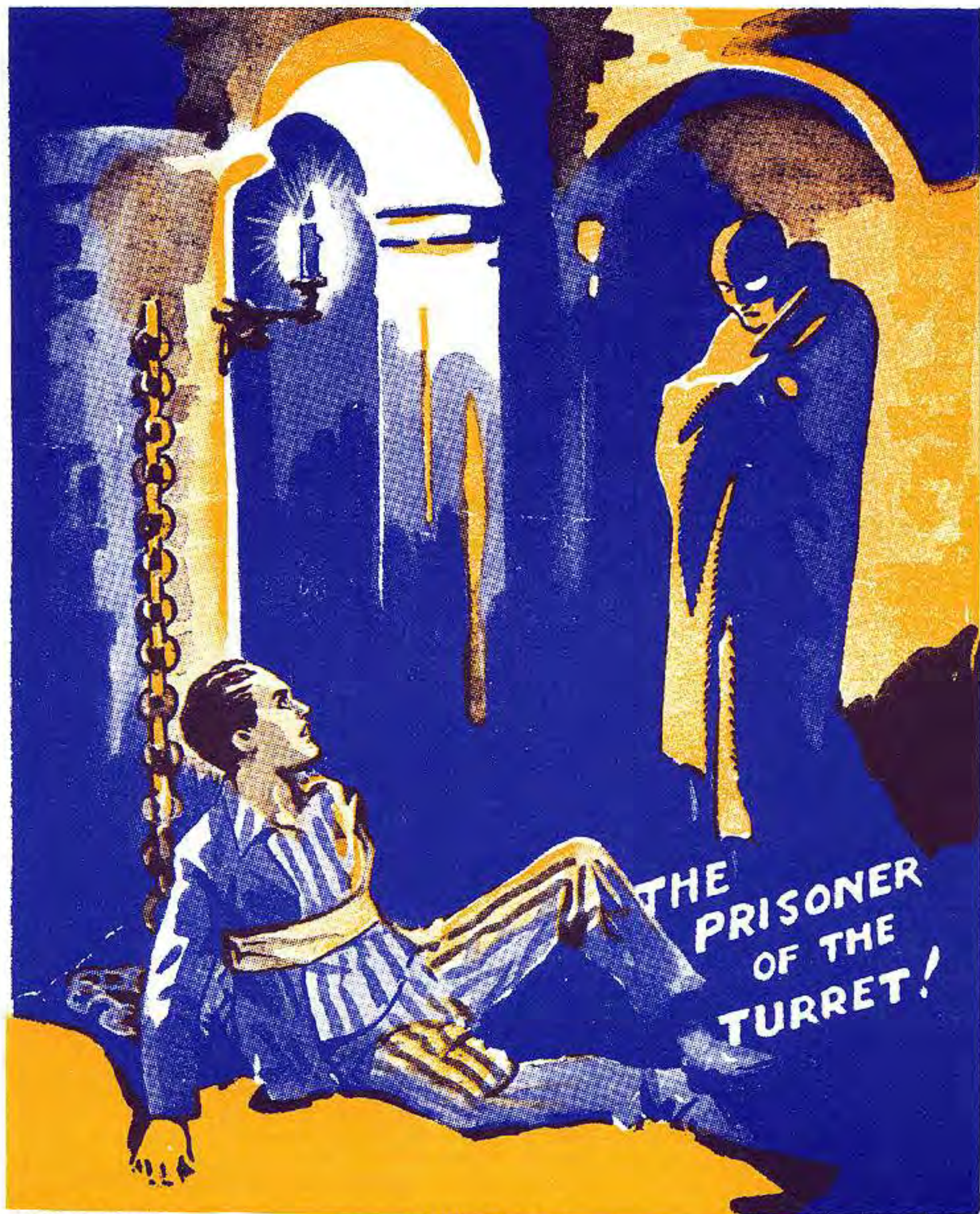


HAVE A HAPPY NEW YEAR WITH THE OLD "MAGNET."

The MAGNET^{2D}



THE
PRISONER
OF THE
TURRET!



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., The Fleetway House, Farringdon Street, London, E.C.4.

BILLY BUNTER would enjoy himself if he could visit America just now! You see, business in the restaurants there hasn't been any too good, so the proprietors have hit upon a means of bucking things up. You pay a set charge—and then you can eat as much as you like! You can have as many courses as you please, and as many helpings of each as you desire!

Luckily for the proprietors, however, there are not many people like William George Bunter living in the States, for it is estimated that only about one person in twenty asks for a second helping. When Bunter hears about this new scheme he is sure to suggest that tuckshops and restaurants in England should adopt this excellent idea! Incidentally, one of my readers suggests that Bunter's middle name should be altered from "George" to "Gorge"!

From Albert Renwick, of Fishguard, comes a curious query. He has heard that there is

A RIVER OF VINEGAR,

and asks me if it is true. He is doubtless referring to the Rio Vinagre, which is a part of the Cauca River of Columbia. No; it is not really composed of vinegar, but it contains sulphuric acid and hydrochloric acid, and is so bitter that no fish can live in it. The early travellers in the country, tasting the water of the river and having no means of analysing it, jumped to the conclusion that it was vinegar. The acid finds its way into the river from an active volcano in the neighbourhood.

ARE THEY REALLY TRUE?

asks a Leamington reader, who is interested in those "Things you'd hardly believe" which I have been publishing. I assure him they are! Here are a few more that seem unbelievable, but are vouched for on the highest authority:

A Pig was once Tried for its Life in a Court of Law! This happened in France in 1457, when a sow and her litter of six were solemnly arrested, taken to court, and tried on a charge of having murdered and eaten a child. The sow was found guilty and sentenced to death, but the six little pigs were acquitted on account of their youth!

A Transparent Man! A Chinaman named Hsieh Hsuan is said to have been born with transparent flesh. The bones

and organs of his body were plainly visible!

A Fish only a Foot in Length can Kill a Shark! One of the shark's greatest enemies is the sea hedgehog. When swallowed by a shark, this little creature first distends itself and thrusts out its spines. Then it calmly proceeds to eat its way out of the stomach and then through the side of the shark, thus killing it!

White Men Cannot Make Indian Ink! Although it is known that Indian ink is made from burnt camphor, its preparation is only known to the Chinese, who refuse to reveal the secret. All Indian ink, therefore, is made by Chinese!

At Two Places on the Earth's Surface There is no Such Thing as Time! Time depends upon longitude, and there is no longitude at the North and South Poles. Consequently there is no time at either of these spots!

DO YOU KNOW

that you can get a dandy leather pocket wallet, or a useful pocket knife absolutely free? If you don't, well, profit by the example of H. G. Martin, of 39, Longton Grove, Sydenham, S.E.26, who has won one of our special MAGNET knives for sending in the following yarn:



Brown: "There's enough wood in your head to make a rowing-boat."

Smith: "And there's enough water in yours to float it!"



Have you ever heard of

A SCHOOL WITHOUT SCHOLARS?

Nevertheless, there used to be a Free School of Lichfield, at which some of the most prominent men in English history received their education. Long after scholars had ceased to go to the school there was still a headmaster, who received a good salary, although there was no one to teach! There was, however, an ancient "flogging horse," constructed of stout timber, but—fortunately—covered with dust! Talking of old school customs, do you know that the principal scholars at Tunbridge and Lewisham once had to walk to church with garlands of flowers on their heads? Can't you imagine the riot there'd be if fellows had to do that nowadays!

Here are a few

RAPID-FIRE REPLIES

to various questions which my readers have asked me this week.

A job in a fire brigade. ("Regular Reader.") You must apply to the superintendent of your local fire brigade, at the central fire station of the town in which you live. Physical fitness and also good eyesight is essential.

The slowest liners still in use. ("Bell Buoy," I.O.W.) Most of the old slow liners were either destroyed during the War or else were broken up after the War and replaced

by more up-to-date ships. Slow liners nowadays are only used on coasting and "branch line" work. Some of them cannot do much more than ten knots.

The Bremen and her sister ships do not actually enter Southampton, but lie in Cowes Roads. For official purposes, however, passengers are counted as having embarked or disembarked at Southampton, although they make the journey from Southampton to Cowes Roads or vice versa by tender.

Publishing a story. ("Amen Road.") You must have your story neatly type-written on one side of the paper only. Then send it to the editor of a journal publishing stories of that type. A stamped and addressed envelope should be enclosed for the return of the manuscript, should it prove unsuitable. The schools you mention, although fictitious, are based upon actual schools of a similar type.

The longest living creature. (K. B., of Stonehaven.) The giant tortoise attains an age of 200 years. At the other end of the scale is the mayfly, which lives for only a day, and, having no mouth, does not eat at all!

I've just got space for a really clever limerick which earns a topping leather pocket wallet for Kenneth Rhodes, of Alma Lane, Wilmslow, Manchester.

Said Fishy one day, with a bark:
"In business I'm up to the mark.
If there's one guy who can
Do business, that man
Is Fisher T. Fish, of Noo Yark."

THERE are good things in store for you—as usual—next week, chums! Frank Richards seems to be determined to improve upon even his excellent yarns. I think he must have taken for his motto: "Every week and in every way, my stories must be better and better!" Anyway, when you've read

"BUNTER'S NIGHT OUT!"

which is the title of next week's long complete yarn of the Greyfriars chums, you'll agree with me that he has touched high-water mark! Don't miss it, chums, or you'll be disappointed!

Of course, there will be another thrilling instalment of our popular serial, while the "Greyfriars Herald" and our shorter features will round off a really "bonza" programme!

YOUR EDITOR.

WHO
SAYS

A DANDY LEATHER POCKET WALLET or a USEFUL POCKET KNIFE?

These handsome prizes are offered for Storyettes and Snappy Greyfriars Limericks. All efforts to be sent to: c/o MAGNET, 5, Carmelite Street, London, E.C.4. (Comp.).

HAVE A GO AT WINNING ONE OF THESE TOPPING PRIZES TO-DAY!

FRANK RICHARDS
AT HIS BEST.



THE FIRST CHAPTER.

Hot!

BILLY BUNTER awoke.
It was a stormy December night.

Snowflakes whirled in the winter wind that howled and roared round the ancient turrets of Mauleverer Towers.

But it was not the roar of the wind that awakened Billy Bunter.

That roar, indeed, had been barely audible in Bunter's room at Mauleverer Towers. It had been almost drowned by the deep and resonant snore that had proceeded from William George Bunter ever since his bullet head had been laid on the pillow.

Bunter awoke—hungry!

Anyone who had seen Billy Bunter at supper would never have guessed that he could possibly get hungry before morning—that is, anyone who did not know William George Bunter.

No doubt, in term-time at Greyfriars School, Bunter would have slept and snored till the rising-bell rang. In the Remove dormitory at Greyfriars there were no refreshments to be had in the middle of the night.

But at Mauleverer Towers, in holiday-time, a better state of things obtained.

There was a table beside Bunter's bed. There was a dish on the table; and on the dish was an enormous chunk of Christmas-pudding.

Christmas was over—but Christmas-pudding was still going! Bunter liked Christmas-pudding. He liked it even better than jam-tarts, or meringues, or cream-puffs. These were all good in their way—excellent, in fact. But Christmas-pudding was a thing that a fellow could bite at, and feel that he really was eating something. It gave a fellow a feeling of solid comfort, when a few pounds of it were landed in his inside.

In some matters Billy Bunter was not a thoughtful fellow. But in matters of

this kind he was very thoughtful indeed. Every night, when he went to bed at Mauleverer Towers, he took this precaution against getting hungry in the night. And every night the pudding haunted his dreams till he woke up and ate it.

Bunter sat up in bed.

"Oooooogh!" was his first remark.

It was cold.

There was a dull red glimmer from the fire, which Bunter always loaded with logs before he turned in. It had burned almost out now. It was long past midnight—near one o'clock.

"Beastly cold!" grunted Bunter.

He groped for his big spectacles, and

Christmas fun and gaiety at Mauleverer Towers is marred by the shadow of an unknown peril. Then, through Billy Bunter, the fat freak of the party, the shadow is dispelled and the secret of the turret is a dread secret no longer!

jammed them on his fat little nose. He shivered, and jerked an eiderdown over his fat shoulders. The glimmer from the dying fire showed the Christmas-pudding on the dish; and revealed a grin of happy anticipation on the fat face of William George Bunter.

He stretched out a podgy hand to the pudding.

Then he uttered an ejaculation.

"Beasts!"

There was no fork on the dish. Bunter remembered distinctly that he had placed a fork there. Evidently it had been removed. There was only one explanation of its removal. One of those beasts, Harry Wharton & Co., must have stepped in while Bunter was snoring and removed it. That, no doubt, was what the beasts would call a lark.

Christmas was over; but Lord Mauleverer's Christmas party had not broken up. Harry Wharton & Co., Hazeldene of the Remove and his sister Marjorie and Miss Clara, were staying over the New Year. And Billy Bunter, of course, was staying. A corkscrew would have been needed to extract Billy Bunter from a place where the grub was so good and so ample.

Bunter knitted his fat brows over his spectacles as he groped for the fork, and groped in vain.

"That beast, Bob Cherry," he murmured; "or Inky—or that silly ass, Nugent—or that hooligan, Bull—or that rotter, Wharton—or Hazel! One of the beasts, anyhow! Bob Cherry most likely—it's what that silly chump would think funny!"

Bunter lifted the dish to his fat knees, drawn up under the bedclothes. Most likely it was Bob Cherry who had abstracted the fork. But if the playful junior supposed that that would prevent Bunter from eating the pudding, it only showed that he did not know Bunter yet.

The fat Owl was not particular in his eating, but he would have preferred an implement of some kind. Still, he had his fat fingers, a large mouth, and a good set of teeth. He was only too thankful that Bob had taken the fork and not the pudding. That, indeed, would have been a real disaster—an irreparable catastrophe.

The pudding was still there—that was the chief thing. No implement being available, Billy Bunter lifted the pudding in his two fat hands and opened his mouth for an enormous bite. His mouth fairly watered in anticipation.

After all, this was a very agreeable way of eating a pudding—to Bunter, at least. A really good bite at a good solid pudding was one of those things that made life worth living. Bunter had no

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real objection to taking his cargo aboard in bulk.

The pudding approached his wide-open capacious mouth.

With an ecstatic smile, Bunter made a bite at it—a huge bite, a bite of which the great, huge bear need not have been ashamed—and his mouth, large as it was, was filled to capacity.

And then—

"Ooooooch! Woooooch! Groooooch!"

Bunter spluttered wildly.

"Gug-gug-gug-gug!"

The pudding dropped from his hands and rolled to the floor. The dish slid from his knees and followed it, cracking as it fell. Bunter did not heed either.

He gasped and gurgled and spluttered and puffed and blew!

"Wooooogh! Oooooch! Beast! Oooooh! Mustard! Groooooch! Oh crumbs! Oh crikey! Oooooooch!"

His eyes streamed water. Fragments of pudding were ejected in a shower over the bed. Bunter gurgled and gasped frantically.

"Oh! Beast! Oooooch! Gug-gug!"

Evidently that late visit had not been paid to his room merely for the purpose of abstracting the fork. Indeed, it was clear now that the fork had only been taken away to induce Bunter to bite at the pudding itself. And mustard had been introduced into the pudding—plenty of mustard—lots of mustard—tons, it seemed to Bunter, of mustard.

"Groooooooch!"

Mustard as a condiment was all very well. Taken unexpectedly in large quantities it was far from well.

Bunter coughed and spluttered and sneezed and gurgled. He rolled out of bed at last, and gurgled water from a jug to cool his mouth. But it was not easy to wash away the flavour of the mustard. Whoever had introduced that mustard into the Christmas-pudding had done his work not wisely but too well. Bunter had taken only a mouthful—but Bunter's mouthfuls were an outsize! He seemed to be full of mustard—reeking with mustard—scorching with mustard.

"Oh dear! Beast! Rotter! Oh crikey! Groooooch! Oooooch! Oh crumbs! Urrrrrrrrgggh!"

There was, as the poet has expressed it, a sound of revelry by night! For ten minutes at least Billy Bunter gurgled and gasped and coughed and sneezed. And when, as the youthful Macaulay would have put it, the agony had abated, Bunter blinked mournfully at the pudding. Hungry as he was, he could not eat that pudding! Bunter liked his Christmas-pudding hot—but not so hot as this!

"Beast!" hissed Bunter.

There was no pudding for him that night; and that was the unkindest cut of all!

His eyes gleamed behind his spectacles.

The worm will turn!

Vengeance was in Bunter's thoughts. He was not a vengeful fellow as a rule; but there are some injuries past forgiveness, and depriving a fellow of his pudding was surely one of them.

"The—the—the awful beast—Groooooch! I'll jolly well take that—ooooch!—pudding, and jam it on his—woooooch!—face, and see if he—ugh!—likes it! Beast!"

And having "fielded" the pudding, Bunter rolled to his door, his little round eyes gleaming vengeance behind his big round spectacles.

He opened the door and blinked into the passage.

All was dark; deeply dark, save for a

glimmer of star-light and snow from the high window at the end of the corridor. All was silent, save for the wail of the wind over the old roofs.

Pudding in hand, Billy Bunter crept out into the dusky corridor, and tiptoed along to Bob Cherry's room. Silently he opened the door and tiptoed in.

THE SECOND CHAPTER.

The Unseen Hand!

BOB CHERRY was fast asleep.

A glimmer of wintry starlight from the window showed his healthy, ruddy face on the white pillow.

Billy Bunter grinned as he blinked at it.

He paused by the bedside, pudding in hand.

He had no doubt that it was Bob who had introduced the mustard into the pudding. Anyhow, it was one of the beasts. Bob, at all events, was going to get it.

If Bob Cherry was dreaming, probably it was of football matches to come, next term at Greyfriars. Certainly he was not dreaming of a fat Owl on vengeance bent.

He slept peacefully, unconscious of peril.

Billy Bunter lifted the pudding.

Squash!

It descended suddenly, fairly on the face of the sleeper.

"He, he, he!"

Bunter gurgled with glee.

"Oooooooch!" came spluttering from the unfortunate Bob.

The pudding squashed all over his face, and he came with a jump out of the land of dreams. His eyes opened—and filled with pudding. His mouth opened, and likewise filled. Pudding squashed all over his features. Life was full of surprises; but never had Bob Cherry been so surprised as he was now.

He started up wildly.

"Oooooch! Groooooch! What—Oooooch! Wooooch! Atchoo—atchoo—atchoo!" Some of the mustard seemed to be in Bob's nose. He sneezed frantically. "Oh crumbs! Oooch! Atchoooooch!"

"He, he, he!" cachinnated Bunter.

"Oh crikey! What—ooooch!—gug-gug-gug—Woooooch!" spluttered Bob, grabbing at squashed pudding, and gouging it from eyes and nose and mouth. "Ooooooh! What—"

"He, he, he!"

Bunter backed to the door.

Bob leaped from the bed. He was utterly amazed and astounded, and hardly knew what had happened to him; but he heard the familiar fat cachinnation of Billy Bunter, and he knew that the fat Owl was there. He stood grabbing at the pudding clinging to his face, and glaring round for Bunter.

"You fat villain! What—groooooch! What—Oh, my hat! I'll spicicate you! Oh crumbs! What—"

"He, he, he!"

Bunter emitted that final chuckle as he reached the door. Bob plunged after him.

The door closed behind Bunter, slamming as Bob reached it. Billy Bunter raced down the dark corridor towards his own room. He had no time to waste. Just vengeance having been exacted, Bunter was anxious to get behind a locked door, before Bob Cherry could execute vengeance in his turn. He went along the corridor with a speed

that was remarkable, considering the weight he had to carry.

Crash!

"Oh!" gasped Bunter, as he reeled.

The corridor was not vacant now. A dark figure loomed in the darkness, and Bunter crashed into it before he knew it was there.

He heard a heavy fall, as he reeled from the shock.

Whoever it was he had crashed into, the victim had been sent sprawling by the terrific impact of Bunter's avoirdupois.

"Ow!" gasped Bunter.

He staggered blindly, and sprawled headlong over the sprawling, panting figure that he had hurled over.

A savage grasp fastened on him.

"Ow! Beast! Leggo!" panted Bunter.

The sudden collision in the dark had taken him utterly by surprise. Who it was he had crashed into he did not know; but he took it for granted that it was some member of the Co., Wharton or Nugent, Johnny Bull, or Hurree Singh—or perhaps Lord Maul-everer or Hazeldene. Whoever it was, Bunter had no time to stop; Bob Cherry's door was already opening. He struggled frantically to escape.

"Ow! Beast! Leggo!" gurgled Bunter.

He smashed out wildly with his fat fists.

He heard a grunting gasp, as one fat fist landed. The grasp on him was like iron; even in those startled moments Bunter realised that that grasp was not the grasp of a schoolboy, but of a strong and powerful man.

Crash!

Bunter gave a wild yell as a blow descended on his head. It was a clenched fist that struck; but the blow came with fearful force, landing like the stroke of a hammer.

A thousand stars danced before Bunter's vision, as his fat senses spun. Only that one howl escaped him. Then he rolled on the floor, stunned.

There was a sound, for a second or two, of running feet. It died away into immediate silence.

Bunter lay senseless on the floor.

A moment later running feet were heard again—this time the feet of Bob Cherry. Bob, with sticky pudding smudged all over his face, and mustard in his nose and mouth, was not in his usual good temper. He wanted to get hold of Bunter—and he wanted it bad.

He came along the dark corridor as if he were on the cinder-path. He uttered a startled exclamation as he stumbled over Bunter, and went headlong.

Bump!

"Oh!"

Bob Cherry sprawled on his hands and knees. His nose tapped on the hard oak floor.

"Oh! Ow! Oh crumbs! You fat villain!" he gasped.

He scrambled up, and grasped "Bunter."

"Now, you podgy porpoise—"

It was dark, and he could not see Bunter; but he knew that it was the fat Owl he had hold of. There was no mistaking the ample circumference of that podgy form.

To his surprise Bunter made no effort to escape. No sound or movement came from the fat junior.

"Bunter, you fat rotter—" gasped Bob.

A door along the corridor opened, and a light gleamed out. Harry Wharton stared into the passage. The



Squash! The pudding descended suddenly, fairly on the face of the sleeper. "There, you beast!" said Bunter. "Groooooogh!" spluttered Bob Cherry, as he came with a jump out of the land of dreams, to find his eyes and mouth filled with pudding.

noise had awakened the captain of the Greyfriars Remove.

"What on earth's up?" he exclaimed.

"Hallo, hallo, hallo! Turn on the passage light," called out Bob. "It's that fat villain Bunter—I was going to spifficate him; but he seems to be in a fit or something—"

"My hat!"

"Or else he's gammoning," growled Bob. "That's more likely!"

Harry Wharton switched on the light in the corridor. He ran up to the spot, and stared down at Bunter.

The fat junior lay on his back, his eyes closed behind the big spectacles that had slipped down his fat little nose. Either he was unconscious, or else he was playing the part extremely well.

"What the thump—"

Other doors were opening along the corridor now. Frank Nugent and Johnny Bull came on the scene, and then Hurreo Jamset Ram Singh, and a moment or two later Lord Mauleverer. His lordship had delayed to encase himself in dressing-gown and slippers, before he emerged to see what the row was about.

"Oh gad!" ejaculated Mauly. "What the merry deuce—"

"What on earth's the matter with Bunter?" exclaimed Nugent. "What's he doing out of bed?"

Another door opened, and Hazeldene came out. All the Greyfriars juniors who were guests at Mauleverer Towers had their rooms on the same corridor.

Hazeldene stared at the scene, and then stared at Bob Cherry's face, which was rather remarkable in its aspect, clothed with squashed pudding as with a garment.

"What on earth's the game?" asked Hazel. "You'll wake the whole house at this rate."

"Something seems to have happened to Bunter," said Harry Wharton, in wonder. "Look at him!"

"But what the thump did he come out of his room for?" asked Nugent.

"He came to my room," said Bob. "I was woke up suddenly. The silly Owl jammed a pudding all over my face—there was mustard in it—"

The juniors stared at him.

"Ha, ha, ha!" yelled Hazel. "He thought you had put the mustard in his pudding, old bean!"

"What?"

Hazel roared.

"I doctored his pudding with mustard," he explained. "I thought it would rather amuse him when he woke up and ate it!"

"Oh gad!" ejaculated Lord Mauleverer.

"Oh!" exclaimed Bob. "And the silly ass fancied that I had done it, I suppose, and came along and mopped the pudding over me."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"But—but I never touched him," said Bob. "He bolted, and slammed the door after him. I came after the fat

chump, and fell over him in the dark—he was lying here—"

"Well, what's the matter with him?"

"Goodness knows!"

Harry Wharton had knelt beside Bunter and lifted his head. Bunter's head rested against Wharton's arm, but his eyes remained closed, and he seemed hardly to breathe. It was plain that the fat junior was not shamming. He was unconscious.

"Must be a fit!" said Lord Mauleverer. "Does Bunter have fits?"

"Might have fallen over and banged his head," said Hazel. "He's silly ass enough."

"Look here! There's a bruise on his head," said Bob. "Look! He's had a knock—"

"Bunged it into the wall in the dark!" said Johnny Bull.

"Blessed if I see how he could! But I—"

"Get him back to bed," said Harry Wharton. "You fellows lend me a hand."

Not without difficulty, the fat Owl of the Remove was lifted and carried back to his room. There he was laid on the bed, and while the other fellows stood round, Harry Wharton bathed his face with a wet sponge. Bunter's eyes opened before long.

He blinked dizzily at the faces round him.

"Ow! Keep him off!" he moaned.

"It's all right, old bean," said Harry

soothingly. "You're a silly owl, but Bob's not going to whop you!"

"You silly idiot!"

"Eh?"

"I mean him!" gasped Bunter. "Not Bob, you dummy! Him!"

"Him! Who?"

"The man who banged me on the head—"

"The—the man? What man?"

"The man I ran into in the dark." Bunter shuddered with terror, and his eyes wandered round the room as if in search of the unseen assailant. "I say, you fellows, stay with me! Don't leave me alone! Oh dear!"

"Wandering in his mind!" murmured Nugent.

"Oh, really, Nugent! I tell you he knocked me silly—"

"Not much of a knock needed," said Hazel.

"Beast! I say, you fellows, stay with me—keep him off—oh dear— Help, I say—"

Billy Bunter's voice trailed away in a feeble squeak, and he relapsed into unconsciousness, leaving Harry Wharton & Co. staring at one another blankly.

THE THIRD CHAPTER.

The Secret Enemy!

HARRY WHARTON & CO. stood silent. What had happened was a mystery to them; but it began to look as if something had happened. Frank Nugent was bathing the bruise on Bunter's head. The fat Owl's eyes had opened again, blinking dizzily over his spectacles. Evidently Bunter was in a state of terror, and his fat senses had been scattered by the thump on his head. That knock might have been caused by

a fall, and certainly nothing had been seen or heard of an assailant. But a startling thought was in Harry Wharton's mind.

"If Bunter really was handled by somebody in the dark—" said Wharton slowly.

"What rot!" yawned Hazel. "He fell over and bumped his silly napper!"

"But he says—"

"Just funk," said Hazel. "He fancied things in the dark. I'm going back to bed."

The Famous Five and Lord Mauleverer remained in Bunter's room. They did not feel disposed to leave the Owl of the Remove in his present state.

"You fellows remember," said Wharton quietly, "the day before Christmas Eve, some unknown villain tried to get at Lord Mauleverer. The man who wrote him threatening letters, asking for money. He got into Mauly's room and chloroformed him, and it was only by luck that he was interrupted. Is it that scoundrel again?"

"Oh gad!" ejaculated Lord Mauleverer.

His lordship had almost forgotten that incident. He had taken it for granted that the unknown rascal who had attempted to kidnap him had been frightened off. Nothing had been heard of the mysterious prowler during Christmas.

"Oh, my hat!" said Nugent. "That may be it! I thought we were done with that villain, whoever he is. Inspector Rymer is still looking for him—"

"But he hasn't found him!" said Harry.

Johnny Bull gave a low whistle.

"If it was that villain after Mauly again, it was lucky that Bunter was

playing the goat to-night," he said. "But—"

"I say, you fellows—"

"Bunter, old chap," said Harry, "try to speak sensibly for once. Did you really run into somebody in the dark?"

"Oh, really, Wharton—"

Bunter rubbed his head.

"Don't splash water down my neck, you silly idiot," he said to Nugent. "You've made my hair all wet, you dummy!"

Nugent grinned. This was Bunter's way of tendering thanks for his attention to the bruise.

"Give me a towel, somebody!" grunted Bunter. Apparently the fat Owl was feeling better.

"Look here, Bunter—"

"Give me a towel, blow you!"

"Give the howling ass a towel, somebody. Now, Bunter—"

"Dripping water down a fellow's neck!" said Bunter, with a glare at Nugent through his spectacles. "Clumsy ass! If you had any sense—"

"Cheese it, fathead!" said Harry. "Look here! Did you run into somebody?"

"Yes, I did!" growled Bunter, as he towelled his fat neck. "I thought it was one of you beasts at first. But it was a man—as strong as a horse, too. He grabbed me like—like a tiger! I knocked him right and left—"

"You whatted?"

"Knocked him right and left! But he was too strong for me. He gave me a fearful blow on the head with a life-preserver or something—"

"Oh, rot!"

"It might have been the butt of a revolver—"

"Gammon!" grunted Johnny Bull.

"I've got a bruise!" howled Bunter. "I was stunned! I was absolutely senseless—"

"That's nothing new."

"Beast! It might have been his fist," said Bunter. "Anyhow, it was a frightful coah. I felt a sickening thud—same as they do in detective novels. After that, I knew no more."

"You weren't frightened in the dark, and you didn't fall over and bang your silly napper on the wall?" asked Johnny Bull.

"No!" roared Bunter. "It was all that beast Cherry's fault! Putting mustard into a fellow's pudding—"

"You fat idiot!" said Bob. "That was Hazel. I knew nothing about it till Hazel told us."

"Oh!" said Bunter. "Well, I knew it was one of you, and I'm jolly glad I jammed the pudding over your chivvy. Serve you jolly well right!"

"And you really think somebody was there, and he collared you?" asked Harry Wharton, eyeing the fat Owl very dubiously.

"Yes, you silly ass! And I jolly well know who it was!"

"Who, then?"

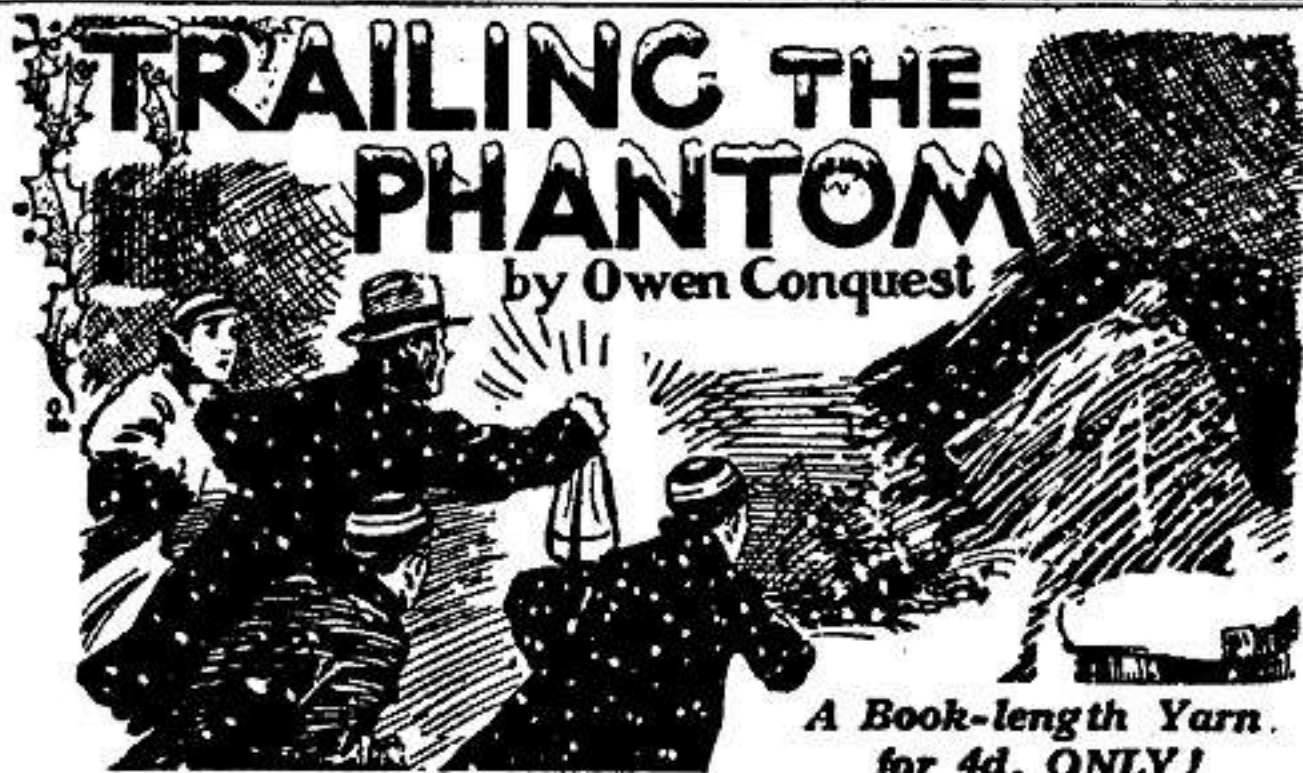
"That beast who was after Mauly before Christmas, that I saved Mauly from before," said Bunter. "I don't know who the beast is, of course; but it was the same man right enough. And he would have got Mauly again if I hadn't collared him."

"He seems to have collared you."

"It comes to the same thing! I've saved Mauly's life a second time. Not that I expect thanks!" said Bunter bitterly.

"Oh gad!" said Lord Mauleverer.

"The fact is, he didn't exactly collar me," went on Bunter. The fat Owl's fertile imagination was already at work. Bunter never could tell a plain, unvarnished tale. "The—the actual fact



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is, that I saw him lurking in the passage, and collared him. Thinking that he was after Mauly, I rushed at him, and—and seized him. You know my reckless courage."

"Oh crumbs!"

"But for his revolver I should have had him. But when he fired——"

"Fired!" yelled Nugent.

"I—I mean, when he clubbed the revolver and knocked me senseless, what could a fellow do? I remember now that he had a revolver. I saw it distinctly."

"In the dark?"

"I mean, I felt it—felt it distinctly. I think he had a knife, too—I mean, I know he had a knife. A long, glittering blade, same as they have on the films——"

"Too much like a film altogether!" grinned Johnny Bull. "This is what comes of going to the pictures."

"Beast! He had a revolver in one hand and a knife in the other, when he seized me by the throat in a steely grip——"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Blessed if I see anything to cackle at!" roared Bunter. "You fellows would have been jolly scared, and chance it!"

"Well, it was enough to startle a fellow, if a man with a revolver in one hand, and a knife in the other, seized you by the throat!" chuckled Bob Cherry. "What hand did he do it with?"

"Must have had three hands!" chortled Johnny Bull.

"I—I mean——"

"You mean that you're telling thumping lies, as usual!" grunted Johnny Bull. "There never was anybody at all."

"My esteemed chums!" murmured Hurree Jamsot Ram Singh. "The nabob's dusky brow was wrinkled in thought. 'My esteemed and absurd chums, if there was a ridiculous person in the passage, he must have got out of the house, and by searchfully looking we shall find that a window or a door has been opened——'"

"Better look," agreed Wharton. "We can't believe a word that fat duffer says."

"Don't you leave me alone!" howled Bunter. "He may come back! Some of you stay with me."

"You can lock your door, fathead. The man—if there was a man—can't get in through the keyhole."

"Look here, I'd rather you fellows sat up with me till morning."

"Bow-wow!"

"Beasts!"

Billy Bunter had to be contented with locking his door after the juniors left him. Having locked it, and dragged a table and an armchair against it as an additional precaution, the fat Owl returned to bed, and about a minute later his deep snore was re-awakening the echoes.

The juniors returned to their rooms to dress, and met in the passage again.

Lord Mauleverer had a rather worried look.

"Look here, you men," said his lordship. "There's nothin' in it, only that fat duffer's gammon. We don't want to wake the house, and alarm my uncle and aunt, and the girls. I'll call Porson and Orris, and we'll trot round quietly, you know. We shan't find anythin'."

But Mauly proved to be mistaken.

Porson, the butler, and Orris, Mauly's valet, were called, and the search began. One of the first rooms entered was the library, and as they entered it a cold draught of air showed that a window was open.

"Oh gad!" said Mauleverer.

He stared blankly at an open casement, through which the December wind howled, scattering snowflakes within the room.

"Somebody's been here!" exclaimed Bob.

"Then—then Bunter was right!" said Harry Wharton. "There's been somebody in the house, Mauly."

"Looks like it, by Jove!"

"This window has been forced from outside, my lord!" said Orris. "Some person has forced an entrance."

"Oh dear!" groaned Lord Mauleverer. "That means the bobbies here again in the morning. What a life!"

"Shall I ring up the police at once, my lord?" asked Porson.

"No fear! The mornin' will be soon enough," answered Lord Mauleverer. "The johnny's far enough away by this time. Leave it till the mornin'. I'm goin' back to bed."

"Perhaps your lordship would like me

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to sleep in your lordship's dressing-room," suggested Orris. "I should be very glad——"

"Not at all necessary, thanks!" said Lord Mauleverer. "Go back to bed, Orris; you, too, Porson. Come on, you men. I'm jolly sleepy! The sportsman won't come back to-night."

The Greyfriars fellows returned to their quarters, leaving the butler and Orris to secure the window.

"You're not going to be left alone to-night, Mauly," said Harry Wharton. "The rotter's not likely to come back; but he might, when all's quiet. Two of us are going to camp in your room."

"My dear men, you'll spoil your night's rest——"

"Rot! It isn't long to morning, now, anyhow."

"Look here, then, I'll ring for Orris. He offered——"

"Bosh! We're going to look after you, fathead!"

"But it's rough on you, old beans——"

"Rats!"

Lord Mauleverer had to give in. Wharton passed the rest of the night rolled in rugs on a settee in Mauly's room, and Bob Cherry slept on a bed in the dressing-room, with the doors on the corridor locked.

Whether the secret enemy made another attempt during the hours of darkness that remained, they did not know; but if he did, he found that there was nothing doing, for there had been no alarm when the winter sun peeped at last in at the windows.

THE FOURTH CHAPTER.

Brave Bunter!

BUNTER!"

"Don't bother!"

"Turn out, fatty!"

"Shan't!"

"It's ten o'clock!" said Harry Wharton.

"I don't care if it's eleven—or twelve!" said Bunter. "I've been injured, stunned senseless, looking after Mauleverer, and I'm not going to get up. I've had brokker in bed, and I'm going to have lunch in bed, and——"

"You're giving the servants here a fearful lot of trouble, Bunter," said Wharton.

"Eh? What are servants for?" asked Bunter.

Harry Wharton did not answer that question. Billy Bunter gave him a disdainful blink.

"You should see the way I order 'em about at Bunter Court," he said. "I never lift a finger for myself! But, of course, we keep more servants at Bunter Court than Mauly does here. Better trained, too! There's nothing to grin at, Wharton! I can tell you that if that man, Orris, for instance, was my valet instead of Mauly's, he would be sacked pretty quick. He's cheeky. So's Porson. Now, our butler——"

"Turn out, you fat piffler," said Harry. "Inspector Rymor has come over again from Winchester, and he wants to hear about what happened last night."

"Tell him to come up here," answered Bunter.

"He's with Sir Reginald Brooke and Mauly in the library."

"They can all come up."

"Well, if you really can't get out of bed——"

"I can't!"

"Then I'll help you."

"Here, I say, stoppit! Yarooop! I can get out! I'm getting out—beast!" roared Bunter.

Bunter got out quite quickly, with Harry Wharton's vigorous assistance. He smote the floor with a resounding smite, and roared.

"Now!" said Harry. "If you're not down in ten minutes I'll come back and roll you down the stairs."

"Beast!"

Bunter was down in ten minutes. His ablutions did not take him long; they never did. When he rolled down he found the Famous Five in the hall, talking with Hazeldene and his sister Marjorie, and Miss Clara. Mauly's aunt, Lady Brooke, was with them. All the group looked at Bunter; and the fat junior immediately assumed an air of suffering. A fellow who had been knocked senseless by a midnight prowler had a right to do so, in Bunter's opinion.

"Good-morning, my dear boy!" said Lady Brooke. "I hope you are feeling no ill effects——"

Bunter blinked at the kind old lady. "I'm not the fellow to complain, ma'am," he answered, with an air of heroic fortitude. "I've got a fearful pain in my head where that villain coshed me with his revolver."

"Did he have a revolver?" asked Miss Clara, with interest.

"Yes—and a knife!" said Bunter. "One in each hand."

"And a machine-gun up his sleeve!" said Bob Cherry gravely.

"Oh, really, Cherry—"

"For goodness' sake, Bunter, tell Inspector Rymer the truth!" said Harry Wharton. "Keep the frills for us, you know."

"I shall tell the bobby the facts, of course!" said Bunter calmly. "The villain was armed to the teeth. You fellows would like to make out that I wasn't in awful danger when I tackled him."

"Did you tackle him?" asked Clara.

"Rushed at him and seized him by the throat!" said Bunter. "Seizing him in a grip of iron, I bore him—"

"That sounds true!" commented Hazeldene. "Bunter bores everybody."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I bore him to the earth—"

"Did it happen out of doors?" asked Clara.

"I mean I floor him to the bore—I mean bore him to the floor. He went down with a sickening thud—"

"You're going to tell the bobby that?" asked Hazel.

"Certainly!"

"Oh, my hat!"

"He gnashed his teeth with rage!" continued Bunter. "His eyes glared like—like a tiger's. You fellows would have been scared stiff. Not me! We struggled like—like tigers. Rolled over and over, you know, in desperate combat. Then—"

"Then you woke up?" asked Hazel.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Beast! Then he got me with the butt end of his revolver and I lost my senses—"

"And you haven't got them back yet!" remarked Hazel. "Poor old Bunter! But I shouldn't worry—they didn't amount to much."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I've got a fearful agony in my crumple, where he bashed me," said Bunter, unheeding. "I'm not the fellow to complain—I can bear it! You fellows would be blubbing. I'm pretty tough, you know. I shall be all right in a few days."

"You're all right now, you silly ass!" said Johnny Bull.

"That's the sort of thing I expect from you fellows!" said Billy Bunter disdainfully. "You took jolly good care not to get mixed up in it. Funking, the lot of you."

"Why, you silly ass—"

"You'd hardly believe, Marjorie, that these fellows were all skulking in their rooms while I was fighting for my life, would you?" said Bunter.

"Certainly I should hardly believe that!" said Marjorie Hazeldene, laughing.

The library door opened, and Sir Reginald Brooke looked out.

"Is not Bunter down yet?" he asked. "Oh, here you are! Come in, please! Mr. Rymer is waiting."

Bunter rolled into the library. He left the juniors and the Cliff House girls smiling, and Lady Brooke looking puzzled.

About ten minutes later Bunter

emerged again, with a dissatisfied frown on his fat face.

"I say, you fellows, that inspector is a silly ass!" he said morosely. "He didn't seem to believe half of what I told him."

"He must be a silly ass, if he believed half!" remarked Hazel. "Or a quarter."

"Beast!"

Billy Bunter sat down in an easy-chair before the log fire in the hall. He frowned over his spectacles at Inspector Rymer, when that official gentleman came out of the library with Sir Reginald Brooke and Lord Mauleverer. The inspector gave him a rather grim look. Probably he had found some difficulty in sifting the truth from the trimmings in the story William George Bunter had told him. The old baronet went to the door with Mr. Rymer, and Mauly joined the group of guests by the fire.

"The bobby's rather flummoxed," he remarked. "He seems to have an idea that somebody in the house is in league with that villain who got in last night—and that's all rot, of course. He suggested having a constable stationed in the house."

"Good idea!" said Bob.

"Rot, old bean!" said Lord Mauleverer. "I'm jolly well not going to be watched over like that! I've agreed to have Orris sleepin' in my dressin'-room at night, in case the brute tries it on again, with the doors locked. That'll make all safe. I say, I'm awfully sorry this has happened while you were stayin' with me—but it's really a thing no fellow could foresee, isn't it? I hope it won't make you girls nervous."

"Not a bit!" said Marjorie, with a smile.

"Not in your lifetime, old bean!" answered Miss Clara, who was rather given to slang. "Besides, Bunter is here to protect us all."

"Yes, rather!" said Bunter. "Rely on me! I'm going to stick to you till the end of the vao, Mauly, and protect you. In fact, I'm cutting all my other numerous engagements for that reason."

"Oh, gad!" said Mauly. "Well, after all, it was lucky you butted into that brute by accident!"

"Look here, draw it mild!" exclaimed Bunter indignantly. "I've told you it wasn't by accident! Knowing that you were in danger, I—"

"Oh, yaas!" said Lord Mauleverer. "Well, I'm much obliged, accident or not. How's your old napper?"

"Frightful pain in it," said Bunter. "But don't bother—I can bear it. I'm prepared to suffer fearful injuries defending my friends—that's me all over, you know! Loyal and fearless, and all that. Blessed if I see anything to cackle at, you cheeky beasts! I'm suffering awful agonies and not saying a word about it."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Well, is there anythin' a fellow can do, old bean?" asked Mauleverer.

"I'll rest here for a bit," said Bunter, with an air of patient martyrdom. "You might tell Porson to bring me a little light refreshment. Nothing much—say, a few mince-pies and a cake or two, and some Christmas pudding, and perhaps a few grapes; not more than a bunch. Just a trifle, you know."

"Is that all?" asked Bob Cherry.

"Well, I think it might do me good if Marjorie sat by me and—and held my hand!" said Bunter.

"Oh crumbs!"

"Will it do if I hold your ear?" asked Johnny Bull.

"No!" roared Bunter. "It won't!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I say, Marjorie, old thing—"

But Marjorie was gone. Possibly, sitting by Billy Bunter and holding his hand did not appeal to her very much.

But Porson brought a well-laden tray and placed it on a table beside Bunter, and the fat Owl was comforted. It was more than an hour since he had breakfasted, so he was quite ready for the few trifles he had enumerated. Having disposed of them internally, Billy Bunter leaned back in the deep chair, stretched out his feet to the fire, closed his eyes behind his big spectacles, and snored. And Lord Mauleverer and his guests very contentedly left him to snore while they went out to skate on the frozen lake.

THE FIFTH CHAPTER.

Cheek!

BILLY BUNTER yawned, and awoke. He yawned again, and set his spectacles straight on his fat little nose and blinked around him. It was dusky in the old oak-panelled hall of Mauleverer Towers. Outside the winter wind was wailing, and feathery flakes floated on the wind and dashed against the windows. The glowing log-fire cast a ruddy gleam through the dusky old hall. Bunter yawned a third time, and sat up. Then he became aware of Orris standing only a few feet from him, looking at him.

Orris, Lord Mauleverer's valet, was a rather plump, but very powerful man. His rather good-looking, clean-shaven face had an habitually deferential expression, and he seldom lifted his eyes and looked anyone in the face. So far as anyone at Mauleverer Towers had ever observed, Orris lived only to brush his master's clothes, and to brush them efficiently and well. No one, judging by his looks, would have supposed him to be anything but a well-trained and very efficient valet.

Bunter, as it happened, knew more about Orris than any resident at Mauleverer Towers. Bunter had his own ways of getting information on all sorts of subjects that did not concern him.

At the present Orris was not looking his usual smooth and deferential self. His eyes were fixed on Bunter's face, with a glitter in them which indicated a very profound distaste and dislike for the ornament of the Greyfriars Remove. Orris' feelings, perhaps, were not surprising, for Bunter had his own way with servants, and it was a way that did not make him popular with them.

But as Bunter's sleepy blink turned on him Orris assumed at once his customary manner. The expression of smooth, silky deferential respect for his betters came over his face like a mask.

He was moving away, with his silent step, when Bunter called to him.

"Here, Orris!"

"Yes, sir!"

The valet came quietly back.

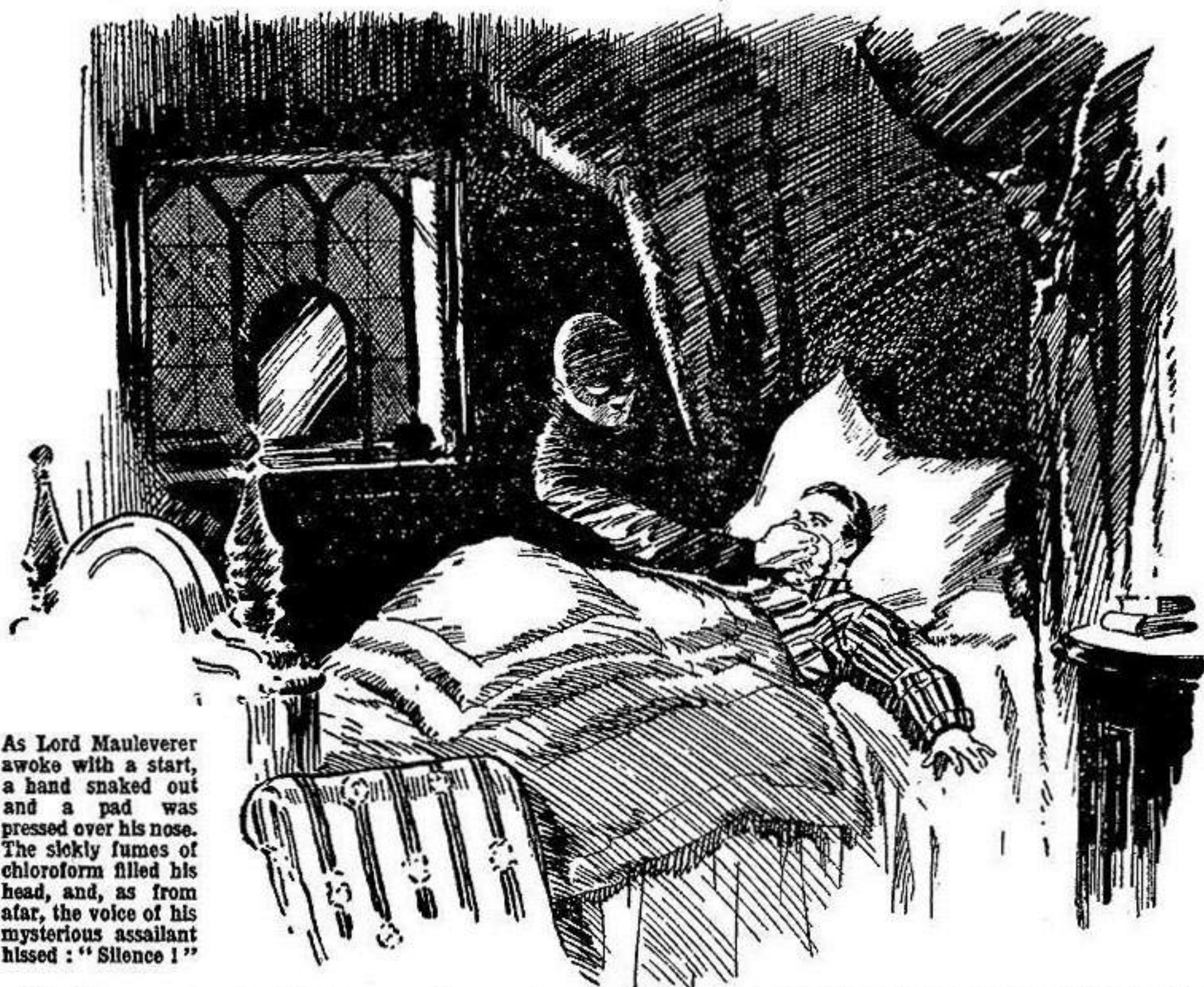
"Where's Mauleverer?"

"His lordship has gone out with his friends, sir. They will be coming in to lunch," said Orris.

"Well, I'll trot out and meet them," said Bunter. "Fetch me a fur coat."

"Certainly, sir!" said Orris. "May I ask, sir, where I am to find the coat?"

Bunter blinked at him suspiciously. He scented impertinence under that smooth question.



As Lord Mauleverer awoke with a start, a hand snaked out and a pad was pressed over his nose. The sickly fumes of chloroform filled his head, and, as from afar, the voice of his mysterious assailant hissed: "Silence!"

All the servants at Mauleverer Towers knew that Bunter had arrived for Christmas without baggage. That was not unusual for Bunter, though it was rather unusual for a guest at the Towers.

The servants were, in fact, puzzled to know how Bunter had arrived at all. He had been found at a late hour, asleep in Wharton's room, a few days before Christmas. Nobody had let him in.

It was surmised that Bunter had concealed his arrival, until it was too late for him to be kicked out. But how he had entered the mansion was rather a mystery, which Bunter had not explained.

Harry Wharton & Co. had concluded that he had sneaked in somehow unseen—as indeed he had. But they were not aware that Bunter had tumbled accidentally into the old well in the grounds in the dark, and had most unexpectedly and fortunately discovered the secret passage that led from the well to the mansion, with an outlet in the haunted turret.

Bunter was keeping that little secret.

But howsoever he had obtained admittance unseen, it was known that he had arrived with only what he stood up in. But for a timely raid on Lord Mauleverer's quarters, he would not have been able even to change his collar! And certainly he had not come in a fur coat. So Orris naturally wanted to know where he was to find the coat he was to fetch.

Bunter gave him a severe blink. Bunter was not the fellow to stand impertinence from servants.

He wagged a fat forefinger at James Orris.

"I don't want any cheek from you, Orris!" he said sternly.

"Oh, sir!" murmured Orris. "I was merely asking for information, sir! I will fetch your fur coat with pleasure, sir, if—"

"There's a fur coat in Mauleverer's room!" said Bunter. "Fetch that. That's the one I mean."

"I am afraid, sir, without instructions from his lordship—"

"Fetch that coat!" rapped Bunter.

"Without instructions from his lordship, sir—" said Orris, shaking his head.

This was distinct cheek! There could be no doubt about it! This impertinent manservant was making out that Bunter's word was not law to him!

The fat Owl sat upright in the chair and fixed his eyes, and his spectacles, on James Orris with stern severity. There was just the trace of a lurking grin on Orris' smooth face, which naturally aroused Billy Bunter's ire.

"Now, look here, Orris," said Billy Bunter. "I've said that I don't want any cheek! You've checked me before!"

"Oh, sir!" murmured Orris.

"I've advised Mauleverer to sack you for your dashed impertinence!" said Bunter warmly.

"Indeed, sir!" said Orris. "Very kind of you. I'm sure, sir!"

"And if he jolly well knew what I could jolly well tell him, he would sack you fast enough!" exclaimed Bunter, more and more irritated. "You haven't forgotten that letter of yours that you

dropped on the ice, and that I picked up. Mauly refused to look at it or hear a word about it, but I jolly well know what was in it, see?"

"I am sure of that, sir," said Orris. "It is, indeed, what I should have expected of you, sir."

If this was not cheek, Bunter had never heard cheek! His fat face became almost crimson.

"You—you cheeky sweep!" he gasped. "Mean to make out that I'd look at your rotten letter—a servant's letter, by gum!"

"Oh, no, sir! No doubt you learned what was in my letter without looking at it, sir!" said Orris.

This, undoubtedly, was sarcasm!

"I happened to see it—I mean, as Mauly's friend it was my duty to look into you: shady goings on!" said Bunter, with dignity. "And that letter was from a firm of 'bookies,' Orris, and it said that you owed them two hundred and fifty-six pounds you'd lost on backing horses, and asked you to square—which I jolly well know you can't do! I'd like to know where a dashed valet is getting two hundred and fifty pounds from! And if Mauly knew—"

"His lordship would hardly listen to a person who told him what he had read in a private letter, sir!" said Orris. "He would naturally despise such a person, sir."

Bunter gurgled with wrath. There was no doubt now that Orris was cheeky! There was not a shadow of a doubt about it.

"Well, if you want me to tell Mauly—" he gasped.

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"I think you would have told his lordship already, sir, if his lordship would have listened!" said Orris. "Neither should I admit, sir, that the letter contained what you state."

"Why, you jolly well know it did!" said Bunter, staring at him.

Orris shrugged his shoulders.

"Mean to say you'd tell lies about it?" gasped the fat junior.

Like many untruthful persons, Bunter was always surprised and shocked at untruthfulness in others.

"Well, I remember the name of the bookie firm—Topham & Tuke," said Bunter. "You've been backing horses, Orris, and got into debt—debt you can't possibly pay, in your position; and I fancy you must have made those bookies believe you're something better than a manservant here, to let you run an account to that tune. If Mauly knew—"

"I fear, sir, that my duties call me away, and I cannot stay to listen further to your very kind and pleasant conversation, sir," said Orris.

"Stop!" hooted Bunter.

Orris was turning away, but he stopped again.

Billy Bunter rose to his feet, his eye gleaming wrath through his spectacles.

It was no doubt true that had Lord Mauleverer learned that his valet, outwardly so very respectable and well-behaved, was secretly a reckless and desperate gambler on horse races, Orris' days as his lordship's valet would have been numbered.

But as Lord Mauleverer had refused to listen to a word of what Bunter had found out surreptitiously, no doubt he felt safe enough.

"Fetch that coat!" said Bunter.

"Without his lordship's instructions, sir—"

"Will you fetch that coat?"

"In the circumstances, sir, I regret to say—no!"

And with that Orris glided away.

Bunter gasped.

"Cheek! A blinking valet! My hat! I've a jolly good mind to go after him and kick him! I'll jolly well get him sacked—if that silly ass Mauly would listen to a fellow!"

Bunter stretched a fat hand to a bell. But it occurred to him that Porson likewise might refuse to fetch his lordship's fur coat, without instructions from his lordship!

With an angry grunt, Bunter rolled away to the stairs, to fetch the coat himself. And he was feeling deeply annoyed, and extremely indignant, when he rolled at last out into the frosty air and the feathery, falling snowflakes, enveloped in Lord Mauleverer's handsome and expensive fur coat.

THE SIXTH CHAPTER.

Artful Bunter!

"GAMMON!" said Miss Clara.

"Oh, Clara!" murmured Marjorie.

"Gammon!" repeated Clara decisively.

"Honest Injun!" said Bob Cherry.

"You were dreaming, old bean," said Clara.

"Nerves!" yawned Hazeldene.

Bob glared at Hazel.

"You silly ass—" he began. He checked himself suddenly. "I—I mean—"

Hazel chuckled.

"Go it!" he said. "You needn't mind Marjorie!"

But Bob Cherry did mind Marjorie. In the Remove passage at Greyfriars he

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would have told Hazel what he thought of him in the plain language of the Lower Fourth. But with Marjorie present at Mauleverer Towers, the plain language of the Lower Fourth was out of place.

"But it's really a fact, you know," drawled Lord Mauleverer. "I can't account for it—but there you are!"

"Rot!" said Hazel politely.

"But what happened exactly?" asked Marjorie.

Lord Mauleverer and his guests were gathered in the old armoury, which was Mauly's den, after tea. The early darkness of the last days of December had fallen, and the log fire glowed brightly and cheerily in the old armoury, glistening on ancient armour and trophies of weapons on the walls. The talk had turned on the haunted turret and the ghost of Mauleverer Towers.

Mauly had told the story of that ancient Mauleverer, the Red Earl, who had disappeared when the king's pursuivants came, vanishing from the haunted turret without leaving a trace behind him. And Bob Cherry followed up the story by describing how the juniors had explored the old turret-room and heard a deep groan behind the ancient walls when Bob had rapped thereon.

Billy Bunter, stretched at ease in a deep chair, with his toes to the fire, was grinning. Bunter knew all about that mysterious groan behind the old panelled walls of the turret-room though nobody suspected what he knew.

"It did happen, you know," said Lord Mauleverer. "We went up to the turret-room, and I told Bob that the jolly old ghost was given to groaning if a fellow tapped on the wall. Well, Bob tapped—and there was a groan."

"We all heard it," said Harry Wharton.

"The hearfulness was terrific," said Hurree Jamset Ram Singh solemnly.

"Fancy!" said Hazel.

"Gammon!" said Miss Clara.

"Of course, it wasn't the ghost!" grunted Bob. "We don't think it was. But it was jolly queer. The groan followed the rap on the wall."

"He, he, he!" came from Bunter.

"If you really heard it, it was somebody, playing a trick!" yawned Hazel. "Bunter, very likely!"

"Bunter wasn't here then!" said Frank Nugent.

"He, he, he!"

Hazel glanced round at the grinning face of the fat Owl.

"He seems jolly amused about something, anyhow," he remarked. "Did you have a hand in it, Bunter?"

"He, he, he!"

"Bunter couldn't have had a hand in it," said Johnny Bull. "He wasn't here, I tell you! It was the night he came—but he hadn't got here then."

"He, he, he!" cachinnated Bunter.

"I say, you fellows, you were jolly frightened, weren't you? Lot of funks! He, he, he!"

"We weren't frightened, you fat owl!" growled Johnny Bull. "You'd have been scared into fits if you'd been there!"

"He, no, he!" gurgled Bunter.

"Look here, let's go and explore the jolly old turret now," suggested Miss Clara. "If there's a giddy ghost we don't want to miss him—do we, Marjorie?"

"Good egg!" said Bob. "Let's!"

Marjorie glanced at Lord Mauleverer. His lordship rose immediately.

"Yaas, let's!" he said. "I don't suppose it will happen again—"

"He, he, he!"

Lord Mauleverer stared at the fat Owl in the armchair.

"What's the jolly old joke, Bunter?" he asked.

"Oh, nothing! He, he, he! I say, you fellows, you'll be frightened again!" chuckled Bunter.

"Fathead!" said Bob Cherry.

"Better get your coats," said Lord Mauleverer. "It's frightfully chilly in the old turret. We shan't catch a ghost, but we might catch a cold."

"I'd rather catch the ghost, old bean," said Miss Clara. "I've never seen a ghost yet, and it would be frightfully thrilling. Come on, Marjorie!"

It was a bright and merry party that prepared to explore the haunted turret. Coats and scarves were donned, and electric torches sorted out. Bob Cherry missed his electric torch, and there was some delay while he looked for it—without finding it. It was not surprising that he failed to find it, as it was in the pocket of William George Bunter, who had borrowed it for reasons of his own. Bunter was not with the party, but nobody missed Bunter. While the rest were getting ready for the expedition Billy Bunter rolled away by himself.

The haunted turret was reached by a stone staircase, near the corridor where the Greyfriars juniors had their quarters. While the others were getting ready Bunter was puffing and panting up that stone staircase.

Harry Wharton & Co. did not miss Bunter; but had they missed him they certainly would not have guessed where he was. It was not likely to occur to them that Bunter had gone ahead of them to the haunted turret on his lonely own.

But that was exactly what the fat Owl had done.

He reached the high turret-room, from which, in the daytime, there were glorious views over the hills and meadows of Hampshire. Now it was wrapped in black darkness, and the wind wailed in through the tall slits of windows, innocent of glass.

Bunter turned on the light of Bob Cherry's torch in the turret-room. He blinked over the oak-panelled wall, and found the grotesquely carved lion's head, which hid the spring of the secret moving panel.

He chuckled as the panel opened.

In a moment he had passed through and closed the panel behind him. It clicked as it shut.

The fat junior was standing in a small stone cell, formed out of the thickness of the ancient wall.

On one side was a deep and dark spiral stair, which led downwards into the depths. It was a narrow, almost endless spiral staircase, as Bunter had good reason to know, as it was by that stair that he had entered Mauleverer Towers when he arrived unexpectedly for Christmas.

Far below, under the ancient foundations of the old mansion, was the secret passage that led to the well in the grounds.

That, undoubtedly, was the way the Red Earl had made his mysterious escape from the king's pursuivants in the far-off days of old.

In those days, doubtless, the well had been in use, and there had been a chain and bucket. Centuries ago the well had dried up, and bucket and chain had long vanished, and anyone who had gone down the secret passage from the turret would have found it exceedingly difficult to get out at the well.

Bunter had discovered the secret by

(Continued on page 12.)

FOOTBALL FAVOURITES!

No. 10.
**ROBERT
McKAY,**
of
**CHARLTON
F.C.**



A wonderful inside-right and master of the art of ball control. He plays—he schemes—he thrills. . . .

A Sense of Humour!

UNLIKE the child in the story-book, young Robert McKay was not clever at either books or games while he was at school. He was born in Glasgow, and attended two elementary schools in that district until he was fourteen years of age, after which he was sent to work at Beardmore's Steel Factory. During the five years that he spent in the steam forge, attending the largest steam hammer in the world, where the heat from the furnaces was almost unbearable, Robert McKay was surrounded by men and boys who seemed to live for football. The result was, he became afflicted with the same mania.

Now at Beardmore's, as with other huge engineering firms around Glasgow, they have what they call a "Welfare Football Team," for workers under the age of eighteen, and this side competes with others in the "Welfare" League. It did not take young Robert very long to get his place in the side, for he was "tricky" with his feet, and did quite a lot of private practice in an endeavour to acquire the art of ball control.

It was when McKay was in his first year at Beardmore's that I met him, and this was owing to his wonderful sense of humour, which proclaimed itself in a loud remark that he made in a public highway. I was standing under the awning of a butcher's shop, where I was taking shelter from a downpour of rain, and at my side there stood a small youth who was blackened by the nature of his work, for it was easy to see that his occupation lay in a forge.

Suddenly there came an English voice from the butcher's shop to which I had turned my back. It was that of a man, and in tones of complaint he was shouting: "When I ask for a sheep's head I want a sheep's head; and let me tell you that I want an English one at that!"

The grimy youth at my side chuckled, and then shouted: "Ay, gi'e him the heed o' a Sassenach sheep. He don't want ain o' oors wi'oot breens!"

I cannot hope to reproduce his speech, for Robert McKay then had, and still has, the broadest Scottish dialect that I have ever tried to understand. But I appreciated his humour, and while we stood there, taking shelter from the rain, I got to know quite a lot about him and his football aspirations.

A Wonderful Temperament!

ABOUT a year after our first meeting, young Robert told me that he was thinking of joining the Parkhead White Rose Club, which had a team that played in the Scottish Junior Cup Competition, and which was regarded as the juvenile side of the Glasgow district.

All this seems strange when I remember the grounds upon which these youths had to play, and the sacrifices that were made by the members. There were no grassy fields, the playing-pitches being hard like racing-tracks, and when the youngsters were brought down by their opponents, their knees, hands, elbows, and sometimes faces ran with blood. Yet each youth contributed a weekly sum of as much as he could afford towards the upkeep of the club.

Robert McKay improved with every match in which he played, and scouts from other junior clubs became pressing in their attentions, with the result that he was pounced upon, and transferred to a team by the name of Neilston Victoria.

This was, in a small way, his first professional engagement, payment being given in accordance with the financial state of the club. He could always be sure of receiving his train fare and a small weekly fee. Sometimes this was only just over two shillings, but there were occasions—few, it is true—when he was paid as much as ten shillings.

It was in September, 1921, or when young Robert was just eighteen years old, that he signed on for Greenock Morton, who were in the First Division of the Scottish League.

His mastery over the ball was a revelation, and so successfully did he operate at inside-right, that in his first season he was the principal factor in Morton's winning the Scottish Cup, beating the famous Glasgow Rangers at Hampden Park by 1-0.

Four seasons with Morton; then came two with Glasgow Rangers, during which period McKay was chosen to represent the Scottish League against the Irish League. This was a great game, and the Scots' victory by 7-2 was brought about mainly by young Robert, who fed the great Hugh Gallacher—now of Chelsea—so well that he was able to net the ball five times.

In 1926, McKay crossed the border, and signed for Newcastle United, and in his first season he brought luck to his club by helping them to win the First League Championship. Then he was transferred to Sunderland, where he quickly became a great favourite with the club's followers, for they appreciated his skill, and the fact that he was a player with a wonderful temperament. He was as hard as nails, yet when he was bowled over, he got on to his feet again and was off to score, *not to retaliate*. He never drank nor smoked; he was always fit, and had the courage of a lion!

A Real Friend!

AT the commencement of his second season with Sunderland, a tragic occurrence nearly put an end to McKay's football career. The carpet in the sitting-room of his home caught fire, and the flames commenced to spread in a manner which threatened the complete destruction of his home.

Without counting the cost, McKay grappled with the flames, stamping them with his feet, and beating them with his bare hands until he got the fire under control. Then it was found that his legs, his hands, and his face had been badly burned; further, the affair had upset his nerves.

When he eventually got into training again, it was discovered that he had a poisoned leg, which called for an immediate operation in the Sunderland Hospital, and it was there that he made up his mind to throw up football for all time, and go back to Scotland, where he could set himself up in some kind of business.

But he reckoned without one, Alex Macfarlane, who knew what a great footballer was likely to be wasted unless he got into the hands of a real friend. Macfarlane, the best friend a man ever had, induced McKay to accompany him to Charlton; and there, to-day, the wonderful inside-right operates in a manner which thrills the onlookers.

As I have said, Robert McKay has a very broad, Scotch dialect, but when you can get him to speak slowly it is easy to understand his speech, and I shall always remember one occasion when he was very deliberate. He was looking at a football crowd of about 60,000 people, and was obviously impressed by the size of the gathering. Suddenly he spoke, but I will not attempt to write his remarks in Scotch dialect, for such a feat is beyond me.

Being interpreted, his words were: "Ye gods, and they say that football was invented by somebody in the Stone Age! Rubbish! It was invented by a cute cloth manufacturer, who had a million yards of cloth he couldn't sell. So he introduced football, turned the million yards of cloth into ten million cloth caps, and—they are all here!"

McKay is a great humorist.

THE SECRET OF THE TURRET!

(Continued from page 10.)

the simple process of falling into the well!

That was how he had been able to ensconce himself unknown in the mansion, much to the surprise of Lord Mauleverer and his guests when they had found him there.

Bunter flashed the light of the torch round the stone cell, and blinked with distaste at the opening of the spiral stair, remembering the terrific exertion it had cost him to mount it.

On the other side of the cell was another opening—a narrow passage, less than two feet wide, leading away into darkness in the thickness of the stone wall.

Where it led Bunter had no idea—neither did he want to know. It was one of the secret passages which honey-combed the ancient building, all knowledge of which had long been lost.

Bunter had not come there to explore. He remained close to the panel, which covered a recess in the stone wall, and listened for sounds from the turret-room on the other side.

There was a sound of footsteps at last. Bunter shut off his light, and stood in darkness. He grinned as he listened.

The oak panel was thick and solid, but he could hear footsteps, and the murmur of voices through the oak. And he prepared to deliver a deep and hair-raising groan as soon as he should hear a rap on the wall.

THE SEVENTH CHAPTER.

Something Like Pluck!

"**H**ERE we are!" said Bob Cherry.

"Chilly!" said Marjorie.

"The chillfulness is terrific, esteemed and beauteous miss!" said Hurree Jamsat Ram Singh, with a shiver.

"Creepy!" said Miss Clara.

Half a dozen electric torches flashed round the dusky old turret-room. It was dark and cold and windy, and far from inviting. The gleam of the lights shone back from the old blackened oak walls.

Miss Clara peered about her, with interest. Excepting for an old oaken bench, the turret-room was unfurnished. It was many a long century since it had been occupied.

"No ghost so far!" commented Miss Clara.

"The ghost-fulness is not preposterous," remarked Hurree Singh. "But the rapfulness is the proper caper to disturb the esteemed spectre."

"Go it, somebody!" yawned Hazel. "Ten to one in doughnuts that we don't hear a jolly old groan!"

"We heard it last time!" said Johnny Bull.

"Who was playing a trick then?"

"Nobody, ass; there was nobody here but ourselves."

"Let's tap, and see!" interposed Lord Mauleverer hastily. "The proof of the jolly old pudding is in the eating—what? Somebody rap!"

"Here goes!" said Harry Wharton.

He lifted his hand and dealt a resounding smack on the oaken wall. It rang almost like a pistol-shot through the turret, echoing eerily.

"Now listen!" grinned Hazel. "Why, what—what—" He broke off with a startled jump.

Groan!

"What the merry thump—" exclaimed Miss Clara.

THE MAGNET LIBRARY.—No. 1,246.

Silence followed.

The juniors and the Cliff House girls looked at one another, with startled faces.

From what direction the sound came it was difficult to say, except that it seemed to proceed from somewhere behind the oaken walls.

But the sound had been unmistakable! It was a groan, and it had followed the knock on the wall, in strict accordance with the legend.

"Look here, it's all rot!" muttered Hazel, breaking the startled silence. But his face was a little pale. "It—it must be some queer sort of echo. These old places are full of queer echoes."

"Try again!" said Nugent.

Harry Wharton struck on the wall again. Again the echoing knock rang through the turret.

Groan!

"Oh gad!" gasped Lord Mauleverer.

"I—I say, it—it's horribly uncanny!" said Nugent. "It must be some queer echo, as Hazel says, but—"

"It can't be anything else," said Wharton. "But it's jolly creepy! Like another knock, or are you fed-up?"

"I'm fed-up, for one," said Hazel, staring round him uneasily. "I've had enough of this! Let's get out!"

Both the girls were looking rather pale. It was eerie, uncanny, almost blood-curdling, to hear that muffled groan from behind the solid-looking walls. It could scarcely have been an echo; but if it was not, there seemed no other explanation but a supernatural one.

"Had enough?" asked Lord Mauleverer. "Come on, then."

Hazeldene had already left the turret-room, and was going down the stairs. Lord Mauleverer and the Famous Five followed with Marjorie and Clara, and they went in silence and with uneasy backward glances.

The ancient turret-room was deserted once more—dark and silent and desolate, only echoing eerily to the wail of the wind.

But a few minutes later a panel in the old blackened wall clicked open, and a grinning fat face appeared through the aperture, and Bunter flashed his light round the room.

He stepped out and closed the secret panel, and chuckled.

Cautiously the fat junior crept down the stone staircase. But his caution was needless; Lord Mauleverer and his guests had gone back to the armoury, and there was no eye to see Bunter.

There was a cheery grin on Bunter's fat face as he rolled into the armoury.

The juniors and the schoolgirls were gathered in a group before the glowing log fire with unusually grave faces.

Billy Bunter blinked at them, grinning.

"I say, you fellows—"

"Hallo, hallo, hallo!" Bob Cherry's cheery voice seemed to lack a little of its usual ring. "Why didn't you come with us, Bunter? We've heard the jolly old ghost groaning in the haunted turret."

"He, he, he!"

"Catch Bunter going there!" said Hazel.

Billy Bunter sniffed.

"I'll go there fast enough!" he retorted. "I'm not so easily frightened as you fellows, I can tell you. Have you had a scare? He, he, he!"

"The scarefulness was not terrific, my esteemed idiotic Bunter!"

"Frightened out of your wits—what?" chuckled Bunter. "I say, Hazel, you're looking as white as a sheet. He, he, he!"

Hazel glared at him.

"You took jolly good care not to go!" he sneered.

"Ho, he, he! I'll go now, if you'll come along with me!" said Bunter.

"Rats!"

"I'll jolly well go alone if you like!" said Bunter. "Dash it all, I don't want Marjorie and Clara to think that Greyfriars men are all funks."

"Who's a funk?" roared Johnny Bull.

"You lot are!" answered Bunter coolly. "Look here, I'll go to the haunted turret and rap on the wall—"

"You'll go somewhere else, and say you've been to the turret!" snapped Hazel. "Can it!"

"You can come and watch me!" said Bunter. "I'll go into the room alone, and bang on the wall as often as you like!"

"Rats!" grunted Bob Cherry.

"Funk!" retorted Bunter cheerily. "I say, Marjorie, jever see such a lot of funks? They're afraid to go to the turret, even if I go with them?"

"You fat, frabjous cuckoo!" said Johnny Bull, breathing hard. "You're too funky to go anywhere near the turret, and if we started you'd dodge away."

"The dodgefulness would be terrific!"

"Any excuse is better than none!" jeered Bunter. "If I go alone, you'll say I haven't been, and you're funky of coming with me!"

"My hat! I'll jolly well come!" snorted Johnny Bull. "And I'll jolly well hold your arm all the way to the turret, and shove you into the room, and kick you if you try to dodge away!"

"Yah! Anybody else coming?" asked Bunter. "Give a fellow a chance to show the girls that we're not all funks at Greyfriars!"

The Famous Five glared at the fat Owl as if they could have eaten him. If there was a funk present the name of that funk certainly was William George Bunter. Not one of the party believed that the fat Owl really intended to enter the haunted turret, little dreaming of the fat junior's secret.

"Look here, we'll go and keep him up to it!" said Harry Wharton.

"Yes, rather!"

"The ratherfulness is terrific!"

"You're for it, old bean!" said Miss Clara.

"Think I'm afraid?" grinned Bunter. "Come on, all of you! I want you to see me do it! Pluck's my long suit, you know!"

"Oh crikey!"

"You can all stand outside and see me go in alone," said Bunter. "I'll rap on the wall as often as you like—what?"

"We'll see you do it, you blithering fathead!" growled Johnny Bull, and he linked his arm in Bunter's. "I'm jolly well seeing that you do!"

"Come on, then!" said Lord Mauleverer.

And once more the Christmas party ascended the stairs and mounted the stone steps to the turret. Billy Bunter rolled in advance, with Johnny Bull's grip on his fat arm. But, to the general surprise, Bunter showed no desire whatever to dodge away.

They reached the landing outside the doorway of the ancient turret-room. There the party stopped.

"Now go it, you fat fraud!" growled Johnny Bull.

And with a rather vigorous shove he sent Billy Bunter rolling into the turret-room.



Bob Cherry poked up the frozen handkerchief and pointed to the orest and the letter "M" in the corner of it. "Mauly must have dropped this!" he said. "It proves that this was the way his captor went!"

"Ow! Beast!"
The fat Owl rolled half across the turret-room before he came to a halt. The rest of the party remained on the landing, looking in through the low, arched doorway of the turret-room. They fully expected to see Billy Bunter come charging out in a great hurry from the dark and shadowy interior of the haunted room.

But he did not. Either Billy Bunter had more pluck than was generally supposed in the Greyfriars Remove, or else he had his own reasons for knowing that there was nothing to fear in the haunted turret! Three or four of the juniors flashed in the light of their torches after him, the beams of light revealing the fat junior, apparently quite cool and collected.

"Now knock on the wall, you fat fraud!" called out Johnny Bull. "You fellows look out, or he'll bump you over when he comes bolting out!"

"Catch me bolting out!" retorted Bunter disdainfully. "My dear chap, I've got pluck! Not like some fellows I could name!"

"Well, get on with it, fatty!" said Bob Cherry.

Bunter approached the farther wall of the turret-room, the party watching him through the low doorway. He was at quite a distance from them, half-hidden by shifting shadows, half-revealed by the glimmering torches. He lifted a fat hand to smite the wall.

Knock!
It was a loud, ringing knock, and Bunter dealt it with a firm hand.

The juniors listened for the ghostly groan to follow.

Had it materialised, there was no doubt that Bunter would have come scuttling out of the haunted room like a frightened fat rabbit. But it did not materialise. Bunter, indeed, had the best of reasons for knowing that it wouldn't! And it didn't!

The echo of the knock died away, and there was deep silence, only broken by the whine of the wind.

"Hallo, hallo, hallo!" murmured Bob Cherry. "The jolly old ghost's gone on strike!"

"He, he, he!" came from Bunter.

"It's jolly queer!" said Lord Mauleverer, in perplexity. "We certainly heard it last time, you men."

"The heartfulness was terrific!"

"Nerves, you know!" chuckled Bunter. "Just funk, old beans!"

"You cheeky fat idiot—" growled Johnny Bull.

"Try again, Bunter," said Lord Mauleverer.

"Oh, I don't mind!" grinned Bunter. "Nothing funky about me, I hope! If there's a ghost here, I'll wake him up all right! He, he, he!"

Knock!
Again the party listened intently.

But there was no ghostly groan! Evidently the ghost of Mauleverer Towers was off duty!

Billy Bunter rolled out of the turret-room grinning triumphantly. The fat Owl felt that he had scored, and the other fellows had to admit that he had. He had demonstrated his uncommon

pluck. He had gone alone into the shadows of the haunted room, and defied the ghost, and the other fellows and the girls had watched him do it. Harry Wharton & Co. looked at him, and looked at one another. Marjorie gave him a smile, and Miss Clara bestowed an approving smack on a fat shoulder.

"Good man!" she said.

Bunter smirked.
"You see, I've got pluck!" he explained. "That's where I come out strong. Not like these fellows, you know!"

"Oh, my hat!" said Miss Clara.

The party descended the stairs. Billy Bunter looked like a fellow walking on air. And the other fellows, who had not believed for a moment that Bunter would venture into the haunted room alone, much less knock on the wall to arouse the ghost, could only wonder. They were far from guessing how the matter really stood—and William George Bunter certainly was not likely to tell them!

THE EIGHTH CHAPTER.

In the Dead of Night!

HARRY WHARTON & CO. lingered at Lord Mauleverer's door that night to say good-night to the schoolboy earl, feeling not quite easy in their minds. They could not help remembering the events of the night before, and wondering whether the unknown, desperate

(Continued on page 16.)

THE MAGNET LIBRARY, No. 1,246.



(Continued from page 13.)

rascal who had marked Mauly as his victim, might not make another attempt.

Sir Reginald Brooke shared their uneasiness, for he came up, and looked through Mauly's rooms with his own avuncular eye, to make sure that all was well. The juniors still lingered, after the old gentleman was gone.

There was a cheerful smile on Lord Mauleverer's face. The schoolboy earl was incapable of fear, and he was not feeling in the least uneasy.

"Look here, Mauly! What about one of us camping in your room?" asked Harry Wharton.

"My dear man, I wouldn't spoil your night's rest for anythin'. I've agreed to have Orris in the dressin'-room, to please my uncle. Orris says he doesn't mind."

"Lot I'd care if he minded, if he was my valet!" grunted Billy Bunter.

Lord Mauleverer did not seem to hear that remark. Billy Bunter rolled off to his own room, and the juniors heard him lock his door. Bunter was not likely to emerge before daylight, even if he found mustard in his Christmas pudding again.

"Well, we'll wait till Orris comes up!" said Bob Cherry. "You've got to be careful, Mauly."

"Oh, yaas!" assented his lordship carelessly.

"You'll lock your door, old chap?" said Nugent.

"I dare say Orris will. I'll tell him if I remember to."

"I'll jolly well tell him, fathead!" said Wharton. "You're not going to be mopped up under our noses, Mauly. That scoundrel, whoever he is, means business. He's chucked writing threatening letters—but he's tried twice to get hold of you. And the third time he may pull it off, if you don't take care. His game is to get you away and hold you to ransom. It would have been safer to let Inspector Rymer leave a bobby here."

"Oh, bosh, old bean!" said Lord Mauleverer. "I shall be all right! Here comes Orris!"

Orris came up the corridor, with his silent tread.

"Mind you lock the doors on the corridor, Orris!" said Bob.

"Certainly, sir!" answered Orris.

"Well, good-night, Mauly!"

"Good-night, old beans!"

Lord Mauleverer went into his room, followed by Orris. The door closed, and the juniors heard the key turn in the lock. They waited till they heard it turn also in the adjoining dressing-room, which had a door in the corridor.

"Well, Mauly will be safe enough if that blighter butts in again," said Johnny Bull. "Both doors locked—and Orris in the dressing-room. I don't see how he can get at Mauly now."

And the juniors, feeling easy in their minds at last, went to their rooms and turned in.

THE MAGNET LIBRARY,—No. 1,246.

They were soon asleep. But sleep was not so swift in visiting Lord Mauleverer. For some little time Mauly lay awake, thinking over the strange visitation of the night before, and of the attempt that had been made the night before Christmas Eve. He gave little thought to danger, but the problem of the identity of his unknown enemy perplexed his mind.

He rejected, and, indeed, rather resented, Inspector Rymer's surmise that the mysterious rascal might have a confederate in the household. Yet it was clear that the "man in black" was well acquainted with the interior of the mansion, and had been able to pick out Lord Mauleverer's room without trouble.

Who the man was, and what had become of him, nobody knew—the police had found no clue to him. On each occasion that an attempt had been made a window downstairs had been found forced open; but that was all the trace that the mysterious prowler had left behind him.

But, whoever he was, it was certain that he was a desperate and determined man, and it was probable enough that he would make another attempt.

Mauly was not feeling uneasy, however. He closed his eyes at last, and dropped into slumber.

He slept peacefully as the night grew older. Midnight chimed out, and the winter wind wailed round the old roofs and turrets of Mauleverer Towers, but Mauly did not hear. One o'clock struck, and two, and the schoolboy earl lay deep in slumber. It was a few minutes after the stroke of two had died away that he awoke suddenly.

He awoke with a sudden start, to feel a hand pressed over his mouth. A shiver ran through him.

"Silence!" came a deep, husky whisper in the darkness.

A nightlight had been burning in the room, but it was out now. The log fire had died down, shedding only the merest glimmer. In the deep gloom Lord Mauleverer's startled eyes made out a dark form that leaned over his bed, and discerned the gleam that came strangely through the eye-holes of a black mask.

He shuddered.

It was the secret enemy! Locked doors had not kept him out, and either he knew nothing of the valet in the adjoining dressing-room, or cared nothing.

A faint sickly odour came to Mauleverer. He knew what it was—the reek of the chloroform pad that was ready to be clapped over his face.

"Silence!" repeated the husky whisper. "I am here again, Lord Mauleverer. The chloroform is ready, if you attempt to call out. Do not think that you will receive aid from your servant in the next room—the chloroform has already done its work with him, and he will not wake till morning."

"You villain!" breathed Mauleverer.

"Did you think that a locked door would keep me away? I have keys that will open any door. I am here—for the last time, my lord. The price of your liberty is a thousand pounds. You are rich—you will not miss the money—it is less than the income-tax takes from you twice a year. Give me your word to place a thousand pounds in notes on the old sundial near the well; to leave the place unwatched, and I will go and leave you. I can trust your word?"

"Scoundrel!"

"You consent?"

"Never!"

"Then this is all that remains."

The soft, clinging pad, impregnated

with chloroform, was suddenly jammed over Lord Mauleverer's face. For a few moments he struggled, and then he knew no more.

THE NINTH CHAPTER.

The Hidden Prison.

LORD MAULEVERER'S eyes opened.

He blinked round him dazedly. His head was dizzy, his eyes dazed; for some moments it seemed to him that he was in the grip of a nightmare.

He had been in his bed, in his handsomely appointed room in Mauleverer Towers, when he had lost his senses under the chloroform. But his surroundings were strangely different now.

Cold stone walls surrounded him. He lay on a heap of sacking, on a floor of stone flags.

He was in a room, not more than ten feet by twelve. On one side was a narrow opening—a doorway without a door. Beyond the opening was darkness.

But the stone-walled room was lighted by a single candle stuck in a crevice of the wall, dripping grease, and casting a flickering light.

"Oh gad!" gasped Mauleverer.

He raised himself on his elbow, staring round him dizzily. Then he made the discovery that an iron chain was locked round his wrist, the other end secured to a staple in the wall. He was a chained prisoner.

The rusty chain clinked as he stirred. "You've come to!" said a voice.

By the opening in the wall stood a strange figure, eerie in the flickering light of the candle. It was that of a man clad in black from head to foot, his face concealed by a black mask, from the eyeholes of which his eyes glittered at the schoolboy earl.

Mauleverer gazed at him.

This was the secret enemy who had attacked him in his room, who had, as he knew, carried him off in the darkness and silence of the night to this secret and hidden place. Mauleverer saw him now, revealed by the candle-light! But he learned nothing by seeing him. Whether the man was a stranger or someone with whose looks he was familiar, he could not guess; the black mask hid the whole face, revealing only the eyes.

Mauleverer rose rather painfully to his feet. His head was dizzy, and he leaned on the chilly wall where the chain was attached to the staple.

"You villain!" he said faintly. "You've got me! Where am I?"

"Where you will never be found," answered the man in black coldly. "Your schoolboy friends, and your police-inspector from Winchester, will never dream where to look for you, Lord Mauleverer."

Mauleverer stood silent. He could not help realising that the man in black spoke the truth. Where he was he had not the faintest idea himself.

"You are in my hands," went on the muffled voice under the mask. "You are a chained prisoner in this room—not the first who has been chained here, my lord. In ancient days that chain has held others in your place—by the order of your ancestors."

"I understand," said Lord Mauleverer quietly.

"When I first discovered this place, my lord, that chain held a skeleton," said the masked man. "Your ancestors had a high hand, my lord. Look!"

He pointed to a shadowy corner, with a black-gloved hand. Lord Mauleverer's

eyes followed the pointing finger, and he shuddered at the sight of a heap of bones. Centuries ago—many centuries, perhaps—some hapless prisoner had perished in that hidden room.

"Your fate may be the same, my lord," said the masked man. "Some ancestor of yours chained a prisoner here, and left him to die. The sight of those old bones would show you how little you have to hope for rescue."

Lord Mauleverer's lip curled.

"You can't scare me!" he added contemptuously.

"We shall see. Do you imagine that you will be found here?" sneered the man in the mask. "You have already guessed that you are in one of the secret, hidden recesses of your own mansion—this very room is mentioned in one of the legends of Mauleverer Towers—"

"I know it. I had guessed that much!" said Mauleverer quietly.

"The secret has long been lost—many have sought it, but never found it. You, yourself, my lord, have sought it—have you succeeded?"

"No."

"Do you think your friends will find it? Do you think they will even suspect that you are within the walls of Mauleverer Towers?"

Mauleverer was silent again.

"A window will be found open—some tracks will be found in the snow—something belonging to you will be picked up at a distance from the house—the search will take a direction far away from here. This secret is known only to me."

Mauleverer breathed hard.

"You've found it—others may find it," he said.

The masked man gave a scoffing laugh.

"They will not have the clue that I had," he answered.

"An old parchment fell into my hands, my lord, in which this room was described. Even then it was not easy to discover the secret panel that gives admission to this secret passage." He pointed to the opening in the wall. "But I hunted and hunted till I found it. Without the clue in the parchment, I should never have succeeded. And that parchment has been burned."

Lord Mauleverer fixed his eyes hard on the masked face. He listened intently to the husky, muffled voice from under the mask. But there was no familiar tone in it to his ears. The man was disguising his voice, and he was disguising it successfully. But Lord Mauleverer realised now that Inspector Rymer's suspicion must have been well-founded.

Only an occupant of the Towers could have made this discovery of the secrets of the ancient mansion. Either his enemy had a confederate in the household, or he was himself an actual member of the household. But if the latter was the case, Mauleverer could not even begin to guess at his identity.

The scoffing laugh came again from under the disguising mask.

"I read your thoughts, my lord. But you will never know with whom you have to deal. If you pay your ransom, you will be taken back to your room in the dead of night—unconscious. If you refuse to pay it, you will remain here till you perish, and your fate will never be known. Your skeleton will bleach here in the darkness, like that of the victim of a Mauleverer of former times." He made a gesture towards the heap of bones. "Take the lesson to heart, my lord."

"I will not pay you a single penny," said Lord Mauleverer quietly. "I do not believe that you will dare to leave me here to die; but if I believed it, I would die a thousand times before I would give in to threats. You've got me in your hands; but you've had your trouble for your pains. You'll get nothing from me."

"You may change your mind after twenty-four hours in the cold and darkness, without food or drink," said the masked man.

"Never!"

"Well, we shall see. It rests entirely with your lordship," said the man in the mask. "You will find it cold and chilly here, my lord—you, accustomed to every comfort and luxury—"

There was a contemptuous sneer in the husky voice.

"Leave me here, then," said Lord Mauleverer quietly.

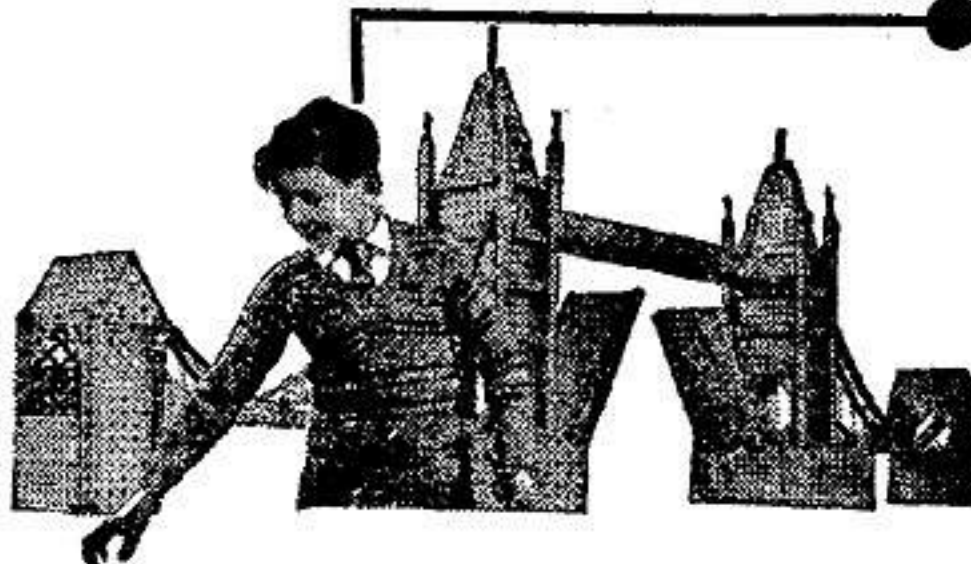
"You will see whether I shall give in, you rascal!"

"I shall return in twenty-four hours—when you have had time to reflect. I shall not bring you food or drink. I shall bring you pen and paper, to write to your guardian. You will urge Sir Reginald to pay the ransom, to save you from death by hunger."

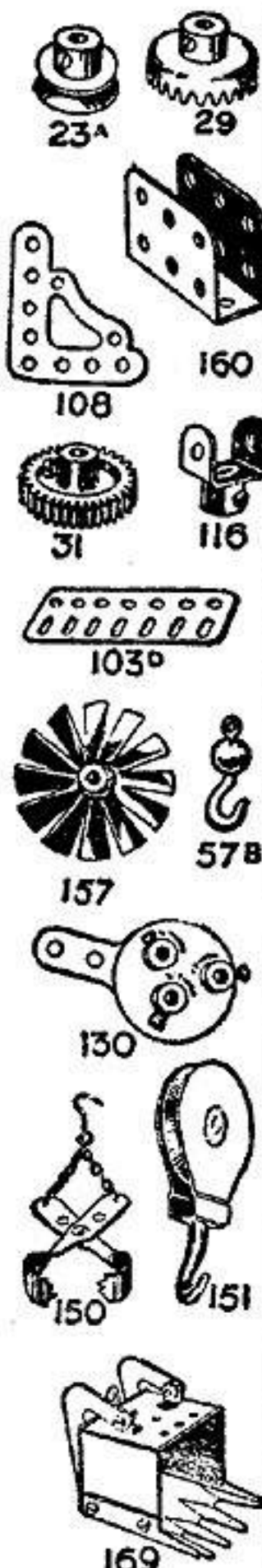
"I shall not write a line!"

The masked man shrugged his shoulders.

(Continued on next page.)



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"I think I shall hear a different tale to-morrow night!" he said. "I am willing to wait! In twenty-four hours you will learn whether you have a chance of being found."

"What you have found others may find," said Lord Mauleverer steadily. "I have heard of this room, though I have never seen it before; the secret has been lost. But I can guess this much—what you have found is the secret way out of the haunted turret, by which the Red Earl escaped hundreds of years ago. I've always known that there must be a secret passage behind the walls of the turret-room."

The masked man gave a slight start, which did not escape Mauleverer.

"I've guessed right, I think," said Mauleverer; "and when I get out of this I'll have the secret found, by gad, if I have to have every inch of the oak walls taken down to find it."

"When you are out of this, my lord, you may do as you please," said the man in the mask. "But you are not out yet! It is true that if you strip the old oak from the walls of the turret-room you will find the secret—why should I not admit it? There is a stone cell behind that ancient wall, my lord, and on one side of it is this secret passage—on the other side a spiral stair that leads away into the depths of the earth. Where it leads I do not know—I have never taken the trouble to explore it; I had no use for it. Perhaps it is the way by which the Red Earl escaped in days gone by. You may have the pleasure of exploring it—if you do not break your neck on the crumbling stairs—when you are out of this! But it will cost you a thousand pounds to have that pleasure, my lord."

He paused.

The candle was guttering low. Strange lights and shadows danced in the hidden prison-room.

"For the last time, my lord! No light reaches you here—but it is very near to morning! I cannot linger! I offer you a chance—will you write at my dictation, now?"

"No!"

"You will come to heel after twenty-four hours of cold and hunger," said the man in the mask. "I would spare you that if I could."

"You will see!"

He heard a muttered oath under the mask. The man in black came closer to him, his eyes glittering.

"Make no mistake, my lord! I mean business! You will ransom your life or perish here! No danger will follow for me—your fate will never be known! Make no mistake about that."

"I've had that before," said Lord Mauleverer coolly. "You're repeatin' yourself, old bean."

The man in black clenched his hand, as if the temptation assailed him to drive his fist into the cool, defiant face of the schoolboy earl. But he restrained his rage.

"Fool!" he muttered. "You talk of discovering the secret by stripping the oak from the walls of the turret-room! Do you imagine that anyone else will think of such a measure? I tell you that clues will be found at a distance from your house proving that you have been taken away—the search for you will begin at a distance from Mauleverer Towers. No one will even dream of searching for you within the building! Think again!"

"You've had my answer!"

"Remain, then, till hunger brings

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you to your senses!" snarled the man in the mask; and he blew out the remaining fraction of the guttering candle.

Black darkness fell in the prison-room.

In the darkness, Lord Mauleverer heard the footsteps of the masked man dying away along the secret passage.

Silence followed.

THE TENTH CHAPTER.

Vanished!

KNOCK!

Harry Wharton, half-asleep, heard the sound along the corridor. The early glimmer of a wintry sun was creeping in at the windows. The last day of the Old Year was dawning on Mauleverer Towers.

Knock! Knock!

Wharton sat up in bed. Someone was knocking at a door along the corridor, in the direction of Lord Mauleverer's room. It was too early an hour for Mauleverer to be called; and Wharton wondered who was knocking and what it meant. With the thought in his mind that something had,

A CHRISTMAS PRESENT

goes to Miss Edith Crush, of 26, Darent Road, Stamford Hill, N., who sent in the following Greyfriars Limerick.

Said Bunter to Toddy: "He, he!
You're really too thin, can't you see?
If you take my advice
And would like to look nice,
You'd cultivate a figure like me."

Send in YOUR limerick, chum,
and WIN A HANDSOME
LEATHER POCKET WALLET.

perhaps, happened in the night, he leaped out of bed, hurried on a dressing-gown and slippers, and stepped out into the corridor.

Knock! Knock! Knock!

Porson, the butler, was standing at Lord Mauleverer's door, knocking. His face wore an alarmed and troubled expression.

Wharton ran along the passage.

"What's happened, Porson?" he exclaimed.

"I cannot make his lordship hear, sir!" answered the butler. "A door was found open downstairs by the maids, and it seems to have been open a long time during the night, as snow has drifted in. I came up at once to call his lordship, but—"

Wharton rapped quickly on the door with his knuckles.

"Mauly!" he shouted.

There was no answer from within the room.

"Is Orris down yet?" asked Harry.

"No, sir."

Wharton turned the door-handle. As the door had been locked on the inside overnight, he did not expect it to open, but it opened to his hand. Porson stared as it swung back.

"Surely his lordship's door was locked?" he exclaimed.

"It was locked last night," answered Harry. "I stopped here till I heard

Orris lock it from inside. But something must have happened—"

He ran into the room.

"Mauly!" he gasped.

The bed was empty. The bedclothes were thrown back roughly, as if the occupant had been dragged bodily out. But the bed was cold; it was long since Mauleverer had been there.

Harry Wharton stared blankly at the empty bed. Porson, with wide eyes, stared over his shoulder.

"Where is his lordship?" gasped Porson.

Wharton did not reply. He ran to the communicating door of the dressing-room. It was open, and in a moment more he was looking down at Orris.

The valet was stretched in bed, his eyes closed, apparently fast asleep. A sickly odour floated round the bed.

Wharton sniffed at it; he knew the sickly scent of chloroform. The same scent had hung over Mauleverer's bed.

He stooped over the valet and grasped him by the shoulder, shaking him vigorously.

There was a low murmur from Orris. He stirred uneasily, but did not wake.

"Good heavens!" breathed Wharton.

Porson had followed him in, his plump face pale with horror.

"What—what—what—" stammered the butler.

"He has been chloroformed," said Harry. "You can smell the stuff. That villain has got in somehow, in the night—chloroformed Orris and taken Mauleverer away!"

"Oh, sir!" gasped Porson.

"He must have picked the lock of Mauleverer's door—it was locked safely enough last night!" Wharton gritted his teeth. Again he shook Orris roughly. "Oh, he's coming to."

Orris' eyes opened.

He blinked up at the schoolboy and the staring butler.

His hand went to his forehead, and he gave a low moan.

"What—what has happened?" he muttered.

"Pull yourself together," said Harry. "Lord Mauleverer is gone—he has been kidnapped!"

"Oh!" gasped Orris. He struggled to a sitting posture. "His lordship gone! And I—I was here to guard him—and I slept—"

"You needn't blame yourself," said Harry. "You seem to have been chloroformed while you slept—the place reeks with the stuff. You did not wake in the night?"

"No, sir! Oh, how my head aches!" muttered Orris, pressing his hand to his forehead. "You are sure his lordship is gone, sir?"

"He is not in his room—the bed's cold and the door was unlocked. That scoundrel has got him at last!"

Wharton hurried back to the bedroom, followed by Porson. The valet turned out of bed at once. Porson went to call Sir Reginald Brooke; and Harry Wharton took a hasty survey of the schoolboy earl's room. But for the lingering reek of the drug there was no clue to what had happened in the silent hours of the night, so far as the junior could discern.

With a clouded face and a heavy heart he went along the corridor to call his friends. The chums of the Remove were soon up and dressed, and had gathered, with grave faces, in Mauleverer's room by the time Sir Reginald Brooke arrived there. Across the corridor the snore of Billy Bunter was heard rumbling; Wharton had not troubled to call the Owl of the Remove,



"Come and lend a hand, Marjorie!" said Miss Clara, rushing to the aid of Bunter. "I'll take one of his ears—so!" "Yoooooop! Leggo! Whooooop!" wailed the fat junior. "Beasts! I mean—cat! Leggo!"

"Herbert—gone!" breathed the old baronet, as he stared down at the empty bed. "Good heavens! His face was white and lined. "But—but what—Orris, did you hear nothing—see nothing?"

"No, Sir Reginald," answered Orris. "I blame myself very much; but—but Mr. Wharton, sir, will tell you how he found me."

"Orris had been chloroformed," said Harry. "He must have been drugged in his sleep. He was unconscious."

"And my nephew—my dear boy—"

Porson appeared in the doorway. "I have telephoned, Sir Reginald. Inspector Rymer is coming over in a car; he will be here very soon."

"Very good, Porson! See that the room is not disturbed in any way; the police may find some clue that we cannot see. Do not touch anything here, my boys."

The old baronet left the room. Orris went quietly away, his hand still pressed to his forehead. Johnny Bull looked after him rather grimly as he went.

"That fellow was here to guard Mauly!" he grunted. "Lot of good he was!"

"Well, if he had a chloroform pad dabbed over his face while he was asleep he couldn't do much!" said Bob Cherry. "He looks as if he's been through it, poor chap!"

"But how the thump did anybody

get in, with the door locked on the inside?" said Nugent.

"Must have picked the lock from the outside. I dare say the police will find traces of that," said Harry. "I—I wish old Mauly had let one of us stay with him. Still, I suppose we should have been put to sleep like Orris. Let's get down."

The Famous Five went down, Hazel joining them on the way.

"I've seen Orris. Is Mauly really gone?" asked Hazel.

"Yes; kidnapped by the scoundrel, whoever he is! We're going down to see the way he was taken out of the house," answered Harry.

The door that had been found open by the maids was still standing open. It was the door of the secretary's room adjoining the library, and it gave on the terrace. Snow had drifted in on the wind, and flakes lay scattered over the floor.

Outside, snow was still falling. It had fallen all through the night, covering up any tracks that might have been made.

"No chance of picking up the villain's tracks!" said Nugent.

"The chancefulness is not terrific," remarked Hurree Jamset Ram Singh. "But the tryfulness is the proper caper."

"Let's see if there's anything to be picked up, anyhow," said Bob.

The juniors hurriedly donned coats and hats, and went out on the terrace,

It was carpeted with snow, and not a single track was to be picked up; long ago the falling flakes had obliterated all sign. But as they went down the steps from the terrace to the gardens Bob Cherry uttered a sudden exclamation:

"Hallo, hallo, hallo!"

He stooped and picked up an object from the snow, and held it up. It was a handkerchief, frozen almost stiff.

"That's Mauly's!" exclaimed Nugent.

He pointed to the crest and the letter "M" in the corner of the handkerchief. There was no doubt that it belonged to Lord Mauleverer.

"Must have dropped that while he was getting Mauly away!" said Bob. "It proves that this was the way the villain went—if we needed proof."

"Better leave it here for Inspector Rymer," said Harry. "Let's get on; we may pick up some clue farther on. I can't imagine how the brute got Mauly away, unless he had a car waiting on the road. But that's a good distance; he must have carried Mauly a long way. Let's get on."

The juniors pressed on down the long avenue, between lines of leafless trees that led to the distant gates. The earth was carpeted with snow, and the fast-falling flakes obliterated their own foot-marks almost as soon as they were made.

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There was no hope of picking up a trail; but they searched hopefully for signs, all the same. From the mansion to the gates on the Winchester road was a distance of a quarter of a mile; and, so far as they could see, the kidnapper must have carried his victim the whole distance.

Half-way to the gates Johnny Bull pounced on an object covered by snow, and dragged it out. It was a silk muffler, which they knew belonged to Lord Mauleverer.

"He came this way!" said Bob.

"The brute must have allowed him to put this on before bringing him out of the house," said Harry. "He couldn't see anything that he dropped in the dark, of course! Most likely he carried him away in a hurry, anyhow. We may find something else."

But nothing else was found, and the juniors returned at last to the house in a troubled and dismal mood, as Inspector Rymer's car came grinding through the snow up the avenue.

THE ELEVENTH CHAPTER.

Bunter Is Not Pleased!

BILLY BUNTER rolled into the breakfast-room, grunting, with a frown on his fat brow.

Bunter was annoyed.

Bunter had not yet breakfasted.

It was rather a late hour for breakfast, and the fat Owl expected to find that the rest of the party had finished long ago, and gone.

Rather to his surprise, he found them all in the breakfast-room. Marjorie and Clara were sitting at the table, with grave and preoccupied faces, Hazel was making a good breakfast—the only fellow there who was—and the Famous Five were standing.

Neither Sir Reginald Brooke nor Lady Brooke was to be seen. Harry Wharton & Co. were making a desultory meal without sitting down to it.

Bunter blinked at them.

"I say, you fellows—" he began.

Nobody answered Bunter. Nobody, indeed, seemed to notice that he had come into the room at all. In that hour of trouble and dismay nobody had any attention to waste on Bunter.

"I say, you fellows!" hooted Bunter.

"Oh, dry up!" snapped Johnny Bull.

"What's up, I'd like to know?" snorted Bunter. "I've rung a dozen times for my brekker, and nobody's answered the bell! I've had to come down to brekker!"

Bunter's voice fairly thrilled with indignation.

"Nice way to treat a guest!" he went on. "Where's Mauly? I shall speak jolly plainly to Mauly about this! If Mauly can't get his servants to answer bells—"

"Oh, shut up, you ass!" growled Bob.

"Nice manners!" sneered Bunter.

"You might remember that you're not in the Remove passage now, Cherry, and that there are ladies present. Don't mind him, you girls; he can't help being a bear."

"Oh, don't be an ass!" said Miss Clara tartly.

Bunter blinked at her.

"Eh?" he ejaculated. "What?"

"Don't bother now," said Marjorie.

"Something has happened to Mauleverer, and we're all worried."

"Oh, is that it?" grunted Bunter.

"The whole place seems upside down—the servants like a lot of cackling geese—not even bringing a fellow's breakfast up to a fellow's room! Everything at sixes and sevens! This isn't

how we manage things at Bunter Court, I can tell you!" Bunter sat down. "Shove that dish this way, Wharton, will you?"

"Go and eat coke!"

"Not even a servant waiting at table!" said Bunter. "My hat, this wouldn't do for Bunter Court! Don't scoff all the kidneys, Hazel!"

Bunter reached round and helped himself, as nobody seemed disposed to help him. He waited till his mouth was full before he spoke again.

"I say, you fellows, what's happened to Mauly?"

"Kidnapped, fathead!" snorted Johnny Bull. "Now shut up!"

"Beast!"

Bunter glowered and ate. No doubt he was sorry to hear that Lord Mauleverer had been kidnapped. But breakfast was a more important consideration. A fellow had to eat!

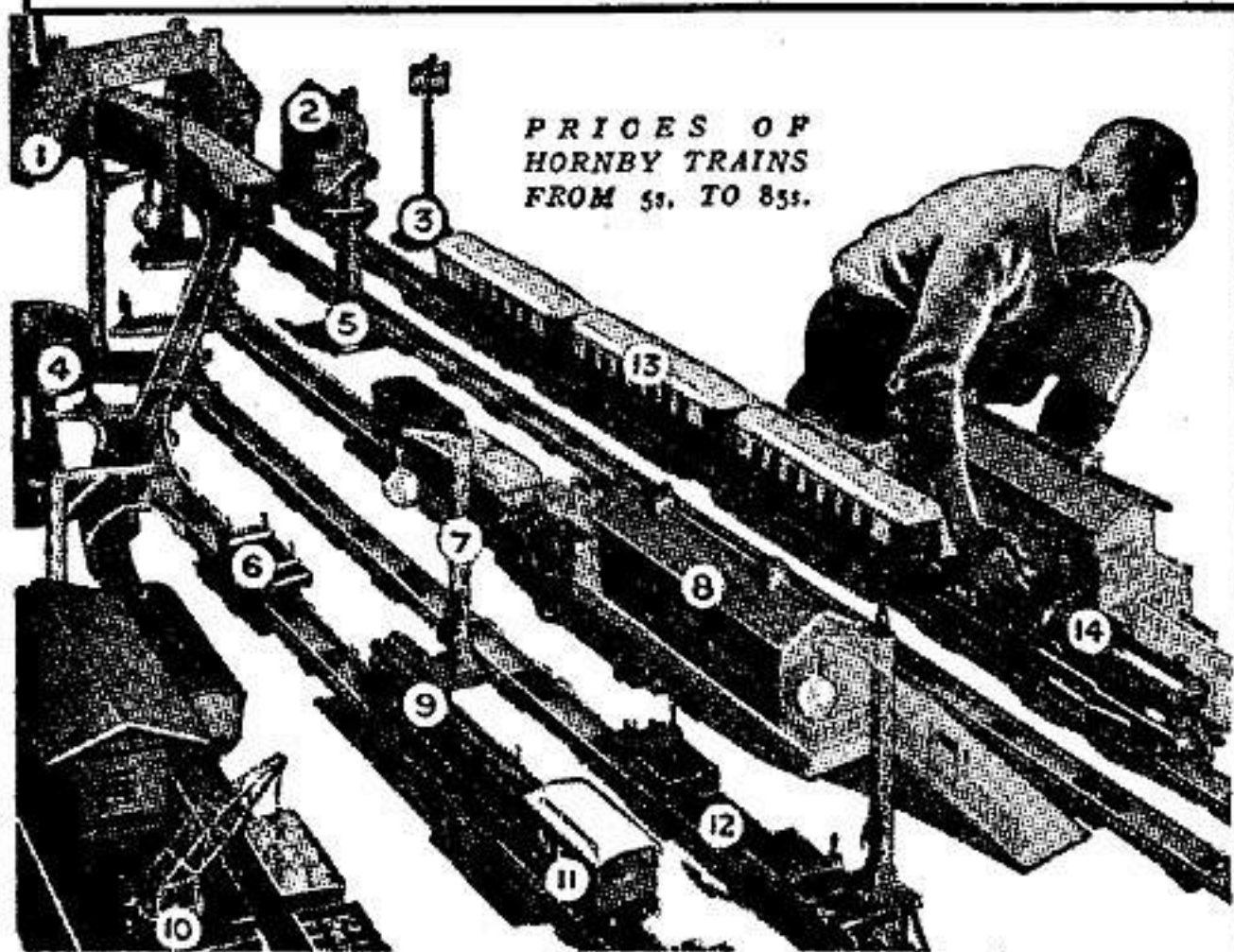
The Famous Five, having snatched a late and hurried breakfast, went out again. Marjorie and Clara went with them. Hazel remained to finish his breakfast.

From Hazel, Bunter learned of the happenings in the night. Hazel was sorry for what had happened to his kind and hospitable host; but it had not affected his appetite. Still less did it affect William George Bunter's.

Everything seemed to be in confusion that morning at Mauleverer Towers, generally the most orderly of households. Bunter rang for further supplies in vain. Perhaps the servants knew that it was Bunter who was ringing, and perhaps that was why they did not heed. But there really were ample supplies on the table, and Bunter removed cover after cover, and devoured the contents of the dishes; all was grist that came to his mill.

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HORNBY TRAINS

BRITISH AND GUARANTEED

He was still going strong when Hazeldene went out, and he remained long enough to clear the table of everything in the shape of eatables. Then, with a fat and shiny and contented face, he rolled out to look for the other fellows.

Inspector Rymer, from Winchester, was in the hall, with Sir Reginald Brooke. The inspector had a grim expression on his ruddy face, the old baronet looked worn and worried. Bunter blinked at them, strongly disposed to join in the consultation and offer his advice; but the look of neither gentleman was encouraging, and Bunter gave up that idea. He spotted Orris in the distance, and rolled up to him.

"Where are they all gone, Orris?" he asked.

"The young gentlemen have gone into the grounds, sir, with the young ladies," said Orris.

"It's still snowing," grunted Bunter. "I think the young gentlemen are looking for—ahem!—clues to his lordship, sir," said Orris.

"What rot!" said Bunter.

"Indeed, sir!"

Bunter wagged a fat forefinger at the valet.

"It's you that's to blame for this, Orris!" he said.

Orris started.

"I, sir!" he ejaculated.

"Yes, you!" said Bunter accusingly. "Why didn't you take proper care of poor old Mauly?"

"I was drugged in my sleep, sir——"

"More likely fanking," said Bunter cheerfully. "I jolly well shouldn't have been drugged in my sleep if I'd been looking after old Mauly. He was rather an ass not to ask me to look after him; but poor old Mauly always was a silly ass. If I were old Brooke, Orris, I'd sack you on the spot for letting Mauly be bagged under your nose."

"Perhaps you will kindly make the suggestion to Sir Reginald, sir," said Orris urbanely; "but I must beg you, sir, not to allude to my master's guardian as 'old Brooke' in speaking to me. It savours of impertinence, sir—indeed, I may say, insolence."

With that remark Orris glided away, leaving Billy Bunter snorting with indignation.

"My hat!" murmured the fat Owl. "The cheek of these blinking menials—Mauly spoils 'em!"

Having encased his fat person in Lord Mauleverer's fur coat—which by this time seemed to have become Bunter's fur coat—the fat junior rolled out into the falling flakes to join the other fellows.

The snow was falling more lightly now; but it was still coming down. Billy Bunter spotted the juniors and the girls in the distance, and rolled away to join them.

"Found anything?" he asked.

"No," said Harry curtly.

"You're not likely to, either," commented Bunter. "Fat lot of good you fellows trying!"

"Better than doing nothing, fat-head!" growled Johnny Bull.

"It's not much good, I suppose," said Harry, with a clouded brow. "Poor old Mauly is far enough off by this time. Goodness knows where that scoundrel has taken him."

"There will be news sooner or later," said Nugent. "It's Mauly's money that the rotter is after—he's been kidnapped to be held to ransom."

"No doubt about that. But——"

"Might have murdered him!" suggested Bunter brightly.

"Wha-a-t?"

"Might have pitched him into the lake. Let's go and see if there's a hole in the ice!" suggested Bunter.

"You howling idiot!"

"Oh, really, Cherry——"

"You frumpious chump!"

"Oh, really, Bull——"

"Shut up, you frabjous ass!"

"Well, if poor old Mauly's been murdered, we might as well look for the body," argued Bunter. "You see—— Yaroooooh!"

A snowball landed on Billy Bunter's fat face, suddenly cutting short his cheerful remarks. Bunter sat down suddenly.

"Owl! Whoop! Beast! Grooogh!"

He sat in the snow and roared.

Harry Wharton & Co. moved off, leaving him sitting and roaring.

Bunter scrambled up, slipped in the snow, and sat down again.

"Owl! Beasts! Give a fellow a hand up!" he roared.

Marjorie glanced round; Miss Clara ran back to help Bunter. She took hold of his fat ear to help him.

"Yaroooooh!" roared Bunter, as Clara pulled. "Owl! Wharrer you up to? Leggo!"

"I'm helping you——"

"Whooooop!"

"Oh, Clara!" exclaimed Marjorie.

"Come and lend me a hand, old thing," called back Miss Clara. "Take one of his ears."

"Yoooooop! Leggo! Whooooop!"

"You asked to be helped up," said Miss Clara. "I'm helping you. Some people are never satisfied."

"Beast! I mean—cat! Leggo!"

Miss Clara did not let go. She pulled, hard, and Bunter scrambled up. Then, having successfully helped Bunter, Miss Clara ran after her friends, leaving the Owl of the Remove rubbing his ear and snorting.

After which Billy Bunter rolled back to the house, feeling that his fascinating society was wasted on the Cliff House girls and the Greyfriars fellows. For the rest of the morning he left them severely alone—which probably did not add appreciably to their troubles.

THE TWELFTH CHAPTER.

Under the Shadow!

A DEEP gloom overhung Mauleverer Towers that snowy day, the last of December. Lord Mauleverer's Christmas party was still there; but Mauly himself was gone, and every face was dark with anxiety. The schoolboy earl and his friends had planned to see the old year out and the new year in; but no one was thinking of festivities now.

The servants had grave faces; Mauly had been liked by all; even Porson so far forgot his professional impassivity as to look distressed. Sir Reginald Brooke was silent and grim; Lady Brooke looked almost the ghost of her usual kind and cheerful self. Even Billy Bunter felt the effect of the general gloom and anxiety, and allowed his thoughts to wander once or twice from his fat and important self.

Inspector Rymer had done all that, so far as anyone could see, could be done. He had followed up the clues of the handkerchief and the silk muffler that the juniors had found, and which seemed to indicate the way Lord Mauleverer had been taken by the kidnapper. His search had been diligent and active. That the kidnapped peer had not been taken out at the great gates, was certain—the gates had been

closed and locked during the night, and the lodgekeeper had heard and seen nothing. But Mr. Rymer had discovered a spot where the snow had been brushed away from the park fence, indicating that something had been dragged over it, and a rope was found lying under the snow outside the fence, in the road.

No doubt was entertained that Lord Mauleverer had been carried off at that spot. It was surmised that the kidnapper had had a car in waiting; but the incessant snowfall had obliterated any traces that might have remained. Inspector Rymer had left the Towers at last, to carry on his search farther afield, and the anxious household waited for news—which did not come.

It was certain that the schoolboy earl had been kidnapped for ransom, and it seemed likely that the next move would be on the part of the kidnapper. Sooner or later it was concluded, a demand would be received from him, and it was possible that this might furnish a clue. But if that was the wretch's intention, he was in no hurry to act.

Since the discovery of the traces left on the park wall, Harry Wharton & Co. had little hope of picking up any clue to their missing chum. It seemed certain that Mauleverer had been hauled over the park wall into the road, and likely enough that a car had been used to get him away—in which case he might be a hundred miles distant.

Old Sir Reginald hovered incessantly by the telephone, hoping for a ring from the police, to announce that they were on the track of his kidnapped nephew. But no call came.

The chums or the Remove had nothing to do but to wait idly, with heavy hearts, anxious for news. But they agreed that any form of exertion, even if it led to nothing, was better than that.

After lunch they stood by a window in the hall, looking out into the whirling flakes, and discussed the matter.

"No good hanging about doing nothing!" said Bob Cherry restlessly.

"What can we do?" asked Hazel.

"Well, it looks as if that villain must have had a car to get Mauly away—how else could he have done it? Somebody may have seen or heard last night along the road—there are cottages and farms——"

"The police will be looking that up."

"Well, yes; but——"

"We might take a walk and look round," said Harry. "We might pick up something from somebody."

"Better than doing nothing!" said Nugent.

"I say, you fellows!"

Billy Bunter joined the thoughtful group at the window. Bunter had had a good lunch, and a happy nap afterwards. No doubt he was concerned for Mauly; but, if so, he was bearing up remarkably well.

"I say, you fellows, no good looking like a lot of moulting fowls!" said Bunter cheerfully. "Keep your pecker up, you know."

"Fathead!" grunted Johnny Bull.

"I'm keeping cheerful!" said Bunter.

"You would!" agreed Johnny.

"Well, Mauly was my pal, and I feel it deeply, of course," said Bunter. "Still, it's no good moping! Keep a stiff upper lip like me. What about going to the pictures?"

"You fat chump!"

"Oh, really, Wharton——"

"Shut up, Bunter!" said Bob. "Give us a rest!"

"Beast! I'll take the girls to the pictures, then," said Bunter. "One of

you fellows can lend me a pound note. You'll come?" he added, blinking at Marjorie and Clara through his spectacles.

"Thank you, no," said Marjorie dryly.

"Don't be an ass!" said Miss Clara.

"Oh, really, Clara—"

"Let's get out!" growled Johnny Bull. "If we don't pick up any news of Mauly, we shall get a rest from Bunter, at least."

"The restfulness from the esteemed Bunter will be a boonful blessing," remarked Hurree Jemset Ram Singh.

"Well, I'll come," said Bunter. "I'm not going to be left alone in this dismal show—everybody with a face like a funeral! Pretty sort of a New Year you fellows are going to give me, I must say! Selfish, as usual—lot you care about me!"

"Come on!" said Harry.

"Wait for me!" hooted Bunter. "I'm going to get my fur coat. Look here, where's that coat? If that cheeky cad Orris has taken my coat back to Mauly's room—"

The party did not wait for Bunter to get his fur coat. Possibly they were not anxious for the fat Owl's enlivening society. They donned their coats and hats, and started, leaving Billy Bunter still inquiring for "his" fur coat.

Bunter snorted as they went. That expedition was a sheer waste of time, in Bunter's opinion, which might have been much better spent at the pictures. And Bunter was prepared to stand treat all round, if somebody would lend him a pound note!

Bunter rang for the butler.

It was some minutes before Porson appeared; but he appeared at last.

"Where's my fur coat?" demanded Bunter.

Porson looked at him.

"If you refer to his lordship's fur coat, sir, I think you had better inquire of Mr. Orris," he said.

"Send Orris to me."

Porson looked at him again.

"Mr. Orris is in his lordship's room," he said.

"Go and fetch him."

Porson did not seem to hear that. He departed—not in the direction of his lordship's room.

Billy Bunter breathed hard with indignation.

"Cheeky menial!" he muttered.

"Putting on airs now that his master's away, I suppose. Mauly spoils these funkeys!"

And Bunter rolled away to the staircase and puffed and blew his way to his lordship's room.

THE THIRTEENTH CHAPTER.

Bunter Begs for It!

"LOOK here—" hooted Bunter.

Orris glanced up.

The valet was in Lord Mauleverer's dressing-room, occupied in brushing a coat—the very coat of which the indignant Owl was in search. It needed some attention, after Billy Bunter had worn it.

He gave Bunter one careless glance and resumed his occupation. The Owl of Greyfriars fixed his eyes, and his spectacles, on him, with a devastating blink.

It seemed to produce no effect on James Orris, however. He brushed the coat quietly and methodically, heedless of Bunter.

"Help me on with that coat, Orris!" said Bunter, breathing hard. "I'm going out."

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"Without instructions from his lordship, sir—" said Orris, shaking his head.

"I'm giving you instructions."

Orris brushed the coat.

Billy Bunter rolled nearer to him, his very spectacles glittering with wrath.

"If you're going to be cheeky, Orris—"

"Oh, sir!" murmured Orris deprecatingly.

"The minute Mauly comes back, I shall ask him to sack you!" said Bunter. "Mind that!"

"Thank you, sir!" said Orris.

"What?"

"You're very kind, sir."

There was no doubt that the man was cheeky! There was absolutely no doubt about that! Bunter breathed wrath. He had no use for sarcasm from a manservant.

"You'd be sacked already if Mauly would have listened to me," he said. "If he knew you'd been backing horses, and were being dunned by bookmakers for hundreds of pounds, you wouldn't stay here long!"

Orris looked up again. There was a smouldering glimmer in his eyes as they fixed on Bunter.

"I'll jolly well make Mauly listen to me, see?" snorted Bunter. "In fact, if you don't mind your p's and q's, I'll go to old Brooke about it. Make him jump if he knew that a servant here was in debt to the tune of hundreds of pounds to a bookie."

"I hardly think that Sir Reginald would take any notice of such a statement, sir!" said Orris, but there was a curious expression in his eyes as they lingered on Bunter.

"We'll jolly well see!" snorted Bunter. "I'm fed-up with your cheek, Orris! I never stand cheek from a servant, see? I keep 'em in order at Bunter Court, I can tell you! I've a jolly good mind to tell old Rymer! How would you like that?"

Orris started.

"I scarcely suppose that Inspector Rymer would be interested in my affairs, sir," he answered.

"Wouldn't he?" sneered Bunter. "Old Rymer's got it into his head that there's somebody in this house who's had a hand in kidnapping Mauly. He might like to hear of a servant who was head-over-ears in debt from backing horses!"

Orris stood very still.

He did not speak, but his eyes remained fixed on Bunter, with a very strange expression in them.

Bunter blinked at him.

The veiled impertinence was quite gone from Orris' manner. Bunter had the impression that he was bringing the fellow to his senses.

"Better mind your p's and q's, my man," he said loftily. "I'm not the fellow to stand any nonsense, I can tell you!"

Orris drew a deep, hard breath.

"Surely, sir," he faltered, "you do not imagine—" He broke off. His eyes were glued on Bunter's fat face.

It seemed as if he was striving, by the sheer force of his gaze, to read the thoughts behind that fat and fatuous countenance.

But there was, in point of fact, nothing to read.

Bunter's words, which had startled James Orris to the extent of driving the colour from his cheeks, had been uttered only from irritation and annoyance.

As for actually suspecting Orris of complicity in the kidnapping of Lord Mauleverer, that had never entered Bunter's mind at all. His fat intellect

moved in mysterious ways its wonders to perform.

Inspector Rymer might certainly have turned his attention to Orris had he known that the valet was deeply in debt from reckless gambling. That would have been very discomfiting for Orris. And that was all that Bunter was thinking—so far as he thought at all.

He was far from realising the effect of his words on Orris.

"You see, it will pay you to be civil, my man!" said Bunter.

"I am sure, sir, that it was not my intention to be uncivil," said Orris humbly.

Bunter grinned.

He felt that he had put the fellow in his place at last.

"That's better," he said. "Now help me on with that coat."

"Certainly, sir!"

Bunter's fat face wore a complacent smile, as Orris held the coat and he squeezed his fat person into it. He had brought Orris to heel!

"Anything more, sir?" asked Orris.

"Get my gloves and hat."

"Very good, sir!"

In a state of complete satisfaction Bunter rolled away. He flattered himself that he knew how to handle servants when they were cheeky.

Orris looked after him as he went, with a singular expression on his face. Bunter would have been startled could he have guessed the thoughts that were passing in the valet's mind.

But the fat Owl, having gained his point, dismissed the matter. Orris had been taught manners, and he was worthy of no more of Billy Bunter's lofty consideration.

The fat junior, comfortably encased in Lord Mauleverer's fur coat, rolled out into the thickening December dusk and the falling flakes.

Harry Wharton & Co. had long been gone, and Bunter rolled down the long, winding avenue to the gates after them.

He grunted discontentedly as he trudged through thick snow.

The pictures would have been ever so much better. Still, he did not want to hang about the dismal, shadowed house by himself. As he tramped along in the thickening winter dusk he thought he heard a footstep behind him, and blinked round. But if there was anyone else coming down the long avenue between the rows of leafless, frosty trees, Bunter did not see him.

He rolled on.

About half-way down the avenue he glanced through an opening of the trees at a mass of snow at a little distance from the drive.

It was the old well, into which Bunter had tumbled on the night of his arrival at Mauleverer Towers.

The well was surrounded by a stone wall for safety; but the wall and the ground adjoining, were piled with snow, thick and white, and looked like a mound in the dimness. Bunter glanced towards it carelessly. As he did so, he heard the footstep behind him again—and now it was the step of a man running.

He blinked round again. It was Orris, coming on at a rapid run. He panted for breath as he joined Bunter.

The fat junior eyed him superciliously.

"Well, what do you want?" he asked.

"Only a word with you, sir!" said Orris, and even Bunter, unobservant and obtuse as he was, was startled by the smouldering gleam in the man's eyes in the dusk, and was vaguely alarmed. "You were pleased to make a

remark, sir, in his lordship's room a short time ago—"

"Well, what about it?" asked Bunter, backing away a step instinctively, though even yet his fatuous mind did not realise danger.

"I could not pursue the matter there, sir," said Orris. "But as you were going out, I thought I would follow, sir, and speak to you here. I have hitherto regarded you, sir, as an absolute fool, from whom nothing could possibly be feared. I find that I was mistaken."

Bunter stared. "Why, you cheeky rotter—" he gasped.

"I find, sir," said Orris, still speaking in the smooth, silky manner, which was strangely at variance with the words he uttered, "I find that it is from you, whom I have considered only a fat and harmless fool, that I have to anticipate danger."

Bunter blinked at him, speechless now. "Whether you actually suspect me, or whether your stupidity is beyond my power of plumbing, I cannot say for certain!" continued Orris, in the same low, smooth voice. "But I know that I cannot take the risk. There is too much at stake for that. Your words, repeated to other ears, would certainly draw upon me suspicion which could have only one end. I must thank you, sir, for having warned me in time to save myself."

Bunter jumped back. Even his obtuse mind understood now, and a terror that was like ice froze his very blood.

Snow was falling after him in great masses.

In the darkness above, Orris was working fast and hard. Mass after mass of snow was piled into the well from above, till it was filled almost to the brim. Ten feet of snow, and more, piled over the hapless junior whom the ruthless rascal had hurled to death.

Orris ceased at last. He wiped his brow, which was streaming with perspiration in spite of the freezing cold. He stared for some moments at the choked well. His face was white, his hands shaking. But he was safe now. Danger of which he had never dreamed had threatened him from the least-expected quarter. That danger was buried deep!

bottom of the well, had rolled into the narrow bricked opening at the side, and the falling masses of snow above never touched him. They fell and fell, blocking up the opening into which he had rolled, choking up the well above, while the Owl of the Remove, sitting breathless in the underground tunnel, spluttered and gasped.

"Oh crikey! Beast! Oh lor'!" gurgled Bunter.

The fall had knocked most of the breath out of him, but he was not damaged otherwise, for he had fallen on a soft thickness of snow. Now he was completely shut into the tunnel by the snow piled in the well. That, however, did not worry Bunter in the least. He had been through the secret passage



Bunter's senses whirled as he was dragged bodily through the thick snow. Then the grasp of his captor was relaxed, and the fat junior shot downwards into the well!

But even as he moved the man was upon him.

One faint squeak escaped the hapless Owl, shut off instantly by a grasp of iron on his throat.

The next moment he was dragged from the avenue among the dim trees.

He struggled feebly. His fat senses whirled, as he was dragged bodily through the thick snow. He hardly knew what was happening in his terror and amazement, but he made one more effort at resistance as he was dragged over the snow-piled parapet of the ancient well.

He had a glimpse of the valet's face, not smooth and deferential now, but fixed, savage, ruthless. Then he slid in falling snow, over the verge, and only Orris' grasp held him for a moment from falling into the well. That grasp was relaxed, and he shot downwards.

Thud!

He landed in the thick snow that was piled far below.

Dizzily he blinked up.

No one would be surprised, when it was learned—after many days, perhaps weeks—that the short-sighted junior had tumbled into the well in the dark, and perished there of cold, buried by falling snow. With a white face, but a cool head, James Orris stole away from the spot in the darkness and the falling flakes.

THE FOURTEENTH CHAPTER.

Bunter Makes a Discovery!

"Oh crikey!"

Billy Bunter, like the heathen of old, sat in darkness. He gasped and spluttered as he sat. Above him the old well was crammed and choked with snow. But the fat junior was not, as Orris believed, buried under the snow.

The secret of the old well, utterly unknown to Orris, and unsuspected by him, was known to Bunter. And Bunter, after landing on the snow at the

before, and knew where it led, and he knew that he had only to follow it to reach safety.

But he was shivering with terror, as well as with cold.

There was no mistaking Orris' intention and his motive! That was clear even to Bunter's obtuse brain.

He had been hurled into the disused well to perish there! Orris, piling in the snow, believed that he was burying him beyond chance or hope of rescue.

"The awful villain!" groaned Bunter.

He shuddered, and his teeth chattered. In his fatuous self-satisfaction he had, as he supposed, brought a cheeky servant to heel, never dreaming that his idle words had inspired the fear of discovery in the heart of a desperate and remorseless malefactor. And but for the secret passage from the old well, and Bunter's accidental knowledge of it, what he knew—or, rather, what he had made Orris believe that

the suspected—would have been buried from all human knowledge.

The fat Owl picked himself up at last.

He was in dense darkness, and, in spite of Mauly's fur coat, the cold chilled his fat limbs. He groped in his pockets for Bob Cherry's electric torch, which he had borrowed the day before when playing ghost in the haunted turret. He turned on the light, and blinked round him.

The snow blocking up the opening of the tunnel rather relieved him; it shut him off from the murderous rascal above. James Orris undoubtedly believed that he was buried under ten feet of snow, doomed to inevitable death; and even in his terror Bunter grinned at that thought. James Orris was going to discover later that he was still alive—very much alive!

Flashing the light of the torch before him the fat junior picked his way along the underground passage.

He reached the spiral stair at the end of it, and clambered up—slowly, and with many a grunt and gasp.

Endless seemed the stone steps to Bunter, winding up and up, as they had seemed on the previous occasion when he had mounted them.

But he reached the top at last.

Now he was in the stone cell, behind the thick wall of the turret-room, where he had stood hidden to utter ghostly groans when the juniors and the girls were exploring the haunted turret.

His fat hand glided over the oak panel in the recess, and found the knob which moved the hidden spring.

All he had to do was to open the panel and re-enter Mauleverer Towers by way of the turret-room. Orris, if he had come in, would doubtless be very much surprised to see him. Not that Bunter intended to let Orris see him if he could help it. His idea was to creep quietly to his own room and lock himself in there, and wait in hiding till Harry Wharton & Co. returned, when he would be safe. And the thought of the news that he had for them made him grin.

They had gone out in the snowy afternoon, hoping to pick up news of the missing Mauleverer, little dreaming

that while they were gone Bunter had put his fat finger on the kidnapper himself!

He grasped the oaken knob, and turned, or, rather, tried to turn. The knob did not move.

"Oh crumbs!" murmured Bunter.

He strove again and again. On previous occasions the knob had turned easily and the spring had moved, the panel opened. Now it refused to move.

Bunter blinked at it in dismay.

Either it was jammed, or it had, somehow, been secured on the other side! It could hardly have jammed; it had worked perfectly before. It had been secured on the side of the turret-room.

Who could have done it? Who, besides Bunter, knew the secret of the moving panel in the turret-room?

Bunter could not guess. But he realised that his escape, on which he had counted as a certainty, was cut off. The thick oaken panel barred him off from the haunted room, and it was now immovable.

"Oh lor'!" groaned Bunter.

He raised a fat hand, but he lowered it again. The turret-room was too far from the occupied parts of the mansion for knocking to be heard from it. But that was not all. If any ears, by chance, heard knocking from the haunted room they were as likely to be Orris' ears as anyone else's. And the bare idea of being caught by Orris in that lonely spot, defenceless, made Bunter's blood run cold.

His teeth chattered.

For a long, long time the hapless Owl stood irresolute. He turned away from the locked panel at last.

He flashed the torch into the narrow passage that led out of the stone cell on the opposite side from the spiral stair.

He had not taken the trouble hitherto even to blink into it; the dark passage winding away into obscurity had had no attraction for him. But now it was a case of any port in a storm.

It was possible, at least, that there existed some other way into the Towers, apart from the panel in the wall of the turret-room. And the fat

Owl resolved to explore it, in the hope of discovering some way of escape.

With the light of the torch gleaming before him, he followed the narrow passage in the thickness of the ancient wall.

Step by step he advanced, feeling his way, and peering before him through his big spectacles.

Clink!

"Ooooooh!" gasped Bunter.

From the darkness ahead of him came the sound of a clinking chain! Bunter stopped dead.

The thought of the ghost of Mauleverer Towers rushed into his mind. He stood trembling in every limb.

Clink, clink, clink!

There was a sound of movement, with the clinking of the chain. Bunter's fat knees knocked together, and the torch sagged in his shaking hand. His teeth clattered like castanets.

Clink, Clink!

"Is that you, you rascal?" came a voice from the darkness. "Or is it help? Who is there? If it's a friend, speak, for mercy's sake!"

Billy Bunter almost fell down in his amazement.

The voice that came from the darkness was the voice of Lord Mauleverer!

THE FIFTEENTH CHAPTER.

A Surprise for Mauly!

LORD MAULEVERER strained his eyes in the darkness from the prison-room.

He stood with the chain clinking round him as he moved, his eyes fixed on a spot of gleaming light in the blackness.

How long he had been a prisoner, in cold and darkness, the schoolboy earl did not know. It seemed like days and weeks; indeed, it seemed to him that centuries of blackness and solitude had passed since the kidnapper had left him there. Yet he knew that most probably it was less than a day, for the man in black had said that he would return in twenty-four hours, and Mauleverer had no doubt that he would keep his word.

As he saw the gleaming light advancing along the dark passage his natural thought was that it was his enemy who was coming. Nevertheless, hope leaped up in his heart.

He heard a gasp from the blackness behind the light. It had stopped; but now it came on again. And from the unseen person who carried it came a voice that—not musical in itself—was music to the kidnapped schoolboy. It was certain that the voice of Billy Bunter had never fallen so gladly on human ears before.

"Is that you, Mauly?"

Mauleverer almost staggered.

"Bunter!" he gasped.

"Yes, old chap!"

"Bunter! Good gad!"

The light came onward. The voice of Lord Mauleverer had banished Bunter's fears at once; and he knew that he had found the kidnapped schoolboy, though the discovery utterly amazed him. He peered over the torch as he came into the stone-walled prison-room that ended the secret passage. His eyes opened wide behind his big spectacles at the sight of Lord Mauleverer, standing in the clinking chain that secured him to the wall.

"Mauly!" he gasped.

"Bunter! Bunter, old man, you're a prize packet!" Mauleverer's white face glowed. He could have hugged William George Bunter at that moment. "Oh gad! How did you find

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me, Bunter?" He caught at the fat junior's plump arm, as if to make sure that the apparition was real. "Bunter, old bean, are the other fellows coming—what?"

"Eh! No."

Bunter peered at him.

"Fancy finding you here!" he gasped. "Have you been here all the time, Mauly?"

"Yaas. That villain drugged me and brought me here. It seems like weeks ago, or years—"

"It was last night!" said Bunter.

"I suppose it was. He said he would come back in twenty-four hours, and he hasn't come yet. But it seems—"

Bunter jumped.

"Oh crumbs! Is he coming back? I—I say, I—I think I'd better go! I—I don't want him to find me here."

"Hold on, you ass!" Mauleverer looked at his wrist-watch, in the light of the torch. "It's not five yet—and he won't come till the house is asleep—lots of time yet. He wouldn't risk it."

"Oh!" gasped Bunter. "All—all right, then! I—I mean, of—of course I wouldn't desert you, old chap."

Mauleverer grinned.

"But how did you get here, old bean? Did you find the way in here from the turret-room? That villain knows it."

"Oh!" gasped Bunter. "Then that's why the panel's locked on the other side—he's locked it after sticking you here. How did Orris find it out, I wonder?"

"Orris!" repeated Lord Mauleverer blankly.

"Didn't you know it was Orris?" asked Bunter, blinking at him.

"Are you mad? Orris, my valet—what do you mean?" exclaimed Mauleverer.

Billy Bunter grinned.

"I've found him out," he said. "It was Orris—"

"What utter rot!"

"And he jolly well tried to murder me, to keep it dark—"

"Oh, rot!"

"Oh, really, Mauly—"

"Orris!" repeated Lord Mauleverer. "Impossible! You're dreaming, Bunter. Don't be an ass, you know."

"You'd have known the kind of man he was, if you'd listened to me, when I wanted to tell you about that letter of his that I saw," grunted Bunter. "He owes bookmakers hundreds of pounds."

"Nonsense!"

"He pitched me into the well because he thought I'd found him out—I mean, because I had found him out—"

hooted Bunter. "He chucked down snow on me, and he thinks at this very minute that I'm buried under it, at the bottom of the well."

Mauleverer gazed at him.

"Tell me how you got here," he said quietly.

And Bunter told him; the schoolboy carl listening in utter amazement. Mauleverer drew a deep, deep breath, when the fat Owl had finished.

"So that's it!" he said at last. "And that's how you got in the night you came, you fat fraud! You've known of that secret panel in the turret-room all the time you've been here! It was you that put up the groaning when we were looking for the ghost in the turret-room—"

"He, he, he!"

"You fat spoofer—"

"If that's how you thank a chap for rescuing you at the risk of his life, Mauly—"

"Oh! Ah! Well, never mind," said Lord Mauleverer. "You ought to have

told me about that secret panel at once, you fat bounder. What were you keeping it dark for? Oh gad! Was it to get in again if you were booted out?"

"Oh, really, Mauly—"

"Well, never mind," said Mauleverer. "Thank goodness you're here, anyhow. I'm dashed if I should ever have believed that I should ever be glad to see you; but it's always the jolly old unexpected that happens."

"Look here, you beast—"

"That villain has got the key that locks this chain," said Mauleverer, unheeding. "You can't get me loose. And if he's locked the panel on the other side, you can't get out and get help. We've got to think this out."

"I—I say, Mauly—"

"Don't interrupt! Look here, that villain isn't likely to come back till after midnight; but he will come. He's counting on my giving in, after twenty-four hours of this, and writing a letter to my uncle to fix up about the ransom." Mauly set his lips. "He mustn't find you here, Bunter."

"I should jolly well say not!" gasped Bunter. "No jolly fear!"

"He will come by the panel in the turret-room," went on Mauleverer. "He knows nothing of the way you came in, from the old well. You'll be out of sight, Bunter—"

"Yes, rather!" agreed Bunter, with emphasis.

"You'll hide on that spiral stair you've told me about. You won't let him spot you when he comes through from the turret-room—"

"What-ho!"

"He will come along here—and then you'll nip through the panel into the turret; it won't be locked on the other side while he's here, see?"

"Good!"

"Then you'll get to Wharton, and the other fellows, and tell them. They'll root me out of this fast enough when they know where I am. Only—take jolly good care that that villain doesn't spot you when he comes through."

"Rely on me for that, old chap!" said Bunter earnestly.

And Lord Mauleverer grinned. Billy Bunter was not, in many ways a very reliable youth. But Mauly had no doubt, not the shadow of a doubt, that he could rely on him for that.

THE SIXTEENTH CHAPTER.

At Last!

HARRY WHARTON rubbed his eyes. Bob Cherry yawned. Frank Nugent was dozing, half-asleep, in a deep chair. Johnny Bull stood by the crackling log fire in the old hall of Mauleverer Towers, his hands in his pockets. Hurree Jahset Ram Singh sat with his dark eyes drowsily on the ruddy embers. At a little distance, old Sir Reginald moved restlessly about, like an unquiet ghost.

The hour was late.

Long since, Marjorie and Clara had gone to their rooms. Hazel had stayed up a little later, but he had gone to bed at last. But the Famous Five, sleepy as they were, were not thinking of bed. They had returned unsuccessful from their expedition; not that they had really hoped for any success. Now, added to their anxiety for Mauleverer, was the fact that Billy Bunter was missing.

Where the fat Owl was they could not imagine. Orris had informed them that he had helped Bunter into his lordship's fur coat, and that he had followed them

out. Porson had seen him leave the house. That was all they could learn. They had no doubt that Bunter had missed his way somewhere in the dark, and would come rolling home late. But at midnight he had not rolled in, and they wondered rather uneasily whether some accident had befallen the fat and fatuous Owl.

Midnight was past now. All the servants were gone to bed. Orris had lingered latest, but he had disappeared at last. The great house was plunged into silence, broken only by the wail of the wind, and the crackle of the fire in the great fireplace, piled with logs. It was the last day of the old year, and Mauly's Christmas party had intended to sit up and see the old year out and the new year in. But this was very different from what the Christmas party had anticipated. They sat up with heavy hearts and anxious minds.

"I say, you fellows!"

Every member of the Famous Five jumped at that whispering voice, coming suddenly from the silence.

"Bunter!"

A fat figure, in a fur coat, came on tiptoe from the staircase. The Famous Five stared at Bunter blankly. Sir Reginald Brooke screwed his eyeglass a little tighter into his eye, and stopped his restless pacing, to stare at the fat junior.

"How the thump—" began Wharton.

The juniors had expected to hear Bunter at the door sooner or later. They were amazed to see him come from the staircase within. And the look on his face amazed them still more. His fat cheeks were white, his little round eyes bulging behind his spectacles, and he breathed in gasps.

"I say, you fellows," Bunter's voice was a husky whisper. "I say—quick—quick—come on, all of you—quick—"

He gasped.

"What does this mean, Bunter?" asked Sir Reginald Brooke quietly.

"I've found him, sir—"

"Found him! What—who—"

"Mauly, sir!" gasped Bunter. "Come on, quick! That villain's with him now! He passed only a couple of yards from me. It was him all the time. He was only spoofing when he made out that he was chloroformed like Mauly, you know. If he'd seen me he would have— Oh crikey!"

The juniors gazed at Bunter, dumb-founded. Sir Reginald grasped him by a fat shoulder.

"Explain yourself—quick!"

Bunter babbled it out. In utter amazement the old baronet and the juniors listened. But as soon as they understood, no time was lost. The baronet and the Famous Five followed Bunter up the staircase; Bob Cherry lingering a moment to catch up one of Sir Reginald's golf clubs from a bag in the hall, with the idea that it might be needed.

Breathless, with gleaming eyes, the juniors reached the old stone stair to the turret, and hurried up. They entered the shadowy turret-room. Bunter flashed on his light, groped for the carved lion's head on the secret panel, and the panel clicked open.

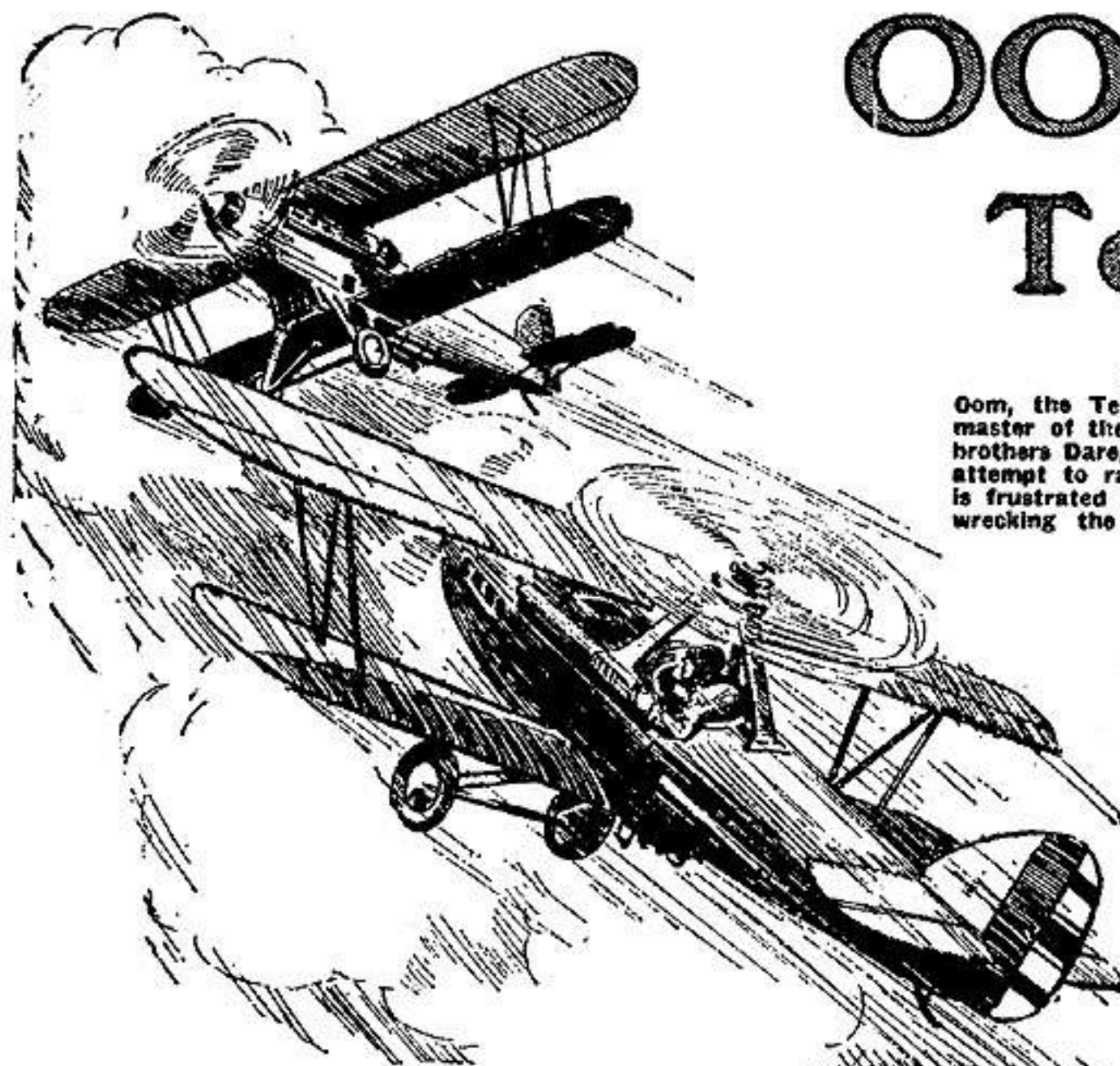
"I say, you fellows, you—you go first," whispered Bunter. "I—I've got to—to tie up my shoelace—"

Without heeding Bunter, the old baronet and the five juniors passed through the aperture into the stone cell beyond.

Far in the distance, at the end of the

(Continued on page 28.)

OOM, the Terrible!



HOW THE STORY STARTED.

Oom, the Terrible, is a Flying-Bandit who aims to be master of the world. He finds two formidable foes in the brothers Dare, who have sworn to bring him to book. An attempt to raid the house of Silas Merger, a millionaire, is frustrated by Rick. Meanwhile, Tom Dare succeeds in wrecking the special wireless apparatus which controls Oom's aeroplane, and sets up an even more powerful one himself. In averting an explosion, however, Tom is injured, and while he is recuperating, Rick is left to carry on.

happened to Tom," said Rick. "He won't be able to do any flying for a bit, poor old chap!"

As Rick related Tom's accident, Alf listened, his gaunt features twitching with wrath, cracking his bony fingers in a way he had when agitated.

"That blinkin' little dwarf—if I o'ud get my foot on 'is hugly dial, I'd squash 'im like I would a black boedle, the villain!" he spluttered. "Lummy, it'll mean waitin' 'til he's better, unless— Look 'ere, sir, if we can git th' power on wot abaht me an' you and old Ham takin' this bus across an' ketching Oom on the 'op, so to speak? Look 'ere, you think it over whilst I gits busy ree-pairin' this prop shaft! I'll 'ave noo blades fixed to 'er in less than a couple of hours, then you can fly back an' consult wiv Mister Merger an' th' young boss. Lummy—if they'd on'y let us—we c'ud 'ave a barney, me and you, and th' old tin o' Nugget!"

Rick had explored the instrument-room in the wireless plane, and had discovered in there a map which had a pencilled line running across it from the Andes to Lake Titicaca. He reckoned that this was the route taken when Oom had first captured him, and thus by following it backwards, so to speak, he would be able to find the secret stronghold without difficulty.

Armed with this he flew back and interviewed Merger.

To his surprise, the millionaire not only gave his consent, but announced his intention of coming on the expedition himself.

"Yeah, me, Silas Merger, the bloated millionaire!" he grinned. "I may tell yuh, young feller, that forty year ago I was well an' truly known from Wyoming to Texas as a plainsman an' Injun fighter, an' thar was few to touch me with either rifle or six-gun! Likewise I'd fight my weight in wild-cats if it came to it! Yep, I've been gettin' fat an' kinder out 'n condition pilin' up th' dollars for my leetle gal, but she's well fixed now, an' I'm just achin' for a bit o' fun! I-guess this Oom feller is doo to provide same. Jump to it, boyce—I'm a-comin', an' we'll go inter this thing wi' both feet!"

Tom naturally chafed considerably at being cut off from going on the expedition, but he was a sensible chap, and realised that it was impossible for

In the Dead of Night!

"GREAT gophers!" gasped Alf Higgs. "What's this?" The little experimental plane limped into view, hovered for a moment like a wounded bird, then slowly descended into the clearing with gyroscope humming, and came to rest alongside the huge wireless plane like a peewit beside a swan.

The men danced around and cheered Rick to the echo as he stepped smiling out of the cockpit. But for a bruise on his forehead, he was none the worse.

"Crikey, wot 'ave yer been a-doin' off?" asked Alf, as he examined the propeller shaft. "Stripped 'er clean as a whistle! Did 'e 'it yer, ol' man?"

"Not with a bullet," answered Rick. "It was jolly lucky he didn't know he had smashed my propeller, or he'd have had me sitting. As it was he seemed only too glad to get away. But he certainly had no guessing when I went bat-eyed into that smoke screen!"

"Wot 'ad 'e done, then?" queried Alf interestedly. "Did 'e put up a smoke screen a-puppis?"

"No, I don't think so. I imagine that when I hit Maleze, he was just in the act of getting out another bomb—their object being to bomb this wireless plane and bust it up before we could get her going again. Oom must have been leaving that part of the business to the dwarf who had jammed the bomb-dropping apparatus when he dropped into the bottom of the cockpit. Oom got a bit panic struck—perhaps I'd hit him, I don't know, and dumped the bombs anywhere to lighten the plane, and not run the risk of the bombs getting a direct hit and blowing him sky-high!"

"Ah, that'll be 'ow it was, wivaht daht," agreed Alf. "Fancy that flat-nosed blinkin' dwarf bein' wiv 'is boss."



That shows that Oom's been back to 'is show ag'in, eh?"

"Looks like it," agreed Rick. "Considering he left Maleze behind him on his last trip. It likewise shows that the stronghold isn't as far off as we thought, because he's been back there in so short a time!"

"Kerrect, an' if 'e can 'op hover there so quick, we'd git there a darn sight quicker, if so be as we c'ud git this 'ere wireless 'ippopotamuss into the air," mused Alf, surveying the big, helpless plane with a disgusted air. "Ow long afore Mister Tom's wireless power'll be all hokey, sir?"

"Almost any time now," said Rick. "He told me when he got that last pair of transmitters fixed that it would be only a matter of a few hours before he'd have her running all sweet!"

"Good enough!" chortled Alf. "Wot 'e says 'e'll do, and as soon as th' blinkin' power comes—orf we goes! I've learnt all abaht this er'e elephant since we've been lyin' 'ere, and I reckon I c'ud fly 'er blindfold. That is, unless you or Mister Tom's goin' to pilot 'er, sir?"

"Of course, you haven't heard what's

him to move for a few weeks, maybe, and he was too generous to let his feelings show. He gave all the help he could while in bed and arranged for a couple of his own trained experts to take over the charge of the power-house which would supply the big plane with her motive power.

"She can be going all out in less than twenty-four hours," he assured his brother and Merger. "And I'll guarantee that my machines will generate double as much power as Oom's ever did, for I've had the advantage of starting where his engineers left off. Gee whiz! Silas, you have got 'em all on!"

The millionaire had arrayed himself in all the glories of a cowpuncher—blue shirt, leather chaps, kerchief, and Stetson hat complete. They showed every sign of the hard wear they had been put to in the days when he had been cattleman, hunter, and scout on the great Western and Southern plains. Slung at each hip was a huge scabbard containing a blued steel six-gun of large calibre; for Silas had been known as a "two-gun man," and was reckoned to be lightning on the draw.

Anyone who saw the kindly, shrewd, easy-going man of commerce nowadays would hardly believe that he had been one of the "roughnecks" of the West.

"Yep, boyees, excuse muh!" he said somewhat sheepishly. "But I feel kinder more comfort'ble like with th' old duds on if it comes to a question o' scrappin', as you say it likely will—an' I hope it does! Don't say nothin' to Beryl; let her think we are goin' on a joy-ride, or she'll be worryin'."

Although he had a picked crew of engineering experts, who would also be useful in a scrap, Rick had made up his mind to depend more on his own little party than on any outside aid, and intended to try to take the garrison at the stronghold by surprise. He explained his plans to Merger, but the millionaire shook his head dubiously.

"It's all right for yuh light-weights, but I go nigh sixteen stun," he explained. "I cain't see myself floatin' thru' th' air held up by one o' them things—no, sirree!"

He was handling one of Tom's "angel's wings" cloaks, which the young inventor had worked sundry improvements upon, and of which the wireless plane carried a supply.

Rick knew that it would be hopeless to attempt to land with the big plane; for the stronghold was too well guarded, and Oom would be on the qui vive for any attack. The essence of success would have to be surprise, and to gain that he must land his little force during the hours of darkness without giving a hint of their presence; otherwise, the searchlights would pick them out, and the anti-aircraft guns would be able to keep them at a distance.

Therefore, he meant to bring the plane down beyond the lip of the precipice which guarded the stronghold so effectually. He knew that there were several good landing-places within a mile or two of the basin, as the main spine of the Andes was a sort of plateau which extended for miles.

"H'm! So I guess yuh mean to kinder hover while we gets through the skylight and drops down into this yer basin?" asked Silas.

"Hardly, sir," said Rick. "We get down into the basin in the dark and attack before they know we've arrived."

"But yuh told me that it was impossible to git inter th' basin except from an aeroplane," objected Silas.

"I said the only entrance was from

the air," grinned Rick. "And so it is. My idea is that we climb over the precipice with these cloaks on, and then waft gently down and—there we are!"

"Oh, are we?" echoed the old plainsman. "Take et from muh, boyee, that my figger wasn't constructed for no waftin', and this yer thing looks mighty flimsy to support my weight. Instead o' 'waftin', I'm more liable to come down all in a heap—like a ton o' coal!"

"Don't worry!" Rick consoled him. "Didn't one of these carry Alf and me? Besides, since then they have been much improved and strengthened. If anything gives way you can kick me from here to Rio!"

"If anythin' goes wrong I guess I shan't be in a condition to do no kickin'. However, I'm on; I kin on'y die but once!"

"Here you are, Ham, here's one for you," said Rick, as he handed a huge cloak to the negro.

Ham eyed the silk balloon fabric doubtfully.

"I reckons dis niggah am a mite too hefty for to go trustin' his body in a toy balloon in de air," he said. "All de parryshootles I hab ebber seed hab been huge brollies what opened out propah—"

"And it over 'ere, guv'nor; he's afraid," said Alf, shoving the big fellow on one side. "I told yer 'e 'ad no pluck. He's that windy he oughter be able to float dahn on 'is own without a parachute. Git out o' th' way, yer big boob, an' let a man 'ave a cut at it!"

"Don' yo' talk to muh, yo' pore white trash," said the darkie scornfully, "or I'll jest natterally take yo' up an' waim yo' pants fo' yo', so's yo' take yo' dinnah off'n de mantelpiece fo' a month! Mass' Rick, don' yo' go thinkin' I'm skeered. Ah am jest precautious by nature, suh, dat's all! Gimme de cloak, an' Ah'll done show dis li'l monkey dat a cullud gemmen knows how to face dangah—yessah!"

So it was that in the dead of night the party stole across the rugged rocks above the basin and peered down into the basin, the occupants of which were all asleep, and unaware of the fact that their most dangerous enemy would soon be in their midst.

Rick and his party looked like big bats flitting along the top of the cliffs, and they moved noiselessly, for they had taken the precaution of wearing rubber shoes.

They could see the lights from the huts in the basin, but the great central arc lamp was extinguished—in fact, it had not been lighted since Oom's return after his futile attempt to wreck Tom's power-house.

The Flying-Bandit had been thoroughly scared by the bad luck that had attended him lately, and knew only too well that he would be raided sooner or later, and had, therefore, taken all the precautions possible.

With his usual cynical indifference to the welfare of those who trusted him, he had determined to save himself, and let them face the music as best they could.

He had returned with the wounded Maleze to the stronghold in the De Hay bomber in a foul temper, and his underlings had hardly dared speak to him. He had given a few curt orders, and then disappeared into his own quarters, since when none of them had seen him.

He had been mighty careful to give them no inkling that trouble was looming up, though he had doubled the armed guards, and insisted upon a rigid patrol day and night, whilst the anti-aircraft guns and powerful searchlights

were all overhauled and put into working order, and a strong party attached to each.

The men grumbled at the extra work, but such was the power of the Flying-Bandit's personality that they gave no sign of demur.

"Now then, I'll go first, as I know the ground best," Rick whispered, as they reached the edge of the precipice; "then Ham and Alf, and you come last, Silas, and we'll stand by to see that you land all right. So-long for the present!"

He stepped casually over the sheer edge, and next moment was plunging down into the pitchy darkness.

Over the Top!

RICK and his party had chosen the spot almost immediately behind Oom's house as being farthest away from the guard-room, where they could see lights, and where probably the watch would be more rigidly kept.

"Come hon, yer long streak o' black treacle!" grinned Alf, shoving the negro towards the precipice. "Jus' shut yer little eyes, clasp yer little 'ands, and dahn yer goes!"

"Don't hurry muh, don't be too quick, Alf, dere's a good fellah!" gasped the negro, his teeth chattering with fright. "Mah golly, but it do look so mighty dark down dere; an' Ah ain't a-tall suah as dis parryshootle am safe! Ow, Alf! What yo' doin' of? Hellup! Ah'm fallin'!"

Alf had wasted no time about his big pal. Having forced him to the edge of the precipice, he had sent him flying over the cliff-side.

Luckily fear paralysed poor Ham's powers of speech, and he plunged downwards in dumb despair.

Alf followed immediately behind him, and, as the negro's parachute opened up and his speed checked, the little Cockney careered down and dropped on the bulkier man from above.

With the added weight, Ham whizzed down to earth like a rocket-stick, to land with a bump near to where Rick was awaiting them.

"Aw, mah golly, but Ah'm a deader fo' suah!" groaned Ham, trying to fight his way out of the tangle of the cloak. "All mah innards hab been lef' up-stairs! Ohohoh! Gib mah lub to mudder an' tell her Ah dies on dooty! Golly wars! What am dat?"

He sprang to his feet with a muffled yell as Silas Merger came sailing down and landed with all the graco of a baby elephant.

"Shurup, yer big hambone!" growled Alf. "Djer want to wake hup th' blinkin' camp?"

"Gee! But this has got th' hoop-la and th' switchback licked to a frazzle!" grinned Merger, as Rick helped disencumber him of his cloak. "I thought th' durned thing was never goin' to open at first, an' I don't mind admittin' I was plumb skeered. But when it did—it was like floatin' down on a feather bed. I'd do it ten times a day wi'out a quiver! Now, what's th' idee, Rick? Yuh are in charge of operations. Give us yer orders, gen'ral!"

"I reckon the first thing to be done is to get the anti-aircraft guns put out of action," said Rick. "We shall want to get the plane down here because of the machine-guns and the rest of the men. They're likely to have too strong a garrison here for just us four to tackle;

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though we ought to be able to account for the gun crews, especially if they're half asleep. I left word with the engineer in charge of the plane to take off in half an hour, so we haven't got too much time."

He sent Ham in advance, because he knew that end of the basin better than any of them, and also because the negro had the peculiar gift so many black men have of being able to see in the dark.

They wrapped their cloaks around them, and in Indian file worked their way over the rocks to where the first anti-aircraft gun was, its nose pointing skywards—as were the noses of the three men who, although supposed to be on guard, were fast asleep, comfortably propped up against their charge!

Ham leapt quietly on to the gun platform with his bare feet, and, grabbing two of the sleeping men by the throat, brought their heads together with a ferocious bang. If they woke they must have slept promptly again, for not a sound came from them except a muffled grunt.

The third man woke to find a cold rim of steel pressed against his forehead, and to hear a hoarse Cockney voice snarl in his ear:

"One salnd from you, and I'll blow the roof o' yer lump o' lead orf! Turn hoyer an' lie doggo!"

They bound the three men back to back, and then fastened them securely to the gun. Then Alf hopped up on to the stand, and with expert fingers probed amongst the mechanism. He reappeared, flourishing a breech bolt.

"They cawn't load or fire 'er 'til they gits anuvver!" he announced. "That's number one out o' action!"

They scrambled down amongst the rocks again, and, keeping well in the shadows, scuttled across to the next emplacement. Here a man was pretending to do sentry-go, but ere he could give an alarm Ham had cricked his neck back, and the further proceedings ceased to interest him.

Rick and Silas Merger tackled the other two, and soon the three sentries were lying back to back, bound to the gun, with gags in their mouths and very startled expressions on their faces.

At the next gun Ham jumped his man as before, but the fellow had evidently not been asleep, and was as slippery as an eel. He managed to wriggle out of the negro's grip, and let out a frightened bellow, at the same time discharging his rifle.

"That's torn it!" said Rick. "Now for trouble! Jump to it, Silas! We've got to look slippy!"

(Next week's instalment of this powerful serial is even more thrilling than any you've read yet. Make sure of reading it by ordering your copy of the MAGNET in good time!)

THE SECRET OF THE TURRET!

(Continued from page 25.)

narrow passage that opened before them, was a glimmer of light.

Silent, grim, they passed along the secret passage.

The prison-room was before them, lighted by a flickering candle stuck on the stone wall. They saw Lord Mauleverer, standing with the chain locked on him, his face white in the candle-light. And they saw a figure in black facing the schoolboy earl, his back to them as they came. The sound of a husky, disguised voice reached their ears.

"There is pen and paper, my lord. I am waiting!"

"You can wait!" answered Mauleverer.

Looking past the man in black, Mauleverer discerned the six figures that came quietly up the passage. But not a muscle of his face quivered. He gave no sign to warn the man in black.

"You have been here twenty-four hours, my lord! Think—before I go! You are cold—frozen—starving! What will you feel like in another twenty-four hours? Write as I dictate——"

"I will write nothin'!"

There was a muttered oath under the mask.

"I will wait a quarter of an hour longer, my lord! I will give you time! Then, if you refuse——"

The man in black broke off suddenly. Mauleverer's face betrayed nothing, but some faint sound from behind him caught his ear. He spun round.

"Scoundrel!" shouted the old baronet.

The masked man uttered a panting cry.

His eyes gleamed through the eye-holes of the mask like those of a cornered wild animal. He gave one glare round him, but there was no way of escape, save by the secret passage—blocked by the baronet and the juniors behind him. In utter desperation the man in the mask made a rush.

"Seize him!" gasped Sir Reginald.

The old baronet reeled over under the rush of the man in black. The next moment a golf-club swept through the air, and the masked man staggered under the blow and fell. And as he went down, the Famous Five piled on him like one man.

"Got him!" gasped Harry Wharton.

"The gotfulness is terrific!"

Harry Wharton tore the mask from the struggling rascal. It was the face of James Orris, white with rage and despair, that was revealed in the flickering candle-light.

"Herbert—my boy?" exclaimed Sir Reginald. "My dear boy!"

"Jolly glad to see you, nunky," said Lord Mauleverer cheerfully. "That villain's got a key to this chain, you men. Get it off him——"

A minute more and the manacles were unlocked and Mauleverer was free. Orris, still resisting feebly, was safely held. There was a cautious step in the passage, and a fat face and a large pair of spectacles glimmered in the candle-light. Orris gave a convulsive start at the sight of Billy Bunter, his eyes almost starting from his head as he saw the fat junior whom he had believed buried under the snow at the bottom of the old well.

"I say, you fellows—got that beast safe? I say, you might have waited for me. Sure you've got him safe?"

"Safe as houses, old bean!" chuckled Bob Cherry.

"The safefulness is——"

"Terrific!" chortled Bob.

Leaning on his uncle's arm, the schoolboy earl left the prison-room, the Famous Five following with their grasp on Orris. Billy Bunter led the way, with a happy grin of anticipation on his fat face. Ten minutes later, Billy Bunter was seeing the New Year in—with the help of a cold turkey and a Christmas pudding.

Marjorie gave Billy Bunter her sweetest smile the next morning. Miss Clara smacked him on the back. Sir Reginald and Lady Brooke made much of him; Mauly was really pally; Harry Wharton & Co. quite chummy; and even the stately Porson waited on him with eager attention. Everybody, for once, was pleased with Bunter; excepting, no doubt, Orris, who left the Towers in the custody of Inspector Rymer, and who could not be expected to feel pleased.

Still more was Bunter pleased with himself.

Indeed, he swelled so much with importance that he seemed really in danger of sharing the fate of the frog in the fable, and bursting. Not once, but many times, did Bunter explain to the other fellows that he, William George Bunter, was the goods—the genuine goods! And for once Billy Bunter was allowed to spread himself to his fat heart's content, and nobody said him nay. For was it not due to Billy Bunter that it was, after all, a happy New Year at Mauleverer Towers?

THE END.

(Next week's grand long complete yarn of the Greysfriars chums is entitled "BUNTER'S NIGHT OUT!" It deals with Harry Wharton & Co.'s further exciting holiday adventures at Mauleverer Towers. My advice to you, chums, is not to miss it.)

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