

"THE BLACK SHEEP!" Twilling and Dramatic School
Story of Harry Wharton &
Co. at Greyfriars. **By Frank Richards**

The Magnet ^{2^d}



Whose Banknote?



Come Into the Office, Boys—and Girls!

Your Editor is always pleased to hear from his readers. Write to him: Editor of the "Magnet," The Amalgamated Press, Ltd., Fleetway House, Farringdon Street, London, E.C.4. A stamped, addressed envelope will ensure a reply.

ONE of my readers, who signs himself "Wet-bob," asks me to solve a few boating queries for him. First of all, he asks:

WHAT IS A CARVEL-BUILT BOAT?

This is a name given to a boat because of its method of construction. There are four different types of boats, known as Clinker, Carvel, Diagonal, and Sewn. The Clinker-built boat is the most common, especially for small rowing boats. In these boats the planks run fore and aft, with the lower edge of one plank overlapping the upper edge of the one below. In Carvel-built boats, however, the edges do not overlap, but fit close together like the staves of a cask, giving the boat a smooth and flush surface.

In Diagonal-built boats the planks are fastened at an angle of 45 degrees to the keel line, and this method of construction is generally applied to fairly large sailing launches and pinnaces. "Sewn" boats have nothing whatever to do with sewing. The expression means that they consist of two thicknesses of Honduras mahogany, one thickness worked vertically, and the other horizontally.

This reader is planning

A HOLIDAY ON THE THAMES,

and would like to know the best type of boat for river work. This depends upon whether my chum is out for speed or comfort, and also whether he is going alone, or has some pals with him. A motor or electric launch, is, of course, the ideal craft for river work, but rather expensive. Here is a brief description of the most popular boats to be found on the River Thames during the summer:

Punts are the most comfortable craft, but they are slow. Not more than four persons should be carried in one. They can be either punted with a pole or paddled, and they afford excellent exercise. They are not suitable for very long river trips.

Skiffs are provided for single, double, or treble sculling, and are more suitable for long trips. Sculling, however, involves more strenuous exercise than punting. Single sculling skiffs are suitable for two persons, double-sculling skiffs for four, and treble-sculling skiffs (known as "Randans") will carry up to eight people.

Dinghies are, perhaps, the handiest craft on the river. They are not so fast as skiffs, but require less energy. They range from eight to twelve feet in length, and the longer ones will carry four persons.

Canoes are only suitable for two persons, and should only be used on the quieter stretches of the river, unless one is an expert canoeist. They are light and comfortable, and require little effort to travel at a good speed.

You may also find gondolas and sandolas on the river, but these are in the nature of "freak" craft.

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FROM Jack Barry, of Morecambe, comes
A COIN QUERY.

He wants to know if it is true that pennies dated 1884 are very valuable? They are certainly very scarce. The story goes that a bar of gold was accidentally dropped into the vat while these pennies were being minted. Whether that is true or not I do not know, but I do know of a man who started to collect these coins about thirty years ago. He kept a sharp lookout for them, and examined every penny that passed through his hands. Would you believe it, but in all those years he has only succeeded in collecting four pennies dated 1884! So have a look at your pennies, chums, and see if you can spot any 1884 ones among them!

Talking of pennies, here's a joke you can play on your pals. Ask them if they know that 1920 pennies are worth £8. They'll probably want to know why. Then tell them that one thousand, nine hundred and twenty pennies make £8.

Have you heard of

HORIZONTAL ICICLES?

As you know, icicles generally hang downwards, but, strange to say, there is one place in the world where they do not. Some of the fiercest winds in America blow around Whiteface Mountain, in the Adirondacks. Some time ago a party managed to get to the summit of this mountain in spite of furious gales. There they discovered that the observation hut which has been built on the peak was covered with icicles. Instead of hanging downwards, these particular icicles were stretched out horizontally, owing to the force of the wind that was blowing when they were formed.

That's just one of the quaint things which happen in this queer old world of ours. Here are a few more

THINGS YOU'D HARDLY BELIEVE!

Fish That Live Out of Water! Lung fish, found in Africa, can live comfortably out of water for as long as eight months! When the rivers dry up in the hot season, these particular fish burrow into the mud. They form a sort of a cocoon around themselves, and hibernate until the rainy season comes again—when they take to the water once more!

Men Who Made a Fortune in a Work-house! Two old men went into a work-house in Ohio. They asked the superintendent if he would allow them to drill for oil in the little garden which had been allotted to them. They got permission—and struck oil! They have refused an offer of £2,000 for the rights, and are going on working the well themselves!

A "Return-Ticket" Channel Swimmer! Do you know that only one man has swum the Channel twice—once in each direction? E. H. Tomme swam from Cape Gris Nez to Dover in 1927. Seven

years later he swam the same distance, but in the opposite direction—the only man to do the return swim!

A Hail of Jewels from the Sky! Strange lumps of crystal have been found in the Libyan desert. According to an expert at the British Museum, they fell from the sky thousands of years ago, and have been buried in the desert ever since. It is said they were caused by the fusion of lightning and sand in the air!

The Biggest Pie in the World! The credit for making this goes to Yorkshire. Eighty-nine years ago the people of Denby Vale made a pie that required thirty-one horses to pull it! No fewer than 60,000 people had a portion of that pie!

A Lake That Sings! In Ceylon there is a lake called Batticaloa. On moonlight nights strange music arises from its waters. The natives say the music comes from a species of shell-fish. So far, scientists have found no other explanation!

Buildings That Bend! It is estimated that, in a high wind, the Empire State Building, in New York, sways as much as five feet out of the perpendicular. Most skyscrapers sway when the wind is strong.

A Town Called "Tum-Tum"! This is the name of a town in America. Other strangely-named towns are Neddy-bemps, Looneyville, Dingy and Worry.

HERE is a paragraph that deserves a little more space. Have you heard of

CANNIBAL FLOWERS?

There are many such varieties to be found in different parts of the world. Blackpool Tower Aquarium have just added a number of fish-eating flowers to their collection. They are in a tidal pool, connected to the sea by pipes. When small fish swim in, the flowers open their petals, wrap them around the fish, and then suck them in.

In the Tropics there are many flowers which live on insects. Immediately bees or other insects lodge inside the flowers, the petals close. Larger specimens can ensnare small birds and mice. They suck the blood from their victim, and then throw out the carcass.

Java, however, is the home of the most notorious flower cannibals. One flower lures mice into its mouth, and then drowns them in a fluid. Another specimen gives off poisonous fumes, which have been known to kill dogs and even goats!

Many other strange and mysterious things happen in this world of ours, but, as space is running short, I'll have to hold over, for the time being, some of the quaint items of information I have gathered for you, and also some replies to various queries sent in by other readers.

Meanwhile, let me tell you what is in store for next week. I won't tell you much about

"A TRAITOR TO HIS SIDE!"

By Frank Richards,

because it would spoil your enjoyment of this fine yarn. Sufficient to say that it is one of the best this popular author has ever given us. It's chock-a-block full of exciting situations, and most of your favourite characters are featured in it.

You'll chuckle in plenty at the "Greyfriars Herald" supplement, and enjoy the thrills in the splendid chapters of our great adventure yarn: "Moose Call!" Our clever Greyfriars Rhymester will be "up to scratch," too, with another of his "Interviews in Verse."

Look out for next week's MAGNET, chums. I can assure you that it's well worth waiting for.

YOUR EDITOR

The BLACK SHEEP!

By FRANK RICHARDS



Featuring Harry Wharton & Co., the Popular Chums of Greyfriars, and Ralph Stacey, the Rascal of the Remove.

THE FIRST CHAPTER.

Whose Letter?

"NONE for Mauly!" said Bob Cherry.

Billy Bunter grunted.

Some of the Remove fellows had come along in morning break to look in the rack for letters.

But there was only one for a Remove man that morning, and that was for Lord Mauleverer.

"Mauly here?" asked Bob, looking round.

Harry Wharton laughed.

"I saw him taking a deckchair out under his arm; most likely he's gone to sleep in it."

"I say, you fellows—"

"Poor old Bunter!" said Bob Cherry sympathetically. "None for you, Bunter! Were you expecting a postal order, old fat bean?"

"Well, as a matter of fact, I was," said Bunter.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I say, are you sure that letter's for Mauly?" asked Billy Bunter, blinking up at the rack through his big spectacles. "I've been expecting a postal order for some time—"

"Quite a long time," remarked Frank Nugent.

"The longfulness of the time is terrific," grinned Hurree Jamset Ram Singh.

"I say, hand that letter down, Bob! I can't see it from here. Very likely it's for me," said Bunter. "You might hand a fellow a letter when he can't reach it!"

"It's for Mauly, fathead!" said Johnny Bull. "It's addressed to Mauly,

ass, and it's got the jolly old family crest on it!"

"If there's a crest on it, it's very likely for me," said Bunter. "I'm expecting a letter from one of my titled relations."

"What's the Bunter crest," asked Bob — "a pork pie or a doughnut?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Beast! Look here, gimme my letter!" howled Bunter.

"Bow-wow!"

"Spotting" winners and raking in the shekels is as easy as pie—at least, so thinks Ralph Stacey, rival and relation of Harry Wharton, of the Greyfriars Remove, until he plunges heavily on a loser! Then the fat's in the fire!

Harry Wharton & Co. went out into the sunny quad, having drawn the letter-rack blank. Billy Bunter was left with his eyes and his spectacles fixed on Lord Mauleverer's letter. Bunter was tall sideways, and the letter was just out of reach of his fat fingers.

The short-sighted Owl of the Remove could not make out the address clearly, so perhaps he hoped that that letter was for him, after all. It would be just like those beasts, Bunter thought, to pull his fat leg. Certainly it was time that Billy Bunter's celebrated postal order arrived at Greyfriars. It had been a

long, long time on the way—if it was coming at all!

Even if it really was for Lord Mauleverer, Bunter was keenly interested in it. It was very likely to contain a remittance. And if an obliging fellow took it out to Mauly in his deckchair under the elms, that obliging fellow might hope for a small loan out of the remittance—a crumb falling from the rich man's table, as it were.

A Remove junior came along and looked at the rack, and Bunter blinked round at him.

"I say, Wharton, old chap, give me my letter down!" he squeaked.

The junior scowled at him.

"You goggling ass, I'm not Wharton!" he snapped.

It was Ralph Stacey, Harry Wharton's relative and "double."

Bunter blinked at him.

"Oh, is it you, Stacey? Well, gimme down my letter."

"What letter?"

Billy Bunter pointed with a fat finger.

"That's not for you, fathead! It's addressed to Mauleverer!" grunted Stacey. The new fellow in the Remove stared over the rack.

Stacey of the Remove had very little correspondence.

Occasionally a letter came for him from Colonel Wharton, Harry's uncle, who had taken charge of him and sent him to Greyfriars. More seldom there was a letter from his father, Captain Stacey, who generally seemed to have forgotten the existence of the son whom he had landed on a distant relative.

Now, however, the new junior scanned the rack eagerly, as if in the hope—or

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perhaps the fear—of seeing a letter there for him.

But there was no letter for Stacey, and he scowled blackly at the one addressed to Lord Mauleverer. He knew as well as Bunter that it was very probable that that letter contained a handsome "tip" for the schoolboy earl; Mauly's letters often did.

Hard-up fellows, keen for remittances, were turned empty away; while Mauly's letter, very likely with a banknote in it, was left neglected in the rack while his lazy lordship, oblivious of correspondence, reclined in a deckchair under the elms. It irritated Stacey as much as it grieved Billy Bunter.

Stacey's eyes lingered on that letter.

No fellow in the Remove knew how desperately he was in need of money; he kept his secrets well. Fellows who saw him smiling and cheerful would have been astonished to learn that black care was eating into his heart; that the shadow of the "sack" was over him, and that every day he dreaded to see the "chopper" come down.

"I say, Stacey—"

"Oh, shut up!" snapped Stacey.

He stepped away from the rack.

That letter addressed to Lord Mauleverer probably contained more than enough to see him through his difficulties. He had an impulse to stretch out his hand to it. That impulse, insensate as it was, was so strong that he hardly dared trust himself within reach of the letter.

"Look here, you beast, you hand down that letter!" yapped Bunter. "I'm going to take it to Mauly. See? I suppose I can oblige a pal if I like!"

Stacey looked at him.

"You'll get into a row, bagging other fellows' letters, you fat frump!" he answered.

"Who's bagging other fellows' letters?" hooted Bunter. "Can't a fellow oblige a pal if he likes?"

"It might come open in your hands!" sneered Stacey. "I've heard that one of Smithy's letters came open when you were handling it, and he booted you along the Remove passage for it."

"That was an accident—a sheer accident!" said Bunter. "And Smithy is a suspicious beast! I never looked at his letter—never read a word in it! And it was only from his father, about some rot in the City—stocks and shares and such rubbish—"

"You saw that without looking at it?" asked Stacey.

"Yah! Look here, you gimme that letter, and I'll take it to Mauly. Can't you hand a fellow a letter, you beast?"

Stacey gave him a strange look.

He nodded.

"Yes, if you like," he said. "No reason why you shouldn't take it to Mauleverer. He's gone up to his study."

"One of those beasts said he had taken out a deckchair," grunted Bunter. "I'll take it up to his study. Hand it over."

Stacey reached the letter down, and Billy Bunter gave it an eager blink through his big spectacles. At close view it was undoubtedly Lord Mauleverer's name that was on it; no amount of blinking could change that name into W. G. Bunter.

"Well, Mauly will be glad to have this letter," said the fat Owl. "It's in his guardian's writing; I know the fist."

And the Owl of the Remove, with Mauly's letter in his fat paw, rolled away to the stairs to ascend to the

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studies. Stacey, with a very strange expression on his face, watched him go; and then, after a brief hesitation, followed more slowly in the same direction.

THE SECOND CHAPTER.

Mistaken Identity!

"H I! You!" No member of the Famous Five of Greyfriars glanced round at that hail; it did not occur to them that they were addressed.

Harry Wharton & Co. were going down to the boathouse. Morning break was brief, but there was time to look over the roomy old boat that belonged to all the Co., in which they intended to go up the river after class.

That old boat had been rather a bargain when the Co. pooled resources for its purchase. But it needed tinkering at times and caulking every now and then. Lately Bob Cherry had done some caulking, and they cut down in break to see how it was turning out. And so they came under the view of a fat, red-faced man who was walking—or, rather, rolling—down the towpath.

And as soon as he saw them the red-faced man hailed them—without receiving any acknowledgment of his hail.

Whereat he grunted, snorted, rolled on, and shouted again:

"Here! You! Hi! 'Old on!"

Then Bob Cherry glanced round.

He stared at the fat man.

"Hallo, hallo, hallo!" he ejaculated. "That blighter can't be yowling to us surely! Anybody here know Banks?"

"The knowfulness is not terrific!" chuckled Hurree Janset Ram Singh.

All the Co. stared at the fat man.

None of them certainly knew Mr. Joe Banks, the bookmaker and racing tout, personally; but they knew him by sight. His fat figure and red face were well known in the neighbourhood. It was clear now that he was hailing them or one of them; but why he should be doing so was rather a mystery.

He came puffing on.

"Looking for a chance to speak to you, sir," he said, touching his greasy bowler hat to Harry Wharton.

Wharton stared at him contemptuously.

"What the thump do you mean?" he demanded. "You've got nothing to say to me, or I to you."

"Oh, ain't I?" said Mr. Banks less civilly. "Well, my idea is that I 'ave, and if you don't want your friends to 'ear it, you'd better ask them to walk on, see?"

"Well, my hat!" said Frank Nugent. Wharton's eyes gleamed.

For a Greyfriars fellow to be spoken to by a man of Joe Banks' character was enough to cause him trouble in the school, if he was spotted by a master or prefect. And the juniors were quite near the school boathouse and any fellow might have come along at any minute.

"Look here, Wharton," grunted Johnny Bull, "if you've got anything to say to a beery blighter like that—"

"You silly ass!" snapped Wharton. "I haven't."

"Well, he says—"

"I don't care what he says!" answered Harry angrily. "Don't be a fool if you can help it, Bull."

It was not polite. But really, Wharton's irritation was excusable. Why Joe Banks was addressing him he could not for the moment imagine; but certainly Banks had no right to do so or reason to do so.

"Look 'ere, sir, you better 'ear me in private," said Mr. Banks.

"I will not hear you at all!" snapped Wharton. "If you have the cheek to talk to me, I'll barge you into the river."

"Hear, hear!" grinned Bob Cherry. "And we'll all lend a hand!"

"The lendfulness will be preposterous."

Mr. Banks knitted his fat brows. His manner at first had been civil, but with a hint of a threat in it. Now it was wholly threatening.

"Oh, orlright!" he said venomously. "Orlright, young fellow-me-lad! P'r'aps you'd like me to speak to your 'ead-master instead."

"You can speak to my headmaster if you like, for all I care!" answered Harry, as much puzzled as angry.

Mr. Banks eyed him curiously.

"Well, it wouldn't pay you!" he said. "I ain't the man to do a feller 'arm if I can 'elp it. But a man wants his money. If you want to 'ear it before your friends, 'ere it is—I want my spondulics, see?"

"Mad?" asked Harry blankly.

"Oh, come off!" said Mr. Banks roughly. "You owe me eight pounds. I got your fist on it! I've waited a week and you ain't come along to square. So I takes a walk this way to keep an eye open for you. I ain't keen on making trouble for you at your school; but if you fancy you can diddle me you're making a mistake, and that's that." Mr. Banks held out a podgy hand, that was considerably in need of a wash. "And it over!"

Harry Wharton's comrades looked at him blankly. It was clear that the racing-man was not speaking idly; he spoke with angry earnestness. Whether Wharton owed him money or not it was certain that Joseph Banks believed that he did—which was utterly mysterious to the Co.

But it was not so mysterious to Wharton—on whose mind the truth was dawning. A black and bitter look came over his face.

"You hear him?" he said. "What do you think of that?"

"Blessed if I know what to think, unless he's been drinking!" said Bob Cherry blankly.

"Oh, come off!" grunted Mr. Banks. "I ain't pushed one back this morning yet! If you young fellers don't know nothing about it, I wasn't going to tell you, was I? Didn't I ask him fair and square to 'ear it in private? I don't want to give no young gent trouble if he settles up fair and honourable. But a man ain't going to be welshed, and you can lay to that."

"He takes me for Stacey!" said Harry savagely.

"Oh!" gasped the Co. in chorus.

They understood now.

Every fellow in the Remove knew that one of the doubles of the Form was a reckless scapegrace in danger of the "sack."

Opinion was much divided on the point whether it was Harry Wharton or Ralph Stacey who was the black sheep.

Wharton's own chums stood by him and believed in him; but there were more fellows in the Remove who believed in Stacey, and they were backed by the opinion of their Form-master, Mr. Quelch. Quelch's confidence in Stacey was so strong that he had made him his head boy in place of Wharton.

But if the Co. had wanted proof they had it now.

Mr. Joe Banks stared blankly at Harry as he spoke. Evidently he was astonished by what he heard.

"Look 'ere, what's this game, young Stacey?" he demanded. "You making out that you're somebody else, or what?"

"By gum!" said Bob. "If Quelch

could hear that, I wonder what he'd think of his precious head boy?"

"I wonder what Oggy and Russell would think of their pal?" grunted Johnny Bull.

"Look 'ere," roared Mr. Banks, "I've 'ad enough of this 'ere. You paying a covey what you owe, or not?"

"I owe you nothing, you rascal!" snapped Wharton. "And my name is not Stacey, as you seem to think. That rotten cur is a relative of mine and like me to look at—and—"

Banks gave a jump.

"Oh, my eye!" he ejaculated. "I remember now—I've seed you afore—you're young Wharton!"

"Roll him in!" roared Johnny Bull. "What-ho!"

Five pairs of hands grasped the roaring Joe. Many hands made light work. Banks, struggling and howling, was rolled into the shallow water at the edge of the Sark. He squelched into mud and bulrushes, spluttering.

Bob Cherry picked up his hat, which had fallen off, and tossed it in after him.

"Urrgh!" came in a spluttering howl from Joe Banks. "Urrggh!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Getting wet, old bean?" asked Bob.

"Urrggh!"

Banks floundered wildly in mud, splashing water on all sides. Four members

THE THIRD CHAPTER.

A Mysterious Disappearance!

BEAST!" yapped Billy Bunter. He was blinking into Lord Mauleverer's study—No. 12 in the Remove.

According to what Stacey had told him, Mauly had gone up to his study. If so, he had gone down again, for the room was empty.

Bunter grunted with wrath.

Stacey had pulled his fat leg. Mauly wasn't in his study; he was in a deck-chair under the elms, just as the other beast had said! No doubt Stacey thought it funny to send the fat Owl



"Roll him in!" roared Johnny Bull. "What-ho!" Five pairs of hands grasped Joe Banks, and he was rolled into the shallow water at the edge of the Sark. "Urrgh!" he spluttered, floundering wildly in the mud. "Urrggh!" "Keep your distance from me, you dinky rotter!" said Wharton. "Make sure it's Stacey next time!"

"Yes, you rascal!" said Harry, between his teeth. "And I'm going to give you a tip to make sure you've got hold of the right man next time. You're going into the water!"

"'Ere, you 'old on!" exclaimed Mr. Banks, backing away in alarm. "Any covey might make sich a mistake you being as like that young gent as two peas out of the same blooming pod! 'Ere, 'ands off—" He yelled. "Leggo! Oh, my 'at! Yaroooooh!"

Harry Wharton rushed right at him. He was already in disgrace in his school through having been taken for Stacey and given the credit of the black sheep's misdeeds. Had official eyes seen Mr. Banks talking to him it would have been taken as proof that he was the scapegrace he was suspected of being. His idea was that Joe Banks had to learn to be careful not to make such mistakes.

With a rush he barged the fat man over, and Mr. Banks sprawled on the towing-path with a wild roar.

of the Co. roared with laughter. But Harry Wharton's face was set and savage, as he looked at the floundering fat man.

"Keep your distance from me, you dinky rotter!" he snapped. "Make sure it is Stacey next time!"

"Urrggh!"

"Hallo, hallo, hallo! There's the bell!" exclaimed Bob Cherry. "Come on!" And the juniors ran back to the school.

The bell was ringing for third lesson, and "break" was over. The time that they had intended to expend in examining the boat had been wasted on Joe Banks. Still it had not been wholly a waste—Joe had had a lesson, which he needed, and a wash, which he needed still more!

But he seemed grateful for neither to judge by his lurid remarks as he scrambled out of the mud, and limped away up the towpath, leaving a trail of water behind him as he went.

of the Remove fagging up the stairs, knowing how Bunter hated stairs.

Having blinked into Study No. 12 and found it empty, Bunter turned away. He had fagged up; now he had to fag down if he was to find Mauly. His feelings towards Stacey were intensely bitter. A fellow like Stacey could skim up and down staircases almost like a bird. It was different with a fellow like Bunter. Bunter had too much weight to carry. Bunter's idea was that schools and all other buildings ought to be planned on the bungalow system. Bunter would have liked to punch Stacey's head.

As he came rolling back down the Remove passage, his little round eyes gleamed behind his big round spectacles at the sight of Stacey. The beast was coming up the passage.

Fellows hardly ever came up to the studies in break. Bunter had no doubt that Stacey had come up to enjoy his little joke at Bunter's expense.

With Mauly's letter in his fat hand, and keener as he was to get to Mauly before the bell rang for class, Bunter paused a moment to tell Stacey what he thought of him.

"Beast!" he hooted.

Stacey glanced at him, his glance lingering on the letter in the fat paw. "Anything up?" he asked.

"Mauly ain't in his study!" bawled Bunter. "You jolly well knew he wasn't, you rotter! Making a fellow lag up those rotten stairs for nothing!"

"Good for you!" suggested Stacey. "A little exercise will bring down your fat, old fat man! You can afford to lose a ton or two!"

"You cheeky rotter!" hooted Bunter. "I'd jolly well punch your cheeky head, only I've got no time to waste on you! I wish Quelch hadn't interrupted Wharton when he was thrashing you the other day! I'll jolly well ask Wharton to thrash you again! Yah!"

Bunter rolled on, with a scornful sniff.

Stacey put a foot in his way.

Bunter rolled on—and over!

Bump!

"Oh crikey!" gasped Bunter, as he tripped over Stacey's foot and crashed. "Ow! Wow! Oooogh! My specs! Wow!"

The letter flew in one direction, the specs in another. Bunter rolled, and roared.

"Ow! I fell over something! Wow! I'm hurt! Oooogh!"

Stacey bent down. The letter had fallen almost at his feet. It vanished into his pocket in the twinkling of an eye.

Bunter, roaring, and blinking dizzily for his spectacles, was quite unaware of that rapid action.

Leaving him roaring, Stacey went into his study—No. 3. Ogilvy and Russell, who shared that study with him, were in the quad with most of the Greyfriars fellows in break, and Stacey had the study to himself. He shut the door.

Bunter, sitting up on the hard, unsympathetic floor, was still roaring.

"Ow! Wow! Oooogh! Where's my specs? Beast! Gimme my specs! Can't you help a fellow find his specs? Beast! Rotter! Ow!"

The fat Owl discovered his spectacles at last, and jammed them on his fat little nose. He blinked round for Stacey, but Stacey was gone. He blinked round for the letter, but that seemed to be gone also.

"Oh crumbs!" gasped Bunter. "Where's that letter? Where's that dashed letter? Oh crikey!"

Up and down and round about he blinked, but no letter was to be seen. Several of the study doors were open, and it seemed possible that it might have dropped in at one when it flew from Bunter's hand. But he blinked in search of it in vain.

Stacey came out of Study No. 3 and walked towards the stairs. Billy Bunter yelled after him:

"I say, Stacey!"

The new junior glanced round.

"Don't bother, you fat ass!" he snapped.

"Have you seen that letter?"

"What letter?"

"Mauly's letter! I dropped it when I fell over!" gasped Bunter.

"Well, if you dropped it, pick it up again!" suggested Stacey.

"I can't see it! Help me look for it!"

"Oh rot!" said Stacey. He came back

a few steps along the passage. "Sure it isn't in your pocket?"

"Of course I am, you fathead! I had it in my hand when you tripped me up!" said Bunter. "I dropped it!"

"May have gone into one of the studies!"

"Help me look, then!"

"Rats! What the thump do you want to meddle with other fellows' letters for? Go and tell Mauly you've lost it, and get a kicking!"

"Beast! I haven't lost it! It must be lying about here somewhere!" gasped Bunter. "I say, help me to find it, old chap! Mauly will be fearfully shirty if he hears that it's lost! There may be a remittance in it, too! I say, old fellow, do help me find that letter!"

Stacey gave an impatient grunt.

"The bell goes in a few minutes. I've got to get some papers ready for the Form. Now I'm head boy!"

"Look here, you beast, you help me find that letter!" bawled Bunter indignantly. "You made me drop it, barging me over! It was all your fault! I shall jolly well tell Mauly it was all your fault!"

"You fat ass, feel in your pockets for it!"

"I tell you it ain't in my pockets!"

Stacey shrugged his shoulders.

"You better tell Mauly that! Perhaps he may believe you!"

Billy Bunter blinked at him, his eyes almost popping through his big spectacles in alarm and horror.

"Why, you—you—you beast!" he gasped. "Mean to say you think I'm only pretending to have lost that letter? I tell you I dropped it when you barged me over!"

"Rot!"

"I tell you—" yelled Bunter.

"Rubbish!"

Stacey turned and walked towards the Remove staircase.

Billy Bunter blinked after him, in great dismay and alarm. What was Mauly going to think if he did not get the letter?

Other fellows' letters, it was well known, were not safe in Billy Bunter's hands. They had a way of coming open if Bunter's fat fingers got on them. If that letter was lost, Lord Mauleverer was fairly certain to believe that its fate had been similar to the fate of Smithy's letter.

"Oh crikey!" gasped Bunter. "I say, Stacey—I say, old chap—you—you—you needn't mention to Mauly that I was bringing him a letter! If—if I don't find it, I—I'd rather he—he didn't know!"

Stacey went down the stairs without replying.

"Oh lor!" groaned Bunter.

From the bottom of his fat heart, Billy Bunter wished that he had left Lord Mauleverer's letter alone. But it was rather too late to wish that now.

He resumed his search for it. There were dusky corners in the Remove passage, and Bunter's sight was none too good, even with the aid of his big spectacles. But the keenest vision could hardly have detected a letter that was no longer there, and Bunter had no luck.

He was still searching breathlessly when the bell rang for third school.

"Oh dear!" groaned Bunter.

He had to go into Form. It was rather unpleasant to meet Mr. Quelch's gimlet eye, coming in late. Bunter gave up his vain search.

He rolled dismally down the stairs and to the Remove Form-room, with the intention of resuming his search for that elusive letter after third school. And if he failed to find it, he decided

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not to mention the matter to Mauly at all. In such circumstances, Billy Bunter, generally loquacious, realised that the least said was the soonest mended.

THE FOURTH CHAPTER.

Stacey's Secret!

HARRY WHARTON looked very curiously at his relative in third school that morning.

When the Remove took their places, Stacey was standing by the Form-master's desk in conversation with the Remove master. Mr. Quelch's face was benignant in expression—as it always was when he was speaking to his new head boy.

Last term Wharton had been head boy of the Remove, and had filled the position to Mr. Quelch's satisfaction. This term Wharton was in disgrace; Quelch seldom even glanced at him without a glint coming into his eyes.

It would have surprised the Remove master very much to learn that a boy in his Form was capable of pulling his majestic leg. But there was no doubt that Stacey had pulled it with complete success.

Quelch was more than satisfied with his new head boy—he trusted him completely. Wharton, watching them, wondered sarcastically what Quelch would have thought had he known about the dingy Mr. Banks. He wondered, too, where Stacey found the nerve to carry off his hidden troubles with such an air of outward indifference. Not a sign showed in his calm face of the deep worry that Wharton knew must be on his mind.

From what Banks had said, it was clear that Stacey owed him money on some of his disreputable gambling transactions, and could not pay. When the matter went so far that Mr. Banks took a walk in the direction of the school to see Stacey and speak to him, it was plain that danger-point was near. He was in peril of being shown up in his true colours at Greyfriars, which could only mean the finish for him there.

Wharton could not feel sorry, if it came to that.

The fellow was a thorn in his side—an unscrupulous and insidious enemy. It was through him that he had lost the captaincy of the Form, and was in his Form-master's black books, and under suspicion of the prefects. Even at home his uncle, Colonel Wharton, was displeased with him—Stacey pulling the strings. Envy—the bitter envy of a poor relation—seemed to be Stacey's ruling passion. And he had made no secret of his intention, if he could, to cut Wharton out, both at home and at school. And so far, he had had a great deal of success.

Wharton could only feel dislike and deep repugnance towards that relative. He would have been glad to see Stacey leave the school. He would have been relieved never to see him again at Wharton Lodge. Yet, at the same time, he shrank from the idea of the fellow being sacked.

Certainly it would have opened Colonel Wharton's eyes, and made him understand why his nephew could not make friends with the fellow. It would have opened Mr. Quelch's eyes, and many others. But he was Wharton's relative, and deep personal dislike could not wholly obliterate the claims of blood. Glad as he would have been to see his enemy go, Wharton did not want to see him go in ruin and disgrace.

Little as he could like him, he could not help feeling something like admiration for his nerve. His manner to

Quelch was respectful, sedate—the manner of a head boy receiving instructions from a master who trusted him. Yet he must have been thinking of the possibility that any day, any hour, Mr. Quelch might discover what he really was—must indeed discover, unless Joe Banks could be kept quiet.

He was in danger of being turfed out of the school. And if that happened, where would he go? Colonel Wharton, kind as he was, would hardly continue to take charge of a distant relative who had repaid him by disgracing him and his old school. Stacey would have to go back to his former wandering life with his father—a disreputable adventurer, living on his wits. Having thrown away his chance, he would not have another.

Yet with such a leaden weight on his mind, he gave no sign of it.

Quelch, certainly, had no suspicion that his head boy was thinking of anything but the duty on hand—taking Latin papers to be passed round the Form. But Wharton knew of what he must be thinking. He did not guess that there was more—much more—on Stacey's mind—that beside Joe Banks and his threats he was thinking of a purloined letter, hidden in Study No. 3 till he had time to attend to it. Had Wharton guessed that, he would have wondered still more at the fellow's iron nerve.

Stacey passed the papers along the Form; then he sat down in his own place, to turn out as good a Latin paper as any in the Remove. Blackguard as he was, rascal as he was in many respects, Stacey had great gifts. He was as good a man in class as any Remove man—better, than most—and, at the same time, he was the best junior cricketer at Greyfriars.

Wharton was thinking the matter over during third school. When the Remove were dismissed he went out with his friends; but he left them and followed Stacey, as the latter headed for the Remove studies.

"Stacey!" he called out.

The new junior glanced round in surprise. The "doubles" of the Remove barred one another completely, and it was very seldom that they exchanged a word.

"Did you call me?" he snapped, over the oaken banisters.

"Yes. I want to speak to you."

"Well, the want's all on your side; keep your distance!" answered Stacey coolly; and he hurried up the stairs.

Wharton's face crimsoned with anger.

He paused a minute or two; then he followed the new junior up to the Remove passage. As Stacey was not to be seen there, it was clear that he must have gone into his study, and Wharton tapped at the door and opened it.

There was a startled exclamation as Stacey spun round from his desk. He had a key in his hand, and had been about to unlock the desk, when the door opened.

Wharton stared at him, surprised by the sudden alarm that had flashed into Stacey's face. It was only for a fleeting second; it was gone as soon as it appeared. But Wharton had seen it.

"You!" snapped Stacey. "What do you want? You don't need telling that you're not wanted in this study, I suppose?"

"No; but I must speak to you," said Harry quietly. "You'd better listen to me, too, Stacey."

"I've asked you to keep your distance."

"Oh, shut up, you cheeky fool!" exclaimed Wharton. "Do you think I want to speak to a rotten toad like

you? I've got to speak! It's my ill-luck that you're a relation of mine, and sent to the same school; but it can't be helped, and I don't want a relation of mine sacked from Greyfriars—"

Stacey caught his breath.

"Sacked!"

"Yes, sacked!"

"You're rather more in danger of the sack than I, I fancy," sneered Stacey.

"Not if Mr. Banks comes along from the Three Fishers to call on Quelch, or the Head," said Wharton scornfully.

Stacey's face paled; but he kept cool.

"Banks—who's Banks? I don't know him."

"He knows you, if you don't know him," said Harry, with cool contempt. "He spoke to me in break this morning, taking me for you—"

"Oh!" panted Stacey.

"From what he said, you owe him money, and he's got what he calls your fist on it. That's why I'm speaking to you!" snapped Wharton. "I don't want to know anything about your putrid betting on races; but I can't help knowing what Banks said to me. You'd better keep that man away from the school, and away from Greyfriars fellows. He gabbled it all out before five of us—"

"The fool!" breathed Stacey.

Wharton's lip curled.

"It's not wholly an advantage to you to be my double," he said. "It's helped you to land your rotten rascalities on me more than once. Now it's led Banks to take me for you, and gabble out your blackguardly transactions with him. If you don't want to be kicked out of the school, you'd better keep that man quiet. I suppose it's no good advising you to keep straight, and play the game, which would be safest?"

"A fat lot you'd care if I was kicked out!" sneered Stacey.

"I should care for the disgrace, and for what my uncle would think," said Harry quietly. "My uncle has ragged me a good deal for not making friends with you; but I shouldn't like to give him the shock of finding out what a rotten rascal you are. I'm warning you; if you can't keep decent, to keep your putrid betting friends away from Greyfriars, and Greyfriars fellows—"

"Thank you for nothing! Now get out of my study!"

Wharton's hands clenched hard.

"I say, you fellows!" A fat voice came from the Remove passage. "I say, you might help a fellow look for a letter."

"I've said all I had to say," said Wharton abruptly; and he turned and stepped back into the Remove passage.

"I say, Wharton—"

"Br-r-r-r!"

Wharton went down the passage to the stairs.

"Beast!" howled Billy Bunter. Then he blinked into Stacey's study. "I say, Stacey, come and help me look for that letter, like a good chap!"

"Get out!"

"Oh, really, Stacey—"

Stacey came across the study with gleaming eyes, and the fat Owl of the Remove backed away promptly.

"Look here, you beast!" roared Bunter indignantly. "You jolly well made me lose Mauly's letter, and you've jolly well got to help me look for it—see?"

Slam!

The door of Study No. 3 slammed almost on Bunter's fat little nose.

"Beast!" howled Bunter.

He opened the door again.

"I say, Stacey—" he recommenced.

"Oh orrikey—" He broke off in alarm.

at the savage rage in Stacey's face, and jumped back. "I—I say—"

Slam! Click!

This time Stacey locked the door.

"Yah! Rotter!" roared Bunter. He thumped on the locked door. "Beast! You come out of that study, and I'll mop up the passage with you! Yah! Funk!"

Thump! Bang! Thump! So long as the door was locked Billy Bunter was full of valour. Had it opened, no doubt the fat Owl would have scuttled away like a rabbit; but it did not open.

Bang! Thump! Bang!

"What the dickens are you up to?" Ogilvy, of the Remove, came up the passage. "Bunter, you potty porpoise, you—"

Bunter ceased to bang on the door. He blinked round at the Scottish junior. "That cad Stacey's locked himself in!" he hooted.

"Fathead!" answered Ogilvy. "Why should he lock himself in?"

"Because he's funky of me—"

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Ogilvy.

"Blessed if I see anything to cackle at! I can jolly well tell you he's shivering with funk in that study—"

Ogilvy, chuckling, turned the door-handle. But the door did not open.

"Here, I say, you locked in, Stacey?" he called out in surprise.

The key clicked back. Ogilvy opened the door and went in. Ogilvy was rather a pal of the new junior; but Stacey did not feel pally at that moment. It needed all his self-control to conceal his rage and irritation at the unwelcome interruption. The key of his desk had been in his hand, but he had slipped it into his pocket before opening the door to Ogilvy.

"What the dickens—" inquired Ogilvy.

"I locked that fat idiot out—I'll kick him instead," said Stacey, and he tramped out of the study.

But Bunter did not wait to be kicked. Bunter was already fleeing—and the search for Mauly's lost letter was postponed once more.

THE FIFTH CHAPTER.

The Way of the Transgressor!

WINGATE of the Sixth tapped Stacey on the shoulder when the Greyfriars fellows came out after dinner.

The captain of the school gave Stacey a very genial look—and Stacey looked respectfully genial on his side. Inwardly, he was savagely impatient. He was anxious to get to his study, where he had business on hand that the Greyfriars captain certainly never would have dreamed of suspecting. But it was a distinction and an honour to receive a gracious word from the captain of the school, head of the games, and skipper of the first eleven. Stacey tried his hardest to look as if he enjoyed that distinction and honour.

"Anything special on?" asked Wingate.

Stacey repressed a start.

With all his nerve, which seemed of iron, he was deeply uneasy, and for a second it seemed to him that the captain of Greyfriars guessed something. But in a moment he was reassured.

"No—nothing!" he answered.

"Like to come and send me down a few at the nets?"

Stacey could have groaned with impatience and dismay.

His wonderful powers as a cricketer, both at batting and bowling, had earned him the favourable notice of the great

men of the first eleven. For a junior to be asked to bowl to the captain of the school was enough to make any fellow feel tremendously bucked. Several Remove men, who heard what Wingate said, gave Stacey glances of good-natured envy. It was simply impossible for him to refuse. A request from the captain of the school was a good deal like an invitation from royalty—an honour that was not to be declined.

"Jolly glad!" said Stacey.

"Well, come along as soon as you can!" said Wingate.

Stacey went down to the senior nets. The letter, locked in his study desk, had to wait.

What he was going to do with that letter, Stacey had not yet decided. He actually did not know.

Temptation had assailed him; a way out of the trouble that loomed over him, and threatened him with disgrace and ruin.

He had not needed Wharton's warning to realise how serious the matter was, when Joe Banks came looking for him in the vicinity of the school.

He owed the man money, and Joe had his written promise to pay—and that paper, shown at Greyfriars, meant the end of Greyfriars for him.

He had to satisfy Banks somehow.

More likely than not, the contents of the purloined letter would have saved him. Yet the thought of taking money that was not his own gave him a feeling of shuddering horror.

Unscrupulous as he was, treacherous as he was, he had never been guilty of such an act; never dreamed that such a base thought would ever come into his mind.

He had not decided what to do—he could not! Almost he hoped that there was no money in the letter, that would save him from himself! But—it would not save him from Joe Banks!

His mind was in a whirl with miserable doubt and indecision and shame. If only he had not played the fool!

But he had; and he had to face the music, somehow.

Gwynne, and Sykes, and North, and other members of the first eleven gathered round to see that wonderful junior bowler send Wingate down a few. Stacey's bowling, as a rule, was so good that it was good practice even for Wingate to stand up to it.

But on the present occasion the seniors were disappointed. Partly because of the trouble on his mind, partly because he was anxious to get away, Stacey bowled very erratically.

After about a quarter of an hour of it, Wingate told him to cut.

"You're off colour to-day, kid—another time!" he said good-naturedly, and Stacey left the nets.

He went into the House at once.

Now, he hoped, there was a chance of getting into his study by himself, and examining the letter. If there was nothing in it—nothing that he wanted—the sooner he found out, the better. If there was what he wanted in it, he had still to make up his mind what to do.

He glanced along the Remove passage quickly, as he came up, half expecting to see a fat junior there searching for a lost letter.

But Billy Bunter was not to be seen. Bunter had given it up as a bad job. That beastly letter seemed to be lost, goodness knew how; and Bunter was tired of hunting for it.

Very likely it would turn up, sooner or later, Bunter considered, and then Mauly would get it! Meanwhile, as Mauly did not know that Bunter had handled it and lost it, it was all right.

Probably Mauly would have kicked him, had he known. As he did not know he would not kick him. The important thing, of course, was that Bunter should not be kicked! The loss of Mauly's letter was a trifling matter in comparison.

So the fat Owl of the Remove had cheerfully dismissed the matter from his podgy mind.

Nobody was to be seen in the Remove passage; everybody, or nearly everybody, was out of the House in the bright June weather. This was Stacey's chance, at last.

He stopped dead in the doorway of Study No. 3.

Dick Russell was seated at the study table, scribbling lines at a great rate.

Stacey breathed hard.

Russell glanced up at him with a rueful grin.

"Don't interrupt, old chap!" he said.

"Lines?" asked Stacey.

"Yes—a hundred for Quelch. He asked me for them this morning," said Russell. "If they're not handed in before tea, they're going to be doubled." "Lots of time after class," said Stacey.

"I shall have to finish them after class—but I'm trying to get fifty done before the bell goes!"

Russell scribbled on.

Stacey turned away, his feelings almost too deep for words. Was he never going to have the study to himself?

Really it was rather a lot to expect, when he shared the study with two other fellows. Already, Ogilvy had found him there with the door locked—and he did not want that to happen again. After class, Russell would be there, finishing his impot for Quelch. Stacey was feverishly anxious to examine the purloined letter; but he dared make no move in that direction, while eyes were upon him.

He went down again, biting his lip with bitter annoyance. The way of the transgressor was hard!

In the Form-room, that afternoon, he glanced at Lord Mauleverer. His lordship's face was calm and placid as usual; it was easy to see that he had not heard yet of the lost letter.

During class Stacey was respectfully attentive, as usual, to Mr. Quelch; but his thoughts were not on the valuable instruction the Remove were receiving from their beak. He thought the matter out during class and decided what to do. He had to examine that letter as soon as possible; and it was risky, almost impossible, to do so in his study. But it was easy to take it out of gates in his pocket, and find a secluded spot—and there it would be safe. A pull up the Sark to Poppo's Island—

His mind was made up when the Remove were dismissed.

He hurried up to Study No. 3 at once.

Quickly, he unlocked his desk, and transferred the letter to his pocket. Then he selected several articles from a camping outfit, and made a small bundle of them.

Russell came into the study by the time he had finished.

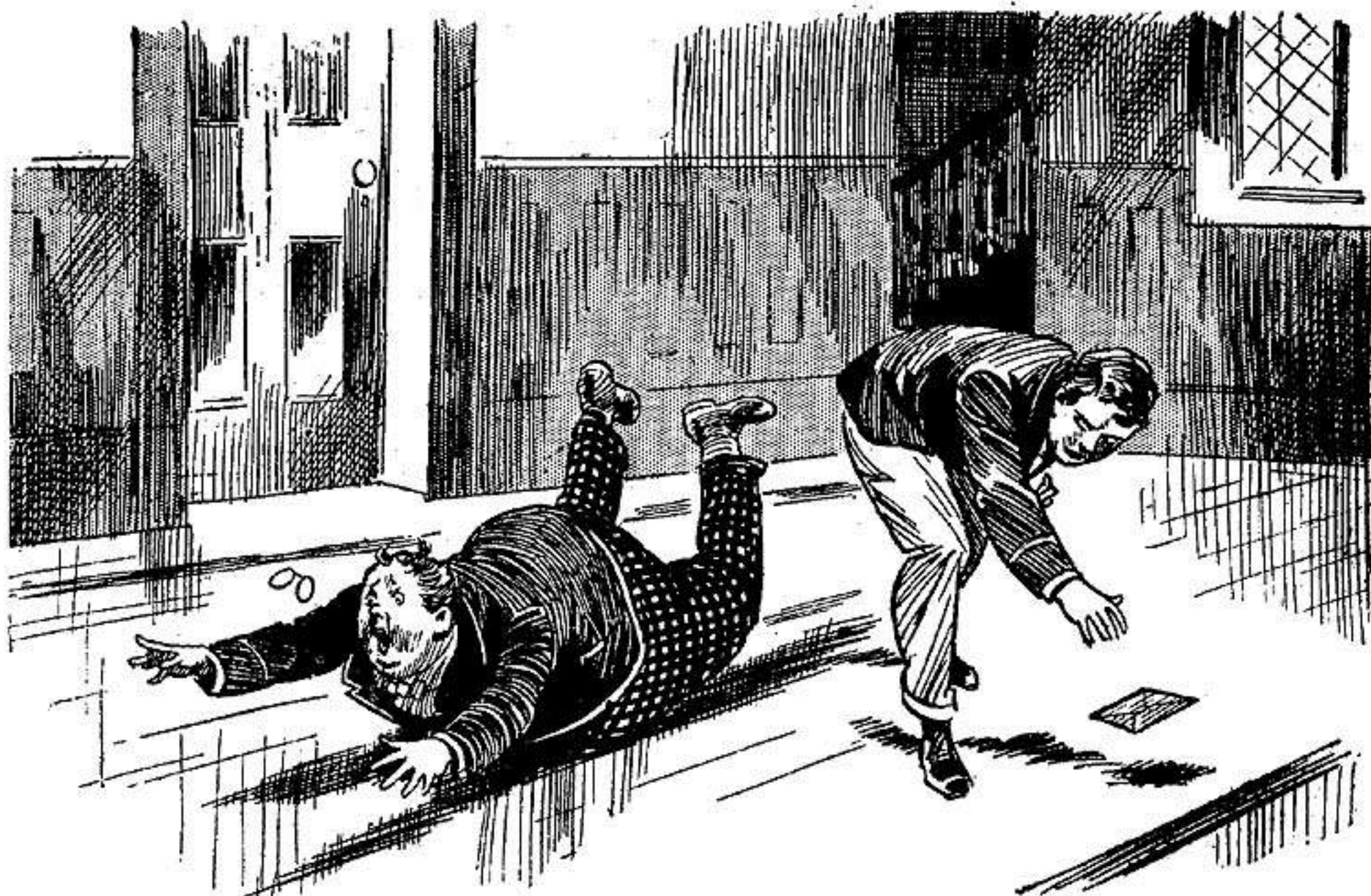
"Hallo! You here?" said Russell. "Seen my Virgil?—Oh, here it is! Like to shove in a few lines for me, Stacey? Quelch won't spot them among the rest!"

Stacey laughed.

"You forget that I'm head boy!" he remarked. "Hardly the thing!"

"Well, you forget it, too, and remember it after you've done twenty for me!" suggested Russell.

But Stacey shook his head and left the study. Dick Russell settled down



"Oh crikey!" gasped Bunter, as he tripped over Stacey's foot and crashed. "Oh! Wow! Ooooooh! My specs—wow!" The letter flew in one direction, the specs in another. Stacey bent down and picked up the letter. Bunter, roaring and blinking dizzily, was unaware of his rapid action.

to lines, which kept him more or less happily occupied till tea-time. He little guessed how Stacey was going to be occupied.

THE SIXTH CHAPTER.

Lost, Stolen, or Strayed?

"**L**END me five bob!" "What?" Five juniors uttered that surprised exclamation in chorus.

Lord Mauleverer grinned. For the schoolboy earl, who was generally rolling in currency notes and banknotes to be requesting a loan of five shillings was rather a surprise. The Famous Five just stared.

After class they were starting for the boathouse, to get the old boat out, when his lordship weighed in with that astonishing request.

"Pulling our leg?" asked Bob Cherry. "No. Stoney!" explained his lordship. "Absolutely pipped! Not a brown—not a solitary stiver! And I want an ice."

Harry Wharton, laughing, sorted two half-crowns out of his pocket, and placed them in his lordship's palm.

"Thanks, old bean!" said Mauly gratefully. "I'll square this when I get a remittance! I'm expecting one—like jolly old Bunter!"

"Poor old Mauly!" said Bob. "Did your uncle forget to put a wad of banknotes in his letter?"

"Worse than that!" sighed Mauleverer. "He's forgotten to write at all! Frightfully neglectful of nunky!"

"Eh!" said Bob. "You had his letter this morning, I suppose?"

"No. I forgot to look in break, but I looked after dinner, and there wasn't any for me! Awful careless of nunky. I told him that I was hard up!" said his lordship sorrowfully. "I expected

a tenner, at least! And the old scout hasn't even written!"

"You howling ass!" said Bob. "There was a letter in the rack for you this morning, and it was in your uncle's fist. I've seen it often enough to know it again! You've overlooked it!"

Lord Mauleverer shook his head.

"My dear chap, I've looked!" he said. "Think I'd leave it there and come and stick you for your loose change?"

"Fathead!" said Harry Wharton. "We all saw the letter. I remember Bunter wanted to know whether it was for him, because there was a crest on it."

Mauleverer chuckled.

"I say, you fellows!" Billy Bunter rolled up to the group in the quad. "I say, if you're going on the river, I'll come, if you like, and steer for you. Having tea out?"

Bunter's eyes and spectacles were fixed on a basket that swung in Bob Cherry's hand. He guessed what was in that basket.

"Hallo, hallo, hallo! Just the man we want!" exclaimed Bob.

"Right-ho, I'll come!" said the fat Owl cheerfully. "I say—"

"We want to ask you where Mauly's letter is."

"Eh!" ejaculated Bunter.

He gave the chums of the Remove a startled blink. Having dismissed that matter from his mind, Bunter had not expected to be reminded of it.

"Look here, you fat chump!" said Harry Wharton seriously. "There was a letter for Mauly in the rack this morning, and he's looked, and can't find it there. Do you know anything about it?"

"Oh, really, Wharton—"

"You blithering idiot!" said Bob. "I remember you asked me to hand the letter down. You benighted bandersnatch, there may be money in it!

Mauly was expecting a tip from his uncle. If you've done anything with that letter, cough it up—quick!"

"Oh, really, Cherry—"

"Kick him!" suggested Johnny Bull.

"Oh, really, Bull—"

"My esteemed and idiotic Bunter—"

"I say, you fellows, it's a bit thick to think I know anything about Mauly's letter just because I thought it might be for me!" said Bunter indignantly. "Of course, I never touched it! Besides, I suppose a fellow can oblige a pal by taking a letter to him, if he likes? I'm always doing those kind and obliging things—and this is the thanks I get!"

"Then you did take the letter?" exclaimed Frank Nugent.

"No, I didn't!"

"Begad!" said Lord Mauleverer, gazing at the fat Owl. "It's a jolly old puzzle why Bunter's people sent him to Greyfriars, instead of to a home for idiots!"

"Oh, really, Mauly—"

"Give Mauleverer his letter, you blithering owl!" said Harry.

"How can I give it to him when I haven't got it?" demanded Bunter. "You jolly well know you refused to hand it down to me, Cherry! I never asked Stacey to hand it down when he came along. In fact, he never came!"

"Oh, my hat!"

"Besides, I told him I was going to take it to Mauly!" continued Bunter. "And so I should have, only the beast pulled my leg, you know, and told me Mauly was in his study, and I lagged upstairs to look for him. Not that I touched the letter, you know!" added Bunter, with great caution. "The fact is, I don't think there was a letter for Mauly at all; and I'm absolutely certain that it was still sticking in the rack when I went away."

"Oh crumbs!"

"Let the matter drop!" said Bunter, with dignity. "You're rather a suspicious lot, I must say—thinking that a fellow's got another fellow's letter. What have you got in that basket, Bob?"

"Never mind what I've got in this basket!" gasped Bob Cherry. "Hand out Mauly's letter, you obnoxious porpoise, before we scalp you!"

"Look here, I've told you—" Bunter, old bean, I really must have my letter, you know," said Lord Mauleverer placidly. "I'm goin' to kick you for baggin' it; but hand me the letter first."

"I never touched it!" hooted Bunter. "And if it's lost, it's not my fault, as I know nothing whatever about it!"

"You've lost my letter?" ejaculated Lord Mauleverer. And for once his placid lordship's face was angry. "You fat rascal! Do you know you'd be reported to the Head for a floggin' if Quelch knew—"

"I never lost it!" roared Bunter. "It was all Stacey's fault! Tripping a fellow up and making him drop a letter—"

"Didn't you pick it up again, if you dropped it, you howling ass?" demanded Bob Cherry.

"I couldn't find it!" gasped Bunter. "I hunted and hunted and hunted, and it was gone, goodness knows where!"

"Oh gad!"

"I—I say, you fellows, don't glare at a fellow like that!" Grim faces surrounded the Owl of the Remove now; and it dawned on Billy Bunter's fat intellect that the matter was more serious than he had supposed. "I—I say, the letter's sure to turn up—"

"If it doesn't, Bunter, Mauly will have to go to Quelch about it," said Harry Wharton quietly. "You know what that means!"

"Oh crikey!"

"If you've got it—"

"I haven't!" wailed Bunter. "I tell you I hunted all over the shop for it, and it was gone! But it will turn up! The maid's sure to find it in the morning when she sweeps out the passage—"

"What passage?"

"Our passage. It's there somewhere—"

"You dropped Mauly's letter in the Remove passage?" exclaimed Wharton.

"Yes; that beast Stacey tripped me up—"

"But a letter dropped there couldn't be lost!" exclaimed Harry. "How could it? You can't have looked!"

"I did! I hunted for hours and hours and hours—ten minutes, at least!"

"Utter rot!" said Bob Cherry. "That blind owl might have missed it; but there have been fellows up and down the passage all day—somebody else would have seen it and handed it to Mauly. Look here, Bunter, try to get it into your fat head that you can't pinch a fellow's letter, and that you'll be taken to the Head to be sacked if it doesn't turn up!"

"Beast!" hooted Bunter. "I tell you Stacey tripped me in the passage because I said I'd ask Wharton to thrash him again, and I dropped the letter, and I couldn't find it again—"

"Rubbish!" said Johnny Bull.

"Beast!"

"Too thin!" said Bob.

"The thinfulness is truly terrific!" agreed Hurree Jamsat Ram Singh.

The juniors' faces were extremely grave now. Wide allowances were made for Billy Bunter in the Remove, on account of his well-known and remarkable obtuseness. But there was a limit.

If Bunter had "pinched" that letter, matters were going to be very serious for Bunter. And it looked as if he had!

"You'd better tell the truth, Bunter," said Harry Wharton. "Mauly's got to have his letter—"

"I say, you fellows, I've told you I dropped it! Look here, you can ask Stacey, you beasts, if you can't take my word—not that my word isn't better than Stacey's. He was with me when I lost it—"

"Might ask Stacey!" said Nugent. "But it looks to me as if that fat rascal's bagged it—"

"Oh, really, Nugent—"

"The lookfulness is terrific!"

"Hallo, hallo, hallo! There's Stacey!" exclaimed Bob Cherry.

"Let's ask him—this way!"

Stacey had come out of the House, with a little bundle swinging in his hand. He was crossing towards the gates, when the group of juniors moved to intercept him.

They rather expected the Owl of the Remove to attempt to dodge away. But Bunter, as a matter of fact, was getting alarmed now; and he really did want Stacey to bear witness to the fact that the letter was lost. It was growing clear to Billy Bunter that if that letter was not accounted for, he would be judged guilty of having "pinched" it! And even the obtuse Owl could realise that that meant bad trouble.

"Hold on, Stacey!" called out Bob Cherry.

Stacey glanced at him carelessly.

"I'm going out," he answered.

"Hold on, all the same—"

"Sorry I can't stop!"

"Oh, hold on!" grunted Johnny Bull. "Joe Banks isn't waiting at the gate."

Stacey started and flushed, and gave Johnny a black and bitter look. But he stopped.

"Well, what is it?" he snapped.

"I'm in a hurry. Cough it up! I've no time to waste chattering!"

"Bunter says—"

"Have you stopped me to tell me Bunter's silly cackle?"

"Oh, really, Stacey! I say, you tell these fellows you saw me lose Mauly's letter!" gasped Bunter.

THE SEVENTH CHAPTER.

A Dark Suspicion!

STACEY stood quite still.

He was thinking of that letter at that very moment; slipped into his pocket to be taken out of gates. But he had not been expecting it to be mentioned. He felt a sudden thrill of terror in his very bones. If any of these fellows had dreamed that the letter was on him—

Of course they could not. For a moment he hardly breathed. But he recovered himself swiftly.

"I don't understand you!" he snapped. "What letter do you mean?"

"That letter I lost in the Remove passage, in break," explained Bunter.

"You remember—"

"I don't!" said Stacey. "I remember you said you had lost a letter that belonged to Mauleverer, and I said I hoped that Mauleverer would believe it. I shouldn't, in his place."

"Oh, begad!" murmured Mauly.

His eyes were rather curiously on the handsome face that was so like Harry Wharton's.

Bunter stared at Stacey in surprise and horror. Apparently it had not

occurred to his fat intellect that this witness would fail him.

"Why, you—you beast!" gasped Bunter. "You know I dropped the letter in the passage—you jolly well know—"

"I know nothing of the sort."

"Did you hand Bunter the letter from the rack, Stacey?" asked Lord Mauleverer very quietly.

"Yes, I did that! He said he was going to take it to you, and I supposed he was, of course," said Stacey. "He could have taken the letter down himself, anyhow—he had only to pull up a chair to stand on."

"Yaas; but—"

"And you told me Mauly was in his study, and he was out of the House all the time, you beast, and I fagged up the stairs for nothing, and I shouldn't have lost the letter, but for that!" howled Bunter indignantly.

"I thought he was in his study. Is that all?" asked Stacey impatiently. "I've got to get a boat out, and I'm in a hurry!"

"Did you see the letter in Bunter's hand?" asked Bob.

Wharton was not speaking, but his eyes were on Stacey's face, and he was thinking—hard.

"I don't remember seeing it!" answered Stacey calmly. "I wasn't thinking about it, of course, and never noticed."

"I had it in my right hand, under your nose, you beast, and then you tripped me, and I fell over, and dropped it, and—"

"Why did you trip Bunter, Stacey?" asked Lord Mauleverer.

Stacey glanced at him.

"The fat fool was slanging me, and I barged him over to shut him up!" he answered. "Why not?"

"Then he dropped the letter?"

"He says he did!" answered Stacey, shrugging his shoulders.

"I jolly well did!" wailed Bunter. "And when I looked for it, it was gone!"

"You saw nothing of it, Stacey?"

"Nothing."

"What do you think became of it, then?"

"I haven't thought about it at all; it's no business of mine. But if Bunter hasn't given you your letter, I should say that he's either lost it or he's still got it in his pocket."

With that, Stacey walked on towards the gates, leaving the juniors with Billy Bunter, whose fat face was now the picture of dismay and woe.

"I—I say, you fellows—" stammered Bunter.

"Cough up that letter, you fat freak!" growled Johnny Bull.

"Beast!"

"Take him to Quelch, Mauly! Quelch will make him cough it up!"

"I say, Mauly, you believe me, don't you?" gasped the hapless Owl.

"Yaas."

"Fathead!" said Johnny Bull.

"You shut up, Bull!" gasped Bunter. "Mauly knows that he can take my word, don't you, Mauly, old chap?"

"This once, anyhow," said Lord Mauleverer, with a grin. "I've no doubt Bunter dropped the letter, as he says, you men. Unless some fellow has picked it up since, it's still lying about the Remove passage somewhere."

"That's as good as impossible," said Harry Wharton. "Some fellow must have seen it before this."

"Yaas! Perhaps if some sportsman has picked it up, he will be good enough to pass it on to me!" jawed

Lord Mauleverer. "Leave it at that."

"But look here, Mauly—"

"Leave it at that, dear men! But I'll tell you what—Bunter ought to be kicked for meddlin' with a fellow's correspondence! Suppose you fellows kick him across the quad?" suggested Lord Mauleverer.

"Oh, really, Mauly—"

"Let's!" said Bob Cherry at once.

"Beast!" roared Bunter.

And he retired from the spot, without waiting to be kicked. Lord Mauleverer walked away with a very thoughtful expression on his face.

"Well, that's that!" said Bob. "It's for Mauly to say—but I'm blessed if I'd let it drop like that! Come on, and get out the boat!"

The Co. proceeded on their way. Harry Wharton dropped behind, and turned to follow Lord Mauleverer. He tapped his lordship on the shoulder, and Mauly gave him a glance of urbane inquiry.

"What have you got in your head, Mauly?" asked Harry, very quietly.

"Brains!"

"Fathead! Look here, you believe that Bunter dropped the letter in the Remove passage when Stacey barged him over—"

"Yaas."

"You know as well as I do that it couldn't have disappeared from sight?"

"Yaas."

"That means that somebody picked it up?"

"Yaas."

Wharton's lips set hard. The thought that had come into his mind filled him with a mingled sense of shame and horror. It would never have come, perhaps, but for that meeting with Joe Banks in the morning. Was it possible—could it be possible?

"Mauly, you know what it looks like?" he muttered.

"Yaas."

"Stacey handed Bunter the letter—he told him you were in your study, when you weren't—and in the Remove passage, deserted at that time of the day, he came on Bunter again—barged him over—and the letter disappeared!"

"Don't jump to conclusions, old bean!" murmured Lord Mauleverer gently. "It looks a bit thick; but—"

"It's well known that I bar the fellow," said Harry, biting his lip. "But—but he's a relation of mine—a distant relation! My uncle thinks a lot of him—"

He broke off.

"Push it out of your head, old bean! The letter will turn up all right," said Lord Mauleverer. "Unless a fellow's sure, the least said is the soonest mended. I think—"

"What do you think, Mauly?"

"I think I'll go and have that ice!"

"Fathead!"

Lord Mauleverer smiled and ambled away to the school shop. Harry Wharton, with a clouded brow, hurried after his friends.

Was it possible? Blackguard, gambler, breaker of bounds, he knew Stacey to be—but was he worse? Was there no limit to his rascality? He owed Joe Banks money, and was in danger if he did not pay—and he could not pay, that was clear, or he would have paid already. Was it possible—

"Hallo, hallo, hallo!" bawled Bob Cherry, from the school raft. "Come on, old bean, and lend a hand with the tub! We shall never get as far as Popper's Island at this rate."

The Famous Five pushed off in the roomy old boat and pulled up the river.

Tea was packed in Bob's basket, and they were going to make a picnic of it on the island in the Sark. But Wharton, as he pulled at his oar, was not thinking of the picnic, or of the shining, rippling river, or the green woods that glided by. He was thinking of Mauly's lost letter—and of his relative and double, Ralph Stacey—and wondering, with a growing feeling of horrified certainty, in whose hands that lost letter was at the moment.

THE EIGHTH CHAPTER.

On the Verge of the Abyss!

RALPH STACEY pulled his boat under the willows on the edge of Popper's Island.

He was glad to get it, and himself, out of sight. He could hardly have chosen a safer spot for his purpose. Popper's Island was out of bounds for Greyfriars fellows—on account of the tremendous fuss made by Sir Hilton Popper when anyone landed there.

As the lord of Popper Court was a governor of Greyfriars, the Head was very strict on that point. Adventurous fellows, however, sometimes landed on the island, especially when Sir Hilton was away from Popper Court; as was the case at present. As detentions or whippings were their reward, if discovered, such visits were not frequent. The chief danger was of being spotted by Sir Hilton's keepers—and Stacey had been very watchful and wary as he approached the island. He was sure that he had landed unseen—and now he was secure.

He pushed the boat deep in the cover of the willows. Then he tramped through the trees to the glade in the centre of the little island, completely hidden from both banks of the Sark.

In the middle of the glade grew an ancient oak, shading it with immense old branches. Under the oak branches he stopped and unpacked the little bundle he had brought from his study at Greyfriars.

It contained a small spirit stove, a bottle of methylated spirit, a box of matches, and a little tin kettle.

He set up the stove in the grass and took the kettle to the water's edge to fill it, returned, and lighted the spirit stove beneath it.

Then he sat down with his back to the oak, to wait for the water to boil.

He took the lost letter from his pocket.

Alone as he was, far from all watchful eyes, he cast a furtive glance round him as the letter came to light.

What was he going to do with it? That depended largely on what it contained.

On one point he had made up his mind—he was not going to be sacked from Greyfriars School if he could help it. If there was a banknote in the letter, as Bunter certainly believed, and as was extremely probable—He had to know!

If there was nothing to his purpose, all he had to do was to seal the letter again, after opening it with steam, and leave it where it could be found, somewhere about the school. That would be an end of the matter. But he was going to know.

The kettle began to sing on the stove. A thin stream of vapour issued from the spout.

Another minute or two and it would be thick enough for him to hold the envelope over it and see the flap peel open. He waited—his heart beating unpleasantly.

Banknotes had numbers! That was

an unpleasant thought! But there was little risk, for a banknote put in Joe's hands would be passed on some race-course, probably far away, and there was nothing to prove that it had ever passed through Stacey's hands.

A shopkeeper would have wanted him to sign his name on the back, but Joe Banks would not, of course, expect anything of the sort. Neither would Joe himself endorse it. It could never be traced to either of them, once it was in circulation.

Even if the number was advertised, even if the note was ultimately traced, upon whom could suspicion possibly rest—unless upon Billy Bunter?

Bunter, and nobody else, was known to have had the letter in his hands!

The steam was coming thickly out of the spout of the little tin kettle now. Stacey rose from his seat in the grass and bent over the jet of steam, holding the flap of the letter in it.

His hand trembled as he did so, though not with fear—he had nothing to fear, alone on the island in the Sark. But there was something so mean, so base, in this surreptitious opening of another fellow's letter, that he faltered. He was hard, unscrupulous, but, like many unscrupulous people, he did not like appearing contemptible in his own eyes. And he could not help despising himself for what he was doing.

The letter came open.

He sat back in the grass under the oak, the open envelope in his hand. He wiped a bead of perspiration from his forehead.

It was a long minute before he found the courage to draw the folded letter from the envelope, but he did it at last.

He did not glance at the letter itself. Such inquisitiveness as Billy Bunter's was not, at all events, one of his failings. He had not the slightest desire to know what Sir Reginald Brooke had written to his ward at Greyfriars.

But from the letter he drew a crisp, rustling slip of paper.

It was a Bank of England note for £10.

Bunter had been right—there was a banknote in the letter. It was one of the handsome tips that Mauly received from home.

Stacey's face was almost haggard as he looked at it.

It was all he wanted—more than he wanted! He had already thought it out and decided that it would be safe. All he had to do now was to get into his boat, pull along to the Three Fishers, and hand that banknote over to Joe, and he would be clear of the terrible shadow that hung over him—the shadow of disgrace and ruin.

Yet instead of satisfaction, there was only misery in his haggard face. As yet he was not a thief—though terribly near it! But after he had parted with that banknote, what would he be?

It was futile to ponder that Mauly had plenty of money and he had little or none. Mauly would spend that ten pounds in careless profusion, as if it had little value—while he needed it to save himself from ruin. Was a fellow entitled to such a disproportionate share of the world's goods? These wretched thoughts passed through his mind. But he was no fool, and he knew that he was trying to deceive himself—trying to make out that he was not doing what he actually was doing!

Sophistry could not help him. Any amount of arguing on the subject could not alter the plain, bald fact that if he took somebody else's money he was a thief—a thing unclean!

Up to that moment his danger and difficulty had filled his thoughts. Now

he realised that there was something worse.

He knew himself to be unscrupulous, hard, worldly minded, and he did not care. But he had his limit, and now that the banknote was in his hand he knew that he could not do this. He could not go through life an object of disgust and contempt to himself.

He could not!

From the bottom of his miserable heart he wished that he had never meddled with the letter.

In those moments of realisation he almost forgot Joe Banks and his threats. He had one gleam of light—it was not too late!

There was still time to re-seal the letter, to place it where it could be found, to wash his hands of the whole thing.

Only a very close examination would reveal that the envelope had been opened by steam, and Lord Mauleverer was not likely to make such an examination. Even if he discerned it, he would put it down to Bunter. Serve the fat brute right for having meddled!

Stacey sat for long, long minutes with the letter in one hand, the banknote in the other. But his mind was definitely made up now.

It was as if an abyss had opened before his feet, which he perceived only at the last moment before stepping into it. One more step would have been fatal, and, now that his mind had cleared, nothing would have induced him to take that fatal step. Mauly would find his letter, the banknote still in it; he would never know—nobody would ever know—and Stacey himself would forget, as soon as he could, how near he had been to irretrievable shame and disaster.

To replace the banknote, to re-seal the letter and make it look as if it had never been opened—that was the next step. That required careful manipulation. But he had plenty of time on hand.

There was a splash of oars in the water, a bump of a boat under the willows at the little landing place on the island.

Stacey gave a convulsive start.

A voice he knew came booming through the trees and thickets.

"Hallo, hallo, hallo! Somebody's here already!"

Stacey sat as if petrified. It was the voice of Bob Cherry. Harry Wharton's voice followed:

"What—"

"Here's a boat tied up!"

"My hat! If that means a keeper on the island—"

"It's a Greyfriars boat!" came Johnny Bull's voice.

"Only one of the fellows here!" Stacey heard Frank Nugent say. "All right, you chaps!"

"The all-rightfulness is terrific."

Harry Wharton & Co. were landing on the island. Stacey remembered the picnic basket he had seen in Bob's hand. The chums of the Remove were tea-ing out of gates—and it was Popper's Island that they had chosen for the picnic.

Only a screen of trees and thickets separated him from them as he sat there, with the letter and the banknote in his hands.

His heart almost died within him.

He sprang to his feet.

There was no time now for resealing the letter—no time for anything, but to get it out of sight. Already there was a trampling and a rustling, as the juniors came towards the glade in the centre of the little island.

Stacey thrust the letter into one pocket of his blazer, the banknote into

the other. His hands were still in his pockets as Bob Cherry's ruddy, cheery face appeared in the trees by the glade. For one hideous moment Stacey dreaded that Bob might have seen the banknote before it vanished. But the next moment he was reassured.

"Hallo, hallo, hallo!" roared Bob cheerily. "Who—why, it's Stacey!"

THE NINTH CHAPTER.

Accused!

HARRY WHARTON & Co. came out of the trees into the little glade.

They stared at Stacey in surprise. The kettle, still spluttering on the spirit stove, looked as if he was there with the same purpose as themselves—a picnic. But it was rather unusual for a fellow to picnic all on his lonely own—neither was there any sign of tea or eatables.

Stacey, his hands still in his blazer pockets, stood facing them, his heart beating in jumps, the colour wavering in his face. With all his nerve, he could not for the moment assume a natural or casual manner.

"All alone here?" asked Bob.

"Haven't you eyes?" answered Stacey. He spoke in a sneering tone; but his voice was husky.

"You're out of school bounds, old bean."

"You, too!" snapped Stacey.

Bob chuckled.

"I'm not Quelch's jolly old head boy, supposed to be setting a good example to the Form! You are."

"Oh, don't be a fool!"

"The politeness of the esteemed Stacey is not terrific!" remarked Hurree Jamset Ram Singh.

Harry Wharton's eyes were fixed grimly on Stacey's face, which flushed and paled by turns. The black suspicions that had been in his mind as he pulled up the river had become certainties now.

What was Stacey doing in this lonely spot—with a kettle boiling on a spirit stove? He had plenty of friends in the Remove—he would not have lacked company had he wanted it? Why had he not wanted it?

"Picnicking on your lonely own?" asked Johnny Bull.

"Have you bought this island from old Popper?" inquired Bob Cherry sarcastically.

"Plenty of room for everybody!" said Nugent.

"A crowd here means danger of being spotted by the keepers," said Stacey sullenly. "You can find another place."

"Rot!" said Johnny Bull. "We're here and we're stopping! If you don't like our company you can clear as soon as you like."

"Oh, don't let's rag," said the good-natured Bob. "As Stacey's here let him join up in the giddy feast! We've got lots in this basket, Stacey."

"I don't want any of it."

"You don't seem to be fixed up with much yourself," said Bob. "Unless you've got grub stacked in your pockets, what have you got in the way of a picnic?"

"Find out!"

Bob's cheery face darkened a little.

"It's just as well for a fellow to keep a civil tongue in his head," he suggested. "Otherwise, a fellow's head might get punched."

"And the punchfulness might be terrific!" remarked the Nabob of Bhani-par.

"Do you think I'm afraid of you—any of you, or the whole crowd of you?" asked Stacey contemptuously. "I'd

punch your silly head as soon as look at it."

"Get going, then!" said Bob. "I'm ready, if you are."

"Oh, don't row," said Frank. "If you don't like our company, Stacey, keep your distance, and keep your cheeky mouth shut!"

Harry Wharton spoke—for the first time.

"What are you doing here, Stacey?"

"No bizney of yours."

"I'm asking you, all the same."

Stacey gave him a quick, searching look. Something in Wharton's face during the talk in the quad at Greyfriars had made him vaguely uneasy: Now he knew! He was suspected!

His heart beat thickly.

"I don't choose to answer!" he snapped. "If you fellows are staying here, I'm going."

"The sooner the better," grunted Johnny Bull.

Stacey made a movement. Harry Wharton stepped into his path. He stopped again, with a hunted look coming into his eyes.

"Let me pass!" he breathed.

"You're forgetting your jolly old kettle," said Bob Cherry, "or are you leaving it for us?"

Stacey did not heed. His eyes were fixed on Harry Wharton; and his fists were clenched. He was suspected—he knew that; Wharton's look was not to be mistaken. And the opened letter was in one of his pockets—the banknote in the other!

"Will you let me pass?" he hissed.

"Not yet!" said Harry quietly. "You fellows collar him if he tries to bolt."

Stacey panted. If the five juniors chose to detain him, he could not get away. What did his enemy mean to do?

The Co. stared at their leader in blank astonishment.

"What the jolly old thump!" exclaimed Bob Cherry. "I suppose the fellow can go if he likes! He can't go too soon to please me."

"I've got something to say first!" said Harry, in the same quiet tone.

"I want to know what Stacey is doing here alone in this lonely place with a kettle on a spirit stove. He has nothing here for a picnic—he was not going to make tea! I want to know whether he was using the kettle to steam open a letter."

Stacey hardly breathed. As Wharton clearly suspected him, it was obvious that he would think of this. It was plain enough—with the suspicion to start on.

Wharton's words made his comrades jump.

"Wandering in your mind, old bean?" asked Bob blankly.

Wharton's eyes were fastened on Stacey's face. It was as white as chalk. If he had not been certain before he would have been certain now. There was no longer the faintest doubt in his mind as to where Lord Mauleverer's missing letter was to be found.

"My esteemed Wharton—" murmured Hurree Jamset Ram Singh.

Stacey found his voice.

"Will you let me get back to my boat?" His voice came husky, half-audible. "Let me pass, you rotter!"

"Wharton—" exclaimed Nugent.

Harry gave an angry laugh.

"Can't you fellows see? You know as well as I do that Mauly's letter couldn't have been lost by being dropped in the Remove passage."

"Mauly's letter!" repeated Johnny Bull. "Bunter's still got that—"

"Mauly believes that he hasn't—and I believe the same as Mauly."

"Harry!" Nugent fairly gasped. "You don't mean—you can't mean—" He



As Coker released one of the lines to give his damp face a dab, he unintentionally jerked at the other. The Fifth Form boat shot across the river, and there was a frantic yell from Vernon-Smith as it surged across his bows. Bump! "You clumsy asses!" roared Coker. "Trying to ram me?" "You howling fathead!" yelled the Bounder. "Do you want to sink us?"

broke off. All the Co. knew now what Wharton meant.

"Stacey knows what I mean!" said Harry. "Look at his face."

"You—you dare—" breathed Stacey. "You—you dare accuse me—"

"Oh, don't get on the high horse," said Wharton. "It doesn't suit a fellow who pinches another fellow's letter and steams it open to see whether there's money in it."

"Wharton!" gasped Bob. "For goodness' sake, take care what you say!" breathed Nugent. "Your own relation, old chap—"

"Yes, my own relation!" said Wharton bitterly. "The fellow my uncle rags me for not making friends with. The fellow who owes Joe Banks money on some rotten race, and who has pinched Mauleverer's letter, and made use of that fat idiot Bunter to do it—"

"It—it's impossible!" stammered Bob.

"Look at his face!"

"Let me pass!" Stacey's hands were clenched convulsively. "Let me pass, you bully, or—"

"Not till you've handed me Lord Mauleverer's letter, to be given back to him!" said Harry Wharton, between his teeth. "You're my relative, you scum, and a relative of mine is not going to be expelled from Greyfriars for stealing, if I can help it. Give me Mauly's letter, you cur!"

THE TENTH CHAPTER.

Out of Bounds!

"COKER!" squeaked Billy Bunter.

Coker of the Fifth heard, but he heeded not.

Horace James Coker, of the Fifth Form at Greyfriars, was far too great

a man to take any heed of a squeak from a junior in the Lower Fourth.

Besides, Coker was busy. He was getting his boat out, with the help of Potter and Greene. Or, to be more exact, he was bargaining about, giving Potter and Greene unnecessary trouble in getting the boat into the water.

"I say, Coker!" "For goodness' sake, shove the thing along, you men," said Coker. "I could handle it better without your help, I think. Let go!"

"Coker—" The boat slipped into the water. It sent up a wave which soaked Coker's trousers to the knees. He gave a howl.

"You clumsy asses!"

Potter winked at Greene. They had let go the boat, as bidden by the great Horace, rather suddenly. The result did not seem to please Coker.

"Look at my bags!" snorted Coker. "You bungling dummies! Look here—"

"I say, Coker—" persisted Bunter.

It was not a judicious moment for bothering Coker! Horace turned a fierce glare on the Owl of the Remove.

"I say, if you're going up the river, give me a lift, will you?" asked Bunter. "Only as far as Popper's Island."

Coker gazed at him. The unexampled cheek in a mere microbe of the Lower Fourth asking a Fifth Form man for a lift in his boat, rather took Coker's breath away.

"I say, my friends started without me, you see!" Bunter proceeded to explain. "They're picnicking on Popper's Island, and I'm left behind! Give me a lift as far as the island, like a good chap."

Coker did not answer. Words were futile, in the face of such cheek as this! He picked up an oar.

He jammed the end of that oar on Bunter!

Bump!

Bunter sat down.

He roared as he sat.

Having thus disposed of Bunter, Coker of the Fifth followed Potter and Greene into the boat, and pushed off from the raft.

"Beast!" roared Bunter. "Ow! Wow! Rotten beast! Yow-ow!"

The fat Owl staggered to his feet. As he did so, a hand dropped on his podgy shoulder, and he blinked round at Wingate of the Sixth.

There was a grim expression on Wingate's face. As head prefect, he had the responsibility of seeing that reckless juniors did not disregard the Head's stern decree that placed Popper's Island out of bounds. And he had been only a few yards from the short-sighted Owl of the Remove, when Billy Bunter made his request to Coker.

"Who's on Popper's Island, Bunter?" rapped Wingate.

"Oh dear!" gasped Bunter. "I—I didn't see you, Wingate—"

"You can see me now! Is anybody on Popper's Island this afternoon?"

"Oh! No! Not that I know of!" stammered Bunter. "I—I never asked Coker to give me a lift to Popper's Island, Wingate—"

"I heard you!"

"I—I—I mean, I was only jo-jig-joking!" stammered the fat Owl. "I—I wouldn't go out of bounds, of course, Wingate! I—I never thought of such a thing. I—I was only trying to pull Coker's leg!"

"And now you're trying to pull mine?"

"Yes—I mean no! Oh! No! I—I—"

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say, Wingate, leggo my shoulder! I—I want to ask Coker to give me a lift in his boat—not to Popper's Island, of course. Nobody's there."

"You don't know anything about a picnic on Popper's Island this afternoon?" inquired Wingate.

"Oh! No! I never heard Bob Cherry mention it to Nugent, and I never heard Nugent say—Yow-wow-wooop!"

Bunter gave a wild howl as a finger and thumb closed on his fat ear. Wingate compressed finger and thumb.

"Now cut!" he said.

"Ow! Wow!"

Bunter cut!

Wingate called to his chum, Gwynne of the Sixth. The two seniors had come down to the boathouse to take a boat out, intending to pull down to Friar-dale. Now the Greyfriars captain had decided to pull up the river instead to Popper's Island.

Which was annoying to Wingate, who did not want to spend an hour of his valuable time hunting after young rascals who ought to have known better than to go out of bounds. It was equally annoying to Gwynne, whose time was equally valuable.

So the two seniors were frowning as they pulled up the Sark, and had made up their minds that any juniors found in the forbidden precincts of Popper's Island should be sent direct to their Form-master for punishment.

"Oh crikey!" gasped Bunter, as he watched the senior boat go.

Bunter was dismayed. He had not intended at all to give the picnickers away; all Bunter wanted was to get a lift after them and join in the picnic.

He blinked round as Vernon-Smith and Tom Redwing came from the boat-house, carrying between them a light, handsome skiff that belonged to Smithy.

"I say, Smithy—" gasped Bunter.

"Gerrouit of the way, fatty!" answered the Bounder.

"I say, you fellows, you could beat Wingate in that skiff!" said the fat Owl eagerly. "I say, he's gone after some fellows on Popper's Island—"

"Remove fellows?" asked the Bounder.

"Wharton's crowd."

"Oh! Buck up, Reddy!" said Vernon-Smith; and the skiff slid into the water, and the two juniors sculled up the river at a great rate.

Wingate and Gwynne were ahead; but they were not hurrying. Smithy's swift skiff would doubtless have beaten them to Popper's Island, had not Coker of the Fifth been on the river that afternoon.

Coker was sitting at the lines while his friends pulled. He was giving Potter and Greene some valuable tips on the subject of rowing. So far from being grateful for these tips, Potter and Greene seemed to be getting into a goaded state. That was not an uncommon result of instructions from Horace Coker.

"Don't dig up the river, Potter!"

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said Coker. "And look here, Greeney, that ear isn't a flag—don't wave it about like one! Can't you fellows pull? Don't you know the first thing about rowing? Can't you—urrrrgh! You silly idiot, Potter, you're drenching me!"

Potter's ear had sent up quite a water-spout, perhaps by accident. Or perhaps, on the other hand, it was not by accident.

Anyhow, Coker was wet!

"You clumsy ass!" roared Coker. "Do you want to drown a chap?"

"Did you get splashed?" asked Potter innocently.

"Look at me!" howled Coker.

He dabbed his wet face with his handkerchief. To do that, he had to release the lines.

"Look out!" exclaimed Greene. "There's a boat just behind—"

"Blow it!" snapped Coker.

Wingate and Gwynne pulled round the Fifth Form boat. The Greyfriars captain made some remarks as he passed.

"If you Fifth Form men can't handle a boat, you'd better get out and walk!" he said. "You can't flounder all over the river like that!"

"Cheeky ass!" said Coker, not, however till the Sixth Form men had pulled on. "Still, I must say you fellows deserve it! For goodness' sake pull, and try to keep time, and try not to splash the river all over Kent and the next county."

Potter and Greene pulled, suppressing their feelings. From astern the Bounder's skiff came shooting on.

It was at this moment that Coker released one of the lines to give his damp face another dab. Unintentionally he jerked at the other. The Fifth Form boat shot athwart the river, and there was a frantic yell from the Bounder as it surged across his bows.

Bump!

The two boats rocked together. Coker stared round.

"You clumsy young asses! Trying to ram me?" he roared. "Can't you steer clear, you thundering little idiots?"

"You howling fathead!" yelled the Bounder. "Do you want to sink us? Haven't you the sense of a bunny rabbit?"

"By gum! I'll jolly well—"

Coker jumped to his feet. He grabbed a boat-hook.

What he was going to do with that boat-hook, Smithy did not stop to inquire. He swung round his scull, and it clumped on the side of Horace Coker's bullet head.

Crash!

Coker landed headlong across the gunwale of his boat, his head dipping in the water. The boat rocked wildly, dipping rowlock under. There was a rush of water that gave Potter and Greene's flannel bags an unnecessary wash. They yelled.

"Urrrgh!" Coker's head was lifted from the Sark. "Yurrrgh! What—urrrgh! I'll spifficate 'em! Gurrgh!"

The boats were rocking apart. Six feet of space separated them when Coker bounded at Smithy's skiff. The space widened as he did so, and he dropped into the Sark, clutching at the gunwale.

"Oh, my hat!" gasped Redwing.

"Knock him off!" shouted the Bounder.

"Hold on—that idiot can't swim for toffee!" exclaimed Redwing.

Potter and Greene were pulling. As Coker was hanging on to the junior skiff he was in no danger, and to Potter and Greene this was quite a windfall. A pull up the Sark in Coker's boat, in the bright June

weather, was quite enjoyable—but only if Coker wasn't in the boat! Now Coker wasn't!

So they pulled on regardless.

The Bounder yelled after them.

"Come back and pick up your lunatic, blow you!"

Potter and Greene exchanged a smile, and tugged at the oars. Coker was left clinging to the skiff.

He was trying to clamber in, his fixed intention being to spifficate the cheeky juniors. The skiff almost cap-sized under his weight. Smithy and Redwing pulled in to the bank, dragging Coker through the water.

"Now clear!" hooted the Bounder.

Instead of clearing, Coker clambered. Vernon-Smith grabbed up a boat-hook. He delivered a jab.

There was a fearful yell from Coker.

"Yaroo! I'll—whoop!"

"Have another?" grinned Smithy.

"I'll—yaroooooooh!" yelled Coker, as he got another. He let go and scrambled through the bulrushes up the bank.

There he stood, drenched and dripping, shaking an infuriated fist after the two juniors, as they pulled on up the Sark.

He soon disappeared behind, as they pulled swiftly on. But too much time had been lost, and when they sighted Popper's Island, it was only to see Wingate and Gwynne tying up at the willows and stepping ashore there.

THE ELEVENTH CHAPTER.

Unexpected!

RALPH STACEY stood as if rooted to the earth, his face white, his eyes burning.

Wharton stood directly in his path, and the other members of the Co. had gathered round him. Even yet the Co. could hardly believe that Wharton was right; that the missing letter was in the keeping of the white-faced fellow who stood in their midst, glaring round him like a hunted animal. Yet the look on Stacey's face was hardly to be mistaken. He did not speak, but he panted for breath as he stood.

"You hear me, Stacey?" Wharton's voice was low and determined. "You're not leaving this island till you've handed over Mauleverer's letter. Then you can go as soon as you like, and a good riddance to you. But you'll part with Mauly's letter first."

Stacey drew a deep, deep breath.

Wharton knew—and the other fellows were convinced now. Every face round him was grim and contemptuous. He was powerless to resist, if they chose to make him turn out his pockets. And the opened letter, and the bank-note were there!

They were not likely to believe that he had changed his intention—that, with the plunder in his hands, he had resolved to avoid the pitfall, and return what he had taken! Even if they believed it, they would know that he had taken the letter and opened it! Anything rather than that!

He made a sudden spring.

To knock Wharton out of his way—to reach his boat before the other fellows could grab him—to leap into it and get afloat—that was his desperate idea. But Wharton was watching him in expectation of precisely such an attempt.

He stood like a rock and met Stacey with his hands up. In a twinkling they were fighting fiercely.

"Oh, my hat!" murmured Bob Cherry.

"Collar him!" growled Johnny Bull. "This isn't a matter for scrapping—if he's got Mauly's letter on him, he's got to give it up."

"Yes, rather!" said Frank Nugent. "Collar the esteemed and rotten rascal!" exclaimed Hurree Jamset Ram Singh.

Stacey was fighting like a wildcat to get clear of Wharton. So fierce was his attack that Harry gave ground before it, though still facing him grimly. But the Co. closed in on Stacey and grasped him.

"Chuck it, you fool!" growled Bob. "You've got to give up the letter—Oh!" He gave a yell as Stacey's fist crashed in his face.

The desperate fellow struggled madly in five pairs of hands. He had no chance—not the ghost of a chance—but he was strong, sturdy, and mad with rage and terror. For several minutes the Famous Five had their hands full with him.

Then he went with a bump into the grass, and was held there. He panted for breath, still struggling.

"Now!" said Harry Wharton.

There was a tramping and a rustling and two Sixth Form men came through the thickets. In the excitement of the struggle, none of the fellows on the island had noticed the arrival of the Sixth Form boat.

"Oh! Here they are!" exclaimed Wingate. "What the thump—scrapping! Stop that at once, you young ruffians!"

"Oh, my hat!" ejaculated Bob in dismay.

The appearance of the two Greyfriars prefects was utterly unexpected. The Famous Five released Stacey, who lay panting in the grass, crimson with exertion, and streaming with perspiration. He had been at his last gasp when the prefects appeared.

Wingate gave the juniors a grim look.

"What does this mean?" he snapped. "I've found the lot of you here, out of school bounds—but what does this mean? Is this what you call fair play in the Remove—five piling on to one?"

Gwynne gave the panting Stacey a hand up. He leaned on the big oak, gasping, gurgling, almost sobbing for breath.

Wharton set his lips.

"Stacey knows why we were handling him," he said. "He can tell you, if he likes, Wingate."

The Greyfriars captain gave an angry grunt.

"You two are always rowing," he snapped, "and I've got a pretty clear idea that it's generally your fault, Wharton! Quelch thinks so, too."

Wharton's lip curled.

"Very likely," he answered.

"But—"

"That's enough! You're here out of bounds," growled Wingate. "The lot of you will go back to Greyfriars at once, and report yourselves to Mr. Quelch. Get going!"

The Famous Five looked at one another rather uncertainly. They did not want to bring the matter of the purloined letter officially before a prefect. On the other hand, they were not going to leave it in Stacey's possession.

"Do you hear me?" roared Wingate. "You can leave that basket here, and that kettle and stove, too! They'll be confiscated! You'll take yourselves off—and nothing else! And take yourselves off at once!"

There was no help for it. The juniors went down the little path from the glade to the landing-place of the

island. Wingate followed them, with a frowning brow, to see them clear of the property of Sir Hilton Popper.

Stacey stepped into his boat, and pushed off by himself. The Famous Five crowded into their roomy old boat and followed.

The letter was still in Stacey's possession. But they did not intend to lose sight of him till it was handed over.

Stacey pulled away down the current, in the direction of the school. The Famous Five followed, the nose of their boat hardly a couple of yards from his.

He put on steam, but it was useless to attempt to pull away from a boat manned by five, and he gave it up and settled down to let the chums of the Remove shadow him.

"Hallo, you fellows!" The Bounder's voice hailed them on the river. "Did the prefects get you?"

"The getfulness was terrific, my esteemed and absurd Smithy!" answered Hurree Jamset Ram Singh.

"Was Stacey with you?" asked Vernon-Smith in astonishment.

But he received no answer to that

question, as the chums of the Remove pulled on after Stacey's boat.

The Bounder stared after them.

"Something's up!" he remarked to Redwing.

Redwing nodded. It was plain that something was "up," though they could not guess what it was.

Stacey pulled on steadily down the stream. The boathouse of Greyfriars came in sight in the distance, as he glanced round.

He stared at the pursuing boat with gleaming eyes. It was impossible to get away by pulling, and the Famous Five would land on the school raft as soon as he did. But Stacey had been thinking—hard!

Suddenly he swerved from his course and shot towards the bank.

Taken off their guard by that sudden move, the Famous Five, pulling on, passed him. Stacey's boat shot at the bank under the towpath.

"After him!" shouted Bob.

Hardly a few moments were lost before the Famous Five swung round in pursuit. But in those few moments

(Continued on next page.)

GREYFRIARS INTERVIEWS

Once more our clever Greyfriars Rhymester bursts into verse, and this time his subject is

ARTHUR CARNE,

the rascally prefect of the Sixth.

(1)

Now Carne is a dog and a blade,
A very unpopular chap;
He shows off his paces at billiards and races
And likes playing banker and nap.
Moreover, he cheats, I'm afraid,
I've reason to think it's a fact!
Like Walker and Loder, his name's in
bad odour,
And one day he's bound to be sacked!

(3)

I met a kind person named Banks,
Who heartily welcomed me in,
And told me to wager my shirt on The
Major,
A horse which was certain to win!
I made my expressions of thanks,
But somehow felt bound to refuse.
"The horse you commended," I told
him, "is splendid,
And practically certain—to lose!"



(6)

I fancy my chances at nap!
I'm quite a good player, you know!
I played just to make him quite stony
and break him,
And then I intended to go!
But somehow, I fear, 'twas a trap!
The plan seemed to work in reverse.
The longer I played him, the richer I
made him,
Until I was stony—and worse!



(2)

I rolled up to see him and found
He was out, and I didn't know where!
But hosts of well-wishers said: "Try
the Three Fishers!
Most likely you'll find he is there!"
This hint I considered was sound;
I wandered down Friardale Lane,
And shuddered at knocking at places so
shocking,
But did so—nor did so in vain!

(4)

I came across Carne playing nap,
With Jolliffe and Loder and Cobb.
He sat in high feather—he'd won alto-
gether
Some sixteen or seventeen bob!
He said: "Take a hand, my dear chap!
Who cares for what purpose you
came?
Blow talking and chinning, sit down and
start winning,
There's plenty more room in the
game!"

(5)

Now the fact is that gambling is
wrong:
You know that quite well—so do I!
I'd no more consider myself as a bidder
Than eat my own headgear, or fly!
But Carne had been winning too long,
'Twas time that was altered, I
knew,
So I said I was willing to put down a
shilling
And play for a minute or two.



(7)

I rose with a woebegone face,
I'd wagered my last half-a-crown!
No money, not any for fares, not a
penny!
I found I must walk back to town.
I mournfully quitted the place,
My feet were soon blistered and sore,
And I vowed that whatever occurred, I
would never,
No, NEVER play nap any more!

Stacey's boat jammed into the bank of the Sark, and with a flying leap he gained the towpath.

He did not even linger to tie up the boat. His leap sent it rocking out from the bank, and he did not heed it, or give it a glance. He crossed the towpath like lightning and disappeared into the wood that bordered it.

He had vanished before the Famous Five's boat bumped on the bank. Harry Wharton, his teeth set, leaped ashore and rushed across the towpath to the trees. But it was useless. Stacey was gone.

THE TWELFTH CHAPTER.

Stacey Covers His Tracks!

"COME in, Stacey!"

"Tea, old bean!"

Russell and Ogilvy called out together as the new junior passed the open doorway of Study No. 3, in the Remove passage.

Stacey was a little breathless, but quite cool.

Whether Harry Wharton & Co. had pursued him in the wood or not, he did not know, and did not care. He had seen nothing of them at all events. He had dodged swiftly through the wood, and got back to the school at a rapid trot. According to Wingate's order he had to report himself to his Form-master; but that had to wait. The purloined letter had to be dealt with first.

He glanced in at Study No. 3 where Ogilvy and Russell were getting tea. He gave them a nod and a smile.

"I'm ready for tea," he said. "I've had a pull up the river and brought back a jolly good appetite. I've got to speak to Squiff, though—I'll be back in a few ticks."

He went up the passage.

But he did not go to Study No. 14, which was Squiff's study. He stopped at Study No. 7, which belonged to Billy Bunter, Peter Todd, and Tom Dutton. Toddy and Dutton, he knew, were on the river—he had seen them in a boat. Billy Bunter he had spotted in the quad as he came in. Study No. 7 was vacant which suited his purpose admirably.

Fisher T. Fish was coming down the passage. Stacey, pausing at the door of Study No. 7, affected to be tying a shoe-lace till the American junior had passed on and gone. Then for the moment the passage was empty, and he swiftly opened the door of Study No. 7, stepped in, and closed it behind him.

He breathed hard and fast.

He was safe for a few minutes at last. A few minutes were all that he required.

He whipped the banknote and the letter out of the pockets of his blazer, and folded the former inside the latter. It remained now only to seal the envelope. He damped the gum on the flap, and pressed it down carefully, laying it on the table and pressing it with his folded handkerchief, to fasten it without a mark or a crease.

Then he gave a quick look round the study.

A shabby jacket belonging to Billy Bunter hung over the back of the arm-chair.

A grubby handkerchief protruded from one pocket. The fat Owl of the Remove had gone out in his blazer, to join the picnickers on Popper's Island, leaving his jacket in the study.

Stacey's eyes gleamed at it.

That was the jacket Bunter had been wearing that morning when the letter was "lost." Luck was going his way now.

Quickly he shoved the letter into the

pocket and jammed the grubby handkerchief in after it.

He grinned breathlessly.

He was clear now—and sooner or later Bunter would discover that letter in his pocket—apparently unopened. What would become of Harry Wharton's suspicions then?

Even Bunter, when he found Mauly's letter in his pocket would wonder whether he really had dropped it, or whether he had put it into his pocket and forgotten all about it.

Other fellows, of course, could only believe that it had been there all the time. Bunter had taken it in the first place, and there was no proof that it had ever been in any but his fat hands.

All Stacey had to do now was to get clear of Study No. 7 unseen, before a crowd of fellows came up to tea.

He stepped to the door and listened.

There was a sound of footsteps in the passage. He waited till they passed on and all was silent again.

Then he opened the door a few inches and peered out.

No one was in sight.

He slipped out of the study and once outside, strolled casually down the passage his hands in his pockets.

From Study No. 3 came an attractive aroma of frying sausages. Stacey looked in, but he did not enter.

"Know whether Quelch is in the House, Oggy?" he asked.

"In his study!" said Russell. "At least, he was when I took in my lines, about a quarter of an hour ago."

"I've got to see him."

"Oh, blow Quelch!" said Ogilvy. "Sit down and have some sosses!"

"I've got to see him. I've been spotted out of bounds, and got to report myself."

"You!" exclaimed the two juniors together.

"Yes—I landed on Popper's Island, to have a look at the place, and Wingate barged in. Wharton's gang came there to picnic, and he was after them, so he got me, too!"

"Rotten luck!" said Russell.

"Yes, isn't it?"

Stacey went down the stairs. He looked round for the Famous Five, but saw nothing of them as he made his way to the Remove master's study.

Mr. Quelch gave him a kind nod as he entered. He was always pleased to see that dutiful head boy.

"What is it, Stacey?" he asked benevolently.

"Wingate has ordered me to report to you, sir!" said Stacey meekly.

Mr. Quelch raised his eyebrows. Then he smiled slightly.

"I don't think you can have been doing anything very wrong, Stacey. But what is it?"

"I went up the river, sir, after class, and like an ass, landed on Popper's Island to look at the place—"

Mr. Quelch's brow became grave.

"You should not have done so, Stacey. You are aware that the island is out of school bounds, and you are my head boy."

"I know, sir!" said Stacey humbly. "I'm not making excuses. Some fellows told me about a man who was wanted by the police, who had hidden in the oak on the island, before I came to Greyfriars, and I was rather curious to look at the spot. I forgot just for the moment about bounds. I shouldn't have been on the island more than a few minutes, only it happened that some fellows came there to picnic and Wingate caught them and—"

"I understand. You were not one of the picnickers?"

"Oh, no, sir! It was just out of curiosity—"

"Well, well, Stacey you certainly should not have done so, but it is not a very serious matter," said Mr. Quelch benevolently. "I can quite understand your wish to look at a spot where some exciting events happened before you came to Greyfriars. Don't let it occur again, Stacey."

"Certainly not, sir."

"Very well; we will say no more about it!" said the Remove master, and he dismissed Stacey with a nod.

Stacey left his Form-master's study. He was in quite a cheery mood as he went up to the Remove passage to tea.

For the time his trouble with Mr. Banks was relegated to the back of his mind, in his satisfaction at having got clear of a trouble which, as he had realised on Popper's Island, would have been very much worse.

Mr. Quelch was left with a benevolent smile on his face. He did not expect his excellent head boy to be faultless. If Stacey's worst fault was yielding to a harmless curiosity, to glance at a spot where something had happened before he came, there was not much to complain of in him!

But the Remove master looked a good deal less benevolent when five juniors presented themselves, about a quarter of an hour later, and stated that Wingate had sent them in to report.

Mr. Quelch frowned portentously.

"This is a very serious matter!" he snapped. "You are well aware that the headmaster has been troubled on many occasions by complaints from Sir Hilton Popper about Greyfriars boys landing on his island. He is especially annoyed by picnics taking place there."

The Famous Five stood silent, wondering whether it would be lines or a licking. Perhaps it was because he had dealt so very leniently with Stacey that Mr. Quelch decided on the former.

"You will take one hundred lines each!" he said. "The impositions must be brought to me to-morrow! You may go!"

The chums of the Remove left the study.

"I wonder whether Stacey's got lines," remarked Harry Wharton, with a curl of his lip.

"Rely on it; he's pulled Quelch's leg somehow, and got off," growled Johnny Bull. "He twists Quelch round his finger. What about that letter? Stacey's in. Bunter said he came in half an hour ago."

Wharton shrugged his shoulders.

"The letter's not on him now—you can bet on that! He dodged us to get rid of it, of course. He's beaten us."

"Then what can we do?" asked Nugent.

"Nothing!"

And the Famous Five, not in their brightest mood, went along to Hall to tea.

THE THIRTEENTH CHAPTER.

In Whose Hands?

BILLY BUNTER, in class the following morning, wore a very thoughtful look.

He was not thinking of his construe, or the scaring remarks Mr. Quelch had made on the same.

More important matters occupied Bunter's fat mind.

He was thinking of the lost letter.

Mauleverer, or any other fellow, might have lost a whole post office full of letters without Bunter troubling his fat mind about it, but for one or two important considerations.

It was practically a certainty that



"Urrgh! Leggo!" roared Bunter. "I say, old chap—leggo, you beast—yooogh! Urrgh!" Stacey, holding Bunter by the back of the neck, proceeded to rub his features among the grass roots, while his slim fingers groped hurriedly in the fat junior's pocket.

there was a remittance in that letter. And Bunter, still disappointed about a postal order, was still in hope of picking up a crumb from the rich man's table. And Lord Mauleverer, usually the best-tempered fellow in the Remove, was quite crusty about that lost letter, and had kicked Bunter several times, and promised to kick him again whenever he came across him.

It was frightfully unjust and ungrateful, of course. Bunter felt, bitterly, that it did not pay to be an obliging fellow—taking letters to a chap who was too lazy to collect them for himself. Bunter hated being kicked.

Often as he had been kicked, he had never grown to like it. It was not like old Mauly to cut up rusty like this. Bunter might have expected it of a fellow like the Bounder—not from old Mauly.

But for these considerations Bunter would have dismissed the affair of the lost letter cheerfully from his mind. Now he could not dismiss it.

He pondered over it; and the more he pondered over it, the more amazing the disappearance of that letter seemed to him.

How could a letter get lost in the Remove passage? It simply couldn't! Even if nobody saw it there and picked it up, it was bound to turn up when the passage was swept by the maids. It wasn't as if a fellow had dropped it out of doors.

Compelled to think the matter out, Billy Bunter came to the inevitable conclusion that the letter had been picked up. Some fellow in the Remove had picked it up. It seemed certain to Bunter—now that he thought it out.

Who—was the question? Whoever had bagged it, he had not handed it to Mauly, as any fellow might have been expected naturally to do. Some fellow was keeping it back.

As the letter bore Lord Mauleverer's name, plainly written, there could be

no doubt about the owner. The fellow, whoever he was, ought to have handed it to Mauly. At the very least he ought to have stuck it in the rack again, to be taken by the owner. Why hadn't he?

When the Remove were dismissed in break that morning, Billy Bunter rolled along to the rack to see whether Mauly's letter was there. Other fellows, coming along to look for correspondence, grinned at the sight of the fat Owl scanning the rack anxiously through his big spectacles.

"Expecting a postal order, old bean?" asked Skinner. "Lord Bunter de Grunter has forgotten you again."

"None for you, old fat man!" said Bob Cherry.

"I say, you fellows, is there one for Mauly?" asked Bunter.

"You fat villain!" roared Bob. "Aren't you fed-up with meddling with other fellows' letters yet?"

"Oh, really, Cherry—"

"Kick him!" said Johnny Bull.

"Beast! I say, you fellows, are you sure Mauly's letter isn't there? I thought it might have been put in the rack again by the fellow who found it."

"What's that?" asked Skinner. "That ass, Mauly, lost a letter! He's always losing something!"

The Famous Five exchanged glances. So far, nothing had been said in public about the lost letter. It was for Lord Mauleverer to take any action in the matter that he saw fit. And so far, his lordship had taken no action, except to the extent of kicking Bunter.

Harry Wharton & Co. had no doubt what had become of the letter. They believed that Mauly had no doubt, either. They were assured that, but for Wingate's interruption, they would have found the lost letter on Stacey the previous day at Popper's Island. But what he had done with it since they had not, of course, the remotest idea.

Now it was plain the affair was coming to general knowledge. It was useless for other fellows to keep quiet, unless Billy Bunter could be permanently gagged, which, of course, was impossible.

"Where did Mauly lose his letter, Bunter?" asked two or three voices.

"In the Remove passage," answered Bunter.

"Ret!" said Vernon-Smith. "A letter couldn't be lost in the Remove passage. Somebody would have seen it."

"Well, that's what I thought," explained the fat Owl. "Somebody must have picked it up, and, as he hasn't given it back to Mauly, I thought he might have put it back in the rack."

"It's not here," said Skinner.

"Well, you see, it ought to be found, as there's money in it," said Bunter. "That beast Mauly keeps on kicking me because it's lost!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Blessed if I see anything to cackle at!" exclaimed Bunter indignantly. "I'd jolly well knock Mauly down, only he's a pal of mine, you know. It was just to oblige him that I took the letter up to the studies yesterday, and I suppose I couldn't help that beast Stacey barging me over, and making me drop it."

"So it was you who lost it?" grinned Skinner.

"Well, I dropped it," said Bunter. "But a letter couldn't lie about the Remove passage for twenty-four hours without somebody seeing it—that stands to reason. Mauly was expecting a tip from his uncle in that letter—most likely a banknote. And it's lost!"

"Looked for it?" grinned Skinner.

"I've looked everywhere—"

"Looked in your pockets?" asked another voice. Stacey came up and joined the group of juniors.

Bunter blinked round at him with a

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devastating blink through his big spectacles, his fat face red with wrath.

"You rotter!" he bawled. "Mean to say you think I've pinched Mauly's letter?"

Stacey laughed.

"No; I don't think that," he answered. "But you're fool enough to stick it in your pocket, and forget what you did with it."

Harry Wharton breathed hard.

"Let's get out of this, you fellows," he muttered. "That chap makes me sick."

And the Famous Five went into the quadrangle.

Stacey glanced after them with a sarcastic sneer on his face. He knew perfectly well what was in their thoughts. He would have been glad for the lost letter to turn up in Bunter's pocket, in their presence. Wharton's face would have been worth watching.

"I never put it in my pocket at all!" roared Bunter. "You jolly well know I didn't, Stacey."

"How should I know what you did with it, you fat ass?"

"It was in my hand when you barged me over, and you jolly well know it!" hooted Bunter. "You must have seen it drop, too. It was gone when I looked for it, and you wouldn't help me."

"I never saw anything of it."

Vernon-Smith, who had taken down a letter, was turning away. But he turned back now and fixed a keen, sharp look on Stacey. Stacey avoided his eyes; but he felt the Bounder's searching glance on him.

"It's jolly queer that Mauly's letter's never turned up, if it was dropped in our passage," remarked Tom Brown. "It must have been found."

"Bunter was the last who saw it alive," grinned Skinner. "I'd take him to Quelch if it was my letter."

"Beast!" roared Bunter. "I tell you some fellow has picked up that letter, and he's jolly well keeping it."

"That's rubbish!" said Tom Brown sharply.

"Well, where is it, then?" demanded Bunter.

"That's for you to explain," said Stacey. "You had it—and nobody else

had! Look through your pockets, you fat duffer, and ten to one you'll find it there."

"You silly ass!" hooted Bunter. "As if I shouldn't know whether it was in my pocket or not! I jolly well shouldn't wonder if you had it, Stacey! You were the only fellow in the passage when I dropped it, and it was gone when I looked for it, and—Yaroooh! Leave off kicking me, you beast! Wow!"

Billy Bunter departed in haste.

The Bounder, with a very peculiar look at Stacey, went out into the quad. He glanced round, spotted Lord Mauleverer in a shady spot, and crossed to him.

"Who pinched your letter, Mauly?" he asked abruptly.

Lord Mauleverer gazed at him.

"Nobody I hope," he answered.

"Never mind what you hope!" jeered the Bounder. "Bunter's not got it; he wouldn't be giving a song and dance about it if he had. Who's got it?"

"Ask me another."

"Why aren't you making a fuss about it? Any other fellow would."

"Weather's too warm to make a fuss about anythin', dear man."

"Don't be an ass!"

"Can't help it," sighed Mauly. "Asses are like jolly old poets—born, not made. Is that Redwing callin' you, Smithy?"

"Never mind Reddy, if he is. You can't lose a letter, especially if there's money in it, as Bunter thinks. You ought to speak to Quelch."

"I don't like talkin' to Quelch; he's no conversationalist."

"You mean," said Herbert Vernon-Smith quietly, "that you know what's become of your letter, and you're goin' to let it rip because you won't bring disgrace on a fellow you like by showin' up his relation."

"Look at the pigeons, Smithy."

"The pigeons?"

"Yaas! They're frightfully interestin', hoppin' about, enjoyin' their little lives," said Lord Mauleverer innocently.

The Bounder grunted and left him. Whatever might be in Mauly's noble

mind on the subject of that lost letter, it was clear that he was not going to confide it to the Bounder.

THE FOURTEENTH CHAPTER.

The End of his Tether!

STACEY was chatting with Ogilvy and Russell in the quad after class, when his eyes suddenly fixed on Billy Bunter.

Bunter's eyes—and spectacles—were, as it happened, fixed on him.

Bunter had been doing some more thinking.

Thinking was not really in Bunter's line at all; he got through his fat existence with very little of it. But the fat Owl was fairly driven to it now.

Since he had babbled on the subject of the lost letter all the Remove had heard of it, and the general opinion in the Remove was that Billy Bunter still had that letter.

It was certain that it could not still be lying about the Remove passage. Hardly anybody supposed that a fellow who picked it up would keep it. So Bunter still had it!

Either he had forgotten what he had done with it—which would have been very like Bunter—or else he was intentionally keeping it back. Most of the fellows made up their minds about that.

Which was intensely irritating and annoying to Billy Bunter. Bunter was far from scrupulous in dealing with other fellows' letters, but he had his limit—and most decidedly he would not have "pinched" a letter. And the more Bunter thought the matter over the more it seemed to him that it was Stacey, and no other, who had picked up the letter. What had struck Harry Wharton when he first heard of the matter had taken twenty-four hours or so to strike Bunter—but it struck him at last.

Stacey had it!

Hence the fact that Bunter was keeping a pair of eyes and a pair of spectacles on Stacey. He was going to find out if he could what Stacey had done with Mauly's letter.

Stacey, quite unconscious of the fact that Bunter was watching him, watched Bunter—owing to a very simple circumstance. It was a hot summer's afternoon, and Bunter's fat face was spotted with perspiration. Naturally, he took out his handkerchief to wipe that fat face.

It was that that interested Stacey.

It seemed impossible that a fellow could take his handkerchief from his pocket and replace it without discovering a letter that had been crammed into the same pocket.

And Stacey noticed another circumstance. Bunter's handkerchief was not so grubby as it had been the day before. He had had a clean one.

He could not have changed his hanky without inserting his fat paw in the pocket. Yet it seemed that he had not found the letter!

Now, as Bunter mopped his heated visage, Stacey watched him, wondering whether the letter would come to light. Russell and Ogilvy noted his gaze and looked round at Bunter.

Stacey forced a laugh.

"Bunter's got a clean hanky," he remarked. "Wonders will never cease!" And his companions laughed.

Having mopped his fat face, Bunter pushed the handkerchief back into his pocket. It seemed incredible that he could do so without feeling the letter there. But he gave no sign of being aware of it.

Stacey set his lips.

REBELS OF PACKSADDLE!



by famous

FRANK RICHARDS

O It's a man-sized job to run the rough and tough bunch of Packsaddle School, Texas, and Mr. Scadder, the new headmaster appointed in place of the popular cowboy head who has been sacked, discovers that it's several sizes too large for him when the boys get out of hand. Here's a thrilling story of western school adventure that every MAGNET reader will thoroughly enjoy. It appears in to-day's issue of

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In planting the lost letter on Bunter he had taken it for granted that it would come to light in a few hours at the most. But it had not come to light.

A day had passed, and it was still undiscovered. That was utterly unexpected and intensely annoying, as the topic was now talked of up and down the Remove. Stacey wanted to hear the end of it, but he was not likely to hear the end of it so long as Mauly's letter was missing.

"Coming down to the nets?" asked Ogilvy.

"No; I'll join you fellows later," said Stacey, and he left his companions and walked out of gates.

It did not occur to him that a fat figure with suspicious eyes behind a big pair of spectacles rolled after him.

He walked down the lane to Friardale. After him rolled Bunter.

The fat Owl had set himself the task of keeping an eye on Stacey. But alas for Bunter! Stacey walked quickly, and half-way to the village the fat shadower was tired and winded.

He sat down on the step of a stile to rest, gasping for breath, and his quarry disappeared from his sight.

Quite unaware of Bunter's shadowing, Stacey went into the village and stopped at the post office. There he went into the telephone-box, after making sure that nobody belonging to Greyfriars was at hand.

Mr. Quelch, had he been able to overhear, would have been astonished at the number Stacey gave. It was the number of the Three Fishers.

When a voice came through Stacey asked for Joe Banks. A minute later he heard the husky tones of the racing man.

"Ho! You, is it?" came Joe's grunt. "Well, I don't want to 'ear you on the phone, Mr. Stacey. I want to see you with eight quids in your 'and—that's what I want!"

"I shall have to ask you to wait a bit," said Stacey. His heart was beating painfully. "I hope in a few days—"

"Few days be blowed!" interrupted Mr. Banks. "Did you back Pork Pie at Wapshot, or didn't you? Did you back him on the nod, or not? Did you give me your I O U for eight pounds, or did you not, Mr. Stacey? More'n a week ago, and I ain't seed hide or hair of you! And a covey I takes for you pitches me into the blooming river—"

"Keep clear of the school, for goodness' sake!"

"Keep clear of the school, says you!" retorted Mr. Banks. "Well, I can tell you this, young feller-me-lad, I ain't keeping clear of no school! You're a young welsher, you are! You'd have took your winnings fast enough if that 'orse had got home! Me took in by a schoolboy at my time of life!" His voice came in a deep growl of anger. "You're a young swindler—that's wot you are!"

Stacey's face whitened. He had to take this kind of talk from a beery, disreputable racing man; that was the result of his misdeeds.

"Look here, Banks," he breathed, "I tell you, in a few days— You'll have to give me time—"

"And you look 'ere," said Mr. Banks, "I comes along to speak to you, and that blooming relation of yours barges me into the river! I crawls 'ome wet to the skin and smothered with mud!"

"That wasn't my fault—"

"It wouldn't have 'appened if you'd squared like you promised. And I'll tell you this, young feller-me-lad, if I don't see you 'ere and if I don't get what's my doo I'm coming right up to the school. Your I O U ain't worth

nothing to me, and I'm going to make a present of it to your 'eadmaster! So you put that in your pipe and smoke it, you young rascal you!"

"Give me a little time—"

"I'll give you till to-morrow!" answered Mr. Banks. "That's the very latest. Arter that—look out!"

"For goodness' sake—"

"That's enough!"

"Mr. Banks—"

But there came no answer; the sharper at the Three Fishers had rung off.

Stacey left the post office with a white face. What Banks had said was true—he was a young swindler. He had "backed his fancy" without the means to pay if he lost, and it was not surprising that Joe Banks was intensely exasperated at being "done" by a junior schoolboy. Stacey had asked for time; but, given time, he had no prospect of raising the money. He was simply trying to stave off the crash, with a vague hope that something might turn up. What was he going to do?

Tramping back down Friardale Lane towards the school, his hands driven deep into his pockets, black care in his face, something like despair in his heart, he spotted a fat figure in the grass by the wayside under the shade of the trees.

And he stopped—and fixed his eyes on Billy Bunter!

THE FIFTEENTH CHAPTER.

Nothing Doing!

BILLY BUNTER blinked up at him.

The fat junior was sitting in the grass, his back to the trunk of a tree, resting his weary fat limbs.

He gave Stacey a very inimical blink.

Stacey, stopping, glared at him. Startling thoughts were passing through his mind. Bunter, it was clear, had not found the letter; letter and banknote were, it seemed, still where Stacey had concealed them—under the grubby handkerchief in his jacket pocket.

The day before, on Popper's Island, Stacey had had that tenner in his hands, and had recoiled with horror from the thought of keeping it.

Now, with Joe Banks' threat ringing in his ears, his mind swayed again. He knew that the exasperated sharper would keep his word. Unless the man was paid, he would give him away to his headmaster! And Stacey's I O U was proof positive of the transaction; lying cost him nothing, but lying could not save him.

He was done for at Greyfriars—done for at Wharton Lodge! After all his scheming, all his trickery, all his treachery, he was hopelessly done-for! He was going to be expelled in disgrace!

Even that was better than becoming a thief. It had been clear enough to him the day before. Now, harassed and terrified, it did not seem so clear to him. Stacey was desperate.

He stepped into the grass beside the road, with a look in his eyes that startled Bunter.

"Here, you keep off, you beast!" exclaimed the fat Owl. "I wasn't following you, you know! I wasn't keeping an eye on you! Nothing of the sort! I—I came this way by sheer chance."

"You fat fool!" muttered Stacey.

"Beast!"

Stacey eyed him. How to get that hidden letter out of the fat Owl's pocket again, without Bunter's knowledge—

that was his problem! He had made up his mind to get it.

"So you followed me?" he muttered.

"Oh, no! Nothing of the kind! The fact is, I—I don't think you pinched Mauly's letter, old chap!" said Bunter. "Look here, you keep off!"

Bunter jumped to his feet; the expression on Stacey's face was alarming. The new junior grasped him by the collar.

"Ow! Leggo!" roared Bunter.

Bump!

Bunter went down in the grass, plunging his fat face among the roots. He gave a muffled roar.

"Urrgh! Leggo! I say, old chap— Leggo, you beast! Yooogh! Urrgh!"

Stacey, holding him by the back of the neck, proceeded to rub his fat features among the grass roots, to the accompaniment of a series of horrible gurgles from Bunter.

That process of friction on his podgy features fully occupied the fat Owl's attention, and he was quite unaware that Ralph Stacey, with his left hand, jerked the handkerchief from his pocket.

The handkerchief removed, Stacey's slim fingers groped hurriedly in the pocket.

As Bunter had not found the hidden letter there, Stacey naturally expected to find it where he had placed it.

But his seeking fingers did not come into contact with anything in the shape of a letter.

Groping farther, while he continued to ram Bunter's face into the grass, he made a startling discovery.

His fingers encountered a slit in the lining of the pocket.

He had not, naturally, noticed that in slipping the letter into that pocket the previous day. But now he groped in the pocket for the letter he discovered it.

He felt sick at heart.

The letter was gone!

He had been astonished that Bunter had not already found it there. But that was easily explained now. It had not been there for Bunter to find!

Obviously, it had slipped through the slit in the lining, probably soon after Bunter had put the jacket on. It had dropped somewhere, unseen by the short-sighted Owl!

When—and where? Yesterday, most likely—and anywhere! Anyhow, it was no longer on Bunter.

Stacey released the fat junior.

Leaving Bunter squirming and roaring in the grass, he walked away.

The game was up now!

Even that last and desperate resource had failed him. Yesterday it had been possible; to-day it was no longer possible! But, to do Stacey justice, mingled with his bitter disappointment was a feeling of relief that it was no longer possible. Once more his feet had slipped on the edge of the abyss, and, in spite of himself, he had been saved!

Billy Bunter sat up in the grass, spluttering wildly. He set his spectacles straight on his fat little nose, and gurgled for breath.

"Ow! Beast! Wow!" gasped Bunter. "Ow! Pitching into a chap! Ow! I'd jolly well go after him and wallop him, only— Ow! Wow! Wow!"

It was a dusty and breathless Bunter that limped back to Greyfriars. Had the Owl of the Remove been a fighting man, undoubtedly he would have looked for Stacey at once and administered unto that youth the thrashing of his life. Being no fighting man, however, he did not look for Stacey; he looked for Harry Wharton.

He found Wharton and Nugent in Study No. 1 writing lines. They were getting through their impota. Bob Cherry and Johnny Bull and the nabob being similarly engaged in their studies up the passage.

Bunter blinked into Study No. 1.

"I say, you fellows—" he gasped.

Frank Nugent waved an impatient pen at him.

"Buzz off!"

"Oh, really, Nugent—"

"Lines, fathead!" said Harry. "We've got to hand them in before tea! Like to do a few?"

"Well, I'd like to," said Bunter—"like a shot, in fact. But I've hurt my finger, and can't handle a pen just now. Otherwise—"

"Well, hook it!"

"Oh, really, Wharton—"

"Buzz the inkpot at him, Frank!"

"I say, old chap, do listen to a fellow!" urged Bunter. "If you knew what Stacey has been saying about you, you—"

"Shut up, you fat ass!" said Nugent, as a dark look came over Harry Wharton's face.

"Shan't!" retorted Bunter. "Wharton's a pal of mine, and I'm going to tell him what Stacey said! He says you're a stuck-up ass, Wharton—"

"Get out!"

"He says he could lick you, with one hand tied behind his back!" went on Bunter. "I wouldn't let a fellow get away with that, if I were you, old chap!"

Wharton looked at him.

"Mind, I'm telling you this as a friend," explained Bunter. "It's not because that beast ragged me in Friar-dale Lane, and I want you to whop him! Nothing of the kind, you know!"

Wharton grinned. Nugent chuckled. Billy Bunter blinked at them. He could see nothing at which either to grin or to chuckle.

"Cheeky rotter, you know!" went on Bunter. "He says that he would have licked you hollow, Wharton, that time you were scrapping, if Quelch hadn't stopped him. He says it's a jolly good thing you were turned out of the captaincy, and that Tom Brown is ever so much better a skipper than you ever were. I say, old chap, I'd go along and wallop him, if I were you!"

"Shut the door after you!"

"I hope you're not a funk, Wharton! I say, he says you're a stuck-up, silly ass! I wouldn't let a fellow say that without punching his head!"

Harry Wharton nodded.

"Right!" he said. "I won't!"

And he rose from the study table.

Billy Bunter's eyes gleamed behind his spectacles. He had hoped to "draw" Wharton, and now, it seemed, he had succeeded.

"I'd jolly well kick a chap for calling me a stuck-up ass, old fellow!" said the fat Owl eagerly.

"I jolly well will!" agreed Wharton.

He came towards the door. To Bunter's surprise, he grabbed the fat junior by the collar, and twirled him round in the doorway.

"I say, wharrer you up to?" roared Bunter, in alarm.

"I'm going to kick a fellow for calling me a stuck-up ass!" explained Wharton.

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Nugent.

"Oh, really, Wharton! I say—Yaroooooooooh!" yelled Bunter, as a boot thudded on the tightest trousers at Greyfriars.

"Whoooooop!"

"Have another?"

"Yow-ow-ow! I say—Wow!"

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Billy Bunter wrenched his collar away, and jumped into the passage. He did not want another! It dawned on his fat brain that Harry Wharton was not to be used as a catspaw! Sadly and sorrowfully William George Bunter rolled away; and Wharton, chuckling, returned to his lines.

THE SIXTEENTH CHAPTER.

A Surprising Discovery!

VERNON-SMITH grinned.

Coker frowned.

Both of them were thinking of the same thing—the ducking of Horace Coker in the Sark the previous day.

It was a difference in the point of view that caused the recollection to make Smithy grin, while it made Coker frown. In Smithy's eyes, the incident was comic. In Coker's, it wasn't!

The Bounder was walking towards the school shop when he met Coker coming out. It was their first meeting since the painful episode on the river. Coker had been keeping an eye open for Smithy, with the fixed intention of giving him what he deserved for his cheek at the first encounter.

"Oh!" said Coker grimly. "Here you are, you cheeky young scoundrell!"

"Did you get wet yesterday?" asked Smithy sweetly.

Coker did not answer that question. Really, it was unnecessary to answer; Smithy knew that he had got wet.

Besides, it was a time for action, not for words. Coker made a rush at the Bounder, intending to collar him with one hand and smack his head with the other. A smacked head was really a light punishment, for having up-ended Coker in the river and soaked him to the skin!

Light as the punishment was, however, Smithy was not taking any. He backed and dodged round the big elm-tree that stood in front of the tuckshop.

"Stop!" roared Coker.

He chased round the tree after the Bounder.

Round that tree was a circular wooden bench, where fellows often sat in the shade. It was the favourite seat of Billy Bunter! From that spot the fat Owl could gaze with wrapt eyes on the tuckshop window, feasting his eyes on the good things displayed there, like a podgy Peri at the gates of Paradise.

Bunter was not there at the moment, but three or four fellows were seated on the bench, disposing of ices. They stared and grinned, as Vernon-Smith whipped round, with Coker in pursuit.

"Will you stop?" yelled Coker.

"I don't think!" answered the Bounder over his shoulder.

Coker, red with wrath, charged on. But at the game of dodging round a tree the Bounder had the upper hand. He was lighter on his feet than the burly Horace, and a great deal more nimble and active.

"Go it, Coker!"

"Go it, Smithy!"

"Here we go round the mulberry-bush!" chuckled Tom Brown, who was one of the fellows on the seat.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Coker paused, panting for breath. On the other side of the elm the Bounder stopped, grinning at him cheerfully. He did not cut off—in the open spaces Coker would have had a better chance. He was prepared to keep up the mulberry-bush game as long as Coker did.

"You young tick!" gasped Coker. "I'll spifficate you! You wait till I get hold of you!"

"Waiting!" grinned the Bounder.

Coker made another rush. The Bounder re-started after the interval. Round the tree they went, pursued, pursuer, amid roars of laughter from a crowd of fellows, gathering to watch the chase.

"Put it on, Coker!" roared Bob Cherry.

Having finished his lines, Bob had come down to the shop for supplies of tea. But he forgot all about tea in his interest in this exciting scene.

"Chase me, Charley!" sang Skinner.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Look out, Smithy! He's just behind you!" shouted Ogilvy.

"Buck up, Smithy!" yelled Russell.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Smithy put on speed and fairly whizzed round the elm, and the laughing fellows on the circular seat. Coker panted after him in vain.

Then Coker suddenly had a brain-wave! He realised that he could not catch the elusive junior; and it was dawning even on Coker's mighty brain that he was looking rather ridiculous. Suddenly Horace whirled round and charged round the tree in the opposite direction.

It was quite a masterly move! For Smithy, coming on full pelt, crashed into him, headlong, before he realised that Coker was making that move.

It was a terrific crash!

"Ow!" gasped the Bounder, as he spun.

"Wow!" gasped Coker, as he staggered.

Vernon-Smith sprawled. He was almost winded by the collision. Before he could scramble up, Horace Coker hurled himself on him.

"Now—" he gasped.

Smack!

"Wow! Rescue!" yelled the Bounder.

That smack was only a beginning—Horace had many more to administer! But he did not administer any of them! There were a dozen Removites on the spot, and they were not likely to stand idly by while a Remove head was smacked by a Fifth Form man.

As one man they hurled themselves on Horace.

"Collar him!"

"Bag him!"

"Rag him!"

"Give him jip!"

Horace Coker rolled, and roared, in the grasp of many hands. Vernon-Smith staggered up, clasping his head, which was singing from the one hefty smack that Horace had had time to deliver. But if Smithy was damaged, his damages were as moonlight unto sunlight, as water unto wine, compared with the damages of Coker of the Fifth.

Coker hardly knew what was happening. He was rolled and rumbled, and hustled and tousled, and finally rolled under the seat round the elm. It was rather a narrow space under the seat, between the wooden slats and the ground, and exceedingly dusty. Horace was crammed into it.

"Urrrrrrgh!" came from Horace.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The juniors yelled with laughter. A red and furious face, surmounted by wildly tangled hair, emerged from under the seat. Vernon-Smith tapped it on the nose, and it popped back again, like a tortoise's head into the shell, amid shrieks of merriment.

"Here, what's all this rumpus?"



Realising that he could not catch the elusive Vernon-Smith, Horace Coker suddenly whirled round and charged round the tree in the opposite direction. It was quite a masterly move, for the Bouncer, coming on at full pelt, crashed headlong into him. "Ow!" gasped the Bouncer, as he spun. "Wow!" gasped Coker, as he staggered.

Wingate of the Sixth came along. "You young sweepa ragging?"

"Urrrggh!" came from under the seat. "Wurrgh! I'll spifigate the lot of you—I'll pulverise you—I—I—I'll—urrgh!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"What the dickens—" exclaimed Wingate in astonishment. "Who's that under that seat? Come out at once, whoever you are!"

The chuckling juniors stood back. Once more the red and furious face emerged, this time untapped, in the presence of a prefect!

Wingate stared blankly at Coker of the Fifth.

"Coker!" he gasped. "Are you mad? You, a Fifth Form man, playing silly tricks like this! If Prout saw you—"

"Gurrrrggh!" gurgled Coker. "I didn't—I wasn't—I—urrgh—"

Words and breath failed Coker.

"You—a senior—"

"Urrgh!"

"Go to the House at once and make yourself tidy!" snapped Wingate; and he went frowning into the school shop, leaving the juniors yelling, and Coker speechless with fury.

"Give him some more!" said Smithy.

But Coker of the Fifth had had enough. He stamped away, smothered with dust, red as a newly boiled beet-root.

Tom Brown picked up his hat, which had fallen off under the seat, and tossed it after him.

"Hallo! He's dropped something else!" said Brown, as a gleam of white in the dusk under the seat met his eyes. "A letter or something—"

He hooked out a letter that lay there.

"Here, Coker—"

Tom Brown broke off. That letter did not belong to Coker. It was addressed to Lord Mauleverer.

"Hallo, hallo, hallo!" yelled Bob Cherry. "That's Mauly's letter! How the thump did it get there?"

"Mauly's letter!"

"Great pip!"

"Here, Mauly!"

Lord Mauleverer, who had been looking on at Coker's wild adventures, came forward, staring at the letter.

"Good gad!" he ejaculated.

"Is that the one you lost, or rather, that Bunter lost?" asked Tom Brown, holding it out.

"Yaas!" Lord Mauleverer nodded. "It's in nunky's fist. That's the letter right enough."

"That fat chump must have dropped it there!" said Ogilvy. "I remember seeing him sitting here just before call-over last evening. He dropped it through the slats of the seat and never saw it."

Lord Mauleverer made no reply to that. Howsoever that letter had come there, there it was, to all appearance, unopened. Mauly slipped it into his pocket and strolled away towards the House, an extremely thoughtful expression on his noble countenance.

THE SEVENTEENTH CHAPTER.

For Wharton's Sake!

RALPH STACEY tramped in at the school gates just as Gosling came down from his lodge to close them.

He was tired and weary, both in mind and body. After leaving Bunter in Friardale Lane he had not returned to the school, he had gone for a long,

solitary tramp, trying to think out the problem that hung like a leaden weight on his mind.

To-morrow!

To-morrow came the end of all things at Greyfriars! The more he thought about the prospect the blacker it seemed. On no side was there a gleam of light. He had played the fool and the blackguard, and he had to take what was coming to him. The exasperated Banks would not spare him, he knew that! There was only one way of placating Mr. Banks, and that was by turning up at the Three Fishers with eight pounds to pay that frowzy gentleman—and he had not eight shillings! What a fool he had been—what a mad fool—to take such risks, in the belief that he had "spotted a winner." He despised his relative, Wharton, as a fellow less keen and clever than himself, but would Wharton ever have landed in disaster like this?

All that he had gained was lost now—thrown away by his own dingy folly! In the black prospect there was only one bitter atom of comfort. His expulsion from Greyfriars would disgrace his rival and enemy! Wharton, no doubt, would be glad to see him turned out, but that would not alter the fact that he was a relation, that his disgrace would, to some extent at least, fall on Wharton, too!

He tramped wearily across the quad. Billy Bunter eyed him with an inimical blink through his big spectacles, but he did not even notice Bunter. Some of the fellows were still on the cricket ground, and he hoped that Ogilvy and Russell were there; he did not want any company now. It was call-over soon, and until then he wanted to be left alone.

What would Oggy and Russell be thinking of him—on the morrow? They had taken him on trust, believed in him—they had been good pals to him—and now they were going to find him out. Stacey was bad, but that he was not all bad was proved by the pang he felt at that thought. He would have given much to keep the respect of those two fellows who had liked and trusted him.

He came up the Remove staircase. He saw the Famous Five in a group in the doorway of Study No. 1. They were discussing something—he did not guess what it was. As he had only just come in, he had, of course, heard nothing of the discovery of Mauly's missing letter.

That discovery had puzzled the Famous Five. All of them knew, or as good as knew, that Stacey had had that letter the day before on Popper's Island. Only for one purpose could he have taken it, yet it was clear that that purpose had not been carried out.

Had he been scared into changing his intentions—or had he, perhaps, some rag of decency left that had caused him to change them at the last moment? They could not tell, but they had no doubt that the letter had been in Stacey's hands, and they could only conclude that he had given up his designs on it and left it about the school to be found by chance.

They ceased to speak as they saw Stacey coming along from the stairs, and went into Study No. 1. He passed them unheeding.

What they thought of him mattered little now. Everybody at Greyfriars would know to-morrow! He would see another sun rise over the old school—but he would not see it set there! What a fool he had been!

He opened the door of Study No. 3 and went in. Ogilvy and Russell were not there, which was a relief. But as he shut the door after him he discerned an elegant figure stretched in the arm-chair.

"Mauleverer!" he ejaculated.

"Yaas!"

The schoolboy earl sat up. Stacey stood staring at him. He could not imagine why Lord Mauleverer was waiting for him in his study.

But an explanation flashed into his mind almost at once. Mauleverer suspected him of having picked up the lost letter—he felt it rather than knew it, but he was sure of it. Mauly was there to ask him for it. Where the letter was, he had not the faintest idea. Billy Bunter had dropped it somewhere about Greyfriars, through the slit in the lining of his pocket; that was all he knew. Whatever Mauleverer suspected, he could prove nothing—not that it mattered, in view of what was going to happen on the morrow!

"What do you want?" snapped Stacey.

"Waitin' for you to come in, dear man!" answered Mauly. "Somethin' to say to you about a jolly old letter that's been missin'."

"Do you think it's in this study?" sneered Stacey.

"Yaas."

"You fool!"

"Thanks! Would you mind keepin' your compliments for a bit. I haven't really come here to punch your nose!" said Mauleverer placidly. "The letter's certainly in this study—"

Stacey laughed savagely.

"You fancy I picked it up when Bunter dropped it—or said he did?"

"Yaas."

"And you think it's here?"

"Yaas."

"Where is it, then?"

"Here!"

Lord Mauleverer slipped his hand into his pocket and drew out a letter. Stacey stared at it blankly.

"You—you—you've found it!" he stuttered.

"A fellow found it and handed it to me. It's all right! Nunky sent me the tenner I wanted, and it's safe in the letter. Rather a windfall, after what this jolly old letter's been through!" remarked Lord Mauleverer.

"I suppose Bunter dropped it about somewhere!" said Stacey carelessly. "I don't see what it has to do with me."

"Bunter dropped it in the Remove passage yesterday, and you picked it up!" said Lord Mauleverer calmly. "I knew that from the beginnin', dear man, just as Wharton did! I said nothin' about it for a reason you probably wouldn't understand—bein' the unspeakable rotter you are, dear boy. Wharton's rather a pal of mine, and I know exactly what he would feel like if a relation of his was sacked from the school for stealin'. I couldn't put him through that."

Stacey clenched his hands.

But he quailed under the calm, contemptuous gaze of the schoolboy earl. He opened his lips; but closed them without speaking. But he spoke at last:

"You say there's a banknote in the letter?"

"Yaas. You know that as well as I do, as you opened it and looked." Lord Mauleverer smiled faintly. "You see, knowin' that you had had it, I rather examined it when I got it back. Openin' envelopes by steam is an old dodge, and a neat one; but it can't be done without leavin' traces that a fellow can spot if he looks for them. I looked for them."

"Bunter—"

"Bunter never did that! Bunter's a blithering idiot and a meddlin' ass, but he's no thief! No fellow's cake is safe from him; but he'd no more pinch a banknote than he'd hold up a bank. You opened that letter, Stacey, to see if there was cash in it—and then, I suppose, you got scared at what you were doin' and chucked it. What?"

Stacey's lip curved bitterly. He did not speak; but Mauly's keen gaze read what was in his mind; and his expression softened a little.

"Or else," he went on, "you found at the last minute, like many another rotter before you, that you weren't quite the poisonous toad you fancied you were—and you couldn't do it! Is that it?"

Stacey made no answer.

"If that's it, you're not such an unlimited blighter as I supposed," went on Lord Mauleverer calmly. "I'm rather glad you've got a limit, Stacey. It's somethin' to have a limit—even such a jolly wide one."

"Is that the lot?" asked Stacey. "If so, I advise you to get out of my study before I throw you out."

"Not at all! I'm not finished yet," said Lord Mauleverer. "I'm goin' to ask you a question. How much do you owe at the Three Fishers?"

Stacey started violently.

"So Wharton's been telling you—" he breathed.

"Nothing."

"Then why do you fancy—?"

"I don't fancy—I know! There's been a lot of jaw about Wharton bein' seen at that jolly old resort—all rot! You've worked your likeness to Wharton for all it's worth, Stacey—but if you can take Quelch in, you can't take me in. I may be an ass—but I'm not a silly ass! You're a bad hat, old bean—and you've had bad luck! Even a rotter like you wouldn't think of stealin' unless he was hard pushed. You owe somebody money that you can't pay—that's why you wangled the whole bizney about this dashed letter."

Stacey burst into a harsh laugh.

"Have it your own way!" he said. "It doesn't make a lot of difference—everybody will know to-morrow. If it's any satisfaction to you, Mauleverer, I'm going to be sacked to-morrow—now get out and leave me alone."

"As bad as that?" said Mauleverer.

"Yes, as bad as that! Now leave me alone—I warn you that I've stood as much as I'm going to stand."

"But you haven't answered my question!" said Lord Mauleverer calmly. "I asked you how much you're landed for? Would it come out of a tenner?"

"Yes! What do you mean?"

Lord Mauleverer slipped two slim fingers into the envelope, and flicked out the ten-pound note. It dropped on the study table.

Stacey stared at it, and at Mauly! His brain was in a whirl. He guessed what Mauleverer meant—but he hardly dared believe it. His face was like chalk.

"What do you mean, Mauleverer?" he repeated hoarsely.

"Can't you guess! So far as you're concerned personally, I'd be fearfully glad to see you turfed out! Can't stand you!" said Lord Mauleverer placidly. "You're the jolly old limit, or very near it! I'm thinkin' of Wharton! He's rather a pal of mine, you know! If I can prevent you from disgracin' him by gettin' yourself kicked out of the school, I'm ready to do it. If the tenner will work the oracle there's the tenner."

Stacey's hand moved slowly towards the banknote. Pride urged him to pick it up and fling it in Mauleverer's face. But a fellow in danger of the sack for rascally conduct, could not afford to listen to the voice of pride. His fingers closed on the rustling slip of paper—greedily, almost convulsively.

Saved! That was his thought! Unexpectedly—almost miraculously—saved! The colour came back into his cheeks—his eyes brightened! Saved!

Lord Mauleverer rose from the chair. He crossed to the door—carefully avoiding Stacey as he did so.

"Mauly—" breathed Stacey.

Mauleverer glanced at him icily.

"I'm Mauly to my friends," he said. "Mauleverer to you, if you speak to me at all—but please don't!"

He left the study, and shut the door after him. Stacey was left with the banknote in his hand.

Harry Wharton & Co. never knew Mauleverer said nothing; and Stacey was not likely to do so. Mr. Quelch had no idea how very near he had been to losing his dutiful head boy. A miss was as good as a mile—and the black sheep was still in the flock.

THE END

Be Sure You Read Next Week's Topping Yarn of Harry Wharton & Co.:-

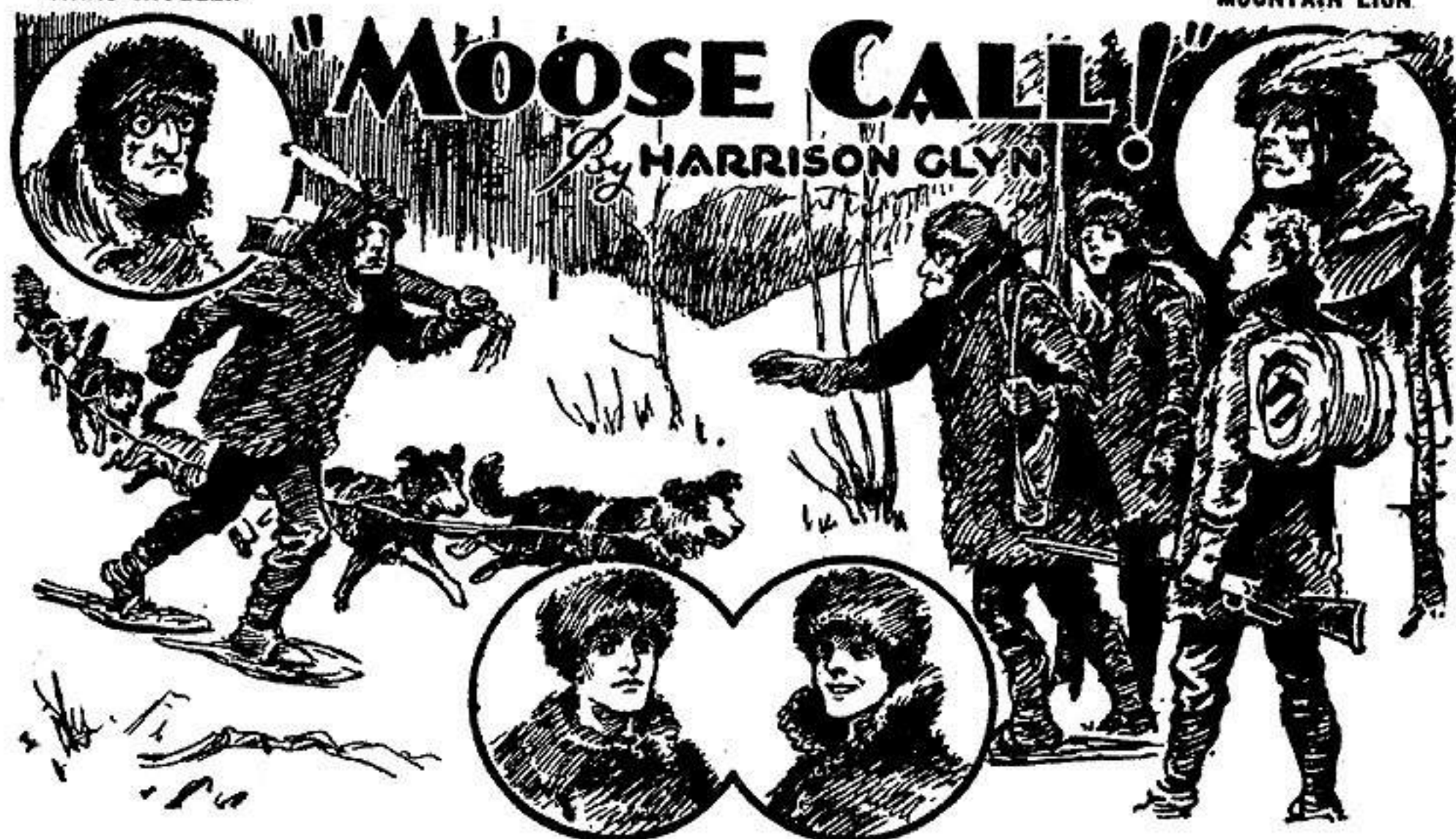
"A TRAITOR TO HIS SIDE!"

By Frank Richards.

It's Full of Surprises and Exciting Situations!

ISAAC SNUGGER

MOUNTAIN LION



SELWYN and COLIN

WHAT'S GONE BEFORE.

Selwyn Gore and his brother, Colin, learn that their Uncle Amyas, a gold prospector, has been murdered in Canada. Determined to settle accounts with the murderers, the two brothers, in company with Snugger, a Tomahawk solicitor, set out for Moose Call. En route they meet Mountain Lion, a Sioux Indian, in whose charge Amyas Gore had left a message requesting that his nephews bury him behind the Great Chief's Head, in the Sunrise Mountains. Reaching the spot the party discover that it is none other than Amyas' claim. While on the homeward trail to register the claim, they are attacked by two villainous rascals named Wilnot and Majoe. The enemy are beaten off, after which Mountain Lion offers to visit a Sioux camp and borrow some ponies and guns from his fellow braves.

(Now read on.)

Trapped!

"WELL, you bring the ponies and never mind the braves an' the guns, Sioux," said Snugger. "You tell us a point on the trail whar we can wait and meet you, we'll make it. Can't see any sense in staying any longer round hyar just at present."

The Sioux smiled and nodded.

"Come that way with me," he said. "Make plenty miles nearer Tomahawk."

They passed into the wood and examined the ground. It was plain to see where the car had stood, for the wheel marks were deep. In their panic to get away, Blackbeard and Musty had left a tarpaulin cover behind. Selwyn folded it and packed it on his back for it might prove useful as cover if they encountered any severe night frost.

The ground revealed no other signs of importance.

With a grunt, the Sioux left them and ran back to find and bury his faithful dogs. His face was grim when he came back.

"If the bad white men have got away Mountain Lion follow them," he

said. "If they come back—ugh!—so much the better. They shall die within sight of the spot where they shot our brave white brother Amyas Gore."

"They haven't had it all their own way," said Selwyn. "We've a big score to settle still, but we've marked up a few points, Sioux."

They trudged on through the pine wood and made their way up the bush-clad hills to the mesas above, along which they made faster progress. For the whole of the day they tramped on, only pausing beside a stream to feed. But as the day wore on, the adventurers found their weary feet flagging and their tired muscles knotting up.

The Sioux, who remained unwearied despite the hardships of the long day, built a fire for them and lit it. Then, pointing away along the range of mountains, he said that he must push on.

"Mountain Lion got to make the Sioux camp and get the ponies," he said. "Bring them back. White brothers wait here?"

"Sure, we'll wait hyar, Sioux," said Snugger. "And why not? Far over thar shows the white line of the road from Tomahawk to Moose Call. Over thar"—and he shifted the direction of his pointing finger—"runs the road to Beaver Creek and Little Fork. If anything comes along either road we shan't miss it. This is a nice spot. Plenty of shelter. How long before you kem back?"

The Sioux held up one finger and then a second.

"One day, two days. Perhaps three," he said. "The Great Spirit watch over you."

He turned, and with a deep throated grunt, ambled away. His moccasined feet took him noiselessly over the rises and down into the dips, until he finally vanished from sight.

Snugger, Selwyn and Colin were glad of the chance to rest. They had sufficient food of sorts to last for a few days. In that sheltered place the cold winds were kept off by the bush-clad slopes.

The next day they shot a rabbit and

ate it for dinner. At night they were careful to screen the light of the fire from view, and always one or the other kept watch whilst the other two slept.

Two days passed without anything special happening. On the third day the trio began to watch out for the return of Mountain Lion, and leaving their camp, climbed higher so that they could command a greater stretch of country.

At his very first look around, Selwyn espied the Indian approaching, mounted on a pinto pony and trailing three saddled mustangs behind him.

The little hard-bitten Indian ponies were fresh and ready for the trail.

Mountain Lion greeted the trio with a salute when he arrived and pointed to the saddles.

"Mountain Lion saddled ponies for white men," he explained. "Injun prefer no saddle. Mountain Lion stay and keep watch on the hills; Snugger and two white boys ride into Tomahawk and set Mounties on the trail of the bad men; then come back and join Mountain Lion."

Selwyn, Colin and Snugger tried to persuade Mountain Lion to go with them, but the Sioux was adamant.

"Bad men may come back," he said. "Mountain Lion watch for them. They killed his dogs. Mountain Lion kill bad men."

The two, therefore, rode away without him. Looking back they saw the Indian watching from the plateau, seated on his pony and looking like a bronze statue.

They gained the road and turned along it. At a steady canter they started on their journey to Tomahawk. As they came within sight of the fork of the road to Beaver Creek, they saw a party of horsemen heading towards them.

The men wore big hats and were armed. They came on briskly, and it was not until they were within revolver shot that Selwyn recognised two of the men, and realised that danger was near at hand.

"Snugger," he cried, "look—two of

those men are Blackbeard and Musty Wilmot!"

At the same instant the two rogues recognised the party in turn and let out a yell of triumph as they urged their horses into a gallop and came on with rifles ready.

Selwyn swung his mustang round, but a bullet singing past his ear warned him that it was too late. He reined the pony to a halt. The next moment the crowd of toughs came on.

Hopelessly Outnumbered!

It needed only a second for Selwyn to realise that they were trapped. The next, a bullet from Blackbeard's rifle tore the hat from Snugger's head, and the three reined their Indian ponies to a halt.

To turn and ride for it would only invite bullets, and while they remained alive they might be able to turn the tables on these murdering crooks.

The men rode up, shouting and cursing, giving their horses the rein and presenting their rifles, or brandishing their revolvers, the grip of their knees sufficient to glue them to the saddle.

Snugger's chin jutted, and his eyes shot sparks of anger. But he had no time to unsling and bare his old-fashioned rifle. Colin had his gun out in a flash, but he did not level it, though he might easily have shot one man. They were hopelessly outnumbered.

John Majoe pulled his horse up in front of Selwyn, his gun at the "ready," while two other men covered Colin. Musty, with a leering smile, trained a Colt on Isaac Snugger.

"Black," he shouted to Majoe, "watch me bump off the old guy!"

"No, wait!" bawled Majoe.

"Ain't he the one who bust up our shack?"

"We ken build another one," said Majoe gruffly. "There ain't no sense in rushin' yore fences. Ring these hombres in, fellers. I want to ask 'em a few questions."

The men crowded their horses closer. Selwyn, Colin, and Isaac found themselves winking into the cold steel ring of pointed gun-barrels. Beyond the group of roughnecks the open road to Tomahawk stretched lonely and desolate.

"Where were you heading for?" asked Blackbeard fiercely.

"Tomahawk," answered Snugger defiantly. "And Heaven help you and yore pals once I get there."

"But supposin' you don't get thar, what then?" grinned Majoe, showing two ugly, pointed dog-teeth. "Why were you makin' fer Tomahawk?"

"That's our business."

"If it wuz to register a gold claim, you're too late," snapped Majoe, "for I've done that already at Beaver Creek. I told 'em that the claim's up beyond the pint of rock they call the Great Chief's Head. What say you to that, Snugger?"

"I say you're a lying, murdering, thieving scoundrel!" answered Isaac Snugger furiously. "You may grin, Majoe, but you'll laugh on the other side of your face when the boys take you out and hang you high for the murder of Amyas Gore."

Selwyn, who was watching Blackbeard's face, saw the lips thin to a cruel line, and an evil, threatening gleam creep into the villain's eyes.

"Why did you bust up my shack with dynamite?" howled Blackbeard.

"Because you set fire to our shack."

"You can't prove it. I've lodged a 'plaint against you for wilful destruction of property and 'tempted murder, and I brought the boys along to deal with you, Mr. Snugger."

Isaac Snugger's lips curled derisively.

"You can't scare me!" he cried contemptuously. "It's known I kem out hyar with the boys to Moose Call, and if I don't show up soon the Mounties'll kem and look for me."

"And they'll go back," said Majoe, with a sneer. "They'll never find you. P'raps they'll never find the boys, neither. This is a great, wide, open country, Snugger, whar a man can die and rot and nobody ever know whar to look for him. The summer's short, and the winter snows lie thick. Prowlin' wolves soon pick a dead man's bones clean. The Mounties won't ever find you around Moose Call."

Isaac Snugger's right hand moved stealthily towards the side pocket in which he kept his pin-fire revolver.

"You can't frighten me with yore threats," he cried. "You killed my friend Amyas Gore and stole his gold, but you're going to pay for it in full."

Snugger's hand flashed into view, gripping the old-fashioned revolver. Even as he turned it on Blackbeard he pulled the trigger, but the hammer snapped upon the pin with an impotent click. The cartridge had refused to explode, and Blackbeard, setting back his head, roared with laughter. His laughter was drowned, however, by a loud report as Musty turned his Colt on Snugger and a jet of bluish smoke was blown away by the gusty wind.

Musty had fired at two paces, and Snugger crumpled over the saddle, tilted forward, his gun dropping into the dust. For a second or two he lay hunched upon the pony's shoulder, then he rolled sideways out of the saddle and hit the road with a dull thud. The last jerk of his relaxing fingers tore the simple bit in the pony's mouth, and as it found itself free, the animal sprang away with a snort and a whinny of distress, and went galloping at racing speed across the barren waste.

Selwyn swung his pony round with a shout of rage, and would have closed with Musty, but the crumpled-up body of the Tomahawk lawyer lay between them in the dust.

"You cold-blooded, murdering beast!" Selwyn shouted, his voice strangled in his throat by the mad anger that burned within him.

Musty laughed, and turned his gun on Selwyn, but as he pulled the trigger, one of the men knocked his arm up and the bullet soared into the blue.

Majoe urged his horse up close to Musty's and tore the smoking gun out of his hand.

"Bit free at shootin', eh?" he stormed. "We can bump off these boys at any time. The same stood for Snugger, too. But since you got him, let him lie near the road an' rot. Some of you boys carry him out on to the plain, thar."

Two of the men dismounted, picked up Snugger's limp and lifeless body, carried it back about thirty yards away from the road, and dumped it in a hollow, where it could not be seen by any traveller passing along the main trail from Moose Call to Tomahawk. Then they came back.

Majoe leered at Selwyn and Colin.

"You ain't smilin' none now," he said. "Waal, what kem to Snugger'll kem to you if you don't tell us all we want to know."

Colin's face was as white as chalk. The men had taken away his arms, or he would have taken a chance in a shoot-up with the enemy. Selwyn felt the same about things, too, but the villains had stolen his rifle and his gun and he was equally helpless.

"What you got in them packs?" Majoe demanded.

"Oh, just some camping things."

"Waal, you'll show me. Get off them ponies. Tear 'em out of the saddle, fellows! Now unfasten them packs. Ah-ha! What have we got hyar? A bag, eh? Gimme that!"

Majoe snatched at a bag one of the men found in Selwyn's pack and began greedily to untie the strings. He poured some of the contents into his palm. It was bright yellow, and glistening, and some of it of a reddish golden tinge. He uttered a yell of triumph.

"Now p'raps you toughs'll believe what I tell yer," he chortled. "This young British cub is Selwyn Gore, nevvie of the prospector, Amyas Gore, who found gold by the quart up in the Sunrise Mountains before the winter snows shut up Moose Call. This gold kem from up the mountain, and I've registered the claim. Boys, you're all gonna share with me if you help sweep the mountains clean till we've dug our pile."

"Here's another gold bag, chief," said another of the gang as he found a second bag of gold dust in Colin's pack.

"And I'll wager a buck," growled Majoe, "we'll find a third bag in the pack that buzzard Snugger was carryin'. But that ken wait till we start ridin'."

Majoe had dismounted. He motioned to two of the men to seize Selwyn, and whilst they held the boy securely by the arms and shoulder Blackbeard ran his hands through his pockets. He found a packet, which he untied and opened eagerly. The packet was heavy, solid. It contained the gold nugget Selwyn had found in the stream that ran through the amphitheatre up behind the Great Chief's Head. Blackbeard's eyes goggled at the sight of it.

"Smokin' crayfish!" he gasped. "Jest look at this! A nugget! A hundred per cent pure gold nugget. An' she's mine! Musty and you guys ken share the dust between you, for a start. Where's she kem from, boy? That claim up in the mountains, whar Amyas Gore found the dust last fall?"

Selwyn made no answer, and Majoe thrust his black-bearded, leering face a little nearer.

"Lost your tongue, 'ave yer?" he snarled. "Don't forget we can make you and yore brother talk any time we want."

Selwyn loathed the sight of his evil face, with its uncertain, shifting, beady eyes and coarse, cruel lips. He could have smashed his fist into it, and had to fight hard to control himself.

"Did the nugget kem from the claim up at the Great Chief's Head?" asked Majoe savagely. "Kem on, out with it!"

Selwyn did not answer.

"Screw his arms until he talks!" shouted Majoe.

The two brutes who were standing guard at Selwyn's shoulders began to twist the boy's arms behind him till the sweat stood out on Selwyn's forehead in beads of agony. But he determined that he would not speak. They could

tear him to pieces, but he would never tell. Colin's spirit was just as resolute.

An extra wrench made Selwyn cry out, and Blackbeard motioned to the men to let him go.

Selwyn was no sooner free than he launched a kick at one of the villains, which landed right under the man's chin and hurled him over backwards, a crumpled heap in the dust.

"That's one for Slick," chuckled Majoe. "I'll bet he won't eat no 'ard biscuit with his bully beef for a week."

Musty had his guns trained on Selwyn, and the others were feeling for their weapons.

"Back!" roared Majoe. "I'll hev no more shootin'. But I promise you boys this—if the kid refuses to answer questions and we hev to string him and his brother up, Slick shall hev the hanging of 'em."

He stalked up to Selwyn once more.

"How did you all kem by them ponies?" he grated suspiciously.

"Mountain Lion brought them."

"The Sioux, eh? Waal, I guess you've spoken the truth at last. Fetched them from Red Bull's camp up in the mountains, I suppose. I ken see they're Injun ponies. Whar's Mountain Lion?"

"Gone back," answered Selwyn, without hesitation.

It was a lie, but the circumstances more than excused it. Why tell these heartless murderers the truth?

Majoe squinted at him evilly and pulled at his beard. Then he stowed the nugget away in his pocket.

"It ain't sech a bad day's work, considerin'," he said, as he swung himself into the saddle. "Musty's bumped off that meddling old buzzard of a solicitor and us guys ought to be more'n a match for a couple of English boys. Tie the kids up to the saddle. Tie their wrists, but leave their hands loose enough for 'em to ride. That's it! Now let's ride over and see what Snugger's got in his pack."

Selwyn and Colin were kept in an agony of suspense in the road whilst Blackbeard and two of the men rode out on to the plain and dismounted in the hollow, where they had left the body of Isaac Snugger. They unstrapped the solicitor's pack, and, opening it, found another bag of gold dust.

"One of you fellers carry the pack," said Majoe, "for it may kem in useful. Specially the sticks of dynamite. Now let's get on to Moose Call."

He swung himself into his saddle, waved the others back to the road, and followed.

Selwyn's heart bled for poor old Isaac Snugger. The brutes had murdered him without giving him a chance. Oh, for a free hand, a gun, and a fighting chance!

The harsh voice of one of the men cut in as the troop moved off.

"Boss, what about that Injun pony the old hawk was ridin'? It's loose."

"Don't you worry about the hoss. It kem from Red Bull's camp, and it'll head straight back thar, only too glad to get home. They'll only think the old snake got throwed because he wasn't smart enough to ride her."

MUM'S THE WORD!

TWO of the men led the way. Then came Colin, strapped securely to the Indian pony. Then two more men, and Selwyn after them. Blackbeard, Musty, and the other two, including Slick, whose jaw had swollen into a huge lump where Selwyn had kicked him, brought up the rear.



Bound as they were, Selwyn and Colin began to eat and drink, while the gang of toughs squatted round them and jeered.

Slick kept his evil eyes fixed on Selwyn, and his hand strayed to the butt of his revolver every time a throb of pain racked his jaw.

Colin did not once look round, made no sign. But as they started on their ride back to Moose Call the brothers had exchanged swift, meaning glances, enjoining silence on each other. An opportunity to talk might come later.

Apart from other considerations, the cords which secured Selwyn's wrists and tied his ankles together beneath the barrel body of the mustang caused him considerable pain. He rode with shoulders drooping, hands scarcely touching the reins, and the brim of his hat pulled down, to hide his face.

He seemed never to look at the trail, and yet he saw just as much as the toughs, who, riding free, swept the open, the bush-clad foothills, the mesas and the mountains with hawk-keen eyes. In the short time which had elapsed since the last of the snows had swept over Moose Call the browns and blacks of winter had changed to liveliest green, and the sun was now quite hot. This the roughnecks saw as they searched for possible danger. But there was nothing they looked upon which escaped the quick, darting eyes of the two prisoners.

"Hulla-la-loo-oo!"

Selwyn burst into a great imitation of an Indian war whoop, and Blackbeard turned his gun on him.

"Another crack like that, and out goes yore light!" he snarled. "Even if it means us losing yore showing us whar the gold claim is hid."

Selwyn relapsed into silence. He saw Colin, just a little way in front, shrug his shoulders, and his heart leapt gaily.

Colin had understood the signal.

Somewhere up on the Sunrise Mountains, Mountain Lion, the Sioux, was hiding. Selwyn knew that he would never desert his post. Selwyn missed

the point up on the hills where he had left him, but the Sioux must be watching. He would see these men riding to Moose Call, and his eyes were so sharp that he must notice, the boy thought, that two of the riders were prisoners. And, of course, he would recognise the pinto Selwyn was riding, even if the dun-coloured mustang which carried Colin did not so readily invite detection.

That Mountain Lion would do his best to rescue them Colin knew only too well. There was a lot of satisfaction in that. Blackbeard and the evil, squinting blackguard, Musty, would surely be called to account sooner or later.

As the cavalcade drew near to Moose Call, Blackbeard turned in to meet the hills, shunning the scene of the dynamite explosion and the glade where Amyas Gore had pitched his shack.

"I've told you boys how Musty and me built a brand new log cabin at Moose Call, and 'ow Snugger and these boys blowed us out of it," he said. "Thar ain't no sense in going back to it. I know a snug little mesa up yonder where we can find plenty of shelter for the hosses and pitch our headquarters. It breaks half the long trail up to the Great Chief's Head, an' the rock wall juts out so's we ken light a fire without its being seen by any prowlin' Injun."

"Sounds the goods to me, boss," mumbled Slick, with difficulty. "Can we hold it, in case we gets raided?"

"Can we? You bet we can! But thar won't be no raiders, Slick. We're the only gold-hunters in the Sunrise Mountains, and thar won't be a rush till we've banked the fortune we'll find up behind the Great Chief's Head. When that rush comes we'll have banked all the dough we want. And these boys will be as dead as mutton and unable to raise a squeal."

"Aim to bump the English boys off,"
THE MAGNET LIBRARY.—No. 1,428.

eh, boss?" said Slick, with a painful grin.

"After they've showed us the way to the gold."

"They ain't jumpin' to do that," growled one of the others. "They don't chin-wag much."

"Not yet—but they will!" chortled Blackbeard. "You leave that to Musty an' me. We know a way to make 'em!"

Such loud-voiced threats as these were bawled at Selwyn and Colin at regular intervals during the journey, this being another rough means of torture to the brutal mind of John Majoe. But Selwyn and Colin ignored them.

When they began the climb, two of the men were sent on ahead to scout. It was an unnecessary precaution, for the trail they followed had been swept clean by the winter snows. Soon they were forced to adopt single file, and in this fashion they wound in and out amongst the bushes and the trees until at last they emerged upon a plateau.

On the left, the plateau was shut in by a rocky wall. On the right, Selwyn could see the whole of Moose Call spread below him. The scene was beautiful beyond description. It was impossible when one looked down upon the pine wood patches of green and black to think of the place buried deep by the winter snows. But the scene had no charms for Majoe.

"Ugh!" he growled. "Shan't be sorry when we've dug our pile and ken turn our backs on it."

A little while later he drew rein and pointed.

"Hyar's the spot," he said. "We can stable the hosses in the hollow of them rocks over thar. You boys ken light a fire close hyar, and the jutting cliff will hide the flame. We can all sleep in them little sheltered places over by the cliff, where it's dry. The beauty of it is, the cayuses will hev us between 'em an' the fire."

"What about feeding?" asked Slick.

"They'll get all the grazin' they want on the plateau before we round 'em up and send 'em to bye-bye!" laughed Majoe.

They pitched their camp, hobbled the horses, and left them loose to graze on the fresh young grass. Then they lit a fire and shared out food from the stores.

Selwyn and Colin were freed from their ponies and nearly fell in the first agony of relief as their cramped feet touched the ground.

Their captors only laughed, tying their hands and feet together, and leaving them to look on while they ate.

"Your turn for grub'll kem later, Britishers," said Musty, with an evil

squinting grin. "That is, if you're good little boys."

Had Selwyn been free with a knife in hand he would have stuck the blade clean through his tormentor. As things were, his bonds hurt him and he was glad to roll over on his side and ease the pain that way. Colin had been placed at a distance from him, but the eyes of the brothers met.

Colin's stare was steadfast, unwilting. His spirits soared as high as ever. Majoe and his blackguards had not the power to tame him.

Realising this, Selwyn felt much more at his ease.

After he had eaten, Majoe decided to give Selwyn and Colin some food.

"Hand 'em out tinned meat and some biscuits—but see the biscuits are hard," he ordered. "Give 'em a pannikin of water each. I guess that'll do. We've gotta keep their strength up till they show us the way to Amyas Gore's claim."

As soon as one of the men brought the food and a small pannikin full of water, Majoe gave orders that the right hand of each prisoner was to be released, while the left was to be tied to their bound-up ankles. In this way they were forced to lie in a hunched-up bundle on the ground while they ate and drank.

They managed this as best they could, for the keen air and the hard riding, to say nothing of their suffering, had set a keen edge on their appetites. As they did so, the gang of toughs squatted around, smoking their pipes and jeering the while.

"Have a table napkin?" asked Majoe sarcastically. "What about a knife an' fork? Musty, why don't you git the gents a finger-bowl? 'Ow ken you be so slack?"

"If I had my hands free I'd smash your face right in, you great big black-bearded, grinning ape!" snarled Selwyn in a white rage.

Majoe lifted up his hands in mock horror.

"Oh, listen to 'im!" he exclaimed. "Shockin'! What langwidge!"

The next moment, however, his mood changed and there was murder in his shining eyes as he bent over Selwyn.

"Think it over to-night," he hissed, "and tell us where Amyas Gore's claim is, or to-morrow I'll put paid to you and your friend!"

Colin saw Musty wink at Majoe, and when the fair, squint-eyed ruffian spoke his voice was smooth and calm.

"You know you're only jokin', Black," he said. "You don't mean it. Didn't you promise me that if the boys were to show us the claim you'd set 'em free

and reward 'em with a bag of gold dust?"

Selwyn set his teeth. Majoe only joking. Why, the rascal knew that the moment Selwyn and Colin got into touch with the Mounted Police they would send them out on a death trail. Joking! When they had murdered Amyas Gore, burnt up his shack, killed poor Isaac Snugger in cold blood, and every one of the roughnecks they had brought back with them to Moose Call. Majoe, of course, had made up his mind to kill him and Colin whether they told him how to get to the gold claim or not.

Musty's interjection had the effect of somewhat soothing Majoe, for the black-bearded ruffian smoked on, with a grunt of content.

"All right. Have it your own way, Musty," he said. "I didn't mean no harm."

Selwyn was glad when the wretched meal was over and he could sit up again. Although the ruffians tied up his hands once more, they had the grace this time to set him close to Colin, beyond the fire and nearer the cliff wall. The gang were going to sleep between them and the way to freedom. But it didn't matter much, for one couldn't move far with his hands and feet tied.

"You two guys talk things over," said the burly, bearded rascal, who had picked Selwyn up like a feather and dumped him down close to Colin. "And take a pal's advice—look for the easy way out."

The straying horses were next rounded up and driven into the rocky place close to the cliff wall and sheltered from the wind.

For a while the men squatted round the glowing fire, smoking and talking and sharing out the stolen gold dust. That done, they rolled themselves up in their blankets and were soon sound asleep.

Selwyn was so wide awake, however, that the slightest sound made his pulses leap. Colin was the same.

The brutal murder of poor Isaac Snugger and their own sorry plight forbade sleep. They tossed and turned, tugging at their bonds without finding relief.

"Sel," whispered Colin, after a while.

"Yes, old scout?"

"We're not going to show these brutes where the gold claim is, are we?"

"Not likely!" answered Selwyn.

(What's happened to Mountain Lion? Will he turn up in time to save Selwyn and Colin? Order next week's MAGNET now, chums, and thus make sure of continuing this grand adventure story.)

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Intending visitors to fairgrounds, fun cities, and pleasure beaches are invited to train for houp-la under expert tuition at SKINNER'S HOUP-LA PRACTICE SALON, The Woodshed. Terms mod!



THE NEW Greyfriars Herald



No. 143 (New Series).

EDITED BY HARRY WHARTON.

June 29th, 1935.

RUMOUR CORRECTED

Mr. Paul Prout, Big-Game Hunter, wishes to deny the rumour that he has grizzles on the brain. Someone must have misunderstood the school barber's recent statement—that he's a little "bear" on top!

HEEBY-JEEBIES

Can anyone cure it? I get it badly every time I look at Loder's face.—Write "SENSITIVE," Box No. 1,313, GREY-FRIARS-HERALD.

THE REBBELS' TRIUMPH!

By DICKY NUGENT

Mr. I. Jolliwell Lickham, the master of the Fourth Form at St. Sam's, looked as if he was going to a funeral. In fact, his eggspression was very grave.

"Jolly!" he said, addressing the Fourth Form kaptin. "Two hours have passed since Dr. Birchmell and Mr. Herlock Sholmes left this tuckshop. I can only conclude that they have fallen into the hands of that tyrant against whom we are all in rebellion!"

"Hevven help them if they have, sir!" cried Jack Jolly. "Dr. Crule is a merciless monster—a feend in hewman shape! If he has caught them, he'll take them to his tortcher chamber in the old cript and put them through it properly!"

Beads of perspiration trickled down Mr. Lickham's forehead, and his face turned pale.

"That's just what I'm afraid of," he said. "Something must be done about it. We must find out definitely what has happened. If you, Jolly, would undertake that task, it would help tremendously."

"I'll do it with pleasure, sir," said Jack.

A few minnits later, having said good-bye to his pals, Jolly slipped quietly out of the back door of the tuckshop where the rebbels were barring out and made his way towards the ancient ruins of St. Sam's.

As he drew near the entrance to Dr. Crule's underground tortcher chamber, he heard cries of aggerny that almost froze the blud in his veins.

"Yarooooo! Lemme alone, you rotter!" "Woowoooo! Leggo, you cadd! Ow!"

Jack Jolly recognised the voices at once. One was that of Dr. Birchmell, the rebel Head, and the other belonged to Herlock Sholmes, the famous detective.

The intrepid junior crawled to the entrance to the tortcher chamber and peeped in. An amazing site met his eyes. Tied to a pillar in the centre of the chamber were Dr. Birchmell and Herlock Sholmes. And dancing in front of them was a grinning figger in cap and gown, bizzily engaged in tortchering them for all he was worth.

Dr. Crule was doing his job thoroughly. His prisoners' noses were gripped with agger-nising force by a couple of strong mouse-traps, and their arms were twisted behind them in a most inhuman way. Meanwhile, the Tyrant Head was jumping from one to the other, jabbing pins in them with terrific energy!

"Here's one for you, Birchmell!" he cried savvily. "Now one for you, Sholmes! Now another for each of you!"

"Ow-wow-ow!" "Yarooooo!"

"Had enuff?" Jack Jolly heard the Tyrant Head ask, as he pawed for a minnit. "If you haven't, there's plenty more to come; but I would remind you, gentlemen, that your tortcher can end at any moment you choose! If you will only promise to keep my secret and not breathe a word to anyone that I am Slim Jim, the 'wanted' cracksmen!"

"Fw!" wizzled Jack Jolly, as he heard these words. "So that's it!"

Leaping to his feet, he flew down the stone steps three at a time and bust into the tortcher chamber like a cyclone.

Bang! It was the sound of his fist crashing into the Tyrant Head's face. Dr. Crule span backwards like a catherine-wheel and fell in a heap in the far corner.

"Jolly! Hooray!" cried Dr. Birchmell. "It's a treat to see you, my boy!"

"Thanks for the condiment, sir!" grinned Jack Jolly, as he cut the prisoners' bonds. "Ah! Would you?" he added grimly, as something glittered in the corner.

It was an ortomattick pistol which Dr. Crule had whipped out of his pocket. But a timely kick from the leader of the Fourth sent it flying.

"Well kicked, Jolly!" chortled Dr. Birchmell. "Now let's nab Slim Jim!"

But Slim Jim, alias Dr. Crule, was too quick. In a jiffy, he was on his feet and running up the steps.

"After him!" sang out Herlock Sholmes, and he and Jack Jolly raced off together—Dr. Birchmell pawing only to snatch up the ortomattick before following.

With the bogus headmaster leading, all four sprinted towards the gates like champions on the cinder-track.



Just before the porter's lodge was reached, a majestic figger came into view whose meer appearance was enuff to stop the chase. It was Sir Frederick Funguss, chairman of the St. Sam's guvverners.

"Crule! Birchmell! What is the meaning of this?" he demanded in his well-bred voice. "Let me eggplain," said Herlock Sholmes. "I am Herlock Sholmes, the Shaker Street slooth. I came here in response to a message from Doctor Birchmell—and glad I am of it, for it has enabled me to capture this desprit criminal—Slim Jim!"

WOULD YOU BELIEVE IT?



When Billy Bunter challenged Bolsover major to twenty rounds, Bolsover turned up stripped for a twenty-round boxing contest. Bolsover stared when Bunter appeared with twenty rounds of toast, which he offered to eat quicker than Bolsover could! The contest was off—but Bolsover looked as though he could have "eaten" Bunter!



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Dick Rake, of the Remove, is a skilful amateur photographer, and something more than a mere snapshot artist. He asked Mr. Quetch to pose for him, and surprised his Form-master by presenting him with an attractive study with splendid tones. Mr. Quetch has had it framed, and it now hangs over his study mantel-piece.

Ever since Whitsun there has been a mystery about Bolsover's bowling. Before Whitsun he used to bowl simple lobs. But from Whit Bank Holiday on it has been noticeable that you have only to give Bolsover a cricket-ball to turn him into a regular demon. Compared with the new Bolsover, log-theory exponents and baseball pitchers pale into insignificance!

At the practice-nets since Whitsun, you see strong men blanch and cricket kings knock at the knees when Bolsover walks up. Half a dozen balls from him, and the practice-nets look like a battlefield.

What's the explanation? A simple one, my 'earers! After exhaustive inquiries into Bolsover's activities on Whit Monday, I've been able to arrive at it without the slightest trouble.

All that it amounts to is that Bolsover spent five solid hours on Whit Monday at a coconut-shy.

And he simply can't get back to normal!

HARRY WHARTON On—GOSLING'S AMAZING CRICKET FEAT!

If I hadn't seen it with my own eyes, I should never have believed it! But it happened right enough!

It was Gosling's comments on 1935 cricket that led to his being invited to wield a bat in our Junior practice game last Wednesday. The old porter had stopped to look on at Little Side, and his remarks were distinctively unfavourable.

"Wot I says is this 'ere," he growled. "If that's cricket, the game as I played when I was a lad, then I'm a Dutchman!"

Chaps within hearing grinned and exchanged winks, and Bob Cherry egged him on with the leg-pulling question: "Why don't you go in and show us the game as it should be played, Gossy?"

Gosling stroled on to the pitch and got to work—first as a bowler and then as a batsman. We got ready for a good laugh.

But, strange to relate, instead of getting a good laugh out of it, we got a shock.

The cold facts are as follows:

W. STOTT (Remove).—"That hound Skinner even tells fibs about me in his sleep."

Never mind, old sport. Remember the old proverb: "Let sleeping dogs lie."

BOLSOY (Remove).—"I declined an offer to appear in a circus as the Giant Schoolboy."

You did quite right not to "stunt" your growth.

JOHNNY.—"Inky" is an asset to our study.

There's nothing like having "colour" in the home!

DYSPEPTIC (Shell).—"Eating cucumber makes me turn as red as a beetroot."

Eat beetroot, and you'll stay as cool as a cucumber!



Gosling's first ball clean bowled Brown.

His second ball touched Nugent's bat and flew right into the wicket-keeper's hands.

His third ball completely wrecked Vernon-Smith's wicket!

The hat-trick accomplished, he batted.

His first mighty swipe scored a boundary.

His second sent the ball soaring right over the pavilion!

His third—

But here the miracle ended. Gosling missed by a mile, skidded violently, and hit the turf with the back of his neck, giving himself the complete k.o.

Awe-stricken spectators helped him back to his lodge, and Gosling's cricket demonstration was over.

Amazing, oh? But the sequel is, if anything, more amazing still.

When the old porter came round, you see, he didn't remember a thing about it and denied, with quite a lot of heat, that he had ever played cricket on Little Side.

It's not often we admit ourselves beaten, but there are problems that defy even us. We give this one up entirely!

GEORGE BLUNDELL Tells—HOW PROUT GAVE COKER AIR!

I'll tell you just how it happened. Coker walked into the Fifth Form-room wearing khaki shorts, an open-necked shirt, golfing stockings, and brogues. There was a very determined look on his rugged face.

As soon as Prout came in to take the class, Coker stood up.

"Excuse me, sir, but I want to say it's the wrong day for wearing stuffy linen collars and dressy clobber."

"Indeed, Coker!"

"More hygienic to dress like this, sir."

"I see. You find it of benefit to your health?"

"Just that!" agreed Coker. "But of course, that's not all. To get the full benefit, a chap should stay out of a musty old class-room."

"Ah! I see!" There was a sort of icy enthusiasm in Prout's tone. "You are suggesting that the class be transferred to the open air?"

"You've hit it, sir!" said Coker, agreeably surprised to find Prout so responsive. "And why not? Sunshine and fresh air are a jolly sight better than gloom and poison, aren't they?"

"Your theories seem indisputable, Coker!" said Prout, with a kind of concentrated politeness. "Perhaps you would like to expound them to the headmaster?"

Coker looked awfully happy.

"Certainly, sir! Shall I go along and see him now?"

"By all means! I will come with you!"

They went. Coker was fairly beaming. Prout looked strangely intense.

Five minutes later they returned. Prout was beaming now and it was Coker who was strangely intense. Nothing more was said about lessons in the open air, and at morning break Coker went and changed back into civilised clobber.

We asked him about it. Coker's only comment was: "Br-r-r! The Head's a chump! So's Prout!"

Apparently all Coker had got out of expounding his theories to the Head was two hundred lines!

But as we told Coker, he couldn't complain. Prout gave him just what he asked for, anyway—THE AIR!

BOB CHERRY Solves—

MYSTERY OF BOLSOVER'S BOWLING

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