

"THE MASKED TERROR!" THRILLING COMPLETE SCHOOL STORY
OF HARRY WHARTON & CO.—INSIDE.

No. 1,108. Vol. XXXV. Week Ending May 11th, 1936.

The Magnet

LIBRARY

2^D

EVERY SATURDAY.



"HE, HE, HE! AND THEY THOUGHT THEY'D LEAVE ME BEHIND!"

If there's an invitation going William George Bunter is the fellow to wedge himself in. And this little habit of Bunter's lands him into the biggest adventure of his life! (See the long school and adventure story inside.)



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.).

JUST to start off with this week, I am going to tell you more about careers, in the hope that it may interest those of you who are wondering what you are going to do in life when schooldays are over. One of my chums asks me if I can tell him

HOW TO GET ON THE STAGE.

Although I don't believe in advising boys to take up the theatrical profession, it is much better for a fellow who is determined to take it up to know the proper way to go about it. My chum should write to the Royal Academy of Dramatic Art, Gower Street, London, W.C., which is the principal academy of acting in this country. If he can afford to come to London and stay there while he is studying, he should spend as much time as possible at the academy. Then, when he is proficient, he will have to look for a job. Some schools of acting promise to get places for their pupils when they have completed their training. But an engagement naturally depends on the proficiency of the artist.

I warn my chum that after he has spent considerable time in training he might find he is entirely unsuited to the job. That is a risk, however, which he will have to take. The stage is the most precarious profession of all, and unless a boy has a definite bent in this direction, he should not dream of tackling it.

FREE GIFTS!

By the way, I hope you are all collecting the marvellous series of picture cards—in full colours—dealing with mechanical mysteries and

MARVELS OF THE FUTURE

which are being presented FREE with our splendid companion paper—the "Gem Library." This week's free picture card, which is better than ever, depicts

A SUBMARINE-BATTLESHIP

of the future.

This set of "peeps into the future" consists of sixteen pictures which will be treasured by every boy and girl alike.

Don't delay, but pop round to your newsagent to-day, and ask him to reserve you a copy of this week's issue of the "Gem Library" containing picture card No. 4.

How's this for a clever Limerick, chums!

There was a headmaster named Locke,
Though just, he was firm as a rock.
With might he did rule,
And was proud of his school,
Because he had such a fine flock!

A pocket-wallet has been awarded to H. Emanuel, 20, Norfolk House, Joubert Street, Johannesburg, Transvaal, South Africa.

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Now to other subjects.

TWO INTERESTING ANNIVERSARIES

are noted in my diary this week. Tuesday is the fourteenth anniversary of the sinking of the Lusitania by a German submarine during the War. This was one of the most terrible things which happened during the U-boat campaign, and caused a great sensation throughout the world. Undoubtedly it helped to sway American opinion over to our side, and helped to prepare the way for the entry of America into the War. Wednesday is the anniversary of another incident in the naval war—an incident which added greatly to the glorious traditions of the British Navy.

On May 8th, 1918, H.M.S. Vindictive steamed into Ostend in the face of terrific gunfire from the German shore batteries and sunk herself in the channel, thus preventing German submarines from using the place as a base. Our losses were very heavy indeed, but we succeeded in our object, and there is no doubt that the gallantry displayed by our sailors on that occasion helped greatly to break the morale of the German Navy. The task of removing the Vindictive after the War was a very big one, indeed, and for some considerable time the wrecked ship was a source of interest to visitors to Ostend.

SOME OF MY PALS

were on the Vindictive on that memorable May 8th, and although naval men don't like to talk much about their exploits, I gathered enough information to know that anyone who came back alive after that affair was tremendously lucky and deserved a V.C. at least! When the idea was first mooted, men were asked to volunteer for a dangerous and secret mission. They were not told what it was, but nearly all the Navy wanted to volunteer.

The required number of men were picked and they went through a special course of training, until, when the attack was to be made, everyone of them was in the pink of perfection. Then they were told what the job was, but not one of them faltered, even though it seemed that they were going to certain death. That's the stuff of which the British Navy is made.

Now let's see what my letter-bag contains this morning. Here's a query from Eric Howes, of Harrogate.

HOW DID A STEEPLECHASE GET ITS NAME?

Because the distance of the first race was from one church steeple to another. This took place in the reign of James I., and two horses competed, jumping all obstacles in the way. It was not until 1792 that the first steeplechase as we know them was run in Leicestershire, the course being a distance of about eight miles. Since that time the word "steeplechase" has always been used to mean a horse-race with obstacles to be jumped.

"GRAND GUIGNOL."

What is the meaning of "Grand Guignol"? asks Harry Beck, of Leamington. The term simply means a large puppet show. In France a Punch-and-Judy show is called "Guignol," and "Grand Guignol" was the name given to a Paris theatre which specialises in short plays of the "thriller" type. Next, please!

What does "clicketty-click" mean? It means "Sixty-six," and comes from a game called "House," which was very popular with the Army and Navy during the War. You probably know the game under the name of "Lotto." (This is in answer to H. T., of Penzance.)

"HOBSON'S CHOICE."

Why do we say a thing is "Hobson's Choice"? Charles Brooks, of Hanley, wants to know. A man named Hobson used to run a livery stable at Cambridge, and when the undergraduates went to hire a horse, Hobson wouldn't let them have their pick. They had to take the horse he picked out for them, or else go without. So when we have no choice in a matter we say: "It's Hobson's choice—we must take it or leave it!"

And now a chuckle for which Jack Hodgson, of 68, Rooley Lane, Bankfoot, Bradford, earns a MAGNET pocket-knife.

A small boy had been sent to the country to stay at a farm for a week. One day he came running up to the farmer, looking very excited. "Oh, Mr. Giles," he said, "a mouse has got into the milk churn!" "Well, you've pulled it out, haven't you?" asked the farmer. "No," replied the boy meekly, "I put the cat in after it!"

I'd just like to mention the fact here, chums, that there are two new numbers of the "Schoolboys' Own Library" on sale this week. No. 99, "The Bounder of Greyfriars," and No. 100, "His Own Enemy!" It's well worth your while reading one or both of 'em!

Now a few words about next week's bumper programme. A glance in my little black book tells me that we kick off with another long, complete story of your old favourites Harry Wharton & Co., of Greyfriars, entitled:

"BILLY BUNTER'S BLUNDER!"

By Frank Richards.

The title, of course, indicates that Billy Bunter is well in the limelight, and such being the case you can rest assured the yarn will be the real goods. You can't have too much of Bunter, can you?

Next comes the second story in the amusing series of St. Sam's yarns dealing with Dr. Birchmell, the "bird-man." You'll be tickled to death with this latest effusion from the pen of our laughter-merchant, young Dicky Nugent.

Following this there will be another gripping instalment of Carney Allan's dirt-track serial:

"SPEEDWAY PALS!"

in which our young speed merchant, Jimmy Beresford, again finds himself at grips with his cousin, Otto.

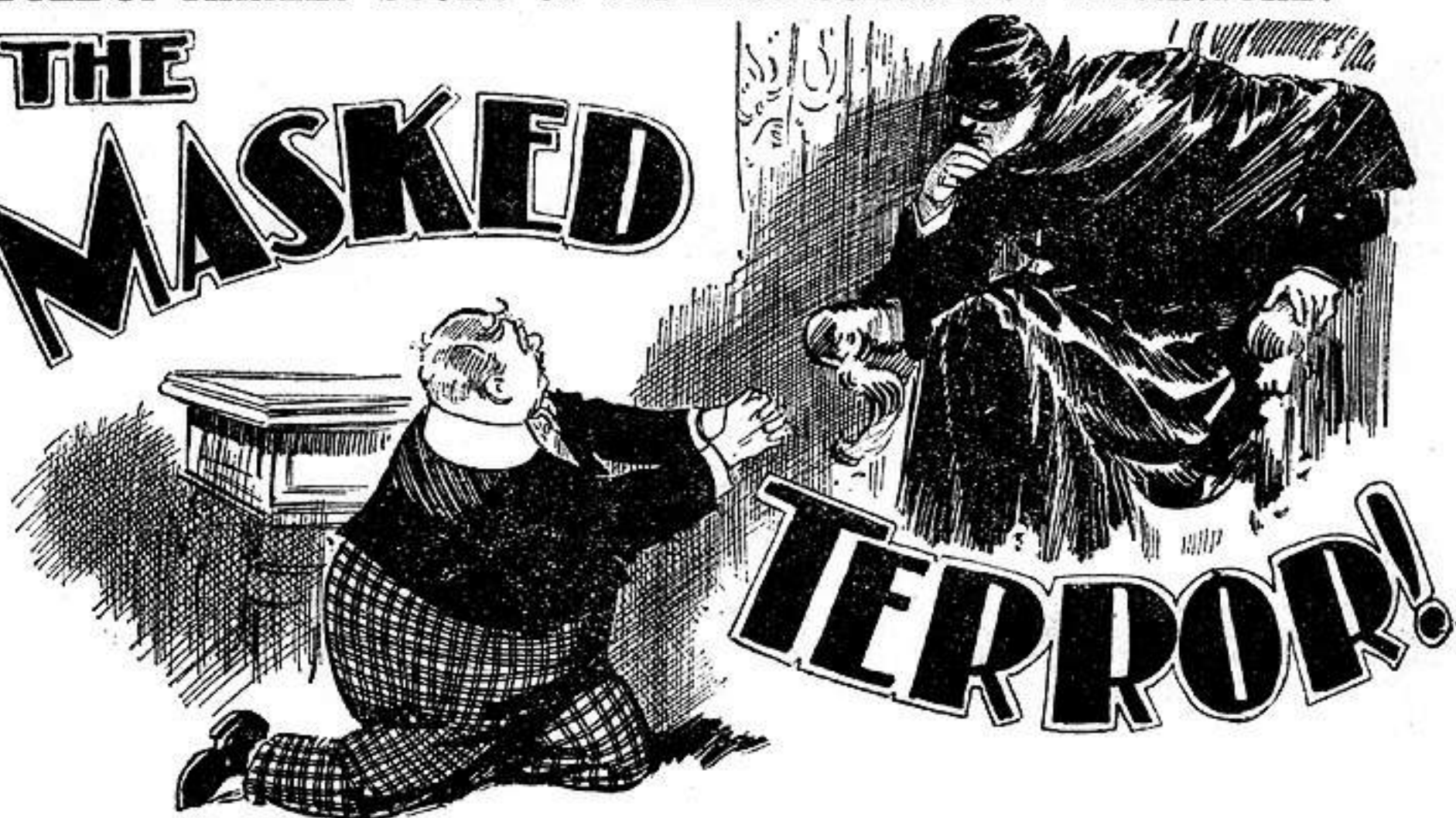
Then, as a grand finale, another cheery "Come into the Office, boys!"

Make sure you order your copy early, chums.

YOUR EDITOR.

A FULL-OF-THRILLS STORY OF AMAZING SCHOOLBOY ADVENTURE!

THE MASKED



Featuring Harry Wharton & Co. the famous chums of Greyfriars. By FRANK RICHARDS.

THE FIRST CHAPTER.

A Slight Misunderstanding!

"**T**IME for Prep!"
"Oh, blow prep!"
"Bless prep!"
"Hang prep!"

Mark Linley smiled.

Of the six occupants of Study No. 1 in the Remove passage at Greyfriars he was, perhaps, the most enthusiastic in the matter of acquiring knowledge, for Mark was a scholarship boy.

Harry Wharton & Co. eyed each other dismally.

It was only a short time since they had returned to Greyfriars after their trip to Hollywood, and, as was only natural in the circumstances, they found it a difficult matter to settle down to the school routine.

The Famous Five had been telling Mark Linley of their thrilling experiences abroad in the famous film city of Hollywood—a subject, even Mark agreed, of more interest than prep. And so engrossed was the scholarship boy in the Famous Five's adventures that he had failed to note the passage of time. Preparation should have started twenty minutes or more ago.

The scholarship junior rose to his feet. "Sorry to go. I could listen to you for hours," he said. "You chaps must have had a wonderful time in America. We've missed you in the Remove, but you've returned just in time for the cricket."

He smiled at the five juniors seated round the table and moved towards the door of the study. Bob Cherry made as if to follow him, and then changed his mind.

"Bless prep!" he said disgustedly.

"The blessedness and the blowfulness of the ridiculous prepfiness is terrific," murmured Hurreo Jamsot Ram Singh in his weird English.

"Hear, hear!"

The Famous Five were agreed upon that.

Mark Linley shook his head in the direction of Bob Cherry, who was his studymate, and departed.

"I suppose I'd better go," remarked Bob Cherry lugubriously. "Old Quelch is extra strict on us since we came back from America."

Harry Wharton laughed.

"Perhaps he thinks we've dodged quite enough Form work as it is."

"Well, we have," grinned Frank Nugent. "While the Remove has been grinding away at Latin and stuff in the Form-room we've been enjoying ourselves in America."

"Rather!"

"Still, I for one am glad to be back," added Nugent.

And there was a general nodding of heads.

With all its charm and interest, its hustle and bustle, America was not comparable with Greyfriars, in the opinion of Harry Wharton & Co. The cricket season was already in full swing

back at Greyfriars, for they always had a good word and a smile for him, and were generous in their tips.

"Trot in, old scout!" said Wharton.

Trotter "trotted" in.

"Which the 'Ead wants master Cherry," he said.

"Oh!"

Bob Cherry's face fell. A summons from the Head was never exactly welcome, for usually painful consequences attended it, and Bob was already wondering what fresh misdemeanour of his had reached the ears of Dr. Locke. Although Bob Cherry had been back at Greyfriars only a short time, there were several little matters on his conscience, such as putting treacle in a prefect's slippers and preparing an "extra special" booby-trap for the benefit of Gerald Loder, the unpopular prefect of the Sixth.

Viewed through the eyes of a junior, these things were just part and parcel of life at Greyfriars. But there was not the slightest doubt that Dr. Locke would not look upon them in that light.

"Hard cheese, Bob!" said Johnny Bull sympathetically.

"You fairly asked for it, you know," said Nugent. "Loder's found out for a cert that it was you who fixed that booby-trap over his door."

Wharton nodded.

"You were an ass to do it after bumping into Carne in the Sixth Form passage, Bob."

Bob Cherry grunted.

"You're a fine lot of Job's comforters, I must say! That rotter Loder deserved it, anyway. Fancy giving a chap six for sliding down the banisters!"

Bob Cherry never could withstand the temptation of sliding down the banisters, an outlet of boyish exuberance that had earned him a licking many a time and oft.

"Better not keep the beak waiting," said Johnny Bull.

"Great Scott, no!"

Already five minutes had elapsed since Trotter, having made the announcement that Cherry was wanted in Dr. Locke's

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Who is the Masked Terror? That's what the police of the world want to know. And to Billy Bunter, the fat and fatuous Removite, falls the glory and credit of supplying the answer!

at Greyfriars, and that meant keen matches against their old rivals, Tom Merry & Co. of St. Jim's, Courtenay & Co. of Highcliffe, and Jimmy Silver & Co. of Rookwood—attractions which George Washington's country could not offer.

The Famous Five felt it was good to be back amongst the old familiar faces in the Remove, even though it meant hard work swotting in the Form-room, under the eagle eye of Mr. Quelch, to make up the ground that had been lost.

Harry Wharton glanced at his watch. "Suppose we'd better make a start," he said. "We don't want to get on the wrong side of the Quelch bird!"

"No fear!"

Tap!

A knock at the study door put a stop to further conversation, and a moment later Trotter, the page, appeared.

He grinned at the Famous Five cheerfully. Doubtless Trotter was as pleased as anyone to see Harry Wharton & Co.

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study, had departed. Keeping the Head of Greyfriars waiting was not likely to appease his wrath. On the contrary, it would doubtless serve only to increase it.

"Better put some exercise books in your bags, old chap," suggested Nugent helpfully.

"Ass!"

Bob Cherry grinned ruefully and left the study. In response to his knock on the door of Dr. Locke's study a stern but kindly voice bade him enter.

"You sent for me, sir?"

Bob's voice was quite steady, although his heart was beating a trifle quickly. The sight of the awe-inspiring figure of the Head of Greyfriars had that effect on members of the Lower School.

"Ah, Cherry!"

Dr. Locke adjusted his pince-nez and looked steadily at the Remove junior.

"Loder has told me—" he began; and Bob Cherry's face fell.

Apparently the unpopular Sixth Form prefect had indeed discovered who had placed that very special booby-trap over the door of his study.

Bob Cherry's mind worked swiftly. In the circumstances perhaps it would be judicious to make a clean breast of things.

"I—I own up," he said, his face turning a deep shade of crimson.

Dr. Locke started.

"Wha-a-at?"

"I—I did it, sir," said Cherry falteringly.

"You did it?" gasped the Head, peering at the Remove junior in amazement.

"Yes, sir. It—it was only a j-joke, sir."

"A joke?" ejaculated Dr. Locke. "A joke? Bless my soul!"

Bob Cherry hung his head. Apparently a booby-trap, specially prepared with a mixture of jam and soot and treacle, with a liberal quantity of red and black ink added to it, was anything but a joke in the eyes of the Head of Greyfriars. Really, now that Bob Cherry was before the stern and majestic figure of Dr. Locke, he almost wondered himself how he could have possibly regarded such a booby-trap as a joke.

"I'm sorry, sir," he said penitently. "Perhaps it was a bit thick. It'll take Loder hours of scrubbing to get the awful stuff off his chivvy—I mean, his face."

"Bless my soul!"

"I'm willing to take my gruel, sir," added Bob Cherry.

A light of intelligence began to dawn on the incredulous features of Dr. Locke. He regarded the Remove junior sternly.

"Am I to understand that you are making a voluntary confession?" he asked.

Bob Cherry started.

It occurred to him in a flash that perhaps he had been a trifle hasty in jumping to the conclusion that Loder had reported him for fixing up that booby-trap. But it was too late now to retreat; he had committed himself.

"Boy," exclaimed Dr. Locke in thunderous tones, "from your own words I gather that you have been guilty of perpetrating some practical joke on a prefect. Is that so?"

Bob Cherry gulped and nodded.

"Might I inquire the nature of this practical joke?" asked the Head, with a slight inflection of sarcasm in his voice.

"It—it—it—" stammered Bob.

"Well?"

"It—it was a booby-trap, sir."

Bob got it out at last.

"Wha-a-at?"

"A b-booby trap, sir!"

For a moment a flicker of a smile crossed the stern features of Dr. Locke.

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but Cherry was too occupied with his own dismayed thoughts to observe it.

"Disgraceful!" snapped the Head. "I will not tolerate this flagrant disregard of authority! Loder is a prefect vested with disciplinary powers for keeping law and order. It is unseemly and disrespectful that you should make him the butt of you. childish pranks!"

Bob squirmed. At that moment he felt as big as the smallest fag in the Second.

"When did you—ahem!—fix this—this booby-trap?"

"About an hour ago, sir!"

"Then it is quite possible that Loder has not yet entered his study," said the Head quickly. "He has been in this room for the past two hours. You had better proceed to his study without delay and remove this—ahem!—booby-trap."

"Yes, sir."

"And then return here immediately," added Dr. Locke.

"Yes, sir."

Bob Cherry turned on his heel and departed. He made for the Sixth Form passage at a run. If he were in time to remove that awful mixture of jam and soot and treacle and ink, doubtless his punishment at the hands of Dr. Locke would not be so severe as it would be if Loder received that booby-trap over his devoted head.

Get these two new numbers of THE SCHOOLBOYS' OWN LIBRARY.

No. 99. "The Bounder of Greyfriars!"
By Frank Richards.

No. 100. "His Own Enemy!"
By Owen Conquest.

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With mixed feelings the Remove rushed along the passage silently censuring himself for his impetuosity in confessing to a sin when no confession was necessary. In his mental preoccupation he lost sight of the fact that the descent of the booby-trap, affixed to the top of the slightly open door, entirely depended on the door being swung open. In any case, to remove the booby-trap it was necessary to enter the study.

Bob Cherry did.

Swoooooosh!

"Yaroooooooooh! Gug-gug-gug-gug! Mmmmmmmmm!"

Simultaneous with Bob's entry the contents of the booby-trap, so carefully prepared, swooped down in a flood over his head and shoulders, enveloping him as in a garment.

THE SECOND CHAPTER.

Poetic Justice!

"GROOOOOOOGH! Oh crikey! Mmmmmmmmm!"

Bob Cherry gasped and spluttered, and spluttered and gasped. He resembled nothing so much as a Christy minstrel at that moment. He gouged jam and soot and treacle from his eyes frantically.

"Oh crumbs!" he spluttered. "Wow! Grooooooogh!"

His clothes were covered in that awful mixture. It dripped from every part of him to the floor in a black and sticky trail. Really, it was a case of poetic justice with a vengeance, but at that moment the hapless Remove failed to see any justice in that awful calamity.

"Groooooogh!"

And at that moment Loder of the Sixth came striding along the passage. His eyes nearly started from their sockets when he observed the awful conglomeration of soot and jam and ink that swamped the floor in the region of his study, as he perceived the diminutive form of a junior, unrecognisable at the moment, frantically gouging that clinging mixture from his face.

"You young scoundrel!"

Loder's eyes glittered. He did not need telling that the booby-trap—for a booby-trap it obviously was—had been intended for him; the unpopular prefect of the Sixth held no illusions as to his popularity amongst the Lower Forms at Greyfriars. And the thought that he might, but for some accident that must have happened, have been in the shoes of Bob Cherry at that moment, made him grind his teeth with rage.

"Who are you?" he demanded harshly, keeping at a safe distance from that fearful mixture.

"Groooooogh!" Bob still clawing handfuls of the "mixture" from his face and hair, hardly heard the prefect's words. His vocabulary, for the nonce, was confined to such expressions as: "Mmmmmmm! Wow! Gug-gug-gug-gug!"

Loder peered closely at the inky face of the Remove and recognised in its outline the features of Bob Cherry.

"Cherry!" he roared. "You young scoundrel! I'll flay you alive for this!"

"Groooooogh!"

The prefect ground his teeth with rage. At that moment he would have dearly liked to give the junior the licking of his life. But that garment of soot and ink and jam proved a formidable barrage, and, for the moment, at any rate, effectively prevented him from indulging his anger. Realising, it was a contre-temps, as the novelists say, which found Gerald Loder hopeless to solve. To come to close quarters with Bob Cherry at that moment would mean that a considerable portion of the inky mixture would transfer itself to the person of Gerald Loder. In the circumstances, Loder's wrath would have to keep, a fact that made the Sixth-Former more furious than ever.

There was a rustle of a gown close handy, and Loder, turning, saw the majestic Head of Greyfriars approaching. The prefect's face took on a malignant expression. He regarded it as a propitious moment for the Head to make his advent, being, of course, unaware of Dr. Locke's knowledge of the booby-trap.

The Head continued his stately tread along the Sixth Form passage, but a lot of that stateliness departed when, into his line of vision, came the hapless figure of Bob Cherry.

"Bless my soul!" he gasped. "Loder—"

"This young scoundrel—" began the prefect angrily, but the Head cut him short.

"Better language please, Loder!" he said. "I am aware of some of the circumstances of this—this outrage!"

"Oh!" Loder was taken aback.

"I summoned Cherry to my study a few moments ago, as you know," went

on the Head, "and he confessed to fixing a—ahem!—booby-trap over your door."

"Oh!" gasped the prefect. Why Cherry, once having taken the trouble to prepare that booby-trap, should confess to Dr. Locke that he had done so amazed him, and the Head, seeing his astonishment, proceeded to enlighten him.

"Cherry was obviously labouring under the misapprehension that I had sent for him in connection with some misdemeanour," he said, "and forthwith confessed to having played a practical joke on you."

"Oh!" gasped Loder for the third time.

"So I immediately sent him along to your study to remove the—ahem!—offending booby-trap!" added Dr. Locke. "He appears to have suffered as a consequence."

There was a twinkle of amusement in the Head's grey eyes which Loder did not observe. Beneath the sternness and dignity which cloaked Dr. Locke so well as headmaster of Greyfriars lurked a sense of humour which time and cares of office had not obliterated.

"Ahem!" The Head coughed, and then turned his attention to the writhing figure of the junior in Loder's doorway. "Cherry!"

"Groooough! Oh dear!" gasped that luckless junior.

"Cherry!" repeated the Head sternly.

"Yow! Yes, sir! Gruuugg!"

"You—ahem!—appear to be the victim of the childish prank you intended to play on a prefect."

"Groooough!" mumbled Cherry, looking a woebegone figure beneath that garment of soot and ink. "Mmmmm!"

"It would seem to be a case of poetic justice," continued the Head, "and, in the circumstances, I shall not punish you further. You will—"

"But, sir!" stormed Loder, hardly able to believe his ears. "Is that young rotter to go unpunished for playing this abominable trick?"

"Silence, Loder!" said the Head sternly. "I have already said that I consider his punishment sufficient!"

The prefect ground his teeth and relapsed into silence. But if looks could have killed, the luckless Cherry would have expired on the spot.

"You will proceed to the bath-room and remove that—ahem!—concoction from your person," said the Head, addressing his remarks to Cherry, "and then present yourself in my study."

"Groooough! Yessir!" mumbled Cherry wretchedly.

And he crawled off along the Sixth Form passage, leaving an inky and sticky trail behind him.

"Loder," said Dr. Locke, "you will instruct Gosling to clear up this mess at once!"

"Yes, sir," said the prefect sulkily.

And Dr. Locke departed with rustling gown, allowing his sense of humour and his facial muscles more play now that it was no longer necessary to show a stern front to a prefect and a recalcitrant junior, which showed that revered old Head, despite his years, was as much a boy at heart as any adult.

Gerald Loder gazed after the Head of Greyfriars with feelings too deep for words, and then he strode off to find the school porter. The Head had declared that the punishment of Bob Cherry was sufficient, but Loder was determined to "take it out of him" as soon as a safe opportunity presented itself, which was a poor solace but the only one in the circumstances.



As Bob Cherry pushed open the study door the contents of the booby trap swooped down in a flood over his head and shoulders, enveloping him as in a garment. Swoosh! "Groooough! Oh, crikey! Mmmmm!" The Removee gasped and spluttered as he gouged jam and soot and treacle from his eyes and mouth and nose. (See Chapter 1.)

THE THIRD CHAPTER.

Good News!

"H A, ha, ha!"
"Oh, my giddy aunt!"
"Who is it?"

A roar of laughter greeted the hapless Bob Cherry as he appeared in the Remove passage. On all sides study doors were opening and inquiring heads were being thrust out, their owners anxious to discover what all the commotion was about. It took some time for the Removees to discover the identity of the black and sticky object who trailed along their quarters, and it was left to Harold Skinner to solve the puzzle, as it were.

"It's Cherry!"
"Oh, my hat!"
"Ha, ha, ha!"

Bob Cherry blushed a deep crimson under his face mask of soot and ink. He had a keen sense of the ridiculous, and he realised what an object he must look.

"Oh crumbs!" he groaned. "This is awful!"

The door of Study No. 1 opened, and Harry Wharton & Co. looked out. Next minute they too sighted the black and sticky figure crawling towards the Remove staircase.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The chums of the Remove doubled up with laughter.

"Who is it?" asked Wharton at length.

And Skinner hastened to acquaint him.

"It's Cherry!"

Harry Wharton & Co.'s laughter stopped on the instant.

"Eh?"

"Whom?"

"Cherry!" grinned the cad of the Remove.

"Oh, great Scott!"

Harry Wharton, Johnny Bull, Frank Nugent, and Hurree Singh ran after the disappearing figure of their chum. They reached him with a rush.

"What's happened, Bob?"

"Mmmmm!"

"How did you get in this awful state?"

"Groooough!" groaned Bob.

And it was not until the little procession had reached the bath-room that Bob's chums were in full possession of the facts. Naturally they were sympathetic, but that did not stifle their laughter. There was something ludicrously comic in Bob himself having

received the mixture which he had prepared with such care and thoughtfulness, although Bob Cherry could not see anything comic in it.

"Poor old Bob!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You cackling asses!" snorted Cherry, divesting himself of his sticky garments. "Blessed if I see anything to chortle about!"

"Ahem!"

Wharton obligingly turned on the hot water tap of the bath; Nugent and Johnny Bull rushed off to the dormitory to get their chum a change of clothes, whilst Hurree Singh gingerly pushed the inky and sooty clothes into a far corner of the bath-room.

Then for the next half hour Bob scrubbed and rubbed until his skin resembled the colour of a lobster. Despite all his efforts with a plentiful supply of hot water and soap and a scrubbing-brush, however, traces of that awful booby-trap still remained.

"Oh dear!" he muttered, surveying himself in the mirror. "This is awful!"

His chums managed to keep straight faces. Despite the humour of the situation they were feeling very sorry for their chum. Being the victim of a booby-trap like that was really rotten luck.

"You don't look so bad, old scout!" said Wharton, running a critical eye over a Bob Cherry newly swept and garnished, so to speak.

"Brrr!" Bob Cherry was not in a mood for conversation. He proceeded to brush and comb his hair, which still showed traces of jam and soot, surveyed himself again in the mirror, and then made tracks for Dr. Locke's study.

He was conscious of his embarrassment when he presented himself before the Head once again.

"Ah! Come in, my boy!"

Dr. Locke gave the Remove one swift, shrewd glance as if to ascertain what efforts he had made to clean himself, affected not to notice the lingering traces of ink and soot that were still

to be seen, and then motioned him to a chair.

Bob Cherry wondered what was coming next.

"I was about to tell you, my boy, when I summoned you here before, that your uncle, Sir William Cherry, has been in telephonic communication with me—or, rather, Loder!"

"Loder!" said Bob Cherry involuntarily.

The Head smiled.

"Loder and I have been going over some Greek papers, and I left him here while I went along to see Mr. Prout. It was during my absence that your uncle phoned. Loder took the message."

"Oh!"

"It appears that Sir William is holding a reception at his house to-morrow, and that he would like you and your chums to spend the evening with him as his guests."

"Oh, sir!"

Bob Cherry's eyes glistened.

His uncle, a Greyfriars Old Boy, had lately returned from China, and had taken up residence on the outskirts of Courtfield, a circumstance Bob had viewed with pleasure, for he was very fond of his uncle.

Sir William was a sportsman—"one of the best," as Harry Wharton & Co. had declared at their very first meeting. An evening spent in his company, and at his big house at Courtfield, would be a rare treat, Sir William being a host who entertained on a lavish scale. But as Bob Cherry remembered his recent conduct his face fell. In the circumstances, it was hardly likely that Dr. Locke would give his consent to Sir William Cherry's request.

Dr. Locke smiled slightly as he read the thought that passed in the junior's mind.

"In view of your recent behaviour, Cherry," he said, "I hardly know whether to let you and your chums attend this reception. But—"

He broke off and smiled as he

observed the eloquent pleading in the eyes of the Remove junior.

"But there are times when it is possible to overlook certain boyish pranks. Added to which Sir William is a Greyfriars Old Boy, and a friend of mine, and I would like to oblige him!"

"Oh, sir!"

"In the circumstances, therefore, you and six of your friends may absent yourselves from school to-morrow evening until midnight."

"Hurrah!" exclaimed Bob involuntarily.

"Sir William stated that he would send a car to fetch you and bring you back," added the Head.

"Oh, good!" gasped Bob. "I mean, yes, sir."

Bob's eyes were shining.

"That is all, my boy," concluded Dr. Locke. "You may go. Before you leave the school to-morrow kindly let me have the names of the boys you intend to take with you."

"Yes, sir," said Bob. "Thank you, sir!"

He turned to the doorway, when once more the Head's voice rang out:

"Cherry!"

Bob turned.

"I would recommend a little more application of soap and hot water—and the energetic use of a scrubbing-brush before you present yourself at Sir William's house to-morrow. The back of your ears—"

The Head smiled over his pince-nez, and Cherry's face turned a deep red. He was conscious that traces of that booby-trap still remained.

He blurted out something in his confusion, and then closed the door behind him. Once in the passage, however, all Bob's natural exuberance returned. He let out a wild whoop of excitement, and then rushed off to tell his chums the good news. He found them all in Study No. 1, just finishing their prep.

Bob burst into the study like a miniature cyclone.

"Hurrah!" he roared; and catching hold of Harry Wharton he began to waltz that astonished youth round the room. "Hurrah!"

"Here, hold on!" protested the captain of the Remove. "Are you potty?"

Bob Cherry grinned and released his amazed chum. The other members of the Famous Five looked on puzzled, all of them wondering whether Bob had suddenly taken leave of his senses. This was a very different Bob from the one they had seen a short time ago.

But when he explained what had transpired in the Head's study Harry Wharton & Co.'s faces were very bright. An evening's outing at Sir William Cherry's place was something to look forward to.

"I say, won't it be ripping?" exclaimed Wharton.

"Sir William's a brick!" said Johnny Bull.

"Rather!"

"I'll swop a couple of aunts and an uncle for him, old chap," said Nugent. "Ha, ha, ha!"

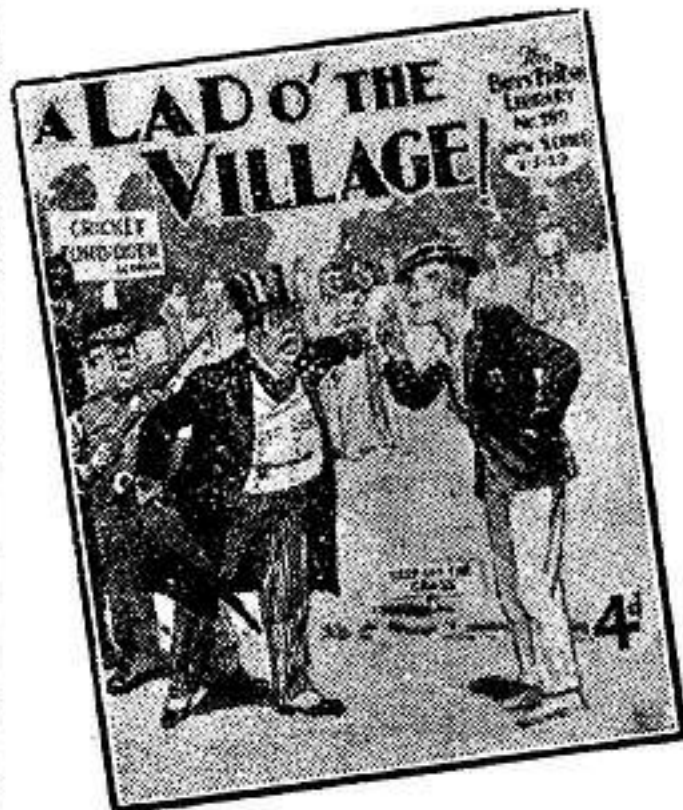
"I'll take Mauly and Mark Linley with us," said Bob Cherry thoughtfully as he sat down at the study table. "The Head said I can take six. Isn't he a rare old sport?"

"Rather!"

"I say, old chap," said Wharton suddenly. "You haven't done your prep."

The breezy smile faded from Bob Cherry's face; he never could contemplate anything in the nature of school work with a smile, for he was essentially a junior of muscle and

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physical energy rather than of brain—a formidable fellow on the playing fields and in the gym; a plodder in the Form-room.

"You'd better not get on the wrong side of old Quelch if we're going out to-morrow," said Wharton, "or he might put the kybosh on the invite."

"Oh crumbs!"

The thought of that was sufficient to induce Bob to open his books, and he sat down, with a wrinkle in his brow, to prepare a passage from the *Ænëid*.

THE FOURTH CHAPTER.

Bunter Takes a Chance!

"HOW'S this tie?"

Bob Cherry turned a perspiring face from the mirror in the Remove dormitory and eyed his chums hopefully.

It was the following evening, and the Famous Five, Mark Linley and Lord Mauleverer, were putting the finishing touches to their toilet in readiness for their departure for Sir William Cherry's house.

Bob Cherry had wrestled with several refractory ties for half an hour or more, but none of them seemed to satisfy him.

Mark Linley smiled and came to the rescue.

"Here, let me tie it for you, Bob."

Bob breathed a sigh of relief. He was anxious to look as smart as possible when he presented himself at his uncle's house, but "dressing up," as he regarded it, was not his forte.

Mark Linley soon had that refractory tie in order, and then Bob surveyed himself in the mirror once again.

"This blessed hair of mine won't lie down," he grunted.

"Curly hair isn't expected to, old scout," said Harry Wharton, with a grin. "Leave it alone; it looks top-ping!"

"I say, you fellows——"

A fat voice squeaked into the Remove dormitory, and next moment the fat owner of it came into view.

"Buzz off, Bunter!"

"Oh, really, Cherry——"

Nobody took any notice of Billy Bunter just then. On this occasion, more than any other, the room of the Owl of the Remove was much more preferable to his company. Already the car that was to take the Greyfriars party to Courtfield had been waiting a quarter of an hour.

William George Bunter snorted and rolled up to the party.

"I say, Cherry, old chap——"

"Don't!"

"Don't what?" asked Bunter.

Bob Cherry turned from the mirror, hair-brush in hand.

"Don't say 'Cherry, old chap,' or I shall dot you with this brush like that."

"Whooooop!"

Billy Bunter let out a roar as the brush tapped against his bullet head, and he staggered back against a bed. Next moment there was a roar from Johnny Bull.

"Look out, you fat idiot! Mind my hat!"

Crunch!

Johnny Bull's warning came too late, for Bunter spread himself over Johnny's best top-
per with disastrous results to that piece of headgear.

"Yaroooooh!"

Bunter let out another howl as the infuriated Johnny Bull rushed at him, grasped his podgy nose between finger and thumb, and wrenched him off the bed.

"You clumsy idiot!" roared Bull. "Look at my hat!"

"Wow! Oh dear!"

Bunter's fifteen stone had not improved Bull's best Sunday top-
per; on the contrary, it had ruined it completely, and had changed its appearance into something that resembled a concertina more than a silk hat.

Johnny Bull glared at the ruined top-
per, and then he glared at Bunter.

"Why, you fat rotter!" roared Johnny. "I'll smash you!"

And he advanced on the Owl of the Remove with fury in his eye.

Harry Wharton interposed.

"Hold on, Johnny!"

Johnny Bull glared at the captain of the Remove.

"Look at my hat!" he exclaimed.

"It's ruined!"

Wharton obligingly looked at the hat and smiled faintly. Undoubtedly that hat was ruined.

"Let me get at that fat idiot and I'll burst him!" stormed Johnny Bull.

Wharton gripped him by the arm.

"It wasn't quite Bunter's fault," he said.

"Look at my hat!" That seemed to be all Johnny Bull was capable of saying.

"Look at my hat!"

"Oh, really, Bull," said Bunter peevishly. "It was Cherry's fault, really. The beast made me fall on it!"

"Why, you silly idiot——" began Bob.

A MAGNET pocket-knife has been awarded to: Jack Mills, of 52, Lannoy Road, New Eltham, S.E.9, for the following amusing joke:

Man (employed by Scot): "I have been here for ten days doing the work of three men for one man's pay, and now I want a rise."

Scot: "I doot if I can gi'e ye that, but if ye'll tell me the names of the ither two men I'll sack 'em!"

Now why don't you other fellows have a shot at winning one of these useful prizes? You supply the laugh, and I'll supply the penknife!

Again Wharton interposed.

"Might I remind you chaps that the car's been waiting over a quarter of an hour. We don't want to waste time jawing here."

Johnny Bull snorted. He picked up his damaged hat and tried to straighten it out—but little success attended his efforts.

"Look at my hat!"

"The ruinfulness of the esteemed hat is preposterously complete," purred Inky sympathetically.

"Begad, it is rather damaged," drawled Lord Mauleverer. "Perhaps I may be allowed to offer you the loan of one of mine, dear boy."

A lot of the wrath faded from Johnny Bull's face as Lord Mauleverer made that offer.

"That's jolly decent of you, Mauly," he said gratefully.

"Not a bit of it!" smiled his lordship. "Help yourself."

He pointed to his wardrobe in which were several hat-boxes, for the school-boy earl was very fastidious in sartorial matters, and possessed the biggest wardrobe of any boy at Greyfriars.

Johnny Bull treated Billy Bunter to another glare, and then proceeded to select a top-
per from Lord Mauleverer's store. Fortunately he wore the same size as the slacker of the Remove.

"I say, you fellows——" began Bunter.

"Oh, roll away, Bunter!"

"Buzz off!"

Billy Bunter snorted.

"I think you might have included your best pal in the party, Cherry," he said.

Once more Bob paused in the task of brushing his curly hair.

"Eh? I have!"

"Then he's to come with you to Sir William's place?" asked Bunter.

"Of course!" said Bob, paying more attention to his hair than to Bunter's words.

Billy Bunter smiled.

"That's good of you, old chap. I wish you'd let me know earlier. As it is you chaps will have to wait for me while I change."

"Eh?"

"What's the fat idiot gassing about?"

"I shan't be more than half an hour," continued the Owl of the Remove. "The car can wait, and when I explain matters to your uncle, Bob, old chap, he'll understand."

"Eh?"

"Of course I shall have to borrow a few things," went on Bunter. "My best clothes haven't been unpacked, and they're certain to be full of creases. Still, I can borrow one of Mauly's jackets——"

"Oh, begad!"

"And Wharton's socks——"

"You leave my things alone!" said Wharton.

Bunter appeared to reflect.

"And Nugent's dress shoes will just about fit me——"

Bob Cherry gave a final brush to his hair and turned to Bunter.

"Now what is it you're gassing about, old fat man?" he inquired.

The Owl of the Remove smiled.

"I shan't keep you long," he said. "I hope you've given in my name to the Head, Cherry."

Bob looked perplexed.

"What on earth are you burbling about? Why should I give in your name to the Head?"

"Well, you've just said that you're taking your best pal with you," said Bunter fatuously.

"That's correct," said Bob. "Wharton's coming."

"Wharton——"

Bob nodded.

Billy Bunter glared.

"But I'm your best pal, old chap," he exclaimed. "Look at the way I looked after you in America. Look at the way I've looked after you ever since we came back to the school."

Bob Cherry grinned.

"Blessed if I've noticed it," he said. "I've noticed the way you've looked after my grub, if that's what you mean, you fat raider."

"Oh, really, Cherry——"

The pained expression in the podgy face of the Owl of the Remove raised a roar of laughter from Harry Wharton & Co.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Run away, old fat man," said Bob cheerfully. "We're late as it is without wasting more time listening to you wagging your chin."

"But I say——"

"Wait till we're gone," grinned Wharton. "And then you can wag your chin as much as you like."

"Oh, really, Wharton——"

Bob Cherry glanced round at the party.

"All ready?"

"Ay, ay!" said Nugent, with a chuckle.

"Lead on, Macduff!" grinned Johnny Bull, whose good-humour was now fully restored.

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"The readyfulness is terrific," said Inky, with a dusky smile.

"Good!" said Bob. "Let's get off, then!"

"I say, wait for me—" yelled Bunter.

The chums of the Remove filed out of the dormitory, regardless of Billy Bunter's injunction. The fat junior trailed after the party.

"I say, Bob, old chap, wait for me!"

"Step it out, you men!" urged Bob.

Billy Bunter glared.

"Beast! I say, Wharton, old fellow—"

The captain of the Remove heard, but heeded not.

"Rotter!" roared Bunter wrathfully.

"Nugent, old chap—"

Nugent was smitten with sudden deafness.

"Yah! Milk-sop!" exclaimed Bunter.

"Wait for me, Mauly, old fellow—"

Lord Mauleverer appeared to be deep in conversation with Johnny Bull.

"Rotten slacker!" roared Bunter indignantly. "Yah! I wouldn't go to the rotten party, not if Cherry asked me on bended knees!"

The Removites had reached the School House steps. Out in the quad was a large Daimler saloon car. The liveried chauffeur opened the door of the car when he sighted the juniors, and one by one they scrambled in. Billy Bunter watched them half enviously and half wrathfully from the School House steps.

"Rotters!" he murmured. "Selfish rotters!"

Suddenly a gleam came into the fat junior's eyes.

The chauffeur had slammed the door of the car shut and was already mounting to his seat at the wheel. The engine broke into action. Then William George Bunter acted. With surprising speed for one of such bulk he dashed down the School House steps and jumped for the luggage-grid at the back of the car just as it started to move off.

Gasping breathlessly, he scrambled on the luggage-grid and held on as if for dear life. Then he grinned, and finally a soft chuckle escaped him.

"He, he, he! The rotters are jolly well not going to leave me out of it after all!"

The car gathered speed and passed through the open gates, exciting the envy of several juniors who were either strolling in or strolling out. There were roars of laughter when Billy Bunter was spotted, clinging to the luggage-grid like a fat spider to its web; but although Harry Wharton & Co. heard the laughter, they did not realise at whom it was directed, or the cause of it. They were chatting about the jolly evening that lay in front of them, all unconscious that William George Bunter, the last person they would have desired to have with them on that occasion, was within a few feet of them.

Billy Bunter had accomplished the first part of the invitation, so to speak, and it remained to see how he would negotiate the next stage. That serious trouble would be his reward when Dr. Locke learned of his absence from Greyfriars without leave did not worry Billy Bunter just then; he had a habit of making the most of the moment and of letting the future take care of itself.

THE FIFTH CHAPTER.

Out of the Past!

"YOU want me, Marsden?"

Sir William Cherry looked up from the lacquered writing-desk in his study as his secretary appeared in the room.

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"Yes, sir," answered Marsden. "The evening mail—"

Sir William smiled and held out a hand for the salver on which reposed a fairly extensive collection of letters.

"I think we might let those wait over until the morning, what?" he said genially. "To-night we enjoy ourselves."

"Very good, sir," was Marsden's respectful reply.

He was a tall, slim, good-looking man, but there was something about him that suggested the neurotic, in striking contrast to his master, who was heavy of build, muscular to a degree, with a healthy tan in his cheeks which bespoke a life of orderliness and careful living.

"Everything is in readiness for your guests," ventured Marsden. "The special orchestra from London has just arrived."

"Good!" said Sir William. "You will see to their comfort."

Marsden allowed a flicker of a smile to cross his pale face.

"I have done that already, Sir William."

"You think of everything, Marsden!" remarked the baronet. "I don't know what I should do without you!"

"You are very kind, sir!"

The secretary bowed and softly vacated the room.

Sir William eyed the pile of correspondence idly. In an abstracted fashion he noted that the majority of the letters bore a foreign stamp with the engraving of the youthful Emperor of China's head upon it. The baronet smiled. Those letters, he knew, were from old friends in China, where he had spent twenty years of his life.

"It's nice to be remembered," he murmured to himself.

He pulled out a cigar-case, selected a Havana, and carefully lit it. Then he lounged back in a comfortable chair, and soon blue clouds of fragrant smoke were writhing ceilingwards. Through the haze Sir William again saw the pile of correspondence on the salver. His attention was drawn to a small package, measuring no more than two inches square.

"Wonder what that is?" he muttered.

And curiosity getting the better of him, he stretched out a hand and took the package.

The writing on the label was unknown to him, and the postmark was Soho, London.

In a moment Sir William had cut the string of the small parcel and was turning out the contents. These proved to be a peculiarly shaped gold ring, resembling the fabled dragon, the eyes of which were set with two well-out rubies.

"Now where on earth have I seen this ring before?" murmured Sir William.

And the brief note that accompanied the ring supplied the answer:

"This ring belonged to your father. Accept it from one who knew him well."

There was no signature to the note; nothing to indicate from whom it emanated, for the writing, identical with that on the label of the parcel, was unknown to the baronet.

"That's rather queer," murmured Sir William. "By gad! I remember the ring now! The old gov'nor used to wear it when I was a kid! Wonder who sent it to me, and how it came into his possession?"

For a long time the baronet gave himself up to reflection, but at the end of it he was still no wiser as to who had sent him the ring. With a smile he slipped it on his finger.

"Well, it's very nice of somebody—very nice indeed!" he said. "The ring's worth a fair amount of money, too, as far I can judge."

"Exactly twenty pounds, Sir William!"

The baronet started violently and turned in his chair as that unfamiliar voice broke in.

"Good gad!"

Standing about three feet away was a tall, masked figure, in an immaculate suit of evening clothes. And in the right hand of the newcomer gleamed an automatic which he slowly raised until it came on a level with Sir William's heart.

"Good gad!" exclaimed Sir William. "Who are you? And what fool's game is this?"

The newcomer bowed slightly.

"My name is unknown to you, sir," he said, in a voice which at once suggested the foreigner. "As to the other question, this is no fool's game."

Sir William's eyes blazed. He half rose in his chair to ring the bell on the writing-desk, but an ominous movement of the wicked-looking automatic stopped him.

"Please don't move, Sir William," said the masked stranger. "You and I have an important piece of business to discuss."

"Business!" snapped the baronet. "Do you think I am in the habit of doing business with a man who hasn't the courage to show his face, with a man who forces himself unasked on my privacy, who speaks of business behind a loaded gun?"

He rose to his feet as he spoke, and there was a glitter in his eyes that indicated his intention of rushing upon the armed stranger. It was momentary, for barely had the baronet stood erect than a strange giddiness came over him, and he pressed his hand over his heart.

A mocking laugh, low and sibilant, escaped the masked stranger as he watched Sir William sway unsteadily on his feet.

"I would suggest that you be seated again."

It was good advice, and involuntarily Sir William carried it out. His face had gone a deathly pallor, his throat was dry, and there was a faint tinge of blue creeping to the edge of his lips.

"I feel ill!" he muttered. "I feel—"

"As if you were dying," supplemented the stranger. "In that you are right."

The baronet's eyes fixed on him in a glassy, terrified stare.

"What do you say?" he asked feebly. "What fiendish business is this?"

For answer the masked stranger smiled and then seated himself in a chair close to the baronet.

"Do you remember the ring?"

Sir William started and instinctively gazed at the ring that glittered on his right hand. What did this masked terror know of the ring?

The stranger's next words were to enlighten him.

"It was I who sent you that ring—or, rather, my society."

"Your—your society?" said Sir William faintly.

The stranger nodded.

"The Rafia."

A light of understanding dawned on the pale face of the baronet. Who had not heard of the dreaded Corsican society—the Rafia? In every portion of the globe the hand of the Rafia had been felt. Who was its chief, who were its members, were questions that had perplexed the police of the world.

But what had the dreaded Rafia to do with Sir William Cherry? The expression of amazement on the baronet's face did not pass the stranger unheeded.

"You are wondering what the Rafia



Billy Bunter let out a roar as Bob Cherry lunged at him with the hair-brush, and he staggered against a bed. Next moment there was a roar from Johnny Bull. "Look out, you fat idiot! Mind my hat!" Crunch! Bull's warning came too late. (See Chapter 4.)

is doing in the house of Sir William Cherry, Bart, eh? I will tell you. Your father was a member of it."

"Wha-a-at?" Despite the weakness that gripped him, Sir William sat bolt upright, his hands clutching the arms of the chair until the knuckles showed white through the skin. "What do you say?"

The stranger smiled mockingly.

"That, perhaps, surprises you," he said softly. "Yet it is true. As a starting-point of proof let me remind you of the ring."

"Ah!"

"Your father, as I have said, joined our society when he was a man of thirty. Now, now! Don't get excited, for you will want every ounce of strength you possess before I am finished. Your father, then, was one of us—"

"You lie!" gasped Sir William hoarsely. "My father, a baronet, a member of your accursed society? Never!"

The masked stranger shrugged his shoulders.

"I will convince you, then," he said. "Your father was of an inquisitive turn of mind. He stumbled across our secret when he visited Corsica in company with a friend. He attended one of our meetings. He was discovered, and death was by rights his due."

"Good heavens!" The perspiration was standing out in beads on the baronet's head. "My father?"

"Your father," said the stranger, with a grim nod. "Death would have been his portion but for the regrettable weakness of our chief. Your father begged on his knees to be spared. He spoke of you, a child of ten, of his wife, your mother. For their sakes he pleaded for his life."

"Good gad!"

"And your father's life was spared

on certain conditions," went on the stranger earnestly. "One was that he became one of us; that he contributed to our funds; that he fulfilled our vows and obligations. His name, his signature, is upon our rolls. The ring he left with us as token of good faith."

Sir William, deathly pale, collapsed in his chair.

"That ring you now wear upon your finger—that ring has been so treated that the wearer of it becomes infected with a deadly poison the moment he wears it next to his skin."

Feebly the baronet lifted the hand that wore the ring and gazed at it glassily.

"Tiny needles have been raised on the inner surface of the ring," explained the stranger, "and on each of those needles is enough poison to kill twenty men stronger than you are—or were," he added.

"Merciful heavens!"

"There is no antidote known to the medical profession. The secret lies with the Rasfa and with me, their agent. Listen carefully!"

The masked stranger paused for breath.

"The Rasfa demands its due of forty thousand pounds."

"What?"

"Let me explain," broke in the masked stranger. "By the foundations of the society the obligations of a father fall upon the son until such time as the Rasfa has no further need of him. Your father is dead; his vows fall to you to fulfil. We demand, as is our right, the sum of forty thousand pounds."

"Forty thousand pounds?" said Sir William weakly.

The stranger nodded.

"In exchange for your life. Unless you agree to do our bidding you will be a dead man within twenty-four hours. You will, if you are a wise man, agree."

Again the baronet gripped the arms of his chair until the knuckles gleamed white under the tension.

"Never!" he said thickly. "You murderous hound! Not even for life itself would I give in to that demand!"

The masked stranger shrugged his shoulders indifferently.

"Just as you like," he said mockingly. "You are worth a million pounds or more. What is forty thousand to you? What is life to you?"

"You murderous dog!" said Sir William faintly. "I'll have you arrested! I'll summon the police!"

A mocking laugh was the response to that outburst.

"You can't. You haven't enough strength left in you even to ring that bell. Try. Prove my words. Ah!"

Sir William stretched out a hand to ring the little bell on the desk; but his muscles seemed paralysed, for the hand fell weakly on his lap.

"You fiend! You fiend incarnate!" he muttered weakly.

"Not that, my friend," came the answer. "Just a zealous agent of the Rasfa. But save your breath. In a few moments you won't be able to speak. It will be too late then to come to terms. Now, for the last time, will you exchange forty thousand pounds for the antidote—for life itself?"

Sir William breathed thickly.

"No, you durned scoundrel!"

The masked man rose and moved softly towards the door. With his hand on the doorknob he turned.

"You're obstinate," he said. "An obstinate old man. Not even for life itself will you fulfil the terms the Rasfa impose. But it is worse than madness, for it means that your male heir will undergo the same ordeal. Let us hope

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that he will prove less obdurate. Sir William, I wish you a pleasant journey."

With a soft laugh that had something maniacal in it, the masked stranger bowed.

"You—you villain!"

Sir William tried to stand upright, his one desire to feel his fingers round the throat of the masked agent of the Rafia. But his strength failed him.

Thud!

With a low moan he pitched headlong to the floor in an unconscious heap.

The masked stranger eyed him critically for a while, and then stooped over the recumbent figure. Next moment the deadly ring had been transferred from Sir William's finger to the masked man's pocket. Then the latter hurriedly slipped off his mask, carelessly dropped it on the floor by the side of the unconscious baronet, and softly let himself out of the room.

THE SIXTH CHAPTER.

Foul Play!

"HERE we are, you chaps!"

Bob Cherry, gazing out of the window of the car, indicated a fine old country mansion that lay about a hundred yards ahead of them.

Harry Wharton & Co. looked at it interestedly. It was of Tudor design, in a state of good preservation, and the well-kept grounds that surrounded it, the laid-out flower-beds, spoke eloquently of a man who believed in spending money on cultivating the beauties of Nature.

"Topping place!" said Wharton.

"Rather!"

"The toppingfulness is terrific, my worthy chums."

The car sped on.

A few moments later it passed through the wrought-iron gates of the lodge at the end of the sweeping drive and purred up to the porch of the house itself. There it came to a standstill, as the driver smartly applied his brakes.

Billy Bunter, whose vision was obscured, had not anticipated that sudden braking. His bullet head whacked back against the coachwork of the car with a crash, and the next moment, losing his hold of the luggage-grid, he collapsed in a heap on the path.

Bump!

"Wow! Oh dear!"

With a roar that was lost as the driver accelerated his engine prior to switching off, Bunter gasped and spluttered on the drive. Then, scrambling to his feet, he dodged behind the shelter of another car that had been drawn up alongside.

Unmindful of the near presence of William George Bunter, the Greyfriars juniors poured from the car and mounted the steps of the porch. A liveried footman awaited them.

He bowed respectfully to Bob Cherry and ushered the party into the spacious hall.

"Sir William is in the writing-room," he said to Bob. "I will make your presence known to him."

"That's all right," said Cherry. "We'll trot along ourselves. Nunks won't mind."

Again the footman bowed.

At Bob Cherry's heels the juniors made their way to the writing-room.

They were within a yard of it when a shrill scream rang through the old house.

The juniors stopped involuntarily.

"Good heavens!" gasped Bob. "What was that?"

"It came from this room," said Wharton quickly. "Come on!"

In a swarm the Greyfriars party rushed into the writing-room. On the threshold they stopped, alarm and horror written on their faces; for just by the writing-desk they saw the inert figure of Sir William, supported by the arms of his secretary, who was kneeling by his side.

"Good heavens! What's the matter?" said Bob huskily.

He gazed at the pale features of his uncle in horror. The baronet's eyes were closed, and the stamp of death seemed to be upon him. Then Bob's eyes shifted to the face of the secretary. Marsden was deathly white himself.

"Something's happened to the master," he said faintly. "I—I—"

Bob and his chums surged forward.

The baronet's eyes opened. He stared unseeing at the juniors, then he gazed at his secretary. The juniors followed that glance. There was terror in it—stark terror.

The next moment Sir William's eyes closed, and he sank back.

"Phone for a doctor," said Johnny Bull, at once becoming practical. And Nugent turned on his heel and rushed off to the telephone.

"We'd better lift your uncle on to that settee," said Wharton. "Don't

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.

MDEEFWEELICKNIRILRAE

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

Last week's solution was—
William George Bunter.

look so worried, Bob. Perhaps it's only a fainting fit."

The juniors, between them, lifted the unconscious baronet on to the settee, and Bob Cherry unfastened his uncle's collar.

"He's breathing," said Bob; "but it's very faint."

The secretary seemed speechless and incapable of doing anything.

Having done what they could for the baronet until the doctor should arrive, the juniors turned to Marsden.

"What's happened?" asked Bob, feeling a dislike of the secretary on the spot.

Marsden made a helpless gesture.

"I don't know," he said. "I came to tell your uncle that you had arrived—I saw the car from my window—and when I entered this room there he was lying in front of the desk unconscious."

Bob gripped the man roughly by the arm.

"Pull yourself together!" he said. "We heard a shriek; you must have heard it, too, as you were in the room when we arrived. Didn't you see anything else when you came to tell my uncle that I was here?"

The secretary, who was trembling, covered his face in his hands.

"I didn't see anything else—except that mask."

He pointed to the chair in front of the desk. At the foot of it was a black silk mask.

Bob ran towards it and picked it up.

"What's this?" he said. "Who does this belong to?"

The secretary shook his head.

"I do not know. I have never seen it before in my life."

Bob eyed him distrustfully; read the neurotic strain in the man's nature and disliked him more. It seemed to the Greyfriars junior that the secretary was deliberately hiding something.

That was the general opinion of the Greyfriars party. All of them had heard a shriek when they had been about to enter the room. That shriek suggested a climax of some sort—something that the shivering secretary must have seen, for he was in the room when the shriek rang out.

That the shriek had come from the secretary himself did not enter into their calculations; that it was the natural outburst of a neurotic temperament on confronting a tragedy they did not give a thought to. And had the terrified secretary confessed to the shriek himself Harry Wharton & Co. would not have jumped to the conclusion that he had something to hide.

By this time a number of servants had rushed into the room, their faces expressive of their alarm and concern when they saw the still figure of their master stretched out on the settee.

Bob Cherry had pocketed the mask. What bearing it had on the tragedy—for a tragedy Bob felt sure had occurred—would doubtless become known later on.

"Here's the doctor!"

Frank Nugent re-entered the room with a fussy little gentleman, carrying a bag, at his heels.

"Stand back!" ordered the medico, as he made his way to the settee. "Let Sir William have air."

The servants and the junior obeyed. And while attention was focused on the doctor the secretary slipped out of the room unnoticed.

The doctor made his examination with a wrinkle of perplexity on his brow. Bob watched him anxiously.

"Well?"

There was a strained note of anxiety in Bob Cherry's voice.

The doctor took him by the arm.

"You are Sir William's nephew, I believe?" And, in answer to Bob's nod: "Your uncle is suffering from acute poisoning—"

"Poisoning?" gasped Bob.

"The symptoms of poisoning are there," went on the medico, with a furrow in his brow; "and yet I am unable to state what poison it is that is responsible for his present condition. You see," he added, "most poisons known to medical science react to certain symptoms—that is how we diagnose for treatment."

"Oh!"

"But in this case," continued the doctor, "I must admit that I am baffled. Your uncle is in a state of coma; his breathing is very weak, his temperature high." He looked at Bob searchingly. "You will excuse me, but, to your knowledge, had your uncle any reason to—to—"

"Commit suicide? Is that what you mean?" asked the Greyfriars junior.

The doctor nodded gravely.

"Of course not!" said Bob warmly. "Uncle, as far as I know, was in the best of health and spirits. In fact, he was holding a reception here to-night."

"I knew of that," said the doctor, "for Sir William had invited me. This is a very strange affair."

"Strange—"

"Very strange. If we rule out that the poison was self administered—and we must rule that out—then it was undoubtedly administered by another

person. It is not an ordinary case of poisoning, as I have said."

Bob started.

"Do you mean that it is a case of foul play, doctor?"

The doctor did not reply in words, but by his manner Bob knew that he did suspect foul play.

"Good heavens!" exclaimed Bob. "But can't we do something?"

"I'm going to ring for a specialist," said the doctor. "I think it necessary. And—and I think the police ought to be notified."

There was such a note of gravity in the doctor's words that Bob felt his head swimming.

Foul play!

Harry Wharton & Co., who were standing some little distance away, surged round their chum as he came towards them. They had not heard the doctor's verdict, but they could see that something was seriously amiss by the expression on Bob Cherry's face.

"What is it, Bob?" asked Wharton quietly. "Not bad news is it—?"

Bob nodded dully.

"They're sending for a specialist—and the police," he said. "Poor old uncle!"

"Keep your pecker up, old scout!" said Johnny Bull. "Things may not be so bad as you imagine."

But as he glanced at the still, pale figure of Sir William, Johnny Bull felt a doubt pluck at his heart.

By this time some of the guests had arrived, and to Bob Cherry, as Sir William's nephew, fell the melancholy task of breaking the news. The reception, of course, had to be abandoned, and the guests, having voiced their sympathy, departed.

Then suddenly Bob Cherry called to mind the secretary. He remembered his agitation, and the look Sir William had given him in his last moments of consciousness. The mask—

What was that mask doing in the room?

Where was the secretary?

Bob confided in his chums, and a search was made for the secretary. But Marsden was nowhere to be found! And as Bob and his chums foregathered in the hallway, discussing his disappearance, a fat figure suddenly rolled from the buffet attached to the reception-room.

"I say, you fellows—"

It was William George Bunter. That fat youth, apparently, had slipped into the house unobserved, and, once inside, his facility for nosing out "grub" had soon made itself manifest, likewise his insatiable appetite. Knowing nothing of what had occurred in the writing-room, Bunter was a little surprised to find the reception-room and the buffet adjoining unattended by servants.

Bunter believed in making hay while the sun shone. In the buffet there was a wonderful assortment of delicacies dear to his fat heart, and very soon the Owl of the Remove was making himself at home. For half an hour he had piled into the good things with a cheerful disregard of the horrors of indigestion; for half an hour unmolested he had tucked into a record feed. His fat face was sticky and shiny, and his breathing was laboured, but there was contentment in his podgy heart.

Bunter had filled himself nearly to bursting-point.

"I say, you fellows—"

"Bunter!" The seven juniors wheeled sharply as the fat junior's voice fell on their ears.

"He, he, he!" cackled Bunter. "Did you think I wouldn't get along, Bob, old chap?"

Bob Cherry gave him a glare. At that tragic moment William George Bunter was the last person he wished to confront, and his unmusical cackination fairly got on the junior's nerves.

"He, he, he!" cackled Bunter afresh. "Surprised you—what? You couldn't leave your best pal behind."

"Shut up, you cackling dummy!" hissed Nugent.

Bunter glared.

"Shan't!" he retorted valiantly, evidently feeling safe in the house of Sir William Cherry. "None of your Remove passage swank here, Nugent! You want to act as a gentleman. Just watch me, then you'll know how to behave!"

But for the seriousness of the occasion the Greyfriars party would have fallen on William George Bunter and smitten him hip and thigh. As it was they had to restrain themselves. Bunter, not knowing the reason for this state of affairs, prattled on.

"Sir William will be glad you brought me, Bob, old fellow," he smirked. "My

distinguished presence will add tone to the party!"

"Brrrr!" breathed Bob Cherry.

"Not a bad place he's got here," said Bunter, looking round appraisingly. "Not as good as Bunter Court, of course. Still, I don't expect that!"

"Shut up!"

Bob Cherry was in a quandary. His inclination was to take Bunter by the scruff of his fat neck and hurl him from the house. In the circumstances, however, that was hardly possible.

"I must say you chaps don't look very pleased to see me," went on the fat junior. "You look like a set of moulting owls."

There was no answer. The juniors just stared at him moodily. And even Bunter, obtuse as he was, could see that something had happened.

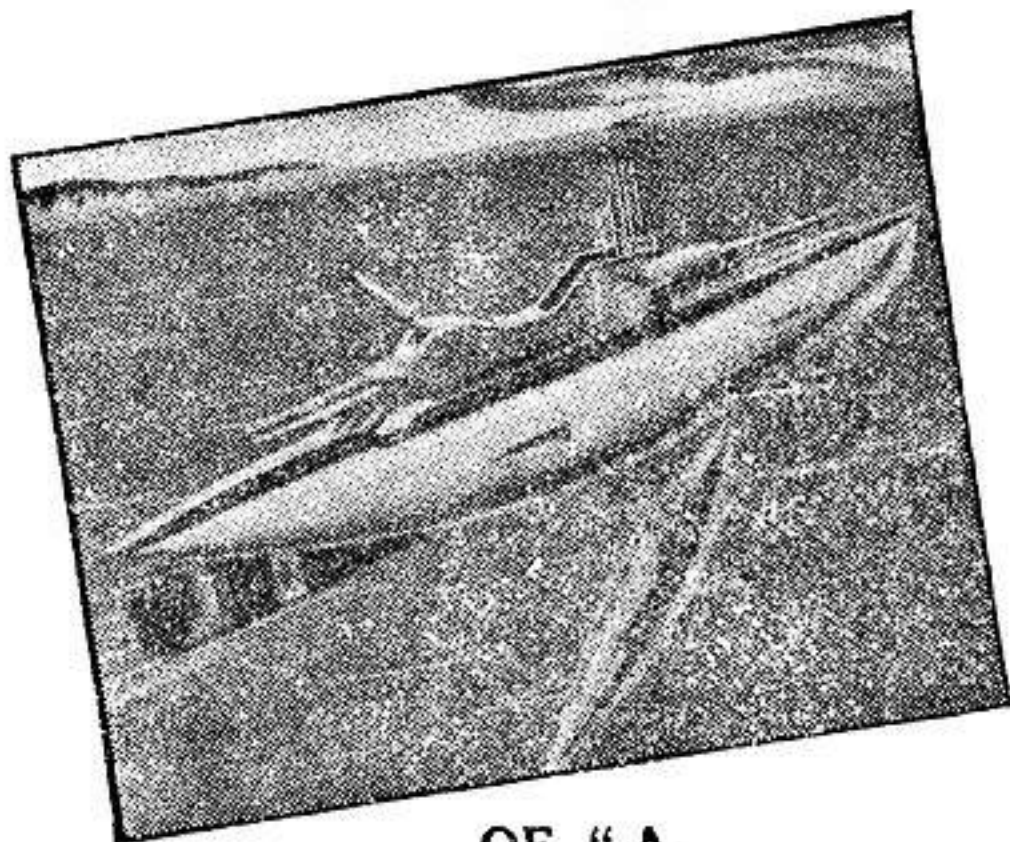
"I say," he asked, "what's up? Anything happened?"

Harry Wharton nodded.

"Oh crumbs!" said Bunter. "Has the grub run out or something?"

(Continued on next page.)

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Even then William George's thoughts ran on food and food only.

"No," said Wharton shortly.

The fat junior heaved a deep sigh.

"Well, that's good!" he remarked.

"I've had a snack in the buffet while I've been waiting, but I expect something better than that later on; a supper—eight-course supper, like we have at Bunter Court."

The captain of the Remove walked over to Bunter and whispered in his ear.

"Don't keep wagging your chin, you dummy!" he said. "Can't you see something's happened?"

Bunter looked amazed.

"But you said the grub——"

"Grub," said Wharton, cutting him short. "That's all you think about! Sir William—something's happened to him. See?"

Bunter did begin to understand then. His fat jaw dropped.

"Oh! Why on earth didn't you say so, Wharton?" he said peevishly. "Does that mean that I have come all this way for nothing?"

Wharton gulped something in his throat. Really, at times William George Bunter was very hard to bear.

"Don't I keep telling you that something serious has happened, you fat ass," he hissed. "Haven't you got the brains or the decency of a bunny rabbit?"

"Oh, really, Wharton," said Bunter. "If something has happened to Sir William I suppose the reception can go on just the same. The grub's here, and——"

But that was more than the captain of the Remove could stand. He motioned to Johnny Bull, and between them they rushed the astonished Owl of the Remove to the hall door, until they were out of hearing of Bob Cherry.

"Now, you fat rotter," said Wharton sulphurously, "out you go!"

"Yooooop! Oh, really, Wharton——"

Biff!

Wharton's neatly shod foot found a billet on Bunter's nether garments, and the fat junior flew down the steps on to the drive as if he had been shot.

"Yooop! Groooooough! Oh crikey!"

For the second time in thirty minutes Bunter sat and roared on the drive. But he quickly scrambled to his feet as Johnny Bull made a leap at him.

"Clear off, you fat ass!" breathed Johnny furiously. "And take that with you!"

"That" was a well-placed kick which Billy Bunter could not just manage to avoid. With another roar he took to his heels and fled.

Johnny and Harry Wharton returned to their chums, breathing hard.

"Have you got rid of that fat cad?" asked Bob.

Wharton nodded.

"I don't know how he got here," he remarked; "but he's gone now, thank goodness!"

But in that the captain of the Remove was wrong. William George had gone, but he was not very far away, and the presence of William George Bunter at Sir William's house was destined to throw light on many things that were now puzzling the Greyfriars juniors.

THE SEVENTH CHAPTER.

Missing!

"I SAY, Bob!"

Harry Wharton touched his chum by the arm.

The Greyfriars juniors were strolling through the reception-room, THE MAGNET LIBRARY.—No. 1,108.

filling in the time until the poison specialist, who had just arrived, could give them any further news of Sir William's condition.

At the far end of the reception-room was a platform for the orchestra, and the members of the orchestra were lounging about, obviously puzzled to know why the guests had not arrived.

"I say, Bob, old man," said Wharton quietly, "hadn't you better tell the orchestra that they won't be wanted? There's no one else here to do it now that the secretary has made himself scarce."

Bob pulled himself together. He was feeling the situation deeply; there was nothing that the energetic Remove loathed more than inaction. And yet there was nothing in his power to do to help his uncle.

Wharton's advice was good. It would be foolish to keep the orchestra hanging about unnecessarily. Bob detached himself from his chums and walked over to the platform.

He guessed whom the leader of the orchestra was by the position of the music-stands, and to him the Greyfriars Remove addressed himself.

"I'm afraid you fellows won't be wanted, after all," he said quietly. "Something has happened to my uncle—I'm Sir William's nephew—and the reception has had to be abandoned."

There were murmurs of sympathy from the members of the orchestra.

"I don't know whether you have been paid in advance, or not," said Bob uncomfortably, "but if you haven't, you may depend upon it that you will be fully compensated for coming here."

"I understand," said the leader of the orchestra, a tall, slim individual with a slight foreign lisp to his voice. "You have my sympathy. In the circumstances we had better go."

Bob nodded.

The band began to pack their instruments.

"By the way," said Bob Cherry suddenly to the leader. "Have you, by any chance, seen Mr. Marsden—Sir William's secretary?"

"Mr. Marsden? Oh, yes; he was the gentleman who engaged us for Sir William," said the band leader. "I saw him—let me see—about twenty minutes ago. He seemed in a hurry to catch a train——"

"A train?" gasped Bob. "Was he leaving the house, then?"

"He was. He had a suit-case with him," added the band leader as an afterthought.

"Oh!" said Bob, and he hastened back to his chums and breathlessly told them the news.

"I believe that rotter Marsden is mixed up in this awful business!" remarked Nugent.

"It's thumping strange that he should have bolted at a time like this!" said Johnny Bull, in his slow, thoughtful way.

"I mistrust the rotter instinctively!" said Bob fiercely. "And I'm going to inform the police if the specialist confirms Dr. Munroe's notion of foul play!"

The chums nodded.

In a silent group they made their way back to the writing-room. Dr. Munroe and his colleague motioned to Bob Cherry. Both the medical men were looking grave, and Bob felt a sinking at his heart.

"Dr. Tomlinson has made an examination," said Dr. Munroe haltingly, "and he's convinced that there is more than a suggestion of foul play."

"Oh," breathed Bob. "But my uncle——"

Dr. Tomlinson placed a kindly hand on the junior's shoulder.

"Calm yourself, my lad," he said. "We're doing everything possible for him; but, frankly, we are up against a baffling mystery. Your uncle is in the grip of a deadly poison—a poison unknown to me, or to any other poison expert I would almost venture to say. He is still unconscious——"

"Is—is there any hope?" asked Bob tearfully.

The doctor pursed his lips.

"It depends," he replied slowly. "We are working in the dark, you understand. But I have at least discovered how the poison entered into his system."

"Oh!"

"In my examination I observed a peculiar swelling on the little finger of the right hand. Under a lens this swollen finger clearly showed several minute pricks——"

"And this note, which I happened to see lying face upwards on the writing-table," said Dr. Munroe, taking up the tale, "bears out what Dr. Tomlinson has just said."

He handed the single sheet of note-paper with the short message upon it which had accompanied the dragon ring.

Unconsciously Bob found himself reading the message aloud:

"This ring belonged to your father. Accept it from one who knew him well."

"Well, what do you make of it, my lad?" asked Dr. Tomlinson kindly.

Bob stared at him dully.

"I can't make anything of it," he said, "although instinctively I feel that it has some connection with uncle's—uncle's condition now."

The doctors nodded.

"There's the wrapping of a small parcel on the table," said Dr. Munroe, "which seems to suggest that it once contained the ring mentioned in that note; there's a small ring-box, too, in the paper basket."

Bob looked at the letter again, fingered the small cardboard box that had been retrieved from the basket, and found himself baffled. He motioned to his chums to draw near, and to them he explained the result of the specialist's examination and the discovery he had made.

"Looks jolly queer!" muttered Wharton.

Johnny Bull, who had walked over to the writing-desk, returned to the group.

"There's a pile of letters on a salver there, unopened," he remarked. "That looks as if the evening mail had just arrived a short time before we came."

"That's so," agreed Wharton.

"And as the wrapping of the box bears the same delivery date as the unopened letters," continued Johnny slowly, "it points to the fact that that ring arrived this evening."

The juniors nodded.

"Then where's the ring?" asked Johnny, with knitted brows.

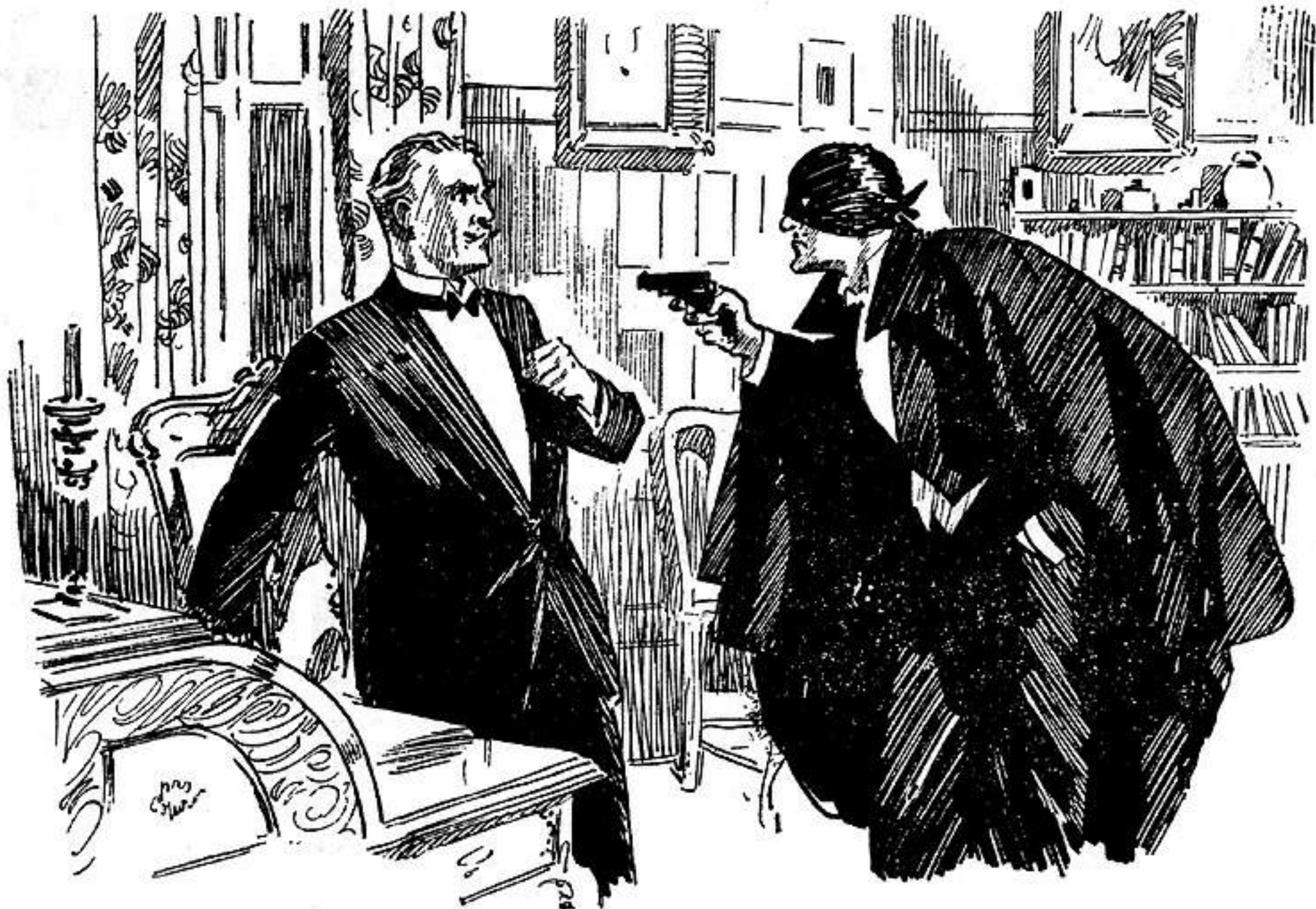
"Aren't we jumping to conclusions a little, dear men?" said Lord Mauleverer slowly. "Wouldn't it be better to question the servants——"

"You leave the questioning to me, young man!"

A stalwart figure strode into the room, and the juniors recognised Inspector Grimes, of Courtfield.

"I came as quickly as I could," he remarked to the medical men. "Now what's all this about?"

In a few moments the inspector was



[Sir William Cherry rose from his chair to ring the bell on the writing-desk, but an ominous movement of the wicked-looking automatic stopped him. "Please don't move, Sir William," said the masked stranger. "You and I have an important piece of business to discuss!" (See Chapter 5.)

put in possession of the known facts, and Bob handed him the mask.

"Don't let that man Marsden leave the house," said Inspector Grimes, at the conclusion of the doctors' report.

"He's gone already," said Bob.

"Oh!" The inspector was obviously taken aback. "Summon the servants, my lad," he added, turning to Bob Cherry. "Let no one else leave the house."

Bob turned and sped out of the room.

In a few moments he returned accompanied by the servants.

The inspector addressed each one of them in turn, but it was the butler's evidence that was the most useful of the lot. He declared that up to tea that afternoon he had never known Sir William to wear a ring on the little finger of his right hand.

"You are positive of that?" asked the inspector.

The butler nodded firmly.

"Absolutely."

"And who brought the evening mail to Sir William?" was the inspector's next question.

"Mr. Marsden, sir. It was his custom always to take the mail in to Sir William."

"And where is Mr. Marsden now?"

The butler shrugged his shoulders expressively.

"He did not tell you that he was leaving the house?" asked the inspector.

"No, sir. But I had occasion to go into his room for something, and I saw that the place was rather untidy—"

"Suggesting that Marsden was in a hurry, for some reason or other, to clear out, eh?"

"Exactly, sir."

The inspector produced the mask.

"Have you ever seen this before?"

"No, sir."

"You have seen no strangers about the place?" was Inspector Grimes' next query.

"None, sir," came the reply, "except the members of the orchestra Sir William hired specially from London."

"Where are they?"

Bob Cherry broke in.

"I dismissed them, inspector," he said. "I saw no sense in keeping them hanging about."

The inspector told the servants that they were no longer wanted. Then he plucked at his chin meditatively. At last he spoke.

"Well, it seems pretty clear that the ring mentioned in this letter is the cause of the present trouble," he remarked. "Our next job is to find out who sent it to Sir William; who dropped this mask—"

"And place that rotter Marsden under arrest," broke in Bob Cherry.

The inspector held up his hand.

"Not so fast, my lad," he remonstrated. "I'll admit that it seems queer that Mr. Marsden should have decamped in a hurry, but in the police force we never jump to conclusions."

"Oh!"

"You had better leave matters in my hands, youngster," said the inspector, not unkindly, "and the doctors will take care of your uncle. You go back to school and keep cheerful. We'll soon get to the bottom of this matter."

Dr. Tomlinson came forward.

"I have put a trunk call through to London, my lad," he said, placing a steadying hand on Bob Cherry's shoulder, "to prepare a bed at the hospital for your uncle. We shall be able to attend to him better there."

"You'll keep me informed—"

began Bob. "And you'll do all you can?"

"Of course," said the doctor, with an encouraging smile. "Keep smiling, young 'un!"

Bob rejoined his chums.

"We can't do anything by staying here, you chaps," he said dismally. "They're taking uncle to a London hospital. Let's get back to Greyfriars."

Harry Wharton & Co. nodded. In the circumstances there was nothing to be gained by staying in that house of gloom.

"Come on, Bob," said the captain of the Remove.

And with a last look at his uncle Bob accompanied his chums to the door.

The visit to Sir William's house, entered upon with so light a heart, had ended in tragedy; and a gloom was cast over the Greyfriars party.

THE EIGHTH CHAPTER.

Billy Bunter's Mistake!

"O H dear!" Thus William George Bunter. It was quite ten minutes since he had been ingloriously kicked out of the house, and the fat junior, crouching by a laurel bush, was in a quandary. He was some considerable distance away from Greyfriars, and the prospect of a long and weary walk home appalled him.

Yet it was either that or a long wait until the car that was certain to take Bob Cherry and his chums back to Greyfriars was ready to leave. Even

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THE MASKED TERROR!

(Continued from page 13.)

the latter was no certainty where Billy Bunter was concerned, for he had more than an idea that Harry Wharton & Co. would not give him a lift back to the school.

"Beasts!" muttered Bunter dismally. "Oh crumbs! It's raining!"

A sudden downpour of rain added to the fat junior's tribulations—a downpour that came with tropic suddenness and drenching force.

Billy Bunter shivered.

To stay out in the rain and be drenched was unthinkable; Bunter had a natural aversion to water at the best of times. To go into the house was to invite a certain kicking out. With all his obtuseness, Billy Bunter realised that his presence at Sir William's house was anything but welcome to Harry Wharton & Co.

"Oh dear!" groaned Bunter. "This is awful!"

He crouched as near to the laurel-bush as he could; but it afforded but scant shelter from the rain.

A few yards ahead of him lay the drive, with three saloon cars drawn up in front of the house. One of them, Bunter knew, was the car which had brought the Greysfriars party—and himself.

Inside the saloon there was shelter from the rain. Perhaps Wharton & Co. wouldn't be such beasts as to kick him out of the car if they found him there. If it were still raining they might even feel inclined to give him a lift back to Greysfriars.

It was a chance, and it was a chance that offered a better fate to William George Bunter at that moment than staying in the open to get drenched.

"Groooogh!" groaned Bunter, as a splash of rainwater trickled between his collar and his neck. "Groooogh!"

He had made up his mind. One cautious glance out, and he saw that the coast, or, rather, the drive, was clear. Next second Billy Bunter was scuttling for the drawn-up cars as fast as his fat little legs would carry him.

He wrenched open the door of the nearest car and jumped inside, his fat heart beating fast. Reclining on the soft cushions, he waited for any sounds to suggest that his move had been spotted. But luck was with the fat junior. No one, apparently, had seen him enter the car.

"This is better than staying out in the rain, anyway!" muttered Bunter, glancing cautiously out of the window. "Perhaps those selfish beasts will do the decent thing and take me back with them."

It was a comforting thought, and it served to conduce a feeling of laziness in Billy Bunter, for he leaned back on the cushion and closed his eyes. Next to eating and talking, William George Bunter was a glutton for sleep, and within five minutes of closing his eyes he was fast asleep. A gentle snore emanated from his podgy nose, and a blissful smile overspread his podgy face as, with mouth slightly open, he

dreamed dreams of tuck—unlimited tuck.

It was when Bunter, in his dreams, was piling into the seventh helping of a particularly luscious rabbit-pie that two tall figures, carrying instrument cases, came down the steps of the porch and stood conversing in low tones for the space of a few seconds by the bonnet of the car in which the fat Removite slumbered.

"A bad night," said the younger of the two, turning up the collar of his coat.

His companion—the leader of the orchestra—laughed softly.

"On the contrary, a good night, my dear Toni. Let's get off!"

He opened the door of the car nearest the driving-seat as he spoke, and clambered in. His companion, with a hasty movement, dumped the instrument cases in the back of the car, the said cases missing the slumbering figure of William George Bunter by a matter of inches only, and then joined the band leader in the front seat.

The engine broke into a soft murmur as the self-starter was put in operation, and then grew in volume under pressure of the accelerator. A moment later, and the saloon car was moving silently down the drive and heading for the road to London.

And inside the saloon, quite unconscious that he had sought refuge in the wrong car, sprawled the ungainly figure of the Owl of the Remove, still snoring, and still dreaming of an extra-special "spread." Certainly no thought of speeding towards London at close on forty miles an hour entered the dreams of Billy Bunter; perhaps even his interest in tuck would have evaporated before that startling act. Yet towards London he was being whirled, every minute or two putting another mile between him and Greysfriars.

The men in the front of the car were talking in low tones, and their conversation, could he have heard it, would have given Bunter the shock of his life. But that was a surprise destined for him a little later. It was not until Canterbury, the famous cathedral town, had been left a mile behind that Billy Bunter awoke, and the manner of his awakening was disconcerting.

There was a loud "plop" as the off-side back tyre punctured; followed a sharp jamming on of brakes that pitched Bunter forward, and awakened him by the simple process of thumping his head against the opposite door.

"Groooogh! Yowp!" gasped Bunter.

As the car came to a standstill the two men in front leapt out, and the strangeness of their voices gave Bunter's waking thoughts a jolt.

"Where am I?" he asked himself.

"Who—who are these chaps?"

He might well have asked himself that question, for in the dim light he saw two grown men who were absolute strangers to him.

"Car thieves!" was Bunter's first thought. "Oh crikey! They've stolen the car!"

The very notion set the fat junior's heart thumping with terror. Car thieves, as he knew, were desperate men, and it was obvious that up to now they were oblivious of Bunter's presence in the car. If they found him! If—

Billy Bunter shivered and crouched back against the car, hoping against hope that his presence would not be discovered.

"Confound the tyre!" he heard one of the men say. "We shall be late. The chief—"

The "chief!"

The Owl of the Remove glanced about him wildly. He was right then. The car had been stolen. This mention of the chief—in the fat junior's mind the chief of a gang of car thieves—proved it beyond all doubt.

"Oh crumbs!" gasped Bunter breathlessly.

Where he was he hadn't the faintest idea; how long he had been asleep he did not know; but the words of the man known as Toni answered one question at least.

"We're a mile and a quarter outside Canterbury—"

"Canterbury!" Bunter's jaw dropped.

"Don't talk so much, Toni," said the band leader. "Give a hand with this spare wheel."

Peering out cautiously, the fat junior saw the two men stooping over the spare wheel. Having detached it from its fastening, they then proceeded to "jack" up the back axle, a task rendered more difficult by reason of the fifteen stone of "passenger" they carried, unbeknown to themselves, in the back seat.

Bunter's heart beat fearfully.

Here was a chance to jump out of the car and make a bolt for it. But the Owl of the Remove was not of the stuff of which heroes are made, and whilst he sat and shivered in a state of indecision, the spare wheel was rapidly put on.

The two men climbed back into their seats, the engine pulsed rhythmically, and once more Bunter was being sped towards London.

"Oh dear!" gasped that hapless youth. "Where—where are they taking me?"

Like a fat jelly Bunter shivered on the cushions in a state of blue funk. It was the merest stroke of good luck that he hadn't been spotted so far, but the men in front scarcely took their eyes off the winding ribbon of road ahead, although they talked practically the whole of the time. Bunter realised that, sooner or later he would be seen, and to put off the evil moment as long as possible, he dived for the floor of the car, and made himself as comfortable as he could there.

In the fat junior's mind surged all manner of wild thoughts. He would wait for his opportunity when the car slowed up, open the door of the saloon, and then leap for the road. But although that seemed a very simple device in theory, the fat junior's courage was not equal to putting it into practice. After due consideration Bunter gave up that idea. Its successor was to open the window of the car when the next town was reached, and yell for a policeman; but Bunter remembered, with a sinking of the heart, that car thieves were not in the habit of responding to police signals to stop, and so he disposed of that idea as being impracticable.

It was while these wild ideas were running through Bunter's podgy brain that, quite by accident, his podgy ear came in contact with the communication-pipe that ran between the saloon and the driving-seat. And curiosity, even in times of stress was one of the fat junior's besetting sins. Forgetful of his predicament, the Owl of the Remove began to listen.

At first the conversation was unintelligible to him but when the man referred to as Toni mentioned Sir William Cherry, Bunter's brain became equal to following the trend of the conversation. And that conversation almost caused the hair on his head to stand up.

"That was a neat job, Melchett,"

came Toni's voice, very faint, but discernible to Bunter's listening ear.

"That's the third time you've said so, Toni," said the driver of the saloon, apparently not displeased by the reiteration of the compliment.

"It's a pity the old fool wouldn't pay up," continued Toni. "He'll never live the next day out."

Melchett laughed sardonically.

"Serve him right," he said softly. "The obstinate fool had his chance. I told him plainly enough that there wasn't a doctor living who would save him once the poison got into his system."

"And the ring did the trick—even as you said it would?"

"It did," replied Melchett. "The chief tried it on a dog first. The poison took in five minutes; in twenty-four hours the dog was a gone 'un."

Toni laughed mirthlessly, and a chill ran down Billy Bunter's spine. That he was on the verge of making a great discovery, he did not need telling, and already his fat imagination was filling in the gaps.

The conversation proceeded, and there was no further need for William George Bunter to exercise that imagination.

"Do you think we shall get the forty thousand, Melchett?" was Toni's next remark.

"Of course. When the old fool dies, his heir will be our game."

"You mean the boy—Robert Cherry?"

"Robert Cherry, of the Lower Fourth at Greyfriars School," said Melchett. "You see, the chief has everything tabulated so as to avoid any possible mistake. It was Sir William's heir that came over and dismissed us, if you remember."

"Oh!" Bunter's eyes were glistening with fear and excitement. "Y-young Cherry—"

"He looks as obstinate as his uncle," went on Melchett; "but youth doesn't die easily. When we try the poison on him he'll cave in quickly enough, never fear."

There was silence between the two men for a while, during which time William George Bunter could almost hear his heart beating against his ribs.

This was something worse than a car theft; this was murder on a new and hitherto unknown scale to the fat Remove. And as the fiendishness of the whole affair came home to him with force he began to fear for his own fat skin.

What would these desperadoes, who talked so easily of poisoning, do with him if they discovered him in the car? Bunter shivered.

Then, to do him justice, his fat, bewildered thoughts turned to Sir William Cherry. He had been poisoned by one of these scoundrels; his life would pay forfeit unless he paid up the terrific sum of forty thousand—forty thousand pounds. Bunter knew that it was money to which the two scoundrels referred.

But apparently they held life cheap. If Sir William died, as he seemed of a certainty to do, their next victim would be Bob Cherry. Many a time and oft had Bob Cherry kicked Bunter, and kicked him hard; many a time had Bob Cherry refused to cash Bunter's postal-orders for him.

Bunter's eyes gleamed a trifle vengefully at that reflection. Bob Cherry was a beast, a selfish beast, in Bunter's opinion—still, so were all the others beasts. And of the decent beasts, so to speak, Bob Cherry was the most decent.

"Poison old Bob!" muttered Bunter to himself. "P-p-pip-poison! Oh, lor'!"

The thought appalled him; it also served to bring to the surface what shreds of courage reposed in the podgy make-up of the Owl of the Remove.

"I'll jolly well stop 'em!" he reflected. "Poison old Bob! The scoundrels! The awful villains!"

In his contemplation of that dreadful deed William George Bunter forgot the most important person on earth—William George Bunter. He actually gave his entire mental machinery over to the cause of Bob Cherry.

At all costs he, Bunter, must get out of that car and warn Bob of his peril—warn the police, or, failing that, take the number of the car. Doubtless that would serve to identify the scoundrels if they got clear before Bunter could have them arrested.

The lights of Lewisham loomed up and the car slackened speed. Here was Bunter's chance. So eager was Bunter to get out of that car, that he did not stop to consider that his chances of doing so with absolute safety would have been a practical certainty had he waited for the car to come to a standstill in the traffic block that lay ahead.

It was now or never, in Bunter's opinion.

(Continued on next page.)



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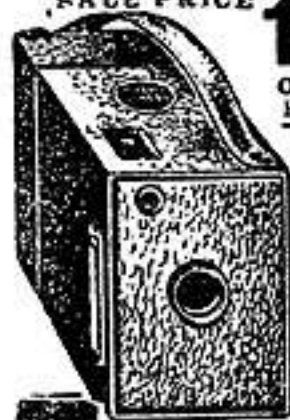
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"Groough!" He rose to his feet, and gasped as he found that his legs were cramped. But the next moment his hand closed on the door-handle of the saloon.

"Hist!"

That ejaculation, like the hissing of a snake, came from the man known as Toni, as, for some reason best known to himself, he chanced to look round.

"A schoolboy!" That sinister voice proceeded from Melchett at the wheel. Next moment the brakes were jammed on; the car came to a standstill, and the two men rushed to the side doors of the car.

"Yoooooop!" A rough, clenched hand caught Bunter full on the chin and sent him crashing back against the upholstery of the car. "Groough! H-help! Ooooooh!"

A hand closed over Bunter's mouth even as he started to yell for help. Next, a heavy instrument crashed upon his bullet-head, and Bunter, with a low, drawn-out moan, collapsed unconscious.

The two men stood over him, with glittering eyes—eyes that showed how desperate they were.

The whole thing had happened in a few moments, and if it had excited any attention at all in the minds of the few passers-by it was not considered of importance enough to investigate.

For the space of a few seconds Melchett and Toni, breathing hard, glared down at the still figure of William George Bunter.

"That was a near thing, Toni!" said Melchett. "The fat spy!"

"He's a boy from Greyfriars?" asked Toni, with an ugly gleam in his eyes.

And Melchett, with a low growl, answered in the affirmative.

"The fat pig wears the Greyfriars colours on his tie," he added. "How did he come here?"

Toni shrugged his shoulders.

"It beats me," he said softly. "But there is no damage done. He will disappear, what?"

Melchett bared his teeth in a snarl.

"It's quite possible that he heard us talking," he said savagely. "In any case, we can afford to take no chances. To-morrow there will be one fat pig the less in the world."

He turned to Toni.

"You stay here and look after this spy!" he hissed. "I'll drive for headquarters as quickly as I can. If anyone should stop us—you never know—tell them that you're the boy's tutor, and that he's fainted or something. You understand?"

"Leave that to me," replied Toni. "I'll see that he keeps 'fainted,' Melchett."

He sat beside the unconscious form of Billy Bunter, what time Melchett returned to the driving-seat.

The car moved off, and within a quarter of an hour it was entering the ill-lighted streets of Limehouse—the place of mystery, of Cosmopolitans; of crime and criminals, of honesty and dishonesty.

And with it went William George Bunter, and the secret he had discovered, never to return!

THE NINTH CHAPTER.

Where is Bunter?

"NICE goings hon, I must say!" William Gosling, the school porter, awoke from a nap in which he had been indulging as the gate bell pealed out its imperious summons.

"All right," he muttered, reaching for his keys. "I'm a-comin'!"

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It was well past lights out, a period of the day to which the irascible porter looked forward, and he disliked intensely being disturbed.

Bob Cherry and his chums, having alighted from the car and dismissed it, peered in at the gates. At times Gosling seemed incredibly slow, and this was one of them.

Muttering to himself, the old porter fumbled with the keys and finally unlocked the gates. He ran a disapproving eye over the party.

"Ho!" he ejaculated. "And where's Master Bunter?"

"Bunter?" echoed Wharton.

"Yes; Master Bunter," repeated Gosling. "Which he hain't been in since he went out with you early this evenin'. And the 'Ead says—"

The juniors started.

"But he didn't go out with us," said Wharton.

Gosling's ancient face creased up in a grin.

"Which henquiries havin' been made, the facts have been elicited that master Bunter haccompanied you young gentlemen—at the back of your car."

"Oh!"

It became clear to the juniors now how it was that Bunter had managed to reach Sir William's house so soon after them. And for the first time since the Owl of the Remove had been kicked out of the house the Removites wondered what had happened to him.

"Isn't Bunter in yet, then?" asked Wharton.

Gosling shook his head.

"Which he hain't been seen since he left 'ete with you young gentlemen. An' the 'Ead, he says to me, 'Gosling, old chap,' he said, 'which kindly hinform Master Cherry and his party that I wish to see them on their return. Also, kindly hinform Master Bunter that he's wanted in my study, too! Those were his very words.'"

That those were not Dr. Locke's "very words" the juniors did not need telling, but at that moment they were not in the mood to appreciate Gosling.

"I wonder what's happened to the fat idiot?" said Wharton anxiously. "If he'd walked home from Courtfield he would have been here by now."

The juniors nodded.

"Bunter will get it in the neck for taking French leave," said Johnny Bull. "The silly idiot's simply asking for trouble, keeping out as late as this."

"The askfulness of the esteemed and ludicrous Bunter is of the ridiculous order," added Hurree Jamset Ram Singh.

"Which I don't approve of young gentlemen gallivantin' about—" began Gosling grumpily.

But Harry Wharton & Co. did not stop to hear of what the estimable Gosling approved. They were already striding up the drive towards the Head's house, with serious faces. Quite enough had happened that evening without this additional worry of William George Bunter.

Dr. Locke greeted them with a kindly smile.

"Ah! You are back much earlier than I expected, my boys," he said. And then, catching sight of the serious expressions on the faces of the juniors: "I—I trust nothing untoward has happened?"

Bob Cherry explained, and the face of the kindly old Head grew grave.

"I am sorry!" he said as Bob concluded. "Deeply sorry! But perhaps your natural anxiety has made you unknowingly exaggerate the case. I sincerely trust that that is so."

Bob said nothing. He knew that he had not exaggerated the case; that was

only the kindly old Head's way of trying to soften the blow.

"By the way," continued Dr. Locke, "I discover that Bunter has absented himself without my permission. You did not include Bunter's name in your list, Cherry."

"No, sir."

"And yet it appears, from inquiries I have instituted, that he was seen at—the back of your car."

"So we have just learned from Gosling," answered Harry Wharton. "Bunter must have jumped on the luggage-grid unbeknown to us, sir."

"The utterly foolish boy!" said Dr. Locke, with a frown. "I suppose you discovered his presence in your party when you arrived?"

"About half an hour after we arrived, sir," explained the captain of the Remove. "But he—he—ahem!—didn't stay very long, sir."

Dr. Locke gave the captain of the Remove a shrewd glance. Perhaps he guessed why the fat junior hadn't stayed long; perhaps he even guessed the manner of his going.

"Bunter has not yet returned to the school," went on the Head. "I suppose you haven't seen him since he—he left Sir William's house?"

"No, sir!"

The Head pursed his lips.

"I hope nothing has happened to the foolish boy," he said.

The juniors hoped so, too; for they were beginning to feel a responsibility in the matter of the missing Removite.

"Very well, my boys," said Dr. Locke at length. "You had better retire. Don't worry yourself unduly, Cherry, about your uncle; he's in good hands."

"Oh, yes, sir!" murmured Bob.

And, with a smile, Dr. Locke dismissed the juniors.

Harry Wharton & Co. eyed each other glumly when they were outside the door of the Head's study. The absence of Bunter seemed to add to the chain of unfortunate events of the evening.

"The silly ass!" said Nugent. "Anyone but Bunter would have been back here long ago."

Wharton nodded.

"I suppose nothing has happened to him," he said.

"Oh, begad!" said Lord Mauleverer. "Don't say that! Bunter's an awful bore, but I should hate to think—"

The slacker of the Remove broke off, and in silence thereafter the juniors made their way to the Remove dormitory. There was a stir as they entered, and several juniors sat up in bed when Wharton turned the light on.

"Is that barrel Bunter with you?" asked Peter Todd.

Wharton replied in the negative.

"Then where has the fat idiot got to?" said Peter Todd. "He's simply asking for trouble staying out like this."

The captain of the Remove explained what he knew of Bunter's movements, which wasn't much in all conscience; and Peter Todd's frown grew deeper. Peter was the leader of Study No. 7, to which Billy Bunter belonged, and he constituted himself the fat junior's guardian.

"Had a good time, you giddy blades?" asked Skinner, with a knowing grin. "You look as if you've been sampling the wine not wisely, but too well. Naughty, naughty!"

There was a ripple of laughter at Skinner's words, but Harry Wharton & Co. did not feel like laughing.

"Shut up, Skinner!" breathed Bob Cherry grimly. "This is not a time for joking."

Skinner yawned.

"Isn't it? My mistake; I thought it was. You should see yourselves! I've



Billy Bunter wrenched at his chain and shouted himself hoarse. Then suddenly he saw several pairs of beady eyes, glowing like pin-points, and seeming to stare straight at him. "Oh, lor'! Rats!" gasped the fat junior in a fresh paroxysm of terror. "Murder! Fire! Help!" (See Chapter 10.)

been a bit of a goer myself, but I hope I've never looked as thumping squiffy as you chaps look. Is the head bad?"

"Shut up!"

But the cad of the Remove was not in the mood to shut up. He misconstrued the grave and serious faces of Harry Wharton & Co. as being outward and visible proof of having looked upon the wine when it was red, so to speak.

"Look at his Magnificence Wharton!" he said. "Look at his boko! Naughty, naughty! You shouldn't go out to these night clubs, you know!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You should wait until you grow up!" went on Skinner cheerfully. "You should—Yooooop!"

The cad of the Remove had no intention of saying that, but a slipper Bob Cherry picked up from the floor and hurled at him caught him full on his prominent nose.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The rest of the Removites enjoyed that part of the joke as much as they had enjoyed the other; but Harold Skinner, like many a humorist, failed to see the point. He sat up, rubbing his nose, which was already turning a shade of crimson, and glared.

"Now shut up!" breathed Bob Cherry. "We're not in the mood for your tomfoolery, Skinner!"

Skinner glared, rubbed his long nose, and wisely shut up.

Harry Wharton & Co. undressed and turned in.

But sleep did not come easily to them. All of them felt concerned about Sir William—most of all Bob Cherry—added to which was the strange disappearance of Billy Bunter.

That Bunter would eventually turn up the juniors felt sure, for they were

went to compare him with the proverbial bad ha'penny; but the manner of his "turning up" was destined to give them the surprise of their lives—and a pleasant surprise at that!

THE TENTH CHAPTER.

The Sentence of the Rafia!

"GROUUGH!"

William George Bunter groaned.

Where he was he hadn't the foggiest idea; what he was most concerned about in those first moments of returning consciousness was the pain in his head. But even that became of secondary importance when Bunter discovered that he was hungry.

"Oh dear!"

He sat up and blinked about him, and he became aware of the noisome darkness which permeated the atmosphere of the room in which he was. That it was a cellar of some sort he could tell by the stone floor and the rough brick walls, on which beads of moisture stood out. That his place of confinement was near a waterside was the next discovery he made, for the odour of tar and bilge water and the occasional faint hooting of a ship's siren all pointed to that.

"Wow!"

That yelp escaped Bunter as, trying to rise to his feet, he found that a chain encircled his wrist, and from there—allowing a foot and no more of freedom—it joined a staple sunk deep in the wall.

"This is awful!" muttered the fat junior fearfully.

He glanced wildly about him, but

beyond those four dripping walls and the tiny glimmer thrown from a gas-jet at the far end of the cellar nothing else could be seen.

Full realisation of his plight had not yet dawned on the slow working intellect of the Owl of the Remove, but as he recalled the events of the evening his terror knew no bounds. It all seemed part of a horrible nightmare. But the clanking of the chain as Bunter moved told him that this was indeed no nightmare, but reality.

He was in the hands of scoundrels who had not stopped at poisoning Sir William Cherry. What fate lay in store for Bunter?

"Help!" Billy Bunter, his nerve failing him, yelled at the top of his voice. "Help! Fire! Murder! Thieves! Help!"

But the only answer was the mocking echo thrown back from the walls of his prison.

Terror overcame Bunter, and he wrenched and wriggled at the short chain in a wild but futile endeavour to free himself.

"Help! Oh, help!"

For ten minutes or more the fat junior shouted until he was hoarse and nearly demented. Still came no answer. And then, as his wildly staring eyes became accustomed to the semi-gloom, Bunter saw something else that added to his terror,

Rats!

Several pairs of beady eyes, glowing like pin-points of light, seemed to be staring straight at him. A movement of the chain sent the owners of those beady eyes scuttling away to their holes. But Bunter had seen enough. His place of confinement was alive with rats!

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"Murder! Help! Fire! Help!" shrieked the fat junior in a paroxysm of terror. "Help!" His voice ended in a scream. Then, shivering with fright, he huddled against the wall. To his ears, now attuned to catch the slightest sound, came the pad of footsteps.

Bunter's heart leapt.

Someone was coming!

Followed the turning of a key in the lock, and a creaking as the door hinged inwards. Next a flood of light almost blinded the fat junior as a torch was switched in his direction.

"Shut your blamed row!" growled a voice.

The terrified Owl of the Remove, through blinking eyes, saw the figure of a burly, rough-clad individual standing before him.

"Help!" screamed Bunter. "Take me out of here! I shall go mad!"

An outburst of coarse laughter that froze the blood in Bunter's veins was the response.

"Go mad?" jeered the man with the torch. "You won't be alive long enough, my fat porker, to go mad!"

"Oh, help! Take me away from here!"

"I'm taking you away, my son, but not for long," was the growling reply. "You're comin' along o' me to see the chief. And when he's had a look at you we jest put a few weights round your ankles, open the trap"—he pointed to a wood section sunk in the flooring—"wish you a pleasant journey, and forget we ever saw you!"

Billy Bunter felt like screaming. He gazed at the trap in the floor with eyes that bulged with terror. He had read of villains disposing of their victims by the simple process of drowning them, but to hear it spoken of in this cold-blooded fashion nearly drove him frantic.

"You'd never do it!" he almost pleaded.

The man laughed mirthlessly.

"Wouldn't we?" he guffawed. "I guess you ain't the first that's said good-bye to this earth that way. The river flows under this floor, my fat pippin, and when the tide's up you don't stand much of a chance. When the tide ebbs—well, you just get carried away with it. See?"

Bunter covered his face with his podgy, trembling hands.

"You awful villain! You'd never do it! The police!"

"The police!" jeered the man. "The police! We don't care a snap of the finger for the police. So rest easy on that score, old porker. Now, just shut up an' come along o' me. And don't try any tricks, or I'll wring your fat neck!"

Desperate as the situation was, Billy Bunter had no intention of trying any tricks with the villainous-looking individual with the torch. Shivering like a jelly, the fat junior allowed the man to free him of the chain. Then he was dragged towards the door of his prison in a grip of iron.

"No tricks, my son," growled his captor, "or I'll clip you over the head, smart!"

But Bunter was too terrified to do anything but follow the direction his captor indicated as they mounted a winding stone staircase to the floor above. It was a relief, anyway, to be out of that noisome dungeon, whatever fate lay ahead of him.

For one wild moment, it is true, the fat junior contemplated making a bolt for it, but his courage failed him. That iron grip on his collar, that savage frown bent above him, was too much for him.

"This way!"

Bunter found himself before a door.

His captor knocked on it three times, and in response a tiny grille was thrown open and a face appeared—a face as evil as that of Bunter's escort. Then the door was thrown open, and Bunter found himself being propelled into a long, bare room which looked as if at some time or another it had been part of a warehouse.

At the far end of this room was another door. Here the same process of the three knocks was gone through. Once more a grille opened in the door and a face peered at Bunter and his escort.

"Now, just behave yourself," whispered the latter, "and mind your p's and q's."

The door opened slowly, and Bunter gasped at what he saw.

"Bring the prisoner in!"

A masked and cloaked figure seated at a long mahogany table of exquisite workmanship, in a chair that must at one time have been in some ancestral castle, spoke the words in a voice that held a lisp in it.

Bunter was quick to notice that. But even then his curiosity came to the surface. He found himself staring at the priceless furnishing of the room. A thick Persian carpet covered the parquet floor. The walls were panelled in rich dark oak. Massive chandeliers of

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"Oh gee! Two cents wrong!
Hear me holler!"

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.....

French workmanship of a bygone generation cast a rich glow of soothing light over a collection of furniture and bric-a-brac in which a dealer in antiques would have revelled.

"Oh!"

Bunter, despite his terror, could not repress that gasp of astonishment. The whole place was so incongruous with what had preceded it in his journey there.

"Your name?"

It was the lisping voice of the masked man seated at the table.

Bunter started.

"Wil-William B-B-Bunter, sir!" he stuttered, unnerved before that awe-inspiring figure.

"Of Greyfriars School, Kent?" came the lisping voice.

"Ye-yes, sir."

"What were you doing in the car that brought my agents here?"

There was an imperious note in that voice now that made Bunter's hair fairly stand on end.

"N-nothing, sir," he stammered.

"That is to say, sleep-sleeping, sir."

"You were not spying?"

Bunter's eyes opened wide.

"Nunno, sir."

"You heard my agents talking in the car. You heard them say what?"

Again Bunter shivered. There was a menace in the voice of the man who was interrogating him that froze the blood in the fat junior's veins.

"N-nothing, sir, really. I didn't hear them say anything about Sir William.

I didn't hear them say that—that they'd poisoned him. And no—no mention was made of f-f-forty thousand pounds, sir."

The man in the mask snarled.

"The boy is a fool, a dolt, or else he is a consummate actor!" he said gratingly.

"No, sir," babbled Bunter wildly, "a f-f-fool, sir. I'm not acting, really."

"Bah!" snarled the man in the mask. "You know our plans. You know too much; that is obvious. Melchett and Toni did well to bring you here. The dead tell no tales!"

Bunter's knees shook. He glanced about him wildly, and for the first time became conscious of a score of cloaked and masked figures lined up at his back.

"Help!" he shrieked.

The man in the chair laughed softly.

"You may save your breath, my fat spy," he said softly. "No one can hear you outside this room. You have meddled in our affairs—the affairs of the Rafia." He threw his head back proudly, and a low murmur came from the score of masked figures at Bunter's back. "The penalty is that you die!"

Billy Bunter shrieked and fell on his knees, his fat heart palpitating wildly. And again from the score of cloaked figures came a murmuring assent.

"The Rafia hitherto," went on the leader, "has never waged war against schoolboys, but you have invited your own fate. By your own foolishness you have become possessed of a secret that must not be passed on."

"Spare me!" shrieked Billy Bunter in a fresh paroxysm of terror. "I won't say a word. Honour bright I won't. Let me go—"

His voice ended in a shriek, and the leader of the Rafia, with a contemptuous movement of the hand, bade Bunter's escort take the fat junior away.

"To-morrow, noon, when the tide is up, Erskine, you will open the trap. You understand?"

"Yes, chief," came the answer, strangely respectful.

"Until then you will leave the hound to keep guard over the prisoner in one of the upper rooms. I will at least spare him the company of the rats in the cellar."

A door opened at the far end of the room and another masked and cloaked figure entered the apartment. He held in leash a particularly wolfish-looking Alsatian dog that bared its teeth as it entered and snarled in a blood-curdling fashion—or so it seemed to the terrified Greyfriars Removite.

The man at the table addressed Bunter once more.

"That Alsatian, my fat spy, is specially trained to keep guard over the prisoners of the Rafia. I warn you, if your last hours are to be peaceful, not to offend it!"

Billy Bunter covered his face with his hands. Was this some dreadful nightmare? Was this the twentieth century? But another terrified glance at that dreaded figure seated at the table, at the score of masked and silent figures, at the fierce Alsatian that strained at the lead, convinced him that it was no dream. And, with realisation of his plight, Billy Bunter screamed once more and then collapsed in a dead faint.

THE ELEVENTH CHAPTER.

On the Scent!

CLANG, clang, clang!
The rising-bell rang out clear and sharp at Greyfriars.

Gosling, the porter, was putting exceptional vigour into his work as he pulled at the bell rope.

It was a beautiful spring morning, and even Gosling, crusty and eaten up with rheumatism and other complaints, both real and imaginary, felt that it was good to be alive.

In the Remove dormitory the juniors were soon astir, and instinctively all eyes turned to William George Bunter's bed.

But that bed had not been slept in, and certainly there was no sign of the fat junior himself.

Billy Bunter was still missing.

Peter Todd was looking anxious, and his anxiety found a counterpart in the faces of Harry Wharton & Co.

"Bunter's not returned," said Peter. "I wonder where the thump he's got to?"

"It's not like our tame porpoise to stay out all night," admitted Bob Cherry, scratching his curly head. "I hope to goodness nothing serious has happened to him!"

And that was the general hope. William George Bunter was by no means a popular character in the Remove, but there was something strange in his prolonged absence, and even cads like Skinner & Co. hoped that nothing amiss had happened to him.

When the Remove trooped down to breakfast, Mr. Quelch officially made the announcement that Bunter was still missing.

There was a frown of anxiety on the Form master's face. He had sat up well into the night in the hope that the wanderer would return, but the hope had been unfounded.

The vacant bed, and, what was more conclusive still, the vacant place at the breakfast-table, proved beyond all shadow of doubt that Billy Bunter had not returned.

After breakfast a number of prefects were sent out on bicycles to search for Bunter, but by the time first lesson came along they returned with no news.

William George Bunter seemed to have disappeared from the face of the earth.

During morning break Bob Cherry received a telephone call from Dr. Tomlinson, the specialist, to say that Sir William Cherry was still unconscious and that everything possible was being done for him.

With downcast face Bob joined his chums and told them the news.

"Cheer up, Bob," said Harry Wharton, with forced cheerfulness.

And the captain of the Remove and his chums tried hard to take Bob's mind off his uncle's condition by talking briskly of the cricket matches that were due to be played during the next week. But it was all to no purpose. A heavy gloom had settled on the chums of the Remove, and even the subject of cricket failed to dispel it.

As was natural, their thoughts turned to William George Bunter, and it was while they were discussing the fat Removeite that Trotter, the page, informed them that Dr. Locke desired to see them in his study.

They trooped in in a body.

"I have been thinking over the strange disappearance of Bunter," said Dr. Locke, "and I was wondering whether the foolish boy has hidden himself at your uncle's house, Cherry."

Bob stared.

The thought had not occurred to him before, but it was barely possible that the Owl of the Remove had indeed stayed at the house. Bob told himself then that it was the sort of idiotic thing Bunter would do.

"In any case," continued the Head, "I can see that you are not in the right state of mind for Form work. Perhaps

you would like to go over to your uncle's house and investigate?"

"Yes, sir," said Bob.

"Very well, then," smiled Dr. Locke, "do so—and keep your eyes open on the way."

"Yes, sir," replied Bob. "I'll cycle over."

The Head looked at the other four Removeites.

"And to keep your mind off things I thought it might be as well if your chums accompanied you," added Dr. Locke kindly.

"Oh, sir!"

"You may consider yourselves excused work for the remainder of the day," concluded the Head; and Harry Wharton & Co., voicing their thanks, trooped out.

"The Head's a brick!" exclaimed Wharton.

"A real brick!" agreed Bob Cherry.

And Nugent, Johnny Bull, and Hurree Jamset Ram Singh heartily agreed.

To the envy of their fellow-Removeites, Harry Wharton & Co. were seen to mount their bicycles and pedal off out of the gates a few moments later. They took the road to Courtfield, stopping only to make inquiries of pedestrians as to whether any of them had seen William George Bunter. Each inquiry drew a blank, however.

And at Sir William Cherry's house the result was the same, although Bob and his chums and the servants combined in a search of the old Tudor mansion. Certainly, Billy Bunter had not concealed himself there.

The chums of the Remove, more perplexed than ever now, gathered in the drive.

"Where on earth has the chap got to?" muttered Wharton.

"Blessed if I know! We've searched every inch of the house," said Bob Cherry ruefully. "I had hopes that we might have found him here. You know what a fathead Bunter is, where grub is concerned."

The juniors nodded—with the exception of Johnny Bull. That youth was gazing fixedly at the drive.

"What's bitten you, Johnny?"

Johnny Bull started as Wharton's voice fell on his ears.

"I say," he ejaculated, with a tremor of excitement in his voice. "Whose hefty footprints are those?"

He pointed to a line of footprints clearly defined in the soil that ended abruptly about five feet from the foot of the steps of the porch.

Harry Wharton & Co. followed Johnny Bull's gaze.

There was a silence for a moment or two. Then, as if moved by one spring, the five juniors hurried forward and examined the footprints. They were deep and well spaced apart, and by

tracing them back the juniors discovered that they started close to a laurel-bush about ten yards away from the house.

"Those are Bunter's footmarks for a pension!" said Johnny Bull excitedly.

"I believe your're right," said Wharton slowly. "By the depth of them they certainly seem to show that their owner was a heavy-weight."

"But the steps

are too far apart for Bunter," said Frank Nugent critically.

"Oh!"

Johnny Bull shook his head.

"Where's your scoutcraft, Franky?" he said. "You can see that whoever left those footprints was running."

Harry Wharton whistled.

"You're right, Johnny," he said admiringly. "You're right. Look how deep the imprint is of the toe!"

Johnny Bull held up his hand.

"Look here, you chaps, I don't want to jump to conclusions, but I think I've picked up the trail."

"Cough it up, old scout."

And Johnny, in his slow, deliberate manner, proceeded to "cough it up."

"Those footprints were made when the soil had been dampened by rain," he remarked. "That's very apparent. Do you chaps agree?"

Harry Wharton & Co., catching something of their chum's excitement, nodded.

"Well, it didn't rain until after we'd kicked Bunter out of the house, last night," he said.

"Go it, Johnny!"

"Now, let's follow the trail," continued Johnny Bull. "You see, it ends jolly abruptly, about five feet or so from the steps of the porch. Never mind whose footprints these are for the moment. How do you chaps account for them ending so abruptly?"

There was a silence for a few moments, and then Harry Wharton let out a whoop of excitement.

"Why, there was a car standing here," he ejaculated triumphantly. "And the chap who made those footprints must have entered the car, unless he vanished into thin air."

Johnny Bull nodded.

"You've got it," he said. "You can see, if you look at the ground, you chaps, that a car was standing here. Well, then, if those footprints were made by Bunter—and we'll be able to prove that in a minute—it means that he entered the car; and as neither the car nor Bunter are here now it suggests that Bunter was driven off in it."

"Phew!"

"But why should our tame porpoise get into the car?" said Bob Cherry, scratching his head.

"It was raining," said Johnny Bull. "As far as I can make out, Bunter was sneaking about round that laurel-bush after we'd kicked him out. Then it came on to rain, and Bunter, getting fed-up, ran for the car and made himself comfortable inside it—"

"That's certainly the sort of thing he would do," admitted Frank Nugent. "Thinking that it was the same car that brought us—and incidentally him—here from the school."

There was a murmur of amazement from the juniors.

(Continued on next page.)



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**EASY
TERMS**

"You've worked out a jolly good theory, Johnny," said Bob Cherry. "But how do you know that it wasn't the car that brought us here?"

Johnny Bull tapped his forehead.

"Memory," he said, with a grin. "Our car, or, rather, your uncle's car, pulled up about three yards farther along the drive—you can see the tyre marks."

"You're right, Johnny!" exclaimed Wharton excitedly. "And it means that Bunter got in the wrong car and must have been driven off—miles, for all we know."

Johnny Bull nodded.

"That would account for his long absence," said the captain of the Remove, "and as he was stony that might account for his silence, too. If he got stranded—and it's quite possible the driver of the car turned him out when he discovered him in it—that would also explain why he hadn't telephoned the school."

"You've got it, Harry," said Johnny Bull.

"All that seems pretty good," said Nugent obstinately; "but assuming that the footprints are Bunter's, that he jumped into the wrong car, why on earth, when he realised his mistake, as he must have done, didn't he hop out? Why didn't the driver of the car see him anyway?"

The juniors felt that Nugent had presented Johnny Bull with a problem that knocked his theory to pieces. But Johnny Bull's reasoning powers, slow though they were as a general rule, seemed to accelerate to the occasion.

He smiled.

"What if Bunter fell asleep?" he said simply. "We know he'd been scoffing, and, next to eating and talking, sleeping is Bunter's pet weakness. Is that a possible, Franky?"

And Nugent, with a wry grin, had to admit that one question had been answered plausibly, at any rate.

"As to why the driver didn't notice him, I'm afraid that is rather more difficult to answer," said Johnny Bull. "But I've known owners and drivers of cars on leaving a house never to think of looking into the back of the car, especially when the car was a saloon, with a division between the driving seat and the back."

"That's true," said Wharton, with a nod. "It's possible, anyway."

"If the car that stood there happened to be a saloon—" persisted Nugent.

Johnny Bull smiled.

"It was a saloon," he said triumphantly. "Once again I'll wager a doughnut to a new cricket bat that it was a saloon."

"Jove, you're becoming some scout!" chuckled Nugent.

"And some detective!" added Bob Cherry, with a smile.

"Hear, hear!"

"The next thing to find out," said Bob, "is to whom did the car belong?"

"I can answer that," exclaimed Johnny Bull triumphantly.

"Well, I'm blessed!"

"It's quite easy when you work it out," said Johnny. "If you remember that all the guests had gone from here long before the rain came on you will remember, too, that three cars were left drawn up here—ours and two others, presumably belonging to the band."

"How do you work that out, Johnny? Why the band?"

"Because they were the only people to leave the house just about the time the rain came on. If you remember, Bob, you told their leader that it was

useless hanging about in the circumstances, and you dismissed them. That occurred about ten minutes or a quarter of an hour after Harry and I had booted Bunter off the premises. And by the time those band merchants had packed their instruments and cleared the rain started."

"You've worked it out like a blessed detective!" said Bob Cherry admiringly. "And if you're right we can soon get on Bunter's track."

"I believe Johnny's right," said the captain of the Remove. "In fact, I feel certain he is, and the only way we can get on the track of that car is to find out where the band came from, and get in touch with one of them by telephone, or something."

"And the way to do that—the only way now that that rotter Marsden has bunked," said Bob Cherry, his brows knitting as he thought of the secretary, "is to hunt through his papers. He engaged the band for uncle—there must be some correspondence about it somewhere."

"That's so," agreed Johnny Bull. "Look here, you chaps hunt up that part of the business, and I'll cut back to the school."

"What for?" asked four voices, in unison.

"To get a shoe belonging to Bunter," said Johnny, who seemed to have thought of everything. "If the shoe fits these footprints that'll prove we're on the right track."

"Johnny, you fairly take the cake!" exclaimed Wharton, in frank admiration.

"Hear, hear!" chorused the other juniors warmly.

And Johnny Bull, seldom in the limelight, blushed confusedly.

"Cut it out," he said, "and let's get on with the washing!"

"Just a moment, old scout," said Bob suddenly, as Johnny Bull prepared to depart. "You're jolly well not going to bike back to the school! That'll mean a waste of time. What's wrong with uncle's car?"

"The only thing that good old Johnny hasn't thought of!" said Wharton, with a grin. "Good for you, Bob!"

Accordingly, Bob summoned his uncle's chauffeur, and within a few moments Johnny Bull was speeding back to Greyfriars. In his absence Harry Wharton & Co. were not idle. A search of Marsden's desk brought to light the name and address of the leader of the band, and his telephone number; and even while Johnny Bull was returning to the house with one of William George Bunter's shoes Bob Cherry was asking for the telephone number.

But there the juniors received a setback. For a long time Bob received no reply; then came the voice of a servant who apparently was one of many in the block of mansion flats where the band leader resided, informing the Remove that Mr. Melchett was not at home.

In response to further inquiries, the servant could give no definite information, and Bob replaced the receiver, with a grunt of annoyance.

"He's not at home," Bob told his chums.

"Well, the only thing for it is to trot up to town and wait until he is at home," suggested Wharton. "We must get in touch with him to find out whose car it was."

"Right-ho!" said Bob. "We'll go up to town. Besides," he added, and a cloud overspread his face, "I'll be able to pop in at the hospital and see how nunks is."

The juniors nodded, and then fell silent, as was their habit every time mention of Sir William was made.

Johnny Bull entering the house and waving one of Bunter's shoes aloft triumphantly, came at a propitious moment.

"We're on the right track, you chaps!" he exclaimed, with a gleam in his eyes. "This shoe fits the imprint of the right foot exactly!"

"Bravo!"

The cheer was spontaneous, and again Johnny Bull coloured.

Wharton quickly explained the outcome of Bob's telephone call, and Bull agreed that the obvious course now was to proceed to London. Here again Sir William's car and his chauffeur were called into requisition; and within ten minutes five juniors, keen as mustard now to see the end of the trail that Johnny Bull had picked up so wonderfully, were being raced towards London and the abode of Mr. Angelo Melchett.

But little did they guess what the end of the trail would be or how miraculous would be its effect on Sir William Cherry, for whom the best poison specialists that London could produce, were fighting a battle of life and death!

THE TWELFTH CHAPTER.

Nothing Doing!

"HERE we are!"

Bob Cherry turned to his chums in the car as the Daimler purred its way along the Edgware Road, and came to a stop outside a block of mansion flats.

"Good!"

Harry Wharton & Co. had enjoyed that swift run up to London, and now as they reached their destination realisation of their errand returned.

"You do the chin-wagging, Bob," said the captain of the Remove, as the chauffeur stood by the side of the open door. "We'll wait here."

Bob nodded, and stepped out of the car.

He was not gone long. In answer to his summons on the bell a maid appeared, and she informed Bob that Angelo Melchett was "out."

"Oh!" Bob was taken aback. "Can you tell me when Mr. Melchett will be at home?"

"Not until late to-night, sir," replied the maid. "You see, he's the leader of the Savinium Band—"

"Oh!"

"And they play during lunch and tea and dinner, sir."

"The Savinium—" began Bob.

The maid smiled.

"That's just off Piccadilly Circus," she volunteered. "If your business with Mr. Melchett is very important, I expect you could see him there."

"Oh, good!"

Bob rejoined his chums, and explained what had happened, and in a few moments the Daimler was purring towards Piccadilly.

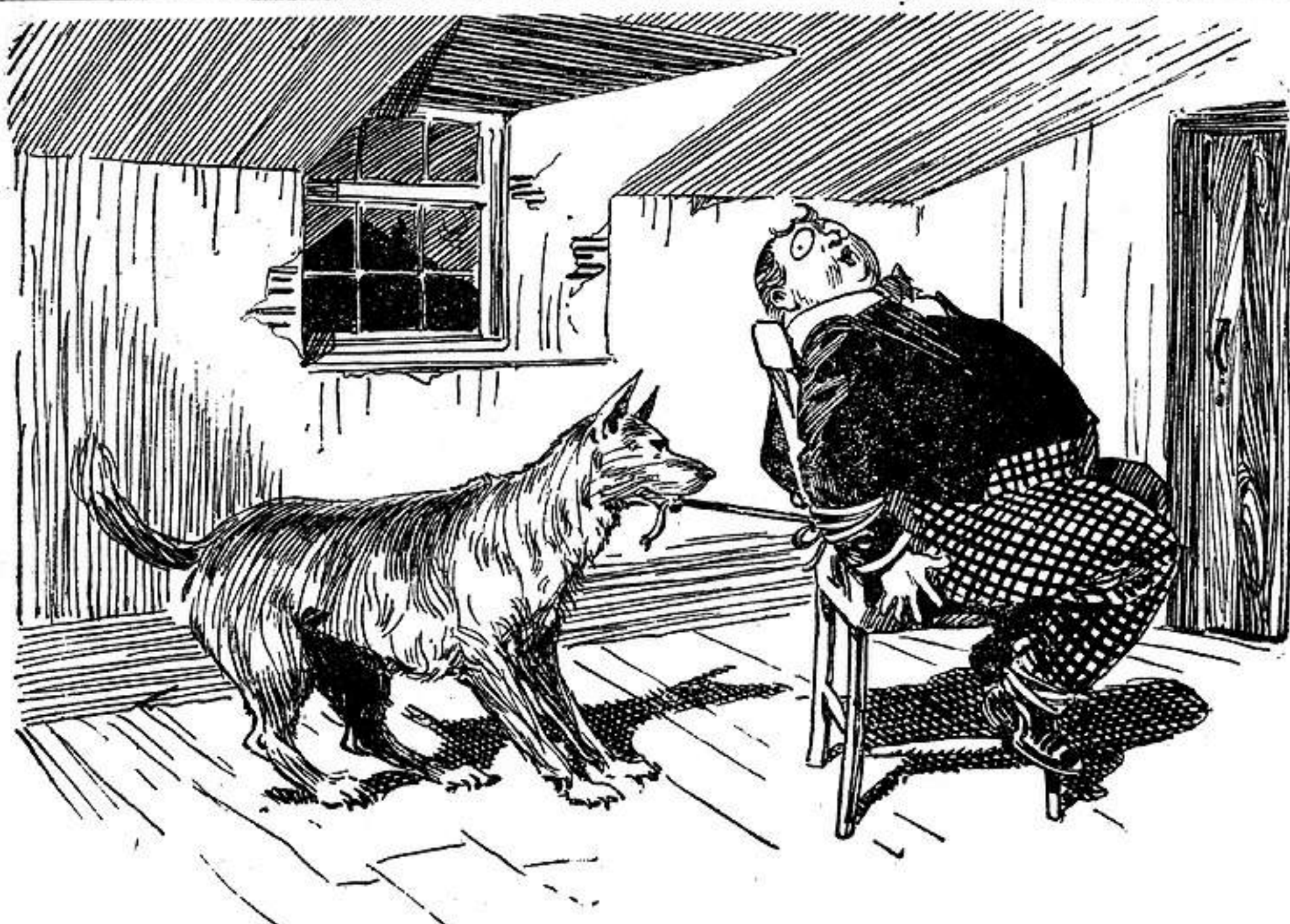
"There's the Savinium!" suddenly exclaimed Johnny Bull, who was scanning the street ahead, and a moment later the car came to a standstill.

"What about lunch while we're here?" suggested Wharton. "It's past our usual grub time, and I'm feeling a bit peckish."

"Same here!"

"The hungerfulness of my ridiculous self is terrific!" said Hurreo Jamses, with a dusky smile.

"Good idea!" agreed Bob. "We'll combine business with pleasure."



The Alsatian seized between its teeth the loose end of the cord that secured Bunter's arms to the chair, and jerked playfully at it. "Good dog!" said Bunter encouragingly, and to his joy he felt his bonds loosening. (See Chapter 13.)

Having said which, he gave the chauffeur instructions to call for them in an hour's time, and then, followed by his chums, Bob strode into the Savinium.

It was an attractive restaurant; a trifle ornate, in the opinion of the Greyfriars Removites, but it had a soothing atmosphere about it that appealed to the people who had plenty of money to spend.

Soft-footed waiters moved backwards and forwards with well-laden trays; obsequious "head waiters" stood ready to bow newcomers to their tables, or, alternatively, to bow to the door those who had dined.

And while Bob Cherry and his party stood looking round the glittering room in search of the band, a head waiter took charge of them.

"A table for five? This way, if you please!"

Still looking about them, the Greyfriars juniors followed the head waiter to a table. Up to then none of them had seen any sign of the orchestra.

"I understand you had an orchestra here," said Wharton to the head waiter.

"That is correct, sir," was the reply. "If you will look towards that little gallery"—he indicated the direction with a movement of the head—"you will see them, and—"

He broke off and bowed as at that moment the concealed orchestra "struck up" a popular dancé tune.

"There's Melchett," said Bob, gazing over to the musicians' gallery.

From a group of palms there emerged the immaculate figure of Angelo Melchett, moving with easy grace as he plied his bow. That he was a skilled performer on the violin was soon made

evident, and at the conclusion of the piece the ovation he received from the people seated at the tables below him must have been very gratifying.

He bowed in all directions, in response to the applause, and then his eyes fixed on the table at which the Greyfriars juniors sat. Immediately the smile on his face died away and a hunted look sprang into his eyes. It was only momentary, however, and none but Hurree Janset Ram Singh seemed to have noticed it. The next second and Angelo Melchett had himself well in hand.

Despite the continued applause and hand clapping, Melchett did not give an encore. His fellow-players looked inquiringly at him, waiting for the word to commence the encore. But no word came. With a significant look at his companion Toni, Melchett sauntered out of the musicians' alcove.

Toni followed him. Melchett gripped him fiercely by the arm.

"The game's up!" he said, in a whisper.

Toni started.

"What do you mean?"

"They're here—those Greyfriars boys," replied Toni, "and the boy Cherry is with them!"

Toni's face blanched.

"But perhaps it's just a coincidence that they've come here," he remarked.

Melchett shook his head.

"It's not a coincidence!" he muttered. "I feel certain of that. They've followed us here. They suspect—"

He broke off as the manager of the restaurant came striding towards them.

"Aren't you going to give them an encore?" he asked fussily. "They're simply clamouring for you!"

Melchett shook his head.

"I'm afraid not. I've come over faint."

He passed a hand over his forehead. Certainly his pallor bore out his words, and the manager, after expressing a few hollow words of sympathy, walked away. Angelo Melchett was his own master, and he had to be treated with a certain amount of respect.

When the manager was at a safe distance Melchett turned to Toni.

"I'm going," he said. "And I'm going right now. And you?"

Toni glanced about him uneasily. "I'm coming with you, too," he answered.

And five minutes later these two members of the Rafia were leaving the restaurant.

In the meantime, Bob Cherry had intimated to the head waiter a desire to see the leader of the orchestra. The juniors waited five minutes for the waiter to return.

"I would wagerfully wager that the esteemed and ridiculous Melchett will not see you!" said Hurree Janset Ram Singh.

The juniors looked at their dusky chum curiously.

"Why do you think that, Inky?" asked Harry Wharton.

Hurree Janset Ram Singh shrugged his shoulders.

"I have an idea that the ridiculous Melchett wasn't at all pleased to see us sitting herefully."

"Oh, rot!"

"We shall see," said Inky. "I don't know whether any of my esteemed chums saw the expression on the ludicrous Melchett's face when he looked over at this table."

"What do you mean?"

The nabob smiled.

"In the East we are quick to read faces," he explained. "And I would wagerfully bet my new cricket bat that the ridiculous Melchett is a badful egg, and that, for some reason best known to his own esteemed self, the sightfulness of us gave him a great shockfulness and a scarefulness."

"Oh, you're talking through your hat, old bean!" said Bob Cherry.

But when the waiter returned with the news that Mr. Melchett had gone home with a headache, Inky's suspicions came back with more force.

Bob's face fell. Did this mean that the journey to London had been made in vain?

Harry Wharton came to the rescue.

"I suppose the other players here belong to the orchestra. Melchett took with him to your uncle's house, Bob," he said thoughtfully. "Let's see one of them."

Bob brightened.

"That's a good idea. Come on!"

Explaining to the waiter that it was imperative that they should speak to the orchestra, that obsequious individual, prompted by a crisp ten-shilling note Bob placed in his hand, intimated that he could work the oracle. At the heels of the waiter the Famous Five trooped up a side staircase until they came on a level with the musicians' gallery, and at the conclusion of a dance tune two members of the orchestra came out to the Greyfriars party.

Bob heaved a sigh of relief when he recognised one of them as belonging to the orchestra that had attended at his uncle's house the previous night. To him the Greyfriars junior explained the position, putting forward the suggestion that Bunter had perhaps entered their car in error.

But the member of the orchestra shook his head.

"Your friend did not enter the car I and my friends returned to London in," he said.

"Oh!" The Greyfriars juniors looked dismal.

"But it may be possible that he entered Mr. Melchett's car—not that Mr. Melchett mentioned such a circumstance to us this morning."

Here again was a set-back.

"And Mr. Melchett's gone home, I understand?" asked Bob Cherry.

"I believe so. He's certainly not in the gallery with us."

Harry Wharton took Bob Cherry by the arm.

"The best thing we can do is to buzz round to Melchett's place again."

"That's all we can do," said Bob; and, thanking the musician, he and his chums retraced their steps.

Without wasting time, the juniors settled their bill, and once more stood on the pavement outside the restaurant.

Wharton hailed a cab, and in a few moments the party was speeding towards Edgware Road.

At Angelo Melchett's flat another set-back awaited them, for the maid declared that Melchett had not been near the place since breakfast-time that morning.

"Well, here's a go!" muttered Wharton, when the Co. stood in some indecision outside the block of flats.

"Checkmate," grinned Nugent ruefully.

"It all seems mighty queer," said Johnny Bull, in his slow way. "We are convinced that that ass Bunter was in one of the two cars that brought the band back to London last night. We have proved that he wasn't in one of

the cars, and the owner of the other sees fit to make himself scarce when we put in an appearance——"

"Well?" said Bob Cherry helpfully. "What are you driving at, Johnny, old scout?"

"I'm beginning to think that Inky's instinct was right. That chap Melchett is a bad egg. I believe he deliberately buzzed off when he saw us."

"Hem!"

"Hum!"

Johnny's belief was not shared by the rest of the Co., with the possible exception of Inky. There were doubtless hundreds of reasons why Angelo Melchett should make himself scarce, for he was his own master.

"You don't think I'm right?" asked Johnny Bull, looking at the dubious faces of his chums. And there was silence.

"Well, I'm for going to the police-station," said Johnny. "We can't do any harm. If Bunter came back to town in a car he must be about somewhere. Perhaps something's happened to him——"

"I hope that isn't the case," said Wharton. "Bunter's not a pal of mine exactly, but I hope nothing has happened to the silly ass."

"A few discreet inquiries at the police station won't do any harm, anyway," said Nugent. "If he's lost himself, or anything fatheaded like that, the police would jolly soon know."

Wharton reasoned with himself that there did not seem much to be gained by making inquiries at the police station; on the other hand, there was certainly nothing to be gained by hanging about the pavement of Edgware Road, so he gave the address of the Vine Street Police Station to the taxi-driver, and in a few moments the car was speeding them there.

THE THIRTEENTH CHAPTER.

Billy Bunter's Luck!

"GROOOOOUGH!"

Billy Bunter groaned and blinked; and blinked and groaned

"Groooooogh!"

The fat junior had come to, and his first waking thoughts gave him a shock. He was doomed to die—to die by drowning. He remembered the awful ordeal through which he had passed in the presence of the dreaded Rafia and their chief.

Bunter blinked about him.

He was bound hand and foot to a chair in an attic that was devoid of all furnishing. Stretched out before him, like some grim sentinel, was the huge Alsatian wolfhound. Its baleful eyes never left the face of the Greyfriars Removite.

"Oh crikey!"

Billy Bunter's nerve almost failed him; he almost felt too frightened to breathe as his wildly-staring eyes fixed on his four-footed guard.

"Good dog!" mumbled Bunter.

"Grrrrrrrrrr!"

The Alsatian rose to its feet, bared its teeth, and snarled. Bunter shuddered. "G-g-good dog!" he said. "Goo-goo-good dog!"

The Alsatian did not snarl this time. It advanced on the terrified Bunter and sniffed the fat junior all over. And the Owl of the Remove expected any minute to feel its fangs in his plump calves.

"Good dog!" gasped Bunter. Then in desperation he started to entertain the wild-looking animal—anything to keep its mind off his plump calves.

Bunter was a born mimic, and for the next half an hour he mimicked bird cries, the neigh of a horse, the trumpeting of an elephant, the hoot of an owl, the braying of a donkey—everything he could possibly think of.

And, wonder of wonders, this savage guardian of the Rafia's victims seemed to find some entertainment in the performance.

At the end of twenty minutes the Alsatian was, wagging its tail; at the expiration of half an hour it was licking Bunter's hands.

Billy Bunter, a wild hope plucking at his podgy heart, "entertained" for all he was worth. Some instinct prompted him to turn this new-formed friendship with the savage Alsatian to account. By means of signs and words and constant wriggles the Owl of the Remove at last directed the dog's attention to his bonds.

"Good dog! Good dog!"

The Alsatian wagged its tail and then playfully seized between its teeth the loose end of the cord that bound Bunter's arms to the chair and began to pull lustily.

"Good dog!" muttered Bunter tremulously.

For a quarter of an hour or more the dog strained at the cord, its canine intelligence rising to the occasion, and at the end of that time Billy Bunter gave a whoop of delight, for he felt the cords loosening. Another frantic jerk—this time from Bunter himself—and the fat junior felt one hand free.

The rest was fairly easy. Inside five minutes both arms and hands were free; in ten minutes Billy Bunter's feet were free.

"Oh, this is great!"

The fat junior stood up and stretched himself. Then he rolled towards the dog and plucked enough courage to fondle it. At that moment Bunter loved his four-footed guardian as much as he loved William George Bunter.

The dog leaped up at him and licked him. What bond there could possibly be between the fattest and biggest idiot in the Greyfriars Remove and the savage guardian of the Rafia's victims will never be known. But a bond of friendship there was.

And then in the midst of his exultation Bunter's terror returned. Outside, growing louder and nearer at every second, was the tramp of feet.

Someone was coming!

"Oh lor!"

Bunter's fat heart beat wildly. He gazed about him for a place of concealment, but that dingy attic offered none. Then in desperation Billy Bunter seized hold of the chair.

A key scraped in the lock of the door, and Bunter, with wildly-beating heart, jumped behind the door. His podgy fists gripped the chair on high.

The door opened.

Billy Bunter shut his eyes and smote with all his force.

Thud!

The chair came down on the head of the luckless man who had entered—it was Bunter's previous guard—and without a sound the man sank to the floor in an inert heap.

Bunter stood breathing hard, his eyes almost starting out of their sockets in fear and trembling of what he had done. Then common sense prevailed. He had acted in self-defence. At any moment the man might return to consciousness. Bunter pounced on the length of cord which a short time before had secured him and then, with feverish haste, he bound up the senseless man.

(Continued on page 23.)

START THIS WONDERFUL DIRT-TRACK STORY TO-DAY!



By fair means or foul, Otto is determined to inherit Beresford Motors, Ltd., and, as is to be expected, it is towards foul means that Otto's inclinations turn!

A Startling Discovery!

THE competitors lined up, the sun gleaming on their bikes, and as they humped themselves on their saddles they looked like beings from another world in their helmets, face-masks, and padded suits—veritable devotees of the great god "Speed."

The four of them were pushed off by the attendants as the starter's flag fell—Melville on the outside, being the rider with the longest handicap; then Jimmy, a second after him; and, lastly, the two back-markers, Stevenson and Lorrimer.

The spouts blazed forth their deafening notes, and the four bikes stormed forward towards the bend. Melville, anxious to make his name, took full advantage of his brief lead and rushed into the curve at reckless speed, swinging round in a long slide.

Jimmy tore after him, whipping his machine into a broadside that peppered the safety-fence with cinders. He came into the back straight with his bike twisted at an angle across the track, his front wheel not more than a length behind Melville.

Stevenson and Lorrimer followed close on the tail of the Beresford speed-iron, and all four riders opened up for the race to the second bend. Melville held his lead, but Jimmy was challenged by Stevenson, who pulled level with a magnificent burst of acceleration.

The second curve was reached, and Stevenson raced round on the outside, a screaming skid carrying him ahead of Jimmy and bringing him level with Melville. On the front straight Melville and Stevenson fought for first place, with Jimmy sticking close to them and Lorrimer bringing up the rear.

The first bend of the second lap reversed matters. Stevenson forged ahead to take the lead; and Jimmy, in the act of scrabbling round to gain second place from Melville, saw Lorrimer thrust past him on the outer edge.

The four riders made the back-straight, Stevenson running first, Lorrimer thundering in pursuit of him, Jimmy and Melville fighting to avoid the tail-end of the procession.

On the next bend Melville made a bid to recover lost ground, and swung into the front-stretch almost level with Lorrimer. Stevenson, however, had increased his lead by several lengths, and looked a decided winner—and just as decidedly Jimmy Beresford seemed out of it. Even his staunchest admirers could see no chance of him carrying the race.

On the first bend of the third lap Melville again made a supreme effort, but he was riding for a fall, and as he pulled abreast of Lorrimer his speed-iron switched sideways in a skid that he could not control.

His front wheel struck Lorrimer's, and both bikes reeled apart from the shock. Melville swung towards the outer edge, and Lorrimer towards the turf.

Tearing round behind them, Jimmy saw in a flash that he might be involved, but he made up his mind on the instant and scraped through between the two of them. As he did so he heard Melville crash to the right of him, and Lorrimer to the left, and he was smothered by a double shower of up-flung cinders.

Jimmy swerved on to the back-straight, his bike bucking underneath him. Ten lengths ahead of him was Stevenson, and Stevenson was storming for the far bend at full throttle.

Jimmy flattened himself along the bank. He had got to beat Stevenson, for a victory in this race would bring him one step nearer to his goal—a match-race with Rossiter, the mystery champion.

Jimmy's progress in the last few weeks had been easy to mark. He was not yet in Rossiter's class, but there was no comparison between his riding now and his riding when he had first launched a speed-iron upon the dirt-track. With one long leg swinging at the cinders to urge the limit of pace out of his bike, he cut down Stevenson's lead to six lengths.

Six lengths in arrears he hit the bend that curved into the front-straight. His machine was fitted with a "cut-out," and he brought it into action to take the corner with a terrific broadside. The crowd rose to him as he swept round the outer edge, and his contingent of admirers yelled themselves hoarse when he gained the straight three lengths behind the leader.

The fourth lap roused the "fans" to a frenzy of excitement. On the first bend Jimmy knocked another length off Stevenson's lead, and, flashing along the back-stretch, both riders forced the best out of their bikes, Stevenson striving to hold the advantage, Jimmy striving to overtake him. At wild speed they dashed into the last curve.

Jimmy thumbed the "cut-out" button
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SPEEDWAY PALS!

A. CARNEY ALLAN

on his handlebars, and then released it for an instant. The exhaust spouts blurted and spat flame, and the sudden wrench of motive-power flung round his back wheel in a screaming broadside once more. Down came his toe as the speed-iron heeled over, and he juggled with the steering to control the skid. Just in front of him Stevenson was doubled in the saddle, raking round by the white line in a desperate endeavour to keep first place.

But Jimmy was gaining on him, and half-way round the bend he was so close that the grit from Stevenson's wheel was rattling against the Beresford's tank.

Slashing on, the youngster pulled level, and then from every quarter his name was yelled in strident accents as he swung into the home-stretch ahead of his rival.

Stevenson tried to make up on him with a final burst of speed, but Jimmy, too, had cut in with the throttle, and he was first across the line by a clear three lengths.

A little while later, fresh from his hard-won victory, Jimmy made his way from the pits and walked through the main gates of the stadium, scanning the road for sign of Ron as he did so.

He had not long to wait, for presently a big open car drew up at the kerb, and he saw Ron's cheerful countenance behind the steering-wheel.

"Which way for the nursing-home?" Ron asked.

"Right-about turn, chauffeur," said Jimmy, with a grin. "But hang on a minute. Here's something coming—a big saloon-car—"

He broke off suddenly as it struck him that the car was familiar, and in the same instant he recognised the man who was driving it.

It was Bernard Volson's car, and the man at the wheel was "Mr. Brown." With him was Otto. But that was not all, for in the back of the saloon, pale and hollow as the result of a long and dangerous illness, was Jimmy's father!

Destination Unknown!

THE big saloon car was past in a moment, none of its occupants perceiving Jimmy or Ron. As for the youngsters, they could only stand and stare, both of them struck speechless; for Ron, too, had seen the figure of Jim's father in the back of the automobile.

Jimmy was the first to find his voice.

"After them!" he said tersely, climbing in beside his chum. "We've got to keep them in sight, Ron."

Ron slipped the gear-lever into place and stepped on the accelerator. The tourer moved forward, the hum of its engine rising swiftly to a high pitch. With rapid precision, Ron pushed the lever into "second" and then into "top."

The saloon was a hundred and fifty yards away by now, but fortunately the road was not particularly crowded, and, keeping the other car in view, Ron was able to gain on it, until he cut down the intervening distance to a bare hundred yards.

Jimmy was huddled beside him, his eyes on the same level as the steering-wheel. There was a grim quality in the expression on his clear-cut face. Not once did he remove his glance from the car they were following, and

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even when he spoke to Ron again he kept it fixed on the vehicle.

"The Volson people are cunning," he said. "As soon as it was known that dad was to be moved, Otto and Brown must have gone to the nursing home, intent on getting there before me. Dad would be expecting me, for he knew I was calling to take him away; but I reckon Otto spun him some yarn."

A traffic hold-up at a main cross-roads involved both cars, and delayed them for several minutes.

"What's the idea, though?" Ron asked suddenly, as they waited for a break. "What do they mean to do with your father?"

"Nothing that will improve his health," Jimmy ground out. "You can bank on that!"

The line of traffic presently moved forward. There were now half a dozen cars between the youngsters' tourer and the saloon; but Ron drove magnificently, and with his experienced hands controlling the steering-wheel, he overtook the other vehicles one after another, gliding past them on the off-side.

The saloon was travelling at a fair speed; but some distance farther on it began to slow down—in order to turn into a side road.

"It looks as if they're going to the house," Jimmy commented. "That road leads to dad's place."

Jimmy's surmise was correct, for, continuing to follow the other car, the youngsters eventually saw it pull to a standstill outside the gates of Gordon Beresford's house.

"What now?" Ron demanded, his fingers poised over the hand-brake.

"Yes, stop by them," Jimmy told him. "I'm going to have a word with Brown and Otto."

Ron obeyed, and drew up the tourer right behind the big saloon car. Even as he did so, Otto emerged from the latter, with Brown at his heels.

Jimmy quickly scrambled out of the tourer, and Otto's face, at sight of his cousin, was a study in surprise and confusion. Then both he and Brown frowned darkly.

Jimmy opened his mouth to speak, but not a word came. Truth to tell, he did not know quite what to say for the moment, because he suddenly realised that what he wanted to say must be left unuttered in his father's hearing.

His father had "turned the corner,"

INTRODUCTION.

Jimmy Beresford, a cheerful, athletic youngster, 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 and, helped by Ron's expert mechanical knowledge, wins several thrilling races 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 little to obtain the plans of Ron's invention. They are stolen by a representative of Volson's: but Jimmy, with great pluck and resource, manages to recover them. A dastardly attempt on Jimmy's life, engineered by his scoundrelly cousin Otto, who is in league with Volson's, all but succeeds; but the serious illness of Gordon Beresford makes it impossible for him to be told of Otto's treachery. Making his way slowly but surely to the top of the tree in the dirt-track racing world, Jimmy is entered for a big handicap race at Elsenham Park, an event which brings him one step nearer his great ambition—a match with "Tornado" Rossiter.

(Now read on.)

and was on the road to health again; but he was still in a pitifully frail condition, and a relapse brought on by any shock or excitement could only end the one way—fatally.

Jimmy looked at his father, and, in spite of the differences—that existed between them, in spite of the old man's antagonism towards the youngster's calling, Gordon Beresford returned the glance with something of affection.

Jimmy opened the door of the saloon and gripped his father's hand in silence. It was a silence more eloquent than words could have been. Incidentally, it was a silence which was compulsory on Gordon Beresford's part, for the stroke had robbed him of the power of speech. There were hopes that he would recover it, together with his strength, but at the moment he sat in the car dumbly, a pale, wasted shadow, with a rug wrapped round his knees.

That silent greeting over, Jimmy turned to Otto, and his glance hardened as it came to rest on his cousin.

"I thought I was going to collect dad," he said grimly.

An ugly little smile lurked at the back of Otto's eyes.

"As a matter of fact," he told Jimmy, speaking so that the youngster's father could hear—"as a matter of fact, I thought it would be better if I went instead. Because it occurred to me that you might have a bad effect on Uncle Gordon. You weren't on too-friendly terms, you know, Jimmy, old man. So I got my friend, Mr. Brown, to bring along his car, and we're going to run your father down to the South Coast."

Jimmy could have taken Otto by the throat and shaken him like the rat that he was. For no words could have been more misleading and more cunningly delivered than those Otto spoke. To Gordon Beresford they must have sounded sincere, and he obviously believed that his nephew had been concerned for his welfare. But to Jimmy the mockery underlying them was stark-clear.

Yet Jimmy had to restrain himself. All he could do was to turn to his father and make a feeble attempt to persuade him against accompanying Otto and Brown.

"Dad, I booked rooms for you at the Marine Hotel, Westleigh. Let me take you there—"

"I've already fixed up for your father, Jimmy," Otto interrupted coolly. "Mr. Brown has a house on the coast which will suit Uncle Gordon down to the ground, and Mr. Brown has been good enough to invite him to recuperate there. It will be much quieter than a hotel, and it appeals far more to your father. Doesn't it, Uncle Gordon?"

Gordon Beresford inclined his grey head, and smiled at Jimmy with a look that was intended to be reassuring. Then Otto spoke again.

"I'll get you those books you wanted out of the library, uncle," he said. "Reading's going to be your one recreation until you're well enough to walk." He glanced meaningfully at Brown, and added: "You can stay by the car."

Otto turned to make his way along the drive, and on the instant Jimmy fell into step beside him.

"I'll help you look for the books," he informed his cousin in a grim tone.

Otto looked at him furtively, but made no answer. In silence they reached the front door, and Otto opened it with a key. It was as the two of them paused there for a moment that Jimmy realised Ron had followed them.

"I'll help, too," said Ron, with some significance.

The trio passed into the house, and Otto walked straight into the library where he consulted a list which Gordon Beresford had written in a tremulous, shaky hand. He began to select books from the shelves that lined the walls of the room, and at length, having completed the list, he started for the door.

Jimmy Beresford and Ron Connolly stood in his way.

"Just a minute!" said Jimmy. "Where are you taking dad?"

Otto set the books on a small table near the door and regarded the two youngsters insolently.

"So far as you are concerned," he observed, "the destination is unknown. The people at the nursing home agreed with me that it would be as well to keep your father right away from any business worries, and I suggested that his whereabouts should remain a secret for the time being."

"You scheming rat!" Jimmy said between his teeth. "You're taking him away so that he won't learn the truth when he's well enough to hear it. But I'm coming with you!"

Otto's right hand was in his pocket, and with a sudden movement he whipped out an automatic pistol.

"I don't think you are coming with us," he answered. "Stand aside from that door, or take the consequences!"

Jimmy's lip curled.

"I wonder what dad would think if he saw you now?" he said. "And I wonder what he would think if he knew that he was in Bernard Volson's car, and that your precious Mr. Brown was Volson's confidential secretary?"

"Stand aside, I tell you!" Otto snapped, with a savage jerk of the gun. "I haven't time to waste talking to you!"

Jimmy made no attempt to obey. He was looking at the automatic in his cousin's hand.

"You carry a gun now," he declared, "but you haven't the pluck to use it!" And as he spoke he made a quick grab and caught Otto by the wrist.

There was a fierce scuffle, and Ron jumped forward to take a hand in it. But before he could do so he was struck from behind by a blow that took him at the base of the skull—a vicious and deadly rabbit-punch.

Ron stumbled and fell. It was Brown who stood in the doorway, and the man shot one glance at Ron as he lay at his feet. Then he strode over the youngster's prone form and caught hold of Jimmy, wrenching him away from the struggling Otto.

"I've got him!" Brown said crisply. "Take those books and get away!"

Otto snatched up the pile of books



"So you carry a gun now, Otto," said Jimmy Beresford, looking at the automatic in his cousin's hand, "but you haven't the pluck to use it." As he spoke Jimmy made a quick grab and caught his cousin by the wrist. (See this page.)

and darted through the doorway. Simultaneously Brown gave Jimmy a vicious shove that sent him staggering into the middle of the room; and when the youngster recovered himself and wheeled round the door had slammed, and a key was being turned in the lock.

Jimmy rushed for the french windows, shot back the bolt, and thrust them open. At the same time he heard a movement behind him, and, looking over his shoulder, saw his chum rising to his knees.

"Come on, Ron!" he called; and then he was out on the drive.

By leaving by the front door Brown and Otto had the start of him; and as Jimmy doubled towards the gate he heard the saloon drive away. When he reached the road the car was already in second gear.

Ron joined his chum. He was nursing the back of his head, and there was a dazed expression on his face.

"We'll follow in the tourer!" Jimmy panted; and, gripping Ron by the arm, he urged him into the car, taking the wheel himself.

Next moment they were moving away in pursuit, but before Jimmy had pushed the gear-lever into "top" he knew that something was amiss. There was a distinct drag on the steering and a distinct check on the auto's speed.

The saloon had turned a corner and was out of sight. When the tourer reached that corner Jimmy saw that the other car had increased its lead appreciably.

He stepped on the brake and clambered out. He had a suspicion of what was wrong, and when he glanced at the near-side front wheel his suspicion was confirmed. The tyre was flat, and it was easy to guess that Brown had furtively punctured it when he had been left alone with Gordon Beresford.

The tourer was fitted with a spare, and both Jimmy and Ron worked with

frantic haste to change the wheels. Ron had practically recovered now, and the job was soon done. But the loss of time was of vital consequence, for when they had finished there was no sign of the saloon.

Half a mile farther on Jimmy stopped the car again. The road forked at that point, both branches leading to the south, and he had to admit that he was baffled, for he did not know which route the saloon had taken.

He chanced the route on the right after some hesitation, accelerating up to the sixty mark; and some time later, overtaking a commercial lorry, he hailed the driver and asked him if he had seen anything that answered to the description of Volson's car.

The lorry-driver shook his head, and Jimmy pulled into the side of the road.

"We're beaten, Ron," he said; "but only for the time being. Somehow we've got to find out where they've taken dad—and we've got to find out what deep game they mean to play."

Beresford v. Volson!

THE Thursday evening meeting at Elsenham Park came round, and still the whereabouts of Gordon Beresford remained a mystery.

Jimmy was desperately concerned over his father, though he reassured himself with the reflection that no harm could be intended at the present. For if anything happened to Gordon Beresford now Beresford Motors would automatically become the inheritance of young Jimmy, he being the next-of-kin. And Jimmy knew that such a state of affairs was far from the ambitions of Otto and Bernard Volson.

The Elsenham Park meeting served to take Jimmy's mind off his trouble to some extent; for, with the track lit up by vivid arc lights, the stands packed

"THE MASKED TERROR!"*(Continued from page 24.)*

The dog stood looking on, snarling occasionally at the inert heap of humanity on the floor.

"Oh dear!" gasped Bunter. He was at a loss to know what to do next. But a chance of freedom had presented itself, and even Bunter, obtuse as he was, was not slow to take full advantage of it.

Dragging the man to the far corner of the room, Bunter searched him for a weapon. His search brought to light a loaded revolver.

Bunter handled it gingerly. Then he tiptoed to the door and looked out. All was quiet. With the dog following him, the fat junior started to descend the staircase, revolver in hand. Fortunately for him, he encountered no one en route. After negotiating about three flights of steps Bunter came to a large door set in the wall, outside which was an iron emergency staircase that ran down to a wharf outside.

Bunter opened and passed through that door with the quietness of a mouse.

A stretch of river lay before him, along which crawled lazily two grimy tugs. With his heart pounding against his ribs, Billy Bunter crept down the staircase and reached the wharf. No one had witnessed his escape.

Idly Bunter looked at a signboard, hardly decipherable, which bore the legend:

"TOOLEY'S WHARF,"

and unconsciously committed the name to memory. Then he passed through a creaking door of the wharf buildings and found himself in a dirty, cobbled street lined with a row of dingy-looking houses. At the doors of five or six of them children were playing, and they turned to stare in wonder at the picture of a fat schoolboy in Etons, followed by a particularly savage-looking dog, that tramped past them with white face and staring eyes.

For five minutes Bunter tramped the street without the slightest idea of where he was going. And then luck smiled upon him. A taxi hove in sight. In a second Bunter had chartered it and scrambled in. The dog followed.

"Where to?" asked the taximan suspiciously.

Bunter's heart leaped.

"Vine Street Police Station!" he said breathlessly, giving the name of the only police station in London that he knew.

And as the taxi drove off, a saloon car passed it at tearing speed. At the wheel of the car was Angelo Melchett, pale-faced and grim. By his side, equally pale, was Toni.

Bunter noted them as the car flew past, and swiftly ducked his head out of sight. Next moment a fat chortle escaped the Owl of the Remove. He was safe now—safe from the dreaded Rafia that had planned his death.

It was while a kindly sergeant of police was interrogating Harry Wharton & Co. at Vine Street Police Station that William George Bunter burst in. His arrival could not have been more electrical in its effect than if a bomb had suddenly exploded in the room.

"Bunter!"

"Oh, my hat!"

"He, he, he!" cackled Bunter. "Did you think I was lost?"

"Where have you been, Bunt?"

"Tell us all about it, old fat man!"

And Bunter proceeded to tell as

NN

strange a story as the police sergeant and Harry Wharton & Co. had ever listened to. Despite Bunter's natural inclination to exaggerate, the true facts of the matter were soon found out.

Harry Wharton & Co. looked at Billy Bunter in unconcealed admiration when he had finished his story.

"Bravo, Bunter!" exclaimed Wharton. "You've done jolly well!"

"Here, here!"

The famous "Co." did not grudge that, for the Owl of the Remove had indeed done "jolly well." That luck had played more than an average part in his adventure did not lessen his moment of glory, and Bunter fairly basked in a whirl of congratulations. Even then, however, he did not lose sight of his canine friend, for he requested the police sergeant to take great care of it, and the Alsatian was lured away from his new master by the simple process of dangling a choice bone in front of its nose.

Bunter watched the departure of the dog with a sigh, for he and the animal, short as had been their acquaintance, had become firm friends. Still, it had to be. Besides, there were other matters of far more importance to attend to just then, namely, the rounding up of the Rafia.

Thus, within ten minutes of Bunter's arrival a fast car, belonging to the famous Flying Squad, was tearing towards Tooley's Wharf.

It returned half an hour later with the news that the Rafia had been rounded up, that only the chief of the gang had escaped.

At this Bunter bathed in a sea of glory, for he considered himself entirely responsible for the capture.

The story created a nine days' wonder throughout the world, and the name of William George Bunter was on everyone's lips. But perhaps the most pleasant side of the astonishing affair was the complete recovery of Sir William Cherry; for Angelo Melchett, rather than face a charge of murder, of his own free will gave the antidote to the poison, and the doctors in charge of Sir William soon did the rest. And a point which all along had baffled Harry Wharton & Co.—namely, the disappearance of Marsden—was also cleared up. Later it transpired that there were defalcations in his accounts, and, fearing that his rascality would be discovered, he had fled within an hour of Sir William having been taken ill. That the rascally secretary had nothing to do with the Rafia was speedily proved.

The dreaded Rafia was now a thing of the past; its power was broken, its remaining members scattered. And this was due to William George Bunter, the most obtuse member of the Greyfriars Remove, the funkiest of funks. As Mr. Quelch remarked to Mr. Capper, the ways of this world are strange, and for a long time the Form master of the Remove turned a very lenient eye on the shortcomings of his most backward pupil; whereat Bunter, as was usual, overdid it, with the result that Mr. Quelch had occasion to cane him severely. And Mr. Quelch, with a pliant cane in his hand, was just as much a terror to William George Bunter as the masked terror of the Rafia.

THE END.

(Billy Bunter's in the limelight again next week, chums. Look out for "BILLY BUNTER'S BLUNDER!" and be prepared for something good. Another thing—order your MAGNET in good time—saves disappointment.)

"SPEEDWAY PALS!"*(Continued from previous page.)*

with spectators, and an air of expectation predominating, he experienced something of that elation which he had never ceased to feel just before a race.

Besides, to-night's meeting was one of especial significance for Jimmy. Because to-night he was to ride in the first big race of his career—the race for the Silver Wheel, in which event several prominent riders were entered.

In the pits Ron made a last examination of his speed-iron, acting as mechanic for his chum—and no better mechanic could have been at Jimmy's service. When Ron straightened from his inspection of the machine he turned towards Jimmy with a look of satisfaction.

"Your bus is in tip-top order," he said—"and she ought to be! I put in some real hard work on her yesterday; worked on her as I've never worked before. Do you know why, Jimmy?"

"Because you're a glutton for work," answered Jimmy, with a grin. "That's one reason. But if there's another, let's have it."

"There is another," said Ron, his face becoming serious all at once. "Jimmy, there are better men than Stevenson riding for the Silver Wheel to-night, but, barring one, they're not much better. The one you have to fear is Mark Dorgan."

"Yes, Ron, I know that, and I'm glad you've tuned up the old Beresford Twin thoroughly. I'll need all the extra speed I can get to make up for Dorgan's superiority on the bends. With all his experience, he's bound to beat me there."

"Jimmy, that's where you're wrong!" Ron cut in. "You're the one who must gain the advantage on the bends. Believe me, you won't have any extra bit of speed to play with, because Dorgan's riding a Volson bike."

"A Volson!" Jimmy's eyes grew hard as he echoed the name.

"This is the first time you've been up against a really formidable rider on a Volson bike, Jimmy," Ron went on, "and you can take it from me that you will be up against it! I've never seen anything like the acceleration on the Volsons. The only thing that might beat it is my invention. I'm not trying to blow. I'm only saying it might, and I hope it will."

"You don't think the present Beresford model can touch the Volson, then?" asked Jimmy.

"For durability, yes," said Ron; "but for speed, no. I've tuned your machine up to the limit, Jimmy; but if Dorgan's bike is in form he'll have you licked on the straights. It means you've got to go at the bends for all you're worth."

Out in the arena the announcer was megaphoning the result of Heat No. 3 of the Silver Wheel, naming Dorgan as the winner. The next event was the fourth heat, in which Jimmy was due to ride.

"Ron," he declared grimly, as he pulled on helmet, goggles, and gauntlet, "I've got to get through my heat to meet Dorgan in the final, and, unless the luck is against me, I ought to do it. And if Dorgan has the measure of me on the straights, then, by Jingo, it's neck or nothing for me on the curves!"

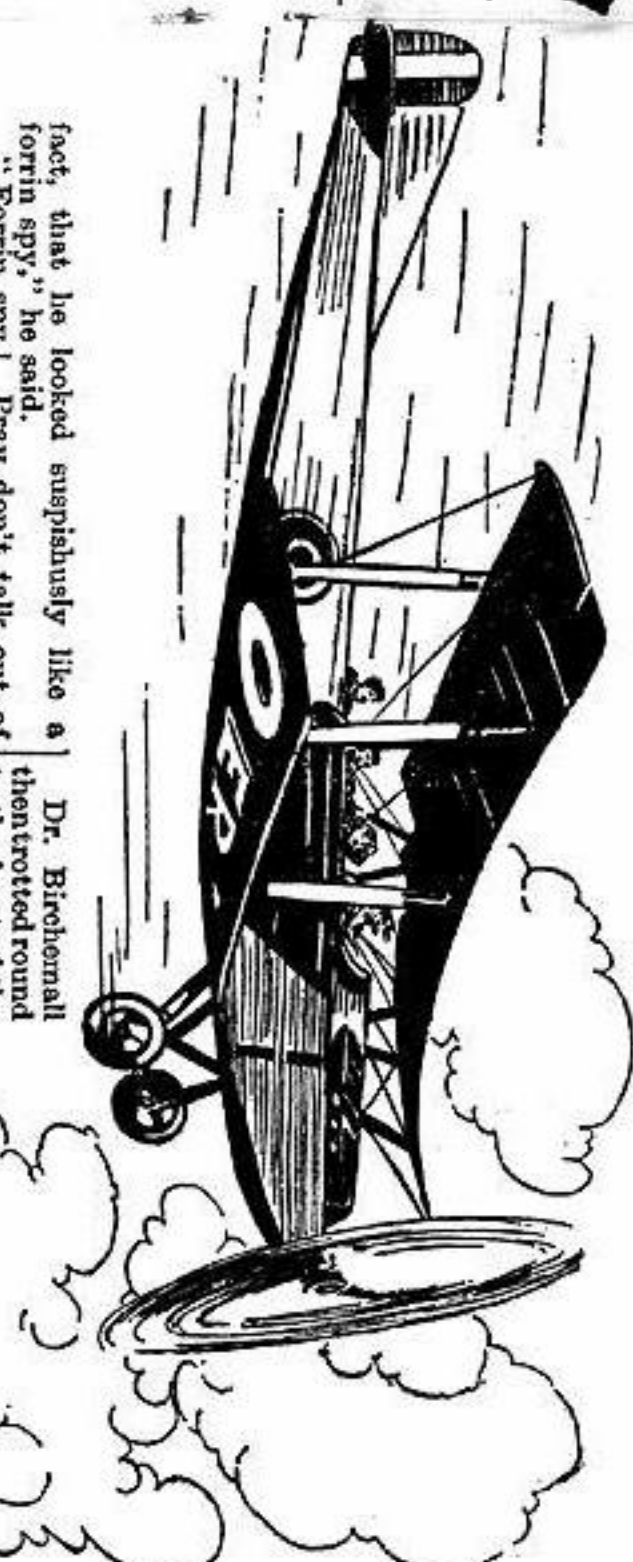
(Faced with the hardest task of his dirt-track racing career, young Jimmy Beresford is going all out to win! Meet him again in next week's thrilling instalment, chums!)

A PREZZENT from the SKY!

by Dicky Nugent.



The proud possessors of an aeroplane—that's the unique position in which Jack Jolly, Merry and Bright, the heroes of St. Sam's, find themselves. And, thereafter, as is natural, their ambitions are of a "flighty" order!



fyers reached the hedge they left the ground and eggs—perceived the eggshattering sensation of soaring into the air.

Leaning over the side, the juniors saw the green fields and pastures of their native land getting smaller and smaller. St. Sam's, that noble pile of buildings they loved so well, soon looked like a blot on the landscape.

Jack Jolly & Co. began to look on life from a different angle.

Meanwhile, Dr. Birchmell was having a very worried time of it in the pilot's seat. Boasting about his abilities as an airman on the safety of terra-firma was one thing, but piloting an aeroplane in mid-air was a horse of a different color, so to speak.

When the Head found that he was really in the air he became all at sea. His senses swam, and grave waves of terror swept over him. He grew red in the face and soon degenerated into a state of blue funk, for he felt that his dying day had come.

Something, however, had to be done; that much was certain. So the Head did something! He did too much, in fact. He opened out the throttle and shut it again; he wriggled the controls and clutched at his scanty hair, and in short behaved like a prize idiot all round.

The results were awfully alarming. The aeroplane nose-dived, spiralled, looped the loop, flew upside down, and performed the most eggshattering feats.

Jack Jolly & Co. clung on like grim death and wondered what the merry dickens was happening. It was all like some garsty interlude to them. One minute they would be looking up at the sky and the next at the rare English countryside, then, with a dull thud, they would hit a gloomy-looking cloud and disappear in the mist for a few seconds.

All at once they felt they were getting near the earth again. A noble pile of buildings seemed to rush up to meet them. "Grate pip! We're going to hit St. Sam's!" yelled Jack Jolly.

The juniors turned pale. But by a miracle they escaped being impaled on the spires and turrets of the old school. How it happened they didn't know—nor did the pilot, as a matter of fact. But, somehow, he righted things just in time, and with the grace of a rooster in flight the aeroplane swooped down into the quad of St. Sam's, and drew up right in front of the School House steps.

Of course, the aeroplane was surrounded immediately, and grave was the surprise of the crowd when they saw Jack Jolly & Co. and Dr. Birchmell jump out.

"What the merry dickens—" gasped Durleigh of the Sixth.

"Am I dreaming, or do my eyes deceive me?" asked Falloway, his pal.

Then a deafening cheer went up as the crowd realised that they were not suffering from a Lucy Nations and that their unexpected visitors from the air were indeed the persons they seemed to be.

All St. Sam's buzzed with excitement for the rest of the day, and the general opinion was that high jinks would be forthcoming if Dr. Birchmell continued his career in the air.

Little did St. Sam's dream, however, what form those high jinks would take!

THE END.

(The story and read the next yarn in this amusing series, entitled—KAPUTURED BY ALIEN!) You'll roar with laughter over it!

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"A IRRYPLANES!" said Jack Jolly, the captain of the Fourth at St. Sam's, listening to a dull drone that came from outside his study window.

"Blow the airplanes!" said Bright, "They're awfully common round here since they set up that Air Force depot at Potshot Camp. Never mind them. The problem is what are we going to do this afternoon?"

"I suggest a walk to Muggleton, and tea in the bunshop," said Jack Jolly. "Does that meet the bill?"

"Yes, rather!" grinned Merry and Bright, for they knew that their leader had just received a whacking remittance from home.

The chums of the Fourth put on their school caps and prepared to go out. But before they were quite ready, an unwelcome visitor had poked his head round the door of the study—no less a person than Dr. Birchmell, the revered and majestic headmaster of St. Sam's.

"Going out, boys?" asked the Head, grinning all over his face.

"Oh, no, sir!" replied Jack Jolly, sarcastically, for the question was obviously unnecessary.

"Then why are you putting on your caps?"

"So as to keep our feet warm!" grinned the captain of the Fourth.

"Ha, ha, ha!" Dr. Birchmell frowned.

"If you're trying to make me look a silly ass, Jolly—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"We're not, sir," chuckled Jack. "I was using the Latin phrase meaning 'beneath your dignity.' Don't you think it would be beneath your dignity to be seen feeding your face in the company of juniors?"

"The Head nodded.

"Perhaps you're right, Jolly. But the feed will, I hope, atone for the loss of dignity I shall suffer. Come! We are wasting time!"

And Dr. Birchmell, beaming cheerfully, whisked out of the study.

Jack Jolly & Co. had no option but to follow. The Head's word was law at St. Sam's, and to have argued the loss any further would have been asking for trouble.

The party therefore started out for their walk, and Jack Jolly knowing what the Head's appetite was like, roofingly wondered how much would be left of the remittance by the time they returned.

As things turned out, however, Jack Jolly need not have worried at all. The tastes had already decided that the party was not to reach Muggleton that day. Something was going to happen to stop them half-way.

That something was an aeroplane. Now air-planes, as Bright had remarked, were awfully common in the St. Sam's district—Potshot Camp, which was only a few miles away, having recently been made an Air Force depot. So when the Head and his unwilling hosts heard the drone of a machine above their heads, they took no notice.

It was only when the aeroplane came down in the field then they happened to be crossing and stopped near them that they glared at it. Then they began to get interested.

"Dear me! The pilot is getting out," eggshattered Dr. Birchmell. "What the merry dickens is he doing of, I wonder?"

"It looks as if he's beckoning to us, sir," said Jack Jolly.

"Perhaps he wants to know the time."

"Very likely, Jolly. Let's trot over and see."

The St. Sam's party crossed over to the plane, and the pilot, whose face wore a strangely furtive expression, waved his hand in greeting.

"Good afternoon, gentlemen!" he said, speaking with an accent which sounded slightly foreign to Jack Jolly's sharp ears.

"Was it?" asked the Head, rather puzzled. "What day eggshattered are you referring to, my good sir?"

"Ach! You no understand. I mean now—vot you call to-day—it vos fine."

"Oh, I follow you! Yes, it was—I mean, is!" grinned the Head. "Is there anything we can do for you, sir?"

"Ach, yes! Do you live near here, don't you, yes, no?"

"Oh, yes, I am the headmaster of St. Sam's, that grade college you see across the fields," replied Dr. Birchmell, jerking his thumb in the direction of the grey old pile of buildings in the distance.

"Dot vos good. You can gif me her help, then. I wish to call on der Camp—vot you call, Potshot—and vizzit my old friend Colonel Flyhard."

"Indeed!" murmured the Head, greatly impressed by the airman's mention of that famous name.

"But I no wish him to learn I come by der air-planes," went on the stranger from the sky with a cunning smile that made Jack Jolly & Co. immensely dislike him.

"I make vot you call der pull of der leg. I have him on foot, isn't it? Ho, ho, ho!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared the Head, always willing to be pleased—to gentlemen who mixed in high society. "But then, what are you going to do with the giddy aeroplane, if you want to keep it dark?"

"Dot vos chust where you come in," chuckled the airman. "While I stay mit my friend, der Colonel, you can help me by looking after der aeroplane."

Dr. Birchmell's eyes fairly danced. "Grate pip! I'll do that, with pleasure!" he beamed. "How long will you be gone?"

"Der fortunate or der tree weeks, perhaps, maybe."

A fortnite or three weeks? And you want me to look after the aeroplane all that time?

"Ach, yes!" said the stranger. "You do dis for me isn't it, yes, no?"

"What-ho!" grinned Dr. Birchmell. "Rely on me, old scout; I'll keep it safe and sound until your return."

"Dot vos ver good. I feel it, den, mit you. And now I go, mit myself. Good-bye!"

And with a wave of his hand, the mysterious pilot hopped it.

Jack Jolly & Co. stared after him, then stared at the aeroplane. To be left with an aeroplane on their hands was rather an unusual experience so far as our heroes were concerned; in fact, they couldn't remember the last time it had happened.

Even to the Head such an event didn't happen very often, and he was as eggshattered as a tag over this gift from the skies.

"Few! What a bit of luck, boys!" he eggshattered gleefully, fairly glowing over his new possession.

Jack Jolly, however, felt a bit dubious about it.

"I'm not so sure, sir," he murmured, frowning his youthful brow in thought. "I can't say I liked the look of that pilot. It struck me there was something fishy about him. That yarn about his being pally with Colonel Flyhard sounded all bunkum to me."

"Oh, rats!" cried Merry and Bright. "I thought he looked a very decent sort of cove, myself."

"But Jack Jolly still shook his head. "I can't help thinking, as a matter of fact, that he looked suspiciously like a forrinn spy," he said.

"Forrinn spy! Pray don't talk out of the back of your neck, Jolly," scoffed the Head scornfully. "Anyway, spy or not, we've got the use of his aeroplane for a week or two, and that's not to be sneezed at. I vote we start up the old bus and eggshatter the clouds."

Jack Jolly & Co. forgot all about forrinn spies at that brilliant suggestion. They turned their attention instead to the prezzent from the sky which had so unexpectedly fallen at their feet.

II.

THEY found nothing suspicious about the aeroplane; no dark and sinister feelers such as might have been eggshattered in the aeroplane of a forrinn spy. The machine possessed wings, a tale, an engine and a propeller just as if it belonged to any ordinary honest airman. It looked a pretty site as it stood there glittering in the sunshine.

"This is something like!" grinned Dr. Birchmell, eggshattering his prize with a professional eye. "Note the delicate three-speed gear and the nifty free-wheel action."

Jack Jolly & Co. were rather surprised to hear the Head talking of the intricate mechanism of the machine so glibly.

"I suppose you know a lot about the air, sir?" suggested Jack Jolly, more respectfully.

"I should just think I do!" replied Dr. Birchmell airily. "My nollidge of aeronautics, Jolly, dates back to the time when I used to patronise the kaptive balloon at the Crystal Palace. That alone should convince you that I am no mere novice when it comes to flying."

"Are you certified, then?" asked Merry, with interest.

"Merry! How dare you? You are well aware that my sanity was established before they discharged me from Muggleton Mental Hospital!" said Dr. Birchmell, with a severe frown.

"Yes, but I mean are you a certified pilot?"

"Oh, I see! Well, not eggshactly," admitted the Head, rather sheepishly. "However, I can assure you that driving this little bus will be child's play to me. Jump in and I will show you."

Jack Jolly & Co. hesitated at first, for they still felt a bit dubious of Dr. Birchmell's capabilities as a pilot. Still, if the Head was willing to risk his own neck, they reflected, there was no eggshouse for heroes like themselves to hold back. So, after the first paw, they climbed in.

"Looks as if we're going to hit something!" gasped Jack Jolly.

But no!

Just before the

Oh crumbs!

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