasped the sprawling rascal on all sides.

But they were hardly needed.

Mr. Carter was snapping the handcuffs on his wrists, and the thug was a prisoner.

The man staggered to his feet, his wrists secured together, the juniors holding him fast. His face was convulsed with fury. A string of savage oaths poured from his lips.

Mr. Carter's hand swept over that infuriated face, jerking away the eye-

patch and the ginger moustache. Quite a different-looking face was revealed.

"Now I guess we'll see who you are!" grinned Mr. Carter.

"Dog-gone you!"

"I sure reckon you're the galoot I pipped last night," said Mr. Carter, with a nod. "I sure shadowed you to this here same shebang, feller, and I guess I want you for burglary."

There was a howl from Billy Bunter.

The fat junior's eyes almost bulged through his big spectacles as he blinked at Mr. Carter's prisoner.

"I say, you fellows, it's the boot-legger!" yelled Bunter.

"Gee! You know this guy, you Bunter?" exclaimed Mr. Carter.

"Yes, rather!" gasped Bunter. "He's one of the beasts who had me in that den in the hills. The other beasts called him Slick Wilson! I jolly well know him now."

Slick Wilson gave the Owl of the Remove a malevolent look. Mr. Carter chuckled.

"Say, bub, you ain't much to look at," he said; "but I'll tell the world that you're useful, if you ain't ornamental."

"Oh, really, you know—"

"I guess I shall want your evidence when I get this guy fixed," said Mr. Carter. "That will cinch him on the rum-running. I got him for burglary already. Gee!"

Slick Wilson spat out an oath.

"Dog-gone you, Carter!" he snarled. "How did you get wise to this, you gold-darned scallywag?"

Mr. Carter chuckled again. He was in high good-humour. The man who had escaped him in the night was safe in his hands now, and the Los Angeles detective had cause to feel satisfied.

"I'll sure borrow your auto to get you to the station, Slick," he said. "Any objections?"

"Gol-darn you!"

"I guess I'd rather have had the man behind you," said Mr. Carter. "But I'll get the goods on him some time."

"What you mean?" growled Slick Wilson. "There ain't any galoot behind me, dog-gone you! If you guess I'm going to squeal, you got another guess coming."

"You mean you want that galoot to go bail for you, and give you a chance to skip, like Gomez?" grinned Mr. Carter. "But I got Gomez agin, and now I got you. And I'll sure get the goods on the man behind."

"Hallo! What's all this?" Coker of the Fifth came out of the gate. "What are you kids up to? My hat! That's one of the bootleggers!" exclaimed Coker, staring at Slick Wilson. "That's one of the gang that collared me, weeks ago, in the Santa Monica hills."

Mr. Carter smiled.

"I'll want your evidence, as well as that fat gink's," he remarked. "I guess I got you for keeps this time, Slick. What?"

"Dog-gone you!" snarled the boot-legger.

"Now I reckon you're going on a leetle pasear with me," said Mr. Carter amicably. "I'm going to borrow your auto, but I won't give you so long a trip as you meant to give the kid. Only jest to the police station at L.A. Ho! in!"

Mr. Carter waved his hand to the Greyfriars fellows.

"So-long, kids! See you another time."

Harry Wharton & Co. stood looking after the car, as Mr. Carter drove it away down Sunset Boulevard, with the handcuffed prisoner inside.

Wharton drew a deep breath.

"That was a jolly narrow escape!"

(Continued on page 28.)

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INTRODUCTION.

Jimmy Beresford, a cheerful, athletic youth, is the son of Gordon Beresford, the head of Beresford Motors. Mr. Beresford is considering the plans of a new motor-cycle engine invented by Ron Connolly, Jimmy's pal. Mainly owing to an encounter with his cousin Otto, Jimmy is told by his irate father that he will either have to take a position in the works or fend for himself. Jimmy decides to do the latter, with the guarantee from his father that if he earns five hundred pounds in twelve months, he wins a position in the works at seven hundred and fifty pounds a year. Faced with the prospect of earning his own living, Jimmy turns to dirt-track racing, and helped by Ron's expert mechanical knowledge, wins a thrilling novices' race at the Elsenham Speedway. It is soon evident that Volson Motors, Beresford's unscrupulous rivals, in whose employ is "Tornado" Rossiter, the mystery champion of the track, will stop at nothing to obtain the plans of Ron's invention. They are stolen from Gordon Beresford's house within an hour of Ron's refusal of the Volson representative's offer for them. Jimmy goes in hot pursuit of the thief, following him to a big house outside the town of Stepford. Through a window the youngster is in time to see his quarry hand a sealed envelope to a heavily-built man. Jimmy climbs over the window-sill and is about to make a dash to recover the envelope, when something hard and blunt is jabbed into his back. "Keep still!" says a voice from the open window behind him.

(Now read on.)

A Double Game!

JIMMY BERESFORD received a staggering shock as he heard those words, not simply because he had been taken unawares, but because the voice that uttered them was familiar.

It was the voice of his Cousin Otto.

Over near the fireplace, Brown and Volson had likewise heard, and they had turned quickly to see Jimmy standing by the window, his hand grasping one of the curtains, and Otto at his shoulder.

Volson gave vent to an exclamation, and came across the room, followed by Brown. The dancing glow of the fire-light seemed to conjure an ugly glint in the eyes of the two men.

Jimmy did not move. The blunt object jammed hard against his back was doubtless a gun of some description, and the voice of Otto had held a quality of danger. It was by no means a cousinly voice. The tone of it had seemed to suggest that Otto was not the one to let any blood-tie restrain him from taking desperate measures.

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SPEEDWAY PALS!

A. CARNEY ALLAN

"Who's this?" demanded Bernard Volson, glaring at the youngster.

He was answered by "Mr. Brown."

"The insolent cub I mentioned when I told you of the call I made on Connolly," he explained. "Gordon Beresford's son, Mr. Volson."

Volson started slightly, then looked at Otto.

"Many thanks," he said.

Otto apparently decided that there was no further need to hold the blunt instrument against Jimmy's back, and he climbed through the window coolly. Not until that moment did Jimmy discover that the blunt instrument was nothing more dangerous than a bunch of keys, pressed together to form a compact mass.

One of those keys took the youngster's eye. It was a large and somewhat ornamental key, identical to those with which the doors of his father's house were fitted, and instantly he realised how he and his cousin, together with Mr. Beresford, had come to be locked in the study previously.

Otto had been the first to reach the door when the alarm had been given. While rattling the handle he had turned the key in the lock and pocketed it!

Jimmy felt his blood run hot in his veins. He had an impulse to take his cousin by the throat, but he suddenly observed that Volson's right hand was reaching towards the drawer of a bureau close by, and as the drawer was opened the youngster saw a flat automatic.

"You will note that this is not a bunch of keys," said Volson grimly, toying

with the weapon as he spoke. "I may add that it is loaded."

Jimmy turned his eyes on Otto again.

"You sneaking traitor!" he ground out, ignoring Volson. "You helped Brown to get that blue-print."

"Helped Brown?" Otto assumed a frown of perplexity. "I'm afraid I fail to understand. Explain yourself, my dear cousin."

"Don't bluff," said Jimmy. "Volson was out to get the blue-print of Ron Connolly's invention, because he knew no patent had been applied for. You helped to steal it."

Otto laughed.

"My dear Jimmy," he retorted, "your imagination is running away with you. I admit Mr. Volson is a rival of Beresford Motors, but that's no reason why I should sever an acquaintance I formed with him long ago. As you know, I am in Stepford on business, and I thought I'd drop in on my friend. Seeing you, I took you for a burglar—"

"You certainly didn't waste time in getting here," Jimmy said scornfully. "to see if the blue-print was safe in his hands. You can cut out the bluff, I tell you! As far as I'm concerned your cards are face upwards on the table. You're playing a double game, ingratiating yourself with dad, and betraying him to the Volson Company! I fancy dad would be interested to know that Bernard Volson was your friend!"

"I fancy your father is not interested in anything at the moment," rejoined Otto, with an ugly little smile.

Volson interposed as Jimmy was about

to demand the meaning of this statement.

"One moment," he said; and he held up the sealed envelope that Brown had given him. "I gather that you imagine this is a blue-print which has been stolen. I ask you to take my word for it that it is not—and I ask you to go."

Jimmy faced him contemptuously. "Take your word for it!" he scoffed. "Listen to me. I can piece two and two together, and I know that's the blue-print. What's more, I'm going to have it back! You can't fool me, Volson. One close look at that paper, and you'd take the principle of Ron Connolly's invention and adopt it to your own uses."

"And risk my reputation in a court-case?" observed Volson with sarcasm. "Young Beresford, you are talking nonsense, and again I ask you to go."

"Not I!" Jimmy answered defiantly. "As for your reputation, you'd be precious careful of that. Do you think I can't see farther than my nose, Volson? You'd switch round the principle of the invention and make one or two minor alterations to disguise it, and by the time you'd finished with it

Its smashing report deafened Jimmy for the second, and he felt the bitter smell of scorched cloth where the shot had passed harmlessly through the curtain. But he had the blue-print, and, stumbling clear of the impeding folds, he made for the open window.

Brown stood in his way, his back to the aperture by which the youngster had entered.

Jimmy did not check to take the measure of him. He simply whipped his right fist round to the lean man's jaw. There was a sharp thud as his bunched knuckles jarred home, and Brown knuckled aside, with his face contorted and his glittering eye quite dulled. He finished up in a heap on the floor. But before he had fallen Jimmy was through the window.

He discerned the lights of Otto's car, and he sprinted in the direction of them.

Within the space of a few seconds he was behind the steering-wheel, and had pressed his self-starter.

As the engine chuckled out its deep-throated note, Jimmy slipped the gear-lever into reverse, and backed out of the drive. Then he drew the lever into first and stepped on the accelerator. He

noticed that the other car had gained appreciably. It was a big closed-in car, high powered.

Jimmy stepped harder on the accelerator-pedal and instantly, to his dismay, there was a significant spluttering in the carburettor. There must have been some grit in the petrol-feed pipe, and the violent acceleration had forced it through to clog the jet.

The youngster managed to keep the tourer at the fifty mark by careful "nursing," but he could not urge her beyond it, and, meanwhile, the other car was gradually overtaking him.

To the left of the road lay a thick copse of trees, with dense, moderately-high undergrowth sprawling about their stems, and suddenly Jimmy slammed on the brakes and brought the car to a standstill.

She had hardly stopped when he leapt out and doubled into the bushes, leaving the engine of the tourer running.

Even as he dived into the thicket Volson's car drew level, and out of it scrambled Otto, Brown, and Volson.

They plunged after Jimmy in full pursuit, and Jimmy heard them crash-

A reproduction of a portion of the letter Jimmy Beresford found—proof positive of his rascally cousin's baseness.

I was interested to hear from you re Gordon Beresford's will.... If you should inherit Beresford Motors, rest assured you will not find that you have sacrificed your own interests by working in secret for me. I propose an amalgamation of the two Companies when you come into your Uncle's business.....

Ron Connolly wouldn't have a leg to stand on—especially as he has no patent."

Volson made a gesture of impatience, but he was still careful to keep the gun trained on the youngster.

"I have asked you twice to go," he said. "I regret that I must ask my servants to use force. Ring the bell, Brown, will you?"

Jimmy realised that action was necessary without delay. He still stood with one hand grasping the curtain, which was suspended from a wooden rod, and suddenly he stiffened tensely.

"I'm going to have that paper," he said between his teeth, and he wrenched on the curtain.

Down it came, rod and all, and the heavy folds collapsed over his own head and the heads of Volson and Otto. But simultaneously Jimmy had lunged forward to snatch the sealed envelope.

His grasp fastened on Volson's wrist. He was aware of Volson's voice and Otto's voice, shouting in alarmed but muffled accents. There was a frantic scuffle under the folds of the curtain, and in the struggle the gun in Volson's hand went off by accident.

had a final impression of three figures running pell-mell along the sweep of gravel towards the gates.

Jimmy did not head for Stepford town, for he did not know if there were any trains leaving for the South at this late hour. Instead, he followed the indication of a signpost on which the car's headlights flashed, and decided to commandeer Otto's tourer for the entire journey home.

Jimmy quickly realised, however, that he had still to reckon with his enemies, for in the side-mirror he suddenly saw the reflection of a pursuing car's lights. He immediately began to nurse the accelerator and by a lamp on the facia-board he saw the speedometer-needle quiver up to forty, to fifty, and on to fifty-five.

The dancing cones of illumination, merging into one concentrated glare, threw the road into sharp relief a long way ahead. The engine droned sweetly and smoothly, and Jimmy reckoned he had plenty more speed to play with, if necessary.

The extra speed was necessary. For, on looking back at a wide bend he

ing through the undergrowth behind him.

The youngster took to cover, flinging himself down in the midst of the bushes. A moment later Volson, Brown, and Otto were within a few paces of his hiding-place, and at that juncture they paused, confounded, while Jimmy watched them through the foliage with a palpitating heart.

"We've got to get that blue-print," he heard Volson say.

"Yes." It was Otto's voice—a voice that sounded querulous, all the insolent assurance quite gone from it. "Yes, and we've got to get him, too. Volson, he's always been in my way, and now's our chance to take desperate measures. If something could happen to him—something that looked like an accident—"

Volson cut in on him.

"We'll talk of that when we lay hands on him," he said. "Come on; he's gone to earth somewhere, but he can't be far off. We'll scatter and search!"

The three separated, and Brown actually brushed the twigs of a bush

that hid Jimmy. But the man passed on unsuspecting, and Jimmy, stealing from the spot, made his way back to the road.

When he reached it he turned his attention to Volson's car and took the float from the carburettor, so that the petrol gushed away. Then he slipped back to the tourer, climbed into it, and drove on.

He heard a shouting in the copse, and the three searchers came blundering on to the roadway again. They packed into the saloon, and resumed the pursuit, but it did not continue for long. After the lapse of only a few minutes the big car slackened speed of its own accord, and came to a stop—inexplicably, as far as its occupants were concerned, though Jimmy knew the reason to be an empty petrol-tank.

Jimmy drove on through the night, over roads that were deserted, and some time later he pitched a carburettor-float into a hedge. Then he settled himself comfortably for the long drive home.

It took him a good deal longer than it ought to have done, since he did not know the route and was frequently forced to consult sign-posts.

The dawn broke, and it was as the pale grey of morning began to sweep the shadows from the countryside that Jimmy saw Otto's motoring-coat on the seat beside him.

A folded paper protruded from one of the pockets, and, thinking it might be a road-map, Jimmy pulled it out. But it was not a map; it was a letter from Volson to Otto.

"I was interested to hear from you re Gordon Beresford's will," one passage ran. "If you should inherit Beresford Motors, rest assured you will not find that you have sacrificed your own interests by working in secret for me. I propose an amalgamation of the two companies when you come into your Uncle's business . . ."

Jimmy continued his journey very thoughtfully, and Otto's grim-sounding words recurred to him:

" . . . Desperate measures—even though he's my cousin. If something could happen to him—something that looked like an accident . . ."

Otto was playing a double game—a dangerous game.

Rossiter Again!

THE sun was up when Jimmy pulled into the drive of his father's house.

Braking, he alighted and made for the porch; but before he could ring the bell the front door was opened.

Somewhat to his surprise Jimmy saw a man whom he recognised as John Robertson, his father's manager, and with Robertson was Dr. Hadley, who had attended the Beresfords for many years as physician. The grave expressions on their faces made Jimmy draw back.

"Is anything wrong?" he demanded anxiously. "Is it—is it dad?"

"I am afraid so, my boy," said Dr. Hadley. "We have been with him all night."

"He's been hurt?"

"No, he was not badly hurt," Hadley answered, "though when I arrived in answer to Connolly's phone-call I imagined that to be the case. It was only when I made a diagnosis that I discovered he had had a stroke—brought

on, of course, by the affair of last night."

Jimmy blanched, and then he made as if to brush past Robertson and Hadley, but the medical man restrained him.

"No," he said. "His condition is critical, and he must see no one. The least excitement may be fatal."

There was a silence, during which Jimmy stood like one in a trance. Robertson was the first to break that silence.

"Connolly phoned me as well," he told Jimmy, "and when I got here he told me all that had happened. I understand young Mr. Otto was present, but left somewhat hurriedly for the north after Dr. Hadley came. I think he might have waited."

Jimmy faced Robertson and, in fierce, impetuous tones, he related the adventures that had befallen him in his own flying visit to the North. He omitted nothing, and finished up by handing Robertson the blue-print and the letter from Volson to Otto.

Robertson had listened with a dark frown, and he frowned the more when he read the letter.

"By Heaven!" he ground out. "This calls for prompt action. We'll bring the Volson people into a court of law over this, and we'll have young Otto there along with them—"

"One moment, Mr. Robertson." It was Dr. Hadley's voice. "I don't quite understand all this, but I must remind you that Mr. Beresford's condition is desperately serious, and, even if he lives, it will not be possible to worry him or excite him in any way for a long, long time. Otherwise, he will certainly never pull through."

Jimmy and Robertson looked at each other. Both realised the shock with which Gordon Beresford would hear of Otto's treachery—the much-vaunted Otto, who had been "an example for Jimmy to follow."

"Yes," said Jimmy at length. "I suppose we'd better leave things as they are till dad's in a fit state to know the truth and take action."

Robertson nodded.

"But, as temporary head of the firm," he amended, "I can, at least, write to Otto—without your father knowing it—and take it upon myself to tell him his services are no longer required."

"Tell him, too, that I'll give him the hiding of his life when I see him," put in Jimmy. "And you can let him know that his car is here if he wants it. But where is Ron—Ron Connolly? He'll be anxious to know about the blue-print."

"He went away hours ago," Robertson informed Jimmy.

"Then I'll leave the blue-print with you, Mr. Robertson, and I'll go and tell Ron that it's safe. And, doctor,"—Jimmy turned to Dr. Hadley—"I'll be back to see how dad is going on."

"As a matter of fact," said the doctor, "I'm going to have him sent to a nursing-home as soon as he can be moved. But that won't be for a day or two."

Some time later Jimmy reached the "digs" that he shared with Ron, and he found the latter just starting out for work. He walked with him to Glendale Richards, the firm where Ron was employed as a mechanic, and gave an account of all that had taken place.

"I'm applying for a patent to-day," declared Ron, when Jimmy had finished.

"Of course," Jimmy told him, "if you wanted to make a case, you could charge the Volson people with attempted theft. But I'd rather you didn't yet, on account of dad."

"I haven't the money to bring an action, even if I wanted to," Ron answered. "No, all I'm caring about is the patent. We'll be safe when we take that out."

Jimmy lapsed into a grim reverie. The invention would be safe, but he was not so sure that he himself would be safe. For the letter found in the motoring-coat had shown him that he stood in the way of two men's ambitions—Volson's and Otto's.

The stands at Elsenham Park were empty, but on the oval of the turf in the arena a number of officials and riders were gathered, and occasionally the vibrant racket of a "speed-iron" filled the air. The "boys," especially those in the novice class, were putting in some practice-work.

Jimmy was present, and was waiting to take his bike on the track. At the moment, however, Ron was tinkering with the machine, and tuning it up to the very limit of efficiency. For Ron, taking the opportunity of an afternoon "off," had come down to the Speedway with his chum.

Not only novices were in evidence there, but some of the bigger men in the game had turned up to try out their machines and polish their skill. Among the latter was Rossiter, back from a triumphant week-end at Stepford, and Rossiter was now tearing into the front-straight on his Volson "twin" in an attempt to beat his own record for the four laps.

Jimmy was standing near the finishing-line, and as he watched Rossiter he was compelled to admire the man professionally. It was a delight to see the mysterious rider of the Speedways taking those wide, sweeping bends, hurling his bike at them with the throttle-grip twisted full open, whipping the rear wheel round in slashing, dare-devil broadsides.

Jimmy studied him closely on the first three laps, and endeavoured to pick up hints from the object-lesson. Then his mind strayed to another sphere in which Rossiter was active—or so the youngster suspected, at least.

Did Rossiter know of the events that had taken place a few nights ago? Assuredly he did if he were in touch with the Volson people, if he were hand-in-glove with them and Otto, as Jimmy imagined.

Jimmy was staring into space, thinking of his father, of the blue-print, which was safely patented now, of Otto and his scheming, when suddenly there was a startling yell in the voice of Ron Connolly.

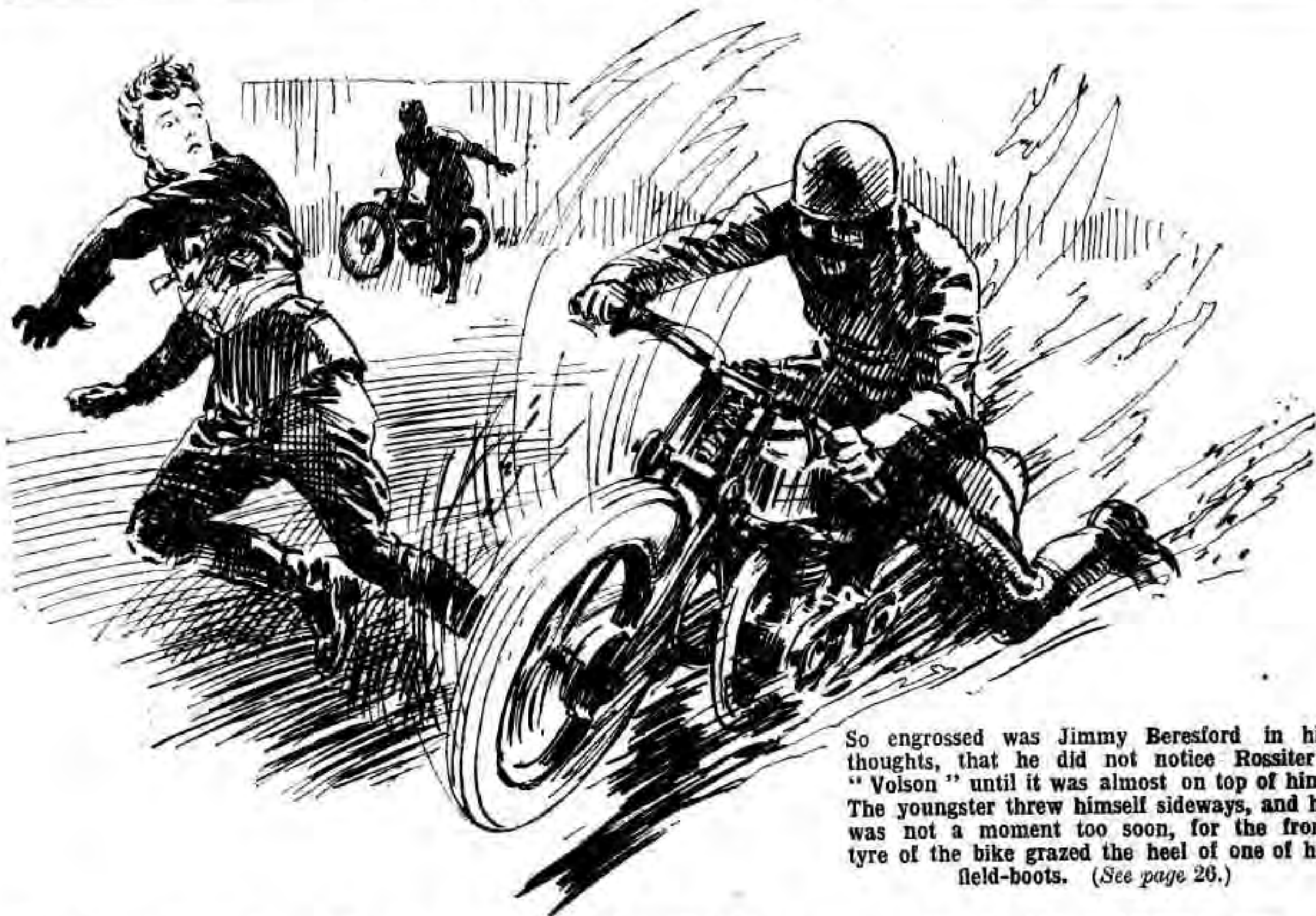
Jimmy turned his head and, in a split second he saw a masked and goggled figure hurtling straight for him on a roaring speed-iron.

It was Rossiter's Volson, and the bike had taken a vicious skid to the left on crossing the line. Engrossed in his thoughts, Jimmy had been dimly conscious of its strident engine note, but now the thunder of it deafened him.

The youngster threw himself sideways, and he was not a moment too soon, for the front tyre of the bike grazed the heel of one of his field-boots.

He picked himself up, a little shaken by the narrowness of his escape. Ron was the first to reach him, an ashen-faced Ron, who asked him in a panicky voice if he were hurt. Then, through the crowd that began to collect, came Rossiter, wheeling his speed-iron along with him.

"Sorry!" he said laconically, in



So engrossed was Jimmy Beresford in his thoughts, that he did not notice Rossiter's "Volson" until it was almost on top of him. The youngster threw himself sideways, and he was not a moment too soon, for the front tyre of the bike grazed the heel of one of his field-boots. (See page 26.)

muffled accents. "The side-slip took me unawares."

He moved on, and the little crowd broke up till Jimmy and Ron were left alone.

"By Jove!" breathed Ron. "That might have been a nasty accident for the two of you!"

Jimmy's lips twisted into a smile that held not a trace of mirth.

"For one of us," he retorted, "and that one wasn't Rossiter. I fancy Rossiter was ready to throw himself clear, and he's been long enough on the tracks to know how to fall. You see, I don't think it was an 'accident,' Ron."

"You--you mean to say Rossiter was out to lame you?"

Ron Connolly's youthful face paled again, but, noticing that several riders were almost within earshot, Jimmy quickly changed the subject and crossed to his machine.

Ron had finished "tuning" it, and Jimmy tried the machine out on the speedway. From the "push-off" he covered four laps in a style and time that drew praise from those who watched—a time far exceeding Rossiter's, of course, but, nevertheless, highly creditable for one so young at the game.

When Jimmy coaxed his bike to a standstill, by the simple procedure of shuffling his feet through the cinders, the clerk of the course came across to him.

"Beresford," he said, "we've got the boys from the Stepford Speedway Club coming down here on Saturday afternoon to challenge an Elsenham Park 'double' in the Inter-Club Competition. We'd like you and Summerton to represent the Park."

Jimmy felt his blood glow. Already his worth had been recognised, and chances were coming his way to lift him out of obscurity. One day he would be on the dizzy pinnacles of fame.

The Inter-Club Race I

THE Inter-Club event was the third in the Saturday programme, and, the first two races having been run, Jimmy, Summerton, and the Stepford pair wheeled their bikes out of the pits.

There was quite an ovation from certain lusty-voiced youngsters in school caps who were sitting near the "ramp," and, with surprise, Jimmy heard them call his name. The incident informed him that, even at this early juncture, he could lay claim to having hero-worshippers.

Lined up at the starting line the four competitors were pushed off, and made a preliminary circuit of the track. But, coming back into the front-straight they throttled up for a flying "take-off," each rider endeavouring to keep in line with his neighbour.

In perfect unison they passed the starter, and the four of them immediately jerked the throttles hard round. The bikes roared with louder voice and dashed forward at increased speed. The line of leather-clad, helmeted figures lost formation and strung out raggedly.

One of the Stepford riders, a fellow by the name of Morrison, had forged ahead to take the lead. Half a length behind him was Summerton. Then came the other Stepford competitor, known as Riley, and last in the running was Jimmy Beresford.

He had been practising assiduously, and knew that he had vastly improved himself on the bends; but the flying-start was fresh to him, as he had only ridden in handicap races previously, and hence he was "left at the post."

He went all out to recover the lost ground, and on the first curve Riley was forced to struggle hard in order to retain third place. Jimmy had dashed into the corner after him in full pursuit, and pulled so close that he was pep-

pered by the cinder-spray from the Stepford man's back wheel.

The two Stepford men could ride, and it was plain to see that they were not destined to remain among the lesser lights for long. When the back-straight was reached Morrison was three or four lengths ahead of Summerton, while Riley was still holding his own against Jimmy.

They blazed along the stretch at full-throttle, and, not for the first time, Jimmy had to thank Ron for the expert tuning of his bike. Extra acceleration brought him level with Riley, and on the second bend they had a wheel-to-wheel fight for the advantage.

Riley hugged the white line on the inner edge and scraped round the curve, but Jimmy juggled with the throttle, and his bike wrenched through the dirt in a raking broadside. It was something he had practised lately, and, though he almost came down and had to dig with his toe frantically, he forced his way past Riley and swung safely into the front-straight.

Three lengths ahead of him was Summerton, and still farther in the lead was Morrison, the Stepford man.

Jimmy stormed after the pair of them, and he was scarcely a length behind Summerton when he hit the first bend on the second lap. Morrison was already half-way round, and tearing up the cinders with a sweeping skid.

Summerton took the curve recklessly and swerved wide, and Jimmy made a dash through on the inside. He came out of the corner on even terms with Summerton, the latter being far up towards the outer edge.

Once more on the back-stretch they raced forward at full speed, Summerton gradually drawing in towards the white line again and riding abreast of Jimmy. After them came Riley, and Riley had

"SPEEDWAY PALS!"

(Continued from previous page.)

not given up. With a furious spurt he dashed into the bend in pursuit of them, and he flashed round on the outside.

But Riley had gone too hard for the curve. Out of the corner of his eye Jimmy saw the Stepford rider come to grief near the safety wire, his machine sliding on its side through the grit.

Jimmy and Summerton were still level when they made the front-straight and crossed the line for the third lap. Morrison was four or five lengths in front.

At the corner Jimmy sprayed away the cinders in a broadside again. Flattened along the tank, his toe scrabbling in the dirt, he left Summerton behind him, and forged closer to Morrison.

The leader glimpsed him and throttled up desperately on the back stretch. Jimmy, no more than a yard to the rear of him now, gave chase in break-neck style, and spurts of flame ripped savagely from his exhaust-spouts.

The bend that turned into the front-straight brought no change in positions of the riders, but on the succeeding curve Jimmy made a tremendous bid to gain first place. Yet Morrison countered the challenge with a tearing skid, and managed to hold the advantage, though Jimmy's front wheel was close to the tail of the leader's machine when they came out of the bend.

Again the engines roared at full-throttle, to switch off on the last curve. Morrison, knowing that he must risk all to win, took it at crazy speed, and suddenly his bike swung out in an ugly side-slip straight into Jimmy's path.

Jimmy wrenched at his handlebars, and literally lifted his front wheel clear of the track, switching it towards the inner edge. In the same instant Morrison crashed in front of him, his speed-iron somersaulting through a shower of cinders.

Jimmy missed Morrison's head by inches, and the Beresford "twin" went on round the curve to victory, bucking like a mad thing.

A few seconds after the youngster had crossed the finishing-line Summerton followed him.

Neither of the Stepford men had been hurt, and Jimmy and Summerton shook hands with them before they wheeled their bikes off the track amid a round of cheering.

It was as he was shoving his machine across the cinders that Jimmy heard his name called, and looking up, he saw the pit steward approaching him.

"A letter was handed in for you," the pit steward told him. "It's marked 'urgent.'"

He held out an envelope, and Jimmy ripped it open. He did not recognise the handwriting, but as he glanced at the signature he saw the name of Dr. Hadley.

The note was brief, and left Jimmy with a sick feeling of dread.

"It is imperative that you should return home at once," it said. "I have something to tell you concerning your father."

Ron was not waiting in the pits for him as usual, for to-night he was working overtime, but, arranging with the pit steward to take care of his bike, Jimmy hurried from the Speedway and caught a train.

It was quite dark when he stepped off the train, and, walking swiftly from the station, he made his way in the direction of his father's house. As he walked he reflected upon the terse words of Hadley's note. It was a note that had come to him as something of a surprise—an unpleasant surprise—for only yesterday Hadley had told him that his father was sufficiently out of immediate danger to be moved to a nursing-home.

Jimmy could only guess that there had been a relapse.

Reaching home he rang the front-door bell, and it was answered by a stranger in a white coat, whom Jimmy took to be a male nurse.

"You are young Mr. Beresford?" the man inquired; and, as Jimmy nodded: "Will you go straight upstairs?"

Jimmy did so. There was a light on the landing, but as the youngster reached the head of the staircase that light went out. Jimmy Beresford thought little of it, fancying that a "fuse" may have occurred, and he fumbled his way through the darkness to the door of his father's bed-room.

He opened the door. The bed-room, too, was in darkness, from which he gathered that the lights had "fused" at the main.

"Are you awake, dad?" Jimmy called softly.

There was no answer, and he tip-toed towards the bed. The next moment Jimmy received a shock, for as he reached out his hand he discovered that the bed was empty. His father was not there!

Jimmy was standing in the gloom like one transfixed when he heard the door close stealthily behind him. With a catch of his breath he wheeled round, a desperate sense of uneasiness within him.

He could see nothing, yet he felt that there were others in that room with him, others who were closing silently around him.

(That false message has undoubtedly lured Jimmy Beresford into one of the tightest corners of his life. Be sure you read how he fares in next week's gripping instalment of this powerful serial. By the way, chums, have you introduced our young hero to your pals? If not, do so now!)

"ALL THROUGH BUNTER!"

(Continued from page 23.)

He said soberly. "But a miss is as good as a mile."

"The missfulness is equal to the esteemed and preposterous milefulness, as the English proverb remarks," said Hurree Jamset Ram Singh. "The timely stitchfulness has saved ninepence."

"Polk was behind it, of course," said Bob.

Wharton nodded.

"Of course! Carter's got that brute, but he can't get Polk. But if the Potter tries on that game again, he won't catch me napping next time."

"I say, you fellows—"

"Shut up, Bunter!"

"Shan't!" roared Bunter. "I say—"

"The speechfulness is silver, my esteemed Bunter, but the silence is the cracked pitcher that goes longest to the well," urged Hurree Jamset Ram Singh.

"I say, you fellows, now I've saved Wharton's life—"

"What?"

"Oh, really, you fellows, I hope you're not going to make out that I haven't?" exclaimed Bunter indignantly.

"What would have happened to Wharton if I hadn't telephoned to old Fish and found out—"

"Bow-wow!"

"I got on to the whole thing," roared Bunter. "That detective had practically nothing to do with it. I found out—"

"Br-r-r-r!"

"As a matter of fact, I suspected something all along—"

"Oh, my hat!"

"That's why I telephoned to old Fish and found it all out—"

"Phew!"

"Acting as your guardian angel, as usual—"

"Great pip!"

"Watching over you night and day," said Bunter. "And now the very least you can do is to lend me seventy dollars to pay that beast Coot—"

"Time to get to the studio," said Harry Wharton, laughing.

"Oh, really, Wharton—"

"Can't be late for work, old fat man," grinned Bob Cherry. "Not even to listen to your delightful conversation. Ta-ta!"

"I say, you fellows—" roared Bunter.

But the fellows were already walking across Sunset Boulevard, heading for the Perfection studio. Their fat guardian angel was left blinking after them, with an expression on his fat face that could not, by the widest stretch of imagination, have been called angelic!

THE END.

(Whatever you do, chums, don't miss the final story in this magnificent adventure series, entitled: "FAREWELL TO THE FILMS!" which will appear in next week's bumper issue of the MAGNET. Make a point of ordering your copy WELL IN ADVANCE!)



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