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The REMOVE'S RECRUIT! By FRANK RICHARDS



THE FIRST CHAPTER.

Smithy's Rag!

"**B**AG him!" Harry Wharton heard that whisper in the dark, and jumped.

He was coming down from his study, and, to his surprise, found that the light was out on the Remove staircase.

He was groping for the switch at the head of the stairs when that whisper reached him from the landing below.

Suppressed as the voice was, he recognised the tones of Herbert Vernon-Smith, the Bounder of Greyfriars.

He stared down over the banisters.

But the well of the staircase was like a pit of blackness. He could see nothing.

But he could hear a sound of suppressed breathing, and a subdued chuckle; then came a sound of scuffling.

Somebody had been collared in the dark.

That somebody, coming up the stairs, had evidently run into an ambush on the middle landing. Smithy and his companions had been waiting in the dark, and they had bagged him as he came.

Evidently it was a "rag."

The sound of scuffling intensified. Judging by it, a good many fellows were mixed up on the landing. Whoever it was that had been "bagged," was putting up a strenuous resistance. It was quite a terrific struggle.

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"Owl!" came a sudden howl. There was a heavy fall.

"Look out!"

"Hold him!"

"Scrag him!"

"Pin the brate!"

The panting voices floated up in the dark, and Wharton grinned as he heard them. The Bounder & Co. had caught their victim, whoever he was; but he seemed to be giving them a lot of trouble. Wharton wondered whether it was Coker of the Fifth. If this was a rag on Horace Coker, he was quite willing to lend a hand—and it sounded as if one was needed.

"Got him!" came the panting tones of the Bounder.

There was a thudding, and a scuffling and scrambling. Somebody was down, with fellows scrambling over him.

"Where's the duster?"

"Haven't you got it, you ass?"

"Here it is!"

"Stick it in his mouth!"

A gurgling followed.

Harry Wharton ceased to grin. The Bounder was the fellow for wild and reckless rags; but this seemed to the captain of the Remove rather beyond the limit. He leaned over the banisters and called down:

"Draw it mild, Smithy!"

There was a startled exclamation below. Two or three voices exclaimed together:

"Who's that?"

"Is that Wharton?"

The Bounder's voice came with a snap.

"Keep out of this, Wharton! You're

not wanted here! Mind your own bizney!"

"Sounds to me as if I am wanted," answered the captain of the Remove. "A rag's a rag, Smithy; but there's a limit, though you don't seem to know it."

He groped for the switch again, found it, and turned on the light. Then he ran down to the middle landing.

Half a dozen of the Remove were there. A fellow was sprawling on his back, with Bolsover major clapping a hand over a duster stuffed into his mouth. Skinner and Snoop were holding his arms. Vernon-Smith and Stott were grabbing his legs.

But the victim was not, as Wharton had supposed, Coker of the Fifth. He was a junior—no other than Eric Wilmot, the new fellow in the Remove.

Wilmot's handsome face was crimson with exertion, his eyes flashing. He was still striving to resist, though in vain.

"Wilmot!" exclaimed Harry.

The ragers blinked at him in the sudden light. The Bounder gave him an angry glare.

"You fool! What did you put the light on for? The cad will know us now—to tell tales to his dashed Uncle Hacker."

"Let him go!"

"Rats to you!" snarled the Bounder.

"But what on earth's the game?" exclaimed Harry Wharton. "I don't like the fellow any more than you do, Smithy; but there's a limit, as I said. What are you up to, anyhow?"

"I'll tell you!" snapped the Bounder.

"We're going to stick the fellow in his uncle's study, for Hacker to find when he comes back from the Masters' Meeting in Common-room. He greases up to Hacker, and we're jolly well going to show Hacker what we think of a sneak in the Remove!"

"You mad ass!" exclaimed Wharton, aghast.

He understood now why the ambush had been laid in the dark.

It was believed in the Remove that Eric Wilmot "greased," as the juniors described it, to his uncle, who was master of the Shell. Certainly Hacker, who was fussy, had given Mr. Quelch, the master of the Remove, a good deal of worry about that new member of his Form.

If that reckless rag was carried out, obviously it was necessary to keep the identity of the raggers a secret. If Wilmot was able to name them, nobody doubted that he would do so.

For which reason Smithy's companions were now looking very dubious. Wharton, turning on the light, had rather spoiled the scheme.

"Tie up his fins, Skinner!" snapped the Bounder.

Skinner hesitated.

In the dark, which cloaked his identity, Skinner was prepared to back up the Bounder to any extent. But his nerve evaporated in the light.

"Look here! He's seen us now, Smithy!" muttered Skinner.

"I don't care!"

"Well, I do! I don't want to be up for a Head's flogging! The tick will give Hacker our names——"

"Let him!"

"Look here!" muttered Snoop. "The game's up, through that fool Wharton! Better chuck it, Smithy!"

"Much better," said Harry. "Chuck it, for goodness' sake, Smithy! There'll be a fearful row if you start Hacker on to Quelch again about his precious Eric. You don't want a row with Quelch."

"Bless Quelch! Give me that duster, Skinner, if you're in a funk."

The Bounder jerked the duster from Skinner, and dragged Wilmot's wrists together. His comrades might be dubious, and disposed to "chuck it"; but the Bounder was obstinately determined to carry on, regardless of consequences.

Harry Wharton stepped forward, pushed Bolsover aside, and pulled the gag from Wilmot's mouth. The Bounder gave a yell of rage.

"Hands off, you meddling fool!"

"Chuck it!" said Harry decisively. "It's too thick, Smithy! Buck up, Wilmot! I'll lend you a hand out of this!"

Wilmot panted.

"Wait till you're asked! I've not asked you to help me!"

"Oh!" ejaculated Wharton.

The Bounder laughed scoffingly.

"That's the thanks you get from the rotter! Now mind your own business, and leave us alone!"

Wharton set his lips, and stepped back.

"Very well," he said. "If you don't want any help, Wilmot, I won't shove it at you! You've asked for this, anyhow, with your greasing and sneaking——"

"That's a lie!"

Wharton gave him a look, turned, and went up the Remove staircase again. Bolsover major grabbed the gag again, and shoved it back into Eric Wilmot's mouth, in spite of his struggles. The Bounder knotted the other duster round his wrists.

"Now give me a hand with the cad!" he snapped.

"But he knows us now," faltered Skinner. "He will tell Hacker. We shall all be up before the Head."

"You can crawl away if you're funky," said the Bounder scornfully.

Skinner did not need telling twice. He went up the Remove staircase after Wharton, and Snoop, after a moment's hesitation, followed him.

"You fellows got cold feet, too?" sneered the Bounder, with a glare at Stott and Bolsover major.

"Carry on!" said Bolsover stolidly. "The cad will sneak about this, anyhow, so we may as well put it through."

"In for a penny, in for a pound!" said Stott.

With the shadow of the past cast behind him, Eric Wilmot, the new boy in the Greyfriars Remove, turns over a new leaf and comes out strong as a footballer!

"Get him along, then!"

And Eric Wilmot, in the grasp of the three, was walked down the lower stairs.

Stott cut ahead to scout. But he returned with the report that all was clear. The Masters' Meeting was going on in Common-room; Masters' Studies, generally a dangerous quarter for juniors, was quite safe. And Eric Wilmot, still vainly attempting to resist, was bundled along hurriedly to the study of Mr. Hacker, the master of the Shell.

THE SECOND CHAPTER.

Bunter Wants His Pal!

"SHIRTY?" asked Billy Bunter.

"Fathead!"

"Well, you look it! You've got a rotten temper, Wharton!"

"Ass!"

"How Nugent can stand it I don't know!" said the fat Owl of the Remove. "How do you stand it, Nugent?"

Frank Nugent did not answer that question. He picked up a Latin dictionary from the study table and took aim. The missile whizzed.

Bunter dodged just in time.

The "dick" crashed on the door of

Study No. 1. It dropped to the floor with a thud.

"Beast!" gasped Bunter.

"Inkpot next?" asked Frank Nugent. "If you're not outside in one jump——"

"Look here, a chap can come into a study to see a pal!" hooted Bunter, with wary eyes and spectacles on the look-out for the inkpot. "Where's Wilmot?"

"Don't know, and don't care!"

"Well, a man expects to find a man in his study!" grunted Bunter. "Wharton been rowing with him again? You're always rowing, Wharton."

"Oh, get out, you fat ass!" said the captain of the Remove.

Harry Wharton was not looking exactly "shirty," as Bunter described it. But he was undoubtedly in an annoyed frame of mind when he came back to his study after the encounter on the staircase.

He "barred" Hacker's nephew, and it had been rather against the grain that he had offered to help him out of the hands of the raggers. Wilmot's refusal of his help was neither grateful nor comforting. He wished that he had left the fellow alone in the first place—as he had done after that rebuff.

At the same time, he was rather worried about the Bounder's wild rag. Had such a rag been carried out in secret it would have been reckless enough. But, owing to Wharton, there was no longer any secret about it, and a little common sense would have made Smithy "chuck" it.

If Wilmot gave the raggers away, when inquiry was made, there would be heavy punishments—and Wharton had no doubt that he would. And, though he was not on the best of terms with Smithy just now, he hated the idea of being the cause of the Bounder getting a Head's flogging. Altogether the whole thing was a worry.

"I want to see Wilmot," went on Billy Bunter. "I hardly ever find him in this study. You might be civil to a pal of mine."

"You'd hardly ever find him at all, if he could help it!" grinned Frank Nugent. "You may be Wilmot's pal—but everybody knows exactly how pally he feels to you, you fat fraud."

"Oh, really, Nugent!"

"Go and look for him, and take your face away with you!" grunted the captain of the Remove. "It worries me."

"That's you all over, Wharton—jealous of a chap's good looks——"

"Oh, my hat!"

"The fact is, you fellows," said Bunter confidentially, "I've been disappointed about a postal order——"

"And that's why you want to see Wilmot?" snapped Wharton. "How many bobs and half-crowns have you borrowed from him since he came?"

"I suppose a pal can lend a pal a bob or two, without you barging in, Wharton!" said Billy Bunter warmly. "Wilmot may have lent me a few half-crowns! Well, considering what I've done for him——"

"Well, what have you done for him?"

"Oh, nothing!" said Bunter promptly.

FREE

**A GRAND SCIENTIFIC GIFT FOR
EVERY READER of the MAGNET**

NEXT WEEK!

See pages 7, 14 and 15.

"I don't know anything about the chap, as I've told you a lot of times, and I'm not keeping it dark. He never asked me to, the day he came. Besides, I promised I would, and I'm a fellow of my word, I hope."

Nugent laughed, and Harry Wharton's frowning face broke into a grin. Billy Bunter had his own inimitable way of keeping a secret.

What Bunter could possibly know about the new fellow that Wilmot wanted him to keep dark, was rather a mystery.

But that there was something was revealed by the masterly way Bunter kept the secret, as well as by the fact that Wilmot tolerated the friendship of the fat and fatuous Owl.

Hacker's nephew had made no friends in the Remove, though he had made plenty of enemies. Least of all was he likely to have desired to make friends with Billy Bunter.

He avoided Bunter as much as he could, and when he could not avoid him he tolerated him with ill-concealed impatience. Even Bunter, probably, would have been fed up with a friendship on those lines, but for the fact that he found his pal very useful on occasions—rather frequent occasions—when his celebrated postal order failed to arrive.

The fat Owl blinked indignantly through his big spectacles at two grinning faces.

"I say, you fellows, I must say you're rotten suspicious beasts!" he said, with deep indignation. "Think I'd ask Wilmot to lend me half-crowns because I'm keeping it dark for him about—about—"

"About what?" chuckled Nugent.

"Oh, nothing! What I mean is, it's got nothing to do with it! I oblige a fellow. He obliges me. Think I'm not going to square?" demanded Bunter hotly. "I shall settle up every bob that Wilmot has lent me this term, when my postal order comes."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Blessed if I see anything to cackle at! You fellows may not be so particular about such things—I've always been. But the trouble at the present moment," added Bunter, "is this—I was expecting a postal order from a titled relation, and it hasn't come. To tell you the truth, I'm absolutely stony now."

"That's rather unusual!" remarked Frank Nugent.

"Yes, it's rather unusual for me to be stony, old chap—"

"I mean, for you to tell the truth!"

"Beast! Look here, where's Wilmot? I've asked half a dozen fellows, and they don't know. That beast Cherry—"

"Hallo, hallo, hallo!" said Bob Cherry's cheery voice at the door. "Who's a beast, old fat man?"

Bunter spun round.

"Oh! I—I didn't see you, old chap! I wasn't speaking of you, old fellow—I meant that beast Bull—"

"Mo?" asked Johnny Bull, appearing in the passage behind Bob.

"Oh crikey! Nunno!" gasped Bunter.

"I mean, I was speaking of Inky—"

"My esteemed self?" inquired Hurree Jamset Ram Singh, as his dusky face grinned into the study over Johnny's shoulder.

"Oh lor! No! I—I meant—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Well, which one did you mean?" chuckled Bob Cherry. "The one you meant is going to biff you on the crummet! Say which!"

"I—I didn't mean any of you fellows."

I was really speaking of Smithy!" stammered Bunter. "That beast Smithy—"

"Well, Smithy's nowhere about!" said Bob. "Sure you didn't mean that I was a beast, old fat freak?" He lifted his foot.

"No, old fellow!" Bunter dodged hastily. "But I say, you fellows, you might tell me where Wilmot is? It's tea-time—"

"Useful man at tea-time!" grinned Bob. "The chap's a worm, and a tick, and greases to the beaks, and can't play football—but useful at tea-time."

"He could play your head off at footer, and chance it!" retorted Bunter. "I've seen him bagging goals—"

"Gammon! Don't spin that yarn again, Bunter!"

"I tell you I've seen him—"

"And I tell you you haven't. Ring off! Looked in to see if you've settled about the Rookwood team, Wharton, old bean—"

"It's practically settled," said Harry. "Nugent will have to play in Smithy's place, as he's no good, and—"

"And we'll hope for the best!" said Nugent, with a grimace.

"I say, you fellows, if you want my advice—"

"Shut up!" roared the Famous Five, with one voice. Advice from Billy Bunter on the subject of football really was not wanted in Study No. 1.

"Well, I could give you a tip!" declared Bunter. "If you want to beat Rookwood, you couldn't do better than play my pal Wilmot—if he'd play, of course. I'd use my influence with him—"

"Cheese it!"

"Chuck it!"

"Shut up!"

"Yah!" retorted Bunter. He rolled to the door. In the doorway, out of reach, he turned, and gave the Famous Five a scornful blink through his big spectacles. "Fat lot you fellows know about Soccer! Look at the way Cherry falls over his own feet, and Bull barges about like a mad walrus, and the rest of you fumble and fizzle! Soccer! Yah! Marbles is your game!"

Having delivered that Parthian shot, Bunter bolted. Really, it was only judicious to get promptly out of reach of the Famous Five, after delivering that devastating opinion of their powers as exponents of the great game of Soccer.

It was rather unfortunate for Bunter that as he bolted out of the study doorway Herbert Vernon-Smith reached it, coming along from the stairs with a grin on his face.

It was unfortunate for Smithy, too!

The grin vanished from his face as Bunter barged into him, sending him spinning. Bunter's weight in a charge was no light matter.

"Oh!" gasped the Bounder.

"Oooooogh!" spluttered Bunter.

The fat junior reeled from the shock. Vernon-Smith went over with a bump. The Famous Five, staring out of the study, roared.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The Bounder was on his feet in a twinkling. He jumped at Bunter. He was damaged, and he seemed to want to pass the damage on.

"I say—Ow! Leggo!" howled Bunter. "I say, I never saw you—Yaroooh! I say, old chap—Yah, you beast—Whoop!"

Thump. thump. thump!

"Whoop! I say, old beast—I mean, old chap—Yaroooh! Leggo! I'll jolly well—Yarooop! I say, you fellows, draggimoff!" yelled Bunter.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"There, you fat idiot!" gasped the

Bounder breathlessly. "There, you blithering owl! There, you piffing porker—"

"Ow! Beast! Wow!"

'Nuff's as good as a feast, Smithy!" gasped Bob Cherry, and he grabbed hold of the angry Bounder, and dragged him off Bunter.

"Hands off, you fool!"

"Cut, Bunter, you fat ass!"

Bunter promptly cut. Vernon-Smith wrenched himself away from Bob Cherry's grasp, with an angry glare at the cheery Bob.

"What have you done with Wilmot, Smithy?" asked Harry Wharton.

The angry scowl faded from the Bounder's face, and the grin returned to it.

"Fixed him up in Hacker's study, ready for the old bean to find!" he answered.

"I hope he'll get away before Hacker gets—"

"He can't, I fancy; he's tied to a chair on Hacker's table."

"Oh crumbs!"

"With Hacker's wastepaper-basket on his head—"

"Oh, my hat!"

"And Hacker's inkpot poured over him—"

"Smithy, you mad ass—"

"Surprise for Hacker when he rolls home after the beaks' pow-wow—what?" grinned the Bounder.

"There'll be a fearful row!"

"I shouldn't wonder!"

The Bounder, grinning, went on up the passage. Harry Wharton & Co. looked at one another in silence. Even the Rookwood match was banished from their thoughts by the Bounder's news. That there would be a tremendous "row" was certain! And it was not long in coming!

THE THIRD CHAPTER.

A Shock For Hacker!

"MY dear Quelch—" said Mr. Hacker.

Mr. Quelch compressed his lips a little.

The Masters' Meeting—which Smithy disrespectfully described as the "Beaks' Pow-Wow"—was over, and the various members of the staff leaving the Common-room.

Mr. Prout, master of the Fifth, was still booming—Capper and Wiggins reluctantly lingering to listen to the boom. Mr. Quelch was rather accelerating, as Hacker came out after him; he had a suspicion that Hacker was going to talk, and he did not want any talk from Hacker. He could guess the subject in advance.

However, he slowed, as Hacker called—he could not actually cut the master of the Shell. And they walked along to Masters' Studies together.

"I was going to speak to you, Quelch, about my nephew in your Form!" said Mr. Hacker.

The Remove master suppressed a snort! He had, of course, guessed that one. He made no reply, and Hacker went on:

"You have doubtless observed Eric since he has been there—"

"He has been very much thrust upon my attention, Mr. Hacker!" said the Remove master. "Really, sir—"

"I am, naturally, somewhat concerned about him, as his uncle, sir," said Mr. Hacker stiffly. "The Remove is a somewhat rough and unruly Form—"

"It is my Form, Mr. Hacker!" said Quelch, very distinctly.

"You will not expect me to be satisfied, Mr. Quelch, with my nephew's progress in your Form!" said Mr. Hacker tartly. "At his last school he was universally popular; here, I cannot help noticing that a dead set appears to have been made against him by the other boys—"

"His own fault, sir!" said Mr. Quelch. "A sulky, sullen temper is no recommendation, sir! Wilmot appears to desire to make no friends—it would almost appear that he desires to make enemies."

"No doubt his misfortune at Topham may have affected his outlook a little," conceded Mr. Hacker. "Allowances must be made for that."

"Allowances are made for it by me! They cannot be made by the Remove

"If he has not carried complaints to you, sir—"

"He certainly has not!" exclaimed Mr. Hacker. "On one occasion only he asked me to use my influence with you to excuse him from detention. I told you so. On no other single occasion, sir—"

"Then, sir, your own want of tact has caused that impression in the Remove," said Mr. Quelch grimly. "For there is no doubt that the whole Form believes him guilty of toadying—what they call 'greasing.' If you desire your nephew, sir, to have a less unpleasant time in my Form, I recommend you strongly to leave him entirely to himself, and even to forget that you have a nephew at Greyfriars at all."

"Really, Mr. Quelch—"

retained so complete a faith in the Topham junior who had been expelled in disgrace.

Having switched on the light, the master of the Shell turned towards his table. Then he suddenly stopped, staring transfixed.

He was not alone in the study.

He stared at the strange sight that met his eyes, almost unbelievably. A junior was seated in a chair on the table. He sat there without moving—for the excellent reason that his legs were tied to the chair. He sat silent—for the equally excellent reason that a duster was stuffed into his mouth. Another duster secured his wrists together.

Hacker did not recognise him for the moment. The handsome face was dis-



Sounds of commotion coming up from below reached Wharton's ears. He switched on the light and raced down the stairs. On the landing below he saw a fellow sprawled on his back. Skinner and Snoop held his arms, and Vernon-Smith and Stott his legs, while Bolsover stuffed a duster into his mouth. The victim was not, as Wharton at first supposed, Coker of the Fifth, but Eric Wilmot, the new boy. "What's the game?" exclaimed Wharton.

boys, who know nothing whatever about it. You do not desire them to know, I presume?"

"My nephew could not remain here if the circumstances were known, as you are very well aware, Mr. Quelch. He was innocent of what was laid to his charge, as I most fully and firmly believe—"

"I trust you are right, sir!" said Mr. Quelch dryly. "Innocent or otherwise, he would be well advised to change his ways here. From your account of him, he was a prominent footballer at Topham; here, he has sulkily refused to take part in the Form games. More than that, sir, there seems to be a general impression in my Form that he is a tale-bearer—what the boys call a sneak, sir! That they cannot be expected to forgive."

"That is certainly unjust and untrue!" exclaimed Mr. Hacker warmly. "Eric is quite incapable—"

"Really, Mr. Hacker—"

"It appears useless to discuss the matter with you, Mr. Quelch!" said the master of the Shell acidly.

"Quite, sir!" said Mr. Quelch. "I fully agree!"

And, leaving Mr. Hacker at his study door, the Remove master walked on to his own study, glad to be done with Hacker and the topic of Hacker's nephew.

Mr. Hacker, frowning, entered his study and switched on the light. Mr. Hacker was very far from realising that he mistook a fussy urge for interference for a strict sense of duty. The fact was plain to Mr. Quelch.

But Hacker certainly had cause to be concerned about his nephew, who had been turned out of his school, and whom Dr. Locke had been extremely doubtful about admitting to Greyfriars.

Hacker's was not a trusting nature, so no doubt it was to his credit that he

figured by streaks of ink, poured over it with a liberal hand; and the wastepaper-basket, inverted on the junior's head, came down to the bridge of his nose. Blindfolded by that extraordinary headgear, the tied junior could not see Hacker.

"Good gracious!" gasped Mr. Hacker, finding his voice. "Who—what—What—who—?"

A mumble came from the gagged junior.

"Who are you?" thundered Mr. Hacker. "What are you doing here? What does this mean?"

Mumble!

Mr. Hacker spotted the gag, and realised that the prisoner of his study could not speak. He grabbed it and jerked it away. Then he knocked the wastepaper-basket off the prisoner's head.

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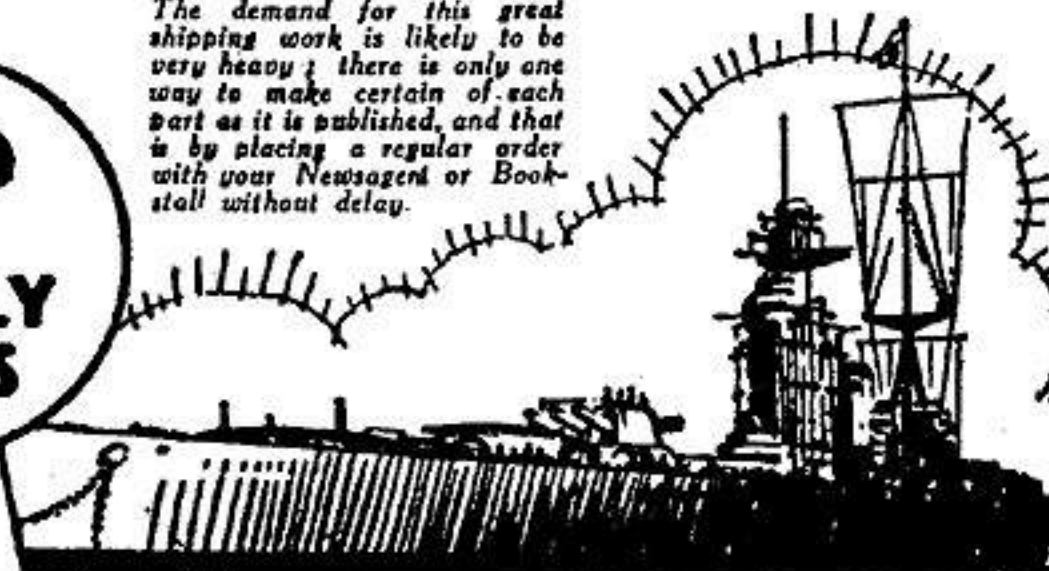
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Then, in spite of the smears and streaks of ink, he recognised Wilmot of the Remove.

"Eric!" he stuttered.

Wilmot, his face crimson where it was not black with ink, stared at his uncle. He had wriggled and struggled wildly, since the Bounder & Co. had left him there, but without being able to get loose—Smithy had taken good care of that!

He had hoped, and longed, that when he was found, it would be by anybody but his Uncle Hacker. But that was not likely, in Hacker's study. And it was Hacker who had found him.

"Eric!" repeated Mr. Hacker, almost dizzily.

"I—I say, get me loose, will you?" muttered Wilmot. "It—it's all right, sir! Only a rag—a joke—"

"The—the rascals! The—the ruffians! The Remove boys have done this!" spluttered the master of the Shell.

Wilmot made no answer.

"Tell me who did this, Eric."

No reply.

"Cannot you speak?" gasped Mr. Hacker. "My poor boy!" He did not notice Wilmot wince. "I will release you at once, and report this matter instantly to Quelch! They shall be flogged—expelled—"

Hurriedly the master of the Shell released the hapless new fellow. Eric Wilmot almost fell off the table.

"Uncle!" he exclaimed. "Don't—"

Deaf to his nephew's voice, Mr. Hacker rushed—almost bounded—from the study! With his gown streaming behind him, in his haste, he rushed up the passage like a thunderstorm—to acquaint Mr. Quelch, without loss of time, with this latest and greatest outrage by that rough and unruly Form, the Remove!

THE FOURTH CHAPTER.

Unexpected!

WINGATE of the Sixth came up to the Remove passage. Harry Wharton & Co. did not need telling why he had come; neither did the Bounder or his friends.

"Form-room at once!" called out the Greyfriars captain.

Most of the Remove fellows were in their studies, or the passage, after tea. Many of them knew, or guessed, what was on; but most of the Form were in ignorance of the Bounder's wild rag.

"Anything up, Wingate?" called out Peter Todd.

"Yes!" answered Wingate curtly.

"I say, you fellows—"

"Are we all wanted?" asked Hazel-dene.

"All the Remove, and at once!" rapped Wingate, and he went down the stairs again. "See that every man goes in, Wharton."

"Yes, Wingate."

"What on earth's the row?" asked Squiff.

The Bounder, in the doorway of Study No 4, laughed.

"Something happened to Eric, perhaps!" he remarked. "Where's dear little Eric? Anybody seen Eric?"

"Isn't he in your study, Wharton?" asked Tom Redwing.

"No!"

"Have you been ragging him, Smithy, you ass?" asked Redwing, with an uneasy look at his chum.

"If you think so, old bean, don't

mention it to Quelch!" said the Bounder, laughing.

"No need—Wilmot will tell his uncle, I suppose," said Redwing, "and Hacker will tell Quelch."

"Silly ass, if you have been ragging that greaser!" said Ogilvy. "But what is the whole Form wanted for? I suppose we haven't all been ragging dear little sweet Eric!"

"Blessed if I know!" said Smithy. "Looks like an inquiry—so Quelch can't have the names yet."

"Then there has been a rag?" asked Toddy.

"Shouldn't wonder."

"Get a move on, you men!" said Harry Wharton. "We're all wanted."

"Wilmot can't have given the names yet!" muttered Skinner. "Of course he will. You were an ass to carry on, Smithy—"

"All that fool Wharton's fault, for turning on the light!" growled Bolsover major. "That tick would never have known us in the dark."

"Sorry!" said the captain of the Remove. "But you should have chucked it—"

"Wish we had!" grunted Bolsover. Now that the hour of reckoning had arrived, Bolsover was not feeling so bold and reckless. "A man might be sacked for it!"

"Couldn't sack five men in a bunch!" said Smithy.

"Five!" repeated Skinner. "Look here, I had nothing to do with sticking the cad in Hacker's study—you know that!"

"Nor I!" mumbled Snoop.

"I'm afraid you backed out too late to dodge the consequences, old beans!" grinned the Bounder. "We're all for it. Bet you Eric will give all the names!"

"Draw it mild, Smithy!" said Lord Mauleverer. "I don't think the fellow's a sneak! Sulky tick, if you like; but—"

"Then you're a silly ass!" snapped the Bounder. "Every man in the Form knows he's a greaser and a sneak, and that's why he's been ragged."

"Is that why?" asked Mauly.

"Yes, ass!"

"Not because he whopped you in a scrap?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Look here, you silly, cheeky idiot—"

"Oh, come on!" exclaimed Harry Wharton. "If we keep Quelch waiting, it won't improve matters."

Some of the Removites were already going down the stairs. The rest followed them. Harry Wharton rooted out other members of the Form from the Rag, and the whole of the Remove marched to their Form-room—with the exception of Eric Wilmot, who was not to be seen.

He was seen, however, as soon as the juniors arrived in the Remove-room.

He was standing there with his uncle, the master of the Shell, and Mr. Quelch. Some of the juniors grinned at the sight of him. His face was still streaked and smeared with ink, his hair tousled like a mop. He had not yet had time to put himself to rights after the rag.

But the expression on Mr. Quelch's face showed that it was no grinning matter. Hacker was almost purple; but the Remove master was pale with anger.

Fed-up as he was with Hacker and his nephew, nothing could have been more unwelcome to Mr. Quelch than

this tremendous rag. It was a rag beyond all bounds—quite outside the limit. And it placed the Remove master in an awkward and painful position. It seemed to justify Hacker's continual complaints that his nephew was ill-used in Quelch's Form.

Mr. Quelch's eyes glittered at his Form, as they stood in silence. It was clear that he was going to take the sternest possible view of this occurrence.

It was not a matter for canings or detentions. It meant floggings from the Head, at least.

Indeed, it was quite possible that it might mean expulsions. Even the hardy and reckless Bounder felt a twinge of uneasiness, as he read the expression on the speaking countenance of Henry Samuel Quelch.

"Boys!" said Mr. Quelch, in a voice that was not loud, but very deep. "An outrage—an unprecedented outrage—has taken place during the Masters' Meeting a short time ago! Every boy who entered Mr. Hacker's study will stand forward!"

Nobody stood forward.

Skinner and Snoop wriggled uneasily, with sickly faces. Having backed out before the actual rag had taken place, they hoped to escape the consequences, or the worst of them, at least. But they were deeply alarmed.

Bolsover major and Stott looked surly. The Bounder was as cool as ice. He had not the slightest doubt that Wilmot was going to give him away. But he had no intention of giving himself away.

There was a brief pause.

"I call upon the boys concerned in this outrage to stand forward!" said Mr. Quelch.

There was no stir in the ranks of the Remove. If Mr. Quelch expected any fellow to own up, he was disappointed.

Mr. Hacker broke in.

"My nephew, sir, can give you the names of the boys who attacked him!" he barked. "It is useless to ask your Form to admit what they have done."

"Please leave this matter in my hands, Mr. Hacker!"

"Very well, sir; but I insist—"

"I shall deal with this matter, sir, in my own Form-room, in my own way!" said Mr. Quelch.

"You will not be able to extract the truth from your Form, sir!" barked Mr. Hacker.

"Mr. Quelch will hear the truth from his Form, or nothing, sir!" said Harry Wharton coolly.

Hacker gave the captain of the Remove a glare.

"Were you concerned in this, Wharton? I think it very probable! Tell me, at once, if you were concerned in this!"

"I shall answer my own Form-master, sir, if he questions me!" retorted Wharton. "I am here at Mr. Quelch's orders—"

"You insolent young rascal—"

"Mr. Hacker, I insist upon your leaving this matter in my hands!" exclaimed Mr. Quelch. "I will not permit you, sir, to question my Form."

"Mr. Quelch—"

"Until you are silent, sir, the matter cannot proceed!" said the Remove master.

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Mr. Hacker controlled himself with difficulty.

"Now, my boys," went on Mr. Quelch, "the truth of this matter must be made known. An unprecedented outrage has taken place in a master's study. Wilmot, of this Form, appears to have been taken by violence to Mr. Hacker's study, tied to a chair on the table, gagged with a duster, and smothered with ink!"

"It is a matter for the headmaster to deal with, and I hope and trust that Dr. Locke will not consider it necessary to expel any member of the Form. But he is certain to take an extremely serious view of an outrage in a master's study! Once more, I ask the boys concerned in this matter to stand forward!"

There was another pause.

"Very well," said Mr. Quelch at last. "If the boys concerned will not confess, I have no alternative but to ask Wilmot to name them."

There was a sound of hissing in the Remove.

"Silence! Wilmot, give me the names
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of the boys who carried you to Mr. Hacker's study."

Wilmot made no answer.

"Speak, Eric!" snapped Mr. Hacker. "Do you not hear your Form-master? What is the matter with the boy? Answer Mr. Quelch at once!"

"I've nothing to say, sir," said Wilmot quietly.

"What do you mean? You know the names of the boys who attacked you!" exclaimed Mr. Hacker.

"Yes, sir."

"Give Mr. Quelch the names at once!"

Wilmot set his lips obstinately, but did not speak. Mr. Hacker stared at him in angry perplexity. Mr. Quelch gave him a very curious look.

"Wilmot, I understand your reluctance to answer," he said. "But this is no ordinary matter. I order you, as your Form-master, to give the names."

"I can't, sir."

"You know the names?"

"Yes, sir."

"Then give them to me at once."

Wilmot did not speak.

"Will you answer, Eric?" thundered Mr. Hacker.

Wilmot drew a deep breath.

"No, sir," he said.

THE FIFTH CHAPTER.

Nothing To Say!

THERE was a deep silence in the Remove Form Room.

Every eye was fixed on Eric Wilmot.

Not a man in the Form, except Mauly, had doubted that he would give the names of the raggers—that he would be glad to give them.

His refusal to speak was utterly unexpected.

A fellow who "greased to a beak"—who was believed to carry tales to his uncle's study—was expected to "sneak" as a matter of course. Indeed, a fellow who was no sneak would hardly have been expected to remain silent in face of a direct order from his Form-master.

But Wilmot stood silent.

Skinner and Snoop breathed a little more freely. Was it possible that the fellow was not going to give them away, after all? Bolsover major and Stott looked relieved. As for the Bounder, he was completely puzzled.

A pin might have been heard to drop in the Remove-room for some moments. Mr. Quelch broke the silence.

"Wilmot!"

"Yes, sir?"

"I repeat that this is no ordinary matter—not a matter for schoolboy scruples. I have given you an order!"

"I heard you, sir."

"You will obey me, Wilmot!"

"I can't, sir."

"And why cannot you?" demanded Mr. Quelch, his voice rising.

"I can't give the names, sir."

"Preposterous!" exclaimed Mr. Hacker. "But I think I understand, sir. My nephew expects further ill-usage in your Form, sir, in the event of—"

Wilmot's face flamed.

"Nothing of the kind!" he exclaimed

hotly. "I can take care of myself! I won't give the names—"

"Eric!"

"I won't give the names! I'm not a sneak or an informer! I'll be sacked before I'll give the names!"

"Oh gad!" murmured the Bounder.

"What game is that tick playing now?"

"He means it," muttered Redwing.

"Rot!"

"You will certainly be punished, Wilmot, and with great severity, if you refuse to obey an order from your Form-master," said Mr. Quelch grimly.

"Very well, sir; I know that."

"Absurd!" booted Mr. Hacker.

"Eric, speak at once! Your Form-master has told you that this is not a matter for schoolboy scruples. Speak at once!"

"I can't, sir."

"If you refuse to obey your Form-master, Eric, you will not refuse to obey your uncle! I speak as your relative in ordering you to give the names."

Wilmot looked at his uncle. Mr. Hacker, according to his lights, was a good and conscientious man and a kind uncle; it was owing to him that the boy had a chance at Greyfriars after his disaster at Topham. But his goodness and kindness, which were undoubted, were outweighed by an acid and irascible temper and a fussy desire to interfere.

"I'm sorry, sir," said Wilmot steadily, "but you cannot give me orders as my uncle, here. I hope I'm grateful for your many kindnesses to me, sir; but here I am a Greyfriars boy, under nobody's orders but my Form-master's."

The Removites could scarcely believe their ears. Mr. Hacker could hardly believe his.

"Upon my word!" gasped Mr. Hacker. "Do I hear aright? I have been your friend, your protector, and you repay me with this insolence—"

"I hope I am not insolent, sir. But I don't need protection any more than any other fellow in the Remove."

"Upon my word!"

Mr. Quelch suppressed a smile. Hacker was staring at Wilmot, dumfounded.

"Looks as if the chap isn't such a worm, after all," murmured Bob Cherry.

"The lookfulness is terrific."

"Blessed if I make him out!" muttered Harry Wharton. "Everybody thought—"

"Everybody seems to have been wrong," grinned Bob.

"Silence!" rapped Mr. Quelch, as murmurs reached his ears. "Now, Wilmot, you will listen to me! I command you—"

Wilmot's inky face set stubbornly.

"I've nothing to say, sir."

"Leave this boy to me for the moment, Mr. Quelch," said the master of the Shell, his voice husky with anger. "Eric, give me your attention! You must give the names of the perpetrators of this outrage, so that they may be dealt with by your headmaster. If you refuse to do so—"

"I do refuse, sir."

"If you refuse, your Form-master will deal with you for disobedience. And I," added Mr. Hacker, his voice trembling with passion—

"I will have nothing further to do with you! I will forget that you are my nephew! I will wash my hands of an ungrateful and stubborn boy!"

"Very well, sir."

"What—what did you say?"

"I said, very well, sir."

Mr. Hacker gave him one look, turned, and whisked out of the Remove-room; the door closed after him—hard. The bang was followed by dead silence.

Mr. Quelch stood looking at Wilmot. As a Form-master he could not pass over the boy's disobedience to a direct order; but in other respects Eric Wilmot had risen very considerably in his estimation—as he had, undoubtedly, in that of the Remove.

"I hardly know what to say to you, Wilmot," said Mr. Quelch at last. "If you refuse to obey me, your Form-master, you know the consequences."

"Yes, sir."

"In such a case I can only report your conduct to your headmaster, with a request that you may be sent away from the school."

"I know, sir."

"Very well. Will you give me the names I require?"

The Remove hung on Wilmot's answer. It came in a voice low but clear.

"No, sir."

"Oh crikey!" squeaked Billy Bunter.

"Silence! Wilmot, I shall consider this matter, and deal with you later. For the present the Form is dismissed."

In amazed silence the Remove filed out of the Form-room. In the passage there was an outbreak of buzzing voices.

"Who'd have thought it?" asked Bob Cherry.

"I did, old bean!" murmured Lord Mauleverer.

"Well, you're an ass, Mauly!"

"Seems to me that Mauly's the only man here who isn't an ass," said Harry Wharton.

"Yaas," agreed Mauly, "that's so."

"I say, you fellows—"

"The chap's a toad," said Harry, "but he's no sneak. And it's all rot about his greasing up to Hacker; he's sent the old bean off in a towering rage. The fellow's all right in his own way."

"He's up to somethin'," said the Bounder.

"Oh, rot!" said Wharton gruffly.

"I tell you—"

"Rubbish! If he'd given you away, you'd have got a Beak's flogging—and very likely the sack! And he's got something coming to him for refusing to obey Quelch's order. You'd better shut up, Smithy!"

The Bounder shrugged his shoulders, and walked away—puzzled, relieved, but still sceptical. But in the Remove generally there was quite a revulsion of feeling.

Mr. Hacker, with the best intentions, had done the worst possible for his nephew since Wilmot had been at Greyfriars. But in bringing about that scene in the Form-room, he had inadvertently done better than he dreamed. Fellows who disliked Wilmot most, for his sulky looks and bitter tongue, felt concerned about him now—wondering what he was going to get from Quelch!

The fellow who had been regarded as a sneak and a "greaser," had proved, beyond question, that he was neither—at a risk to himself that few fellows would have been prepared to run. It was unexpected—it was amazing—and it kept the Remove in a buzz of excited discussion.

THE SIXTH CHAPTER.

Not Pally!

HARRY WHARTON paused—opened his lips—and closed them again. He hesitated.

It was the following day—and a half-holiday at Greyfriars. When the

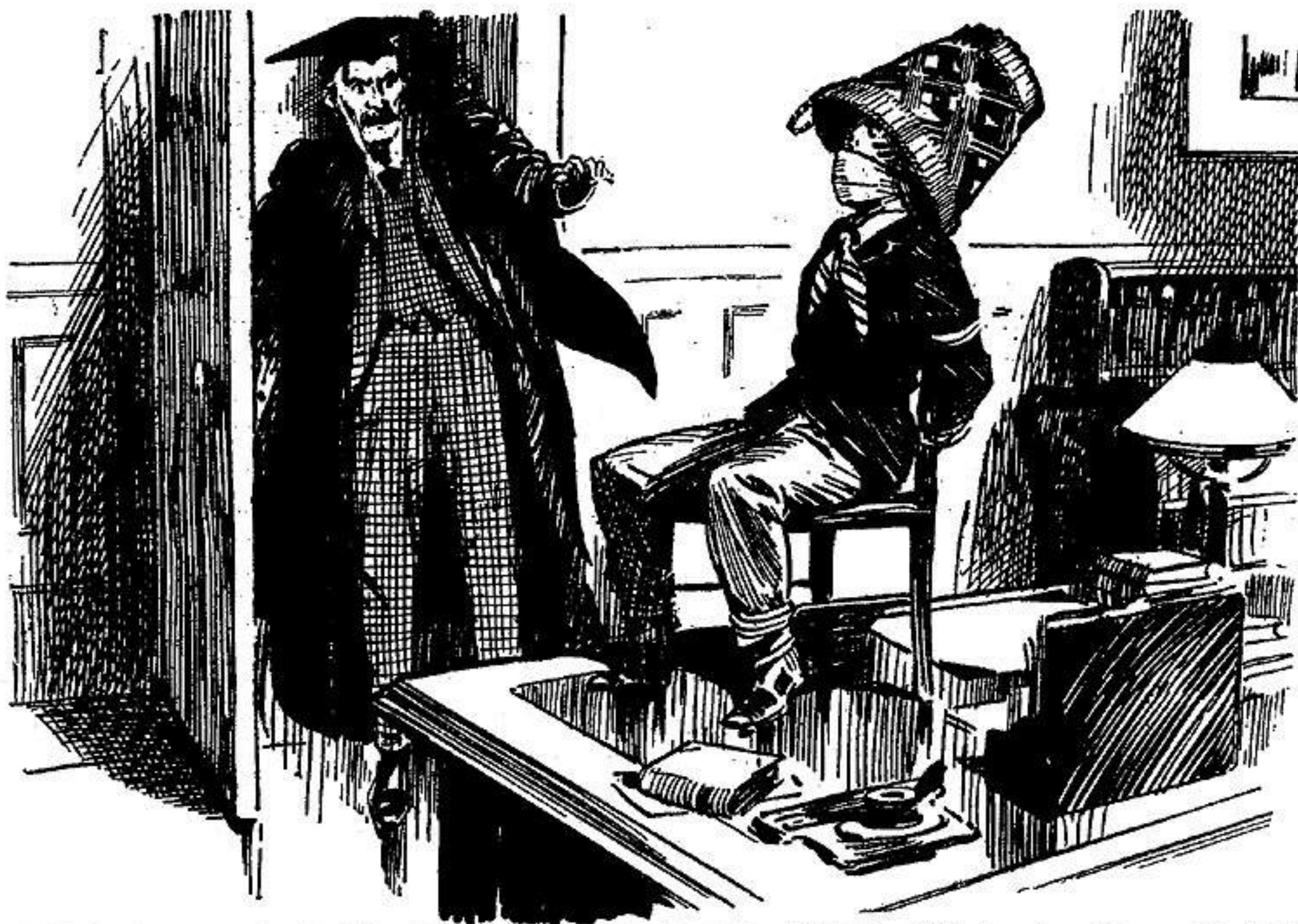
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Mr. Hacker's eyes opened wide at the sight of the junior tied to the chair on his table. "Good gracious!" gasped the Shell master, finding his voice at last, but failing to recognise the junior. "Who—what—what—who—" A mumble came from the gagged junior.

Greyfriars fellows came out after dinner, Wharton sighted Wilmot—going into the quad, alone, as usual.

He was tempted to speak; but the half-sulky, half-disdainful expression on the new junior's face gave him pause, and Wilmot passed on.

Wharton stood looking after him doubtfully.

Then he smiled, as he saw Mr. Hacker.

The master of the Shell, walking in the quad, passed his nephew—but, for the first time since Wilmot had been at Greyfriars, passed him with an unregarding eye.

Wilmot might have been the veriest stranger to Mr. Hacker. Hacker did not even give him a glance.

Evidently Mr. Hacker was still very annoyed about the occurrences of the previous day. Equally evidently, he was sticking to what he had declared in the Remove Form Room. Henceforward, Eric Wilmot was, in his eyes, simply a Remove boy, like any other—no longer the object of his fussy concern.

Making up his mind, Harry Wharton followed the new junior, and overtook him. He tapped him on the arm, and Wilmot glanced round.

"Sorry!" said Harry.

"What about?"

"You can guess! You've put everybody's back up, Wilmot; but it was decent of you to act as you did yesterday. There would have been floggings all round—and very likely the sack for Smithy! A good many fellows would have given them away—considering what they did."

"I shouldn't!"

"We know that—now!" Wharton carefully took no notice of the fellow's curt, dry manner. "Look here,

Wilmot! You've set yourself right with the Form, to a good extent! Why not carry on the good work?"

Wilmot stared at him.

"I don't quite see—"

"Chuck up sulking, and being a sullen ass, and all that!" said Harry. "Look here! We're putting in some games practice this afternoon, and after that, going out on the bikes. Will you join up?"

"No!"

Wharton breathed rather hard.

He had felt that it was up to him to make some advance to bridge the gulf between that peculiar new fellow and the rest of the Form. Wilmot had been misjudged, though it was largely his own fault. But bridging the gulf seemed rather uphill work.

"I can't make you out, Wilmot!" said the captain of the Remove at last. "Do you want to live in a school like this like a sort of Robinson Crusoe?"

Wilmot smiled involuntarily.

"What's the good of it?" went on Wharton. "If you came a mucker at your last school, you don't want to repeat the performance here, I suppose?"

The new junior started violently, and the red rushed into his face.

"Has Bunter—" he stammered. He broke off quickly. "What do you mean? What do you know?"

"Nothing!" answered Harry. "But a blind man could see that you've got something on your mind. It's not natural for a fellow to behave as you do. And everybody in the Remove knows that Bunter knows something or other that you've asked him to keep dark."

"If that's so, it's my own business."

"I know! I'm not inquisitive," said

Harry. "Nobody wants to know anything about your affairs. But a fellow is expected to keep a civil tongue in his head. According to what Hacker's said, you're no end of a footballer, and played for your last school, wherever that was. That ass Bunter spins a yarn about having seen you do terrific stunts at Soccer, and I believe he did, though I'm blessed if I know where he can have seen it. Why not give yourself a chance?"

Wilmot made no reply.

"I shouldn't be speaking to you like this, or at all, but for what happened yesterday," added Wharton frankly. "But—"

"I guessed that one!" said Wilmot, with a curl of the lip. "And I'm not asking to be taken up, by you or any man in the Remove. I only want to keep to myself, and be let alone."

"If that's what you want, you'll get it! But I can't understand a chap chucking footer, if he's good at the game. Will you join up?"

There was a perceptible hesitation before Wilmot replied. But the answer came curtly:

"No—thanks!"

"Well, you're an ass!" said Harry.

"Thanks again!"

"I say, you fellows—"

Billy Bunter rolled up. Harry Wharton walked away. He had had enough of Wilmot, and he did not want any of Billy Bunter.

Wilmot would have walked away also, but the fat Owl caught hold of his sleeve.

"Hold on, old chap!" he said.

Wilmot held on. The look on his face would have discouraged any fellow but
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Bunter. But William George Bunter was not easily discouraged.

"I say, old chap, it's a topping afternoon for a run out of gates!" said Bunter cheerfully.

"I'm not going out."

"Like a walk down to Courtfield?"

"No!"

"And tea at the bunshop?" said Bunter temptingly. "My treat, you know. I say, Wilmot, I'm rather sorry, but my postal order hasn't come yet. I say, don't walk away while a chap's talking! You've lent me a few small sums since you've been here, old chap, but—"

"Never mind that!" said Wilmot, displaying very visible signs of impatience. As he had no friend in his Form, he might have been expected—at least, by Bunter—to be glad of the fat Owl's friendship. But if he was feeling any gladness, his looks belied him.

"But I do mind!" said Bunter firmly. "I'm rather particular about such things, Wilmot. We are here, you know! It may have been different at Topham!"

Wilmot gave a quick glance round, and Bunter grinned. When the new fellow showed too visible signs of being fed-up with Bunter, the fat Owl had a cheery way of mentioning Topham! It was a hint to Wilmot that a fellow knew what he knew, so to speak.

Why Wilmot wanted to keep his former school dark, was a complete mystery to Bunter. But he knew that Wilmot did, and that was enough for him.

"Shut up, you ass!" muttered Wilmot.

"Oh, really, Wilmot—"

"Oh, buzz off, Bunter!" said the new junior impatiently. "Do give a fellow a rest!"

"If that's what you call pally, Wilmot, I—"

Wilmot set his lips. Billy Bunter was very near, at that moment, to stopping a boot with his tight trousers! Bunter had been very near it many times since he had established himself as Wilmot's "pal." Never had a generous friendship been so lightly prized!

"As I was saying," went on Bunter, with a great deal of dignity, "I've been disappointed about a postal order, so I shan't be able to settle those few trifling sums at present—"

"Never mind, then!"

"I've said that I do mind! But I shall have to let it stand over till next week. Perhaps the week after. Now, what about a walk down to Courtfield?"

"No!"

"We'll take the motor-bus, if you like."

"I don't like!"

"We can get a jolly decent tea at the bunshop!" said Bunter. "My treat, you know! I shall have to ask you to lend me ten bob, that's all!"

The idea of expending ten shillings for the pleasure of watching Bunter feed at the bunshop in Courtfield, did not seem to appeal to the new junior, somehow. He grunted.

"I say, you're not detained, are you?" asked Bunter. "Has Quelch come down on you, old chap? I say, I don't believe he was so ratty with you yesterday as he made out. He doesn't like fellows sneaking. Your uncle's a bit of a blighter, I must say, but—"

"Shut up!" muttered Wilmot.

Mr. Quelch, coming out of the House, glanced at the two juniors. Bunter, having his back to him, and having, of course, no eyes in the back of his head, did not see him. He rattled on:

"I believe Quelch is going to let the matter drop. Most of the fellows think so. He isn't an old toad like Hacker, you know."

"You fat idiot! Shut up!" hissed Wilmot. Mr. Quelch was coming along directly towards them. "Quelch—"

Bunter, not seeing Mr. Quelch with the back of his bullet head, did not see any reason for shutting up. Bunter seldom shut up, anyhow.

"Quelch is a crusty old stick!" he went on cheerily. "But Hacker's really the limit, you know! A regular acid drop! Crusty old toad—"

"Bunter!"

"Oh lor'!"

Billy Bunter spun round in alarm. His eyes almost popped through his spectacles at his Form-master.

Mr. Quelch gave him a severe frown.

"Bunter, are you venturing to speak of a gentleman on Dr. Locke's staff in such terms?" exclaimed Mr. Quelch.

"Oh, no, sir!" gasped Bunter. "I wasn't speaking of Mr. Hacker, sir! I—was—was speaking of somebody else of—the same name, sir—"

"You will take two hundred lines, Bunter—"

"Oh crikey!"

"And go into the House at once and write them!"

"Oh lor'!"

"If the lines are not brought to me by tea-time, Bunter, I shall cane you!"

"Oh crumbs!"

Mr. Quelch walked on. Billy Bunter gave his back a devastating blink.

"Beast!" he gasped, when Quelch was out of hearing. "I say, Wilmot, old chap, you do those lines for me, will you?"

"No!"

"Oh, really, old fellow, you can make your fist like mine! Look here, I'll do the first line, and you can copy the fist—I say, don't walk off while a chap's talking to you!" roared Bunter. "I say—"

But Wilmot was going, evidently having had enough of Billy Bunter's fascinating company and entrancing conversation. Heedless of Bunter's roar, he accelerated.

"Beast!" hooted Bunter.

And the fat Owl went, indignantly and morosely, into the House to write his lines—or, at least, to squat in the armchair in Study No. 7, and think about doing them.

Wilmot, with a clouded brow, went out of gates for one of the solitary rambles with which he was accustomed to kill time on a half-holiday. The new junior had made no friends at his new school, and the alternative was a sulky solitude. But even that was preferable to the valuable friendship of William George Bunter.

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THE SEVENTH CHAPTER.

A Surprising Discovery!

"HALLO, hallo, hallo!"

"Old Lunn!"

Five cheery cyclists slowed down and jumped off their machines. The Famous Five had been for a spin in the cold, clear, frosty afternoon, and were coming back in a whizzing bunch along the road when they sighted the St. Jude's junior.

Lunn of the Fourth Form at St. Jude's, was standing by the roadside, with a bike upended under a tree, evidently having found trouble with a puncture. He glanced round, and nodded to the Greyfriars fellows.

"Want any help?" asked Bob.

"Thanks, I've finished the dashed thing!" answered Lunn. "Must have picked up a thorn on the footpath! All

right now. I've only got to pump up the brute! Blow it!"

"Rotten luck!" said Bob. "I had a puncture the day we were coming over to see your match at St. Jude's, and we never got there. Bunter told us that you let Topham beat you."

"We won't let you beat us, anyhow, when you come along!" said Lunn. "You can get ready for a wallop!"

"Then Topham did pull it off?" asked Harry. "We were coming over to see the game, but Bob's bike conked out. Bunter went over in a taxi, and it's been a mystery ever since who paid for the taxi."

Lunn chuckled.

"You missed a good game," he said. "Topham aren't up to our weight, really—"

"That's why they won?" asked Johnny Bull.

"Oh, don't be an ass! Topham aren't whales at Soccer," said Lunn. "But they had a wonderful man—a real corker—and he lapped up goals like a cat lapping up milk! You should have seen him!"

"Wish we had!" said Bob. "Should have but for that rotten puncture! Bunter told us something about it; even Bunter noticed it, so the man must have been a regular eye-opener!"

"He was," said the St. Jude's junior. "I'm not likely to forget that chap; it was a queer business."

"His goal-getting?"

"No; what happened afterwards. Can't make it out to this day!" said the St. Jude's junior. "They had some sort of a row in the dressing-room after the game. Fancy that at a football match! You'd have thought they worshipped the ground that chap trod on after the game when he'd piled up the goals. And then afterwards—goodness knows what happened! But he went off by himself, and the team went back to Topham without him—"

Lunn broke off suddenly.

From the footpath, near which the group of schoolboys stood, a schoolboy came into sight, walking along, with a moody face, his hands in his pockets and his eyes on the ground.

Lunn stared at him.

"Well, my hat!" he ejaculated. "Talk of angels, and you hear the rustle of their wings—what?"

Harry Wharton & Co. looked round. It was Eric Wilmot, the new fellow in the Remove, coming down the footpath, returning to the school after his solitary ramble.

He looked up and saw the chums of the Remove. Whether he noticed Lunn or not, they could not tell; but he turned abruptly from the path and went through the wood, evidently desirous of avoiding a meeting.

Bob Cherry grinned.

"Cheery and friendly as ever!" he remarked.

"You know that chap?" asked Lunn, staring after Wilmot as he disappeared among the frosty trunks of Friardale Wood.

"Well, yes, rather!" said Bob. "Do you know him, Lunny?"

"Only met him once, on the football ground," answered Lunn. "But I shan't forget him in a hurry. That's the chap I was speaking of."

"What?"

"Who?"

"That's Wilmot!" exclaimed Wharton. "Yes; that's his name." The St. Jude's junior nodded. "Can't imagine what a Topham man is doing walking about here; his school must be sixty miles away!"

"His school?" repeated Wharton.

"Yes, Topham—"

"His school's Greyfriars," said Harry.

"Greyfriars?" repeated Lunn. "You don't mean to say he's at your school now?"

"He's a new chap in our Form. He's only been in the Remove two or three weeks," said Bob, in wonder. "Mean to say that he's the chap who piled up goals for Topham?"

"He's the chap all right! Jolly odd that he should leave his school just after the term started and go to another show!" said Lunn, mystified. "My hat, we shall have to pull up our socks when we meet you if you've got that sportsman playing for you!"

"But we haven't," said Harry.

"Don't you know a footballer when you see one?" asked the St. Jude's junior. "I tell you, that man Wilmot came through us like a knife through cheese! The rest were nowhere! But he walked all over us, and did what he liked with the ball! Four goals off his own boot—"

"He's a dud at footer!" roared Johnny Bull. "He's never touched a ball at Greyfriars except to fizzle it!"

"You should have seen him that day at St. Jude's!" grinned Lunn. "Ask

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your fat man Bunter! He saw him—"

Bob Cherry gave a yell.

"Oh, my hat! That's where Bunter saw Wilmot play and pile up goals; we know he saw that match at St. Jude's! What has the blithering idiot kept it dark for?"

"That's it!" said Nugent, with a nod.

"Look here, Lunn," said Harry Wharton, "are you sure it's the same chap?"

"Am I sure he kicked four goals for Topham?" grunted Lunn. "Think I'd forget him after that? Besides, the name's the same—Wilmot! There were a dozen Topham men there that day, and they were all yelling 'Wilmot!' and 'Good old Eric!' at the top of their voices. Of course he's the same chap!"

"Eric!" said Nugent. "His name's Eric all right! That settles it!"

"Hasn't he let on at Greyfriars that he plays footer?" asked Lunn. "He must be pulling your leg—goodness knows why! I'll tell you this—you haven't got a man that could play one half of him, and we haven't, either! I tell you, he's a real corking miracle at Soccer, and I'd give any three of my forwards to have him in my front line! If he's left Topham, we shall beat them when we go over there, that's a comfort!"

"Well, my only hat!" said Bob.

Lunn pulled his bike out into the road, and put a leg over it.

"Must be blowing along," he remarked. "See you chaps again, when we come over to beat you at footer! Leave Wilmot out, for my sake!"

He waved his hand and rode away for St. Jude's. Harry Wharton & Co. stared after him, and then stared at one another. That chance meeting had brought about an astonishing discovery.

"That dud—the man who piled up goals for Topham!" said Bob. "What is his silly game, then, making out that he doesn't care for footer?"

"He's no dud, at any rate, from what Lunn says," said Harry Wharton. "I've

thought before that his fozzling at footer was only part and parcel of his sulks—and I'm sure of it now."

"But why?"

"Goodness knows! But one thing's jolly certain," said the captain of the Remove emphatically. "Now we know what Wilmot is like at Soccer, he's the man we want for Rookwood. Sorry, Franky, but—"

"Don't mind me!" said Nugent, with rather a grimace. "I don't make out that I could pile up four goals against St. Jude's."

"Only a jolly good man could!" said Harry. "I can't make Wilmot out; but one thing's a cert—he's going to play for the Form if we have to take him by his ears and make him! Come on!"

And the Famous Five remounted their jiggers and rode home to Greyfriars, greatly surprised by what they had learned from the junior captain of St. Jude's. Why Wilmot had kept it dark, when it was so much to his credit, was a mystery they could not begin to fathom. But it was "dark" no longer, and Harry Wharton's mind was made up—Wilmot was going to play for Greyfriars in the Rookwood match, even if he had, as he put it, to take him by his ears to make him!

THE EIGHTH CHAPTER.

Let Down!

"JUST the chap I want!" said Billy Bunter.

Wilmot compressed his lips.

If he was just the chap Bunter wanted, it was clear that Bunter was not just the chap he wanted!

The new fellow had just come in, a little tired after his long ramble, when Bunter spotted him in the Remove passage.

Wilmot had paused outside his study—No. 1 in the Remove. He did not care for the crowd in the Rag, but the sound of voices from his study told him that Harry Wharton & Co. had got in. Billy Bunter, blinking out of Study No. 7 through his big spectacles, spotted him as he stood hesitating, and bore down on him.

"Come into my study, old chap!" said Bunter.

Wilmot did not move. He did not want company in his own study, but he would have preferred it to Bunter's.

But the fat Owl was not to be denied. He grabbed the new fellow by the arm, and almost dragged him along to Study No. 7.

"Look here—" muttered Wilmot.

"Oh, come in!" urged Bunter. "It's rather particular! In fact, I want you to do me a favour."

Wilmot unwillingly followed him into Study No. 7. Peter Todd and Tom Dutton were teasing out, and they had the study to themselves.

"Well, what is it?" asked Wilmot restively.

"Tea-time—"

"I'm going to tea in Hall—"

"I'll come with you, old chap—lots of time yet. I'll help you carry in a few things, if you're going to do any shopping! But never mind that now—tea can wait a bit."

Wilmot stared at him. He had had a good deal of conversation from Billy Bunter during the past few weeks. But this was the first time that he had heard Bunter suggest letting a meal wait a bit!

"It's my lines!" explained Bunter.

"Lines?" repeated Wilmot.

"You remember Quelch gave me two hundred lines because he heard me talking about your beastly uncle—"

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"My what?"

"Beastly uncle! Well, I haven't done the lines!" said Bunter. "I was going to—in fact, I started two or three times, but they never got done."

"Better wire in, then, before it's too late!" suggested Wilmot, making a move towards the door.

"Don't go, old chap! It's too late already," explained the fat Owl. "Old Quelch said they were to be handed in by tea-time. Well, it's tea-time now. He may be up after them any minute. If I don't take them to his study pretty quick, he will come up here—and I can tell you he will bring a cane with him. Don't go! I can't take them as they're not done, can I? But I jolly well don't want to be whopped."

Bunter rolled between Wilmot and the door.

Wilmot, it was quite clear, was anxious to go. Bunter was anxious for him to stay.

Without rolling the fat junior out of his way, Wilmot could not depart. So he stayed. But his manner grew more and more restive.

"Look here, cut it short!" he said.

"You're not in a hurry, I suppose—"

"Well, I am."

"Rot!" said Bunter. "You've got no friends—nobody ever speaks to you; you've always got lots of time on your hands. Don't you try to gammon me, Wilmot. I'm your only friend here, and I think you might be a bit grateful, too. I must say that."

"You fat fool!"

"Oh, really, old chap—"

"What do you want? Cut it short, I tell you!"

"I'm telling you as fast as I can, only you keep on interrupting me. A chap can hardly get in a word edgewise. Look here, there's my lines—you can see how much I've done."

Bunter pointed a fat forefinger at a sheaf of impot paper on the study table.

On the top sheet was written a single line: "Arma virumque cano, Trojae qui primus ab oris—"

That, apparently, was the total contribution Bunter had made, so far, towards the two hundred lines awarded him by Mr. Quelch. Certainly, little time remained for writing the remaining hundred and ninety-nine.

Wilmot glanced at the scrawl, and then stared impatiently at Bunter. He could not in the least make out what the fat Owl wanted.

"Will you tell me what you want and let me get out?" asked Wilmot, breathing hard.

"I'm telling you, ain't I? Look here, you're going to chuck that stack of paper in the fire—"

"What on earth—"

"And explain to Quelch when he comes that you used my lines to light the study fire for tea! See?"

"But the fire's lighted already—"

"Quelch won't know that, ass! If you tell him you lighted it, why shouldn't he believe you, fathead? By carelessness, you know, you grabbed my lines to light it with. Quelch will see bits of burnt paper in the grate. He won't know they hadn't been written on. See?"

Bunter bestowed a fat wink on the astonished Wilmot. Evidently, Bunter had given a good deal of thought to this brilliant scheme for eluding the wrath—and the cane—of his Form-master. No doubt he had been thinking out this astute dodge, instead of writing the lines.

But Wilmot did not seem fearfully keen.

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"If you want lies told to Quelch, you can tell them yourself!" he suggested.

"That's where you're wrong!" explained Bunter. "If I spun Quelch that yarn, he wouldn't believe me. He's doubted my word before. Do you know what he'd do? He'd whop me for—for what he'd call prevarication, and make me write the lines over again—very likely double 'em! Well, that's not what I want. Quelch wouldn't believe for a minute that I'd written my lines, and they got burned by accident, if I told him."

"Probably not!"

"You see, I need a pal to stand by me in this," said Bunter. "You're a sulky toad, Wilmot, and Quelch doesn't like you—nobody could, really, you know, as I dare say you know as well as I do—but he'd take your word. It's not fair to take one fellow's word and not another's, but I never get fair play. There's no such thing as justice here. I never get justice."

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"Don't you?" gasped Wilmot.

"You tell Quelch you used my lines by mistake to light the fire."

"Rubbish!"

"And if he asks you whether they were all written, you say, yes, they were. You saw me write them—"

"Oh, my hat!"

"And it will be all right. Quelch is a beast, but he wouldn't give a fellow an impot to write over again, just because of an accident that might happen in any study. You can tell him you sat here with me while I was writing them—just as well to make the thing complete, you know. You can't be too careful in dealing with a man like Quelch. He's suspicious."

"Have you finished?"

"Yes; that's the lot. Wait here till Quelch comes. He's sure to come up if I don't go down. But get those papers in the fire to begin with. Leave bits about the fender. Where are you going? I say, Wilmot—"

Bunter grabbed the new junior by the arm as Wilmot pushed him aside.

Wilmot jerked his arm away, and strode to the door.

Billy Bunter blinked after him, his little round eyes gleaming with wrath behind his big round spectacles.

His pal had let him down.

After all the mental exercise Bunter had put in, thinking out that brilliant wheeze, Wilmot, the fellow whose secret he was keeping, wasn't going to play up. Bunter fairly gasped with wrath.

"Look here, you rotter!" he bawled. "I shall get that impot doubled."

"Serve you right!"

"Wha-a-t!"

Bunter jumped after the new junior. He grabbed his arm again as Wilmot was stepping out of the study.

"Look here, you cad!" howled Bunter. "If you think you're going to let me down like this, after all I've done for you, I can jolly well say—Whoop!"

A forcible shove on his fat chest sent Bunter toppling. He sat down in Study No 7 with a bump that made the furniture dance.

"Oooogh!" gasped Bunter.

Wilmot strode away.

"Ow!" gasped Bunter. "Wow! Ooogh! Beast! Ungrateful rotter! Letting a fellow down! Ow! I say, Wilmot! Beast!"

Wilmot was gone. Bunter was left in happy anticipation of a call from Quelch, without a pal to help him carry through his astute scheme. Really, it was rough luck on the fat Owl, after all his mental efforts in thinking out that scheme. And the fact that it was exactly what he deserved seemed to afford Billy Bunter no comfort whatever.

THE NINTH CHAPTER.

The Secret Out!

"COME in!" The door of Study No. 1 was wide open as Eric Wilmot went back towards the stairs. Five smiling juniors emerged from that study, and surrounded him in the passage.

Wilmot, supposing for a moment that it was a rag, clenched his hands. But the next moment he saw that it was no rag.

They surrounded him with cheery smiles, and edged him into the study doorway, evidently with no hostile intentions.

The table was laid for tea in Study No. 1. There was rather a spread. The Famous Five, it seemed, had been busy getting it ready when Wilmot came up, and Billy Bunter had captured him.

"We heard you," explained Wharton. "We've been waiting for you to come in."

"I don't see why."

"It's rather a long time since you tea'd in this study," remarked Frank Nugent. "You haven't had your tea?"

"I'm going down to Hall."

"You're not," grinned Bob Cherry.

"Look here!"

"Trot in!" said Johnny Bull.

"I'm going—"

"Not at all; you're coming!" said Harry Wharton.

And Wilmot came. With five fellows pushing him into the study, he had not a great deal of choice about it.

Wharton shut the door.

"Here's your chair, Wilmot," said Nugent.

"I'm not teaing here."

"You are!"

"Look here! What's the fool game?" exclaimed Wilmot angrily.



"I'm sorry, sir!" said Wilmot steadily. "But you cannot give me orders as my uncle, here! I hope I'm grateful for your kindnesses to me, sir; but here I am a Greyfriars boy, under nobody's orders but my Form-master's." "Upon my word!" gasped Mr. Hacker. "Do I hear aright? I have been your friend, your protector, and you repay me with this insolence!"

"You don't want me here, any more than I want your company. Is this a rag, or what?"

"Sit down, old bean!"

"Well, I won't!"

"Sit him down!" said Johnny Bull.

Wilmot was twirled to the chair placed ready for him at the table, and sat in it. He rose to his feet at once; and Bob's powerful hands on his shoulders sat him down again.

"Like sosses and ham?" asked Wharton hospitably.

"No!"

"And poached eggs?"

"No!"

"Look here, you sulky toad—" began Johnny Bull.

"Shush!" said Bob chidingly. "None of these painful truths now. Wilmot, old man, you're an honoured guest."

"Don't be a silly ass!"

"We've got something to talk about to you."

"I don't want to hear it."

"You don't like our company?" asked Bob sadly.

"No!"

"Well, if you prefer Bunter's, we'll ask him in. I fancy he would come, if he knew we had sosses and ham and poached eggs."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Oh, don't talk rot!" snapped Wilmot. "I don't want to tea here. Can't you leave a fellow alone? Look here! If you don't let me clear, I shall hit out! I'm fed-up with this!"

"By Jove!" said Harry Wharton. "I've never seen Topham, and don't know anybody there. But they must be regular whales on teaching fellows manners."

"The whalefulness must be terrific!" grinned Hurree Janset Ram Singh.

Wilmot caught his breath.

He was rising from the chair again, with the evident intention of punching his way out of that hospitable study—or, at least, attempting to do so. But at the mention of Topham he dropped back. The angry red faded from his face, leaving it pale and almost haggard.

The change was so startling that the Famous Five stared at him. Since their meeting with Lunn of St. Jude's they knew that Wilmot had been a Topham fellow. But certainly it had never occurred to any of them that the mention of his old school would produce an effect anything like this on Eric Wilmot.

"I say! What's the matter, old scout?" asked Bob uneasily.

Wilmot did not answer.

He sat in his chair as if overwhelmed.

The chums of the Remove exchanged startled glances. Harry Wharton broke a painful silence.

"Look here, Wilmot! We want to speak to you! We want to wash out all that rot of yours, and get you to play up like a sensible chap. I don't know what your game is, but it seems to me absolutely idiotic. But, look here! If you want to go, go, and be blowed to you!"

But Wilmot, now that he was free to go, did not stir. He sat heavily in the chair as if he had lost the power of his limbs.

"So it's out!" he said, in a husky voice.

"Eh? What's out?"

"Didn't you just say—" stammered Wilmot.

"Oh, about Topham! Yes; it's out that you were a Topham man. Why shouldn't it be? Have you been keeping that a secret, as well as your Soccer?"

Wilmot looked at him, mute.

He had been so sulky, so reserved, so uncommunicative, that nobody appeared to have remarked on the fact that he had never mentioned his former school. He had never mentioned anything in connection with himself, so his reserve on that subject excited no special notice.

Certainly his manners and customs had led Wharton to entertain a suspicion that he had been in trouble of some sort at his last school. But the captain of the Remove had not given the matter much thought.

Now, however, all the five could see how matters stood. They had been utterly mystified by the knowledge that Wilmot had asked Bunter to "keep dark" his Soccer exploits at St. Jude's. They understood now. As soon as it was known that he was the goal-getter who had scored so wonderfully at St. Jude's, it would be known that he came from Topham. And that was what he wanted to keep secret.

There was a very uncomfortable silence in the study.

Wilmot broke it.

"So Bunter's told you—"

"Bunter's told us nothing!" answered Harry Wharton. "If that fat freak promised to keep your secret even Bunter wouldn't let it out—though I must say he's got his own weird way of
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Nugent in my place, even if it means a beating at Rookwood!"

"Nothing of the kind—and you know it, or ought to know it!" answered the captain of the Remove scornfully. "A man like you in the team is enough to turn a football skipper's hair grey. But if you were back in your old form I'd play you—and Nugent would have to stand out. You're not! You've condescended to put in some practice, and I dare say you've kept off smoking for a week or so—but you can't pick up in a week all you've chucked away in a month!"

"Better than Nugent—"

"Not at all! You've picked up—and I dare say you're as good as Frank now—if you keep it up! That's no reason for turning out a good and reliable man, who's as keen as mustard, to play an unreliable man who's no better."

"So I'm out, anyhow?"

"Yes; stick to the game and keep off playing the giddy ox, and your old place is ready for you—next time. Not on Rookwood day, though."

"It's some days yet—and if I improve—"

The Bounder was unusually patient. As a matter of fact, he was realising, as he generally did when it was too late, that he had played the fool.

Wharton shook his head.

"It's not possible now. Besides, to tell you something I wasn't going to mention yet, I've got an eye on another man—"

"Leaving out dear Franky?" sneered the Bounder.

"Nugent will be glad to stand out for a better man—he's not your sort!" snapped Wharton. "Besides, he's got home leave for the day, as it happens."

"And who's the man?" demanded the Bounder. "I thought you'd been over the Remove with a small comb, hunting for a man to replace me."

"So I have; but—"

"Well, who's the man?"

"It's not settled yet. Anyhow, you can fix up one of your appointments with the Highcliffe cads for Saturday—you won't be wanted for the Rookwood game."

With that, the captain of the Remove walked round Vernon-Smith and went on his way down the stairs.

Herbert Vernon-Smith stood staring after him as he went, with a black scowl on his face.

Having thrown up his place in Remove football by sheer carelessness, and disregard of any consideration but the whim of the moment, the Bounder wanted it back—when it was too late! For some days now he had been trying his hardest to get back into his old form, scarcely believing that his skipper would venture, when it came to the test, to leave out a man who had always been a tower of strength to the side.

But the Remove men took Soccer seriously, and it was not a matter in which even the Bounder could play fast and loose. What he had done, he had done—and that was that!

He tramped up the Remove staircase at last, and went scowling along the passage.

"I say, Smithy—" Billy Bunter squeaked, blinking out of Study No. 7 through his big spectacles.

Heedless of the fat Owl, Smithy tramped into his own study—Study No. 4. His chum, Tom Redwing, was not there, which added to his irritation. Without quite realising it, he wanted

somebody to listen to an outburst of angry temper!

"I say, Smithy, old chap—"

Bunter's spectacles glimmered in at the door. The Bounder scowled round at him.

"Get out, you fat freak!" he snapped.

"Oh, really, Smithy—"

"Take your idiotic face away!"

Billy Bunter did not take his idiotic face away. As the Bounder turned his back to him, he proceeded to address Smithy's back.

"I say, what are you shirty about, old chap? I say, I'm in a bit of a fix, Smithy! That rotter Wilmot—"

The Bounder looked at him again. He disliked Wilmot intensely—and the new fellow's action in the Form-room, which had made most of the fellows think much better of him, had made no difference to Smithy. Smithy could not forget that Wilmot had knocked him out in a scrap. But he was surprised to hear this description of him from Bunter.

"Has he stopped lending you money?" sneered Smithy.

"I may have borrowed a few bobs from the chap!" said Bunter, with dignity. "He knows I'm going to settle out of my postal order when—when it comes. I don't owe him so much as I do you, old chap, anyhow."

"He hasn't been here so long!" agreed the Bounder. "You will, in the long run!"

"I say, he's let me down, Smithy!" said the fat Owl sorrowfully. "After all I've done for him, you know, he wouldn't help me pull Quelch's leg over some lines! Old Quelch came after those lines, and he's doubled them—I've got four hundred now, Smithy!"

"Go and do them!" suggested Smithy.

"How's a fellow to get through four hundred lines? I say, Smithy, you might help a chap!"

"I can see myself writing your lines!"

"I don't mean that! Skinner will do a fellow's lines, at half-a-crown a hundred—he's done lots for you. If you've got ten bob—"

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared the Bounder. It was true that the wealthy Bounder sometimes "tipped" the needy Skinner to write "impots" for him. But if he could not see himself writing Bunter's lines, still less could he see himself tipping Skinner to write them.

"Blessed if I see anything to cackle at!" said the fat Owl. "I say, I shall get a licking if those lines ain't done, Smithy."

"Good!"

"Beast! I mean, look here, old chap! You've got lots of money—your pater's a profiteer, reeking with it—"

"Wha-a-t?"

"And look here, you loathe Wilmot, because he thrashed you," said Bunter. "Well, now the cad's let me down I don't see why I should keep his rotten secrets. You tip Skinner to do those lines, old chap, and I'll tell you about Wilmot."

Billy Bunter was not, perhaps, a whale in tact. His description of Mr. Samuel Vernon-Smith as a profiteer reeking with money did not seem to gratify the son of that financial gentleman. And Smithy was very far from admitting that he had been "thrashed" by Wilmot, or that that episode had anything to do with his dislike of the fellow.

Instead of jumping at Bunter's offer, therefore, the Bounder jumped at Bunter himself.

He grasped the fat Owl by the collar.

"I—I say," howled Bunter, "I say, leggo! I'll tell you—I'll really tell you

about that cad who thrashed you, old chap—"

Bang!

Bunter's bullet head smote the door of Smithy's study.

Bunter's yell rang the length of the Remove passage.

"Yaroooh!"

Then the fat Owl was twirled round, and Smithy's foot landed. Bunter flew into the passage.

Bump!

Smithy's door slammed. The fat Owl scrambled up, in wild wrath.

"Ow!" roared Bunter. "Wow! Beast! Rotter! Cad! Sulking because you're chucked out of the football! Yah! I've a jolly good mind to thrash you like Wilmot did! You come out of that study, you rotter, and I'll mop up the passage with you."

The door-handle turned!

So did Bunter!

He flew!

On second thoughts, undoubtedly the best, he decided not to mop up the passage with Smithy. The Bounder, looking out of Study No. 4, had a brief glimpse of a fat figure vanishing into Study No. 7.

Inside Study No. 7, Billy Bunter jammed his foot against the door—and kept it there for several minutes, till it dawned on his fat brain that the Bounder was not pursuing him.

THE TWELFTH CHAPTER.

A Friend In Need!

"WILMOT!"

A pale face glimmered in the gloom under the old leafless elms.

The winter dusk was thickening over Greyfriars School. It was close on lock-up now, and most of the fellows were in the House. But Wilmot was still out, and Wharton had found him, pacing to and fro on the dusky Elm Walk.

The sulky, disdainful pride that had seemed a part of Wilmot's nature, was gone now. He was pale, troubled, utterly down and out. At Topham, only a few short weeks ago, his little world had fallen in ruins round him. Greyfriars had been his refuge—owing to his uncle's intervention with the Head. Now he was driven from his refuge.

"You!" he muttered. "What do you want?"

"A few words!" said Harry quietly.

"You want to rub it in?" asked Wilmot bitterly. "Well, I've been a rotten brute to you—you can take it out of me now. Get on!"

Wharton gave him a pitying look.

"Even if I believed you were a—a—" He balked at the miserable word and went on. "If I believed that of you, I shouldn't think of rubbing it in, I hope. But I don't—and my friends don't."

"What rot!"

"Eh?" ejaculated Wharton, startled.

"Don't you know a thing's true, if it's proved?" said Wilmot, with an accent of almost wild bitterness. "Wasn't it proved? How could it be proved more than it was? A stolen wallet dropping out of my pocket before a dozen fellows—and the money missing—haven't you sense enough to know what evidence is? You're a fool, then."

The wild words did not make Wharton angry. They only added to his compassion and concern for the unfortunate Topham fellow.

"I can't make all that out, of course," he said. "If you never did it, some other fellow did, and he seems to have fixed it on you. It sounds pretty black, but—but—I don't believe it of you."

"Why not?" sneered Wilmot. Wharton paused a moment. "Well, I don't quite know!" he confessed. "But we've talked it over in the study, and we all agree that you're not that sort. Hacker believes in you—"

"He's my uncle—"

"He's a keen man, and he must have some reason, besides being a relation. He must have persuaded the Head that there was some sort of doubt—Dr. Locke must have felt you were entitled to a chance, if he let you come here. And—you've done nothing of the sort here!"

Wilmot started, as if a snake had stung him. "Oh!" he gasped. "Could you think—"

"I'm looking at the matter as a sensible chap," said Harry. "I can't understand a thief—it's a sort of problem I can't find an answer to. But I know this, as every fellow does—if a man's a thief, it's because there's some queer kink in him, and he can't take normal views of things—and what he's done once he will do again. Every thief goes on till he gets spotted. He never has the sense to stop."

Wilmot stared at him. "You think that?" he said. "I—I suppose you're right. Yes, I suppose you're right. If you are, there may be a chance for me yet."

"How do you mean?"

Wilmot gave a harsh laugh.

"The rotter who bagged Raleigh's currency notes, and planted the empty wallet in my jacket—if he goes on, as you say, he will get spotted in the long run, as you seem to think—then it may all come out."

"Oh!" said Harry. That was a new thought to him. He pondered for a moment or two, and nodded.

"I think it's quite possible—even likely!" he answered. "Anyhow, you've shown no sign here of being such an awful beast—I can't believe it of you, and I won't."

"The school will!"

"Nobody knows!" said Harry quietly. "You couldn't have come here if it had been known. You couldn't stay if it got out. But why should it? The Head's given you a chance here—through your Uncle Hacker—Quelch must know; I'm jolly sure he does; but he's a just man, and if he's undertaken to give you a chance, he will do it. Nobody knows—"

"You and your friends—"

"We know; but we know how to hold our tongues, too!" said Harry Wharton. "Hold yours, and nothing's different from what it was before."

"But—it will get out that I was at Topham, and then—"

"I'm coming to that!" said Harry. "Let it get out about Topham—nobody here knows the place or the people—nobody will guess the facts. Shout Topham from the housetops, and they'll suspect less than ever that you have anything to hide there."

Wilmot smiled faintly. "My uncle didn't think so!" he muttered.

"There is such a thing as being too cautious. Anyhow, it can't be helped now—Bunter is sure to tattle sooner or later, as you'd know if you knew him as well as we do—and any St. Jude's man who saw you would give the whole show away, without even knowing it. Take the bull by the horns."

"I dare say you're right—but—"

"I know I'm right, in that!" said Harry. "Make the best of your chance here, Wilmot. Think of your uncle, too! He's a crusty old stick, and has no tact; but he did a big thing for you,

getting you here. You don't want to hurt him. And your people, too—"

Wilmot winced. "The poor old mater!" he said. "If I get kicked out of here as I did from Topham, it will break her heart." His voice faltered. "That—that's what I was just thinking of, when you came up—"

"That does it, then!" said Harry. "Your mother comes first—no fellow can have a right to think of himself before his mater. You've got to make good."

"But—" muttered Wilmot wretchedly.

"You've had rough luck, if what you say is true—and I believe it is, and my friends believe the same. No need to say a single word. Make the most of the chance you've got here. If you're innocent, as I believe, you've a right to keep such a rotten accusation dark. You'll keep it dark better by talking about Topham than by trying to keep it a secret that you were there. It can't be kept a secret, anyhow."

"But—you don't mean you're standing by me?" muttered Wilmot.

"That's exactly what I do mean."

"I've been a sulky brute in the study—I played a rotten trick on you the other day, getting off detention by pretending I was keen to play footer—"

"We'll wash that out with the rest."

"I can explain that—now. Crawley—that Topham fellow—insisted on coming over to see me. Goodness knows why, for he's no friend of mine, unless

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he wanted to borrow money. Anyhow, he came, and if I hadn't met him in Courtfield he would have come to the school. I was glad to lend him a couple of pounds, and get his promise not to come again. But—but you see, I had to meet him that day—"

"I see!" said Harry. "If I'd known it was anything like that—"

"Of course, you couldn't; and I couldn't tell you."

"We've had faults on both sides. Wash it all out! And the best way to begin is—"

"What?" asked Wilmot, with a docility that was new and strange in him.

Harry Wharton smiled. "Take the bull by the horns about Topham," he said. "Join up for the football on Saturday, when the Rookwood men come over. I'll put your name on the list, and let everybody know you're picked because you were the Topham man who walked all over St. Jude's in the match there."

"You'll put me in the football—now you know?"

"Now I know you piled up four goals in a match at St. Jude's?" asked the captain of the Remove, with a smile.

"Now you know what I was accused of at Topham?"

"I'm going to forget that—and so are you. If I believe in a fellow I can't do it by halves. Is it a go?"

Wilmot seemed to choke.

"I wanted to make no friends here," he muttered. "I had a rotten secret to keep, and I was afraid—afraid of being turned down if fellows got to know,

But you know now, and instead of turning me down you're taking me up! If I'd known you better—"

"We'll get better acquainted," said Harry, smiling. "There's the bell for lock-up! Come on!"

He linked his arm in Wilmot's and walked him away to the House.

By the time they reached the lighted doorway, and he glanced at his companion's face, he saw that it was cool and calm. There was nothing in Wilmot's looks to betray the stress of emotion through which he had passed. There was, indeed, a new light in his eyes, a new elasticity in his step. Sulky solitude had not been his desire; but it had seemed to him a necessity. It seemed now as if a heavy weight was gone from his mind and his heart.

They walked into the House together. The Co. joined them, and they went in to calling-over. And the whole Remove stared to see the outcast of the Form on such cheery and friendly terms with the Famous Five.

THE THIRTEENTH CHAPTER.

Bunter's Trump Card Trumped!

"I SAY, you fellows!"

Billy Bunter rolled along to Study No. 1 after prep that evening.

He blinked at the doorway in surprise.

Wharton, and Nugent, and Wilmot had been at prep together, as usual. But other things did not seem quite as usual.

Generally, prep in Study No. 1 went on in grim silence, and Wharton and Nugent left the study immediately it was over, if Wilmot remained, while, if they remained, Wilmot left it immediately.

Now, after prep was finished, the three juniors sat round the table in cheery conversation. Wilmot's face had lost its dark and sulky expression. It was brighter and happier than it had ever been seen before since he had become a Greyfriars fellow. And it was clear that he was on the best of terms with his study-mates.

Which caused astonishment to the fat Owl and afforded him no satisfaction. For Bunter was wrathful!

His "pal" had let him down! And Bunter was not the man to be let down with impunity. He had come to Study No. 1 to make that fact clear to the cheeky new fellow!

Once before, Wilmot's patience had run out, and he had so far forgotten friendship as to sling Bunter out of his study! On that occasion Bunter had brought him to order. He had talked about Topham!

Talking about Topham had been enough! In his uneasy dread of the fat Owl "spilling the beans," Wilmot had come round and endured once more the fatuous friendship of the fat Owl.

Now, Bunter—in happy ignorance of the change in the circumstances—was going to play the same game again.

"Cut off, Bunter!" said Harry Wharton over his shoulder, without looking round.

Bunter rolled in.

"You seem to be jolly friendly here!" he remarked sarcastically.

"Quite, thanks!" said Frank Nugent, laughing.

"Well, look here, I've got four hundred lines for Quelch!" said Bunter. "I want to know what's going to be done."

"The lines, I should think."

"It's all your fault, Wilmot—"
 "Mine?" said Wilmot, smiling.
 "How's that, fatty?"
 "If you'd stood by me it would have been all right. Now Quelch has doubled my lines. If you think I'm going to be treated like that, after all I've done for you, you're jolly well mistaken—see?"

"Shut the door after you!"
 "Wha-a-t?"
 "Getting deaf?"
 Bunter blinked at the new fellow. Deep, dark wrath gathered on his podgy brow. This was sheer cheek! If the fellow was getting his ears up Bunter was the man to make him put them down again.

"I don't want any cheek, Wilmot!" he hooted.
 "What a coincidence!" remarked Wilmot.

"Eh? What do you mean?"
 "I mean that I don't want any, either!"

"Look here—" roared Bunter.
 "Excuse me!" said Wilmot politely.
 "Would you mind getting a new set of features before I look there? I don't like looking at that lot!"

"Why, you—you—" gasped Bunter. Wharton and Nugent chuckled.

They knew the card that Bunter had up his sleeve—the card that had hitherto been a trump, and which he was not aware had now become, as it were, a chicken that would not fight. So they were rather amused.

Bunter blinked in amazement at Wilmot. He could not understand the change in the fellow.

He seemed to have turned from a glum misanthrope into a cheery and light-hearted schoolboy. And it was a startling change.

Still, Bunter knew what he knew!

Very fortunately, he had not the faintest idea why Wilmot had wanted to keep Topham "dark." But he knew that he had wanted to! He had brought him to order before by talking about Topham! He was going to try to bring him to order again—at all events, so he fancied.

"I—I say, you fellows," gasped Bunter. "Talking about Topham—"

"Ha, ha, ha!" yelled Wharton and Nugent.

Wilmot grinned.

Bunter, expecting him to wince, could only blink in amazement at his handsome, laughing face.

"Go it, Bunter!" said the captain of the Remove. "Let's hear about Topham!"

"Oh, do!" said Nugent.

"Get on!" said Wilmot. "I don't think you know a fearful lot about my old school, Bunter, but talk about it as much as you like!"

Bunter jumped, and his spectacles nearly fell off his fat little nose. Never had the fat Owl been so astonished.

Here was Wilmot babbling out the secret which for several weeks he had kept dark, at the heavy cost of accepting Billy Bunter as a "pal."

Bunter could scarcely believe his fat ears.

"Oh crikey!" he exclaimed blankly.

"Have—have—have you told them?"

"Ha, ha, ha!" yelled Wharton and Nugent.

The expression on Bunter's fat face was worth a guinea a box at that moment.

"I say, you fellows, has that chap told you he was at Topham?" gasped Bunter.

"Why shouldn't he?" asked Harry.

"Eh? I don't know, but he was keep-

ing it dark, for some reason. He jolly well asked me to keep it dark!" gasped Bunter. "Why, the day he came here I knew him at once! I knew he was the Topham fellow I saw playing football at St. Jude's, and he asked me not to mention it." He gave Wilmot an accusing glare. "You jolly well know you did! And I kept it dark out of sheer good nature. You lending me ten bob had nothing to do with it, as you jolly well know!"

"Did I lend you ten bob?"
 "You jolly well know you did!" hooted Bunter.

"And have you come here to square?"
 "Eh?"

Wilmot held out his hand.
 "Shell out!" he said cheerfully. "I can do with that ten bob, if you're keen to square."

"Oh! No! I—I wasn't thinking of that!" stuttered Bunter. "I'm going to square when my postal order comes! It—it hasn't come yet!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Blessed if I see anything to cackle at!" snorted Bunter. "Wilmot made out that he wanted it kept dark about my seeing him at St. Jude's, so that the fellows wouldn't know where he came from. If he was pulling my leg, I don't see why."

"Do you ever see anything?" asked Harry.

"Oh, really, Wharton—"

"See that door?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Well, if the silly ass has let it out—" said Bunter, puzzled and greatly annoyed. He realised that the power had departed from his fat hands. If Wilmot no longer cared whether the fellows knew that he had come from Topham, it was clear that he was not going to be brought to order by talk on that topic. "I say, he really asked me—"

"Never mind what Wilmot asked you—I'm asking you to get on the other side of that door!" pointed out the captain of the Remove.

"So you know that chap was at Topham?" said the puzzled Owl. "You know he was the Topham man who played football at St. Jude's?"

"Well, rather!"

"You never knew it before!" howled Bunter. "He can't have told you very long ago—you never knew—and I don't see now why he's let it out, after keeping it dark all these weeks. I think—"

"Hallo, hallo, hallo!" came a cheery roar from the passage. "Bunter telling whoppers again!"

Bob Cherry and Johnny Bull and Hurree Singh arrived at the study doorway.

Bunter blinked round at them.

"Who's telling whoppers?" he snorted.

"You are, old fat bean, if you were saying that you think!" answered Bob. "You can't, old chap! At least, you never do!"

"The thankfulness of the esteemed fat Bunter is not terrific!" grinned Hurree Singh.

"I say, you fellows, did you fellows know that that chap Wilmot was at Topham?" demanded Bunter.

"The knowfulness is preposterous!" chuckled the Nabob of Bhanipur.

"Did you know he was the chap who played football at St. Jude's?" gasped the perplexed Owl.

"Of course we know, as that's the reason why Wharton's putting him in the team for the Rookwood match!" said Bob Cherry.

"Oh crikey! Is he?" gasped Bunter.

"Making up the list now," said

Harry, laughing. "Anything more you want to know before you travel?"

"Well," said Bunter, blankly, "I'm blowed!"

"Blow away!" suggested Nugent.

"Well, look here," said Bunter. "I can't make it out, but I jolly well know he was keeping it dark, and I jolly well know he wanted me to, and I jolly well know—"

"There's one thing you don't jolly well know," remarked Johnny Bull, "and that is when your company's superfluous!"

"Oh, really, Bull—"

"Roll that barrel out!" said Wilmot.

"I say, you fellows— Yarooooop!" roared Bunter, as he rolled out.

The door of Study No. 1 slammed on the fat Owl! In that study, now prep was over, the Famous Five and Eric Wilmot devoted themselves to the subject of football and the Rookwood match.

Billy Bunter rolled away in a state of great astonishment and annoyance. What it all meant he could not understand, but one thing, at least, was clear to Bunter—he had lost his "pal," and talking about Topham would never bring him back again! That pal had gone for good! The Owl of the Remove had played his trump card, and it had been trumped—and that was that!

THE FOURTEENTH CHAPTER.

Smithy Is Not Pleased!

HERBERT VERNON-SMITH looked—and looked again. At the first glance, the Bounder doubted whether he had seen aright.

The Rookwood list was posted in the Rag.

Perhaps with a lingering hope of finding his name there, Smithy gave it a look when he came in after prep.

His name was not there. But another name was there that made him stare blankly—the name of E. Wilmot!

Nugent's name was not there. In the place of F. Nugent was written E. Wilmot—amazing, but perfectly plain!

Smithy looked, and looked again, and drew a deep, hard breath. Wharton had told him that he had his eye on "another man," and the Bounder had been puzzling a good deal to guess which man it was. But Wilmot had never occurred to his mind for a moment.

He looked round the Rag! Harry Wharton & Co. stood in a cheery group by the fire, Wilmot with them. Smithy had heard already, with perplexity and irritation, that the outcast of the Remove had, somehow, established friendly relations with the Famous Five. But certainly he had never dreamed that it would go to this length.

He strode across to the group at the fire. He was enraged; but he was more astonished and puzzled than enraged.

"What does this mean, Wharton?" he asked, between his teeth.

"What and which?" inquired the captain of the Remove.

"Wilmot's name is up in the footer list."

"Yes, that's right."

"Is it a joke?"

"Hardly! Footer isn't a funny subject."

"You're playing an out-and-out dud in the Rookwood game?"

"No—you're left out!"

"Don't be a cheeky fool!" roared the Bounder, as there was a laugh from the fellows in the Rag.

"May I ask the same of you?" inquired Wharton politely.



With his back to the Form-master, Bunter did not see Mr. Quelch coming out of the House. "Quelch isn't an old toad like your uncle, Wilmot," he rattled on. "He may be a crusty old stick, but Hacker's really the limit, you know! A regular acid-drop! Crusty old toad——" "Bunter!" exclaimed Mr. Quelch, angrily.

"You were going to leave me out, to play the soft ass Nugent——"
"Thanks!" interjected Frank.

"Now it seems that you're leaving Nugent out, to play that dud—that fozzler—that slacking rotter, who has to be kicked down to games practice!"
"Thanks!" said Wilmot.

"Do you think the team will stand it, Wharton?"

"I think so," said Harry cheerfully. "I've told all the men my reason. You'd have heard it if you'd been here when I put the list up. A first-class footballer like Wilmot can't be left out."

"A—a what?"

"First-class footballer!"

"That dud!" gasped the Bounder. "That idiot who lurches about the field like a sack of coke!"

"He won't lurch about like a sack of coke when Rookwood come over! Will you, Wilmot, old bean?"

"I'll try not to!" said Wilmot, smiling.

"You've seen him on Little Side—a dud, a slacker, a fool, a clumsy ass——" gasped Smithy.

"That was only his little game!" said Bob Cherry. "He fancied he didn't want to play Soccer here—but he's changed his mind."

"Rubbish! Rot! You know he can't play!" yelled the Bounder. "Has any man here ever seen him play footer?"

"Yes; Bunter has."

"Fat lot Bunter knows about Soccer! Anybody else?"

"No; but we're all going to see him to-morrow. We're fixing up a pick-up, just to show what the new man can do."

"You dummy——"

"Thanks!"

"You fool——"

"Thanks again!"

"Smithy, old man!" Redwing had just come into the Rag, and he caught the Bounder by the sleeve. "Don't be a goat, old man! Wharton wouldn't put a man in the team unless he knew——"

"Shut up, you ass!" Vernon-Smith shook off his chum's hand. "Look here, Wharton, you dolt——"

"Keep it up!"

"You howling dummy——"

"Is that the lot?"

"Will you tell me what you've put Wilmot into the team for?" almost shrieked the enraged Bounder. "You've always called him a dud!"

"Certainly! That was when I didn't know that he was the man from Topham who kicked four goals in a match with St. Jude's."

"He never did——"

"If you can't take my word, and Wilmot's, old bean, ask Bunter, who saw him doing it!" said the captain of the Remove. "Bunter was there! You've heard him talk about a Topham man who was a wonderful goal-getter! Well, Wilmot's the man!"

"Bunter's idiotic lies——"

"Well, Lunn told us the same. The St. Jude's skipper ought to know!"

"Lunn told you?" stuttered the Bounder.

"Yes. We met him this afternoon; and Wilmot came along, as it happened. So we found out we had been entertaining an angel unawares," said Wharton, laughing. "Wilmot seems to have been too jolly modest to tell us what a wonderful man he was; but as soon as I heard it from Lunn I made up my mind at once to bag him for the Remove eleven. And I can tell you

we've got a prize-packet, Smithy! You'll see when you see him play."

"I don't believe it."

"Well, seeing is believing—and you'll see to-morrow."

"If he can play Soccer, what has he been pretending to be a slacker and a dud for all the time he's been here?"

"Just temper," said Wilmot—"rotten, sulky temper! Not unlike your own, Vernon-Smith; but the difference is that I've got over it and you haven't."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The Bounder clenched his hands.

"It's all rot, spoof, lies!" He almost choked with rage. "The fellow can't play, and he's too sulky and slack to play if he could! If you put him in a pick-up to-morrow he will fozzle about, as usual——"

"Well, if he does, out he goes again," said Harry. "Can't say fairer than that, Smithy."

"Look here——" roared the Bounder.

"Give a man a chance," interrupted Bob Cherry. "If Wilmot fozzles in the pick-up to-morrow you can turn on the megaphone then, old bean."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The Bounder panted. He could not and would not believe, and his angry temper broke out fiercely. He made a spring at Wilmot.

"Put up your hands, you cad!" he panted. "Put up——"

Instantly the angry Bounder was grasped; the Famous Five closed round him like one man and seized him on all sides.

"Chuck that, Smithy!" said Harry Wharton tersely. "You can't punch a man because his skipper's picked him to play footer—and you're not going to

damage my new recruit. Keep cool, you ass."

"Oh, let him come on!" said Wilmot, with a flash of his old disdain. "He won't do a lot of damage."

Wharton gave him a look; Wilmot coloured.

"Sorry!" he said at once. "Look here, Vernon-Smith, don't play the goat! We've had one scrap—and I don't want another, if you do. Keep your temper."

"Let me go!" yelled the Bounder, struggling.

"Will you chuck it?"

"No!"

"You'll chuck it, or you'll be chucked out!" said the captain of the Remove. "Take your choice."

The Bounder's reply was a desperate wrench to free himself. The next moment he went whirling to the door in the grasp of the Famous Five. Lord Mauleverer opened the door, and Smithy went spinning into the passage.

"Come back when you're cool," said Harry. And the door slammed on Smithy.

Apparently Smithy did not get cool; at all events, he did not come back.

THE FIFTEENTH CHAPTER.

An Unlooked-for Chance!

FEELING fit?" Harry Wharton asked that question, with a smile, on Saturday afternoon, and Wilmot smiled as he answered:

"Fit as a fiddle!"

It was a cold, dry, keen February day, glorious for footer—as all the Remove men agreed—and the Removites were looking forward very keenly to the match that afternoon.

Even the Bounder did not doubt now that Wilmot was a good man for the side. He had seen him play in the pick-up, in which he had been put to the test for the general satisfaction of the footballing fraternity.

Smithy had watched him with angry, jealous eyes; but, angry as he was, he was no fool, and he had to admit that the fellow could play Soccer.

Whether it was sulky temper or any other reason that had made him show up as a dud hitherto, it was gone now, and the fellow from Topham put up a game as good as any man in the Remove—better than most—and quite equal to Vernon-Smith when he was at the top notch of his form.

The Bounder had to admit it, but the knowledge only made him the angrier. Frank Nugent displaced by the new recruit, had taken it with perfect good-humour, glad that his chum's worries over the Rookwood match were ended. The Bounder was far from taking it in good-humour.

Smithy was a sportsman in his own way, but the unexpected discovery that the fellow he loathed—the fellow who had licked him in a scrap—was a first-class footballer was too bitter a pill to be swallowed easily. The Bounder had had the solace of, at least, despising him as a dud at games; now that solace was taken away.

He had not even the solace of seeing the fellow unpopular, as he had hitherto been. He had no handle against him. It was useless to revive the old story of "greasing to the beaks," which had been so thoroughly disproved. Even Skinner & Co. had dropped that, and were rather ashamed of the part they had taken, in view of what they had escaped by Wilmot's refusal to give them away. Bolsover

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major was heard to declare that the chap was a jolly decent chap. Billy Bunter, it was true, displayed rather a resentful and disdainful attitude towards Wilmot—but to be barred by Bunter was rather a compliment than otherwise. If Wilmot had not exactly become popular, he was, at least, regarded with friendly eyes and greatly admired as a footballer.

Some fellows in the quad smiled as they glanced at the Bounder's face. He tramped into the House and went up to the Remove passage. Skinner and Snoop, loafing on the landing, winked at one another.

The Bounder gave them a black scowl, stopped at Study No. 1, and threw the door open. He had noticed that Wilmot was not in the quad with the other fellows just then, and he was in a mood for a row and a scrap. The idea of giving Wilmot a swollen nose to take on the football field with him was rather attractive to Smithy at the moment.

But Wilmot was not in the study. Frank Nugent was there, putting some things together on the study table, apparently for packing. He glanced round as the door flew open.

"Got it?" he asked.

"Eh, what?" asked Smithy, scowling. "Got what?"

Nugent smiled.

"I thought it was Wilmot. He's gone up to the box-room to fetch a bag for me."

The Bounder stared at him.

"Aren't you going to stop in and see the wonderful man playing in your place?" he sneered. "I remember Wharton mentioned you had home leave, but—"

"I'd like to, but I've got leave to go home for my sister's birthday; and as Wharton doesn't need me I'm going. You can watch Wilmot bagging goals, and tell me about it afterwards," suggested Nugent, with a grin. "I shall be back on Monday morning—"

Slam!

Frank Nugent laughed as the Bounder shut the door with a bang that rang the length of the passage.

Vernon-Smith tramped away up the Remove passage towards the box-room stairs. He almost ran.

His mind at that moment was full of bitterness and evil. Nugent's words had put an idea into that angry, bitter mind.

Already it had been in the Bounder's thoughts that he would put a spoke in his enemy's wheel if he could. There was little at which he would have stopped to prevent Wilmot's triumph on the football field that day. Now, as if to tempt him, at the moment when he was overcome with bitterness and rancour, it seemed as if the fellow was playing right into his hands—giving him the chance he had not dared to hope for. He ran up the box-room stairs—and reached the landing above just as Eric Wilmot came out with an empty suitcase in his hand.

Wilmot glanced at his bitter face, and would have passed him. The Bounder stepped aside for him.

But as Wilmot passed he made a sudden snatch at the suitcase and jerked it from his hand.

Wilmot, taken quite by surprise at what seemed to him a childish trick, stared at the Bounder as he ran up the upper stairs with Nugent's bag in his hand.

"You silly ass, what sort of a game do you call that?" exclaimed the new junior. "Chuck that bag down!"

"Fetch it if you want it!" retorted Vernon-Smith.

"You utter-ass!" exclaimed Wilmot.

The Bounder laughed mockingly and ran up to the upper landing. Above the box-room was a disused garret. The Bounder swiftly took out the key, which he jammed into the outside of the lock.

Wilmot, angry, but more surprised than angry at what seemed to him an absolutely infantile prank, followed him up. The Bounder stepped into the garret.

"Give me that bag, you fathead!" exclaimed Wilmot. "Nugent's waiting for it—he's got a train to catch; he's going home this afternoon."

"Come and fetch it!"

"I'll do that fast enough!" snapped Wilmot, and he came into the garret, his hand outstretched. "Now, you silly ass—Oh!"

The Bounder swung the suitcase round, catching him on the shoulder. Wilmot staggered across the garret.

In an instant Vernon-Smith leaped to the door and slammed it after him as he leaped out. The next instant the key turned in the lock. And in a moment more Wilmot was thumping on the inside of the door.

"Let me out, you fool!" he shouted.

"All serene—I'll take Nugent his bag!" The Bounder chuckled breathlessly. "You can stay there, you rotter!"

"I'm wanted at the footer, you fathead—"

"Not by me!"

Thump, thump! came angrily on the door.

"You rotter!" came Wilmot's angry voice. "If you don't let me out at once I'll shout for help, and you'll take the consequences."

"Why do you think I got you up to this garret, you fool?" jeered the Bounder. "You can shout till you're tired, but nobody will hear you from here! Shout away!"

With that the Bounder went down the stairs, grinning, with the bag in his hand. The thumping on the door died away as he descended the lower stairs. He strolled along the Remove passage, a grin on his face, though his heart was beating rather fast.

"Wilmot— Oh, you again!" exclaimed Nugent, as the Bounder opened the door of Study No. 1. "Is that my bag?"

"Yes; Wilmot's gone down to the changing-room," answered the Bounder carelessly. "He asked me to bring it along."

"You're getting jolly obliging, old bean," said Nugent. "Thanks!"

"You'll want some things from your box in the dorm if you're staying over the night," remarked the Bounder. "Like me to help you pack?"

"If you like!"

They went to the Remove dormitory together. Ten minutes later Frank Nugent came out of the House, and his chums joined him, to walk down as far as the gates. The Bounder watched them with a cynical smile on his hard face.

Nugent was gone! Wilmot was locked in a garret at the top of the House, out of hearing if he shouted at the top of his voice. It looked as if Herbert Vernon-Smith might be playing in the Rookwood game, after all.

THE SIXTEENTH CHAPTER.

Neck or Nothing!

OH, the rotter!" panted Wilmot. He thumped and thumped on the garret door.

But he soon gave that up.

The Bounder was gone, and it was clear that Smithy did not mean to let him out. And the fact that he had

taken the trouble, and the risk; to look him in the garret at all was pretty conclusive proof that it was impossible for a prisoner there to make himself heard. Wilmot clenched his hands.

What would the fellows think if he failed to turn up for the match? That it was another sample of his sulks and disdain? That he was treating an important fixture as he had treated the pick-up of a week ago—letting them expect him and then failing to turn up? What else could they think?

The thought of that made him desperate. With the friendship and faith of the cheery Co. to help him through he had resolved on a new life at Greyfriars—and a few days of it had made him more than satisfied with his resolve. Wharton had been right in advising him to “take the bull by the horns” with regard to Topham! Everybody knew now that he had been at Topham—and thought nothing at all about it! Even the vengeful Bounder had extracted the information from Billy Bunter, too late to realise that there was anything in it to harm his enemy.

For several days now Wilmot had been almost as happy as in the old days at Topham. He had made friends—he was booked for the game he was keen on—the miserable past faded into the background.

Now was it all to be thrown away to gratify the malice of the scapegrace of the Remove—the fellow who had let the team down himself and yet was unwilling to see another man play in his place?

Wilmot gritted his teeth.

Minutes were passing—and minutes were precious. It was only half an hour to kick-off—Rookwood might arrive any minute.

With considerable difficulty Wilmot opened the window and put his head out. But he realised at once that the loudest shout could never be heard so far below with intervening roofs and buildings.

Far in the distance, toy-like, he had a glimpse of the gates, and saw several fellows there, one with a bag in his hand.

He gave a start. Nugent, of course—he was going! He would not be available if Wilmot failed his side! Wharton would be left a man short; he would have to pick up some stop-gap at the last minute—

Then the whole of the Bounder's scheme flashed into his mind.

Smithy knew that Nugent was going! All the Remove knew that Nugent had leave to go home for his sister's birthday party that day, and only playing in the Rookwood match would have kept him. As he was not wanted, since Wilmot had been put in, he was going. He would be wanted now—but he did

not know it—and he was going! The Bounder was counting on that! Nugent gone and Wilmot tricked out of the way, Smithy was banking on being shoved into the vacant place—his old place in the team! Chance had played into his hands—and with reckless unscrupulousness he had jumped at the chance.

“Oh, the rotten rascal!” breathed Wilmot.

He stared at the distant gates.

Frank Nugent was gone! The other fellows who had seen him off came back from the gates and the buildings hid them from Wilmot's eyes. Had they looked up at that tiny window far over the roofs they would hardly have seen him there. But they naturally did not. Now they were lost to his sight.

He clenched his hands desperately.

Already they would be missing him! What would they be thinking of him? He craned his head out of the little window, trying to get a glimpse of the playing fields. He had a partial view and could see fellows gathering there. Then he had a glimpse of a pink-and-white shirt, and he knew the Rookwood colours. Jimmy Silver & Co. had arrived then!

He crossed to the door again and beat on it savagely. But only the echo of the knocking answered him. Even if the noise reached as far as the Remove passage no fellow was there in the studies to hear.

Again he went to the window.

Six feet below it was a roof ridge, with a steep slant of slates on either side. At the other end of the ridge was a window of some attic. For a long minute he stood looking, and then he moved. To drop to that narrow stone ridge, and work his way along, was to risk life and limb—but he had made up his mind to do it.

He had already changed for football, and had a coat on. He threw the coat off, and his slim figure squeezed through the window easily enough without it, small as the aperture was.

Holding on to the narrow sill, he could just feel the stone ridge below him with his football boots.

For a second he hesitated. If he failed to make good his hold—if he slipped—A sudden slide down the slanting slates—a rush through the air, a fall of seventy feet or more to hard earth. Was it worth the fearful risk?

He let go his hold.

His heart was beating; but his head was cool. An instant, and he was astride the ridge.

On either side, space—and death! Carefully, steadily, he avoided looking down on either side, as he worked his way, slowly but surely, along the stone ridge.

It was slow progress. The studs of his football boots scraped lines on the

damp slates. Inch by inch, foot by foot, his eyes fixed steadily on the attic window before him, he worked his way on.

It was minutes—but it seemed hours—before he reached the end of the roof ridge. Cold at it was, the perspiration was breaking out on his forehead.

But his nerve was steady as steel as he rose upright on the narrow ridge, and reached the attic window-sill above him.

He got his elbows on the sill, and hung there, his feet in space. The window was fastened within.

Holding on with one arm and hand, he cracked a pane with his other elbow. The shattering fragments fell within.

He groped for the fastening, and unlatched it. Even then it was difficult work to get the long-disused window open.

But it was open at last. He crawled through and dropped, almost exhausted, on a bare floor.

For a minute he lay there to recover. Then he was on his feet again, and dragging open the door. Outside was a staircase. He ran down, and found himself in the Fourth Form passage.

Temple of the Fourth, in his study doorway, stared at him.

“Hallo! Aren't you playin' footer?” drawled Cecil Reginald Temple. “I heard that you were in Wharton's team, old bean.”

Without delaying to answer, Wilmot cut down the passage, and flew down the stairs, and out of the House. Cecil Reginald was left staring.

THE SEVENTEENTH CHAPTER.

Victory!

“WILMOT!”
“Where's Wilmot?”
“Where's that ass?”
“Where the dickens—”

A dozen fellows were asking those questions on Little Side. The Remove men were there—Jimmy Silver & Co., from Rookwood, were there—but the new recruit in the Remove Eleven was not there.

He had changed for the game when the other fellows did. Some of them had been punting a ball about when Wilmot went into the House with Frank Nugent, and he was not missed till the footballers were ready to gather for the kick-off.

Up to the last moment, Harry Wharton expected to see him come cutting down to the field. But he did not come.

The Bounder, lounging with his hands in his pockets, watched the captain of the Remove curiously. He had no compunction. If Wharton wanted him, he was ready to play—if not, the captain of the Remove could do his best without

(Continued on next page.)

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him. Wilmot, at all events, would not be there.

"Where the dickens is the man?" muttered Bob Cherry.

"The wherefulness is terrific!"

Harry Wharton stared towards the House. There was no sign of Eric Wilmot coming. Other fellows were to be seen, coming down to the football ground to look on. But Wilmot was not among them.

The captain of the Remove knitted his brows. Was it possible—was it barely possible—that the fellow had failed him, after all? He remembered the pick-up of a week ago. Was it possible?

Potter, who was acting as referee, came up to Wharton.

"You can't hang about for ever, kid! If your man hasn't turned up, put in another man, and get going, for goodness' sake!" he said.

Harry Wharton gave a last look in the direction of the House. Then he made up his mind. He could hardly keep the Rookwooders waiting any longer for a man who did not choose to turn up.

He looked at Vernon-Smith.

"You get changed, Smithy! Thank goodness you're here, as Nugent's gone!"

The Bounder cut off towards the doorway of the changing-room with the speed of a deer.

"Only a few minutes now, Silver!" said Harry, biting his lip.

"Right as rain!" said the Rookwood junior cheerily.

"Hallo, hallo, hallo!" roared Bob Cherry. "Smithy's changed pretty quick!" His eyes were on an active figure, in football rig, racing down to the field. "Why—great gum—it's not Smithy—it's Wilmot!"

"Wilmot?" gasped Wharton.

"The esteemed and idiotic Wilmot!" exclaimed Hurree Jamset Ram Singh.

The Bounder was in the changing-room—changing fast. He was still there when Wilmot reached the group of footballers, panting for breath.

Wharton gave him a grim look.

"Sorry!" panted Wilmot. "I got delayed! I'm awfully sorry! If I'm not too late, Wharton! It wasn't my fault, really!"

"What the dickens— But never mind that now! You're here!" Harry Wharton's face cleared. What had happened to keep Wilmot away, he could not guess; but, at the moment, it mattered little, as he had turned up in time. "Get into the field, you men!"

The footballers went into the field. Potter blew the whistle, and the ball was sent rolling. The game had already started, and was going strong, when Herbert Vernon-Smith came cutting down to Little Side—changed for football.

He gave almost a convulsive jump at the sight of the players in the field.

"What!" he gasped. "What!" For the moment he did not observe Wilmot there.

"Wilmot turned up, old man!" said Tom Redwing.

The Bounder staggered.

"Wilmot?" he repeated.

"Yes, at the last minute!"

"Don't be a fool!"

Redwing stared at him.

"He did, Smithy! There he is, on the wing!"

Vernon-Smith fixed his eyes on the graceful, athletic form, the handsome face, flushed and keen. He felt as if his head was turning round. He had left Wilmot locked in an inaccessible

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garret—the key was still in his pocket! And Wilmot was there—playing football!

As he stared almost stupidly at that unexpected and amazing sight, there was a roar from the Greyfriars crowd:

"Wilmot! Wilmot!"

"Oh, good man!"

"Goal! Goal! Goal!"

"Wilmot! Oh, bravo, Wilmot!"

"By gum, that man can play football!" said Redwing.

The Bounder did not speak.

He could not.

With starting eyes, he stared at Wilmot. The Topham man had put the pill in in the first six minutes of the game. The Greyfriars crowd roared.

Harry Wharton clapped his new recruit on the shoulder as the players went back to the centre of the field. His eyes were dancing.

"Keep that up, Wilmot!" he said.

Wilmot smiled cheerily.

"I'll try!" he said.

He did try—and succeeded. Jimmy Silver & Co. had come over from Rookwood, expecting a hard game on the Greyfriars ground. But they had not expected quite so hard a game as this proved to be. They had never seen Wilmot before; but now that they saw him, they were not likely to forget him.

Another goal came to the new man in the first half. And one came to Harry Wharton, as the result of a pass from Wilmot.

Mornington put the ball in for Rookwood just on half-time. When the whistle went, Greyfriars were leading three to one.

In the interval Harry Wharton ran across to speak to the Bounder.

"Sorry, Smithy!" he said. "Wilmot turned up, and so— You understand?"

"Oh, quite!" sneered Smithy. "Has he told you how he managed to turn up?"

"Eh—no."

"I'm rather curious about that!"

"Blessed if I know what you're driving at, Smithy!" said the captain of the Remove, puzzled.

"You will!" sneered the Bounder.

Wharton shrugged his shoulders, and went back to the players. When Potter blew the whistle again, the game went on hot and strong, the Greyfriars men in great spirits. Jimmy Silver & Co. fought hard; and they were good men, with plenty of fight in them.

But it booted not. Another goal came to Wilmot, and another to Wharton! After which the Rookwooders packed their goal, and defended successfully till the final whistle blew. For once Jimmy Silver & Co. were rather glad to hear it. Five goals to one was enough to satisfy the greediest!

Herbert Vernon-Smith watched the game to its victorious finish, and then went back to the House and to his study.

No one came up to the studies; but he could hear sounds later of a celebration going on in the Rag.

The Rookwooders were gone, with a tale of unusual defeat to tell. In the Rag, Wilmot was the hero of the hour—once the outcast of the Form!

The Bounder—gloomy, half-repentant, half-defiant—waited. He knew that they would come for him sooner or later. As soon as they knew the treacherous trick he had played—as soon as Wilmot told them why he had been kept away—the Remove footballers would deal with him. He knew that. Keeping a man who was wanted away from a football match was not an

offence the Removeites were likely to forgive. He had failed, and he knew that Wilmot must have risked life and limb to make him fail. And when the Remove knew—

A record ragging, and "Coventry" for the rest of the term—that was the least the Bounder had to expect. He had risked it, with cynical recklessness, and he had at least the hardihood to stand it when it came. But the prospect was not attractive.

There was a step in the passage, a tap at the door. It opened, and Eric Wilmot came in.

The Bounder gave him a glance.

"Are they coming?" he jeered.

"Who?" asked Wilmot quietly.

"Oh, do you think I don't know what to expect?" exclaimed Smithy scoffingly. "Haven't you told them yet?"

"No."

"You prefer to keep it hanging over my head?" sneered Vernon-Smith. "Well, it's like you!"

"I hope not!" said Wilmot in the same quiet tone.

"What do you mean?" snapped the Bounder roughly.

"No harm was done, after all," said Wilmot. "If I'd been kept away, I should have had to explain; but I got through. I've said nothing, and I'm not going to say anything. If you have the sense to hold your tongue, nobody will know what you did."

The Bounder stared at him blankly. He doubted whether his ears had heard aright.

Wilmot smiled faintly.

"Look here, Vernon-Smith," he said, "we've had rows, and we've had a scrap—my fault as much as yours, as I'm willing to own up. I made a bad start here; but the other fellows are willing to wash it out, and give a man a chance. Why not you? If we can't be friends, we needn't be enemies."

The Bounder still stared.

"Is that what you came up to say?" he stammered at last.

"Yes."

"After what I did——"

"Wash it out!"

The Bounder was silent for a long moment.

"Wash it out!" he repeated at length. "I—I'll tell you now, as you take it like that, that I'm sorry for what I did. I acted in a rotten temper, and I jolly well know that I ought to be booted for it! But if you're willing to wash it out——"

"More than willing!" said Wilmot.

"Well, I'm not the man to refuse a good offer!" said the Bounder, with a grin. "It's a go! But I'm really sorry!"

"I guessed you would be. Come down to the Rag. There's a feast of the gods going on. Let's get down before Bunter clears the table!"

The Bounder laughed, and went down with Wilmot. Harry Wharton & Co. gave him a cheery welcome as he came in, glad to see him on friendly terms with their new friend.

It was a great celebration of a great victory, and there were a good many bright faces in the Rag. But the brightest of all was that of Eric Wilmot, once the outcast of the Remove, the shadow of the past that had haunted him cast firmly behind him now, and his eyes fixed on a brighter future.

THE END.

(Next week's MAGNET will contain the first of a splendid new series of stories featuring Harry Wharton & Co., entitled: "THE TRAIL OF ADVENTURE!" As there will be a great rush for next week's DOUBLE FREE GIFT NUMBER of the MAGNET, order your copy NOW!)

DAN of the DOGGER BANK!

By David Goodwin

The Escape!

KENNETH GRAHAM, son of a millionaire shipowner, is rescued off the Dogger Bank by the crew of the fishing trawler, Grey Seal.

His past life a blank, he is given the name of "Dogger Dan," and signed on as fifth hand, under Skipper Atheling, Finn Macoul, Wat Griffiths, and Buck Atheling.

Aware of his nephew's fate, and knowing that he will come into the shipowner's money when his brother dies, Dudley Graham engages Jake Rebow and his cutthroats of the Black Squadron to get Kenneth out of the way for ever.

Rebow's efforts prove fruitless, however. A series of exciting adventures follow, after which Dan and Buck Atheling find themselves aboard Dudley Graham's yacht. Dan's memory returns, as the result of meeting his uncle, but Dudley denies relationship.

In Dan's possession is a chart, disclosing the whereabouts of a hidden treasure, worth £5,000. Knowing full well of his uncle's treachery, Dan makes friends with Jack Ward, the yacht's mate, gets him to broadcast a message telling of his whereabouts, and then fixes a dummy figure in his bed. Suddenly, in the darkness, a trapdoor by the side of the bunk opens, and a hand, gripping the haft of a knife, is thrust through the aperture. Springing forward like a panther, Dan grips the wrist, and then yells for his chum, Buck.

There was a savage wrench as Dan grabbed the protruding hand, but he hung on with all his might. The knife dropped upon the bunk.

A strong panting and gasping came from the other side of the panel, as though someone there were struggling with all his strength. The strain was terrific. There was a hurried rush outside in the alley-way, and in a moment Buck burst into the cabin.

"I've got him!" panted Dan. "Ah, he's slipping! I can't hold him!"

Buck, taking in the situation at a glance, came swiftly to the rescue and grabbed at the wrist.

But there was not room for both, and the boys hampered rather than aided each other.

Frantic wrenches came upon the wrist from its owner, and a running fire of oaths, muffled by the bulkhead, broke the silence.

"No good!" whispered Dan hoarsely. "Scoot round to his cabin, break the door in, and nail him, while I—Ah!"

He staggered backwards. The hand broke from its hold with a jerk—Dan could get no purchase on it from where he was—and struck the top of the trapdoor, cutting the flesh deeply from wrist to knuckles. A moment later it disappeared, and the trapdoor closed with a snap.

Buck had dashed round to the other cabin like lightning before Dan had recovered himself. He was soon back, however, looking very crestfallen.

"There's no one there," he said—"not a soul!"

"I'm sick of this death-trap of a

steamer!" said Dan bitterly. "Nothing but tricks and dirty work!" He picked up the knife that had fallen, and stowed it away. "Let's go on deck! Dudley won't be there, that's one blessing!"

The two chums walked the decks till breakfast-time, talking in a low voice.

Dudley turned up for breakfast, after all, much to the boys' surprise. He was even more cool and self-possessed than usual; but his long dressing-gown sleeve could not entirely cover his bandaged right wrist.

"You have a damaged wrist, I see," said Dan.

"Yes," returned Dudley. "I struck it against a stanchion last night."

"I should be careful next time," murmured Dan. "Stanchions are tough things."

The meal ended, and the rest of the day passed without any special incident.

When night was once more shutting out the daylight, Dan and Buck went below to settle on a plan of campaign.

"It's plain," said Dan, after they had been below for some time, "that we can't go on like this without—Hullo!" He broke off suddenly. "The yacht's slowing down, isn't she? Great Scott, who's that?"

There was a stir in the cabin next door, and from behind the bulkhead came the sound of a harsh, grating voice the boys knew only too well.

"Aboard here, are they? Gosh, mon, why ha'e ye not settled them?"

"That's all very well," said Dudley's voice irritably. "I'm not a North Sea cutthroat, like you, Rebow. Can't you see I'm well known, and if I do anything shady it's easy to lay hands on me, to say nothing of this dago crew, who'd give their ears for a chance to blackmail me afterwards!"

"Ye could ha' done it without makin' a mess before the crew," said Rebow.

"I've tried, and they got to windward of me, the cursed cubs! Confound it, Rebow, you've got nothing to brag about yourself! You've had a thousand pounds before your nose, and two months to track the cubs down in, and you've failed a dozen times!"

"De'il tak' them!" growled Rebow. "It's not your bit siller that I'm followin'! Four o' my craft ha'e I lost since I started the chase!"

Buck nudged Dan, an appreciative grin on his face. Every word came, muffled but audible, through the paneling.

"Well, listen, and don't chatter!" continued the yacht-owner's voice angrily, "and don't tell me you care nothing for the money! I'm not a fool! You shall finger it; but the job mustn't be done here. It must be done on Baltrum Island!"

"Ah!" said Rebow. "What d'ye ken o' Baltrum Island, ma mannie?"

Dudley's voice sounded lower than ever.

"I know where Jan Osterling's treasure lies. I have the chart!"

"I'm wi' ye!" said Rebow, with an oath. "Let's have your plan!"

The voices sank to an inaudible whisper.

"Come, Dan!" breathed Buck. "Out of it—quick! To Jack Ward's cabin!"

They stole away without a sound, and

were soon telling Ward what they had overheard.

"Great Scott!" ejaculated Ward. "The Wasp must be alongside. She's come up in the skipper's watch. Come on!"

They gained the deck and stood for a moment in the shadow of the chart-house.

A hundred yards away, rocking on the swell, lay the Black Fleet trawler, Wasp. The yacht's longboat lay alongside the Ercildoune, two of the dagos in her, and they were holding on by the yacht's davit-falls, which hung down to the water. Five of the Wasp's crew were on the Ercildoune's deck, talking earnestly with the deck-hands. A low chorus of laughter arose from time to time.

The mate looked round keenly. Then, turning round, he vanished down the engine-room. There was a squeal, and the sound of a heavy hammer striking upon solid steel.

Ward reappeared later, panting.

"There's but two on her," he said fiercely, pointing to the Wasp, "an' a pair o' dagos in the boat! The rest are here, palavering. Are ye game to take the trawler? It's your last chance!"

"Come on!" said the boys.

A moment later they were swarming down the davit-falls into the boat. One of the men aboard her looked up and gave a startled yell:

"Help, help! Dey ees-cape!"

Hampered!

THE mate let go the davit-fall and dropped lightly into the boat. The broken English of the terrified dago boatman stopped with a gasp as he looked down the barrel of Ward's revolver.

"That's right, sonny," said the mate—"dey ees-cape! An' if they don't, you don't, either, for I'll drill a hole in your saddle-coloured skin! So push off, an' pull for that smack quicker'n lightning!"

As the boat pushed off, the yacht's crew, with the Black Fleet visitors, made a startled rush for the rail and stared over it.

"Give way, you mongrels!" cried the mate, as the scared boatmen pulled out for the Wasp, where she lay to leeward. "If you slacken stroke, you're dead meat!"

The men wanted no reminding. They knew the mate of old, and guessed he would be as good as his word.

"Well done, Jack!" said Dan. "You did that smartly! They haven't tumbled to the game yet on the Ercildoune."

"They don't know it's us!" put in Buck. "They think we're some of her crew gone off to palaver without leave. Ah! They know now! They've gone below for Jake and Dudley."

"We'll reach the trawler before they're on deck!" said the mate, gleefully. "An' there'll be a change of ownership! Go on, you snuff-coloured sweeps! Put your backs into it!"

The Wasp nodded drunkenly on the swells. There were only two men on

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her, and they were drowsily waiting for the return of Jake and their comrades, who were on the yacht.

Swift and noiselessly, the boat slipped alongside.

One of the Wasp's men roused himself.

"Back already, skipper?" he said. "What! Hallo! Who the blazes are you?"

A yell of rage arose astern from the decks of the Ercildoune as Jake Rebow came up from below and learned the truth, and Dudley Graham's curses at the negligence of his crew were soon added.

Before the noise was thoroughly started, Dan seized the oars from the dago rowers and flung them away. Then it was that the Wasp's watch on deck said in his alarm:

"Who are you?"

"We're the new crew!" said the mate grimly, as he sprang aboard. "See?"

Without another word, he grappled with the astonished Black and flung him clean over the rail into the sea.

His companion turned on the newcomers with a yell, but he was soon overcome by Dan and Buck, and slung overboard like a sack of coal. He swam to the boat, where his companion was already hanging on.

The two dagos, furious but helpless, dragged them on board.

"Now, then, boys," said the mate, "fore-sheet over, an' let her rip! Here's the yacht down on us!"

There was hardly enough wind to move the trawler four miles an hour, and her new crew looked anxiously behind them.

A bell clanged deep in the Ercildoune's engine-room, and, with a long hoot of triumph from her whistle, she circled round, and came swooping down upon the Wasp.

"They won't run us down!" said Buck. "It's their own blessed boat, this!"

"Won't they?" retorted the mate, putting his helm up. "That's all you know! It's worth fifty old twopenny trawlers to them if they can wipe out our young millionaire here, eh, Kenneth Graham?"

"Dogger Dan's my name, Mr. Mate!" said Dan. "But you're right.

They've got the three of us on board here, an' they can make a clean job of us without any knifing, an' swear it was an accident. But I thought you'd snaffed the engines?"

"So I did," said Jack Ward, glancing at the towering steamer as she came hurtling down upon them. "They're bound to break down in a few dozen revolutions, but it's touch and go whether the steamer hits us first."

"The engines are sick already!" commented Buck. "I can hear 'em coughing."

The usual steady beat of the yacht's screws was changed to a groaning, clanking noise, and, by the shouting and bell-ringing aboard her, it was plain that those on the bridge were not pleased with those in the engine-room.

"We've got ye, ye loons!" roared the hoarse voice of Rebow from the yacht's bridge. "Give her mair steam, Mr. Dudley!"

The Ercildoune's stem was barely a dozen yards away, when there was a sudden grinding, crashing uproar in her bowels, and she rolled past, splintering the edge of the Wasp's taffrail as she went.

Slowly she came to a standstill, and her crew yelled with rage and disappointment.

A spattering storm of shots rattled on the Wasp, as spit after spit of flame leaped from the yacht's deck. One chance shot drew blood from Dan's wrist; but he had flattened himself behind the mast.

The smack glided away, and in a few minutes was out of range, leaving the Ercildoune crippled.

The Last Of The Narwhal!

"**H**OW long before they start after us, Jack?" cried Dan.

"Long after we're out o' sight," said the mate. "if only this night breeze'll hold. They'll take three hours, at least, putting things right. I'd say we've done pretty well in that deal. They've always a card up their sleeve, though. See there—"

From the dark hull of the yacht, now

half a mile away, gleamed the Black Fleet's signal—two short flashes and one long.

"There's the answer!" put in Dan, as a faint triple flash shone far out on the weather-beam.

"Ay," said Ward. "Hope it ain't the Thresher! We can deal with a trawler; but the tug would do us in, sure as a gun, in this breeze!"

"The Narwhal's dismayed," said Dan thoughtfully, "and her bows are stove in. Can't be her."

"That was a week ago," retorted Buck. "You can bet they ran her in sharp and put a new stick in her. The Blacks do repairs mighty quick."

"Then it's her," said the mate; "for it's a trawler, right enough. See her topsail! There's the yacht talkin' to her."

A constant flicker of flashes, dot and dash, gleamed from the yacht, whose hull was now out of sight in the dark distance, and when she paused the far-away trawler answered.

"Gettin' her orders," said Jack. "They've a fine system, them Blacks, an' that's a fact."

A great funnel of light came staggering across the sea, its thin end a blinding point far away astern, and its wide end a great ring of radiance that rested on the Wasp and lit her up as though a gigantic bullseye-lamp had been turned on her.

"A searchlight from the yacht!" cried Dan, when the ray of light had wandered round for a few moments and then settled steadily on the smack. "Didn't know she had one!"

It was not long before the nodding topsail of the Narwhal came bearing down upon the Wasp. The beam of light from the yacht rested on the newcomer for a moment, showing her new mast, unvarnished, and a rather rough patch on her port-bow where she had suffered from her collision on the night of the thunderstorm. The light gleamed on the barrels of four rifles levelled over the rail, and then the glare shifted from the attacker and settled on the Wasp again.

"They've got Service rifles," said Buck; "but there may be some aboard here, too!"

"Rout 'em out, lad, an' quick about it!" said Ward, gripping his tiller. "Don't fail to find 'em, or we're done! It's too long a range for pistol-shooting!"

The Narwhal ran down within a hundred yards of the Wasp, and then shifted her helm and ran parallel with her, just keeping outside the line of the searchlight, while her intended prey was in the full glare of it.

The first rifle spoke. A bullet screamed close over Jack Ward's head.

"Ay," he said, stretching himself out on the deck and steering with his left hand on the tiller, "they've got it all their own way, the swabs!"

"Here you are!" cried Dan, tumbling up the hatchway with a couple of rifles under his arm. "Buck's bringing up more, an' these are loaded!"

"Let her come up close," said the mate, holding his revolver at the ready, "and both of you keep under cover. See the patch on her bow? It's rottenly put on—not even let into the wood."

"I see," said Buck. "Fancy putting to sea like that! But what good will it do us?"

"It's a white deal," said Jack. "Pour in a sharp fire on it, an' it'll crack up an' splinter, an' leave the breach open. We've two magazine rifles. She's down by the head as it is. She'll fill in ten minutes if we can strip it, short-manned as she be!"

SMASHING NEW STORY OF THRILLING ADVENTURE on LAND, SEA and in the AIR . . .

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Jack shifted his tiller. Straight at the Narwhal he went, and the searchlight followed him. Viciously the rifle-bullets pattered about the Wasp, but her crew were well sheltered, and in another twenty seconds the glare of light covered both vessels together.

"Now," cried Jack, thrusting his helm hard up, "let her have it!"

A blast of lead struck the crazy patchwork on the Narwhal's bows as the two magazine-rifles and Jack's revolver poured in a rapid fire. The deal patch withered and collapsed under it like a sheet of gelatine before a hot fire, and as the trawler dipped heavily to the next swell, she took a hundredweight of water through the open breach.

"Up forrard, ye fules!" shrieked the Narwhal's skipper to his men. "Stanch her, or we shall founder!"

But as two men started forward, Jack's revolver spoke. One of them yelped, while the other fled aft, for a bullet had passed through his hair.

The Narwhal made a plunge, the water pouring into her by the ton, and when the next wave passed, her bow did not rise.

"She's gaun!" yelled the captain, in a frenzy. "Oop, an' pour a volley intae them before she sinks! They shall gang tae their death with us!"

But even as they rose to their feet, the long black trawler hove up her stern to the sky, wallowed heavily in the trough of the sea, and dived into the depths. The seething waters closed over her!

Dan Means Business!

"**S**TAND by!" said Dan. "Can't leave the poor beasts to drown! Heave her round, Mr. Ward!"

"It's more'n they deserve," said the mate. "But rope's cheap, so's Dartmoor Prison, an' the situation's fine and healthy. We'll pick the dirty dogs up, if you say so!"

Dan and Buck were leaning over the rail, ready to help any struggler in the water, as the Wasp passed over the scene of the wreck.

There was nothing to be seen, however. The silent sea had swallowed up the Narwhal and her crew of gunmen.

The Wasp stretched herself out to the eastward, and all night she sailed till the grey dawn began to grow over the sea. The yacht was nowhere in sight, and Jack Ward opined that the dago engineers were still pinching their fingers among the machinery.

Hunger and the cold of dawn began to weigh on the crew of the Wasp, and, routing out the smack's stores, they made a breakfast off hot coffee and bully-beef.

After the meal, Buck climbed leisurely to the cross-trees and peered out over the horizon.

"Land-ho!" he hailed. "Baltrum right ahead, by the look of it! Bring up the glasses, Dan! Ay, there's the hut and the old tree, too! We'll be there in two hours!"

He came down jubilantly; the smack began to hiss through the water. The wind was freshening, and the morning was dark and lowering.

"Dirty weather coming," said the mate, looking to windward. "What's that away on the quarter? Patrol boat, ain't it?"

"Gosh!" exclaimed Buck, staring at a long, low, grey vessel, almost invisible through the smother. "That's the old German gunboat that stopped the Seal last week. She's after the Wasp!"

"What!" said the mate blankly. "It's all up for us, then!"

GREYFRIARS INTERVIEWS

(1)

The inkliest of Friars
In Fagdom's happy land
Is known as Teddy Myers,
Of Dicky Nugent's band;
He has the reputation
(A gruesome one, I think)
Of taking recreation
By wallowing in ink.

(3)

I saw the young ass playing
At Soccer in the Rag,
With energy displaying
Much prowess for a fag!
The Second in full muster
Were kicking at the ball
(An old discarded duster)
Towards the goal—a wall!



(6)

So I was ref! Well, clearly
The goal had been offside.
I told them so severely,
At any rate, I tried!
But they were then re-starting
Their soul-destroying row!
And I, before departing,
Exclaimed: "I'll stop that—now!"



This week's brilliant verses by our long-haired poet are written around
EDWIN MYERS,
an inky-fingered member of the Second Form.

(2)

If you should wish to spot him
And find a little swell
Whose face is clean—that's NOT him;
No fear! We know him well!
Find some untidy slacker
Who's just one mound of grime,
And if there's no one blacker,
Well, you'll be right this time!

(4)

Although not solentiffo
The game was hard and fast.
The clamour was terrific,
It smote me like a blast!
I scrambled on a table
In case I might be slain,
And shouted through the babel
To Teddy Myers—in vain.

(5)

The din was most appalling
As Dicky Nugent scored!
Some players started howling,
And those that didn't, roared!
"Offside!" They cracked the
ceiling!
The tumult made me deaf;
I found they were appealing
To me—"Offside there, ref!"



(7)

I whistled long and shrilly.
They stopped the game and stared.
They asked: "What's that for, silly?"
And, "Time's up!" I declared.
"I'm ref, so just you stop it!
The game is finished—see?
And all save Myers can hop it!
And you, Myers, come with me!"

(8)

My words were quite unheeded!
They started up again!
And that was all I needed!
I smote them might and main!
Instead of swiftly fleeing
They seized me, one and all,
And I stopped refereeing
And started as—the ball!



Up came the gunboat, flying an urgent signal to heave-to. She had every right to stop a Black Fleet vessel that was plying her trade in German waters.

Seeing no notice taken of her signal, she threw a stronger one. She was nearly two miles away.

Boom!
A mushroom of white smoke blossomed against the gunboat's side, and a shell screamed across the bows of the Wasp.

"No need for you to worry, Dan," said the mate sadly. "You'll be all right, but it's ruin for me. This is a Black Fleet ship—the one they're looking for. I've been mate of a steamer for a month past, in close touch with the squadron all the time, an' you can bet when they're scooped in—as they will be—they'll swear I was one of them. They'll get even. An' those dagos of the Ercildoune—there'll be some of those brought in as witnesses, an' they'll swear 'emselves blue to get their own back on me! It means a German gaol for me, my lads!"

"Rot!" said Dan. "We can bear witness you kept clear of the Blacks and helped us."

"Dudley Graham'll save himself by jumpin' on me, too; an' even if I wasn't

shoved in quod, I'm done for!" said the mate gloomily. "My ticket'll be dirtied, an' I'll never get another ship. However, it can't be helped, an' I'm glad you're out of your troubles, Dan. Heave goes!"

He put the helm down, and waited in silence for the gunboat to come up.

"He's right, Dan," said Buck. "It's tough on old Jack."

"Then, by gosh," cried Dan, springing to the tiller, "we'll run for it, neck or nothing!"

He wrenched the helm up, and the Wasp fell away before the wind and filled her sails.

Boom!
A second shell shrieked overhead as the tearing breeze sent the Wasp rushing along as fast as the gunboat herself.

"Let him fire, and be hanged to him!" cried Dan. "There's Baltrum close under our lee, an' we'll give him the slip and unearth the treasure yet! Give her sheet, there!"

Boom! Z-z-z-z!
A shell tore past within a dozen feet and smacked the top off a high wave just to leeward.

"That's his sighting shot!" said Buck, setting his teeth. "He'll blow us to
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blazes with the next! He's training his gun dead on! Let's give in!"

"No!" said Dan savagely. "Let her rip!"

And as the gunboat surged clear of a white-topped wave, the gun-layer pulled his lanyard.

The Friendly Fog!

BOOM! Z-z-z-z-z!
The smoke leaped from the gunboat's side, and the shell screamed past so close to the Wasp that Dan felt the wind of it on his cheek.

"Smack through the mainsail!" cried Buck.

Boom-z-z-z!
Another shell whistled through the air, and over went the topmast like a reed snapped by a blast of wind. It hung over forward like the broken wing of a bird, and plunged and swayed with the kicking of the trawler.

"Cut it away!" cried Dan desperately. "Up aloft with you!"

The gunboat was coming up fast, and as Buck sprang up aloft to cut away the wreckage, Jack Ward turned upon Dan.

"Nothin' on the seas can save us now," he said. "The gunboat has the legs of us. We're only makin' it worse."

Dan glanced at the gunboat, and saw, with a sigh, that the mate was right. The sinking of the Wasp with a few more shots was a certainty. He had no right to throw away his comrades' lives.

"Here goes, then!" he said, luffing the trawler-head to wind. "Fore-sheet a-weather, and heave her to! I'd rather have gone on and taken what came. But they've got us now!"

Up came the gunboat. An angry, red-faced lieutenant was stamping on the bridge as he brought his vessel to a standstill close by.

"I guess we're in for it!" muttered Buck. "Whatever might ha' happened before we ran for it, we've done for ourselves now. Here comes the quarter-boat."

The davit-tackles of the gunboat screeched as they ran out, and the boat came pulling towards the Wasp. There was nothing to be said.

The bow-man was reaching out with his boathook to hook on to the Wasp's rail, when Dan, looking astern, gave a gasp of excitement.

A great billowy mass of dark mist—the thick wind-fog of the North Sea—came driving down upon the trawler and the gunboat like a curtain. A rush of damp wind came with it, and in a few seconds the gunboat seemed a mere filmy outline in a shroud of haze.

Dan sprang to the tiller.

"It's our turn now!" he cried hoarsely. "By George, we'll slip them yet! Smash that boathook! Let go the foresheet!"

Jack Ward, fired with new hope, snatched up an oar and snapped the boathook even as it touched the Wasp's rail.

Buck leaped into the bows and swung the fore-sheet over, and, amid a volley of angry shouts from the boat's crew, the black trawler laid her side down and leaped away into the fog.

"Fooled again!" shouted Buck, hauling madly on the bowline.

"Shut up that row," hissed Dan, "and pray that this fog doesn't lift, or we'll

be at the bottom of the sea in ten seconds, boat and all!"

The fog held. Anxiously the little crew watched it, for they knew their lives depended on it. One rift in the haze, and the gunboat would open fire.

"He'll think we've put to sea," muttered Dan, shifting his course. "An' for that very reason we'll make straight in for Baltrum, an' see if we can find the entrance of the gateway."

"He'll see our mast, even if we're anchored inside, when the fog lifts," said Buck. "An' he'll send a party ashore to capture us."

"I reckon not!" said Dan, closing his lips tight. "We'll cut the mast down and sink her in the creek!"

"Good lad!" said Ward. "The very thing! But how shall we get off again? S'pose the Ercildoune or the Fleet tug turns up, an' they're on the way to the treasure? They know where we've gone."

"The gunboat'll keep the Fleet off!" chuckled Dan. "One good turn deserves another. They thought we were one of Rebrow's lot, an' I fancy we've made things hot for the Fleet if she does catch 'em. And the Valhalla—dad's yacht—ought to be here in twenty-four hours if that message you sent has gone through."

"Ah!" said Jack Ward eagerly. "An' there's the treasure in front of us! Let her go!"

Dan stood at the helm; the mate went into the bows and began to heave the lead, and Buck shinned up aloft and sat in the cross-trees.

"It's a bit clearer up here," he said, "an', by George, I can just see the beach!"

"In she goes!" cried Buck, as the narrow creek between the islands, white with tumbling surf, opened just ahead of them. "It's high water, an' a big tide, too!"

A minute later the Wasp was tumbling and plunging through the broken water over the bar, her decks washed like a half-tide rock, and her mast whipping like a reed. Dan's steady hand brought her through it, and she drew clear and glided up the sheltered waters of the creek, where the boys had already seen such stirring events.

"There's the old Vulture's topmast stickin' up though the water," said Buck. "We'll sink this hooker alongside her for company."

"Look sharp, then; the fog's clearing!" said Dan. "Down all sail and let go the anchor. If the gunboat spots our mast over the dunes, we're done!"

Down went the anchor, biting into the very ribs of the departed Vulture. The boat was launched and the rifles, cartridges, and all the available provisions bundled into her. Then a dozen strokes of an axe on the skin of the hold did their work, and as the fog drove away on the wings of a rising gale the Wasp settled down and joined her old comrade on the creek-bottom.

"And now for the treasure!" said Dan. "Give way!"

The Treasure!

THE boat grounded on the sand. Dan, Buck, and the mate unloaded her, dragged her right up the dunes, and then put the provisions back again.

"She ought to be well out o' the way there," said Dan. "It's going to be a

mighty big tide. It's over high-water mark now, an' coming in fast. Gosh! How it blows! We got here just in time!"

The high wind had cleared the last trace of fog, but a snorting gale was lashing the sea.

They raced down the dunes to the spot where the spades lay. The hole that Dan and Buck had made was undisturbed.

Without another word they fell to and dug furiously. No tide had touched the spot for many years; but the conditions were just right for a big flood, and things looked threatening. There were no dunes opposite the place where the treasure lay, nothing but a long slope of sand.

Nearer and nearer crept the surf.

"The breakers'll be over the dunes soon!" said Dan. "What on earth shall we do if the sea sweeps the island? Hallo! There's a tongue of smoke in the offing. It's the gunboat come back!"

Buck leaped up, gave one glance, and whistled in the teeth of the gale.

"Gunboat?" he said. "No, by George! It's the Ercildoune!"

He jumped down, seized Dan's spade, and began to dig frantically.

One glance showed the mate that Buck was right.

"Shall we let up till they've gone?" said the mate.

"No!" cried Dan. "Keep on with it! Get it, an' hold it!"

Furiously they dug, shovelling the sand like madmen and building up a rampart as best they could against the seething waters. The smoke to seaward thickened as the twilight grew, and the long, black hull of the Ercildoune, bearing with her the finest crew of scoundrels on all the bosom of the North Sea, came racing up through the gloom.

"They'll never make the gat!" said Dan, watching. "Her engines are half crooked and the gale's got her tucked under its arm. She's driving ashore!"

The Ercildoune drove far up the sands and struck with a crash; the seas poured over her and stripped her clean as a hulk. A swarm of black figures poured over her bows in twos and threes, leaping into the boiling surf, swimming for their lives.

"Dirty dagos!" growled the mate. "Ah, we're done!"

"No!" cried Buck, as his spade rang upon metal. He dropped to his knees and gripped a rusty handle of thick iron that peeped through the sand. Even as he did so the seething brine poured in, nearly swamping him. "Dan—Mr. Ward, give a hand here! I've got it!"

They bent down and felt wildly for a grip of the chest. Ten seconds of aching suspense, a wallowing struggle, and up through the sandy water came an iron chest that was more than one man could lift.

Over the sands, yet some distance away, a crowd of black figures came running towards the boys.

Dan snatched up the rifle.

Before the wrecked men had time to reach them, however, a mightier power intervened. The crests of the dunes crumbled under the battering of the breakers, a fierce swirl of waters broke through the gaps, and the North Sea rushed in upon Baltrum Island.

"To the big knoll, and quick, if you value your lives!" shouted Jack Ward. "Bring the chest along! Give me hold!"

Already the foaming water was nearly up to their knees.

Hoisting the treasure-chest up, they forged ahead with all the speed they could muster towards the higher, rising hill of sand in the centre of the island.

The men of the *Ercildoune* did not follow. The encroaching sea reached them first, and they were nearer to a second hill, whose crest lay a hundred yards away from the one the boys were trying to reach. Towards this, the tall figures of Dudley Graham and Rebow leading them, they struggled desperately.

Jack and his men throw themselves down at full length, sheltering behind the iron chest, and a heavy fire was poured in by Rebow's men. Buck and Ward lay flat, firing quietly now and then into the heart of the smoke, whence came a choked cry or an oath.

Dudley Graham stopped and stared out to sea as if petrified. His face was white and rigid, his breath came sharp between his teeth. Rebow followed his gaze.

"We're done, anyhow," he said. "This tide's finished us!"

Out of the morning haze, shouldering through the swells, the smoke pouring from her funnel, came a large shapely white vessel. She gave a blare from her siren that echoed over the wastes.

"It's the *Valhalla*!" shouted Dan, flinging his cap into the air.

All's Well!

DONALD GRAHAM, the man of millions had come back to demand his son from the sea. He was within an ace of coming too late.

Buck, Dan, and the mate were cut off completely from the lower sandhill on which the *Ercildoune's* crew had gathered. That was no refuge now, but a swamped billock that was fast going under as the conquering sea ravaged it in a turmoil of foam and breakers.

No question of a fight now. The North Sea was master. Already the *Ercildoune's* men were up to their waists in water. A tidal wave swept a dozen of them away.

"Swim for the hut!" yelled Rebow, for the roar of the gale was deafening. "There's enough of us yet to mop up those devils yonder and stop their mouths if we make the sandhill. It's drown or hang!"

"Keep by me!" screamed Dudley, as a breaker bore him off his feet. "Give me a hand; I'll never swim through that!"

"Every man for himself!" snarled Rebow. "You an' your fool games got us into this mess—get yersel' oot of it!"

The tide and the surf swirled over them. A fierce inrush of the sea swept the *Ercildoune's* crew and the Blacks away together. The current swept them relentlessly, wide of the hut's hillock by hundreds of yards. No man could strive against that tearing tide nor keep afloat long in the boil of surf.

A score of black heads bobbed among the foam. One by one they went down, blotted out by the wrath of the sea.

By the hut Buck and Jack Ward watched, helpless and awestruck. A struggling swimmer, on the point of sinking, was swept past the hillock, far out, but no human power could have helped. The last of the *Ercildoune's* crew and the Blacks had vanished; nothing but a waste of wide, tossing waters and the scream of the gale.

"That's saved 'em from the hangman. So I'll say nothin' more," said Ward.



The long black trawler hove up her stern to the sky, wallowed heavily in the trough of the sea, and dived into the depths!

Dan took one look round at the empty sea and sank down on the sand, shivering.

In half an hour the water was falling steadily, the wind easing. The island began to reappear, one hillock after another showing.

Away off the island, the *Valhalla* was fighting the gale. As soon as the tide fell and the surf eased, she stood inshore and smartly lowered her two white quarter-boats.

Dan ran down to the beach. He was staring with wild eyes at a big, bronzed man in the bows of the foremost boat as she came in with lashing strokes of her six ash oars.

Without slackening an ounce of speed, she took the sands with a surge and a heave. The bronzed man leaped out of her and took Dan by the shoulders, his voice shaking.

"Kenneth!" he said. "Kenneth, my son!"

The evening sun gilded the swells, as the s.s. *Valhalla* steamed swiftly for the West, her tall bows turned towards Britain. By her quarter-rail sat Kenneth Graham and his father, and beside them Jack Ward and Buck. And from Dogger Dan fell the last words of his strange tale.

"It's like a nightmare to me—that Dudley should have come down to that," said Donald Graham, after a long pause. "He was crooked by nature, and he found his own level when he met up with the Black Fleet.

I've heard something of their doings before now. But that my own brother should—" He stopped dead. "Well, we won't talk of it, Ken. Nothing matters now I've got you back!"

He gripped his son's hand in his own.

"I own a fleet of liners, but you're the best thing I've got, or ever shall have. I'm proud of you! Proved yourself a better man than I ever reckoned. I spoiled you a bit ashore, being an only son. And your two mates, here—you're lucky to have such friends!"

He turned to the mate.

"You hold a master's ticket, don't you, Mr. Ward? My skipper is quitting the sea after this voyage—retiring for good! Most of my skippers seem able to do that, after a few years!" He chuckled. "I'm offering you a nice, fat bonus, right away—and the command of the *Valhalla*. How's that?"

Jack Ward flushed, and then grinned with delight.

"That's how, sir! I want to tell you I—"

"Never mind about thanking me! Now, Buck, what about you?" Old Graham clapped a hand on Buck's shoulder. "You're too good a sailor to give up the sea. I'm going to set you on the road to the biggest job afloat, and a fortune. I dealt with men and things before you were born, and I know the man I want, when I see him. I want to meet up with the *Grey Seal*, and you, father, and his crew, right away. Think you can find her for me?"

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"I bet I can pick her up, sir," said Buck, "if you'll let me give the skipper his course!"

"Do!" said Mr. Graham. "And tell him, from me, to whack up the ship to full speed!"

Dan went below. Almost too tired to eat, he staggered into a luxurious cabin berth and slept soundly for ten hours.

When he came on deck again the yacht was hove-to, with engines stopped, thirty miles south of the Dogger. Rocking in the warm rain, he saw a smart, red-sailed trawler lying with her fore-sheet a-weather. He gave a rousing whoop at the first sight of her.

"The Seal!" he shouted. "The old Seal!"

"Seal-ho!" said Buck, grinning. "Said I'd pick her up, didn't I? Gave the old skipper the tip, and we cruised around till we sighted her topsail!"

In ten minutes the Seal's crew—all but Griffiths, who was left to steer—climbed aboard the Valhalla. The handgrips, the questions, the whoops of surprise, filled the entire ship.

"Well, I'm busted!" said Atheling, for the fortieth time. "So you're a copper-bottomed millionaire, Dan! An' I thought you wasn't anything but a liar! Well, the laugh's on me!"

"There's one more laugh coming, skipper!" chuckled Kenneth. "What hit me was that you didn't believe in our little treasure-hunt—Buck's and mine. Got it right aboard here. Real, hard stuff! Pretty good voyage, eh? What d'you say if I come back with you on the Seal, and we'll lead the Valhalla to Lowestoft? I want to feel the heave of a trawler's deck under me!"

"Come on, lad!" cried Atheling. And over the side they went.

As soon as Griffiths had greeted him, Kenneth helped to crack on all sail, and away leaped the Seal, her head laid for Lowestoft. To Kenneth's huge delight, she held her own with the yacht—for it was just her day—and entered the harbour a quarter of a mile ahead of her. When the Valhalla came in the crew of the Seal had snuggled their vessel down, and were ready to bear a hand.

That evening Mr. Graham, Kenneth, Ward, and all the Seal's crew sat down to a sumptuous banquet in the Valhalla's cabin, and in the centre of the table stood a rusty iron chest, that held £5,000 in Dutch gold.

Kenneth announced that according to Dogger rules it was to be divided equally among the crew of the Seal, including Jack Ward.

"I was wrong," admitted Skipper Atheling. "I was wrong, Dan—Kenneth, I mean. I ought to ha' listened

to ye. But if ye came to me with such a yarn again I'd rope's-end ye, all the same!"

Donald Graham laughed. He put his hand on Atheling's shoulder.

"What do you think of it all, captain?" he asked.

"I'm thinking," said Atheling slowly, "that it's a pity Kenneth's got a job as a millionaire, for he's the best seaman o' his age that ever trod a deck on the Dogger. If ye'd seen the luck he brought us, trawlin'—"

"He'll bring you better luck yet. I want to have a talk with you, Skipper Atheling."

A wink passed between Kenneth and

Buck. They slipped away on to the pier and gazed thoughtfully out on the starlit sea—the sea that the holiday-maker and the landsman know.

As Kenneth gazed out over the sleeping waters towards the vastness beyond he sighed.

"Buck," he said, "it's a fine breed of men they grow out there on the big waters. I bet Ken Graham'll never have as good a time as Dogger Dan did!"

THE END.

(See below for particulars of our grand new serial commencing next week.)

COME INTO THE OFFICE, BOYS!

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

WELL, chums, having read the announcements in this issue concerning our

FREE GIFTS,

there is no doubt you will all be bubbling over with excitement and waiting anxiously to get possession of the

MARVELLOUS MAGIC SPECTACLES and the first sheet of

PICTURES THAT COME TO LIFE!

To look through the Magic Spectacles and see the pictures come to life, is a most fascinating experience.

These grand Scientific Gifts, which will put all previous free gifts entirely in the shade, will be **PRESENTED FREE** with next week's record-breaking issue of the **MAGNET**.

Further pictures will be given free in subsequent issues.

In order to give all my regular readers the chance of being able to

STEP IN FIRST

and secure these **FREE GIFTS** I have arranged to publish next week's issue of the **MAGNET** one day earlier than usual—Friday, February 7th. If you are wise, you will get your newsagent to deliver, or reserve, you a copy. Failing this, be sure and get your copy early Friday morning, for you will find boys and girls alike flocking round the newsagents' like bees round a jam-pot!

Though I have been very busy lately preparing these grand Free Gifts, my time,

of course, has not been occupied solely with the **FREE GIFTS**. I have also been working hard on a

BUMPER PROGRAMME OF STORIES,

which I am confident will surpass any yet published in the good old **MAGNET**.

The piece-de-resistance is:

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keeping it. But Bunter hasn't told us that you came here from Topham."

"How did you know, then?" muttered Wilmot. "Has Crawley—"

"Crawley! Who's Crawley?"

"Nobody here of that name that I know of," said Bob.

"A Topham chap—a chap who doesn't like me!" muttered Wilmot. "He came over with our team that day at St. Jude's. He knows I'm here! But—he hasn't—"

"Never heard of him!" said Harry.

"Then how—"

"Easy enough," answered Wharton. "I can't imagine why you've been keeping your last school a secret, but you must have been an ass to think you could get away with it."

"Only Bunter knew, through that rotten chance of seeing me play in the match at St. Jude's!" muttered Wilmot.

"But all St. Jude's saw you," answered Harry. "Do you think they'd forget a man who scored four goals against them in a Soccer match?"

Wilmot started.

"Do you know anybody at St. Jude's?" he stammered.

"Do we? We have regular fixtures with St. Jude's—you'd know that if you took any interest at all in our matches."

"Didn't you know?" grunted Johnny Bull.

Wilmot shook his head.

"Why, you ass," said Harry, "St. Jude's are coming over here to play football in a week or two. Any man from there would have recognised you at once if he'd seen you here."

"Oh!" muttered Wilmot.

"It was a St. Jude's man told us who you were," went on the captain of the Remove. "Didn't you see the chap we were talking to when you ran into us this afternoon?"

"I saw somebody with a bike—I never noticed him—"

"He noticed you!" grinned Bob Cherry. "He remembered the man who had piled up goals on the St. Jude's ground, you see!"

"I—I see!"

"That's how we knew!" said Harry. "If you don't want us to mention it we won't! But it's not a thing a fellow can keep dark. Is that why you've let Bunter stick on to you—because he knew?"

"Why else?"

"Well, you're rather a fathead, old chap! Oh!" went on Wharton, light breaking in on his mind. "Is that why you've been such a sulky, unsociable tick—to keep fellows from asking you—"

"So that's it!" said Nugent. "But why—"

Johnny Bull gave a grunt.

"What were you turfed out of Topham for, Wilmot?" he asked very quietly.

Wilmot did not speak.

His face reddened, and paled again. Now that his secret was known its reason was easy enough for anyone to guess. He had kept Topham dark because he dared not let it be known. And he could have had only one reason. There had been a vague suspicion of it in Harry Wharton's mind. It was now a certainty. Wilmot was silent; but the Famous Five knew, as well as if he had told them, that he had been expelled from Topham School.

THE TENTH CHAPTER.

What Happened At St. Jude's!

HARRY WHARTON & CO. stood looking in silence at the crushed, shame-faced fellow, almost hunched in his chair. Sosses and poached eggs were getting THE MAGNET LIBRARY—No. 1,460.

cold on the table, but no one noticed them.

The chums of the Remove had intended that spread to be a sort of feast of reconciliation; they had resolved to get Wilmot out of his "sulks," to argue him into acting more reasonably and sensibly, and to rope him into the Form footer.

Now they understood.

That sulky, disdainful temper had been a screen to hide a wretched secret. Partly from the weight of a miserable remembrance on his mind, partly from a fear of questions, the new fellow in the Remove had set himself apart—resolved never to enter upon a friendly or confidential footing with any fellow in his Form.

Only Bunter knew—and by tolerating the fat Owl's fatuous friendship he had kept Bunter silent.

But the whole thing had been in vain! Even while he was keeping all the Remove at armslength, wrapping himself up in solitary disdain and sulky silence, the secret he was keeping might have come out at any moment—was practically certain to come out sooner or later—as, indeed, it had done now.

That chance meeting with Lunn had done it. But any such chance might have happened at any time. It had been almost certain to happen when the St. Jude's team came over to play Greyfriars. There would be a crowd of them—and any one of them would have recognised Wilmot if he had seen him.

He had kept Bunter quiet—he had prevailed on Crawley of Topham not to pay him another visit. And all the while his secret trembled on the edge of the revelation that was inevitable.

He knew it now.

"Well," said Harry Wharton, after a long and painful silence, "I'm sorry, Wilmot; but you can see for yourself that it was bound to come out."

Wilmot nodded.

"I know that—now!" he said in a low, almost inaudible voice.

"You've gone the wrong way to work," said Harry uncomfortably. "Topham's miles from here, in another county. Nobody here knows the place—hardly heard of it! If you'd said out plain that you came from Topham nobody would have fancied—"

"I dared not!" breathed Wilmot.

"I see that—but you were wrong, all the same. Keeping it dark was the way to make fellows curious about it—only, of course, nobody ever thought of asking you anything as you were so dashed sulky. But now—"

"Oh, tell all the Form—tell all the school!" said Wilmot wearily. "Now it's out I shall have to clear!"

"I don't see why!"

"I do!" said Johnny Bull grimly. "We don't want a man here who's been sacked from another school. Fellows aren't sacked for nothing."

Wharton paused.

"Well, we don't know the circumstances," he said. "I've heard of a man being sacked from school for a fool trick of locking his beak in a study."

"If it was a harmless fool trick Wilmot wouldn't have carried on as he's done."

"My esteemed Johnny—" murmured the Nabob of Bhanipur.

"Give a chap a chance!" said the captain of the Remove. "I suppose it means that you were sacked, Wilmot?"

"You know it now."

"Some fool trick like—"

"No!"

"It can't be so jolly bad, or Dr. Locke would never have let you in here," said Wharton uneasily.

"Oh, that's an easy one!" grunted Johnny Bull. "Hacker wangled that!"

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"I suppose he did—but Hacker couldn't have wangled it unless the Head believed that the chap ought to have a chance!" said Harry. "The Head wouldn't let a bad character into the school. Hacker believes in the chap, anyhow—he's a fussy old ass, but his opinion's worth something about his own nephew. He must know him pretty well."

"My uncle stood by me," muttered Wilmot. "He got me in here! I wish he hadn't—I never wanted—"

"Well, you're here now!" said Harry. "Will you tell us what it was you did at Topham, Wilmot? It's only fair to us."

"Oh, quite!" said Wilmot bitterly. "I did—nothing!"

"Sacked for nothing?" asked Johnny Bull sarcastically.

"Yes!"

"Oh crikey!"

"I don't expect you to believe me. But that's how it was," muttered Wilmot. "I was believed to have done a thing I'd rather cut off my hand than do—and I'm not blaming my headmaster, either—he couldn't act otherwise than as he did—"

"Hacker doesn't believe you did it?" asked Wharton quietly.

"No! He wouldn't have bunged me in here if he had."

"Well, Hacker's fussy, but he's a keen old bird—not what I should call a trustful man!" said Harry. "Hacker may be right."

"But what the dickens was it happened at Topham?" asked Nugent.

"Not at Topham—it was that day at St. Jude's!" muttered Wilmot wearily.

"After the match—"

Bob Cherry whistled.

"Lunn said there was a row among the Topham men after that match!" he exclaimed. "The St. Jude's men don't seem to know what it was about."

"It was kept dark there—but it had to come out at Topham," muttered Wilmot wretchedly. "I—I cleared off by myself—the team went home without me—I got back on my own, and then—then—" He broke off, with a shiver.

"But what—"

"I can't tell you! It's too rotten! You'd believe— But why shouldn't I? I never did it!" Wilmot lifted his head, the old, proud, disdainful look coming back to his colourless face. "I'll tell you, and you can dashed well think what you like! A chap's notecase was pinched out of his pocket in the dressing-room—"

"Oh!"

"When the fellow was changing, he missed it. There was a lot of money in it. The money was never found again—"

"But why should they think—"

"Because," said Wilmot, with a ghastly face—"because the notecase dropped out of my pocket before them all when I was putting on my jacket."

"Oh!"

"They'd been cheering me—clapping me on the back—but you should have seen their looks then!" groaned Wilmot. "It was our skipper—man named Raleigh—chap I'd always liked—but his face—when he picked up that wallet—"

He broke off with a shudder.

The chums of the Remove stood silent.

Wilmot's voice went on, almost in a whisper:

"He asked me for the money—the wallet was empty! I—I lost my temper, and hit him. I was a fool, of course. Then I went off by myself. I was a fool to do it—but—but—in the

state of mind I was in—but I suppose you don't understand—"

"I think I do!" said Harry softly.

"Well, I cleared—I got back to Topham on the railway—feeling like a fellow in a bad dream! But—but that finished it! You—you see, they supposed I'd cleared off like that to get rid of the money. If I'd let them search me, in the dressing-room at St. Jude's, it would have been all right—it couldn't have been found on me, as it wasn't there! But—but clearing off, like that—it looked—"

He broke off.

"I mightn't have played the fool like that, but Crawley—that cad Crawley was there—he said he wouldn't travel home with a thief. That did it! I went out and left them—"

Wilmot dragged himself from the chair.

"Now you know!" he said. "Tell all Greyfriars—it can't matter much—I shall have to get out now!"

He went unsteadily to the door and left the study. The chums of the Remove were left in a grim, uncomfortable silence. On the table the sosses and poached eggs were quite cold!

THE ELEVENTH CHAPTER.

Shirty!

LOOKING for you!" The Bounder spoke quite amicably.

There was a glint in his eyes and a compression of his lips which revealed that he was not feeling so amicable as he chose to appear. But his manner was quite friendly and civil, as he stopped Harry Wharton on the stairs.

Wharton stopped—reluctantly.

He could guess what was coming—Smithy's claims to play in the match at Rookwood. He did not want to hear any more about that. But he had another reason for wanting to get away. He was going down to look for Wilmot.

"Well, what?" he asked. "Cut it short, Smithy—I'm in a hurry."

"You may have noticed that I was in the football practice this afternoon, before you went out on your bike?"

The Bounder wanted to be amicable; but he could not help being sarcastic.

"Of course I did, ass!"

"If you condescended to give me the once-over, you may have noticed that I've picked up some form again?"

"Yes, I noticed that."

"Well, what about me for Rookwood on Saturday?"

"Nothing!" answered Wharton tersely.

The Bounder set his lips. He was trying to be friendly, though he was not feeling so. But he kept his temper.

"Look here, Wharton, I'm not denying that you were right in chucking me for a time. I conked out at football—I know that. I've picked up since. I—"

"Only a week ago you cut games practice, to go blagging with Pon & Co., of Highcliffe. I told you that day that if you cut footer, footer would have to cut you. I haven't changed my mind since."

"Then you're against me—on any terms!" All pretence of civility was thrown aside now, and the Bounder knitted his brows over gleaming eyes. "You're determined to play your pal

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