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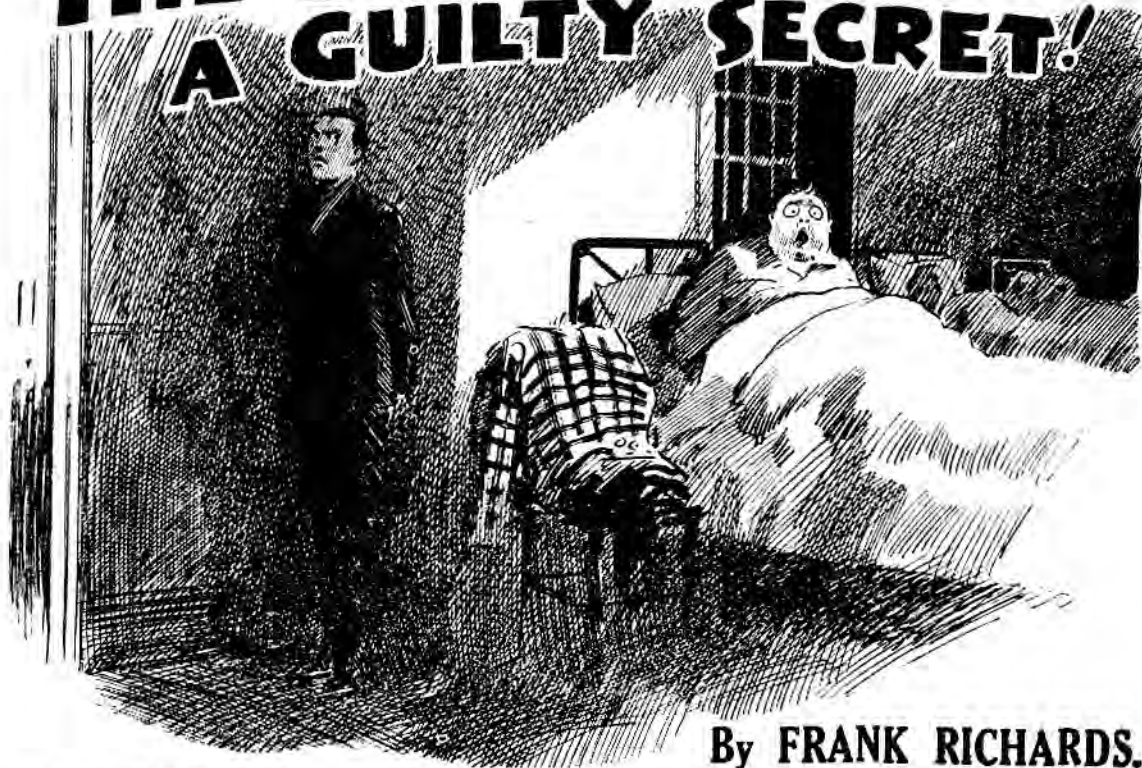
(Simple and Fascinating One-Week Competition—Inside.)

The MAGNET

2^d



THE BOY WITH A GUILTY SECRET!



By FRANK RICHARDS.

THE FIRST CHAPTER.

Very Urgent!

IF—if you please, sir—”
“Well?” rapped Mr. Quelch.
“May—may I fetch a map, sir?” stammered Billy Bunter.
“What?”

It was second lesson in the Remove Form-room at Greyfriars. Mr. Quelch, the master of the Remove, was just going to begin.

Bunter interrupted him.
Mr. Quelch looked at Bunter. Remove fellows looked round at Bunter. The fat Owl of the Remove became, all at once, the cynosure of all eyes.

“Did you say a—a—a map, Bunter?” ejaculated Mr. Quelch.

“Yes, sir! I—I forgot my—my map!”
There was a general grin in the Remove-room. Only Mr. Quelch did not grin. Grinning was not in his line. He frowned.

Herbert Vernon-Smith, the Bounder of Greyfriars, winked at Bob Cherry, who burst into an involuntary chuckle. That chuckle died a sudden death as Mr. Quelch’s gimlet eye was turned on him. Bob was reduced to instant gravity.

Billy Bunter, blinking round through his big spectacles, could see no reason for the juniors to grin, or for Mr. Quelch to frown. It was not uncommon for a fellow to forget to bring in a map, or a book, or something or other, and ask leave to fetch it. Had second lesson that morning been geography, Bunter would probably have got by with it.

As it happened, second lesson that morning dealt with the interesting and important subject of English literature. Billy Bunter had overlooked that little

circumstance. Maps were not required for English literature. So it was fairly clear that what Billy Bunter wanted was not an aid to learning, but an excuse for getting out of the Form-room.

“M-m-may I go and and fetch my map, sir?” asked Bunter, rising hopefully. He was a little dismayed by Quelch’s frown, but he stuck to his guns.

“You may not, Bunter!” said Mr. Quelch, in a very deep voice. “No map will be required for this lesson, Bunter.”

“Oh!” gasped Bunter. “I—I mean, I—I didn’t mean a map, sir—”

“You did not mean a map?” exclaimed Mr. Quelch.

“N-no, sir! I—I meant my Latin dictionary. M-m-may I go and fetch it, sir?”

“You may not, Bunter! You may take fifty lines!”

“Oh!” gasped Bunter. And he sat down again.

Mr. Quelch gave him a grim glance and turned away. Billy Bunter nudged the fellow next to him, who was Jim Valentine, the new boy in the Remove.

“I say, what’s this lesson?” he whispered. “I haven’t brought any books—what beastly books shall we want?”

Valentine grinned.

“We’re doing ‘Gray’s Elegy,’ fathead! You’ll want your ‘Selected Verse.’”

“Oh, all right!”

“Bunter! Are you speaking in class?” inquired Mr. Quelch, in a voice resembling that of the Great Hugo Bear.

“Oh, no, sir! I never opened my lips! I only said to Valentine—”

“Ha, ha, ha!”

“Silence!” Bunter, if you speak again—”

“No, sir! I mean, yes, sir! May I go and fetch my ‘Gray’s Elegy’—”

“What?”

“I mean my Selected Gray—that is, my Elegy verse—I—I mean—”

“Have you not brought the book required for this lesson, Bunter?”

“No, sir! I—”

“You may use the book of the boy next you—”

“Oh lor!”

“And you may take a hundred lines!”

“Oh errikey!”

“And if you speak again, I shall cane you!”

Billy Bunter gasped; but he did not speak again. He did not like the look in Quelch’s eye.

Bunter could see that Quelch somehow—he did not know how—suspected him of making excuses to get away from the Form-room!

Bunter had his reasons for wanting to get to the Remove studies while the other fellows were in class; especially while Herbert Vernon-Smith was in class; reasons not wholly unconnected with a large cake which happened to be in the Bounder’s study cupboard.

But even Bunter realised that there was nothing doing! Quelch, in that suspicious way of his, which Bunter disliked intensely, did not believe that this bright member of his Form really wanted to fetch a map, a Latin dictionary, or even a volume of selected verse.

Probably he suspected Bunter of desiring to escape for a few minutes from the delights of English literature.

There was no escape for Bunter. He was booked for a whole hour of English literature; a subject in which the Owl

of the Remove took no interest whatever. "Gray's Elegy" was the order of the day in the Remove-room—and under Mr. Quelch's suspicious eye, Billy Bunter tried to give his attention to it. Really it was an excellent poem; and there were fellows, even in the Lower Fourth, who could appreciate its beauties. But William George Bunter was not one of those fellows. Bunter would have given the Complete Poetical Works of Thomas Gray for a cake, and thrown in those of William Shakespeare as a makeweight and considered that he had got the best of the bargain.

How was a fellow to fix his attention on this tosh, when there was a big plum cake in Smithy's study, which Smithy had invited half a dozen fellows to whack out with him in break?

Bunter was not one of the invited fellows, even! All Bunter was going to see of that cake was its transit down the necks of Herbert Vernon-Smith, Tom Redwing, and Harry Wharton & Co. That is, unless he could contrive somehow to get out of the Form-room before break! In which happy case, Bunter was certain to see a lot of the cake—and no human eye was ever likely to behold it again! In such circumstances, it was a sheer impossibility for a fellow to take much interest in the "Elegy in a Country Churchyard." Bunter did not care in the least whether the curfew tolled the knell of parting day, and wasn't in the least interested in the ploughman homeward plodding his weary way.

So it was sheer luck for Bunter that a tap came at the Form-room door, and Trotter, the house page, looked in.

Mr. Quelch snapped: "What is it, Trotter?"

Quelch did not like interruptions in class—differing, in that respect, from most of the class.

"Your telephone, sir—"

"Oh! Very well!"

Mr. Quelch glanced at Harry Wharton. This term Wharton was in his old place of head boy of the Form.

"Wharton! I shall leave you in charge of the Form for a few minutes."

"Yes, sir!"

The Remove master whisked away.

There was a general movement of relaxation in the Remove. Wharton, as head boy, had to keep order. But while the cat is away, the mice will play; and the Lower Fourth took it easy. Lord Mauleverer gave a long, long yawn, which he had been with difficulty suppressing in Mr. Quelch's presence. Bob Cherry sat on a desk instead of a form. Skinner caught Frank Nugent behind the ear with an inkball. Johnny Bull produced toffee and handed it round. Billy Bunter jumped up like a Jack-in-the-box.

"Hold on, Bunter!" called out Wharton, as the fat junior made for the door.

"Oh, really, Wharton—"

"Sit down, fathead!"

"I've got to fetch a book—"

"Never mind your book."

"I mean I've left my notecase in my study, with all my banknotes in it—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You silly ass, sit down!" exclaimed Wharton, making a jump at the fat Owl as he opened the Form-room door.

But Bunter was desperate. This was his last chance—an unlooked-for chance, which he was not going to lose. He tore the door open and rushed out. Wharton, jumping at him to catch him, did not catch Bunter—he caught the door as it was flung wide—and he caught it with his nose and chin. There was a yell in the Remove-room.

"Yow-ow-ow!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Bunter was gone. Wharton was left spluttering, and caressing his nose and chin. And the Remove chuckled and chortled, as if they saw something funny in it.

THE SECOND CHAPTER.

Under Suspicion!

G OBBLE! Gobble!

"Grooogh!"

Billy Bunter coughed and choked and spluttered.

Bunter was busy.

The fat Owl of the Remove was seldom swift in his motions. In a race between Bunter and a tortoise, as a rule, the tortoise would have romped home. But Bunter could get a move on when the case was really urgent—as it now was! Once outside the Form-room, Bunter moved almost as if he had borrowed the shoes-of-swiftness of the ancient giant-killer. He flew up the staircase, he darted into Study No. 4 in the Remove, he whizzed to Smithy's cupboard. Still more swiftly his fat hands grabbed the cake which reposed there waiting to be whacked out in break—but destined never to be whacked out! A split second more and Bunter was gobbling cake.

There was no time to waste.

Quelch was not likely to linger at the telephone. He was much more likely to

To his schoolfellows he is just Jim Valentine, the new boy. To certain lawless characters outside Greyfriars, however, he is known as Dick the Penman, the forger!

snap at the tactless individual who had rung him up during classes—to snap his head off, in fact. And Bunter had to get back to the Form-room before Quelch did, or Bunter was booked for trouble.

Bunter's idea—quite a bright idea, and worthy of his powerful intellect—was to get that cake into a safe place out of reach of a lot of greedy fellows who were looking forward to whacking it out in break. Bunter's idea was to deal with that cake himself in break in a retired and solitary spot—far from the maddening crowd's ignoble strife, as Thomas Gray expressed it in the "Elegy," with which the Greyfriars Remove was now dealing. But it was a rich and luscious cake, with an aromatic odour that was absolutely irresistible—and Bunter was not the man to attempt to resist the irresistible. He simply could not help taking a snack.

He took a large mouthful, which made a considerable hole in the cake—Bunter's mouth having been designed by Nature on a generous scale. He bolted that mouthful rapidly—too rapidly! He gobbled, not wisely but too well. And he choked.

"Grooogh! Hoooh! Wooogh! Oooogh!" gurgled Bunter—wasting precious moments. "Oooogh! Wooogh! Gug-gug-gug!"

Still gurgling, he rolled hurriedly out of Smithy's study, with the cake under a fat arm.

He stopped at the door of Study No. 7—his own study. But he stopped only for a second. Study No. 7 was no use;

Smithy would look there when he missed the cake. He would suspect Bunter. In such cases fellows always did suspect Bunter—a rotten, suspicious lot, Bunter considered. He rolled on to Study No. 1, which belonged to Wharton and Nugent and the new fellow Valentine. They were not likely to come up to their study in break—neither was the Bounder likely to look in that study. It was a safe spot for the loot. Bunter rolled in and blinked round the room through his big spectacles. The armchair stood in a corner—and Bunter, after another bite at the cake, dropped it behind the armchair out of sight.

Then he hastened to the stairs again. He gobbled his second mouthful as he went. He was still gobbling the remnants, and hoping from the bottom of his fat heart that Quelch had not come back yet, when he reached the Form-room. A buzz of voices in the Form-room told that Quelch was not there. In great relief, Bunter rolled in. The buzz ceased as he turned the door-handle.

"Hallo, hallo, hallo! Only Bunter!" exclaimed Bob Cherry, who had slipped down from his desk in a great hurry as the door opened.

"You fat villain!" Wharton was still caressing his nose—which, like Marian's in the ballad, was red and raw. "Come here and be kicked!"

"Oh, really, Wharton—"

"Anybody had a cake in his study?" asked Skinner, with a chuckle, surveying the sea of crumbs scattered over Bunter's fat waistcoat.

"Eh? Yes!" The Bounder looked round. "I had! What—"

"Oh, really, Skinner—" gasped the Owl of the Remove. "If you think I've been after Smithy's cake—"

"By gad! If you've snaffled my cake—"

"Oh, really, Smithy! I never knew you had a cake! I never heard you asking the fellows to whack it out in break—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Blessed if I see anything to cackle at! I've been out in the quad," explained Bunter. "I had rather a headache, and I—I walked it off, you know."

"I know you've walked off something," chortled Skinner. "I rather fancy you've walked off Smithy's cake!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Did you get those crumbs on your waistcoat walking off a headache, or walking off a cake?" inquired Peter Todd.

Billy Bunter started. He blinked down at his waistcoat and the signs of guilt. There were plenty to be seen.

"Oh!" gasped Bunter. "I—I—the fact is—"

"The crumbfulness is terrific," chuckled Hurree Jamset Ram Singh.

"You've scoffed my cake!" roared Vernon-Smith, jumping up and grasping a ruler.

"I—I haven't! I—I—the fact is I—I—I've been to the tuckshop and—and had a bun—" stammered Bunter. "Ow! Keep off, you beast! I say, you fellows, keep that beast Smithy off! I say—Yarooogh!"

Billy Bunter dodged round the desks like a fat kangaroo. After him went the Bounder, smiting with the ruler. Three successive smites landed, accompanied by three fearful howls, when the Form-room door opened again and Mr. Quelch stepped in.

"Cave!" gasped Hazzeldene.

"Look out, Smithy!"

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But it was rather too late! Vernon-Smith stopped, with uplifted ruler. Bunter was still roaring.

"Yaroo! Keep off! Yooop! I say, you fellows—Yow-ow-ow!"

"Vernon-Smith!" thundered Mr. Quelch.

"Oh! Ah! Yes, sir!" gasped the Bounder. He had forgotten Mr. Quelch in the excitement of the moment. He rather wished now that he had remembered him.

"How dare you! Is this how you behave when my back is turned for a few moments?" exclaimed Mr. Quelch.

Smithy did not answer that question. Really it was superfluous. Obviously that was how he behaved.

Mr. Quelch had come back a little cross. Inspector Grimes had asked him to name a time when it would be convenient for him to call to discuss a rather urgent matter. It was not convenient for Mr. Grimes to call at all. Neither did Mr. Quelch see what matter, urgent or otherwise, a police-inspector could possibly have to discuss with him. However, he considered the point, and made an appointment with Mr. Grimes for his call. Then he came back to resume the interrupted lesson, and found Smithy chasing Bunter round the Form-room with brandished ruler. Thunder gathered in his brow.

"Bunter! Be silent! Go to your place! Wharton, I left you in charge of this class! Is this how you keep order?"

It was another superfluous question. "You will take a hundred lines, Wharton! I think I should be able to trust my head boy to keep order during a brief absence! Vernon-Smith, hand me the cane from my desk!"

With deep feelings, Smithy handed Mr. Quelch the cane from his desk. The Remove master took a grip on it.

"You will now bend over that chair, Vernon-Smith!"

With still deeper feelings, the Bounder bent over the chair.

Whack, whack, whack!

"Go to your place, Vernon-Smith."

The look that Smithy gave Bunter as he went to his place made the fat Owl of the Remove cringe. It was only too clear that something unpleasant awaited Bunter after class.

Billy Bunter was longing for break—and the plunder he had parked in Harry Wharton's study. But he was not longing for the interview with Herbert Vernon-Smith. On account of the cake, he desired the moments to fly. On account of Smithy, he wished them to crawl. It was quite a mixed and unhappy state of feeling. "Gray's Elegy," in the circumstances, passed by him like the idle wind which he regarded not. The amount of knowledge of English literature which Bunter acquired in that lesson was absolutely nil!

THE THIRD CHAPTER.

A Matter for the Police!

"I SAY, you fellows—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Harry Wharton & Co. seemed entertained. Billy Bunter could see nothing to cackle at, but it was clear that the Famous Five could.

The Co. had gone out in break with Jim Valentine, who was on very pally terms with the chums of the Remove. They had agreed to join up with Smithy and Redwing in whacking out a cake—but they rather doubted now whether there was a cake to be whacked out. Smithy had cut off to his study to make

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sure, but the other fellows felt fairly sure already. Billy Bunter rolled up in a state of great distress. He was eager to get at the cake—but it was clear that a fellow could not enjoy his cake in peace with another fellow hunting him for vengeance. The way of the transgressor was hard!

"I say, you fellows, don't cackle!" said Bunter peevishly. "That beast Smithy will be after me in a minute, and—"

"Serve you jolly well right, you pilfering porpoise!" growled Johnny Bull.

"Oh, really, Bull! I think you fellows ought to stand by me, after all I've done for you!" said Bunter reproachfully. "I never had the cake!"

"Well, if Smithy finds it in his study you're all right," said Valentine laughing.

That was not much comfort to Bunter!

"Oh, really, Valentine! He—he—he may not find it, you know—"

"He will if you haven't had it!"

"It—it may be gone," said Bunter.

"Of course, I know nothing about it! It's simply sickening the way fellows pick on me if there's any tuck missing! It's unjust. Look here, Valentine, you could lick Smithy! I'll tell you what, old chap! You give Smithy a jolly good hiding, and I'll stand you half the cake!"

"Half Smithy's cake!" yelled Valentine.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I—I—I mean—I—I— Don't keep on cackling!" howled Bunter, with an anxious blink towards the House.

"That beast Smithy will be out in a minute! He will make out that I had the cake when he misses it. You know how jolly suspicious he is! I say, Valentine, it's up to you to stand by a chap! Look how I've stood by you! Lots of fellows wouldn't speak to you, knowing what I do about you, you know. And I speak to you, don't I, old chap?"

"Too often!" agreed Valentine.

"Oh, really, you beast! I—I say, you fellows, is—is that Smithy coming out?"

"No, ass, it's old Prout!"

"Oh, good! But he'll be out in a minute! Look here, I never had Smithy's cake, honour bright! If it's gone it must have been the cat. But I shouldn't wonder if Smithy never had a cake at all! He's untruthful!"

"Oh, my hat!"

"Smithy tells whoppers, you know," said Bunter. "It doesn't shock you fellow so much as it does me. You're not so particular about such things. But—"

"Hallo, hallo, hallo! Here comes Smithy!"

"Yaroooooh!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Herbert Vernon-Smith came out of the House, with a grim expression on his face. Only too obviously he had not found that cake in his study.

Billy Bunter dodged round Valentine and the Famous Five. He blinked at the Bounder between Wharton and Valentine.

"I—I—I say, Smithy, old chap—I say, don't be shirty, you know—"

gasped the fat Owl. "D-d-did you find the cake?"

"I did not!" said Smithy, with unexpected calmness.

"I—I—I fancy it was the cat, old chap—"

"Well, it's gone," said Vernon-Smith.

"Sorry I shan't be able to whack it out

with you fellows. Did you bag it, Bunter?"

"Oh, really, Smithy! That question's insulting! I'm not the fellow to bag a fellow's cake, I hope."

"The hopefulness of the esteemed Bunter is terrific!" chuckled Hurree Jamset Ram Singh.

"Well," said the Bounder, still with the same unexpected calmness, "it looks as if you had it, Bunter! But if you didn't—"

"Honest Injun, old fellow!" groaned Bunter.

"Very well! Must have been a burglar, then," said Vernon-Smith.

"Everybody was in class excepting Bunter, so if it wasn't Bunter, it must have been one of those daylight burglars."

"Of—of course, it was!" gasped Bunter, in great relief, while the Famous Five stared blankly at the Bounder. "That was it, old fellow! The—the police ought to do something about—about those daylight burglars!"

"They're going to," said the Bounder coolly. "I'm going to ring up Court-field Police Station about it."

"Wha-a-at?" Bunter's jaw dropped.

"Wha-a-at did you say, Smithy?"

"Is Prout out, you men?"

"Yes; but—"

"Then I can use his phone."

Herbert Vernon-Smith, taking no further notice of the dismayed Owl, walked back to the House.

The chums of the Remove stared after him blankly. Billy Bunter goggled after him, his little round eyes almost bulging through his big, round spectacles in sheer horror. Valentine gave the Famous Five a startled look.

"Surely Smithy won't—" he began.

Bob Cherry closed one eye at him, and Valentine grinned and was silent. The Famous Five had been startled, Smithy's manner being so serious; but a moment's reflection assured them that the Bounder was only giving the grub-raider of the Remove a fright.

There was no doubt that Bunter was getting the fright! He goggled after the Bounder till Smithy disappeared into the House; then he turned his big spectacles on the Famous Five.

"I—I—I say, you fellows!" he stammered. "Smithy was only jig-jig-jig-joking, wasn't he? Oh crikey!"

"He didn't look as if he was joking," said Frank Nugent gravely. "If you had the cake, Bunter, you'd better cut after Smithy and tell him!"

"B-b-but the beast would kick me!" gasped Bunter. "Besides, I never had the cake!"

"Well, in that case," said Bob, "the sooner Smithy puts the bobbies on the track of that daylight burglar, the better!"

"The soonerfulness the betterfulness!" agreed Hurree Jamset Ram Singh, with a grave nod of his dusky head.

"Yes, but—but—but—" gasped Bunter. "Oh lor! I—I say, you fellows, that beast can't really mean—"

"You're all right if you never had the cake, old fat bean," said Harry Wharton. "The police don't arrest a chap for what he hasn't done. You'll get justice!"

"Oh lor!" groaned Bunter, apparently alarmed at the idea of getting justice!

He rolled away to the House after Smithy.

He left the Famous Five chortling—after his podgy back was turned.

Bunter did not feel like chortling himself! He hurried away to Masters' Studies, still nourishing the hope that

Smithy had not really meant it. He had a view of Smithy disappearing into Mr. Prout's study—Prout being at a safe distance.

"Oh crikey!" gasped Bunter.

He rolled hastily up the passage and into Prout's room after Smithy.

"I—I say, Smithy—" he gasped.

"Quiet, Bunter, while I'm speaking on the phone!" said Vernon-Smith.

The Bouncer was standing at Mr. Prout's telephone, with the receiver to his ear, his mouth to the transmitter. The short-sighted Owl of the Remove did not discern that, as he lent over the phone, he was holding down the hooks with one finger, which, of course, prevented the instrument from ringing up

come over, Mr. Grimes! I am really very much obliged!"

"Oh scissors!"

"Only one fellow was out of class," said Vernon-Smith, apparently in reply to a question at the other end. "A chap named Bunter. Yes, if you question him he may have seen something of the burglar—"

"Oh crumbs!"

"Bunter says he never had the cake, but if it turns out that he did, I shall certainly charge him, and I want you to take him away in custody."

"Yaroooooh!"

"Very well; I shall expect you, Mr. Grimes," said the Bouncer, and he replaced the receiver on the hooks

The shuddering prospect of Inspector Grimes' official hand dropping on his fat shoulder, to march him away in custody, was enough to take away even Billy Bunter's appetite!

THE FOURTH CHAPTER.

A Trump Card!

JIM VALENTINE stood in the gateway of Greyfriars, looking out into the country road that passed the school gates. A man who looked like a carter with a whip under his arm, was loafing idly by. His eyes turned, for a brief moment on the schoolboy standing in the gateway as he passed.



Billy Bunter tore the door open, and rushed out. Wharton made a jump to catch the fat junior, but caught the door—as it was flung wide—with his nose and chin. Biff! "Yow-ow-ow!" yelled Wharton, while the Remove chuckled and chortled, as if they saw something amusing in it.

the exchange. It did not even occur to Billy Bunter's fatuous brain that Smithy was speaking into an unconnected telephone, with nobody at the other end!

"Is that Inspector Grimes? Vernon-Smith, speaking from Greyfriars School!" said the Bouncer into the instrument.

"I say, Smithy—" squeaked Bunter.

"Quiet! There's been a robbery here, Mr. Grimes—"

"Oh crikey!"

"A cake was pilfered from my study while all the fellows were in class—a clear case of daylight burglary—"

"Oh lot!"

"Yes, quite a trifling matter, I know, sir. It's not so much the cake I'm worrying about, as the fact that a burglar got into the school—"

"Smithy!"

"Yes, I shall be very glad if you will

very carefully, without ringing up the exchange.

"I—I—I say, Smithy—" gasped Bunter.

Vernon-Smith walked out of the study without answering. Billy Bunter rolled after him in a state of palpitating terror.

"Smithy!" he hooted, as the Bouncer went into the quad. "I say, Smithy, old chap, hold on!" He bolted after Smithy and grabbed him by the arm. "I say, Smithy, I—I think I—I might be able to help you find your cake—some of it, at least!"

The Bouncer shook off his fat hand.

"No need; it's in official hands now," he answered. And he walked away, leaving Billy Bunter rooted to the ground.

Billy Bunter did not sneak up to Study No. 1 after the hidden cake. Even the cake did not tempt him now. He had lost his appetite for cakes!

A dark and bitter smile came over Valentine's handsome face as he watched the man pass along the road and turn into a woodland path farther on.

For some minutes Jim Valentine remained where he was, in thought. Then he left the gateway and strolled along the road in the direction the carter had taken, and turned into the same path through the wood towards the river.

He walked slowly, whistling as he went, his hands in his pockets.

There was a rustle among the trees, and the man in the carter's smock stepped into the path behind the schoolboy.

At the same moment another man stepped into the path ahead of him—a man dressed in brown tweeds, with a hard, thin face, and a beak of a nose.

Valentine smiled rather grimly.

He was taken between the two, and they came towards him quickly, as if

expecting to see him dodge into the woodland on either side of the path.

But the boy showed no desire to dodge. He came to a halt, and stood where he was, waiting for them to reach him, which they did in a few moments.

The man in the carter's smock dropped a heavy hand on the boy's shoulder. Valentine gave him a glance. "Hands off, Barney!" he said quietly.

Barney glanced at the beaky-nosed man for instructions. Nosey Clark gave the schoolboy a keen, searching look.

"Keep your eye on him, Barney," he said. "That's enough."

"All right, guv'nor!"

Nosey Clark's sharp, black eyes roved up and down the woodland path. There was no one in sight; but it was a public path—too public to suit Nosey.

"Step into the wood, Jim," he said. "Any old thing," answered Valentine carelessly.

Nosey Clark led the way, and the schoolboy followed, Barney Hayes bringing up the rear, watchful as a cat. His grasp would have been on the boy fast enough, had Valentine made an attempt at escape. But that did not seem to be in the boy's thoughts.

They stopped at a distance from the path. Mr. Compton Clark, alias Nosey, searched the boy's face with his sharp, black eyes, evidently puzzled.

"You've walked into our hands, Jim," he said, at last. "You never knew that—"

Valentine laughed contemptuously. "I knew you were here. I recognised Barney, and followed him. I knew you wouldn't be far away, Nosey."

"That means you're coming back to us, then?"

"No."

"You won't have much choice, Jim, now we got you," grinned Barney.

Nosey Clark looked, as he felt, puzzled and perplexed. For more than a week the crooks had been watching Greyfriars, for the chance of getting their hands on the boy who had fled from them, and whom they were determined to recapture. They had fully expected that he would remain within the safe shelter of the school. Why he had deliberately walked into their hands was a puzzle, unless it was his intention to rejoin the gang, which obviously it was not. Nosey Clark was uneasy, as well as perplexed.

"Well, what's the game, Jim?" he asked. "We've got you! You won't get out of our hands again in a hurry, now you're landed. But if you're willing to come back—"

"Never!"

"You fancy we shall let you go, now you've walked into our hands?"

"Yes."

"Guess again," grinned Barney. "Let's have it clear, Jim," said Nosey Clark, gesturing to the ruffian to be silent. "You've got a card up your sleeve to talk like that."

"A trump card, I think," said Valentine coolly. "Let's have it clear, by all means. When I ran from you, Nosey, it was for good. How you found me out at Greyfriars, I can't guess."

"How you got there beats me," growled Nosey. "I'll bet the head-master don't know that Jim Valentine was 'Dick the Penman' when he was at home. Have you told him that the police want you?"

Valentine flushed.

"I'll tell you, Nosey. I did a little service, just after Christmas, for a man who turned out to be a master in this school. He is a kind and generous man, and, finding me friendless, he

managed to get me into the school, taking responsibility for me with the head-master, paying my school fees out of his own pocket. One of the best men that ever breathed."

"And you've told him—" gasped Nosey.

"I've told him I'd been in bad hands, and got away from them," said Valentine. "He trusts me, and he will find that I'm worth trusting. I'm done with you, Nosey, for ever, and the sooner you get it into your head, the better."

"We shall see about that!" said Nosey Clark. "We can't afford to lose you, Jim. You're too clever with the pen for that. Who's the man you speak of?"

"Mr. Quelch, the master of the Remove—the Form I am now in," answered Valentine. "A good and kind man, but as hard as iron if he had to deal with a man like you, Nosey."

"Would he stand by you, if he knew—what I could tell him if I liked?" jeered Nosey. "Have you told him your work when you were with us—signing other men's names to bits of paper?"

"If he knew that," said Valentine quietly, "I don't know what the result would be; but I should have to leave the school. I should not want to stay. The shame of it would drive me away."

"Dick the Penman is getting mighty particular!" sneered Nosey.

"Cut that out!" said Valentine. "I'm here to talk business, Nosey. I hoped when I got into Greyfriars School under Mr. Quelch's protection, that I should never see you again—that you'd never guess where I was. But you found me out. You nosed it all out."

Nosey Clark laughed.

"Easy enough, Jim. I was after young Wharton. I knew you'd been with him at his home in the Christmas holidays, and I reckoned he knew where to lay a hand on you. I was going to make him squeal. That's what brought me to this quarter. When I found you was a Greyfriars boy, you could have knocked me down with a feather. But since then—"

"Since then you've been watching the school, for a chance to get your paws on me," said Valentine. "I've seen you at it—you, and Barney here, and Nutty Nixon, and one or two others. I've had my eyes wide open."

"You was always a clever lad, and a sharp one," said Nosey Clark. "Too clever for us to let you go, Jim."

"I thought at first of keeping inside the school—you'd never dare attempt to touch me there. But I'm not going to lead a hunted life. I'm not going to have a gang of crooks hanging round my school. I hoped you'd never find me; but you've found me, and now you're going to let me alone. I'm not going to dodge and hide. I'm going to walk out whenever I like, without the fear of a hand dropping on my shoulder. That's why I'm here now—to tell you."

"We've got you, you cheeky young fool!" growled Barney.

"Quite—if you want me," assented Valentine. "I know you've got a car handy—out of sight somewhere. And you can nail me, if you like. Stick me in the car, and clear. You'll repent it if you do."

"Put your cards on the table!" snarled Nosey.

"If I don't go back to school now, or at any other time, I shall be missed at once, and then—"

"And then?" muttered Clark, watching him like a cat.

"Then," said Valentine coolly, "a

paper I've drawn up, and left in a certain place, will be put into the hands of Inspector Grimes, at Courtfield. It will tell him all the police want to know about Dick the Penman, and Nosey Clark's gang. And they will get you, Nosey."

"And you, too!" snarled Nosey savagely.

Valentine nodded. "I know that. If you shame me at Greyfriars, if you drive me away from the school, if you get me back into your hands, Nosey, I want the police to get me. Whatever the result, I'd rather be in the hands of the police than in your hands. I tell you, you made me a crook when I was a mere kid, but you'll never keep me a crook! Prison sooner!"

Jim Valentine spoke quietly and calmly, but with a ring of intense earnestness in his voice. It was very clear that he meant every word he uttered.

Barney, staring at him blankly, muttered an oath. Nosey Clark clenched his claw-like hands with rage.

"They'll get me," said Valentine.

"Let them get me, and welcome. Better them than you, Nosey. And they'll get the man who forced a boy into crime, who pocketed the profits, and you'll get ten years, Nosey, whatever I get. Go ahead, if you like! Here I am—in your hands. Take me, if you choose—I can't stop you. You won't keep me long."

Nosey Clark's black eyes seemed to narrow to pin-points as he stared at the boy who coolly defied him. His rage was almost beyond his control.

"You—you've really written that paper?" he muttered huskily.

"Take me away with you, Nosey, and you'll see—soon enough," answered Jim Valentine. "Take me to-day, and you'll be in the stone jug to-morrow. If you doubt me, take the chance."

But Nosey Clark was not taking that chance. He knew that the boy who had escaped his clutches was telling him the truth.

Valentine, with a contemptuous glance at the crook's enraged face, stepped away. Barney lifted his hand with an inquiring look at Nosey.

The man with the vulture's nose shook his head.

"Let him go, Barney! But"—his voice came in a hiss—"you ain't done with us, Jim! You've played a trump card—for the moment! But you'll find Nosey Clark hard to beat! I'm getting you back to the gang—mark that!"

"You'll never do that," answered Valentine—"never!"

"You young fool! You're throwing away a fortune—a fortune, I tell you! I've got a job on hand for you now—you and your pen—only you can do it—and I tell you it's thousands!" said Nosey Clark hoarsely. "What are they giving you at the school?"

Valentine laughed.

"I have a few shillings for pocket-money—"

"A few shillings! You mad young idiot! Put this one job through for me, and you shall have five hundred pounds in a lump!"

The hawk eyes scanned Valentine's face eagerly. They read there nothing but contempt and disgust.

"You won't?" muttered Nosey Clark.

"I'd die sooner!"

"You mad young fool!"

"That's enough, Nosey!"

Valentine moved away. Barney Hayes glared at him like a savage dog, but made no motion to stop him.

"Go, then!" muttered Clark. "But you ain't done with me, Jim—don't fancy that! I'm getting you yet—"

you're coming back, Jim! You're coming back—and doing your old work! Mark that!"

Valentine, without an answer, walked back through the wood to the path. Neither of the crooks made any attempt to detain him. But as he walked back to the school, believing, hoping, at least, that he was done with Nosoy Clark for ever, there was a lingering doubt in his mind, a lingering heaviness in his heart. Nosoy Clark's words seemed to ring and echo in his ears.

Was his life at Greyfriars, after all, only a daydream that must end; he was fated to fall once more into the dismal depths of the underworld from which he had escaped? Never, never that! He drove the thought from his mind—and yet, in spite of himself, it would return.

THE FIFTH CHAPTER.

The Tortures of Tantalus!

"WHAT the dickens—"

Harry Wharton stared. The captain of the Remove had a letter in his hand—a letter from home—as he came into Study No. 1 after morning classes. He pulled the armchair out of the corner to the window, to sit there and peruse his letter. And his eyes fell upon a parcel that lay in the corner, hitherto concealed from view by the armchair. He stared at it.

It was a large cake, still in its wrappings. The captain of the Remove picked it up and stared at it in astonishment. There was a gap in the cake—two mouthfuls taken by Billy Bunter left quite a large gap.

For some moments Harry Wharton held the cake, staring at it, wondering how on earth it had got there. Then he guessed, and broke into a laugh. Obviously, this was Smithy's missing cake. Bunter had only had time to leave that gap in it, and had hidden it in Study No. 1—left till called for, as it were.

"The fat villain!" exclaimed Wharton.

He took the cake along to Study No. 4. The Bouncer and Redwing were not there, so he placed it in the study cupboard for Smithy to find, and returned to Study No. 1.

As he reached that study he sighted a fat face and a pair of glittering spectacles rising to view on the Remove staircase. Billy Bunter was coming up.

Wharton grinned and went into the study. He pushed the armchair back into the corner and sat in it, rather interested to see what Bunter was going to do.

The fat junior blinked into the study. He started at the sight of Wharton sitting in the armchair, and apparently deeply occupied in reading a letter.

In break, Bunter had not ventured to Study No. 1 after the cake. His fat mind had been full of terrifying thoughts of Inspector Grimes. All through third school Bunter had been thinking of what Smithy had said on the phone in Prout's study, in a state of palpitating funk. Quite unaware of that rather important fact that Smithy had not been speaking to Mr. Grimes at all, Bunter was in dread of hearing the heavy, official step of that portly gentleman.

But there had been no heavy, official step, and after class Bunter recovered his fat spirits a little. Also, he was fearfully hungry. According to what

he had heard Smithy saying on the phone, Inspector Grimes was to call at Greyfriars about that cake. But was it really probable that a police-inspector would come to the school for such a trifling matter?

Even to Bunter's terrified fat mind it seemed rather improbable. Anyhow, Mr. Grimes had not come, and Bunter was hungry—too fearfully hungry to wait for dinner, if he could help it. He resolved to finish that cake. If the worst came to the worst, at least he would have had the cake, which would be a comfort.

Billy Bunter thought it over—but not for long. The cake weighed heavy in the balance against all other considerations when Bunter was fearfully hungry, and he rolled up to the Remove passage with his fat mind made up. It was sheer ill-luck for Bunter that Wharton had had a letter that morning and had gone to his study to read it. The Owl of the Remove blinked at him from the doorway in great irritation.

"I say, Wharton, old chap, Bob's calling you," he said.

Bunter naturally supposed that the cake was still hidden behind the armchair, which, so far as he knew, had not been moved. He only needed to get Wharton out of the study for a minute or two.

"Is he?" said Harry, glancing up from his letter. "All right—tell him I'll be down soon."

"I—I mean, it's Wingate calling you, Wharton! I think I'd go, if I were you, old chap. You can't keep the captain of the school waiting."

"My dear man, I'm reading a letter from home. I dare say Wingate won't mind waiting a bit," said Harry cheerfully.

"I didn't mean Wingate—I meant Loder!" gasped Bunter. "That beastly bully, Loder of the Sixth, old chap! I—I wouldn't keep Loder waiting. Wharton—you had a lot of trouble with him last term, you know."

Wharton suppressed a chuckle.

"Oh, Loder seems quite good-tempered this term," he answered. "I'll chance it, anyhow."

Billy Bunter glared at him, with a glare that almost cracked his spectacles. Had it seemed possible that Wharton could know anything about the cake parked behind the armchair, Bunter would have supposed that the beast was sitting there on purpose, just to tantalise him. But Wharton, of course, could know nothing about the hidden cake!

"I say, old fellow, Valentine's gone out," said Bunter at last.

"Yes—don't talk while a chap's reading a letter."

"What I'm afraid of is that those

rotters may get hold of him," said Bunter. "You remember some rotters were after him when you took him in at Wharton Lodge in the Christmas holidays, old chap. Well, now he's gone out of gates, I'm afraid they may nab him. Hadn't you better go and see?"

"You go and see," suggested Wharton.

"You'd frighten them off at once if they saw you."

"Well, I couldn't handle a lot of ruffians, you know,"

urged Bunter. "I'm a pretty good fighting-man—"

"Oh crickey!"

"I might handle a couple—"

"Phew!"

"But three or four would be too many for me," said Bunter, shaking his head. "You get the other fellows, Wharton, and go—"

"No, you go!" insisted Wharton. "You'll frighten them, away all right. Just let them see you—features."

"You silly ass!" roared Bunter.

Harry Wharton chuckled and resumed reading his letter from home. But he was really more interested in Bunter's antics than in that letter. There was something rather entertaining in Bunter's frantic efforts to get him out of the study in order to get at the cake which was no longer there!

"I—I—I say, Wharton, is that the dinner-bell?" exclaimed Bunter.

"Twenty minutes to dinner yet," answered Harry.

"Sure your watch isn't slow?"

"Quite!"

"Look here, you slacker, what are you frowning in the study for?" exclaimed the exasperated Owl. "Much better get out of doors."

"I'm reading a letter from home."

"Leave it till after dinner, old chap, and get out while it's fine. I fancy it's going to rain soon."

"Shut up while a fellow reads a letter."

Billy Bunter, in a state of intense exasperation, shut up, waiting impatiently for Wharton to finish reading that letter. It was rather a long letter, from Wharton's Aunt Amy, whose communications were never brief. But he reached the end of it at last, and laid it on his knee.

"Finished it, old chap?" asked Bunter eagerly.

"Yes. Cut off!"

"Ain't you going out, now you've finished reading your letter?"

"I'm going to read it through again."

Wharton turned back to the first page of that lengthy letter. Billy Bunter's very spectacles gleamed with wrath.

It was simply awful to stand in the doorway of the study, watching a fellow reading a letter, sitting in the armchair, behind which a purloined cake was hidden.

Billy Bunter's classical knowledge was limited, but he knew all about Tantalus of ancient times who was kept just out of reach of food and drink.

Bunter was feeling like poor old Tantalus now. Indeed, the tortures of Tantalus had nothing on the tortures of

(Continued on next page.)

PIN-IT CONSTRUCTIONAL TOY.

RESULT OF COMPETITION NO. 2.

1st Prize £2-2-0 Guy Furness, "Ratho," Egerton Park, Birkenhead.

2nd Prize £1-1-0 Bryan Hollands, 107 Southwood Road, Ramsgate, Kent.

24 CONSOLATION PRIZES TO:

R. Hayward, Killy, Swansea; Leslie Fulton, Queensway, Rochdale; W. Buxter, The Heath, Cardiff; Albert Kohler, Edinburgh; J. Joseph Henshaw, Wilmsholme, Manchester; Thomas Chapman, Westbourne, Otley; R. Deraney, Hayfield, N. Stockport; Robert Flemming, Downe, Kent; William F. Cole, Exeter; E. C. Westhorpe, Gravesend, Kent; George O. Whyte, Newry, Co. Down, S. Ireland; S. Brand, Walker-Ville, Newcastle-on-Tyne; Cyril Phillips, Forest Hill, S.E.23; O. Killington, Iwerne Minster, Nr. Blandford, Dorset; David Phillips, Forest Fields, Nottingham; Arthur Hanbury, Ripley, Derbyshire; Geoffrey Charles Ray, Luton, Beds; Robert Spencer Cowley, Streatham, S.W.18; Alan Wilkie, Greenford, Middlesex; E. N. Pyman, Romford, Essex; G. Grimley, New Eltham, S.E.9; T. Lampard, Aldershot; William Jackson, Sutton, Surrey; O. F. Allen, Heston, Hounslow, Middlesex.

Billy Bunter as he waited for Wharton to move.

But Wharton did not move.

Fellows seldom gave all this deep attention to letters from home. And here was a fellow reading a long letter from home twice over at the most unpropitious time—for Billy Bunter!

"I—I—I say, Wharton," gasped Bunter at last, "I—I—I forgot to tell you that Quelch wants you!"

"You shouldn't forget a thing like that, Bunter."

"I—I've just remembered! Cut off, old chap! Quelch will be fearfully waxy waiting all this time!"

"Must be!" agreed Wharton. "As he's bound to be fearfully waxy, I don't think I'll go!"

"Beast!" roared Bunter, losing patience.

"Eh—what's the matter now?" asked Wharton innocently.

"Oh, nothing—I—I mean—I say, old chap, that's the dinner-bell!"

It really was the dinner-bell at last. Wharton rose from the armchair and put the letter in his pocket. Billy Bunter watched him eagerly. He did not want to be late for dinner—but he did want to get at the cake. One bite at the cake would be a comfort, if there was no time for more—and the remains could be shifted out of a study where an irritating beast sat in front of it reading letters. Wharton went to the door.

"Come on, Bunter!" he said. "You'll be late!"

"I—I—I'm just coming!" stammered Bunter. "You cut off, old chap!"

"Let's go together," said Wharton affably.

"Oh, yes—no—I mean—look here, you clear off! I don't want your company—see? Go and eat cake!" hooted Bunter.

"Oh, all right!"

Harry Wharton laughed, and went along to the stairs. In deep relief, Billy Bunter watched him go. Scarcely had Wharton's head disappeared down the Remove staircase than Billy Bunter made a jump into the study. He made another jump at the armchair and jerked it out of the corner. His fat hand grabbed in the corner for the cake, and clutched empty space.

"Oh!" gasped Bunter.

He stared through his big spectacles into the empty corner. Two or three crumbs were there, but the cake was not there. The cake was gone. Billy Bunter gazed into empty space, fairly overwhelmed.

"The—the—the beast!" gasped Bunter. "He's scoffed the cake! He's jolly well found it and scoffed it, the—the awful beast! Keeping a fellow on tenterhooks all this time—when he's scoffed the cake! The awful rotter! Fancy a fellow scoffing another fellow's cake! Sickening, I call it!"

The bell had ceased to ring. Billy Bunter scuttled down the staircase. His feelings were too deep for words as he scuttled.

He was two or three minutes late in Hall. Mr. Quelch gave him a grim glance as he rolled breathlessly in. All the Remove were in their places.

"Bunter, you are late!" rapped the Remove master.

"Oh, yes, sir!" gasped Bunter. "I—I fell downstairs, sir—I—I mean, I—I slipped on—on some snow in the quad, and—"

"Take fifty lines, Bunter!"

"Oh lor!"

Really, it seemed to Billy Bunter that life at Greyfriars School was hardly

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worth living. But he found comfort in dinner. Fortunately, it was a good dinner.

THE SIXTH CHAPTER.

Horrible for Bunter!

"HALLO, hallo, hallo!"

"What—"

"Look out, Bunter!"

"Oh, really, Cherry—"

Bob Cherry grabbed the Owl of the Remove with one hand, and with the other pointed to a portly and rather ponderous figure that was entering at the gates.

Bunter gave that portly figure, with its ruddy face and keen eyes, one startled blink, and yelped with terror.

"Oh crikey! Leggo! Oh crumbs! Yaroooooh!"

Bunter tore himself away from Bob Cherry, spun round, and fled. The sight of Inspector Grimes, of Courtfield, coming in at the school gates was enough for Billy Bunter—in fact, a little too much.

It was a good many hours now since the Bounder had phoned—or, rather, pretended to phone—and no Inspector Grimes had come. So Billy Bunter had recovered from his fright, though with a lingering, lurking uneasiness at the back of his fat mind. Now his terror came back at one fell swoop, for there was Inspector Grimes walking in, evidently with business on hand at Greyfriars School! Mr. Grimes was known at Greyfriars; but, naturally, he was very rarely seen at the school—only very occasionally had his duties called him there. So Bunter could hardly doubt that his visit now was a result of the Bounder's telephone call. Terror lent Bunter wings at the sight of the portly inspector. He flew.

"Hold on, Bunter!" roared Bob Cherry. "Better face it, old man! They'll get you in the long run!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" yelled the Co.

"Jolly odd thing that Grimes happened to drop in to-day, though," said Nugent, in surprise. "What does he want here, I wonder?"

"Let's walk another way," murmured Harry Wharton. "I'd rather not see Grimey."

"The rather-notfulness is terrific!" murmured the Nabob of Bhanipur.

The Famous Five had reasons for not desiring another talk with the police-inspector from Courtfield. They were rather afraid that the subject of Jim Valentine might come up, and the less they said about Jim Valentine the better, in the strange circumstances. So they strolled away and joined some fellows who were punting a footer.

Bunter was heading for the House at a terrific rate. Harry Wharton & Co. did not know why Mr. Grimes had called, but Bunter did—or fancied he did. He had come for Bunter! Really, it was not such a coincidence as it looked, as the Bounder had heard Mr. Quelch tell Trotter, the page, after second lesson that Mr. Grimes would be calling after dinner, and had directed him to show the inspector into his study at once when he came. That, indeed, was what had put the idea into Smithy's head.

Bunter, of course, was unaware of all that. Frightened out of his fat wits, Bunter bolted for the House; while Mr. Grimes, blissfully unconscious of Bunter's existence, rolled on with his slow and stately tread.

Bunter was in far too great a hurry to see where he was going, and it was rather unlucky for Jim Valentine that he was coming out as Bunter came in.

There was a crash just inside the doorway, and Valentine went sprawling. Bunter rolled over him, spluttering.

"Urrrrrggggh!"

"Oh, my hat! You fat chump!" gasped Valentine. "What the thump are—"

"Ooogh! Oh crikey! Ow!"

Bunter scrambled up. He planted a fat knee on Valentine's waistcoat and another on his face as he scrambled.

Then he was up. Valentine was up the next moment, and grasping the fat Owl by the collar.

"You porty hippopotamus!" he gasped.

"Ow! Leggo! He's after me!" gasped Bunter. "Leggo, old chap! Beast! Rotter—I mean, dear old fellow! Leggo! He's after me! Oh lor!"

"Who's after you, you porty owl?"

"Old Grimes! He—he's going to arrest me!" gasped Bunter. "Leggo!"

"Grimes—going to arrest you?" stuttered Valentine.

"Yes. That beast Smithy—he phoned to him about the cake! I never had it, you know, and it wasn't hidden behind the armchair in Wharton's study—and it was Wharton scoffed it, too!" gasped Bunter. "That awful beast Smithy is going to give me into custody!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" yelled Valentine.

"Leggo! He'll be here in a minute!" shrieked Bunter.

Valentine let go, howling with laughter. Bunter bolted for the staircase. Unhappily, Vernon-Smith was coming down. He had seen Inspector Grimes from the landing window.

"Hold on, Bunter!" grinned the Bounder, blocking the fat Owl's way up the stairs.

"Beast! Let a fellow pass!"

"Grimes is coming!"

"Yah! Rotter! Lemme pass!"

"But he will want you!"

"Beast!"

Bunter turned and dodged down the stairs again. There was no escape for him upward. A glimpse from the open doorway showed him the portly figure of Inspector Grimes advancing. Mr. Grimes was slow, but he was sure! Billy Bunter fairly cringed with terror. Reflection had shown him how very improbable it was that a police-inspector would come over from Courtfield about a missing cake. Yet here was the police-inspector. So what was Bunter to think?

To dive deep into some hiding-place till Mr. Grimes was safely off the premises, was Bunter's only thought. But the grinning Bounder cut him off from the studies. In less than a minute Grimes would be coming in. Like a gleam of hope, Bunter remembered that he had seen Mr. Quelch go to the library after dinner. Quelch's study would be vacant. Nobody would think of looking for him in a master's study. Bunter scuttled away for Masters' Passage, and bolted breathlessly into Mr. Quelch's study.

There he paused to gasp for breath, the perspiration thick on his fat brow. He gasped and gasped and gasped.

Trotter met Mr. Grimes at the door. He had his instructions already.

"Mr. Quelch is in the library, sir," said Trotter. "If you'll wait in his study, sir, I'll call him. This way, sir."

"Very good!" said Mr. Grimes, and he followed Trotter.

The sound of a heavy footstep in Masters' Passage made Billy Bunter quake. He whizzed to the door of Mr. Quelch's study and blinked out. He had a full view of the police-inspector's portly figure.



Billy Bunter dodged round the desks like a fat kangaroo. After him went Vernon-Smith, smiting with the ruler. Three successive smites landed, accompanied by three fearful howls, when the Form-room door opened, and Mr. Quelch stepped in. "Cave!" gasped Hazeldene.

He staggered back into the study. Grimes was coming! Did the awful beast guess that Bunter was there? It really looked like it. Grimes was coming straight to the fat Owl's selected hiding-place!

"Oh erikay!" groaned Bunter. He blinked wildly round the study. He would have jumped from the window, had it been open. But it was shut.

It was a case of any port in a storm! He dived under Mr. Quelch's writing-table.

It was rather a large table; and there was ample room for Bunter underneath it. By squatting in the centre underneath, he was out of view of anyone in the room, unless that one stooped and looked under the table. Bunter could only hope that Inspector Grimes wouldn't.

In point of fact, Inspector Grimes didn't! Certainly he had no idea whatever of squinting under Mr. Quelch's writing-table!

He came in with a heavy tread. "If you'll please take a chair, sir," said Trotter.

Inspector Grimes took a chair. Trotter quaked, unseen.

Trotter went away to call Mr. Quelch. Inspector Grimes sat stolidly, waiting for the Remove master to arrive. Under the table, Bunter had a view of Mr. Grimes' official boots and trouser-ends. He blinked at them in horror. He was not three feet from Mr. Grimes' two feet! He tried to still his breathing. If Grimes heard him there—

The door opened again, and Mr. Quelch came in. It was rather a relief to Bunter than otherwise. Surely, if the worst came to the worst, his Form

master would not let that awful policeman march him off in custody! But the fat Owl was not taking the chance, if he could help it. He sat tight!

THE SEVENTH CHAPTER.

A Surprise for Mr. Quelch—and for Billy Bunter!

MR. QUELCH greeted the Court-field inspector politely, though his manner indicated that he was a little mystified.

He could imagine no reason why Mr. Grimes had rung him up that morning to make an appointment. He had no business, that he was aware of, with the police force. He had a great respect for that force; but his time was of value. Certainly, it did not occur to his mind to think of Jim Valentine, the boy he had taken under his protection, in connection with the official gentleman's visit.

Having greeted the inspector, Mr. Quelch sat down in his usual chair at his writing-table. His rather long legs stretched under the table, and his foot came into contact with something there—and Bunter trembled. Fortunately, Mr. Quelch only supposed that it was a hassock, or something of the sort—never dreaming how near the object was to uttering a terrified squeal!

"I am at your service, sir," said Mr. Quelch. "You desired to see me—"

"That is so, sir," said Mr. Grimes. "It was hardly a matter I could go into on the telephone. It is possible, sir, that you may be able to render assistance to the law in a very important matter."

"I should certainly be very glad to do so, such being every citizen's duty,"

answered Mr. Quelch. "But I quite fail to see—"

"There is a boy in your Form here, sir, named Wharton—"

"Certainly! Your call cannot surely have any connection with a Greyfriars boy!" exclaimed the Remove master in astonishment.

"As a matter of fact, it has, sir. I will explain. Wharton, I understand, lives at his uncle's home in Surrey, called Wharton Lodge, and he was there in the Christmas holidays with some friends from school."

"That is certainly the case," said the amazed Remove master. "I visited Colonel Wharton during the vacation, and saw his nephew and his friends there. But what—"

"Wharton and his friends seem to have befriended some boy, who was, as he told them, in flight from certain lawless characters."

Mr. Quelch started. "I believe so," he said rather shortly.

"These rascals, knowing that Master Wharton had given the boy shelter, believed that he was still an inmate of Wharton Lodge, and seem to have haunted the place, seeking to get hold of him again. Failing in this—for, as a matter of fact, the boy was not there—they went to the length of kidnapping Wharton, with some lawless scheme of holding him as a hostage till the boy was given up to them. I, sir," said Mr. Grimes rather impressively, "was instrumental in effecting Master Wharton's release. As it chanced, they had selected a hiding-place for him in this district—a great distance from his home—and from certain information that came my way, I was able to effect his release."

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"Some of this is news to me, Mr. Grimes. But—Dear me!" ejaculated Mr. Quelch, as, shifting one of his lengthy legs, he knocked his foot against some object under the table.

Again that object barely suppressed a squeal!

"I questioned Master Wharton after his release, sir," resumed Mr. Grimes. "He naturally told me all he could of the strange affair. Two men had kidnapped him—called Nosey Clark and Barney."

"Indeed!"

"One of these men, at least, is known to the police, under several names," said Mr. Grimes. "Wharton's description of Clark was very useful."

"I am glad of that," said Mr. Quelch. "There is no definite charge against the man at the present time, but there is, at least, a suspicion that he has connection with certain very skilful forgeries that have taken place during the past year."

Mr. Quelch looked as interested as he could.

This, obviously, was a matter of the deepest interest to Inspector Grimes; but to a Form master in a school it was not of deep interest. In fact, Mr. Quelch did not like the flavour of this stuff from the underworld. But he was studiously polite.

"Moreover," resumed Mr. Grimes, in his slow, stolid way, "when I received certain information which led to Master Wharton's release, a certain name was used—but for the mention of that name, in fact, I should hardly have taken any notice of such anonymous information. The name that was mentioned was that of 'Dick the Penman.'"

Mr. Quelch opened his eyes wide.

"You have never heard that name, sir?"

"Never!" said Mr. Quelch.

"It has scarcely been heard anywhere, sir, outside the police and the underworld. It is the nickname of a very skilful forger of our times, sir," said Mr. Grimes impressively. "His name, his identity, his appearance, are alike unknown—but his work is only too well known; and he is always referred to as 'Dick the Penman.'"

"A strange name," said Mr. Quelch, with a surreptitious glance at the clock on his mantelpiece.

"Now, sir," said Mr. Grimes. "The probability exists, that if the rascals who kidnapped Master Wharton can be found, the arm of the law may reach to the forger who has been wanted so long. These rascals have totally disappeared; but—" He paused.

"Well?"

"If the boy can be found—"

"The boy?" repeated Mr. Quelch, with a start.

"Yes, sir! The boy who fled from this gang, and who was befriended by Wharton and his comrades. This boy, if he could be found, would almost certainly be able to help us very considerably."

"Bless my soul!" ejaculated Mr. Quelch.

He stared at Mr. Grimes.

"The boy's name, sir, was Valentine—Jim Valentine!" added the inspector.

"Jim Valentine!" repeated Mr. Quelch mechanically.

"That was the name, sir."

Mr. Quelch sat dumb.

For the first time it came into his mind that his kind and generous action in taking Jim Valentine under his protection might have results that he had never dreamed of contemplating.

Certainly he had never dreamed that it might bring him into contact with an investigating police officer—as it was now doing.

"I have mentioned to Master Wharton, some time back, that if he should hear anything further from the boy, I desire him to inform me at once," said Mr. Grimes.

Mr. Quelch started again.

"And he has not done so?" he exclaimed.

"No, sir. I have not seen him since, certainly, but—"

Mr. Quelch breathed rather hard.

Obviously Harry Wharton had deliberately refrained from passing on to Mr. Grimes the information that Jim Valentine was at Greyfriars School.

"So far as I am aware, sir"—Mr. Grimes' stolid voice was going on—"the boy, Valentine, disappeared into space, after leaving Wharton Lodge some weeks ago. But it appears to me very probable that a boy in such a situation—such a very peculiar situation—would keep in touch with a kind-hearted lad who had befriended him."

Mr. Quelch had a glimmering now of the inspector's object in calling on him. He sat silent, in a state of great discomfort.

Wharton had kept silence on the subject. That was clear. Mr. Quelch would have been glad to do the same. But that was scarcely possible for a man in his responsible position.

"Master Wharton is a very upright and dutiful boy, I believe," continued Mr. Grimes. "But it might seem to him that he had a right to keep silent concerning this boy. He might even fancy that he was bound to do so. He might suppose that it might cause the boy trouble, if he came in contact with the police. You, sir, will, of course, take a rather more serious view of the matter than a thoughtless schoolboy might take."

Mr. Quelch was still silent.

"In a word, sir, it is very important for the police to get in touch with the boy Valentine," said Mr. Grimes. "He may, of course, know little or nothing, or he may know a great deal. No doubt, sir, you, as the Form master concerned, exercise the usual supervision over the correspondence of boys in your Form. Letters—any letters—from this boy, addressed to Wharton, would probably come to your knowledge. You see my drift, sir?"

Mr. Quelch saw it only too clearly.

"Any information leading to the discovery of the boy, sir—" said Mr. Grimes.

Mr. Quelch breathed hard.

He had to tell Mr. Grimes the facts. But he was deeply, intensely unwilling to tell him that Jim Valentine was at Greyfriars, a boy in the Remove.

Mr. Grimes, ruddy and portly and stolid as he was, was a keen gentleman. He read the Remove master's reluctance in his face, though he could not understand it. He was aware that Mr. Quelch knew something. And Mr. Grimes was stolidly resolved that he was going to know it, too.

"The name of Valentine is not, perhaps, strange to you, sir?" asked Mr. Grimes, his eyes keenly on the Form master's troubled face.

"No, sir," said Mr. Quelch.

"You know the name?"

"I do."

"Then there has been some communication?" exclaimed the Courtfield inspector eagerly.

"Mr. Grimes," said the Remove master abruptly, "I am bound to tell you the facts, disagreeable as it is to me. The boy Valentine is here."

"Here!" ejaculated Mr. Grimes.

"He is now a Greyfriars boy!"

"A—a Greyfriars boy!" gasped Mr. Grimes, astonished out of his stolidity. "Did—did you say a Greyfriars boy, Mr. Quelch?"

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THE NINTH CHAPTER.

What Wharton Knew!

"I SAY, you fellows—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I say—"

"Cut, old fat bean!" chuckled Bob Cherry. "Grimey was looking out of Quelch's window a minute ago! He'll spot you."

"The spotfulness will be terrific."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"The beast isn't after me at all!" gasped Bunter. "Smithy was only pretending to phone in Prout's study—he knew I was there, you know, and he was taking me in—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Blessed if I see anything to cackle at!" howled Bunter. "I can jolly well tell you that I've had six! I hid in Quelch's study—"

"Oh, my hat!"

"Under the table!" groaned Bunter. "And the silly old ass kicked me on the nose—"

"Ha, ha, ha!" shrieked the juniors.

"Well, you may think it funny, but I don't!" hooted Bunter. "The beast yanked me out and gave me six! Made out that I was listening, you know—as if I'd listen! Me, you know!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I told him I hadn't heard a word, but he didn't believe me! Quelch is no gentleman, you fellows! He's doubted my word before. I've had six—hard, too!" said Bunter sorrowfully.

"Good!" said Johnny Bull.

"Poor old Bunter!" said Jim Valentine, laughing. "But you're not going to be run in, old bean."

"No," said Bunter. "You are!"

"What?"

"Old Grimey isn't after me, as it turns out," explained Bunter. "He's after you."

The laughter faded from Jim Valentine's face.

"After me?" he repeated.

"Yes, old chap. He's going to run you in!" said Bunter cheerfully. "Quelch told me to send you to his study at once."

"You piffing, pernicious porpoise!" roared Bob Cherry. "What do you mean?"

"Oh, really, Cherry—"

"Grimey must have come here for something," said Harry Wharton, with a clouded brow. "Has it anything to do with Valentine?"

"Quelch told him Valentine was in the Remove now," explained Bunter. "He's after him. Dash it all, what did you expect, Valentine?"

"Shut up, you fat chump!" growled Bob. "If Quelch's really sent for you, old chap, you'd better go."

Valentine nodded.

"He's got his handcuffs ready," said Bunter brightly. "And, I say—Yaroooo! If you kick me again, Bob Cherry, I'll— Whooop! Wow!"

Jim Valentine walked away slowly to the House. His manner was composed and his face calm, but all the brightness had gone out of it.

Inspector Grimes knew nothing—could not possibly know anything. Even if he knew, or suspected, that the gang from which the boy had fled was the dangerous gang of forgers long wanted by the police, that was all. It was scarcely likely to cross his mind that a boy, no older than other fellows in the Greyfriars Remove was the mysterious and unknown individual who had been called "Dick the Penman."

He had nothing to fear! But his heart was heavy. At Greyfriars School,

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which had seemed such a haven of refuge to him, he had hoped to have done with the shadowed past—with the breakers of the law, and with the defenders of the law. But fate was too strong for him. The past was not so easily shaken off.

Harry Wharton and Co. watched him go into the House, with rather anxious faces. They knew little of his strange and shadowed history; but they knew enough to be aware what he was feeling like now.

"I say, you fellows—"

"Oh, shut up, Bunter!"

"Oh, really, Wharton! I say, you fellows have been pally with Valentine," said Bunter, blinking at the Famous Five inquisitively through his big spectacles. "I dare say he's told you a lot of things about when he was with those crooks—"

"He's told us nothing, ass!"

Bunter winked a fat wink.

"That won't wash, old chap," he said. "Of course, you've got it out of him. You can trust me, of course. If you tell me, you can rely on it that it won't go any farther. You know what a fellow I am for keeping a secret."

"Fathead!"

"Close as an oyster, and all that," said Bunter. "I say, has Valentine ever told you about a sportsman called Dick the Penman?"

"Who the which?" ejaculated Bob Cherry.

"That's what old Grimey said—that's what they call him—some fearful crook, you know," said Bunter impressively, while the chums of the Remove stared at him blankly. "Grimey makes out that those blighters who were after Valentine are a gang of forgers—"

"Oh, rubbish!" said Wharton. "Shut up!"

"That's what he said—and one of them is called Dick the Penman—a chap they've wanted for a year or more. Grimey's own words."

"Bosh!" said Bob Cherry.

"Well, you weren't under Quelch's table, and you didn't hear what Grimey said!" snorted Bunter. "I heard every word! Dick the Penman is the name—some chap who's wanted badly by the police, and he's one of that gang, and old Grimey thinks that Valentine can help to get hold of him."

"A—a forger!" breathed Wharton.

"Yes; name and description, and all that, unknown," said Bunter. "Grimey wants to know badly! I say, you fellows, I wonder if Valentine knows the chap?"

"Rot!" said Frank Nugent uneasily.

"Well, he was mixed up with that gang," argued Bunter. "We'd never have seen him only he was running away from them. If he knows—"

"If he knows, he's bound to tell Grimey!" grunted Johnny Bull. "But I don't suppose they let a kid like Valentine know much, whatever he had to do with them."

Harry Wharton did not speak.

His face became suddenly pale.

Back into his mind came that incident of a week ago, when Valentine had saved him from serious trouble, by writing an imposition he had failed to write at his Form master's order.

Valentine had written those lines in Wharton's hand so accurately as to deceive Mr. Quelch's gimlet eyes.

To Wharton he had admitted—he had had to admit, when Wharton learned what he had done—that such was the work that the "gang" wanted him for—the imitation of other people's handwriting!

It had been a shock to the captain of

the Remove, though it had had the effect of strengthening his determination to help the unhappy boy to keep out of the hands of Nosey Clark.

But now—

Now, as Bunter babbled, it was borne in upon his mind how matters really stood. He had wondered why the gang were so savagely determined to get Jim Valentine back. It had seemed strange, inexplicable, that they placed so high a value on a mere boy, a lad no older than any Remove fellow of Greyfriars!

That incident of the lines, added to what Bunter said of Dick the Penman, brought a flash of illumination into Wharton's mind. He knew now—he could not help feeling that he knew—the dark and terrible secret of the new boy in the Remove. Dick the Penman—a crook, hunted by the police—a Greyfriars boy in the Lower Fourth! Was it possible?

Harry Wharton left the group of juniors, and walked away by himself. He was afraid that the other fellows might read in his face what he was thinking.

It was half an hour later that he saw Inspector Grimes leave the House. His interview with Jim Valentine was over.

It was a relief to Wharton to see that the inspector went alone. There had been a fear in his heart of seeing Mr. Grimes take Valentine away with him.

That, evidently, had not happened. He wondered what the boy had said to Mr. Grimes. He watched Mr. Grimes from a little distance, as he went; but there was nothing to be read in the inspector's ruddy, stolid face.

What did he suspect? Not what Wharton suspected—what he felt, with a shudder, that he knew! Wharton was sure of that.

The bell rang for class, and he went slowly towards the House. Jim Valentine joined the crowd of Remove fellows at the door of the Form-room.

The Co. gathered round him cheerily—glad to see him there, and to see him calm and cheerful. They did not know what Wharton knew; but they had been feeling vaguely uneasy.

Wharton did not join him. In spite of his liking for the boy, in spite of himself, a feeling of repugnance kept him away—a feeling that was something like horror.

He was not willing to show it, and he began talking football with Squiff and Tom Brown, while the juniors waited for Mr. Quelch, affecting not to see Valentine, though he had an uncomfortable feeling that the dark hazel eyes turned on him once with keen scrutiny.

Billy Bunter blinked at Valentine through his big spectacles with an air of surprise.

"Grimey hasn't got you, then?" said Bunter.

Valentine's eyes narrowed for a moment. Then he burst into a laugh.

"No," he answered. "It wasn't I that pinched Smithy's cake, Bunter!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Oh, really, Valentine! I thought that—"

"You thought?" asked Valentine.

"Yes, I thought—"

"My hat! What did you do it with?" asked Valentine.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You cheeky tick!" roared Bunter.

"I thought that old ass Grimes—"

"Bunter!" Mr. Quelch came up the corridor to open the Form-room door. "Are you speaking in such terms of Inspector Grimes?"

"Oh lor'! No, sir!" gasped Bunter.



"Yaroooh!" Billy Bunter, concealed under the table, squealed quite involuntarily as Mr. Quelch's foot jammed on his little fat nose. "Bless my soul!" ejaculated the startled Remove master. "What—what—what—" "Ooooooh—" Inspector Grimes stared in astonishment.

"I—I wasn't speaking, sir! I was only saying to Valentine—"

"Take fifty lines, Bunter!"

"Oh crikey!"

Billy Bunter went into the Form-room in the lowest of spirits. That day he had accumulated a total of two hundred and fifty lines—as well as "six." Billy Bunter often complained that he did not get justice. But when he got it he did not find it satisfactory.

THE TENTH CHAPTER.

The Bar Between!

"WHAT about Valentine?"

Frank Nugent asked that question two or three days later, in Study No. 1.

Bob Cherry, sitting on the study table, had one trouser-end rolled back, and was dabbing a damaged ankle with embrocation. He left off dabbing for a moment to nod endorsement to Frank's suggestion.

Wharton did not speak.

"He's a good man," said Frank. "He sticks to footer practice like glue, and he's come on jolly well, though he hasn't been here long. If you wanted a forward, I'd offer—." He laughed.

"Well, you can play half, Frank," said Wharton slowly.

"Admitted! But—"

"Sure you'll have to stand out, Bob?" asked Wharton.

"My dear man, if it was hopscotch, I'd play up like billy-ho!" said Bob Cherry. "But I've got only one leg to stand on, and that won't do for Soccer. That idiot Bolsover has crippled me in practice to-day. Barging about like a mad bull and hacking a fellow—"

"Bother him!" growled the captain of the Remove.

"Bother him twice!" said Bob cheerily. "Accidents will happen, old bean, especially when a bullfiant like Bolsover major is barging about. Can't be helped! You've got a good man on hand. I've noticed Valentine a lot of times; he's a good half."

"Yes, but—"

"But what?"

"Oh, nothing!" said Harry, colouring a little.

Bob went on, rubbing the ankle where Bolsover major's heavy foot had landed. Frank Nugent gave his chum a rather curious glance.

"Harry, old fellow," said Frank quietly, "I've noticed the last day or two that you seem to steer a little clear of the new kid."

"I hope he hasn't, then," said Harry.

"Well, he's a keen chap, and he's bound to notice what's right under his eyes. As he's in this study and we're friends—" Frank paused. "I've been going to speak about it once or twice, Harry. You're not turning him down, surely?"

Wharton was silent.

"We all agreed to stick to him and stand by him," said Nugent. "He's been through some queer things; but, from what we know, it doesn't seem to have been the poor chap's own fault. We should never have met him at all, and he would never have got here at Greyfriars, if he had not been trying his hardest to keep clear of that gang of rotters who had him. Surely that's proof enough that he's a straight chap!"

"Confirmation strong as proof of holy writ, as jolly old Shakespeare says," said Bob Cherry. "What's up,

Wharton? You were as keen as anybody to stand by him. You've not changed your mind? That's not quite cricket, is it?"

"No. But—"

"But what?"

"Nothing!" said Harry.

"But you don't feel as pally to him as you did, is that it?" asked Bob Cherry, puzzled. "I don't make you out! You're not a fellow to chop and change, as a rule. And, dash it all, you can't take a fellow up one day and drop him the next—that's not done!"

Wharton's colour deepened.

He could not explain to his chums. What he knew, indeed, he could not be sure of, though he felt that it was true.

At the beginning he had pictured Jim Valentine as a fellow in the hands of rascals, from whom he had run, but he had not pictured him as a breaker of the law.

Even when he had learned that the boy had not passed through the fire unscathed, so to speak, he had pictured him as having unwillingly obeyed the dictation of Nosey Clark, powerless to help himself. But the babble of Billy Bunter, about what he had heard in Mr. Quelch's study, had brought a flash of illumination to his mind. He still sympathised, he pitied the unhappy boy, and he was ready to help him if he could. But—

If Jim Valentine was Dick the Penman—

In spite of himself, in spite of a real regard for the boy whose fate had been so strange, Wharton could not help feeling a repugnance for his presence—a desire to keep clear of him.

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THE BOY WITH A GUILTY SECRET



(Continued from page 13.)

It was an instinctive feeling, and he could not help it.

Not for weeks would he have wounded the feelings of the boy, to whom Greyfriars was a refuge from the world of crime. He believed, too, that Valentine, whatever he had been, was "straight" now, or, at all events, resolved to keep straight if he could. But—

Bob Cherry left off dabbing his ankle and looked very seriously at the captain of the Remove. Nugent's face was grave.

Wharton did not speak, and there was silence in the study for some minutes. Bob broke it.

"This won't do, old chap," he said very quietly. "We've taken Valentine up, whatever he may have been, and whatever he may have done. I'll bet a hat that he's all right—a thoroughly decent fellow! We can't turn him down on second thoughts. Second thoughts aren't always best, by long chalks."

"I don't want to. But—"

"But what, then?"

"Oh, nothing!" said Wharton miserably.

"Well, if it's nothing, you can wash out nothing. Dash it all, Quelch is satisfied with him; it was Quelch brought him to Greyfriars."

"Quelch doesn't know—"

"What doesn't he know?"

Wharton made no answer.

"That silly Owl, Bunter, has been gabbling about the chap," said Bob. "None of the fellows takes any notice—they know Bunter, luckily. But if a fellow like you turned him down, Wharton, it would make a big difference to his outlook here. You simply can't do it."

"I'm not going to. But—"

"The butfulness seems to be terrific, as Inky would say. Do you mean that you've got hold of something fresh—something that we don't know?" asked Bob, puzzled. "You can't mean that Valentine has done anything rotten since he's been here?"

"Oh, no! I believe he's all right. But—"

"I know he's all right," said Bob. "If he turned out a bad hat I'd drop him fast enough. But he's as right as rain. I'm sticking to him, anyhow. And, look here, Wharton, you're bound to do the same."

Harry Wharton nodded.

"That's so," he said. "So long as he doesn't show the cloven foot, I suppose we're bound to stick to him."

"You trust him—surely?" asked Frank.

"Yes, I—I suppose so," said Harry slowly. "Look here—he made up his mind abruptly—he's going to have a chance in the footer, anyhow. If you're sure you'll have to stand out at Highcliffe to-morrow, Bob—"

"Unless you make it hopscotch, instead of Soccer—"

"Fathead! I'll put Valentine's name in, then."

And it was done.

The captain of the Remove took the football list down, to pin on the door of the Rag, the usual place for Remove notices. Fellows gathered round to read it, and the comments on the inclusion of the name of J. Valentine were mostly favourable. In spite of Billy Bunter's battle about the new boy, Valentine was well liked in the Remove; he had made a good many friends, and no enemies. He was so good-tempered, cheerful, and good-natured that it would have been difficult for anyone to dislike him. Even Skinner rather liked him—as much as Skinner liked anybody. And there was no doubt that Valentine was coming on well at football; he thoroughly enjoyed the game, as he seemed to enjoy everything at Greyfriars—even class with Mr. Quelch!—and he was undoubtedly a good man at Soccer.

"You'll have to pull up your socks to-morrow at Highcliffe, Valentine," said the Bouncer, when the new junior came into the Rag later.

"How's that?" asked Valentine.

"You're down to play to-morrow."

Vernon-Smith pointed to the notice on the door.

Valentine looked at it in surprise.

"That's good!" he said.

His handsome face was thoughtful when he came into Study No. 1 for prep that evening. Nugent was there, but Wharton had not yet come in. He came in a few minutes later, and Valentine looked round.

"I've seen my name in the list, Wharton," he said, with a curious and rather keen look at the captain of the Remove. "I shall be jolly glad to play football for the Form!"

"Good!" said Harry.

He spoke as cordially as he could. He wanted to show no difference in his manner if he could help it.

He sat down to his books.

The three juniors worked in silence for some time. Jim Valentine was a hard and keen worker. He was hardly equal to the Form work in the Remove, and had lee-way to make up. His occupations for a year or more past had been like anything but those of a school-boy. What had they been like? Wharton could not help thinking of it. He could not help noticing Valentine's clear, beautiful calligraphy—his "fist" was remarkable in the Remove. He was an artist with the pen. It was that fatal gift of penmanship that made him so valuable to Nosey Clark and the gang. It was true that he had run from them—that he was resolved to keep clear of them—but for a year or more he had been with them—one of them—and the terrible word "forgery" gave Wharton a feeling almost of physical sickness.

Prep finished, Wharton left the study abruptly.

He knew that Valentine gave him a quiet glance as he went, but affected not to see it.

"Coming down, old bean?" asked Nugent rather uncomfortably, as he rose from his books.

"No; I'm going to swot a little," answered Valentine; and Nugent nodded and left the sindy after Wharton.

Valentine, left alone in Study No. 1, did not immediately begin to swot. He sat, pen in hand, staring at his books, hardly seeing them.

He was keen enough, and sensitive enough, and he understood. He did not blame Wharton, or resent that instinctive shrinking. He understood it only too well. But it gave him a bitter pang.

Only Wharton knew him as he really was—or, rather, as he had been—the fellow he liked best of all the friends he had made at Greyfriars. He wondered whether, after all, he had done wisely in coming to Greyfriars—in seizing that great chance which had come to him like a gleam of sunshine through black clouds. It was too late to think of that now.

With an effort he gave his attention to his books again, and worked quietly and steadily till dorm.

THE ELEVENTH CHAPTER.

The Match at Highcliffe!

"BRAVO!" roared Bob Cherry.

"Well kicked, sir!"

"Good man!"

Bob Cherry—damaged leg and all—had come over to Highcliffe with the footballers. As Bob had to stand out of the game, the next best thing was to watch it and encourage the players with his stentorian voice. Plenty of other fellows had come over—some in the charabanc, others on bikes, and they had a good game to watch.

Courtenay and his men were in great form; so were Harry Wharton & Co. Bob had been, perhaps, a little dubious about the half-way line, with himself left out of it. And he was glad to see how Jim Valentine was playing up in his place. And he roared, in a voice that the ancient Stentor himself might have envied, when the new man dropped the ball at Wharton's feet, and the captain of the Remove put it into the net.

"Bravo, Wharton!"

"Good man, Valentine!"

"They won't miss you, anyhow!" granted Bolsover major in Bob Cherry's ear.

Bob chuckled.

"Not a bit, old bean! That new man is a real coughdrop! Jolly lucky we had him, what?"

"I fancy I could have done as well," granted Bolsover.

"What a fertile fancy!" grinned Bob.

"Oh, rats!"

"That's one up for us," said Frank Nugent, who was standing beside Bob. "Two to one—we're going to win this." "What-ho?" chuckled Bob. "Old Valentine's a real cat. Two to one in the first half—and the Highcliffe fellows are playing up well, too. That Caterpillar chap looks too lazy to live—but he's put the ball in once. Go it, ye cripples!"

The sides lined up again, and Highcliffe kicked off. The kick-off was followed by a rush of the Remove and a hot attack on the home goal.

"Play up, Greyfriars!" roared Bob. "On the ball! That man Valentine's got pace! What's Smithy lying down for? Play up, Smithy—you're not here to take an afternoon nap! Wake up! There they go—Murrall!"

In the exuberance of his spirits Bob Cherry yanked off his cap and waved it wildly.

There was an angry exclamation just behind him.

Really it was a little thoughtless of Bob. The wildly waving cap had smitten fairly in the face of a man standing behind the exuberant junior.

"You young fool!"

"Oh, my hat!"

Bob Cherry spun round.

He supposed that it was some Highcliffe fellow whom he had unintentionally smitten for a moment; but he saw that it was a man, and a stranger.

"Sorry, sir," gasped Bob—"really sorry! I didn't see you!"

"Confound you!"
"H'm!"

The man was rubbing his eye, which seemed a little hurt. He was rather a small man, with an almost colourless face, a hard mouth, and cold eyes somewhat like those of a fish. Bob's cap, apparently, had caught him in one of those fishy eyes, and he was annoyed.

"I really couldn't help it, sir!" said Bob apologetically. "You see, I wasn't looking behind me."

"Snort! from the fishy-eyed man."
"I hope you're not hurt, sir?" said Nugent politely.

"Do you think a clumsy fool can knock me in the eye without hurting me?" snapped the stranger.

"H'm!"
Evidently the man with the fishy eyes was not a good-tempered man.

"Well, I'm sorry!" said Bob. "Can't say more than that! Rather a good

game, sir, isn't it?" he added amicably. Another snort!

Bob gave it up. Having done what he could to set matters right, he turned back to the game again.

The pasty-faced man rubbed his eye for some moments, snorted and grunted, and then resumed watching the game. It was upon Jim Valentine that his fishy eyes were fixed.

"Who is that boy?" he asked suddenly over Bob's shoulder.

Bob glanced round again, obligingly ready to give information.

"Which?" he asked.
"The one who has the ball. There, he has just kicked it!"

"That's Valentine."
"Valentine!" repeated the pasty-faced man; and he nodded.

Bob wondered whether the man knew Valentine; but he forgot the stranger the next moment as he watched the

struggle in front of the Highcliffe goal. The pasty-faced man watched it as keenly, though all his attention was fixed on Jim Valentine.

The whistle went, and the tussle broke off. It was the interval. Bob waved his hand to Valentine, and the new half came over to speak to him.

Jim Valentine's face was very bright and cheery. He was doing well in the game, and he was enjoying it. And he had been glad to hear the cheery roar of the half-back whose place he had taken.

"Good man!" said Bob cheerily. "Enjoying life—what?"

"Yes, rather!" said Valentine, with a smile.

The smile died off his face suddenly as he glanced past Bob at the stranger standing behind him.

He started, and the colour seemed to
(Continued on next page.)

SOCCER QUERIES ANSWERED HERE.

"LINESMAN CALLING!"



Come on, you footer enthusiasts, old "flag-wagger" is waiting to solve those intricate Soccer problems for you. Send in your queries to "Linesman," c/o MAGNET, The Fleetway House, Farringdon Street, London, E.C.4.

STRANGE COINCIDENCES!

FROM time to time the draw for the English Cup brings together what might be called such strange "bed-fellows" that people sometimes get suspicious. I even have a letter from a reader of the MAGNET who puts the direct question: "Is the draw for the Cup ever wangled?"

This reader mentioned one strange coincidence of the present season—that in the first round proper Clapton Orient and Aldershot should have been drawn in opposition. Now these teams, as my readers probably know, are managed respectively by James Seed and Angus Seed—two brothers. Strange, isn't it, that the draw for the first round of the Cup should have brought these two clubs in opposition? But such a coincidence—and others which are at least as strange—only serve to prove that truth really is stranger than fiction. Look at the number of times the two "A" teams of the First Division—Arsenal and Aston Villa—have been drawn together in the Cup competition!

Believe me, however, that when these strange things do happen the long arm of coincidence is alone to blame.

There is no "wangling" of the draw at the Football Association headquarters. I have seen the draw take place, and I know.

The balls, representing the clubs left in each particular round and duly numbered, are placed in a bag. The bag is given a very good shake before a single ball is drawn out. And, as a rule, there are at least a dozen members of the F.A. Council on the spot. No, the draw is absolutely straight.

Each of the numbered balls represents a club, and the secretary of the Association has a sheet of paper with similar numbers. Opposite those numbers on his sheet of paper is the name of a football

club. Number six may be Grimsby Town. If ball number six comes out first, then Grimsby Town play at home in the Cup for that round. The next ball out may be seventeen—say, Manchester City. Thus Grimsby Town would meet Manchester City at Grimsby. All very simple and, I repeat, all very straightforward.

GRIM CUP FIGHTS!

THERE is plenty of variety in the questions in my postbag to be answered this week. A Hull reader wants to know which is the longest Cuptie ever played? I suppose by that he means which is the Cuptie which has been replayed the greatest number of times? As a matter of fact, there are three Cupties, in the past, each of which has run to the fifth meeting before the clubs have decided which should carry on.

In 1924-25 Barrow and Gillingham, meeting in the last qualifying round, played five times. The first four games—despite extra time at three of them—were all drawn. Eventually Barrow won by two goals to one.

In all, these two clubs played that one Cuptie for nine hours and a half, and perhaps you won't be surprised when I tell you that as the two captains got together to toss up before the start of the fifth game one of them said to the other: "Sorry I have to say it, old boy, but I am sick of the sight of you."

Strangely enough, in that same season two amateur teams—Leyton and Ilford—also met five times before they could decide which club should pass on. There is one other case of the same clubs meeting five times in a Cuptie, Woolwich Arsenal—as they were then called—and New Brompton, in the season of 1899-1900.

I don't suppose many of my readers will be aware of the fact that in a grim

Cup fight in 1898 Sheffield United and Liverpool actually met four times in the semi-final before they could decide which club should go into the final tie. There were not four whole games played between these teams in that season, however, because one of the matches had to be called off before the finish, owing to the huge crowd of spectators getting out of hand, swarming over the pitch, and eventually stopping the match before it had run its full course.

STILL SUNDERLAND SMILES!

A COUPLE of readers who reside in that little hot-bed of football, Hebburn-on-Tyne, have been having an argument, apparently, on the respective merits and records of the Newcastle United and Sunderland teams. One is a Newcastle "fan" and the other a stout supporter of Sunderland, and they ask me to decide some matters for them.

Newcastle United hold the pull over Sunderland in respect of both Cup and League successes. Since 1896 Newcastle have won the English Cup three times. I am sorry to say that Sunderland, despite the fact that they have had a side which was called the team of all the talents, have never yet won the Cup.

In respect of the championship, Newcastle have been successful on four occasions since 1906, while Sunderland's successes in this direction have been limited to two. Previous to 1896, however, Sunderland won the First Division championship on three occasions. In case my friend who "sticks up" for Sunderland is rather disappointed with these figures, I can give him one piece of football history which he can mention on behalf of Sunderland at the expense of Newcastle United.

In 1908 Sunderland beat Newcastle United in a League match at Newcastle by nine goals to one, and that is the biggest away win ever recorded in a First Division game.

A reader who lives at Seven Kings wants to know how, in deciding the positions of clubs in the League table when they are level on points, goal average is calculated. The process is quite simple. All you have to do is to divide the goals for by the goals against and thereby get the average. Of course, it is sometimes necessary to work out goal-average in this way to two or even more places of decimals.

An Oldham reader who wants his club to get into a suitable League is advised to write to the secretary of the nearest association.

"LINESMAN"

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drain from his face as he looked at the man with the fishy eyes.

The latter nodded coolly.

"Playing for your school, Jim—what?" he asked.

Valentine did not answer.

Bob and Nugent looked at him, and then at the stranger, curiously. Evidently the man knew Valentine.

There was an unpleasant grin on the stranger's pasty face. He seemed to be enjoying the blank dismay in Valentine's.

Bob and Nugent, feeling rather uncomfortable, moved away a little. Valentine seemed to have forgotten their presence. But as soon as they had moved away he leaned towards the stranger and whispered:

"Natty Nixon! What are you doing here?"

Natty grinned, showing a set of discoloured teeth.

"Surprised to see me?" he asked.

"Yes."

"Same here," said Natty. "You're getting on at your school, Jim, it seems. I was walking round when I heard your name shouted, and came along to look at you. Playing for Greyfriars—what?"

"What are you doing here?" breathed Valentine.

"They let people come in to see the matches here," explained Natty airily. "Chance for a man to look at this interesting old place."

"You villain!" breathed Valentine. Natty laughed.

"Any message for Nosey?" he asked.

"I shall be seeing him again when"—he grinned—"when I'm through in this quarter."

"You—you mean—"

"To-night," said Natty coolly. "Are you coming to lend me a hand?"

"Oh!" gasped Valentine.

"You're attracting attention, old bean. You'd better get back to your friends," drawled Natty Nixon. "Like to introduce me to some of them? An old friend, you know—quite an old friend!"

Valentine gave him a look of loathing, and turned away, sick at heart. Natty Nixon, grinning, strolled away from the football field. Natty was not interested in the game; his game at Highcliffe was a game very different from Soccer.

The whistle went again, and Valentine went to his place in the field, rather like a fellow in a dream.

All the brightness had gone out of his face.

Natty Nixon had disappeared from sight; whether he had gone, or whether he was prowling round the school buildings, Valentine did not know. But he knew why Natty was there—Natty Nixon, the cracksman, whom he had once known only too well in Nosey Clark's gang.

In the first half of the match Valentine had shown great form, even to the satisfaction of the half-back whom he had replaced. In the second half he was very much off colour. All his keenness, all his nerve, seemed to be gone. Bob Cherry watched him, with a rather worried look. Several times the new half fumbled hopelessly. Every now and then he seemed to pull himself together and play up, only to fall back again into fumbling.

"Call that man a footballer!" growled Bolsover major. "Did you see him make Courtenay a present of the ball? Yah!"

"Wharton's playing a passenger this time!" remarked Hazeldene.

Bob Cherry glanced round for the pasty-faced stranger, but the man was

not to be seen. He could not help remembering Valentine's look when he had seen the man, and wondering whether it was that meeting that had put the new half-back so completely off his form.

There was a roar from the Highcliffe crowd when the Caterpillar put the ball in again, and the score was equal.

Harry Wharton gave his new half several sharp glances. A "passenger" in the team was rather too heavy a handicap in a game with Highcliffe. He caught once the drawing voice of Ponsonby of the Highcliffe Fourth, who was idly watching the finish.

"They've got a man there who's goin' to sleep—what?"

What was the matter with Valentine, Harry Wharton did not know, but he knew that his new man was no good. Bob Cherry fancied that he knew what was the matter, but he also had to admit that the new man was no good. In the last few minutes there was a fierce tussle before the home goal, and, to the great relief and glee of Greyfriars, the Boulder drove the ball in, almost on the nick of time.

"Goal!" roared Bob Cherry. "Good old Boulder! Bravo, Smyth!"

"Goal! Hurrah!"

It was a Greyfriars win, right on the stroke of time. It was a cheery and satisfied team that went back to Greyfriars. But the captain of the Remove had settled in his mind that the new man, who had started so well and petered out so lamentably, was no use in Remove football. He little guessed what was on the mind of the boy with a past—whose past was haunting him like a grisly spectre.

THE TWELFTH CHAPTER.

Brainy Bunter!

"SKINNER, old chap!"

Harold Skinner shook his head sorrowfully.

"Stony!" he answered.

And Snoop and Stott chuckled.

Billy Bunter did not chuckle. Judging by the expression on Billy Bunter's fat face, he was in no humour for chuckling. The world is full of troubles, and most of them seemed to have descended on Bunter's fat shoulders at one fell swoop, judging by his woebegone looks.

He blinked at Skinner & Co., who were adorning the balustrade of the Remove landing in a lazy row. It was time for prep; but as the eye of a master or a prefect was not on them, the slackers of the Form had not yet gone in to prep. And Bunter was not for the moment thinking of prep.

"Oh, really, Skinner," said the fat Owl peevishly. "I wasn't going to borrow anything from you!"

"You weren't!" agreed Skinner. "But you were going to try, otherwise why the 'old chap'?"

"Beast—I mean, I want you to do me a favour. Not money!" added Bunter hastily. "I know you're too jolly mean to lend a fellow anything!"

"Bunter's jolly tactful when he's going to ask a favour, isn't he?" yawned Skinner.

And Snoop and Stott chuckled again. "It's my lines!" said Bunter, almost tearfully. "Quelch has been lading out lines at a fearful rate. He asks me for them every day regularly, just because I haven't done them, you know."

"What a reason for asking for them!" said Skinner sympathetically; and once more there was a chuckle from Snoop and Stott.

"I've been going to do them," said Bunter. "But I—I haven't, you know. I've never got time."

"You'll get time some day," said Skinner reassuringly. "You came near getting time for snaffling Smyth's cake the other day—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Oh, don't be a silly ass!" hooted Bunter. "This is a jolly serious matter, I can tell you. There's two hundred and fifty lines, and they've been hanging over my head for days and days. Quelch has put his foot down now, and he's given me the tip that if I don't hand them in before dorm to-night, it's six!"

"More power to his elbow!" said Skinner heartlessly. "Six will do you good."

"I can't do them, of course," said Bunter. "It's prep now, and after prep there's no time. I want you to help me out. I'm not going to ask you to write the lines—"

"Might as well save your breath!" assented Skinner.

"I've got a wheeze," said Bunter. "You see, suppose I had done the lines and had them all ready in my study, and—and a fellow knocked them over into the fire, and—and I explained to Quelch—"

"Quelch is the sort of unsuspicious, trusting old cove to swallow that—I don't think!" chuckled Skinner. "Pack some exercise-books in your bags before you try that on Quelch, fatty. You'll need some protection."

"Well, he might not take my word," said Bunter. "It's a bit sickening. He's doubted my word before. But I've thought it all out. I've got a lot of old exercises and things to burn—there will be a heap of burned papers in the fender as proof, see?"

"Oh crumbs!"

"I've asked Toddy to own up to Quelch that he knocked my lines into the fire, like a clumsy ass, you know. Quelch would take his word, and—and let me off the lines, see? Well, he's refused. A fellow in my own study—and after all I've done for him, you know!" said Bunter sadly. "Makes out that he can't tell a lie, like some American in a story book. He actually slanged me, and called me untruthful!"

"He called you untruthful!" gasped Skinner. "Now, I wonder what put that into his head?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Well, Toddy's a beast," said Bunter. "But you're an awfully decent chap, Skinner, one of the best, a fellow I've always liked. You're good-natured, kind-hearted, and all that!"

"The speech may be taken as read!" agreed Skinner.

"Being one of the best natured chaps in the Remove, old fellow, I'm sure you'll help," said Bunter. "I never did agree with all the fellows thinking you were a measly, sneaking, malicious sort of rotter, Skinner. I've often spoken up for you, and I've said plainly that if a fellow's a rank outsider he can't help it—what are you glaring at me for, Skinner?"

"Oh! Nothing!" gasped Skinner. "Go on—it's a pleasure to listen to you."

"Well, old chap, this is the idea—you were skylarking about in my study, and there was my impot on the table, all finished and ready to take to Quelch, and you knocked it over into the fire, see? These chaps were in the study and saw you do it. How about that?"

"How about it? My only hat!"

"With a lot of burned papers in the grate as a proof, even Quelch can't make out that we're pulling his leg," explained Bunter. "Anyhow, if he doesn't swallow it, it doesn't make



"Play up, Greyfriars!" roared Bob Cherry. "On the ball! There they go—hurrah!" In the exuberance of his spirits, he yanked off his cap and waved it wildly. "You young fool!" There was an angry exclamation from the man behind Bob as the cap smote him fairly in the face.

matters any worse. Of course, I'd rather have some other chap to back me up—but it's no good asking Wharton or Bob Cherry—they'd talk rot just like Toddy—

"But you're asking me!" gasped Skinner.

"You see, you don't mind telling lies," explained Bunter.

"I—I—I don't mind telling lies!" stuttered Skinner.

"That's it, old fellow! It's rather unfortunate that Quelch knows what a fibber you are—but what's a fellow to do?" asked Bunter. "It's no good asking a decent chap to back up a yarn like that! It's up to you or nobody."

Snoop and Stott burst into a roar. Skinner looked at the fat Owl as if he could have eaten him. It was not to be denied that Bunter's way of putting it was lacking in tact.

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Snoop and Stott.

"Oh, chuck it," snapped Bunter. "Blessed if I see anything to cackle at. Is it a go, Skinner? I'll do the same for you another time, if it works. See? If I don't bamboozle Quelch somehow, I've got six coming. I wouldn't ask you, if you were particular about such things, but— I say! Leggo! Yarooooop! You awful beast, wharrer you up to?" roared Bunter.

What Skinner was up to hardly needed explaining. He was grasping Billy Bunter by his fat neck, and banging his bullet head against the banisters.

Bang! Bang! Bang!

"Yow! Wow! Whooooop!"

A fiendish yell from Bunter followed each bang from Skinner.

Why Skinner had broken out into a bad temper like this, Bunter did not know. But there was no doubt about the fact! Skinner, obviously, was annoyed about something, though Bunter did not know what it was. He banged Bunter's head on the banisters as if bent on demolishing them.

Then, still looking very annoyed, Skinner walked away to his study for prep, followed by Snoop and Stott, who were laughing.

Billy Bunter rubbed his damaged head and gasped.

"Oh crikey! Oh crumbs! Wow! Beast! Oh lor! My napper! What was the matter with the brute, I wonder? Wow!"

Whatever had been the matter with Skinner, it was clear that he was not going to back up Bunter's masterly scheme for "bamboozling" Mr. Quelch. Bunter considered that it was rather a brainy scheme, deserving of support; but it seemed that there were no takers in the Remove.

Still rubbing his head, the fat junior rolled dismally into his study, No. 7, where Peter Todd and Tom Dutton were already at prep.

He sat down to prep in low spirits.

He was deeply worried about what was going to happen after prep.

Mr. Quelch had really been very easy with Bunter about those lines—they had stood over for days and days. But now he was adamant; and it was going to be a licking. It was a depressing prospect.

After prep, when Toddy and Dutton

rose to go down, Bunter fixed a beseeching blink on Peter.

"I say, Toddy, old fellow—"

"Bow-wow!" said Peter, and he strolled out of the study. For some reason, incomprehensible to William George Bunter Toddy had some objection or other to hearing false witness. Dutton followed him out, and the hapless Owl was left on his own.

"Beast!" groaned Bunter.

He left his study and rolled along to Study No. 1. Wharton and Nugent were disappearing down the Remove staircase, but Valentine was still in the study. He was not at work; he was standing by the mantelpiece, his hands driven deep into his pockets. Bunter blinked at him curiously. There were lines of trouble in the face that was generally as bright and cheerful as any at Greyfriars. The new fellow, deep in thought, did not see the fat Owl blinking in at the door.

"I say, Valentine—" began Bunter.

Valentine started, and stared round at him.

"What do you want?" The words came in a snap, quite unlike his usual manner.

"Well, you needn't bite a fellow's head off," said Bunter, blinking at him. "Has Wharton been ragging you about the footer, old chap?"

"No, ass!"

"I hear you played a rotten game at Highcliffe this afternoon—"

"Is that all?"

"Oh, no, old fellow! The fact is, Valentine, I want you to do something for me," said Bunter. "As you've been

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mixed up with crooks, and all that, I suppose you're not particular about telling a whopper or two—he, he, he!"

"What do you mean, you fat dummy?"

"It's that beast Quelch," explained Bunter. "He's after me for lines! I expect him up here after me, as I haven't gone to his study—and it's no good going to him without lines, is it? He will bring his cane. May hear the old blighter's hoofs in a minute. Well, old chap, I've got a lot of old exercises here—see?"

"For goodness' sake, cut off, Bunter!" "I haven't told you yet what I want you to do. The idea is this—I was just taking my impot to Quelch, when I stepped into this study to speak to you! Got that?"

"What on earth—"

"You bumped into me, for a lark, and sent me spinning," continued Bunter. "The impot flew out of my hands, right into the fire—"

Valentine gazed at him.

"Quelch comes up—may come up any minute, see? Well, he sees all these burnt papers, and you explain how it happened—"

"Do you mean how it didn't happen?" gasped Valentine.

"Oh, really, Valentine! You see, Quelch seems to think a lot of you—goodness knows why! He will take it down like milk, if you tell him." Bunter rolled into the study. "Now, you've got it clear, old fellow! I burn these papers, and you make out to Quelch that they were my lines, and that you bumped me over, and—"

"You fat rascal!"

"Oh, really, you know! I'll do as much for you another time, of course! In fact, if this works, we can use the same idea over and over again!" urged Bunter. "It may turn out a jolly valuable idea, in the long run. Here goes!"

Bunter heaved his papers into the fire. They smouldered and smoked, and he stirred them. Valentine watched him blankly.

"There!" said Bunter. "That's all right! Now, all you've got to do is to tell Quelch, when he comes up, that those old exercises were my lines, and you bumped me over, see, and they fell in the fire—"

"I shall do nothing of the kind, you howling ass!"

"Look here, Valentine, if you get me a licking from that old brute, Quelch, I—"

"Bunter!"

"Oh lor!"

Bunter had said that he might hear Mr. Quelch's footsteps any minute. Now he heard them—and Mr. Quelch's voice, too!

"You young rascal!" exclaimed Mr. Quelch, glaring into the study.

"Bunter—"

"Oh crikey!"

"You have not done your lines, Bunter!"

"Yes, I have, sir!" gasped Bunter. "I—I've done the whole lot, sir! I—I was just bringing them down to you when—"

"What?"

"But—but I stepped into this study, sir, to speak to Valentine, and—and he bumped me over for a lark—"

"Bunter!"

"And the—the lines fell into the fire, sir! And—and—and there they are now, sir!" gasped Bunter.

The Gorgon of old might have looked as Mr. Quelch looked. Really, his look was petrifying.

"Bunter!" he gasped. "I heard what you said to Valentine, as I came from the stairs!"

"Oh crikey!"

"You are a young rascal, Bunter—an untruthful and unscrupulous young rascal. I intended to cane you, Bunter, for not having handed in your lines. I shall now cane you with much more severity!"

"Ow!"

"Go to your own study, Bunter! I will follow you there!"

"Wow!"

Billy Bunter tottered to his own study. Mr. Quelch followed him there, slipping the cane down from under his arm into his hand, and taking a business-like grip on it. In Study No. 7 he pointed to a chair with the cane. Billy Bunter groaned, and bent over the chair. His brainy scheme had not saved him. He had been, indeed, a little too brainy!

What followed was painful! There were many echoes in the Remove passage, and Billy Bunter's dulcet tones

woke all of them as his Form master laid on the cane. But for Bunter's brainy scheme, which had so unfortunately come to his knowledge, the Remove master would probably have let the Owl off lightly. Now he felt it his duty to be severe, and he did his duty thoroughly.

By the time Mr. Quelch tucked his cane under his arm again and departed, Billy Bunter was feeling tired of life. He was still groaning when the Remove went up to their dormitory. After lights out, the usual deep snore was not heard from Bunter's bed. A series of deep and dismal groans was heard—which did not cease till Bolsover major hurled a boot. Then there was a yelp, and silence.

THE THIRTEENTH CHAPTER.

At Midnight!

JIM VALENTINE lay staring into the darkness.

The hour was late; the Remove dormitory deep in slumber. Intermittently, a rumbling snore proceeded from Billy Bunter, though he was not sleeping so soundly as usual that night.

Valentine could not sleep.

His face, in the darkness, was white; his eyes stared fixedly, unsleeping. Since the visit to Highcliffe School, Valentine had not looked his usual self, and fellows who noticed it attributed it to his failure in the football match. But the boy with a past was not thinking of that; he had forgotten it.

He was thinking of the pasty face and fishy eyes of Nutty Nixon. Trying to think of what he should do, of what he must do. Even in those weary minutes, as he lay, sleepless, among the sleeping Removites, the cracksmen was lurking in the shadows at Highcliffe, the "crib" marked down by Noscay's gang for "cracking."

What was he to do?

The desperate thought had been in his mind of getting Inspector Grimes on the telephone, as he had done once before, and warning him of an intended robbery at Highcliffe School.

But that he could not do.

In his interview with Mr. Grimes in the Remove master's study days since, he knew that he had not satisfied the keen inspector of police.

Mr. Grimes certainly did not associate him in his mind with Dick the Penman, but he had a very shrewd suspicion that Valentine could put him on the track of that elusive crook if he liked.

Mr. Quelch was not aware, but Valentine was only too keenly aware, that Inspector Grimes had an eye of suspicion on him, that he was very far from having done with that official gentleman.

But it was not only his desire to keep clear of Mr. Grimes that prevented him from giving warning of Nutty's intentions at Highcliffe.

Nutty, so far as that went, was at his mercy; but he was equally at Nutty's mercy. Nutty, in the hands of the police, would not have failed to realise who had placed him there, and he would have taken immediate care that Dick the Penman joined him in custody. It was because of that, because he knew that the boy dared not speak, that Nutty had coolly told him what his intentions were. He knew that he had no betrayal to fear. And, by telling him, he had made the boy, in a way, his accomplice. On the morrow there would be news of a robbery at Highcliffe.

Nutty would not fail. He had marked out the crib for cracking, and he was a past-master in his peculiar trade. Such a crib as a school was simply "pie" to



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Nutty. Valentine remembered him well. He had seen a great deal of Nutty in his year with Nosey Clark's gang. Why had they picked out a crib so near to Greyfriars? There was loot at Highcliffe—it was worth Nutty's while. But it was not his usual kind of "job." It seemed to the boy that he could read some intention in this—that it was some plan of Nosey's to bring close to him the shadow of crime from which he had escaped.

Since the day he had seen Nosey and Barney in the wood, he had heard nothing from the crooks. Evidently they had realised that, for their own safety's sake, they had to let him alone. He had begun to hope that he was, after all, done with them. If he had not met Nutty that afternoon at Highcliffe, would he have known anything about his cracking the crib there?

Had they intended, in any case, to let him know—to force him to be an unwilling accomplice? Was there something more than that in it, even? It seemed to Jim Valentine, as he lay sleepless, thinking, that he glimpsed vaguely some cunning scheme, some spider-like net that was spread to drag him back into the depths. Only too well he knew that Dick the Penman was too valuable for Nosey Clark to lose, if Nosey could help it.

What was he to do? That thought came back incessantly to his aching mind. To put the police on to Nutty Nixon, was to put them on to himself. He could not do that. Not without leaving Greyfriars in disgrace and shame, the centre of a sensation such as had never been known in the school. Worst of all, bringing trouble and distress to his kind friend and protector. But what else?

To shut the matter out of his mind, and go to sleep? He could not do that, either.

He heard eleven chime out in the winter night.

As the last stroke died away he slipped quietly from his bed. Quietly he dressed himself in the darkness.

His mind was made up.

Round him the Removites slept the sleep of healthy youth. If they were dreaming, little dreaming of what the new fellow in the Form was doing, of what he intended.

Softly he crossed towards the door. "I say, you fellows! Who's that?" came a startled squeak from one of the beds.

Valentine stopped, his heart thumping, his teeth set. That fat idiot, Bunter, was awake—a fellow who usually slept like Rip Van Winkle.

Bunter sat up in bed. He had awakened six or seven times that night owing to Mr. Quelch having done his duty so very thoroughly with the cane. Now he was awake once more—and startled and alarmed to see a dim figure move in the glimmering starlight from the windows.

"I say, is that you, Smithy?" exclaimed Bunter.

Valentine stood very still, pressed close to the wall by the door. He dared not open the door while fellows were awake. The slightest sound—

"Hallo, hallo, hallo!" came a drowsy voice. "Is that Bunter gabbling? Shut up, Bunter, you blessed gramophone."

"I say, you fellows, there's somebody up! I saw somebody—"

"Fathead!"

"Look here! If it's a burglar—" squeaked Bunter in alarm.

"Smithy going out on the tiles?" came Skinner's voice, with a sleepy chuckle.

"You silly ass!" came a grunt from the Bounder's bed.

"I say, you fellows, it's somebody!" squeaked Bunter.

"Oh, dry up, Bunter!" came Harry Wharton's voice. "You're waking up the whole Form, you babbling bandersnatch!"

"Oh, really, Wharton—" "The terrific snorefulness is the proper caper, my esteemed and idiotic Bunter!" yawned Hurree Jamset Ram Singh.

"I tell you I saw somebody, and if it isn't one of you fellows, it's a burglar!" howled Bunter.

"A jolly old burglar after Bunter's watch!" said Skinner. "Call out to him that it's only worth twopence, Bunter!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I say, you fellows—" Whiz! A slipper shot through the air, and landed on Billy Bunter's fat features. There was a sudden howl.

NOW HE'S GOT A MONEY PRIZE!

All he did was to send me a funny story. Have you heard it?



Shopkeeper: "Here's your sixpennyworth of treacle, sonny. Now, where's the sixpence?"

Bobby: "At the bottom of the jar!"

Congratulations to William Preston, of 245, Great Northern Street, Lisburn Road, Belfast. Hope you'll find the money prize useful, William.—Ed.

"I've got another here, Bunter," said Bolsover major.

"Beast!"

Bunter did not seem to want the other. He laid his bullet head on the pillow again, but his little round eyes blinked uneasily into the shadows. A burglar in a junior dormitory was really rather improbable, as even Bunter realised. Still, he was certain that he had seen somebody, and nobody had owned up to being out of bed.

For a good many minutes Billy Bunter blinked and listened in a state of uneasy trepidation. But there was no sound, save that of fellows settling down to sleep again. Ten minutes passed, and all was silent, and then Billy Bunter gave a gasp as he heard, or fancied he heard, a faint sound in the night.

"I say, you fellows! Was that the door?" he gasped.

"Shurrup!" came a sleepy murmur.

"Blessed if I don't think I heard it, though!" It was Harry Wharton's

voice. "Nobody can be up at this time of night, surely?"

"Oh dear! If it's a burglar—" gasped Bunter.

"Oh, don't be an ass!"

Harry Wharton sat up in bed staring towards the door, invisible in the deep gloom. He was almost sure that he had heard a faint, soft, stealthy sound of the door opening and shutting under a cautious hand. He had been fast asleep when eleven chimed out, and did not know the hour; but he knew that it must be very late. He reached for a matchbox, struck a match, and glanced at his watch. It was nearly half-past eleven. It could hardly be the most reckless breaker of bounds, going out at that hour. And yet—

He gave a violent start as his eyes fell upon a bed, next but one, revealed by the flickering glimmer of the match. It was Jim Valentine's bed, and it was empty! He stared at it, so amazed, that the match burned down to his fingers unregarded. He hastily extinguished it.

"I say, Wharton!"

"Oh, go to sleep!" snapped Harry.

"If it's somebody—" "It's nobody, ass! Go to sleep!"

Bunter settled down again, still uneasy, though his uneasiness was soon forgotten in slumber.

But as Bunter's snore was heard in the dormitory once more, there was one fellow who remained wakeful.

Wharton's eyes were wide open.

Valentine was gone. He knew now that he had not been mistaken; he had not fancied that sound at the door. It was Valentine whom Bunter had seen moving in the gloom—Valentine who had left the dormitory at nearly midnight. Why?

He tried to fancy, to imagine, that it was some harmless prank—a "lark," perhaps, on fellows in another dormitory. He knew it was not that, could not be that at such an hour of the night. But he tried to think so, waiting for the boy to come back. He did not come back.

Wharton heard midnight strike, and Valentine was still absent. It was plain enough that he had gone out of the house. Where, and why?

There were dark thoughts in Wharton's mind now—dark thoughts and suspicious. The boy who had been a crook, in a gang of crooks, was gone—at midnight, secretly surreptitiously! But for Bunter's happening to be awake, no one would have known that he was absent. What did it—what could it mean?

Wharton was still sleepless when one o'clock boomed through the winter night. Valentine had not come back. He fell asleep at last.

THE FOURTEENTH CHAPTER.

Put to the Test!

MIDNIGHT! Darkness lay like a cloak over Highcliffe School. Not a light glimmered from a window. The porter's dog had barked twice; but had settled down again, and all was silent.

Jim Valentine waited.

His footsteps made no sound when he moved. His nerves were strung taut; his eyes searched the shadows; his ears were keen for the slightest sound.

From somewhere in the night the deep boom of one reached him.

Was Nutty coming?

The man might have deceived him—might have changed his plans. But he did not believe so. Nutty would be at

work that night at Highcliffe—he knew it. Even in those moments he might be already at work, silent, invisible.

The faintest sound was enough for Jim's straining ears. A sudden blaze shot into his eyes, and he breathed hard and quick. Silently, softly, he trod in the darkness.

The man who crouched by a little casement window in the old stone porch of the House heard nothing. There was a gauze mask over the pasty face; through the holes in it the fishy eyes glinted. A tiny speck of light played on the casement for a few moments. There was a faint sound of an instrument at work. It was easy to Nutty. A bolted window was not likely to keep him out of any building. The diamond point traced on the glass, cutting out a lozenge. Nutty laid it silently down. His long, thin, thievish fingers reached through the opening he had cut, to draw back the bolt within.

The next instant his hand jerked back from the casement, and a shuddering thrill ran through him as he felt a hand on his shoulder.

He spun round, hissing like a snake, a jemmy grasped in his right hand, ready for a murderous blow, his electric torch flashing.

But his half-lifted arm dropped again as he stared at the boy who stood before him, clearly revealed in the flash of the torch.

"Jim!" Nutty Nixon shut off the light again. In the darkness of the porch he peered at Jim Valentine, and grinned.

"You, Jim! You've turned up, then!" There was surprise, mingled with satisfaction, in the crook's voice. "That's good!"

Valentine was breathing in jerks. His heart was pounding. He did not answer immediately, and Nutty ran on in a whisper:

"Good for you, Jim. You're coming back to us. I reckoned you'd get fed-up with playing at being a schoolboy, after the life you had with us. Nosey will be glad to hear this, Jim."

Valentine's face, in the darkness, was black and bitter. Nutty did not know why he was there—never dreamed why. He took it for granted that Dick the Penman was there to join up with him.

"Good for you, Jim," repeated Nutty, in whispered tones of satisfaction. "Don't you be afraid of Nosey. He'll be glad to have you back. And he won't have it against you that you cut. Take that from me."

Valentine had no doubt of that. "You've saved us, and yourself, a lot of trouble," grinned Nutty. "I dessay you know that Nosey wasn't going to leave you quiet at the school, Jim? Not likely! He wants you back—we all want you back, Jim. There's a big job on hand waiting for Dick the Penman. You couldn't have stood out against Nosey, Jim. He had you fixed—had it all cut and dried."

Valentine spoke at last. "What was he going to do, then?" Nutty chuckled.

"Never mind that now—that's washed out, now you're back with us. We're in this job together, Jim—what?"

"Fool!" The boy's accent was contemptuous and bitter.

Nutty Nixon started, and flashed on the light for a second. In its gleam he read the white, set, almost desperate face of the boy, and he gave a low whistle between his yellow teeth, and his grip hardened on the jemmy.

"What's the game, Jim?" His tone was altered. "Mean to say you're not here to join up?"

"Never!"

"Then what?"

"Get out of it!"

"What?" breathed Nutty.

"Get out of it!" Valentine's voice rose, almost shrilly.

There was a hiss of warning from Nutty Nixon.

"Quiet, Jim! Do you want to wake the House?"

"I don't care much if I do! Get out of it! If you don't go, I'll wake the House soon enough—and the police, too!"

Under the mask, the crackman's face was working with rage. He understood now; Jim Valentine was not there to join him, to help him, to return in his company to Nosey Clark's headquarters. His intention was far enough from that.

"Take care, Jim!" Nutty's whisper was full of savage menace. "Take care, you young fool! Police! Do you think the cops wouldn't be quicker to grab Dick the Penman than Nutty Nixon? Are you mad?"

"Will you get out of it?"

"I fancy not!" jeered Nutty. "Wake the house, if you like! We'll go to the stone jug in company!"

Valentine stood very still, the crook watching him savagely and mockingly through the eye-holes of the mask. The test had come—the stern moment of trial for the boy who had been forced into crime, and who had dragged himself from the mire. The burden laid on him was almost greater than he could bear. To stand idle, a party to the robbery, was to fall back into the mire of crime. But to face what he must face, if he stood true to the test—It was no wonder that Valentine hesitated.

But his hesitation was brief.

"You won't go, Nutty?"

His voice was husky.

"Hardly!"

"That does it, then?"

Jim Valentine pushed past the crook to the great door at the back of the high stone porch. There was a big brass knocker on the door, and he grasped it.

Nutty Nixon's hand on his shoulder jerked him back just in time. A second later, and a thunderous knock would have rung through the sleeping building.

"Jim, you mad young fool! You mean it, then?"

Nutty was almost choking with rage.

"Every word!"

"And you fancy you'll get by with it?" snarled Nutty, his fishy eyes ablaze.

And he closed in on the boy, the jemmy lifted now. Even as he spoke he struck, and had that blow reached its mark, Jim Valentine would have fallen stunned and senseless, unable to interfere further with Nutty's "job" at Highcliffe School.

But the blow did not reach its mark; the boy was on his guard. He twisted aside, and the jemmy swept down and missed him, barely grazing his shoulder.

Before Nutty could recover the weapon for a second blow, Jim Valentine's clenched fist was dashed full in his face.

It was a fierce blow, with all the boy's desperate strength behind it. Nutty Nixon staggered back, with a panting howl, the jemmy falling from his hand with a loud clang on the stone flags. He went over backwards, crashing, and lay gasping. The mask had slipped from his face, revealing the features distorted with fury.

He was up again like a cat, and springing at the boy. In an instant they were struggling.

Crash! Locked in a fierce struggle, they crashed against the great oak door. The sound boomed through the silent house.

There was a sharp, loud barking at a distance and the rattle of a chain. Bark, bark, bark! came savagely from a startled dog. A voice was heard calling.

Jim Valentine was fighting desperately in the clutches of the crook. For the moment Nutty Nixon, mad with rage, was thinking only of vengeance on the boy who had defeated and defied him. To carry out his plans was impossible now. The house was awakening; the porter could be heard calling to the barking dog; the alarm was given. Lights flashed on in three or four windows.

Nutty's savage grip was on the boy; but Jim Valentine was strong and sturdy, and he held his own well. There came a sound of pattering feet and of fierce barking close at hand, warning the crackman that there was no time to wreak his fury. The porter had let the dog loose, and the animal was tearing to the spot.

"Let go, Jim, you madman!" Nutty panted hoarsely, and dragged himself away from the boy.

He dashed out of the porch, running like the wind, and disappeared into the night.

Jim Valentine staggered against the door, panting, breathless, almost exhausted, his brain in a whirl.

There was a sound of drawing bolts and a rattling chain within, footsteps and voices. He realised his position. Nutty was gone, vanished in the night, and he—there was there, to be seized in Nutty's place if he was found! He darted out of the porch.

There was a fierce growl, and a dog leaped at him from the shadows. He had a glimpse of teeth and blazing eyes.

How he eluded that leap he hardly knew. But he eluded it, and tore away in the darkness.

Crash!

He rushed into an unseen figure. It was the school porter, following the dog in the darkness, and the fleeing boy crashed into him, and sent him spinning headlong.

But the man grasped him as he spun over and dragged him down.

Valentine panted.

Practically he tore himself loose. The man grasped at him again, and, scarcely knowing what he did, he struck out, his fist dashing into a half-seen face. The man, with a grunt, let go, and Valentine tore away and ran.

A shadowy form leaped, and there was a snap of teeth barely an inch from him. He raced away, the snarling dog at his heels.

Windows and open doors were blazing with light now. Voices called and shouted. Valentine reached a wall and sprang desperately, grasping the top and dragging himself up, the dog barking and leaping below.

He dropped on the outer side, rolled over, gained his feet, and ran. The flashing lights and the hubbub died away behind him as he ran—breathlessly, desperately, as if for his life.

THE FIFTEENTH CHAPTER.

Taking Bunter to Tea!

"WHEN are you fellows going?"

"When we start!"

"I mean, when are you starting?"

"When we go!"

"Beast!" roared Billy Bunter.

Whereat Bob Cherry chuckled.

It was the following day, and class was over. William George Bunter was intensely interested in the movements



Striking out at the half-seen face, Valentine tore himself free and raced away. As he did so, a shadowy form leaped from out of the darkness, and there was a snap of teeth barely an inch from him. The junior put on a spurt, the snarling dog racing at his heels!

of the Famous Five. That they were going out to tea Bunter was aware; but when they were going, and where they were going, Bunter was unhappily unaware. Naturally, he wanted to know, for he was going out to tea with them—if he could.

Owing to the non-arrival of a postal order which Billy Bunter had been expecting daily—in fact, hourly—he was in the unpleasant state known as "stony." Study No. 7 that day was a dreary desert, so far as tea was concerned. Toddy and Dutton were teasing in Hall. When his study-mates tea'd in Hall, Billy Bunter was wont to roam the Remove passage like a lion seeking what he might devour.

In the circumstances, it was grateful and comforting to learn that Harry Wharton & Co. were going out to tea. They were taking Jim Valentine; Bunter knew that. Well, if they could take one friend, they could take two, especially such a pal as Bunter!

Having settled it in his own fat mind that he was going with his dear old pals, it was rather irritating to find that his dear old pals had settled it in their minds that he wasn't!

It was not only ungrateful, after all Bunter had done for them, but it was very awkward, as this was Bunter's only chance of tea, excepting what he scornfully described as "dish-water and door-steps" in Hall.

Bunter wanted to know, but the chums of the Remove did not want him to know. When he asked Johnny Bull, Johnny told him that they were going to a garden-party at Buckingham Palace. When he asked Frank Nugent, Nugent confided to him that they were going by air to take tea with the President of the United States. All this information was quite useless to Bunter.

Now he tackled Bob Cherry, but with no better luck.

Harry Wharton came out of the House, and the Owl of the Remove rolled over to him.

"Starting now, old fellow?" he asked. "Eh?"

"You'd like me to come?" asked Bunter hopefully.

"Fathead!"

"If you don't want my company, Wharton—" said Bunter, with a great deal of dignity.

"You've got it!" agreed Wharton.

"He, he, he!" Billy Bunter decided to take that answer as a joke. "I say, old fellow, I'm ready when you are. Is it Highcliffe? I suppose you fixed it with Courtenay when you were over there at the footer yesterday?"

"You can suppose any old thing you like!" said Harry, laughing.

"Well, look here, if you're going to Cliff House, I'd better come," said Bunter. "If Marjorie's asked you to tea, you know what it means—she will expect you to bring me. You don't want to disappoint her, Wharton. Jealousy apart, you know she's rather sweet in my direction, and I can jolly well—Whoooooop!"

Billy Bunter sat down suddenly and roared. Harry Wharton walked on and joined the Co, who had gathered in the quad. Jim Valentine was not on the spot yet, which was rather a relief to Wharton.

"Time we were off, old bean," said Bob. "Somebody will have to kill Bunter; we can't land him on Courtenay and the Caterpillar."

"I've got some work to do, you fellows," said Harry. "I'm going to cut it. You get off without me."

"Oh, what rot!" said Bob. "Those Highcliffe chaps will have a jolly good spread! Not lines, is it?"

"N-no, but I'd rather stay in, really." Frank Nugent gave him a rather quick look.

"Is it because Valentine's coming, Harry?" he asked very quietly.

Wharton coloured a little.

"Look here, I've said I want to do some work," he answered. "Leave it at that."

"Please yourself, of course," said Bob, rather shortly.

But the Co. looked a little glum as Wharton went back to the House. It looked as if the captain of the Remove was going to "bar" Valentine, which was uncomfortable all round.

Wharton was not feeling happy about it himself. But Jim Valentine's mysterious expedition the previous night had "put the lid on," so to speak.

Wharton had hoped, or tried to hope, that it might have been, after all, some harmless excursion, some sort of a reckless "lark"—though reckless larking was not in the new fellow's line. In that case he would naturally have told other fellows about it—his friends, at least.

But Valentine had said no word.

At what time he had got back to the dormitory the previous night Wharton did not know; but he knew that it must have been after one o'clock; he remembered having heard one strike before he fell asleep.

His first glance, when he awakened at the clang of the rising-bell, had turned on Valentine's bed; and he had seen him there fast asleep—too fast asleep to awaken at the clang of the bell! It was no wonder, considering how late he must have gone to bed. Valentine had not awakened till Bob Cherry dragged his bedclothes off.

Where had he been that night—and why? Obviously he intended to say

nothing about it—not knowing that Wharton knew.

Wharton tried to dismiss the matter from his mind as no business of his. But he could not. He hated the miserable suspicion that forced itself into his mind, but he could not help it. If Valentine, after all, was keeping in touch with his former associates—if, after all, he was once more in collusion with Nosey Clark and his gang—

It looked like it! What else could that secret nocturnal excursion mean? Wharton would not and could not think so. He was determined not to think so—and yet the dismal suspicion would not leave his mind.

Valentine was not a fellow to go "blagging" out of bounds, like the reckless Bounder. What had taken him secretly out of the school, and kept him out till after one o'clock in the morning? If he was Dick the Penman—and Wharton could hardly doubt that—did it mean that he was tired of his new life of reform, that the call of old associations had been too strong for his new resolutions?

Valentine, coming out, passed him as he went in. His face was cheery, as usual, and a glance at that handsome, pleasant face made Wharton feel a twinge of shame for his suspicious doubts. But—There was a "but"—and the captain of the Remove could not help it.

"I say, Wharton—" "Oh, roll off, Bunter!" snapped Wharton.

"Don't bite a fellow's head off!" said Bunter. "Look here, old fellow, what are you going in for? Ain't you starting yet?"

Wharton went up the stairs without replying.

Billy Bunter blinked after him, and then blinked at the other fellows in the quad. Bob Cherry winked at his chums and shouted to the Owl of the Remove: "Hallo, hallo, hallo! Bunter!"

"Yes, old chap!" Bunter rolled up hopefully.

"Where's Wharton?"

"Just gone in!"

"Tell him not to be late!"

"Oh, all right, old chap!"

Bunter rolled back into the House. Johnny Bull stared at Bob.

"What's the good of Bunter telling Wharton not to be late, if Wharton's not coming?" he demanded.

"Lots!" answered Bob cheerfully.

"While he's telling Wharton not to be late we can get off! That will save us the trouble of slaughtering Bunter and burying him along the road!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

And the juniors walked down to the bikeshed, wheeled out their machines, and started for Highcliffe.

Unconscious of that nefarious proceeding, Billy Bunter rolled up to the Remove passage, and blinked into Study No. 1.

"Harry, old chap—"

"Hook it, fatty!"

"Bob's sent me to tell you not to be late!" said Bunter, with dignity. "If that's the way you thank a chap for coming upstairs to tell you—"

Wharton stared at the fat Owl for a moment, and then laughed.

"Oh, all right!" he said. "Thanks, old fat bean! If you're coming to tea with me, Bunter—"

"I am, old fellow! Rely on me."

"Right as rain; wait for me, then."

Billy Bunter waited. Rather to his astonishment, Harry Wharton sat down at the study table, and picked up a pen

and opened a Latin grammar. Bunter blinked at him.

"I say, old chap, you're not going to mug up that rot now?" he asked anxiously. "You're keeping the fellows waiting, you know."

"Don't talk while a fellow's working, old fat man."

"Oh, really, Wharton—"

"Shut up!"

Bunter shut up. Wharton had told his friends that he had some work to do; and he did some. For a quarter of an hour he laboured at Latin conjugations; Billy Bunter watching him with growing impatience.

The fat Owl was blissfully unconscious—so far that Wharton was not going with the tea-party at all; happily unaware that the Co. were already miles on their way.

So long as he kept an eye on Wharton, Bunter felt safe. So he kept an eye on him—in fact two, not to mention a large pair of spectacles!

Harry Wharton pushed back his books and laid down his pen at last. To Bunter's intense relief, he rose from the table.

"Ready, old chap?" gasped Bunter.

"Quite!"

"Let's start, then."

"Come on! Sure you want to come to tea with me?"

"Yes, rather!"

"Well, I'm taking you to tea if you want to come. I hope you won't be disappointed when you get there."

Wharton left the study, and Bunter rolled after him. They descended the stairs.

"If you're going on bikes, old chap, I can borrow Mauls's," remarked Bunter.

"No; we're walking this time," chuckled Wharton.

"Where the dickens are you going, then?" demanded Bunter. "Look here, get your cap—you'll want your cap, wherever it is."

"I shan't want a cap. Come on!"

"You're not going out without your cap, I suppose?"

"No; I'm not going out at all."

"Eh?"

"Come on!" said Wharton. "We're a bit late already. You know what tea in Hall is like when a fellow gets in late—fearfully washy!"

Bunter jumped.

"Tea in Hall!" he shrieked.

"Yes, come on!"

"Tut-tut-tea in Hall! You—you beast, you said you were taking me to tea!" roared Bunter.

"So I am—if you want to come. Please yourself!"

Harry Wharton walked into Hall to tea. Billy Bunter stood and glared after him with a glare that almost cracked his spectacles.

"Beast!" he roared.

Then he rolled away to look for the Co., realising at long last that Harry Wharton was not going with them. But the Co. had vanished into space long ago.

THE SIXTEENTH CHAPTER.

Startling News!

"JOLLY old burglars—"

"At Highcliffe—"

"Last night—"

"Two of them—one of them a boy—"

"No end of excitement over there—woke them up in the middle of the night—after one in the morning, Courtenay said—"

Harry Wharton stopped dead in the doorway of the Rag.

His friends had returned from Highcliffe—evidently with news. There was a buzz of voices in the Rag when the captain of the Remove came along. A crowd of fellows had gathered round Bob Cherry & Co. to hear the startling news.

It was more startling to Harry Wharton's ears than to any others. Every word, as he heard it, struck him almost like a blow.

He stood in the doorway looking into the room. A crowd of fellows was there, but he noticed that Valentine was not there. He did not step into the room, or speak; he stood as if suddenly turned to stone. Bob Cherry's voice ran on.

"We've heard it all from Courtenay. He was woke up with the rest. No end of excitement at Highcliffe, I can tell you. They've had old Grimey there, and—"

"What did they get away with?" asked Skinner.

"Nothing, as it turned out," answered Bob. "It seems that the porter's dog was alarmed—must have heard something—and started barking. The porter let him loose and went to see what was up; he saw a man running, and then another fellow ran into him and bumped him over; he grabbed him, and the fellow hit him in the eye—he's got a gooseberry eye to-day—"

"And the man got away?"

"Yes—only it wasn't a man, it was a boy! So the porter says; he's positive of that. Of course, he couldn't see him in the dark, but he got hold of him, and they had a bit of a tussle; only the fellow knocked him in the eye and barked. I suppose the burglar had a boy with him—some awful young sweep."

"Some terrific young rascal!" said Hurree Jamsat Ram Singh.

"And they never got either of them?" asked the Bounder.

"No; they cleared in different directions, and both of them got away. Old Grimey's on the trail—if that's any good. They found a hole cut in the glass in a downstairs window, and a jenny lying around where the jolly old cracksmen had dropped it. The dog seems to have scared them off."

Harry Wharton's thoughts were racing.

Jim Valentine had crept out of bounds that night—he had been out after one o'clock in the morning. And there had been burglars at Highcliffe, only a few miles away—two of them, and one of them a boy. Was it possible? Could it be possible? Was that what it meant?

He felt sick at heart. That was what it meant!

There was a step beside him. He glanced round and saw Valentine. The new junior was about to enter the Rag—but he stopped, struck by the look on Wharton's face. His own face paled a little.

"What—" he began.

Wharton started back, as if from an adder.

"Don't speak to me!" he muttered huskily.

"But what—"

"Keep away from me!"

With that Harry Wharton turned and left Valentine, the boy staring after him with startled eyes.

THE END

(Now look out for the next yarn in this stirring new series! It's entitled: "HIS PAST AGAINST HIM!" and without doubt it will hold your interest from first line to last! See that you order your copy of the MAGNET in good time, chums!)

NOBBY, the 'Shooting Star'!



A Job for Nobby!

IN the meantime, Lord Douglas Weatherstone talked to the embarrassed Nobby.

"How long have you been kicking a football, boy?"

"Ever since I can remember, sir," answered Nobby. "Don Carlos made me practise kicking and ball control when I was a toddler."

"Don Carlos—"

"He was the proprietor of a circus, sir," explained Nobby. "He was a sort of foster parent. I—I ran away from him yesterday."

"The devil you did! What for?"

"I wanted to see something of the world, sir. I wanted to get away from circus life—"

"And from this Don Carlos, too—what?" asked his lordship shrewdly.

"Was he a brute?"

"Well," grinned Nobby, "he didn't believe in sparing the rod—"

Further conversation became impossible as the players emerged from the club buildings and surrounded their chairman and managing-director like a swarm of excited children.

"Morning, boys!" cried his lordship boisterously, in answer to the chorus of greeting. "I want you to meet Nobby. He's going to start work with us as a groundsman—or shall I say boy."

Nobby blushed as he felt the gaze of twenty-five muscular "pros" turned upon him, but he threw back a cheery grin as he caught Jack Drake's encouraging wink.

"This young fellow can kick a ball," continued his lordship. "I was told he was a genius. That we have yet to prove. But I know from personal experience that he is a marksman. Get between the sticks, Grosvenor."

"Yes, sir."

A tall, loosely-knit young man of between twenty-five and thirty, clad in a green sweater, doubled towards the goal net at the southern end of the ground. At a more leisurely gait the other players and his lordship made for the penalty spot. With great deliberation his lordship placed the leather sphere on the "spot," and signalled to Nobby.

"Go for that net like you did for me, young man," he invited, "and if you get the ball past Grosvenor I'll double your wages!"

Nobby thrilled. His wages! That meant he had definitely got a job!

Steadying his nerves, he gauged the distance from ball to goal net, backed three paces, and then, with seemingly effortless ease, slammed the ball hard and true for the far corner of the net.

Grosvenor saw the peculiar flight of that ball—only after it had passed him and was thrashing up and down the back lacing of the net!

He picked up the ball very self-consciously, and punted it back to the watching players.

Most of these latter were speechless. Taking a "spot" kick successfully was never a certainty with the best of professionals, and yet the way this youngster shaped seemed to indicate that he could ring the bell ten times out of ten.

"Bravo—er—Nobby!" exclaimed his lordship. "That was with your right foot. D'you think you can do as well with your left?"

"I'll try, sir."

Try? Why it seemed easiness itself the way Nobby thudded the second "spot" kick into the gaping net!

Grosvenor, the goalie, very much on

HOW THE STORY STARTED.

NOBBY, a red-headed youngster of sixteen, who has worked in a football booth belonging to

DON CARLOS' circus for as many years as he can remember, decides to run away to London. By his presence of mind he succeeds in saving

FERRERS LOCKE, the detective, and Jack Drake, his boy assistant, from serious loss in consequence of this he is introduced to

LORD DOUGLAS WEATHERSTONE, chairman of the Perriton Rovers F.C. Nobby soon proves himself worthy of a trial, and his lordship dispatches Drake to tell the Rovers to turn out for practice.

(Now Read On.)

his mettle, could have sworn afterwards that the ball suddenly changed its direction of flight. Be that a true explanation or not, the ball whizzed past him with rocket-like force—a yard clear of his tautened, spreading fingers.

"Bravo!" The pros, hardened though they were to football, burst into a hearty roar of applause. "Bravo, Nobby!" "Bravo, Ginger!"

Nobby blushed—felt a bit sorry for the long-legged goalkeeper, whose face was strained and set—and murmured something unintelligible to the big man at his side.

"Double your wages, did I say?" barked his lordship, misunderstanding. "Why, of course. Ahem! Consider yourself on the ground staff, my boy—at two pounds a week." Then to Grosvenor: "Don't you look so unhappy, my lad. There's not a goalkeeper in the country could stop shots like those. Jenkins"—this to the custodian of the second team—"give Grosvenor a rest, and you try your hand."

The grin on Jenkins' face vanished promptly. Truth to tell, he had rather enjoyed seeing his colleague from the first team beaten so hopelessly. He felt woefully unhappy, however, when it came to his turn to face the red-headed youngster, for, like his predecessor, he never saw either of the balls that flashed past him.

"That will do, Nobby," said Lord Douglas Weatherstone, with a beaming smile. "You will be a rod in pickle for some of the goalies before you're much older. Sandy"—to the sour-faced trainer-manager—"if you don't make a first-class player of him in two seasons I'll fire you!"

"Thank ye, sir!" crackled back an answer in broad Scotch. "An' Sandy Macfarland takes the liberty of tellin' ye that he'll fire himself if he don't make a player of yon boy in one season."

Not a flicker of expression crossed his stony features as he made this declaration, nor was there any apparent enthusiasm in his manner of saying it. But those who heard Sandy then knew that the dour Scotsman had spotted talent all ready for the moulding in the sturdy, red-headed youngster who had surprised them all that morning.

He turned to the radiant Nobby and regarded him stonily.

"Ye smoke? Ye don't?" There was no time for an answer had Nobby wished to make one. It was Sandy's way of giving an order. "Ye drink? Ye don't! Ye keep late hours? Ye

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don't! Ye know everything about football! Ye know nothin'!"

With which amazing string of toneless queries and answers, Sandy Macfarland wheeled and set the players trotting round the turf, bellowing instructions by the aid of a megaphone.

Feeling a little out of place, and hardly able to believe in his good fortune, Nobby wondered what he should be doing, when he felt his arm taken by Lord Douglas and gently escorted back to the club buildings.

Drake strode along at his side, humming a popular dance tune—until Lord Douglas turned on him an expressive glance which bade him be silent. Back in the board-room, Nobby was beckoned to take a seat.

For a long time his lordship studied the rather handsome features of the boy, his own softening in the process. Then he spoke.

"Now, look here, Nobby. I'm giving you a chance. What comes of it rests entirely upon you. The Rovers have a high reputation. Perhaps one day you will don their colours. Again that depends upon you. I have a motto—an old one, but I shall always like it. Remember it. 'Play the game!'"

"I will, sir." Nobby's lips trembled their sincerity. "I don't know how to thank you, sir."

Lord Douglas waved aside the youngster's thanks.

"Don't thank me. I should never have known of you, but for Jack Drake here. He's taken you on trust and recommended you. I have taken you on trust. Now, I want no more thanks. Take this—it was a month's money in advance—"get yourself fixed up in some respectable lodgings, fit yourself out with some clothes, and present yourself here to-morrow morning, sharp, at nine o'clock, and report to Mr. Macfarland. Good-morning, Nobby!" He shook the youngster firmly by the hand. "Good luck! Now run away, Drake! Your monkey face annoys me! My regards to Ferrera Locke—Tscah! That accursed gout!"

Drake made haste to depart, dragging the amazed Nobby with him. From the other side of the board-room door came the nobleman's customary "Tscah!" many times repeated as the pair of them went down the passage and out into the sunlit ground.

A Capture and an Escape!

NOBBY'S head was buzzing with excitement; his heart was high with hope. A new life had opened up before him. He tried to thank Drake in suitable words, but words failed him—for the simple reason that Drake jabbed him playfully under the fifth rib the moment he attempted to voice them.

"I'll give you another, my lad, if you start mumbling any more thanks. Come on—I've got to see you fixed up with some digs and clobber, and I've got only an hour left in which to do it. Get a move on. And, by the way," added Drake, "when you have bought yourself a pair of boots, I'd like to have mine back."

"Of course—" began Nobby, somewhat embarrassed.

Drake grinned.

"Oh, I don't mean to wear them. I want to keep them as a souvenir. When you are an International umpireen

times over think of me showing my pals the original pair of boots that kicked you into the Rovers."

Drake hailed a passing taxi, hustled Nobby into it, gave the address of a well-known stores, and told the cabby to wait outside while they shopped. He did not notice that wherever their taxi-cab went, so followed another, painted a dark green. Neither did he know that inside it, burning with rage and impatience was the Don. Not even when the matter of lodgings had been settled and Drake had voiced his farewell to Nobby at the street door, did he observe the green taxi halted a dozen yards farther along the street.

When Drake had gone, the Don barked to the taximan to draw up to the house and wait until he should be required. Then, with an evil smile on his sallow features, the Don walked up to the front door and thumbed the bell with unnecessary violence.

A buxom Irish woman answered his summons. Her face showed her resentment at the impatience of the caller; her eyes narrowed into rank displeasure when she saw the yellow skin of the tall Spaniard, and the oily smile that suddenly settled on it.

Not one word was Don Carlos allowed to utter. The Irishwoman hurled a volley of rich brogue at him to this effect:

"How dare ye, ye spalpeen of a foreigner? Can't yer see, begorrah, that 'tis a gentleman's house an' no less ye be disturbin'? An' for sure if that don't suit ye then Oi'm full up."

Slam!

The door crashed back into place, scraping the tip of the Don's prominent nose in the process of drowning the flow of imprecations that sped from his lips. Rubbing his damaged nose, the Don retreated, sullenly dismissed his taxi, and took up a position on the other side of the street, from which he could watch the house which sheltered young Nobby.

It came on to rain, but the Don stayed on regardless. He was drenched from head to foot, and shivering with the cold, but still he stayed. His patience was rewarded. The rain stopped, the door of the apartment-house opened, and a familiar boyish figure, clad in a new macintosh, came into view.

Despite the vagaries of the weather, Nobby was smiling good-humouredly with himself and the world at large. He stood up in a new suit of clothes, new shoes, new hat and raincoat. He liked his violent-tongued Irish landlady, Mrs. Sullivan; liked his combined bed-sitting-room, and the good lady's cooking. A warm bath in which he had splashed and soaped to his heart's content had put the finishing touch to the dingy life from which he had flown for ever.

But all that went by the board in one heart-stirring cry as he caught sight of the livid face of the watcher across the street.

"The Don—"

His cry escaped his lips as he spun round and made to key himself back into the house. But before that key found the wards of the lock which the trembling hand holding it sought, the Don's massive hand gripped the youngster's shoulder in a clutch of steel and whirled him round.

"Got you!"

That was all the Don said just then,

but there was a world of menace in his tone. Nobby felt a shiver run down his spine. He looked up and down the street. It was deserted. In desperation he struck out with both clenched hands and tried to free himself.

The Don grunted as the two blows landed, struck just one in return, and Nobby slid into unconsciousness without so much as a moan.

A quick glance to right and left, and the Don had picked up the youngster's insensible figure and was striding off into the gloom. At the bottom of the street he hailed a crawling taxi, explained to the driver that his ward had fainted, and gave an address to which he asked to be driven with all speed.

The driver sympathetically helped to place the unconscious youngster on the seat, closed the door of the cab, and then jumped back to his box. The clutch was let in, and the taxi hummed into the traffic at top speed, what time the Don gloated over his capture and revelled in the vengeance he would wreak upon the youngster now that he had him safe in his hands again.

Nobby stirred, groaned, and slowly opened his eyes. He shrank back as he saw the baleful eyes of the Don focused upon him.

"Ah! You have come to? Caramba! You will be sorry—yes—that you ran away from the Don!"

Nobby stared at him wildly, like a cornered rat. Some idea was in his mind to make another bid for freedom, but the Don seemed to sense it. In the man's dusky hand appeared a knife.

It pressed perilously close to Nobby's stomach.

"One cry, my young friend," hissed the Don, "and it will be your last!"

"You villain!" exclaimed Nobby.

"Caramba! You will be sorry for that, you ungrateful cub! I'll larrup you until you yell for mercy! I'll—"

The Don was not prepared for what happened next. Up came one of Nobby's new boots to strike against the wrist that held the gleaming knife, in a sudden smashing kick. The knife fell noiselessly on the thin strip of carpet that covered the floor, while the Don fell back with a cry of pain.

Almost in the same breath, Nobby wrenched open the door of the taxi, steadied himself precariously on the running-board, made as if to drop off into the road, and instead took a flying leap across five feet of roadway to land on the running-board of a taxi speeding in the opposite direction. His outstretched fingers caught the window-frame of the taxi, his feet steadied into a solid foothold on the running-board, and in a peculiarly calm manner Nobby told the amazed taxi driver to proceed to 23A, Derham Street, whither he lodged, at all speed.

Pedestrians who had witnessed that trapeze-like leap from one cab to another told themselves that they had been witnessing a film stunt.

A point-duty policeman listened doubtfully to the wild story told him by the driver of a private car which had travelled between the two taxis, and had narrowly escaped running down the "red-headed maniac" to quote the driver's own words.

The Don cursed his luck and massaged his tender wrist.

The most amazed person, however, in the little drama was the Don's taxi-driver when he finally opened the door

for his fare to alight, and found only one person inside the cab.

"Why, bless me," he ejaculated, "where's your ward?"

The Don replied in a string of unintelligible language, but which, if the driver could have translated it, would have made his ears burn.

He took his fare from the Spaniard, pocketed it without even counting it, and stood scratching his bald head as the Don darted off round a near-by corner.

"Fainted, 'ad 'e? Lumme, spirited away would 'ave been better."

Meanwhile, Nobby, jubilant again at having thrown off the Don, was being whirled to his new home.

Just that one personal victory over the old tyrant had given Nobby the confidence necessary to a boy who has been ill-treated, and at a physical disadvantage all the years of his life. He was no longer afraid of the Don. The Don was an ordinary human being after all. All the larrupings, privations, even torture he had undergone at the hands of the villain, became as nothing from that hour onwards.

The boy whose spirit the Don had tried to break had come into his own. He stood upon the threshold of manhood. Never, Nobby told himself, would he go back to the Don; never would that old terrifying fear of the man return.

But much as Nobby knew of the Don, he did not realise the complete depths of villainy to which the showman was prepared to go; neither did he know for what purpose the Don so determinedly wanted him. These things were of the future; and the future to Nobby as he let himself into his cosy room seemed bright—gloriously bright!

The "Urchin" at the Gate!

"GOOD lor! Where on earth did you spring from?"

Daniel Willoughby Thundersley halted at the players' entrance to the Rovers' ground, surprise and astonishment written large in his handsome face. Before him, a disarming smile on his equally handsome countenance, was Nobby.

The new ground-boy's job was to see that no unauthorised persons entered the club grounds during practice. For three days now he had parked himself at the small side door and memorised the faces of the players. The one confronting him now was distinctly unfamiliar.

"I'm sorry, sir," he said civilly, "but only players are allowed—"

The words almost died in his throat as Thundersley growled something, thrust out a hand, and literally pushed young Nobby off his balance. The red-headed youngster reeled against the hinged door, swayed, and finally collapsed in an uncomfortable heap right in a puddle of overnight rain.

"Cheeky young cub!" growled Thundersley, and made to stride in.

Although Nobby was uncomfortably cooled off at one end, so to speak, his red head and the temper that went with it was decidedly hot. In a moment he sprang to an upright position and leaped upon the tall trespasser.

"Out you go!" he snapped.

Nobby's blood was up, added to which he felt a trifle humiliated. With a sweep of his strong right arm he twirled the amazed Thundersley so that he faced the opposite direction and started to run him out of the ground.

Next moment the pair of them were fighting.

"By George, I'll smash you for that, you low rotter!"

Thundersley's blood was up.

"Try the smashing, guv'nor!" jeered Nobby. "Half a dozen like you couldn't get far with it—Ooooh!"

He ended in an ejaculation which synchronised with Thundersley's fist slamming home on his nose. The blow carried weight, and it hurt. Next second Nobby was repaying it—with interest.

Biff! Bang! Wallop!

There was little science behind the blows, for Nobby knew next to nothing about the gentle art of self-defence. But the first one found a lucky billet, the second missed by a foot, whilst the third merely succeeded in sweeping

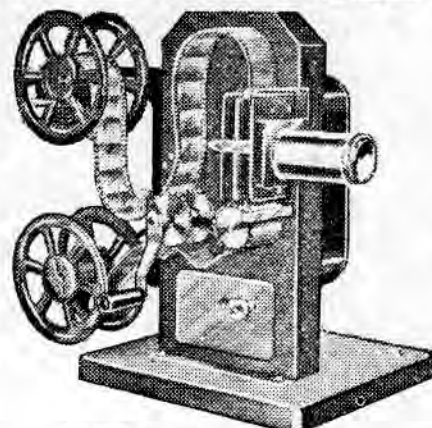
Thundersley's felt hat off his head and sending it whirling into the very puddle into which Nobby had sat a few moments earlier.

Crash!

A straight left from Thundersley levelled accounts—in fact, it levelled young Nobby flat with the ground. There he lay, blinking and seeing more stars than he had ever seen in the heavenly firmament. And while he blinked, he became conscious that his opponent was also red-headed—not quite so Titian red as himself, but still colourful enough to deserve a nickname of "Ginger."

(There's a big surprise in store for young Nobby! Don't miss next week's chapters of this grand footer story, chums! Order your MAGNET early!)

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"Home Cinema" Prize,
5, Chancery Street,
London, E.C.4 (Comp.).

so as to reach that address not later than Wednesday, January 18th.

Entries arriving after this closing date cannot be accepted.

SPECIAL NOTE.—KEEP A COPY OF YOUR ENTRY, because as soon as all entries are under seal, the CORRECT SOLUTION will appear in our companion paper, the "Gem," issue dated February 11th. All competitors must make sure they watch the "Gem," so that they can check their entries by this solution, and those whose attempts contain six errors or less will have to send in a claim for the prize. Full particulars for claiming will be given with the solution in the "Gem"—remember the date!

RULES (to be strictly adhered to) The Home Cinema will be awarded to the competitor whose solution is correct, or most nearly so; and the 100 Model Planes in order of merit. In the event of more ties, the value of the prizes may be divided.

All solutions must be written IN INK on the "Home Cinema" coupon. Entries mutilated, or which bear alterations or more than one letter in each space, will be disqualified. Responsibility cannot be taken for delay or loss in the post or otherwise. No correspondence will be allowed, and the decision of the Editor will be final and binding. Employees of the proprietors of this paper must not compete. The Correct Solution will appear in the "Gem," issue dated February 11th, 1933, and competitors must get it to check their entries. Failure to claim by the date stated will entail forfeiture of all interest in the competition.

"Home Cinema" Contest	
1 What you are reading now.	P A P E R
2 Footballers wear them	S H R T S
3 A bright light.	F L A E
4 Well-known animal.	A T
5 To keep.	E T A I N
6 A boy's name.	I M
7 Used in cricket.	B A L
8 Something to sit on.	S E T T E
9 Tear.	R E N
10 Unseen.	A G G E D
11 A length of wood.	P L E
12 Another animal.	B A R

I agree to accept the Editor's decision.

SIGNED _____
ADDRESS _____