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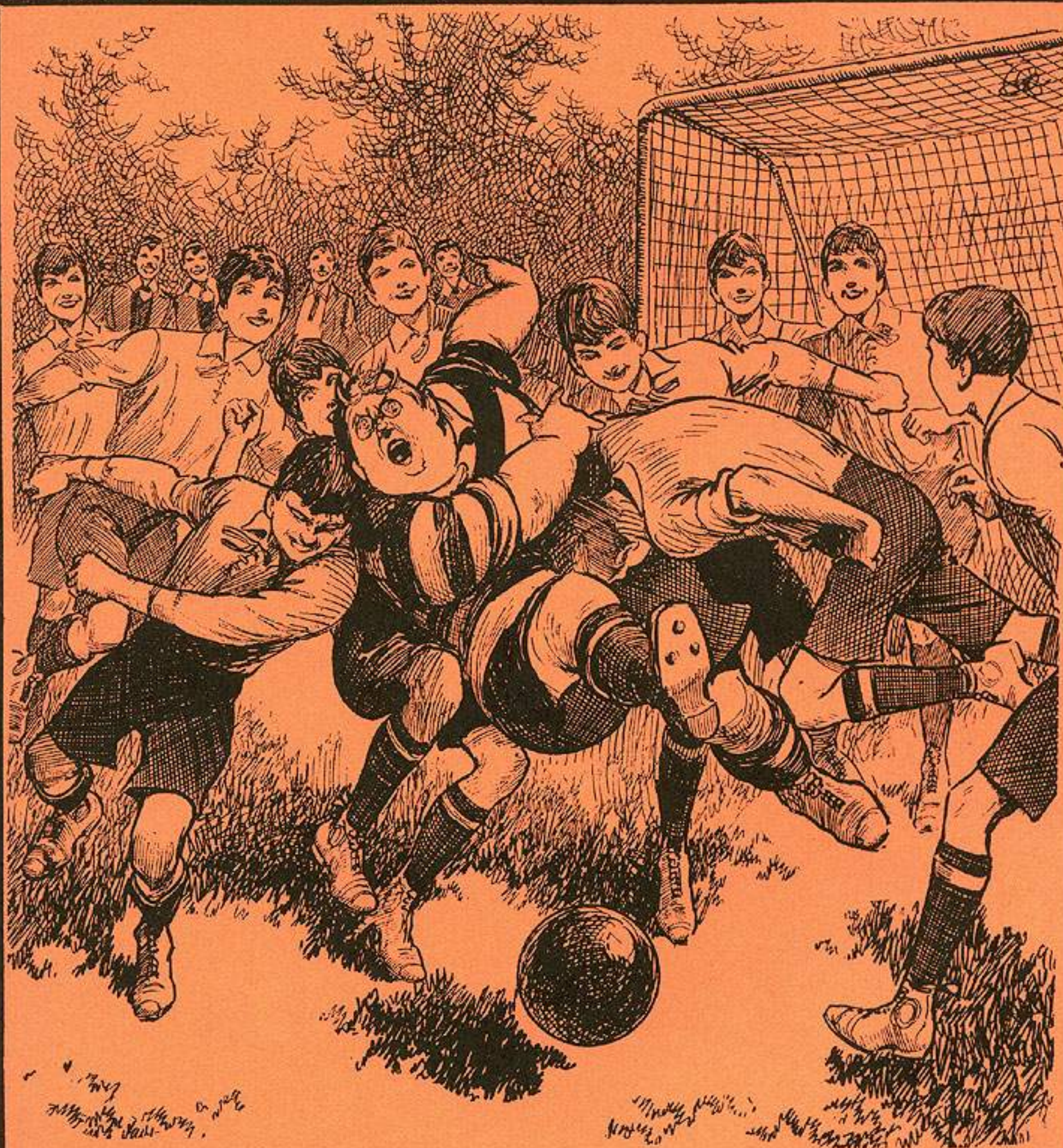
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No. 136 |

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Billy Bunter's Kick-off!

A Splendid, Long, Complete
School Tale of
HARRY WHARTON & CO.
at Greyfriars.

— BY —

FRANK RICHARDS.

THE FIRST CHAPTER.
Bunter Causes Surprise.

"My hat!"
"What is it?"
"Bunter!"
"Not Bunter!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Billy Bunter, of the Remove Form at Greyfriars, blinked through his big spectacles, in deep indignation.

"I say, you fellows——" he began.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Oh, really——"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

It was certainly the reverse of polite to interrupt Billy Bunter in that way, with a roar of laughter, but the Greyfriars fellows could not have helped it to save their lives.

Billy Bunter was just coming downstairs, and he stopped on the lowest step as the crowd of juniors in the hall greeted him.

Bunter, the fattest junior at Greyfriars, had been fired by ambition in many ways during his career there. He had sought fame as a ventriloquist, as a hypnotist, as a gymnast. His latest ambition was to distinguish himself on the football field, and he had bothered Harry Wharton in season and out of season to give him a trial for the Form eleven.

Harry Wharton had been deaf to his appeals. Bob Cherry, during his short tenure as football captain in the Remove, had been deafer.

There seemed to be no chance for Bunter.

Yet here was the fat junior in football garb—in shorts and jersey and football boots—ready evidently for the great game.

Bunter's garb was striking.

Its pattern consisted of alternate broad stripes, so that he looked like a walking advertisement of a well-known grate polish.

Added to that, the attire, though ample enough, was more than well filled by the fat junior, so that he looked as if he were threatening to burst through at every point.

The Owl of the Remove in those striking football clothes was, as Ogilvy remarked, a new sensation.

It was no wonder that the juniors burst into a roar of laughter as they saw him.

Bunter could not see the joke.

He was perfectly convinced that he was destined to become a second Bloomer, if he had the slightest chance, and that chance he was determined to get.

He stood on the lowest step of the stairs, blinking at the grinning juniors.

"I say, you fellows——"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Look here——"

"We're looking," howled Frank Nugent. "Ha, ha, ha! We can't help it."

"I tell you——"

"What's on?" demanded Bob Cherry. "Is it a fancy-dress ball?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Certainly not! I'm going to play football."

"What?"

"Which?"

"How?"

"I'm going to play footer," said Billy Bunter, with a considerable amount of dignity. "I may not be appreciated in my own Form——"

"You're not, Billy," grinned Harry Wharton.

"But I have friends elsewhere," said Bunter. "The Upper Fourth may be glad of a recruit who is too good for the Remove."

"What?"

"Eh?"

The Removites stared at Bunter blankly.

They were too amazed to laugh.

The idea of Bunter playing footer for the Remove was absurd; but his playing for the Upper Fourth, the next Form above the Remove at Greyfriars, was inconceivable.

They could only stare.

"You see," went on Bunter victoriously, "some fellows who know something about football may have observed my form."

"His fragile form," murmured Nugent.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I mean my form at footer, of course. Some fellows may think more highly of my play than you fellows think."

"H'm!"

"Rats!"

"Some fellows," went on Bunter, with emphasis, "may know more about footer and about a player's form than Wharton does."

"Quite possible," said Harry Wharton cheerfully, "but——"

"And they may be glad to play me."

"Play you?"

"Certainly!"

"At—at footer?"

"Of course."

"Not—not at marbles?" stammered Wharton. "Not at hop-scotch? Not at buttons—eh? You're sure you're not making a mistake about the game?"

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

"Oh, really, Wharton——"

"What kind of footer?" asked Bob Cherry, with interest

"Not soccer or Rugby, I suppose?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I'm playing for the Upper Fourth. Temple has asked me to play, and I have consented," said Bunter, with dignity.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You ass!" roared Bulstrode. "Temple's pulling your leg."

"Oh, really, Bulstrode——"

"They're making a guy of you."

"This jealousy is what I might have expected, I suppose?" said Bunter. "I am sorry to see it. It makes me think the less of you, Bulstrode."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"My only hat!" said Bulstrode.

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NEXT WEEK: "ONLY ALONZO."

"I am sorry to have to join a team outside the Remove," went on Bunter. "I have been driven to this. Wharton can bear witness to the fact that I have offered more than once to play for the Remove."

"You have," grinned Wharton.

"And you have declined my services?"

"What-ho!"

"Cherry will say the same."

"Exactly the same," grinned Bob Cherry.

"I don't think I can be blamed, therefore, for taking my services where they are regarded with value," said Bunter, with dignity. "I have offered them to my own Form, and they have refused them with indignity. I have therefore joined the Upper Fourth team. When I am playing against the Remove, and scoring goals for the Fourth Form, I have no doubt you will all be sorry. Then it will be too late."

"Too late," sobbed Bob Cherry, falling upon Nugent's shoulder, and weeping—"too late! Boo-hoo!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"The too-latefulness will be terrific," murmured Hurree Jamset Ram Singh, the Nabob of Bhanipur. "The weepfulness is great."

"What is it the poet says on the subject?" said Tom Brown pathetically. "Of all sad words of tongue and pen, the saddest are these—'It might have been.' Oh, boo-hoo!"

"You asses!" grunted Bunter. "You can cackle now, but you'll be jolly sorry when I'm kicking goals for the Upper Fourth. You'll be sorry to see me in the Fourth Form eleven."

"So will the Fourth, if they want to win," said Hazeldene.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Well, I'm not going to waste time talking to a lot of jealous rotters," said Billy Bunter. "I've been excluded from the Form team by personal jealousy and detraction. I'm joining the Fourth Form eleven. That's all."

And Billy Bunter walked towards the door.

The juniors made room for him to pass.

"You're going to play now, Bunter?" asked Tom Brown.

"Certainly!"

"My hat, this will be worth watching!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You're welcome to come and see what you've lost," said Bunter.

"We'll come."

"Yes, rather!"

"The ratherfulness is terrific."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Billy Bunter stalked away towards the junior football-ground with great dignity. The juniors of the Remove followed him in a crowd. That Bunter was the victim of a jape on the part of Temple, of the Upper Fourth, they felt pretty certain, and it looked as if there would be fun.

THE SECOND CHAPTER.

Bunter Plays Football.

TEMPLE, the captain of the Upper Fourth, was chatting with Dabney and Fry and Scott on the junior football-ground. The Fourth-Formers were in football garb.

The days were still long and light, and most of the Greyfriars fellows were now going in for football-practice after school. Temple looked towards the House, and burst into a sudden chuckle.

"Here he comes."

The other fellows followed his glance.

Billy Bunter was approaching.

The Fourth-Formers grinned. They knew that the Owl of the Remove was too short-sighted to see them from that distance. When he got nearer they would be serious.

"My hat!" said Temple. "Look at his clothes!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Note the giddy stripes!"

"Oh, rather!" said Dabney. "A giddy zebra, and no mistake."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Most of the Remove seem to be coming, too," said Fry. "They've caught on to it."

"Well, Bunter could hardly go about in those clothes without attracting some attention," grinned Temple. "I wonder where he picked them up? The suit for seven-and-six at Ikey Mo's, I suppose."

"Looks like it."

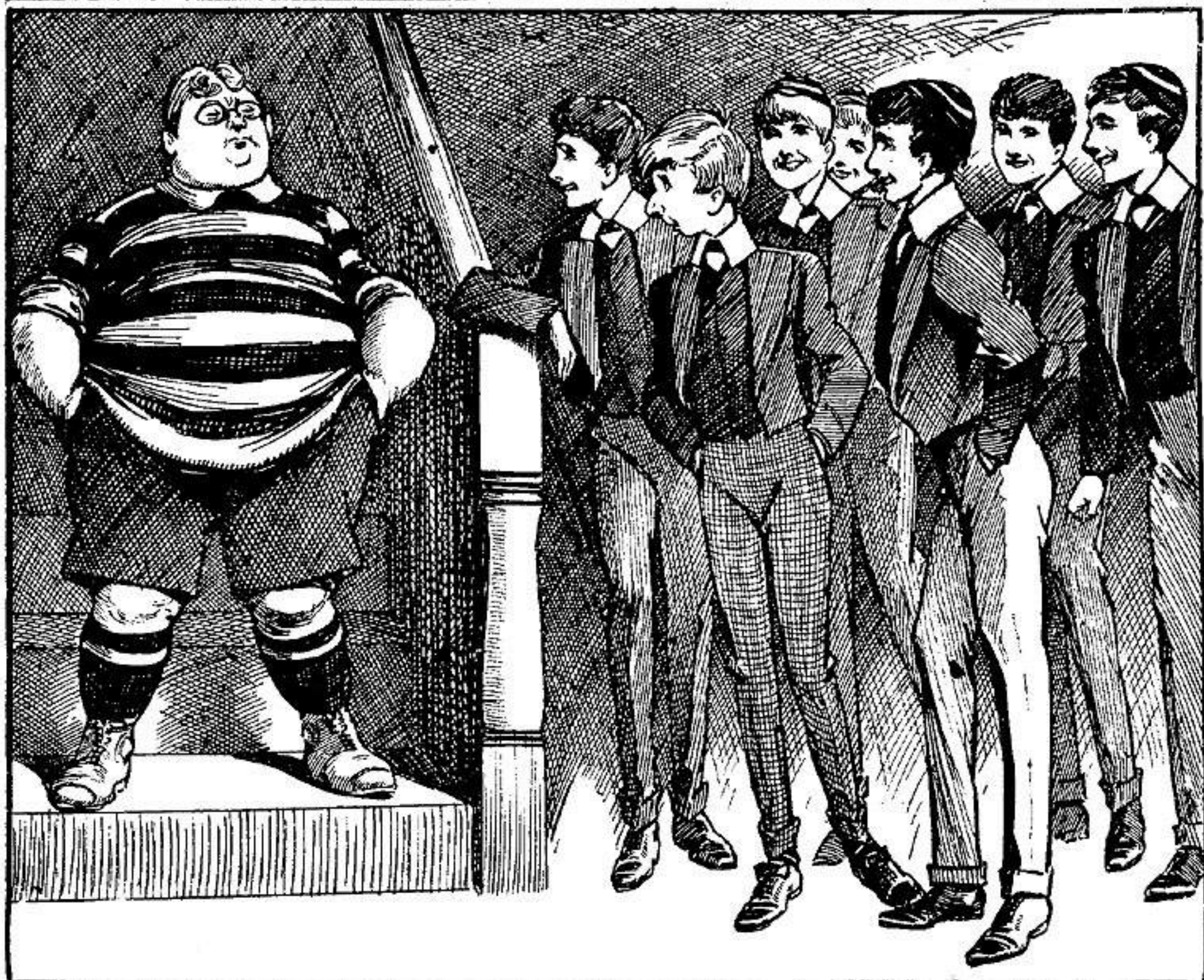
"Bunter would make a sensation on any football-field in that rig," grinned Scott.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Order!" said Temple. "Don't let him see you grin. Follow my lead."

"Oh, rather!"

A Splendid Tale of Harry Wharton & Co.
By FRANK RICHARDS.



"What's on?" asked Bob Cherry, as he saw Billy Bunter standing on the bottom stair dressed in football garb. "Is it a fancy-dress ball?" "Certainly not!" said Bunter, with a considerable amount of dignity. "I'm going to play footer!" (See Page 2.)

Billy Bunter rolled up.

"I hope I haven't kept you fellows waiting?" he said, in a sort of superior tone of voice, as if he really didn't think it mattered if he had.

Bunter was always like that.

He could eat humble pie to any extent when it suited his purpose; but once he was given an inch, he would take an ell.

It was only necessary to be civil to him and make him believe that he was valued, for him to become impertinent at once.

Temple & Co. were elaborately rotting the fat junior, with the result, so far, that Bunter was developing a decidedly swelled head, and was inclined to treat Temple himself with superior airs.

"Oh, that's all right!" said Temple cheerfully, bestowing a wink, which Bunter did not see, upon his comrades. "We don't mind waiting."

"Not at all."

"Not for a chap like you, Bunter."

"Oh, rather!" said Dabney. "It would be different, of course, if you were a common sort of fellow."

"But any team would be glad enough to wait for a player like Steve Bloomer or Billy Bunter," said Fry solemnly.

"Exactly."

"Oh, all right!" said Bunter carelessly. "I'm ready. These fellows have come to see me play."

"They're welcome. It will be worth seeing."

"So I've told them."

The Removites chuckled.

"Look here, what's the little game?" demanded Harry Wharton. "I suppose you're rotting Bunter? You know he can't play footer."

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"Oh, really, Wharton—"

"That's our business," said Temple loftily. "If we like to play Bunter, I suppose you've got nothing to say against it?"

"Ha, ha! No."

"This is how the matter stands," went on Temple, with great solemnity. "You fellows had a ripping player in your Form, and you neglected him."

"That's it," said Bunter.

"We saw what wonderful possibilities there were in Bunter, and we picked him up," went on Temple. "That shows my judgment as a footer captain. I don't want to brag, but there it is."

"Oh, rather!"

"Now you'll see how he can play, and you'll want him back," said Temple. "Well, you're not going to have him. We're sticking to Bunter."

"Oh, rather!"

"Bunter's ours."

"What-ho!"

Harry Wharton laughed.

"You see how it is, Wharton," said Bunter, blinking at the captain of the Lower Fourth. "This is what comes of jealousy of a good player. You must admit that I've done my best to play for the Remove, and that I've got nothing to reproach myself with in going over to the Upper Fourth."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"They laugh best who laugh last," said Temple. "You wait till you've seen Bunter play."

"Yes, you just wait," said Bunter, with a sniff. "You'll laugh on the other side of your mouth, then. Temple's going to play me against you."

A Splendid Tale of Harry Wharton & Co.
By FRANK RICHARDS

"If Bunter's satisfied with the treatment we give him, he'll stick to us," said Temple.

"Oh, rather!"

"I'm sincerely sorry for the Remove," said Bunter, "but you see how it is. I must go where I'm valued and appreciated."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Blessed if I can see anything to cackle at. I'm ready, Temple, when you are."

"Then come on," said Temple.

He linked his arm affectionately in Bunter's, and led him away. There were juniors and seniors gathered round the field from all sides to see the fun. Everybody but Bunter could see that an elaborate process of rotting was going on, and all were keen to see how long it would be before Bunter was undeceived.

Temple walked the fat junior upon the field.

There were a dozen Fourth-Formers ready for the game. Bunter blinked round at them inquiringly.

"Not playing full teams?" he asked.

"Oh, no; this is just a scratch game!" said Temple. "We're playing five against seven. Five will be enough, as you will be on the smaller side."

"I see."

"Five with you will be equal to any seven, I suppose?"

"I suppose so," assented Bunter.

The teams formed up.

Temple, Dabney, Fry, Scott, and Billy Bunter formed one side. The other was composed of seven Upper Fourth fellows.

They all put on exaggerated looks of alarm as they came near Bunter. It was easy for the fat junior to see that he was regarded as a deadly dangerous antagonist.

He swelled more and more with importance, until there was really danger that his striped jersey would burst.

"You kick off, of course?" said Temple.

"Certainly!"

"Now look out, you fellows; Bunter's playing against you!"

"Go it, Bunter!"

"Kick off, stripes!"

"Bravo, zebra!"

Bunter blinked round at the disrespectful spectators, and then blinked at the footer. He kicked off.

There was immediately a wild scramble for the ball.

The Fourth-Formers and Billy Bunter were mixed up in a trampling mob.

"Now look out for fun," murmured Bob Cherry.

"The funfulness will be terrific."

The Removites were right.

The fun began, and it was fast and furious.

The Fourth-Formers struggled for that ball as if they had been famished dogs tussling for a bone.

The zebra stripes were seen tossing to and fro amid the crowd like a boat on a stormy sea, and soon they had disappeared, like a wrecked boat beneath the billows.

Where was Bunter?

A feeble voice was heard amid the press.

"Ow! Oh, really, you fellows! Yow! Yaroo! Gerroff!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Help!"

The press separated, and Bunter was revealed.

He was stretched upon the ground, gasping for breath. Temple and Dabney, choking with suppressed laughter, rushed to help him up.

"Hurt?" asked Temple anxiously.

"Groo!"

"Winded?" asked Dabney.

"Gerrooh!"

"Hold on, you chaps! Our best player's hurt."

Bunter gasped for breath.

"It's—it's all right," he panted. "Somebody fell on me. Groo!"

"Too bad!"

"Rotten!"

"Never mind. Buck up, Bunter!"

"Gimme my glasses."

"They're on your nose."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"So they are," said Bunter, adjusting his spectacles. "I—I wish you fellows wouldn't be quite so rough. It spoils the—the finesse of my play."

"You hear that, you chaps?" said Temple severely. "I suppose you don't want to spoil the finesse of Bunter's play?"

"Certainly not!"

"Oh, rather—I mean, rather not!"

"Ready, Bunter?"

"Ye-e-s."

The game proceeded.

Billy Bunter was allowed to take the ball and dribble it towards goal. His dribbling was about as clumsy as THE MAGNET LIBRARY.—No. 136.

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performance as could be imagined; but he was getting the ball towards goal, and he was quite satisfied with himself.

The crowd burst into ironical cheers.

"Bravo, Bunter!"

"Go it, stripes!"

"On the ball, zebra!"

"Hurray!"

Bunter rushed the ball goalward.

Never had a Remove crowd cheered him before.

This was glory!

Now at last he was proving his true value to his own Form, and showing Harry Wharton what an ass he had been to neglect so splendid a player.

Bunter was thinking these thoughts more than he was thinking of the ball, and perhaps that was the cause of the disaster that followed. Perhaps it was because he couldn't dribble. Anyway, his feet and the ball became somehow entangled, and he rolled over on the ground with a breathless gasp.

There was a roar from the crowd.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Do that again!"

"Go it, Bunter!"

"Buck up, stripes!"

"Encore!"

Bunter sat up.

"My-y-y hat!" he gasped.

Temple dragged him up.

"You're all right, Bunter. Go ahead!"

"T-t-thanks!"

Bunter was on the ball again. He kicked it towards goal, and at the same moment his opponents rushed in. His backers were quickly on the spot, and the two sides met—perhaps on purpose—with Bunter in the midst of the charge.

The fat junior gave a wild gasp as he was jammed among them.

The stripes disappeared again.

Footballers stumbled over him on all sides, and in a few seconds nearly everybody was on the ground in a struggling heap.

Where was Bunter?

"My hat!" gasped Bob Cherry. "He's underneath that lot!"

"Phew!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"He'll be squashed!"

"The squashfulness will be terrific."

The Removites, feeling that the Fourth-Form joke had gone a little too far, rushed upon the field, and dragged and pommelled the fallen footballers right and left.

"Here, chuck that!" roared Temple, as he went bumping upon the ground.

"We've chucked you!" grinned Bob Cherry.

"Hands off!"

"Rats!"

"Look here—"

"More rats!"

The Fourth-Formers went whirling.

Bunter was revealed.

He lay gasping like a newly-landed fish. His jersey was split up the back, his hair was a tousled mop, his spectacles were gone.

Wharton dragged him into a sitting posture, and he blinked round.

"Ow! Ow! Oh! Yah! What has happened?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Ow! I'm hurt!"

"Ha, ha!"

"I'm winded!"

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"What did you expect, you young duffer?" said Wharton. "Get up, and get off the field, and don't play the giddy goat."

"Oh, really, Wharton—"

Temple sat up on the ground and yelled with laughter.

Bunter blinked at him.

"Where are my glasses? Ow!"

Bob Cherry picked them up and handed them to him. Fortunately, they were not damaged, save for a twist of the frame that could be remedied. Bunter adjusted them as well as he could upon his fat little nose.

"I say, you fellows—"

"Ha, ha, ha!" gasped the Upper Fourth.

"Upon the whole, your methods of football are too crude, and too rough, and altogether no class!" said Bunter. "I decline to play for the Upper Fourth!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" shrieked the Fourth-Formers.

And Billy Bunter, gasping for breath, staggered off the football-ground, leaving Temple, Dabney & Co. still shrieking.

THE THIRD CHAPTER

A Chance for Bunter.

"I'M so sorry, Bunter!"

It was Alonzo Todd, the Duffer of Greyfriars, who made the remark.

Billy Bunter was coming in after his unfortunate experience on the Upper Fourth football-ground.

The fat junior was looking as if he found life not worth living.

He was tired and dusty and perspiring, and he rolled along with incessant grunts, to an accompaniment of chuckles from the juniors who were following him in.

It had dawned on the Owl of the Remove that the Fourth-Formers had been elaborately "rotting" him, and that he had had no chance of really playing footer in Temple's team.

That, added to the usage he had received, made Bunter in the reverse of a good temper, and he was by no means inclined to receive Todd's long-winded sympathy in a genial spirit.

"I'm so sorry, Bunter!" went on Alonzo. "My Uncle Benjamin says that we should always feel sorry for persons in distress, and you look very distressed. Of course, you cannot play football, I suppose?"

"Oh, go and eat coke!" growled Bunter.

"My dear Bunter—"

"Oh, ring off!"

"But I feel the keenest sympathy," said Todd. "My Uncle Benjamin says that sympathy is always welcome to persons in affliction, and you look very afflicted."

"You chump—"

"I'm so sorry you can't play footer, and that you are hurt—"

"Let me pass, you ass!" howled Bunter, while the juniors roared with laughter.

"But you know, Bunter—"

Billy Bunter put out a fat hand and pushed Todd violently aside. Taken by surprise, Alonzo sat down on the linoleum with a bump that made him gasp.

"Oh-oh!"

Bunter rolled on, and went upstairs. His beautifully-striped football clothes were raising merriment in all quarters, and even Bunter realised that he was looking an ass. He was anxious to get his football things off. He proceeded straight to the Remove dormitory, and there the juniors left him in peace—though it was a long time before they ceased to chuckle over his adventures on the football field.

But Alonzo Todd, when he once started to be sympathetic, never left anybody in peace. He peeped in at the dormitory door a few minutes later.

Bunter, who had his spectacles off, and was rubbing down his streaming face, blinked round at the opening door. He could not see who it was.

"Who's that?" he growled.

"It is I, Bunter—"

"Oh, you!" growled Bunter. "What the dickens do you want?"

"I'm so sorry—"

"You've said that before—"

"That you are hurt—"

"Oh, get out!"

"My Uncle Benjamin says—"

"Blow your Uncle Benjamin!"

"My dear Bunter, that is not a respectful way to speak of a kind and estimable gentleman," said Alonzo reprovingly. "My Uncle Benjamin says that we should always speak of our elders with respect."

"Hang Benjamin!" roared Bunter.

"My dear fellow—"

"Get out!"

"But I feel so sorry—"

Bunter groped blindly for the soap to hurl at Todd.

The Duffer of Greyfriars came into the dormitory, and closed the door behind him. The cake of soap crashed on

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the door, and fell upon the floor. Bunter's aim was not good. Todd started, and blinked at the soap.

"Dear me! What did you do that for, Bunter?"

"Will you buzz off?"

"Oh, certainly, if you wish. But I had something to say to you—something that I think will interest you very much," said Todd, taking a folded paper from his pocket. "Have you seen this paper?"

"No; and don't want to!"

"It's the 'Courtfield News'—"

"Take it away!"

"But there's an advertisement in it—"

"Hang the advertisements."

"But—"

Bunter buried his fat face in a towel and towelled away. Todd regarded him with surprise, and went on speaking. Bunter caught a few words indistinctly, and among them the words "Rovers" and "football."

They arrested his attention, and he lowered the towel.

"What are you jabbering about?" he asked, in his polite way.

Todd held up the paper.

"This advertisement."

"What has it to do with me?"

"I thought you might like to play football."

"What?"

"You see, you won't have any chance in the Remove, and the Upper Fourth, of course, were only making fun of you—"

"Oh, cheese it!"

"But if you can play—"

"Of course I can play!" said Bunter indignantly. "I'm kept back by sheer jealousy on the footer committee."

"It is the same with me, though I do not attribute it to jealousy," said Todd. "I have a feeling that, given an opportunity, I should shine forth as a very great footballer. I am kept in the background, I believe, through a misunderstanding on Wharton's part—he does not know what he is losing."

Bunter granted.

"I should not attribute such a sordid motive as jealousy to Wharton," went on Todd. "My Uncle Benjamin always says that one should never attribute bad motives to anyone when it is possible to attribute good ones. You see—"

"Oh, cut the cackle!"

"But certainly Wharton fails to understand. I have no chance of playing for Greyfriars. You have no chance either. It has occurred to me that, being misunderstood and unappreciated at home, we might look further afield."

"I don't catch on," said Bunter, puzzled.

"Well, look at this advertisement. As soon as I saw it I thought immediately what a chance it would be."

"Read it out."

Todd read out the advertisement in the local Courtfield paper.

"Wanted, players for the Courtfield Rovers team. Average age, fifteen.—Apply, W. Bunter, 10, Oak Lane, Courtfield."

"By Jove!" said Bunter.

"It struck me that this might be a relation of yours, as the name is the same," said Todd, looking at him.

Bunter shook his head.

"I haven't any relations in this county at all," he said. "My people live a good distance from Greyfriars, and Courtfield is only a couple of miles."

"H'm! It's not an uncommon name, of course."

"We're a big family," said Bunter. "The original Bunter came over with the Conqueror. That was Sir Jocelyn de Bunter. The family has spread very much. Many of them are titled people—in fact, most of them. I don't suppose this Courtfield Bunter is a relation, as he can't be very well off. All my connections are rich."

"How nice!" said Todd.

"Yes, I frequently get postal-orders from my rich relations and titled friends," said Bunter, becoming more genial. "Speaking of that, reminds me that I'm expecting a postal-order this evening. Could you manage a small loan of, say, five shillings till my postal-order comes—"

"I should be very pleased—"

"Hand it over, then—"

"Only I haven't any money," said Todd. "If I had any I would lend it to you with pleasure."

Bunter snorted.

"But about this advertisement," went on Alonzo. "They want players for the Courtfield Rovers. Now, Courtfield is only two miles away, and there is a short cut, too. We could get over there easily enough, and if we joined the team—"

Bunter rubbed his fat hands.

"Well, that's not a bad idea," he agreed. "It would serve these conceited bounders right if we gave Greyfriars the go-by and joined the Courtfield Rovers."

"Well, it would be a chance for us."

"I suppose they'd be glad to have us?" said Bunter. "We're public school fellows, and they're only village chaps. Besides, this chap, W. Bunter, may turn out to be a relation of mine, and I could use my influence."

"I think we ought to call on him and see."

"Good! We'll buzz over on bikes to-day."

"I have no bicycle," said Todd doubtfully. "It is not a very long walk."

Bunter grunted.

"If you think I'm going to tramp three or four miles you're jolly well mistaken! It's fag enough to ride."

"But have you a bicycle?"

"I can borrow one, I suppose?" snapped Bunter.

"But—"

Billy Bunter fastened his collar.

"We may as well get off now," he said. "I'll have Nugent's bike, and I'll lend you Wharton's."

"But have you a right to lend Wharton's bike?" asked Todd.

"He's in my study, isn't he?"

"Yes, but—"

"That's all right. Let's get off."

And Bunter and Alonzo Todd went downstairs together. And Bunter, fully convinced in his usual way that he would be welcomed with open arms by the Courtfield Rovers, was already swelling with importance, and he was strutting by the time he reached the lower passage.

THE FOURTH CHAPTER.

Borrowing a Bike.

HARRY WHARTON was standing in the doorway, chatting with Frank Nugent and Bob Cherry. The chums of the Remove had been at football practice, but that was over for the day. They were discussing the advisability of "buzzing over" to Cliff House, on the chance of finding Marjorie Hazeldene at home, and getting tea out somewhere along the shore—a very cheerful way of ending a half-holiday. The pros and cons were being discussed when Bunter and Todd came up. Todd nodded, and went on into the Close, but Bunter stopped to speak to the Removites.

Wharton smiled as he saw him.

"Feeling better for the footer, Bunter?" he asked.

"I'm all right," grunted the fat junior. "I was treated very shabbily. I'm not understood at Greyfriars."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I think I understand you pretty well," said Bob Cherry. "You're a fat, conceited young bounder. Isn't that about right?"

"Oh, really, Cherry—"

"Better stick to ventriloquism, and leave footer alone," grinned Nugent. "You can chuck your voice about, and it's about the only thing you can do. Better leave footer alone."

Bunter sniffed.

"If I didn't know that was jealousy, Nugent—"

"What?" roared Nugent.

"You know how I play, and—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Of course, you're all jealous. It's only to be expected. I'm being kept in the dark here, owing to personal envy."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"But I've had enough of it," said Bunter warmly. "How I stand you fellows is a mystery to me."

"And how we stand you, that's another problem that knocks Euclid hollow," said Bob Cherry.

"Oh, really! Look here, I'm done with Greyfriars! You can go on your knees and beg me to play in the Form eleven if you like, and I won't do it."

"I don't think we shall come to that."

"I won't play for the Upper Fourth, either."

"Poor old Temple!"

"Or for the First Eleven, even. If Wingate came to me and asked me to play centre-forward in the First Eleven match, I'd—I'd refuse."

"I can see Wingate doing it. I don't think."

"There are people elsewhere who can appreciate me," said Bunter. "In future I shall play all my football outside Greyfriars."

"My hat!"

"Other teams may be glad to welcome a good player."

"Yes; but how would that concern you?" asked Nugent innocently.

Bunter blinked at him.

"Oh, really, Nugent! I'm going to play for the Courtfield Rovers. Once out of this atmosphere of jealousy and personal detraction, you will see how I shall go ahead. I want to borrow your bike, Nugent, to go over to Courtfield now."

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WEEK

"ONLY ALONZO."

A relation of mine is captain of the footer team there, and he wants me to play."

"Gammon!"

"The gammonfulness is terrific," chimed in Hurree Jamset Ram Singh.

"Look here, will you lend me your bike, Nugent?"

"You'd squash it, old chap. Besides, I want it myself. We're going to ride over to Cliff House in a quarter of an hour from now."

"Oh, really—"

"Sorry, it can't be did."

"But I must have a bike," said Bunter, in an injured tone. "I suppose you fellows don't want me to fag myself out walking over to Courtfield?"

"Blessed if I care."

"But really—"

"Well, we'd better get into our things, if we're going," said Harry Wharton.

"Perhaps I might hire a bike," said Bunter. "I'm expecting a postal-order this evening. If you chaps could advance me ten bob off it—"

The chaps were already going upstairs, and Bunter's modest request was not even heard. He blinked after them for some moments, and then made his way to the bicycle-shed in a state of suppressed wrath and indignation.

Alonzo Todd was already there.

He had taken Wharton's and Nugent's bicycles off the stands, and had them at the door ready. He looked inquiringly at Bunter.

"You have asked them about the machines?" he said.

Bunter nodded.

"It's all right, then?"

"Of course it is," said Bunter irritably.

"It is very kind of them to lend us the machines," said Alonzo. "Perhaps I ought to go and thank Wharton."

"Oh, rats!"

"My Uncle Benjamin says that appropriate thanks should always be rendered for an obligation received," said Todd, in his solemn way.

"Blow your Uncle Benjamin!"

"My dear Bunter—"

"Buck up, and let's get the bikes out while they're changing their clothes," said Bunter. "We don't want to meet them."

"Why not?"

"Oh, come on, and don't jaw!"

They wheeled the bikes out, and soon had them in the road outside the school gates. Bunter was feverishly anxious to get off. He knew what would happen if the chums of the Remove caught sight of their machines being raided in that barefaced manner.

That the juniors wanted their machines to use themselves in a short time, did not matter at all to Bunter, so long as he succeeded in escaping with them now. He was not accustomed to thinking of later consequences.

"I suppose you can ride?" he said doubtfully, as Todd brought the machine awkwardly into the road.

"Well, as a matter of fact, I am not accustomed to riding a bicycle," said Todd, "but I have no doubt I can ride quite easily. It certainly looks very simple."

Bunter stared at him.

"Do you mean to say you don't cycle?" he demanded.

"Not as yet."

"You ass! You'll have to learn before you ride, then."

"Oh, that is all right!"

Bunter snorted.

"You fearful chump! You can't ride without learning," he yelled. "You'd better take that bike in, and walk by the short cut, while I ride."

Todd shook his head.

"Not at all, Bunter. Cycling is perfectly easy. I have seen children of seven and eight on bicycles, and I am nearly fifteen."

"But—"

"You will see that it is quite simple."

"Then let me mount first and get away," said Bunter. "I'm jolly well not going to have you pitching into me."

"Oh, I shall not fall over! You simply have to sit squarely on the seat and strike a balance—"

"You're more likely to strike the road," grunted Bunter.

"Oh, no; it is quite simple!"

Bunter sniffed, and, having put down Nugent's saddle as low as he could to suit his short legs, he mounted and pedalled away.

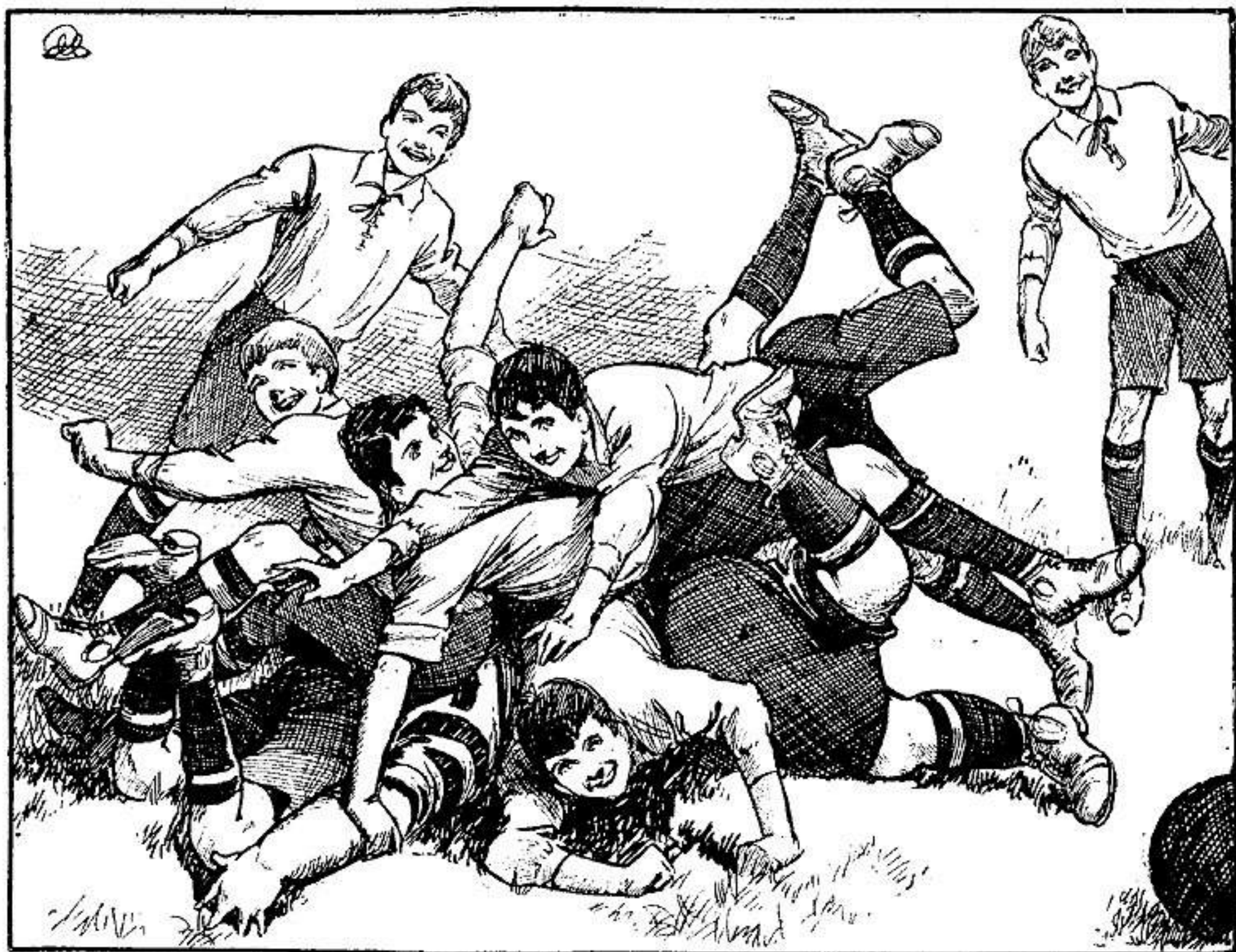
Todd wheeled Harry Wharton's handsome machine into the middle of the road, and prepared to mount.

He had seen Harry Wharton mount it often enough by lifting his right leg over the bar and sitting in the saddle quite easily.

Todd saw no reason why he shouldn't do the same.

He tried it.

A Splendid Tale of Harry Wharton & Co.
By FRANK RICHARDS.



"Stripes" had disappeared under a crowd of Fourth-Form footballers. A feeble voice was heard calling out to them: "Ow! Oh, really, you fellows! Yow! Yaroooh! Gerroff!" (See page 4.)

The next moment he was sitting in the road, and the cycle was clanging down beside him. Todd sat in bewilderment.

"How very odd!" he murmured.

He rose and picked up the machine, and rubbed his nose thoughtfully. Bunter shouted back to him:

"Are you coming, Todd?"

"Yes, I'm coming. I'll overtake you," shouted Todd.

"All right!"

Todd grasped the machine firmly.

"After all," he murmured—"after all, perhaps that is the way of mounting that requires practice. Wharton is doubtless an old cyclist. Perhaps I had better mount in the usual way, using the foot-rest."

Alonzo got behind the bike, and leaned over it, grasping the handle-bars. Then he put his left foot on the rest projecting from the hub of the rear wheel on the left side of the bicycle.

He remained in that attitude for some minutes, uncertain what to do next.

But it was evident that he had to get speed on the bicycle, and then leap forward into the saddle. That was the way he had seen it done, and there was no other way.

He pushed the bike forward, hopping along with his left foot on the rest and his right on the ground.

Thud!—thud!—thud!

"Dear me!" gasped Alonzo.

He covered about a hundred yards in this way; and then, taking his courage in both hands, as it were, he made the plunge.

He went flying up to land in the saddle.

It was unfortunate that the cycle should have curled up at that moment, but perhaps it was due to the way Alonzo handled it.

What happened Alonzo did not exactly know; but there

was a terrific crash and jingle as the bike crashed down in the road, and Alonzo found himself, when his senses cleared, sitting there, with his legs through the bars and a wheel reposing in his lap.

"Dear me!" said Alonzo, gasping. "How very, very odd!"

THE FIFTH CHAPTER.

Wharton Takes It Cheerfully.

IT was some minutes before Alonzo Todd rose from the wreck. He was dusty, and he was aching considerably in several parts of him. He shook himself and dusted himself, and regarded the curled-up bicycle doubtfully. He wondered whether anything was broken. He felt rather broken himself. He blinked up the road for Bunter, but Bunter was just disappearing. The fat junior did not intend to wait for his unfortunate chum.

"Dear me!" said Todd.

He picked up the bicycle.

It looked all right, and, excepting for a few broken spokes, a twisted crank, and a battered mudguard, it was not much injured.

The twist of the crank was not sufficient to stop the pedals, only to give them a curious wobble, and that Todd did not even notice.

"Dear me!" he said. "There seems to be more in riding a bicycle than I should have suspected merely from observation. I think that perhaps I shall not learn in time to accompany Bunter to Courtfield. It is very unfortunate."

Bunter was gone. He did not mind going alone to Courtfield, and he did not mean to hang about Greyfriars until the Famous Four came to look for their bicycles.

NEXT
WEEK:

"ONLY ALONZO."

A Splendid Tale of Harry Wharton & Co.
By FRANK RICHARDS

Todd was quite ignorant of the fact that there would shortly be wrathful juniors hunting for jiggers.

"I had better leave going to Courtfield till another time, and get some bicycle practice now, as Wharton has so kindly lent me his machine," he murmured.

He turned the machine round towards Greyfriars again, and essayed to mount.

He hopped along behind the bicycle for some time, and finally made a jump, with the same result as before. The bicycle crashed, and Todd bumped. He sat down for some minutes in a cloud of dust.

"Dear me!" he murmured. "Who would have imagined that it was so difficult to mount a bicycle? But my Uncle Benjamin says that if at first you don't succeed, you should try again. I shall certainly try again. I really hope that the bicycle will not be injured."

Todd was very sanguine to hope that, for the machine was already showing signs of damage. But Alonzo was always hopeful.

He rose to his feet, and as he did so a peculiar sound fell upon his ears.

"Haw, haw, haw!"

Todd looked round.

A fat, red-faced youth in a smock frock was watching him, and grinning all over his fat, good-humoured face.

"Dear me!" said Todd. "If you knew my Uncle Benjamin, my young friend, you would learn that it is bad form to laugh at the misfortunes of others."

"Ha, ha, ha! Shall I help 'ee, sir?"

"That is very good of you. If you would kindly hold the bicycle while I get on, I should regard it as a very great obligation."

The grinning country youth held the bicycle while Todd mounted. He held it firmly enough, and Todd climbed upon it as if it had been a fence, and sat in the saddle. He tried to put his feet through the mudguards and then through the chain, but finally got them upon the pedals.

"Dear me!" said Todd. "That feels very comfortable. Now, if you would start me a little, my young friend, I think I should get on nicely."

"Yes, sir."

The obliging youth ran alongside Todd for some distance, almost as far as the gates of Greyfriars, till he was fairly going.

Todd's feet were going round with the pedals now like clockwork, and as long as the lad was holding him up he felt all right, but as soon as he had no more support, he felt very wrong indeed.

He swayed to one side and then to the other, and the machine went through some really wonderful evolutions without falling over or curling up.

Todd drove away desperately at the pedals. He felt that he could only keep upright by going very fast.

He drove down the road at express speed.

The bike shot first to one side of the road and then to the other, and Todd was in alternate terror of falling into the ditch or crashing into the school wall.

As he came abreast of the open gateway, he dragged on the handle desperately, and more by good luck than anything else the machine shot in and dashed up the drive, Todd still pedalling away as if his life depended on it.

There was a yell.

"Look out, you madman!"

Wingate, of the Sixth, the captain of Greyfriars, jumped aside just in time as the cycle rushed at him.

But Todd paid no heed to his shout. He would have been deaf just then to the voice of the Head himself. Where he was going, or why he was going there, he did not know. He would have given worlds, whole solar systems, in fact, to be off the bicycle. But the only visible way of getting off was by falling, and he did not want that.

"Hallo—hallo—hallo!" exclaimed Bob Cherry, as he came out of the School House with Wharton and Nugent and Hurree Singh, all four of them in Norfolk jackets and cycling knickers. "Look there!"

"Todd!"

"Alonzo the Great!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The juniors yelled with laughter as they watched the wonderful evolutions of the Duffer of Greyfriars.

Todd had evidently lost all control of the bicycle.

Why he did not fall off was a mystery. But, as sometimes happens in such cases, the rider, in expectation of a fall every moment, remained in the saddle, and the machine rushed on like a thing of life.

"Help!" gasped Alonzo faintly.

Harry Wharton rushed down the steps of the House; but the unhappy cyclist had taken a fresh turn now, and was rushing away from him at top speed.

The bicycle turned upon the grass, and Alonzo went off

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NEXT WEEK: "ONLY ALONZO."

through the doctor's flower-beds, and a yell of laughter followed him from all quarters.

"My hat," gasped Nugent, "he's in for it now!"

"Look out!"

"Mind your eye, Todd!"

"He'll be in the wall in a minute!"

"He'll be killed!"

"He'll smash his machine!"

"Great Scott!"

"The great Scottfulness is terrific."

The juniors watched Alonzo breathlessly.

The cyclist left the flower-beds, and came careering down the drive again. There were a dozen juniors in pursuit by this time, but Todd easily outdistanced them all. Wharton rushed into his way; but the bicycle, as if endowed with an uncanny cunning all its own, dodged him.

Crash!

The catastrophe had come at last.

Todd was down, sprawling in the grass, and the cycle was curled up, the front wheel twisted almost out of recognition, the chain broken, the mudguards folded up like paper.

"Phew! What a smash!" gasped Nugent. "I'm sorry for Todd if that's a new bicycle of his. I didn't know he had one."

"The sorrowfulness is terrific."

Wharton reached Todd. He helped him up; but the Duffer of Greyfriars sat in the grass, gasping and gasping.

"W-w-w-what has happened?" he exclaimed.

"Ha, ha, ha! You have!" roared Nugent.

"I—I have fallen down, I think."

"Go hon!"

"I—I am somewhat hurt."

"Well, you couldn't expect to bump down like that without getting hurt," said Bulstrode. "It's a wonder you were not killed."

"Ow! I have an ache in several places. I trust my legs are not broken."

"They're all right," said Harry Wharton. "You'll come round, but I don't know about the bike. That looks rather rocky."

"The rockyfulness is terrific."

"Oh, it'll mend!" said Bob Cherry. "I hope so."

"Yes, I truly hope so," said Alonzo Todd. "It will be a great misfortune if the bicycle cannot be repaired."

"What an ass you were to practise on a new bike! And why didn't you get someone to hold you?" said Wharton.

"I thought it was easy."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The juniors roared.

"I'm so sorry," repeated Todd, blinking at Wharton.

"The machine certainly seems to have been damaged."

"Never mind! We'll all buckle to and help mend it," said Harry.

"You are very good——"

"Not at all. We'll all lend a hand."

"I mean, you are very good to take it so cheerfully."

Wharton looked puzzled.

"I don't understand," he said. "Of course, I'm sorry to see you smash your bike up in this way, but I don't see any particular reason not to be cheerful."

"Eh? It is not my bike."

"Not your bike!"

"Certainly not."

Wharton gasped.

"You don't mean to say you borrowed a bike to ride on, you duffer, when you can't ride?" he exclaimed.

"You see——"

"Ha, ha, ha! Whose bike is it?"

"Yours!"

Wharton almost staggered.

"Mine?"

"Yes; certainly."

There was a yell of laughter from the juniors. Wharton's face was a study.

THE SIXTH CHAPTER.

Alonzo is Sorry.

HARRY WHARTON did not recover his breath for some moments. He simply gasped, looking at the Duffer of Greyfriars as if he would eat him.

"My bike," he gasped at last—"my bike! That wreck is my bike?"

"Certainly. I'm so sorry."

"You mean to say you've been riding my bike, when you can't ride, and you've twisted it up into scrap-iron in this way?" roared Wharton.

"You see——"

"My only hat," gasped Bob Cherry, "what princely cheek!"

"The cheekfulness is terrific."
 "Ha, ha, ha!"
 "You lent it to me, you know," said Todd, blinking at Wharton. "I'm so sorry this has happened."
 "I lent it to you?"
 "Yes; to go over to Courtfield with Bunter. Bunter had Nugent's bike, and I had yours," explained the Duffer.
 "Bunter's got my bike?" roared Nugent.
 "Yes; you lent it him."
 "Lent it him? Lent it to that fat oyster? I didn't."
 "Dear me! Bunter must have deliberately deceived me."
 "You cheerful chump!" shouted Wharton. "Do you think I should lend my bike to a chap who couldn't ride? Oh, you dangerous ass!"
 "I'm so sorry."

Alonzo staggered to his feet.
 He was really sorry, and he looked very distressed. That, however, did not mend Harry Wharton's bike, and was not likely to do so. Sorrow was all very well, but it could not undo the damage that was done.

"My hat," exclaimed Wharton, "I shall have to squash him! There's nothing else for it. Put up your hands, Todd."
 "Eh?"

"Put up your hands, you chump!"
 Alonzo innocently held his hands in the air.
 "Oh, certainly!" he said. "I am willing to do anything to oblige you, Wharton, especially after the damage I have inadvertently caused to your bicycle. But will you explain in what way it will assist you for me to put up my hands?"

The Removites yelled.
 Wharton, angry and exasperated as he was, could not help laughing, and he dropped his hands to his sides.

"Oh, you chump!" he exclaimed. "You're not worth licking. You want chaining up, that's what you want."

"My dear Wharton—"
 Harry walked to his bicycle and stood looking down on it. He was laughing, but he felt inclined to cry, too. It had been a new machine that summer, and now it was a wreck. Careful and patient repair would do much, but it was doubtful if that jigger would ever be quite the same jigger again.

"I'm so sorry," said Alonzo.
 "Oh, cheese it!" said Wharton rather roughly; and he had plenty of excuse for being rough just then. "That's all right."

"But I assure you—"
 "Oh, don't bother!"
 "My Uncle Benjamin says—"
 "Cheese it!" roared Wharton. "Haven't you done enough damage, without springing your Uncle Benjamin on me, too?"

"My dear fellow—"
 "Buzz off, hang you!"
 And Alonzo sadly buzzed off. He was very much distressed, but it was evidently useless to stay and reason with Harry Wharton just then.

The juniors dispersed, laughing. Todd's first experience with the bicycle seemed very funny to all but the owner of the machine. Harry Wharton, with help from his chums, carried the machine away to the bicycle-shed.

"Looks like our ride to Cliff House being off," Bob Cherry remarked.

"Well, I can't ride this, that's certain," Harry said ruefully, "and Bunter's got Frank's machine."

"That fat young scoundrel! He's the cause of this."
 "Always Bunter."

"We'll smash him when he comes in."
 "Yes, rather! But this machine—"

"I'll help you mend it," said Nugent. "Bob and Inky can go over to Cliff House."

Bob Cherry coloured for a moment, guiltily. He would have been very glad to go over and see Marjorie on his "lonesome," but he heroically thrust the temptation from him.

"I won't go," he said; "I'll stay and help."
 "Same here," said Hurree Singh. "The samefulness is terrific."

Wharton nodded.
 "All right," he said; "let's wire in."

And the idea of a ride out being given up, the Famous Four set to work on the damaged bicycle. They were all handy fellows and knew a great deal about bikes and machinery generally, and they made good progress. Mark Linley and Tom Brown happened into the shed, and found them at work, and joined in; and with six active pairs of hands going, the repairs were soon under good way.

It was some time before Alonzo Todd learned what was on; but as soon as he knew that Wharton was repairing his damaged bike, he felt that he could do no less than give up his leisure time in helping him. That was the least he could do, and he hurried off to the bicycle-shed to offer his services.

The chums of the Remove stared at him as he looked diffidently into the shed.

"I want to help you, Wharton," he began.
 Wharton grunted:

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"It's all right; I've got enough help."
 "But I—"
 "Got out, old man! That's the best thing you can do for me."

"But my Uncle Benjamin always said that I ought to be useful and obliging," Todd explained, "and I was really the cause of this damage to your machine, you know."

"Buzz off!"
 "I should very much like to help. My Uncle Benjamin—"

"Did your Uncle Benjamin ever tell you that there was a time to bother and a time not to bother?" demanded Bob Cherry.

Todd rubbed his nose thoughtfully.
 "N-n-no; I don't think I quite remember my Uncle Benjamin telling me that," he replied.

"Then he is an avuncular ass, and he has neglected your education!" said Bob. "How long will it take you to get outside this shed?"

"Eh? Only a few seconds, I suppose," said Alonzo, looking puzzled.

"Then buck up," said Bob Cherry, taking up a spanner. "In five seconds I'm going to chuck this spanner, and if you're not gone—"

"My dear Cherry—"
 Bob Cherry's hand swung into the air. Todd blinked at him for a moment, and then made a bound through the doorway.

The next moment the heavy spanner crashed on the wall. Bob had hurled it, missing the spot where Alonzo had stood by a good three feet, but Alonzo did not know that.

"Oh, dear!" he murmured. "How very savage of Cherry! I think that perhaps I had better not press my services upon them at present. I will try and find some other way of making it up to Wharton."

And Todd drifted away, turning over in his mind various schemes for "making it up" to Harry Wharton; and in his perplexity he had recourse to Bulstrode and Skinner for advice, and they gave him counsel.

THE SEVENTH CHAPTER.

Bunter Means to be Gracious.

BILLY BUNTER pedalled on towards Courtfield, leaving Todd to fight out his desperate struggle with the bicycle. He did not pause for a moment. He knew that if Nugent discovered him in possession of that machine there would be trouble. And he didn't want to miss the interview with W. Bunter, the captain of the Courtfield Rovers. The more Billy thought about that matter, the more he saw what a brilliant prospect was opening before him. His footer had been laughed at at Greyfriars. Well, they should see that others could appreciate it. If he could make no impression upon the Greyfriars fellows—well, there were others.

At Greyfriars there was never any difficulty in filling up an eleven. The difficulty was in selecting from the crowd of candidates; but at Courtfield, in the local team, it was evidently different. The Rovers were players short for the season, and they were advertising in the local paper for recruits—a usual step on the part of junior clubs in want of members. They would not be able to pick and choose, like Wharton, Bunter thought; and he thought, too, that they would probably be glad of having a public school chap in their ranks. Bunter was already swelling with snobbish importance on that score. He was preparing to descend upon the Courtfield fellows like a great noble upon his retainers, and to treat them with condescending politeness. Of course they would be glad to have him in their team. Probably the other Bunter would resign in his favour and make him captain. He would then challenge the Greyfriars Remove, and lick them on their own ground.

At that dazzling prospect Bunter grunted with satisfaction. He reached Courtfield, and inquired his way to Oak Lane, which he found to be a quiet street on the outskirts of the village.

The house he was seeking was one of a row of small dwellings with large gardens. There were children playing in the street and gardens, and, small as the houses were, they looked cosy and comfortable. Bunter could see that

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they were inhabited by a good class of artisans. He stopped at No. 10, and wheeled the machine into the front garden and leaned it against the fence.

This proceeding was watched with considerable interest by several pairs of eyes at the front parlour window, but Bunter was too short-sighted to notice them.

He walked up the little gravel path to the house, and gave a knock and a ring that resounded through the building. That was Bunter's way of announcing that a very important person had arrived.

The door was opened very quickly by a lad of about Bunter's age. He was much better built than Bunter, however, and had a frank and cheerful face and quick eyes.

He had been watching Bunter from the parlour window, and was at the door as soon as the fat junior thundered at it. Bunter blinked at him.

"Master Bunter live here?" he asked.

"Yes, I'm Walter Bunter."

"Good! My name's Bunter, too—William George Bunter."

"Oh!"

"I'm from Greyfriars."

"The school near Friardale?"

"That's it."

"Yes?" said Walter Bunter.

"I've seen your advertisement in the Courtfield paper," explained Bunter. "I've called about that."

"Oh, I see! Will you come in, please?"

"Certainly," said Bunter, in his lordly way.

The lad showed him into the parlour, which opened off the narrow passage—or hall, as the builder would have called it. The parlour was quietly furnished—windsor chairs and a table with an art pot and a dead plant, and a piano that was seldom opened. There were two other lads in the little room, both very plainly dressed, and evidently lads in employment in the village. Their round, red faces were in healthy contrast to the fat, overfed visage of Billy Bunter.

They looked at Bunter civilly enough as he came in. The fat junior blinked at them through his big spectacles.

"This is Bunter, of Greyfriars," said Walter Bunter. "He's come about our notice in the 'Courtfield News.'"

"I'm thinking of playing for your team," said Bunter.

The Courtfield boys looked at him.

The fat, unwieldy body, the short, thick legs, the big spectacles, the overfed aspect generally of the redoubtable Bunter did not impress them very favourably as to his abilities in the football-field.

"Oh!" said Walter. "Well, these chaps are members of the team—Porter, half-back, and Graham, our secretary. If you can play we should be glad to have you; but excuse me, are you playing for Greyfriars?"

Bunter shook his head.

"Not at present."

"Sit down, will you?" said Walter Bunter, considerably puzzled by his visitor. "I suppose you are a footballer?"

"Well, I should say so," said Billy Bunter. "I have played for—oh, years! I belong to the Remove at Greyfriars. The Remove is the Lower Fourth Form, you know. But I don't suppose you chaps know much about public schools."

The chaps exchanged glances. Walter compressed his lips a little.

"No," he said quietly; "we don't."

"No; I thought you wouldn't. Well, I'm in the Remove, but I've been kept out of the Form team by jealousy. You know how much jealousy there is in football matters, I suppose?"

Walter nodded without speaking.

"I've played for the Upper Fourth there, but—but I didn't quite like the team. I was badly treated. I thought I'd like to play for Courtfield. You fellows would naturally be glad to have a gentleman in your club."

At this tactful speech the three boys turned red; but Bunter blinked at them with much self-satisfaction, as if he had said quite an ordinary thing.

It was some moments before Walter replied. He was struggling with a desire to take his visitor by the collar and sling him out of the house.

"I suppose that would be natural," he remarked.

"Quite natural," said Porter, between his teeth. "It's really very kind of our friend to take notice of us in this way."

"So kind," murmured Graham.

Bunter beamed upon them.

"You see, I mean to be kind," he said. "I'm not appreciated at Greyfriars, and I've come over here. Of course, I don't deny it's a bit of a come-down for a chap like me to play in a working-class club. I've never done such a thing before."

"No; I imagine you haven't."

"But there's no pride about me," said Bunter, feeling

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that he was getting along very nicely with the Courtfield fellows. "Why, there's a chap at our school—a chap named Linley. He used to work in a factory, and he came to Greyfriars on a scholarship, you know. He was a factory hand—fellow who worked for his living, you know, and never had any grub unless he earned it himself. Awful, isn't it? Well, I take a lot of notice of that chap—quite a lot."

"That's kind of you," said Porter.

"I mean to treat you fellows in the same way," said Bunter graciously. "There's no side about me. My idea is, that a real gentleman can do practically anything, without danger of being misunderstood. Don't you think so?"

"I haven't thought the matter out," said Walter.

"Well, that's my view. Lots of fellows at Greyfriars may sneer at me, and say I'm associating with people below me in station. I don't care. It's their own fault, anyway, for keeping me out of my proper place in the team."

"You must be a very popular chap at your school, I should think," remarked Graham quietly.

Bunter blinked at him.

"Oh, yes; I've got lots of influence, you know. But about this footer business—I suppose I can sign into your club?"

"I hardly think so," said Walter, with a gleam of scorn in his eyes that was quite lost upon Billy Bunter. "You see, we're working-class chaps, and hardly suited to associate with you."

"Hardly!" said Porter.

"Not at all," said Graham. "I should be very sorry to think we were."

"Well, I like to see a chap conscious of—of social differences," said Billy, with a nod. "But you needn't carry it too far. So long as you recognise that I am a gentleman, and have to be treated with respect, it will be all right. Of course, I should allow no familiarity. But otherwise I intend to treat you quite as if you were like—well, like myself."

"But we are not like you at all."

"I know you're not; but I mean to take you up and be decent to you," said Bunter. "Now, I want to join your team."

"I'm sorry, but—"

"You're not going to let a chance slip like that. Think what a standing it will give you, to have a public-school fellow playing in your club!"

"I'm sorry—"

"You're not going to refuse?" asked Bunter, with his eyes wide open in astonishment.

Walter nodded.

"Yes, we're going to refuse," he said.

"But—but why—"

"Well, you see," explained Walter, "you are kind enough to say that we're fit for you to associate with—but we can't quite think that you're fit for us to associate with. There's the rub!"

"That's it," said Porter.

"Exactly," assented Graham.

"Look here—" began Bunter.

"If you weren't in my house, I'd take you by the scruff of the neck, and land you in the road," said Walter. "I don't want to handle a fellow who came here not expecting it, though. But you'd better go."

"But—"

"Better get out," said Graham.

"Look here, you rotten cads—"

Walter threw the door open.

"That's the way out," he said.

Bunter blinked at him.

"You won't sign me in the club?" he exclaimed.

"No."

"You—you refuse to take a public-school chap—you working-class bounders!"

Porter clenched his fists. Walter pushed him back.

"Don't touch him," he said.

"I'm not going to stand—"

"Let him go. He's not worth a kick."

"But—"

"You'd better go," said Walter.

Billy Bunter blinked at him savagely.

"You—you blessed low cads—" he exclaimed.

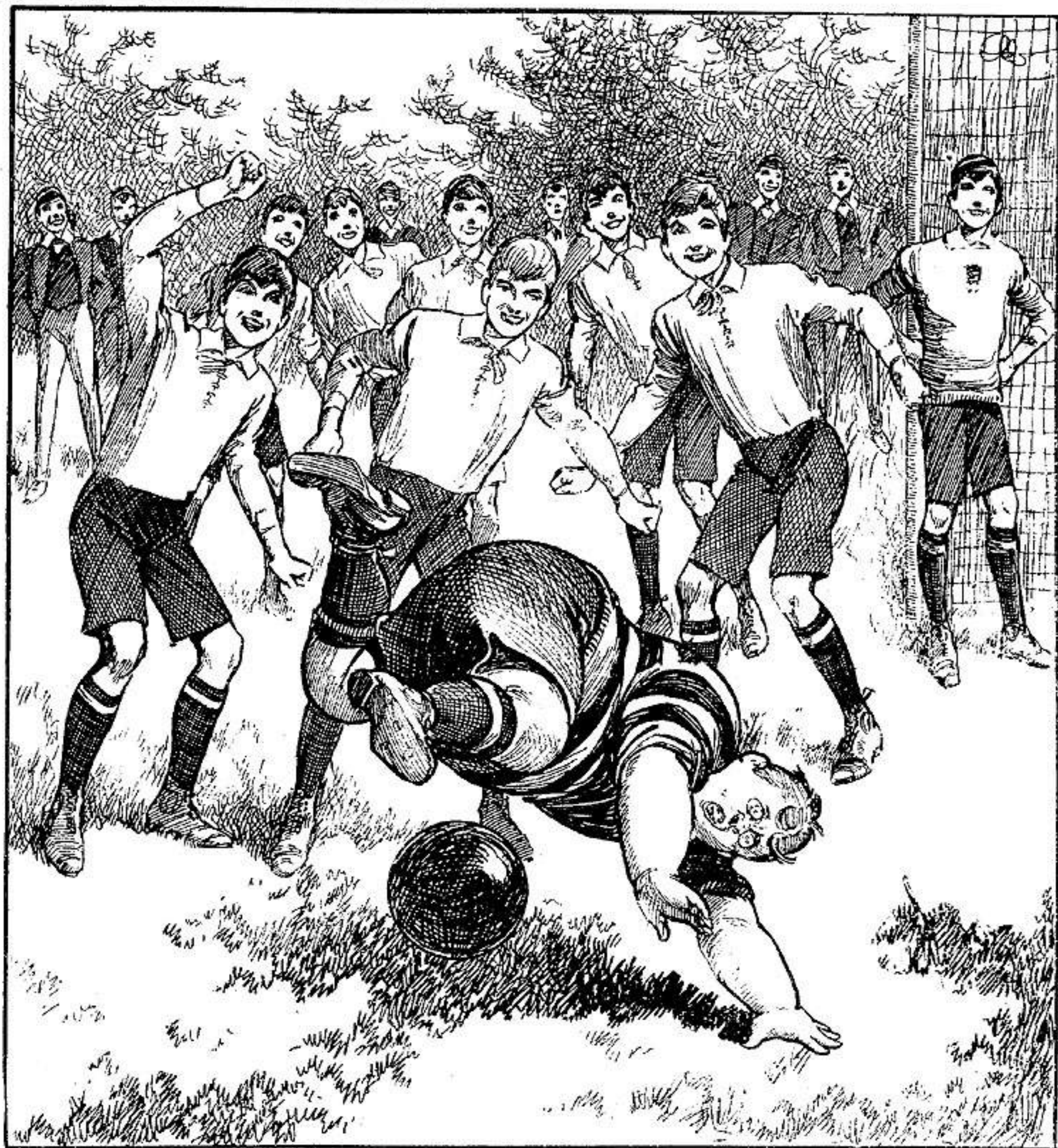
"I'm going to smash him!" roared Porter, making a rush at Billy Bunter.

The fat junior hopped out of the room with wonderful quickness.

Walter held his irate friend back, while Bunter scooted out of the house, and slammed the door behind him.

With the belief strong upon him that Porter was pursuing him, Billy Bunter raced down the path, grabbed the bicycle, and dragged it into the road, and mounted. He went pedalling off at top speed, and not till he was half-way to Greyfriars did he venture to slacken.

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Billy Bunter's feet somehow got entangled with the ball, and he went spinning to the ground with a breathless gasp. "Ow! M-m-m-my hat!" he gasped. (See page 4.)

THE EIGHTH CHAPTER. Bunter Makes Terms.

"THERE'S Bunter!"
"Collar him!"
"But where's the bike?" said Nugent. "The young bouncer's on foot!"
"We'll soon make him tell!"
The chums of the Remove had finished work on Wharton's machine, and had succeeded in restoring it to something like its old self. They were returning to the School House when they caught sight of Billy Bunter.
The fat junior was rolling up the drive to the house, but he was on foot, and there was no sign of Nugent's bicycle.
The juniors ran towards him.
At the sight of them Bunter halted, with a sickly smile.

upon his fat face. He never thought of consequences till they arrived; but they had arrived now."
"You young sweep!" exclaimed Wharton. "You told Todd he could have my bike, and he's smashed it up!"
"Oh, really—"
"Well, didn't you?"
"Todd may have understood so," said Bunter cautiously.
"all I said to him was that it was all right."
"And you've had my bike, when you knew I wanted to go out on it!" exclaimed Nugent.
"Well, I had to go over to Courtfield—most important—ow! Leggo! D-d-don't shake me like that, Nugent! You'll make my glasses fall off, and if they get broken, you'll have to pay for them, so there."
"You—you oyster—"
"I don't think you ought to call me names, Nugent."

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because I'm going to play footer for an outside club," said Bunter, in an injured tone. "You can't say that I didn't offer my services to Greyfriars first—both to the Remove and the Upper Fourth."

"I'm—going—to—bump—you—for—taking—my—bike!" enunciated Nugent.

"Oh, really—"

"Collar him, you chaps!"

Bunter was collared by his four limbs, and swung into the air. He was not a light weight, and it was as much as the Famous Four could do.

"Hold on!" gasped Bunter.

"Now, then—ready—"

"The readyfulness is terrific!"

"Hold on! Yaroo! You'll never find Nugent's bike!"

"What!"

"I'm sorry it's lost, but—"

"My bike lost!" roared Nugent.

"I'm sincerely sorry, but—"

The chums of the Remove set Bunter upon his feet again. They stood round him and stared at him speechlessly. The fat junior readjusted his collar.

"You don't mean to say that you've lost my bike?" asked Nugent, holding himself in with a great effort.

"Not exactly lost it," said Bunter. "I've left it outside."

"Outside! Where?"

"In the fields."

"Why?"

"Well, I know where it is, and I can tell you exactly how to find it," said Bunter, blinking at the chums of the Remove.

"But—but I shan't unless—"

"Unless what?"

"Unless you make it pax."

The juniors gasped.

They understood.

This was Bunter's way of escaping punishment. Nugent turned crimson with anger, and laid violent hands upon the fat junior.

"You fat young villain, I'll—"

"Ow! Yow! Yaroo!"

"Where's my bike?"

"Yowp!"

"Where is it, you young scoundrel?"

"Yaroo!"

Harry Wharton burst into a laugh.

"It's no good, Nugent!" he exclaimed. "We shall have to let him off if we want to get the bike in before locking-up!"

"I won't let him off!" roared Nugent. "I'm going to lick the cheeky young villain!"

"Well, I'm sincerely sorry!" said Bunter. "If the bike stays out all night, it may get damaged by the dew, and if it rains—"

Nugent clenched his hands hard. The coolness of the Owl of the Remove was very hard to stand.

"There isn't much time before locking-up, either," continued Bunter. "Of course, it doesn't matter to me. I don't care. It's not my bike!"

Frank Nugent breathed hard.

"I'll—I'll let you off this time," he said. "Go and get the bike in."

"Oh, I say, you know! I'm tired. One of you fellows had better go and fetch it," said Bunter. "I'll tell you just where it is!"

Nugent pointed to the clock-tower.

"I give you exactly five minutes to have it here," he said. "If the bike isn't here by that time, I'll get my dog-whip and give you such a licking as you've never dreamed about—honour bright!"

Bunter snorted.

He knew Nugent meant business this time, and he scuttled off towards the gates. The chums of the Remove followed him to the gateway. They looked after him as he went out into the road.

"My hat!" said Wharton.

The bicycle was leaning in the hedge opposite the school gates—perfectly plain to anyone who had gone near it. Bunter had not left it at a distance, as the chums had supposed; he didn't want to risk a long walk.

He wheeled the bicycle in with a sullen and injured air. The chums watched him in silence. Their feelings were too deep for words.

"I suppose you're going to put it away," said Bunter.

"I'm not," said Nugent, with a deep breath. "You're going to do that, Billy, and you're going to clean off every speck of dust and every stain—and I'm going to stand over you with a cricket-stump while you do it."

"Oh, really, Nugent—"

"Buck up!" said Frank curtly.

"But, I—I can't—"

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"Will you fetch me a cricket-stump, Inky, while I keep an eye on Bunter?" asked Frank.

"With pleasurefulness, my worthy chum."

"Hold on!" gasped Bunter. "You—you needn't trouble, you black beast; I'll do it!"

And he did.

For an hour Bunter was kept fagging away in the bike-shed cleaning the bicycle, and when he had finished he staggered away exhausted—or pretending to be exhausted. He pathetically informed the chums of the Remove that a bit of a feed at the school shop would revive him—a suggestion which was greeted with heartless laughter.

THE NINTH CHAPTER.

Early in the Morning.

ALONZO TODD had been waiting for Bunter to come in, but Bunter had been busily occupied, and the Duffer of Greyfriars did not meet him until they went up to the dormitory. In the Remove dorm. Alonzo tapped the fat junior on the shoulder. Alonzo generally attracted a fellow's attention by tapping him—sometimes hard—with his hard, bony fingers.

Bunter jerked round.

"What are you jabbing at me for, you ass?" he exclaimed.

"My dear Bunter—"

"You've nearly punctured my shoulder, you chump!"

"I wanted to know how you have got on at Courtfield," said Alonzo patiently. "I'm so sorry I was unable to come with you. Wharton's bicycle broke down. Did you get on all right with the Courtfield Rovers?"

"First rate!" said Bunter, with a defiant blink round at the Removites, who were listening with interest.

"You have joined the team?"

"Certainly! That's what I went over for, wasn't it?"

"Oh! I didn't know you were certain of joining."

"Rot! Of course I was certain. They could see by my mere look what kind of a footballer I should make."

"Do you mean to say you've been let into the team?" exclaimed Bob Cherry.

"Of course."

"What team is it?"

"The Courtfield Rovers."

"Never heard of them—but they must be a pretty rocky team to take in a fellow like you," said Bob, with a shake of the head.

"As a matter of fact, I've been offered the captaincy," said Bunter, whose vivid imagination generally outran his facts.

There was a roar of laughter.

"Captain Bunter!" roared Bulstrode. "Ha, ha, ha!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Bunter blinked round at the laughers.

"Have you accepted the position?" asked Nugent, with a grin.

"Yes, I have."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Billy Bunter grunted and kicked off his boots. Not a fellow in the dormitory, with the possible exception of Alonzo Todd, believed his statement. Bunter's yarns were too well known.

But a peculiar idea was already in Bunter's mind. The name of the Rovers captain was the same as his, and it had occurred to the fat junior to make capital out of that. Bunter was not clever, but he was cunning.

"Oh, all right!" he said. "You can cackle if you like, but you'll see."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You don't seriously expect us to believe that you're taken on as a footer captain, Bunter?" exclaimed Harry Wharton.

"Well, you'll see."

"When are you going to play?" asked Tom Brown.

"Every Saturday afternoon."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"There will be reports of the matches in the local paper," said Bunter, with dignity. "You can read them. I suppose seeing is believing."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Dear me!" said Todd. "I suppose it is true, as Bunter says so. I suppose you will put me in the team, Bunter?"

"Certainly not," said Bunter. "I'm not going to have any Remove fellows. Besides, you're no good."

"My dear Bunter—"

"A footer captain has to be careful, you see—"

A yell of laughter interrupted Bunter, and he did not finish. Wingate came in to see lights out, and the juniors tumbled into bed.

After the captain of Greyfriars had gone, Alonzo Todd

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lay awake while the rest of the Greyfriars juniors were composing themselves to sleep. Todd's bed was next to Bulstrode's, and as the sound of talk died away in the dormitory, and sleep descended, the Duffer of Greyfriars whispered to his neighbour.

"I say, Bulstrode,"
Bulstrode grunted.
"Bulstrode, are you asleep?"
"Eh—what?"
"You said five o'clock, didn't you?"
"Eh? Yes. Groo! Go to sleep!"
"You are quite sure Wharton—"
"Shut up!"
"But—"
"Whisper, you ass, if you must jaw," said Bulstrode.
"Oh, all right!" said Alonzo, lowering his voice.
"Wharton has said nothing to me on the subject."
"That's all right—he told me."
"You are sure he wants to be awakened at five?"
"Quite sure."
"But it is very odd—"
"Look here," whispered Bulstrode. "You said that you wanted to make it up to Wharton for busting his bike—"
"Oh, certainly!"
"He particularly wants to be called at five in the morning to go out bathing."
"It is very late in the season for bathing."
"Well, it's his own look-out about that. He said to me, almost with tears in his eyes, that his health depended on getting an early morning bathe, and that he never could wake up. He said that if he only had a chum who would throw some cold water over him at five in the morning, everything in the garden would be lovely. No good shaking him; the idea was, to squeeze a wet sponge over his face and wake him up that way. He said it had a bracing effect."

"I should think it very unpleasant."
"Well, tastes differ, you know."
"I suppose so."
"But if you don't want to take the trouble—"
"Oh, it isn't that! My Uncle Benjamin always impressed upon me to take any amount of trouble for fellows I like, and I like Wharton very much. But it is a little odd that he should not mention it himself."
"Oh, he's so unselfish, you know! The idea of a fellow staying awake to call him wouldn't suit him at all. In fact, he wouldn't hear of such a thing."
"I shall do so, however, in order to compensate him for breaking his bicycle. I feel that I owe him something."
"That's right."
"My Uncle Benjamin—"
"Exactly! Good-night!"
"My Uncle Benjamin says—"
"Goo'-nigh'!"
"Uncle Benjamin—"
Snore!

Alonzo gave it up.
Bulstrode was soon asleep, and so was the rest of the dormitory with the exception of Todd. There was no doubt that Todd was a most unselfish fellow. He would do anything for anybody; generally, it is true, with the most unfortunate results.

Alonzo sat up in bed, with his bedclothes tucked round him, blinking into the gloom. Alonzo fully intended to keep awake till five in the morning to wake Wharton up at that hour, in the bracing manner suggested by Bulstrode.

Alonzo found the task difficult. In spite of himself, he would nod and nod. He dropped right off to sleep once, and awoke with a start. He had been asleep about two minutes—but it might have been hours. He listened anxiously for a clock—but none was to be heard. He struck a match and consulted his watch. He wondered whether it was past five in the morning. It was a quarter to eleven.

"Oh, dear!" murmured Todd.
The dormitory was terribly still.
Only a quarter to eleven.
More than six hours yet to the time he was to call Wharton. Todd wished he had an alarm-clock, and mentally resolved to buy one on the morrow. That, however, would not assist him that night; he had to stay awake. He began to repeat the multiplication table, and then to mentally recite poetry, to occupy his mind and keep himself awake.

His drowsy brain soon had them in a tangle, and he found himself sleepily murmuring:

"On Linden when the sun was low, twice two were four and three were six, and dark as winter was the flow of three times twelve and two times three."

Naturally enough he soon slid from that to sound sleep. Alonzo had meant to keep awake; the spirit was willing, but the flesh was weak. He dropped his chin upon his knees as he sat hunched up in bed and snored.

Hours passed.
Alonzo slept, and dreamed—and in his dreams he was

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ONE
PENNY.

haunted by a guilty consciousness of the fact that he ought to be awake.

He awoke at last with a jump.
The bedclothes had slipped from his body, and he was shivering with cold. The night was chilly, and his shoulders seemed like ice, and there was a shiver travelling round his back.

"Groo!" murmured Alonzo.
Then he sneezed.
The hour came booming from the clock-tower.
One, two, three, four, five!
Five strokes!
"Oh, dear!" murmured Alonzo. "How fortunate it is that I woke up! This is the time that Wharton wants to be called. Groo! How cold it is!"

Alonzo scrambled out of bed.
He was catching a cold, if he had only known it; but even if he had known it, that would not have prevented him from being obliging.

He stepped to the washstand, and groped for the jug. His hands pushed against it and sent it rocking, and a splash of cold water came over Alonzo's nightshirt, and he gasped. He found the sponge, and dipped it in the jug, and filled it as full as it would hold with cold water.

Then he stepped towards Wharton's bed.
He knew which bed it was; he could find it easily enough in the dark. A glimmer was coming in, too, at the high windows of the dormitory.

Todd just made out Wharton's oalm, clear-cut face on the pillow.

He lifted the full sponge directly over the sleeping face and squeezed it with both hands.

THE TENTH CHAPTER.

A Roland for an Oliver.

HARRY WHARTON started out of slumber with a wild yell.

A shower of icy water had descended upon him, and the shock woke him up instantly.

He opened his eyes, to have them flooded with water; his mouth, and that was also filled.

He yelled and gasped and choked, and sat up in bed, hitting out blindly.

"Ow!" gasped Alonzo.
Wharton's fist caught him on the chest, and he staggered back from the bed, and fell backwards upon the next one, and flopped upon Nugent.

Wharton's yell had awakened Frank, and he was starting up in bed, just in time to meet the falling Alonzo. Their heads crashed together with a ringing crash.

"Oh!" shrieked Nugent.
"Ah!" gasped Alonzo.

He slid to the floor. Nugent pressed his hand to his ringing, buzzing head, wondering what had happened.

Wharton sat in bed, drenched with water.
"Oh!" groaned Nugent. "What's that?"

"What's what?"
"Somebody's hit me on the head with something awfully hard," moaned Frank. "I'm nearly stunned. It wasn't wood; it was too hard for wood. Some idiot is playing pranks with a lump of iron."

"Ow!" groaned Todd. "It was my head."

"Your head?"
"Yes. It knocked against yours when Wharton pushed me over."

"Todd!" ejaculated Wharton.
"Ow! I am somewhat hurt. It was very thoughtless of you to strike out in that exceedingly irrational manner, Wharton."

"You utter ass! Did you throw this water over me?" roared Wharton.

"I squeezed the sponge over you, certainly."
Wharton did not reply. He scrambled out of bed, found the sponge, collared Alonzo, and proceeded to squeeze cold water over him. The Duffer of Greyfriars gasped and gasped, and struggled in the muscular grip of the captain of the Remove in vain.

"There!" gasped Wharton at last, when Todd was smothered with water, and wet all over. "There! That will teach you not to play practical jokes on chaps in the middle of the night."

"Oh!" groaned Alonzo. "Ow! Groo! I wasn't playing practical jokes. Ow!"

"You ass!" shouted Wharton. "What were you doing, then? Did you think you would please me by throwing cold water over me?"

"Ow! Yes."

"My hat!" ejaculated Bob Cherry. "Toddy has awfully queer ideas about pleasing people."

"Wharton wanted to be woke up—"

"What!"

"And he prefers being awakened in that manner," groaned Alonzo. "I thought it was very odd, and I told Bulstrode so, but it's Wharton's own business, I suppose, if he prefers it."

"You—you unspeakable chump!" gasped Harry. "Do you mean to say that Bulstrode told you that, and you believed it?"

"My dear Wharton—"

"Bulstrode! Bulstrode!"

The Remove bully did not reply. He thought it wiser to be fast asleep, under the circumstances.

"Bulstrode!" roared Wharton.

The whole dormitory was awake now, and there was a buzz of voices, and Bulstrode could hardly pretend to be slumbering. He affected to yawn, and sat up in bed.

"Eh? What? Did anybody call?" he asked.

"Yes, I did."

"What's the row about?"

"Todd says you told him—"

"Oh, Todd!"

"My dear Bulstrode, you certainly told me—"

"Oh, you've been dreaming," said Bulstrode; "I haven't told you anything. Go to bed."

"But you told me—"

"Ow! My head!" growled Nugent. "It will ache for days. I wonder if we could hire somebody to take Todd into a corner and kill him?"

"My dear Nugent—"

Wharton took the jug from his washstand. He knew now how matters lay, and he did not mean Bulstrode to get off scot-free.

He strode towards the Remove bully's bed with the jug. "You've got awfully curious ideas of practical jokes," he remarked. "Drenching a fellow in bed may be funny, but there's two ways of looking at it. One is when another chap's drenched, and the other way is—this."

Splash!

The contents of the water-jug swooped down upon Bulstrode.

The Remove bully gave a fearful yell and leaped up.

"Oh! Ow! Gerrooh!"

"How do you like it yourself?"

"Ow! Yaroo! Groo!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Wharton went back to his washstand, and towelled his face and head. Bulstrode grabbed a towel and followed his example. But Bulstrode was the wetter of the two, and his bed was drenched. It was impossible to sleep in that bed again that night.

"Oh, dear," said Alonzo, "I feel very wet! I am afraid I am catching a cold, too. Tsoo—atchoo—tsoo!"

He crept back into bed, and tucked the clothes round him. Bulstrode felt his bed, but it was swimming with water.

"Look here, I'm not going to get into that bed, and catch my blessed death of cold," he shouted.

"Sleep on the floor, then," said Tom Brown. "You ought to draw it mild in your jokes on the Duffer. It's going too far."

"Oh, rot! Bunter!"

Bunter snored.

"I want your bed, Bunter. You can turn in with Todd."

Bunter snored still more emphatically. But Bulstrode soon stopped his snoring. He seized the fat junior and rolled him out of bed.

Bunter roared.

"Oh, really, Bulstrode, I'm asleep—I—I mean I'm not

awake—that is to say—ow—ow! Lemme alone! You're not going to have my bed."

"You can have mine," said Bulstrode, slipping into Bunter's warm bed.

"Yow! It's wet!"

"Turn in with Todd, then."

"Yow! Wharton, make him get out of my bed."

Wharton had just settled himself comfortably in his own. He laughed.

"Don't be an ass, Bunter. He can't sleep in a soaking wet bed. Don't be selfish. It's only kind to give up a bed to a chap. Todd's Uncle Benjamin would tell you so in a minute."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Blow Todd's Uncle Benjamin!" growled Billy Bunter.

"I'm not going to be done out of my bed. You ought—"

"Rats! You're a giddy football captain, and you've done with the Remove—you said so yourself. You'd better go for Bulstrode and lick him."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Bunter snorted, and rolled away to Snoop's bed.

"I suppose I shall have to come in with you, Snoop," he said.

"I suppose you won't," said Snoop promptly. "I'm not going to have a fat porpoise in my bed, if I know it."

"But—"

"Go to Todd."

"But he's got a cold, and—"

"Well, you're not going to sleep in here," said Snoop.

"There's no room. If you get near me I'll land out with my foot."

"I say, Skinner, I think I'll come in with you."

"Something wrong with your thinker, then," grinned Skinner. "You won't."

"Look here—"

"Buzz off! I've got a boot here."

"I'll sleep with you if you like, Russell."

"I don't like," said Russell.

"I say, Lacy—"

"Oh, go and eat coke!"

"I suppose I shall have to turn in with you, Todd," grumbled Bunter.

"I don't like the idea," said Todd. "You are very fat, and there is hardly room, and you are very selfish, too, and will take all the bedclothes, I am sure. But my Uncle Benjamin always says that one should be kind even to selfish and unpleasant people, so you can get in if you like, Bunter."

And Bunter grunted and got in.

THE ELEVENTH CHAPTER.

Alonzo Catches Cold.

"ATCHOO! Choo-oo!"

That was Alonzo Todd's first remark in the morning, as he sat up in bed.

"Choo-choo! Atchoo!"

Todd sat and sneezed, and sneezed, and sneezed.

"Oh, dear!" he said, when the worst of it was over, and he could speak. "I fear that I have caught a cold, you know. It must have been the wetting last night."

"Oh," said Wharton, "I'm sorry!"

"Yes, I think you should be sorry, Wharton, as you wetted me with that sponge because I tried to be obliging."

"You shouldn't be so obliging, Toddy. It's a habit you'll have to get out of."

"My Uncle Benjamin always says—choo-choo-atchoo!"

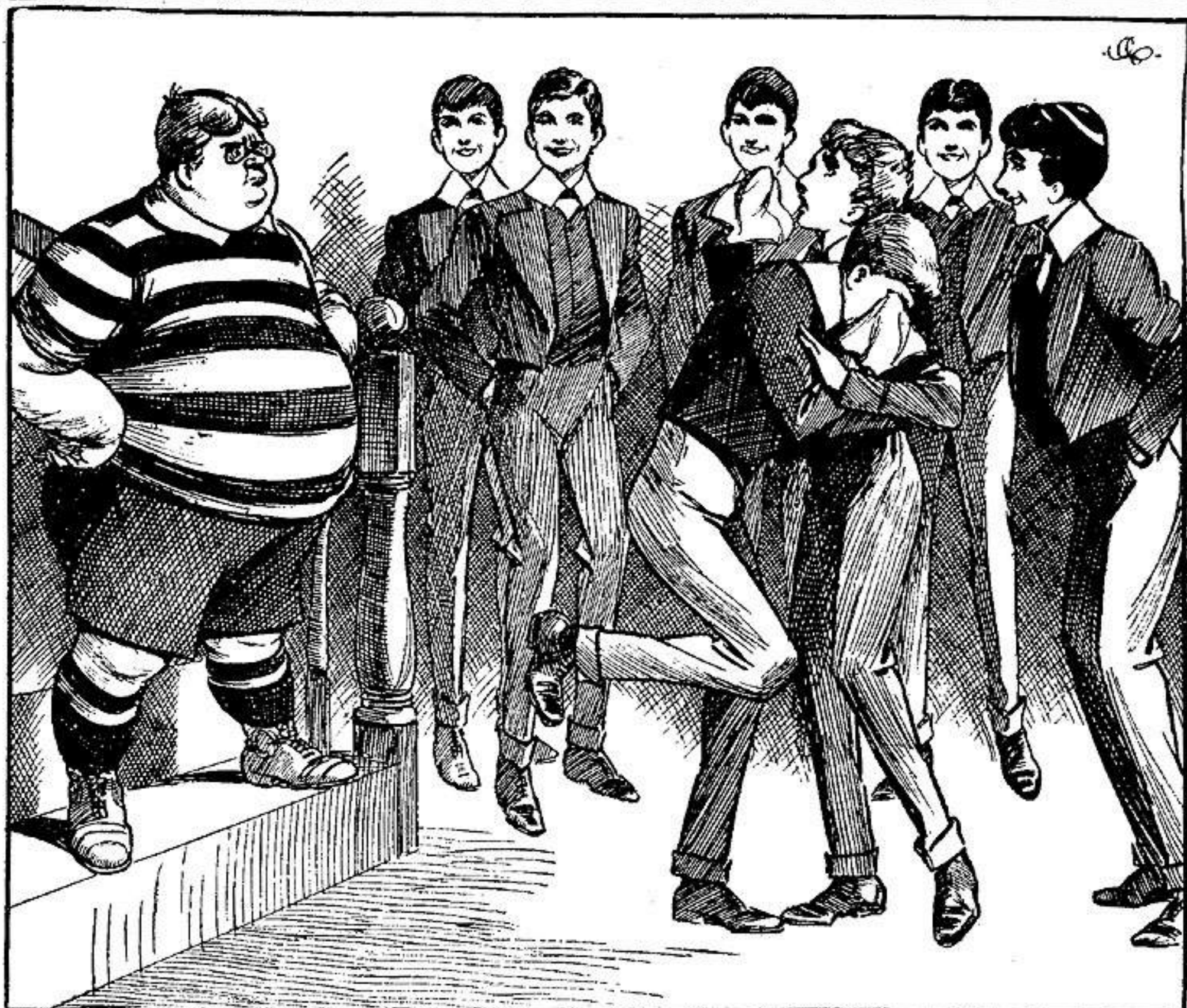
"By Jove," said Nugent, "what a queer thing for Uncle Ben to say!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"ONLY ALONZO!"

A Special Story by FRANK RICHARDS.

NEXT TUESDAY.



"I don't think I can be blamed for taking my services where they are appreciated," said Bunter. "You have refused them once; now it's too late." "Too late," sobbed Bob Cherry, falling on Nugent's shoulder and weeping. "Too late! Boo-hoo!" (See page 2.)

"I did not mean—choo-atchoo!"
"What did you mean, then?"
"Choo-choo-atch-atch-choo!"
"Oh, I see. Does Uncle Ben talk Chinese?"
"Chinese? No."
"It sounds like it. What does he mean when he says choo-choo-atch-atchoo?"
"My dear Nugent—choo-choo!"
"I've nothing to chew," said Nugent, shaking his head.
"Can't be did."
"Really—atchoo-atchoo!"
"He's got it," said Bulstrode. "Serve him jolly well right, for being such an ass. It's a wonder I haven't a cold too. Go it, Toddy."
"Choo-choo-atchoo!"
Billy Bunter squirmed out of bed. Bunter was not generally among the first to rise, but he was prompt enough to get out now.
"You blessed ass!" he exclaimed. "You'll be giving me that cold. Keep away from me. Keep your blessed microbes to yourself."
"My dear Bunter—"
"Don't you talk to me. Turn your face the other way, please."

Todd stopped slowly out of bed. There was no doubt that he had a cold in the head, and the other juniors, who did not want to catch it, gave him a wide berth. Todd sneezed and grunted all the time he was dressing.

"You'd better draw it mild with that snorting when you

go down," Ogilvy remarked. "You'll get sent into the sanatorium."

"Oh, dear!" said Todd.
"Best place for him," growled Bulstrode. "He'll be giving the whole class coids if he keeps on like that."

"My dear Bulstrode—"
"Br-r-r! Keep away!"

The Remove went down. Todd found himself pretty well isolated. No one wanted to catch the cold.

At breakfast the juniors crowded up to leave a clear space on either side of him. Todd suppressed his sneezing as much as possible, for he did not want to be sent into the sanatorium. True, some of the juniors thought that the school hospital wasn't so bad, as they had no lessons to do there; but, on the other hand, the isolation was not pleasant. Todd, too, had been carefully warned by his Uncle Benjamin to stick to work.

The Duffer of Greyfriars got through his breakfast pretty well, with only a sneeze or two. After breakfast, he blinked into the Close, and sniffed. The morning air was very fresh.

"Better cut chapel," said Skinner. "It's very draughty there."

"Thank you so much, Skinner. That is a good idea, and I shall certainly take your advice," said the Duffer gratefully.

"Don't be an ass," said Bob Cherry. "You're not allowed to cut chapel unless you're ill, and then you have to ask the Form-master."

"And get sent into sanatorium," said Skinner.

"H'm! On second thoughts, I will attend chapel," said Todd.

And he did. He suppressed a strong desire to sneeze all the time, and when the Remove came out, he had a regular storm of sneezing.

By the time the juniors went into the Form-room for lessons, however, Todd had his unruly cold somewhat in hand again.

The juniors took their places, and Todd, who felt Mr. Quelch's eye on him, fought heroically with a desire to send forth a sneeze like the blast of a trumpet.

He sat struggling with that sneeze.

It was growing worse. The more he suppressed it, the stronger became his desire to let it go, and he had to hold himself hard.

It was impossible to speak, or even to move, for he felt that if he moved, the sneeze would begin; and if it began, there was no telling where it would end.

Mr. Quelch glanced at him once or twice.

The Duffer's efforts were making his face more and more crimson, and his high colour could not fail to attract attention.

"My only hat," murmured Frank Nugent, "I believe Todd will burst a boiler if he goes on like that!"

There was a ripple of chuckles in the class. Mr. Quelch glanced round sharply.

"Todd!"

Alonzo started.

"Todd, you will construe."

Todd rose to his feet.

That was as far as he could get. He could not have spoken a word to save his life without giving the rein to that terrible sneeze which was, as it were, lying in wait for him.

"Todd!"

"M-m-m-m-m!"

"Did you hear me, Todd?"

Todd mumbled indistinctly.

"Construe!"

Mumble.

"Dear me," said Mr. Quelch, in astonishment—"dear me! What is the matter with you, Todd? Are you ill?"

"M-m-m-m-m."

"Answer me at once, Todd?"

Todd made a desperate effort.

"I—I— Oh! Ow-choo! Atchoo-o-oo-ooo!"

It was out at last.

It rang through the class-room like a trumpet, and it was followed by a succession of sneezes, big and little.

"Choo-choo-atchoo-oo-oo-oo-choo!"

"Dear me!" said Mr. Quelch.

"Choo-choo-atchoo-aychoo!"

"Bless my soul!"

"Choo-choo-choo!"

Todd was fairly going now.

He had dropped his book, and he was grasping the desk before him with both hands, and sneezing away as if his life depended upon it.

"Atchoo-atchoo-atchoo!"

"Dear me! You have a cold," said Mr. Quelch.

"Atchoo-atchoo! Yes, sir. Choo-choo!"

"You should not have come into class in this state, Todd. You may go to your dormitory at once, and go to bed. Take this note to the housekeeper, and she will give you something for your cold."

"Atchoo! Yes, sir. Choo-choo!"

"Go at once!"

Todd took the note, and left the class-room. The last sound heard from him as he disappeared was:

"Atchoo-atchoo-choo-choo!"

Then the door closed, and the Remove ceased from chuckling, and resumed work.

THE TWELFTH CHAPTER.

Bunter is not so Lucky.

BILLY BUNTER sat with a thoughtful expression upon his face. Alonzo Todd had not been sent into the sanatorium; he had been sent to bed, and the housekeeper was to give him something, doubtless warm gruel. He was free from lessons for the day, and could read in bed if he liked. Billy Bunter sighed inwardly at the idea. Even with a cold, it was better to be Todd that morning. Mr. Quelch was in a businesslike frame of mind, as he generally was, and Bunter did not like work.

The fat junior looked more and more thoughtful, and presently an expression of martyr-like suffering crept over his plump face.

Nugent was the first who noticed it, and he nudged Harry Wharton.

"Bunter's at it again," he murmured. "Look at him."

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NEXT WEEK: "ONLY ALONZO."

Harry looked at Bunter, and chuckled.

"What's the little game?" he murmured.

"I don't know, but—"

"Bunter!"

Mr. Quelch rapped out Bunter's name. He had caught the dying-duck expression upon the fat face, and it did not please him.

Billy Bunter did not reply.

"Bunter!"

"M-m-m-m," mumbled Bunter.

"Bunter!"

"Atchoo-atchoo!"

Mr. Quelch's eye glimmered.

"Have you a cold, Bunter?" he asked, in a quiet tone which ought to have warned the fat junior of danger ahead.

"Atchoo! I mean, yes, sir. I slept in Todd's bed last night, sir—"

"Indeed! Why did you do that?"

"Bulstrode had mine, sir."

"Why did you have Bunter's bed, Bulstrode?"

Bulstrode looked daggers at Bunter.

"Some water had been spilled on mine, sir, and it was too wet to sleep in," he said. "Bunter turned in with Todd."

"That's how I caught his cold, sir," said Bunter.

"You are sure you caught it?"

"Atchoo-atchoo-atchoo! Yes, sir."

"A cold in the head, I suppose?"

"Atchoo! Yes, sir. Choo-choo!"

"When did you first feel it coming on, Bunter?" asked the Remove-master, still in the same quiet and patient tone.

"Just now, sir—I—I mean, this morning at brekker, sir."

"Was it while I was telling Todd that he might leave the class-room?"

The Remove grinned. They could see Bunter's dodge with perfect clearness, and it was evident that Mr. Quelch could see it, too.

"Yes, sir—I mean, sir, no, sir," stammered Bunter.

"You are quite sure you have a cold?" said Mr. Quelch, in honeyed tones.

"Quite sure, sir. Atchoo-atchoo!"

"It is not merely a device to get out of the Form-room and escape work for the day?" suggested Mr. Quelch.

"Oh, sir! No, sir. Atchoo!"

"You would not be guilty of a lying and mean device like that, Bunter, which could only be regarded with contempt?"

"Oh, no, sir! Atchoo!"

"Very well, Bunter, if you have a cold, you certainly cannot remain here for lessons this morning," said Mr. Quelch thoughtfully.

Billy Bunter beamed.

"Shall I go at once, sir?" he asked.

"Yes."

"Thank you, sir."

"Go to the housekeeper, and tell her that you are to be kept in the sanatorium," said Mr. Quelch.

Bunter stood rooted to the floor.

He hadn't expected that.

"If—if you please, sir, I don't think my cold is severe enough for that," he said nervously. "I'd rather go back to bed, sir, like Todd."

Mr. Quelch smiled grimly.

"Probably you would, Bunter, but you will not be allowed to have it as you wish. Kindly go to the housekeeper, and tell her what I have told you. You may add that, as your cold is doubtless due to a weak state of health from over-feeding, you are to be kept on a very low diet."

"Oh!"

"You will also be given some healthy physical exercises."

"Oh!"

"You may go, Bunter. Take this note."

"If—if you please, sir, I—I feel much better now," ventured Bunter. "I—I don't want to be a slacker, sir. I'd rather stick to work."

"My hat!" murmured Bob Cherry. "That from Bunter!"

And the Remove grinned. The idea of Bunter wanting to stick to work was funny. Mr. Quelch smiled, too.

"Ah! You feel better, Bunter?"

"Much better, sir."

"I have noticed that you are no longer sneezing. Do you feel any desire to sneeze now, Bunter?"

"No, sir. Not at all, sir."

"I thought not. It is wonderful; the mere mention of the sanatorium and a low diet has been sufficient to cure you," said the Remove-master. "It is wonderful—at least, it would be wonderful, if you had really had a cold, Bunter, but I am afraid that you were only pretending."

"Oh, sir!"

"You have played this kind of trick before, Bunter. I think I can remember your affecting to be deaf on one occasion."

"Oh, sir!"

A Splendid Tale of Harry Wharton & Co.
By FRANK RICHARDS.

"Kindly stand out here, Bunter."

"If you please, sir," said Bunter nervously, as Mr. Quelch picked up his pointer—"if you please, I—I have rather a cold, sir. I think perhaps I had better go into the sanatorium, after all, sir."

"It is too late now, Bunter. Your colds come and go so rapidly that I cannot send you into the sanatorium for them."

"Atchoo—atchoo—choo—"

"Stop that ridiculous noise, Bunter, and step out here at once!"

"Oh, sir! Atchoo!"

"Come here!"

Billy Bunter unwillingly went out before the class. He was fairly bowled out, and he had to face his punishment. Mr. Quelch took a grip upon the pointer.

"Hold out your hand, Bunter!"

"M-m-m-my hand, sir?"

"Yes, and at once."

"If you please, sir—"

"Will you obey me?"

"Do you think you ought to—to cane a chap with a—bad cold, sir? It might have a very serious effect upon my constitution, sir. I—Ow! Yes, sir! All right!"

Bunter held out his hand.

He received a cut that made him squirm, and he returned to his place gasping like a newly-landed fish.

Bunter did not sneeze any more that morning.

THE THIRTEENTH CHAPTER.

Bunter the Jackdaw.

ALONZO TODD remained in bed in the Remove dormitory the rest of that day, and some of the fellows paid him visits there. The Duffer of Greyfriars certainly had a bad cold in the head, which was likely to stick to him. Harry Wharton, a little repentant of the sponging he had given the Duffer the previous night, spent a great deal of time with him to cheer him up. Some of the fellows drenched themselves with eau-de-cologne or sanitas before paying their visits. They didn't want to catch that cold, and if the Duffer had a cold, he was just the fellow to give it to everybody else. Some chaps could have colds for private consumption only, as Bob Cherry remarked, but Alonzo Todd was not that kind of a chap. And the Remove didn't want to begin the football season with an epidemic of colds in the Form.

But Alonzo was not allowed to remain out of the sanatorium after that day. As his cold showed no sign of being a slight one, he was shifted off into the school hospital in the evening, and Bunter, upon the whole, was rather glad that he had not succeeded in imposing upon Mr. Quelch. He had a horror of the sanatorium, with its regular spare diet and enforced tidiness and cleanliness.

Bunter had other things to think about, too. His yarns on the subject of the football club at Courtfield had not been believed by anybody in the Remove except Alonzo. But circumstances seemed to bear out the fat junior's statements, curiously enough, and some of the Removites were staggered in their disbelief a few days later.

It was Skinner who first hit on it.

Bunter had had a local Courtfield paper sent to him. The local paper reported the local junior football news, and they mentioned that the Courtfield Rovers were playing Lindrop Athletic on the Saturday afternoon that week. The list of the Rovers team was given, and the captain's name was given as W. Bunter.

Billy Bunter left the paper about, open at that page, and Skinner found it and read it. He carried it to the common-room to communicate his discovery to the other fellows. This was on Friday evening.

There were a good many juniors in the room, including Bunter. Billy blinked in a self-conscious way as Skinner came in with the paper. He knew what was coming. Some of the fellows glanced at Skinner, wondering what he was looking so excited about.

"I say, here's news, you chaps!" said Skinner.

"Hallo, hallo, hallo! What's up?" asked Bob Cherry.

"It's the Courtfield local rag, you know."

"Nothing in it about Greyfriars, surely?" said Harry Wharton.

"About Bunter!"

"Bunter!"

"Yes. Listen to this."

The fellows gathered round with keen interest. Skinner read out the paragraph that had caught his attention.

"On Saturday afternoon the Courtfield Rovers play Lindrop Athletic. The list of the home team is as follows: W. Bunter (captain), Porter, Graham, Spicer, Norton, Mason, Richards, Green, Parker, Robinson, Smith."

The Removites stared blankly.

"What!"

"Bunter!"

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NEXT WEEK: "ONLY ALONZO."

EVERY
TUESDAY,

The "Magnet"
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ONE
PENNY.

"W. Bunter!"

"Impossible!"

"There it is," said Skinner. "Unless Bunter's paid them to put that in at advertisement rates, it's a fact."

"Oh, really, Skinner—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Let's look at it," said Harry Wharton.

Skinner handed him the paper. Harry read the paragraph carefully. There was no doubting that it was there. And that Bunter could have induced the Courtfield publisher to print it was impossible, unless he were really captain of the Rovers. It was incredible; but it was there!

Wharton could only stare at the paragraph.

"Blessed if I can make it out," he said, at last. "I've never heard of the Courtfield Rovers, I know, but they must be an average junior club to have their bizney reported in the Courtfield paper. And if they're an average club, or anywhere near average, what on earth do they want with Bunter?"

"Echo answerfully replies what?" remarked the Nabob of Bhanipur.

"Oh, really, Inky—"

"Hallo, hallo, hallo! Here's Bunter! Let him speak!"

"Come forward, Fatty."

"Speak up, porpoise."

"What does it mean, Bunter?"

"Is it a joke?"

Billy Bunter blinked at the eager and excited juniors. Bunter's imagination was vivid, and he was really too stupid to distinguish clearly between truth and falsehood. By this time he almost believed that he was really the W. Bunter who was captain of the Courtfield Rovers, and who was to play Lindrop Athletic on Saturday afternoon.

"I say, you fellows, it's all right. I told you I had consented to skipper the Rovers, didn't I?"

"Yes, you told us so," said Ogilvy, in a tone that implied that some stronger evidence than Bunter's words was required.

"Oh, really—"

"It's not true, Billy," said Nugent.

"There it is in the paper."

"Yes, but—"

"Seeing's believing, I should think," said Bunter. "I'm sincerely sorry to see you fellows so suspicious. It shows a low nature to be suspicious."

"Well, I think a chap may be pardoned for being suspicious just now," said Wharton. "You know you can't play footer."

"Oh, really—"

"It must be some rotten baby team," said Tom Brown. "Fellows who can't play for toffee, and Bunter has bounced them into it."

"It's not that," said Bob Cherry, shaking his head. "I don't know anything about Courtfield Rovers, but I know Lindrop Athletic, and they wouldn't play a club that wasn't pretty well up to the mark."

"Then I'm blessed if I understand it."

"Same here."

"The sameness is terrific."

"It's perfectly simple," said Bunter. "The fact of the matter is, that you fellows are pretty rotten players. I'm a dab at footer. I've told you so before. You think I can't play, because I'm miles above your form, and you can't see it. That's how the matter really stands."

The juniors gasped.

"Why, you cheeky young sweep," said Harry Wharton.

"Well, that's how the matter really stands," said Billy Bunter. "If you can't see it, I can't help it; it's not my fault."

"I don't believe what it says here."

"Well, you'll see the report of the match in the next number," said Billy Bunter coolly. "You'll see for yourself. The paper is published on Mondays, and in next Monday's number there will be the report."

And Billy Bunter rolled away, swelling with importance. Bulstrode caught him by the shoulder and stopped him.

"Do you mean to say you're really playing to-morrow for Courtfield, Bunter?" he demanded, in amazement and unbelief.

"Of course."

"But it's impossible. You—"

"Keep an eye open for the report, that's all."

And Bunter jerked himself loose and walked away. He left the Removites in a state of the greatest astonishment. True or false, the news had made a sensation in the Form.

"Well, we'll see whether he goes over to Courtfield to-morrow," said Skinner. "That will settle it."

And the juniors agreed that they would see. Meanwhile, Bunter strutted about like a jackdaw in peacock's plumes, as he was.

THE FOURTEENTH CHAPTER.

Bunter Goes.

SEEING is believing, as a rule, but though the fellows of the Greyfriars Remove saw it in plain print that "W. Bunter" was captain of the Courtfield Rovers, they did not believe it. They couldn't. That a club that could play footer at all should take Bunter in as captain was incredible. It was more likely a misprint—a mistake of some sort—anything but what Bunter said it was. And the well-known mendacity of the Owl of the Remove made it impossible to take his word without corroboration. Bunter's yarns, his postal-orders that never came, his titled friends and rich relations who were never seen—were well known and laughed about. The story of the captaincy of Courtfield was soon known all over Greyfriars as "Bunter's latest."

Yet some of the juniors had their doubts; and all were looking forward to Saturday afternoon, to see if Bunter really went.

The true explanation, that a fellow of the same name, who happened to have the same initial, was captain of Courtfield, naturally did not occur to the juniors. Alonzo Todd was the only one who knew that circumstance, and Alonzo Todd was shut up in the school sanatorium with a cold, and could not say what he knew.

Bunter, of course, involved as he was in a maze of falsehoods, was under the necessity of living up to them.

He had to go over to Courtfield that afternoon, or own up that he had been romancing; and like a true romancer, he was determined not to own up to the facts so long as he had a lie left.

After school on Saturday, therefore, he prepared to go to Courtfield. As he could not hope to get a bicycle again, and he did not care to walk the distance, he had to go by train, and the question of the fare arose. The train journey was a somewhat long one, as the line was not direct, and the return fare was two shillings—a considerable sum to a junior.

Bunter tackled Harry Wharton on the subject as the juniors came out of the Form-room after morning lessons.

"I suppose you've had your remittance, Wharton?" he remarked, blinking up at the captain of the Remove.

"Yes," said Harry.

"I haven't," said Bunter. "There's some unaccountable delay on the part of the post-office. This has happened before."

Wharton grinned.

"Yes, I think it has, Bunt."

"I suppose you could lend me a couple of bob for my fare to Courtfield?" said Bunter. "It would be a shame to disappoint the Rovers, for the sake of a couple of paltry shillings, and owing to my disappointment about a postal-order, I'm stony just now."

Harry Wharton laughed.

"So you're still keeping that up?" he said.

"Keeping what up?"

"That Courtfield yarn?"

"Oh, really, Wharton—"

"If you're really going, I'll stand the fare," said Harry.

"It's two bob," said Bunter eagerly. "Hand it over, then."

Wharton shook his head.

"No hurry," he said coolly. "I'm not going to give you two bob to blue in the tuck-shop. I know you'd tell me a yarn about having gone to Courtfield, Billy; but your lies are expensive at two bob each."

"Oh, really—"

"We're playing footer this afternoon, but I shall have time for a walk down to the village after dinner. I'll come with you and buy your ticket."

Billy Bunter's jaw dropped.

He had intended to absent himself from the school for a few hours, and come back with a romance; he was never at the loss for one. But Wharton's suggestions nipped that idea in the bud. If he borrowed the railway fare to Courtfield, he had to go to Courtfield, and that was the long and the short of it.

Wharton was looking at him with a grin. Bunter recovered himself. It was necessary to keep up appearances. After all, the question of the fare would keep any of the juniors from accompanying him, that was one comfort. So long as he really did go to Courtfield, he could keep up his role of jackdaw.

"Oh, very well!" he said, with all the dignity he could muster. "If you can't take my word, Wharton—"

"Hardly."

"Then you can come with me to Friardale. When you see me in the train for Courtfield, I suppose you'll believe me."

"H'm! Perhaps."

After dinner, Wharton having mentioned the matter, a

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"ONLY ALONZO."

good many juniors decided to walk down to Friardale to see Billy Bunter off. Some of them offered to help him pack his things. Bunter groaned inwardly at the prospect of having to carry a bag about all the afternoon, but there was no help for it. The kind youths helped him pack the zebra costume, as they called it, and he left Greyfriars with the bag in his hand, and seven or eight juniors to keep him company.

Some of the fellows were beginning to have their doubts. After all, the thing had appeared in print; and it seemed incredible that anybody would undertake a long journey for the sake of backing up a lie.

Just inside the village the juniors met Marjorie Hazeldene and Miss Clara, the girl chums of Cliff House. They stopped to speak; and Bunter began to swell with importance. Bunter was not a fellow whom girls liked—he was too conceited and too self-important for that, and he had an idea, too, that all girls were fascinated by him, which was quite sufficient to make girls despise him. But Bunter never could see that, and he liked to strut about for feminine admiration.

"Hallo, hallo, hallo!" exclaimed Bob Cherry, raising his cap, and blushing as he saw Marjorie. "You're just in time to see Bloomer II."

Marjorie looked puzzled.

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Nugent. "Steve Bloomer the Second! Here he is!"

"Bunter!"

"Yes, Bunter. Isn't it so, Bunter?"

"I say, you fellows—"

"Bunter is going to play football?" asked Miss Clara, with a mischievous twinkle in her eyes. "I am surprised."

"Oh, really, Miss Clara, I don't see why!" said Bunter.

"If you girls knew anything about footer, you'd know that it was us medium-sized, well-built chaps who played footer best. Long-legged scarecrows like Bob Cherry, for instance, can't stand against us."

"Eh? What's that?" exclaimed Bob.

"I don't mean anything personal. I'm just stating a fact," said Bunter. "I should think that the fact that I have been asked to captain a team shows that I'm in pretty good form as a footballer."

"To captain a team!" said Marjorie.

"Yes. Courtfield Rovers have asked me."

"I have never heard of them," said Marjorie, and she looked at Harry Wharton, as much as to ask if Courtfield Rovers were a real team, or a figment of William George Bunter's lively imagination.

Harry laughed and nodded.

"It's in the Courtfield paper," he said. "Bunter's mentioned as captain. I don't understand it, myself."

"It's sheer jealousy," said Bunter, "but you'll see. When you see my record at Courtfield, you may want me to play for the Remove. I may consider it."

"Thanks!"

"The Rovers have a specially tough match on to-day, you see," Bunter explained to Marjorie. "They asked me to captain them, and I consented. I like to help a lame dog over a stile, you know."

Marjorie looked perplexed. She did not like to doubt anybody's word, even Bunter's; but she found it hard to believe that Billy Bunter had been asked to captain anything but a raid on a tuck-shop.

"We're going to see Bunter off," said Nugent, with a grin, "as he's suddenly developed into a great footballer; he's a chap whom we delight to honour, you know."

"The honourfulness is terrific."

"Well, I hope you will win," said Marjorie.

"Thank you!" said Bunter, with dignity. "I feel pretty certain that we shall pull it off, you know. You might look in the Courtfield paper for the result."

"I will," said Marjorie.

And the girls, very much perplexed, went on their way, and the Greyfriars party walked on to the railway-station. They were in good time for the train, and Harry Wharton having bought the ticket, the whole party went on the platform with Bunter.

The train came in, and Bunter took his seat in the carriage.

The juniors stood round the door waiting for the train to start. They were more puzzled than ever. Bunter was certainly going!

"I say, Wharton, I suppose you don't want me to go over to Courtfield stony broke?" Bunter remarked, leaning out of the window.

"I really don't mind, Bunter."

"Oh, really Wharton! You might advance me a few bob off my postal order—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Blessed if I can see anything to cackle at. I'm expecting a postal order this evening, and I'll settle up as soon as it comes."

A Splendid Tale of Harry Wharton & Co.
By FRANK RICHARDS

"Oh, give the postal order a rest, Billy! Here's another bob."
 "I'll put this down to the account——"
 "Stand back there!"
 The train started.
 "Good-bye, Munchausen, and mind you take all the goals," roared Bob Cherry.
 "Oh, really——"
 "Ha, ha, ha!"
 The train steamed out of the station. Billy Bunter was off to Courtfield, and the Greyfriars juniors, in a puzzled frame of mind, returned to the school to play footer.

THE FIFTEENTH CHAPTER.

Glory for Bunter.

HARRY WHARTON & CO. forgot Bunter while they were on the football-field that afternoon, but when the match was over, they remembered the fat junior. The chums of the Remove changed and went into tea, and Billy Bunter had not returned. They discussed Bunter and tea at the same time.

"He's missing tea!" Nugent remarked. "Nothing could possibly make Bunter miss a meal except——"

"Except another meal," said Harry.

"Ha, ha! Yes. They must be feeding him at Courtfield."

"In that case he's playing."

"The playfulness is terrific."

"I can't understand it," said Harry Wharton, shaking his head. "They must be a rotten team if they'll stand Bunter; yet they're playing the Lindrop Athletic. Well, we'll see when Bunter comes in."

"I say, you fellows——"

"Talk of angels!" grinned Nugent.

"Here he is!"

Billy Bunter came into the study.

He looked extremely tired, and he threw himself down into the armchair like a sack. He blinked at the juniors and gasped for breath. His clothes were dusty, and his fat face damp with perspiration.

"I say, you fellows, give me something to eat. I'm played out."

"Been playing?"

"Of course."

"Did you beat Lindrop?"

"Yes."

"You beat them!" said Harry.

"Yes, hollow."

"How many goals?"

"Three to one."

"And you kicked them all, of course?"

"Two!" said Bunter.

The chums stared at him.

"You kicked two goals against Lindrop Athletic!" said Wharton.

"Oh, you can doubt my word if you like—I'm too tired to punch your head!" said Bunter. "Give me something to eat. Can't you see I'm tired?"

"Well, you look tired," said Nugent. "Here's a sardine—there's one left. You can have it all."

"Oh, really, Nugent——"

"Didn't they give you any grub at Courtfield? I should think they would, after you had kicked two goals for them."

"Oh, they treated me splendidly!" said Bunter. "I'm a regular big gun there, I can tell you. You'll see it all in the paper on Monday."

"Ahem!"

"Well, seeing's believing. I was going to bring some of the fellows home to tea, but I thought you'd be mean about it. If you've got nothing better than this for me——"

"You can have the cake."

"Hand it over! I don't want to move. I'm tired. You can give me some tea, too."

The chums grinned and fed Bunter. He certainly looked fatigued, whether he had been playing football or not.

They did not, as a matter of fact, know what to believe. Bunter's word was very unreliable, yet the evidence seemed to be accumulating in his favour.

Bunter wired into the cake at top speed. The way he tucked in did not look as if he had been richly fed at Courtfield; but then, Bunter was always ready for a meal, whether he had just had one or not.

"Was it a hard game?" asked Nugent.

Bunter nodded.

"Yes, very tough," he said. "You fellows ought to come over and see us play some time, if you really want to know what footer is like. Greyfriars footer is a joke to it. You should have seen me getting the ball down the field against Lindrop! I fairly walked over them!"

"Poor Lindrop!"

"Oh, you can cackle if you like! There are football clubs that can appreciate a good player, and Courtfield is one of them."

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NEXT
WEEK

"ONLY ALONZO."

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ONE
PENNY.

them. You'll see it all in the Courtfield paper. Hallo, what are you doing with that bag, Nugent?"

Nugent had opened the bag, and was shaking out Bunter's football costume.

The fat junior jumped up, dropping his cup of tea with a crash to the floor in his excitement.

But it was too late.

Frank Nugent held up the zebra-like football costume with a shout.

"Look at it! You fat humbug!"

The football things were neatly folded, just as when the juniors had helped Bunter to pack his bag, and there was not a sign on them of having been worn. Bunter could hardly have been through a tough football match in those things without leaving a trace on them.

"Same old spoofer!" said Harry Wharton. "You haven't been in those things to-day, Bunter."

"Oh, really, Wharton——"

"Played in Etons, I suppose?" suggested Nugent sarcastically.

"Oh, really——"

"Now, tell us the truth," said Harry. "What did you go to Courtfield for?"

Bunter took a big bite at the cake.

"I went there to play footer, and I played," he said.

"Porter suggested that I should wear the club's colours, and as he had a set to spare, he lent them to me."

"Oh!"

"I wore the club's things. Porter happens to be my size."

"There never was another chap your size, Bunter, except Falstaff, and that chap at Peckham," said Nugent.

"Oh, really——"

"Well, the esteemed Bunter is never at a lossfulness for an esteemed fib," remarked Hurree Singh.

"Look here, Inky——"

"So you played in Porter's things," said Harry Wharton. "I should like to see Porter! Oh, Billy, why don't you learn to tell the truth?"

"If you fellows doubt my word, this discussion had better close," said Billy Bunter, with a great deal of dignity.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

And the discussion closed. They certainly did doubt his word; but, at the same time, it had to be admitted that Bunter had an explanation ready for anything that might turn up.

When it was known that the Owl of the Remove had returned, there was a general gathering of the fellows round No. 1 Study to hear his tale.

Bunter told it, with variations, his own exploits growing larger every time he narrated them.

At last it appeared as if Lindrop Athletic had been driven before the mighty Bunter like sheep before a sheep-dog—or, rather, a wolf—and the only surprising thing was that Bunter hadn't taken dozens of goals instead of only two. But the fat junior let it be understood that he wanted to let them down lightly.

"My hat!" said Ogilvy. "Talk about Gulliver among the Lilliputians! It was nothing to Bunter among the Athletics!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Well, I was in pretty good form, you see," said Bunter modestly. "I went over there to play, you know, and I played—that's all!"

"Good old Bunter!"

"Champion fibber!"

"Wonderful fairy-tale merchant!"

"Oh, really, you fellows——"

"Blessed if I can make it out," said Hazeldene. "The ass knows we shall look in the Courtfield paper on Monday and see that it's all gas!"

"Well, look!" said Bunter.

"We jolly well shall."

And the juniors waited quite anxiously for the appearance of the Courtfield paper. Skinner even went so far as to write for a copy, enclosing stamps for it to be posted to him immediately on publication.

During the next day or two Bunter swaggered about Greyfriars in a most impressive way. The juniors were frankly puzzled, and they let him swagger.

When the postman brought Skinner his paper, there was a general rush to look at it. Skinner opened it in the common-room, and turned to the local football news, and read it, with a dozen fellows reading over his shoulders.

"COURTFIELD ROVERS v. LINDROP ATHLETIC."

"Played on the Courtfield ground. The Rovers won by three goals to one after a stubbornly contested match. W. Porter scored first for Courtfield, and then N. Morris captured a goal for the visitors. This was in the first half. In the second half the score remained equal till

near the finish, when W. Bunter scored a second goal for the home side, and almost immediately followed it up with another. The Rovers are to be congratulated upon the splendid play of their captain."

The Greyfriars fellows stared at one another.
"My only hat!" said Skinner.
And no one else found anything to say.

THE SIXTEENTH CHAPTER.

The Investigators.

BULSTRODE looked into No. 1 Study the next day after school. Skinner and Hazeldene were with him. Harry Wharton looked up from his work.

"Coming?" said Bulstrode.

"Where?" asked Harry.

"Courtfield."

Billy Bunter was sitting in the armchair, and as Bulstrode pronounced that word, he suddenly sat bolt upright.

"Going to Courtfield?" he exclaimed.

Bulstrode grinned at him.

"Yes, Bunter."

"Oh!"

"Don't you want us to go?" asked Skinner.

"I—I don't care, of course. What are you going for?"

"To look up some of the Courtfield Rover chaps, and ask them things," said Bulstrode. "We're going to get at the facts."

"The—the facts."

"Yes, rather! We believe you've worked the thing somehow with the Courtfield paper, and we're going to look into it," said Bulstrode. "We know jolly well you're a rotten humbug and a blessed spoofer, and we're going to show you up."

Bunter had a sickly look.

"I—I say, you fellows—" he began.

"Are you coming, Wharton?" asked Bulstrode. "One of the chaps from this study ought to come, as a witness. We're going to get at the truth."

"Oh, that's all right!" he said. "We shall believe your report. But as a matter of fact, I don't think Bunter's worth the trouble of a walk over to Courtfield."

"We want to clear the matter up," said Hazeldene.

"Bunter's been swanking about a long time now as a great footballer, but nobody's ever seen him play any decent football here. We're going to show him up."

"Good egg!"

"Oh, really—"

"Unless he likes to own up now," said Bulstrode.

Bunter blinked at him through his big spectacles. It was not likely that he was going to own up. That was the last thing Bunter was likely to do. He was more likely to scheme out fresh falsehoods against the hour of discovery.

"I—I shouldn't go over to Courtfield if I were you," he stammered. "The Rovers mightn't like it, you know."

Bulstrode chuckled.

"You mean you wouldn't like it," he said.

"Oh, not at all! I—I don't mind. But if—if they think you've got anything up against me they might rag you," said Bunter. "I'm a very great favourite at Courtfield, of course."

"We'll see about that."

"Besides, you don't know the chaps, and—"

"No, but I know where to find 'em," said Bulstrode. "I've been told that they practise on the green at Courtfield in the evenings, and we're going to look for them there, and ask them questions."

"You may as well own up, you fat fraud," said Skinner.

"Oh, really, Skinner—"

"You're not coming, then, Wharton?"

"I think not."

"Oh, very well!"

Bulstrode and his companions strode away. Billy Bunter blinked uneasily at the captain of the Remove.

"I—I say, Wharton—" he stammered.

"Well—"

"Well?"

"Do—do—do you think they're really going over to Courtfield?"

"I suppose so."

"But—but—"

Harry Wharton laughed.

"You may as well own up now, Billy."

"Oh, really—"

"Bulstrode's pretty certain to get at the facts."

"I've given you the facts," said Bunter. "Bulstrode doesn't like me, and as for Skinner and Hazeldene, they'd say anything. I hope you won't believe them if they come back with a pack of lies about me?"

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"No, but if they come back with the truth I shall believe them. I'm afraid you're going to be bowled out, Billy."

"Oh, really—"

Billy Bunter rolled out of the study looking very uneasy. The fat junior seldom looked ahead, and he had not foreseen even so simple a thing as a visit of the Greyfriars fellows to Courtfield to ascertain the facts. The Removees all grinned at him when they saw him. They knew of Bulstrode's mission, and they had no doubt that the mystery would be explained when he returned from Courtfield. How it had been managed they did not understand, but that Bunter was a great footballer they regarded as altogether too steep.

Meanwhile Bulstrode & Co. were on their way to Courtfield. It was a pretty long walk for them, but the desire to show the humbug of the Remove up in his true colours was sufficient to make them undertake it.

They reached the village by taking the cut through the wood, and as they came out into the High Street the shouts from the village green told them that the footballers were at practice there.

"Here they are!" exclaimed Bulstrode.

There was the usual evening concourse on the village green, and a number of young footballers were at practice there. They were not playing a match, but merely passing and kicking. A good many fellows were looking on, and Bulstrode and Skinner and Hazeldene joined the crowd.

"We don't know if they're the Rovers," Skinner remarked.

"We'll soon find that out."

And Bulstrode put the question to a lad who was sitting on the railings and looking on. It happened to be Porter, who was not playing. He turned round as he saw a fellow in Etons, looking not very amiable. Billy Bunter's visit to his namesake's house had not prepossessed the Courtfield fellows in favour of Greyfriars.

"Are those chaps the Rovers?" Bulstrode asked.

"Yes," said Porter shortly.

"What's the name of their skipper?"

"Bunter."

"What?"

"Bunter."

The Greyfriars fellows stared at one another.

"Oh!" said Bulstrode. "Bunter—eh? I suppose you know."

Porter sniffed.

"I ought to know, as I belong to the team," he said.

"You're in the team?"

"Yes, I'm a Rover."

"You've played with Bunter?" asked Hazeldene.

"Of course."

"Did he play for you last Saturday?"

"Yes," said Porter, looking surprised at these questions.

"He captained us against Lindrop Athletic. What are you getting at?"

"Well, it beats me," said Hazeldene.

"And me," said Skinner.

"It's all rot!" said Bulstrode. "Bunter can't play for toffee!"

Porter's eyes sparkled.

The Courtfield fellows had had enough insolence from the Owl of the Remove. That these juniors were labouring under a mistake did not occur to Porter, as he knew nothing of the mystification Billy Bunter had caused at Greyfriars.

"Who can't play?" he exclaimed.

"Bunter can't."

"You'd better not say that here," said Porter.

"I'll say it where I like," said Bulstrode, all his combative instincts aroused at the tone Porter used.

Porter slipped off the railings.

"You'll get a thick ear if you do," he said.

"Who'll give it me?"

"I will."

"Then you'd better start!"

"Here, hold on!" exclaimed Hazeldene in alarm. "We didn't come here for a row. Keep the peace, Bulstrode. We don't want a row in the enemy's country."

"What-ho!" said Skinner. "I say, Bulstrode didn't mean anything. He—"

"Rats," said Bulstrode, in his most bullying tone. "I mean that I could wipe up the ground with any chap in Courtfield, and not half try."

"School cad!" exclaimed Porter.

"Village lout!" retorted Bulstrode.

Porter did not speak again. Words failed him. He rushed at Bulstrode, hitting out. Bulstrode caught Porter's knuckles on his nose, and countered with his right, sending the Courtfield footballer crashing into the grass.

There was a shout from the crowd round.

Bulstrode glared at them defiantly. He was hot-headed, and he was a bully, but he had plenty of courage. Hazeldene and Skinner were looking very uneasy.

"What's the row here?" demanded Graham, pushing his way forward.

A Splendid Tale of Harry Wharton & Co.
By FRANK RICHARDS.

"Mind your own bizney," said Bulstrode coolly.
 "You cad——"
 "Do you want some of what your friend's had?"
 "Shut up, Bulstrode!" said Hazeldene, in a hurried whisper, "The chaps have left off playing. We shall have the lot of them on to us."

"Bah!"
 "I'm going, then," said Skinner.
 "Póoh!"
 "He says that Bunter can't play footer," said Porter, scrambling up. "He's a cad from Greyfriars, like the fellow who came over the other day. Kick him out!"

"Down with the school cads!"
 "Kick them out!"
 "What are they doing on our green, anyway?"
 "I'll fight any one of you, if you like," said Bulstrode, with a fierce look round.

"Taken," said Graham quietly.
 He put up his fists and advanced upon Bulstrode.
 In a moment more they were going at it hammer and tongs.

How it would have ended it is impossible to say; for the village crowd, angered by the interruption of their peaceful gathering, were looking very ugly, and some of them made a rush at the schoolboys.

"Hang it!" muttered Hazeldene. "We'd better clear."
 "What-ho!" muttered Skinner.

And they cleared.
 They intended to walk away, but they were rushed and shoved, and they broke into a run. In a minute more they were pelting off at top speed.

Bulstrode felt himself grasped by half a dozen pairs of hands and dragged away from Graham.

"Let him alone!" exclaimed the latter. "Leave him to me!"

"Bosh!" said Porter. "Kick him out!"

"Hurrah! Down with the college cads!"

Bulstrode was whirled away from Graham. He was not struck, but he was pushed and shoved, and pulled and hustled, till he was glad to take to his heels and dash after Skinner and Hazeldene, who were already at a distance.

He joined them breathless and gasping.

The three juniors panted on into the wood. A yell of derision followed them from the Courtfield crowd, and the latter turned back from the pursuit as the Greyfriars juniors ran into the wood.

THE SEVENTEENTH CHAPTER.

The Report.

"BULSTRODE back yet?"

Harry Wharton asked the question as he came down after tea. Tom Brown, to whom he addressed it, shook his head. Tom Brown, the New Zealander, was Bulstrode's study-mate in the Remove, though they did not pull very well together.

"Not yet," said Tom. "It's a good step to Courtfield."

There was a loud shout from the Close.

"Here they come."

"Hallo! Is that Bulstrode, I wonder?"

"Something's up," said Tom.

They hurried out together to see what it was. In the gathering dusk of the Close, groups of juniors were staring at three figures that came in at the gates, and a ripple of merriment ran from one end of the quad. to the other.

"It's Bulstrode."

"They've been getting into a scrap at Courtfield."

"Hallo, Bunter! Look what your friends have done to Bulstrode!"

Billy Bunter blinked uneasily at the three, through his big spectacles. They were in a torn and dishevelled state indeed. They had tidied themselves as much as possible in the wood, after their escape from Courtfield, but they could not mend torn collars and ripped jackets. They looked very dishevelled indeed, and tired and breathless, and decidedly ill-tempered.

"Great Scott!" exclaimed Harry Wharton. "What on earth have you chaps been doing?"

Hazeldene sat down on the steps with a gasp.

"I'm about done," he said.

"Did you get into a row at Courtfield?"

"Bulstrode did."

"We all did," said Bulstrode, with a scowl. "It was Bunter's fault, of course."

"Oh, really, Bulstrode——"

"You—you fat worm! You warned them that we were coming, I suppose, and they were ready for us," said Bulstrode savagely, and he made a rush at Billy Bunter.

The Owl of the Remove skipped behind Harry Wharton.

"Stop him!" he gasped.

Wharton pushed Bulstrode back.

"Hold on!" he exclaimed. "You're off the track there—Bunter certainly didn't want you to go to Courtfield."

"Of course, I didn't," said Bunter.

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"The fat fraud——"

"Have you proved that he's a fraud?"

"Well, no, but——"

"It seems genuine, from what I can make out," said Hazeldene. "Blessed if I can understand the business from beginning to end."

"Tell us what happened, then?" exclaimed a dozen voices.

"Yes, let's have the yarn," said Bob Cherry.

"Well, the Rovers were practising when he got there, and we asked a chap named Porter——"

"That name was in the newspaper report," Nugent remarked.

"Yes, and he said he was a member of the Rovers team. He got his rag out because Bulstrode said that Bunter couldn't play footer."

"Oh, was that it?"

"Yes. I can't catch on to it, but Bunter certainly seems to be thought a lot of there, and they hustled us because Bulstrode ran him down."

"Blessed if I understand!"

"The blessedness is terrific!"

Billy Bunter blinked at them through his spectacles. His fat face was triumphant now. The visit to Courtfield, which had caused him so much fear and trembling, had turned out very fortunately for him.

The fact that the Rovers captain was his namesake had not been brought to light, and all that had passed corroborated his claim.

He swelled with importance again now.

"Well, I warned you how it would be!" he exclaimed.

"Wharton will bear witness that I said the Courtfield chaps would be ratty if Bulstrode went there saying things against me. They admire me over there."

"Queer taste," growled Frank Nugent.

"Oh, really, Nugent——"

"Then it seems to be established that Bunter had been telling the truth all along, and he has really captained Courtfield Rovers!" exclaimed Ogilvy.

"So it seems."

"The Courtfield fellows themselves said so?"

"Yes."

"Well, that ought to settle it."

"I say, you fellows, I think you might take my word. Anyway, now that the whole Courtfield team have backed me up——"

"Rats!"

"Do you mean to say you don't believe me now, Bob Cherry?"

"Blessed if I know what to believe!"

"Oh, it's a miracle, that's what it is," said Hazeldene.

"I don't see how we can doubt it any longer, when we've got evidence straight from the horse's mouth. Bunter has told the truth for once in his life it's remarkable, but true."

"Oh, really, Hazel——"

"How did you come to do it, Bunter?" asked Tom Brown, with great interest.

"Oh, I've practised——"

"You've never practised telling the truth, to my knowledge."

"Oh, really, Brown, I thought you were asking me how I came to play——"

"I was asking you how you came to tell the truth? Were you in a trance at the time? Or is it possible that you've been taking to drink?"

"Oh, it's a giddy miracle!" said Russell.

"Yes, rather!"

"The ratherfulness is terrific!"

"Well, I suppose that wonders will never cease," Nugent remarked. "It's wonderful for Bunter to have played a decent game of footer—but to discover that he's been telling the truth—well, that takes the cake!"

"Oh, really, Nugent——"

"It's wonderful!" said Bob Cherry. "Wonderful! Marvellous! Look here, Bunter, now you've done it once, you ought to try again. It will come easier the second time, too. I should advise you——"

But Billy Bunter snorted and stalked away, without waiting for Bob Cherry's advice.

THE EIGHTEENTH CHAPTER.

A Warning for Bunter.

THERE seemed to be no further doubt about it. Billy Bunter was a footballer.

There was no doubting further, most of the fellows said. They hadn't believed Bunter. They had doubted cold print. But when the Courtfield Rovers themselves bore witness, and showed a determination to resent any aspersion cast upon Bunter, how was it possible to doubt any further?

Even Harry Wharton wavered in his doubt.

Most of the Remove came to the conclusion that, wonderful as it was, it was true; and that there was more in William George Bunter than met the eye.

It was difficult to reconcile his absurd displays at Greyfriars with his reported performances at Courtfield. But Bunter said that he really hadn't done his best at Greyfriars, owing to discouragement resulting from jealousy on the part of others; and fellows who did not like the Remove football captain were inclined to take Billy Bunter's side there.

"After all, Bunter may be a player," said Bulstrode, changing sides with great facility, for the purpose of scoring against Harry Wharton. "It's quite possible that he's been kept back because some chaps didn't want to be put in the shade. Anyway, he's proved that he can play now, and I think he ought to be given a chance in the Form eleven."

To which Wharton's reply was brief but expressive, being contained in the classic monosyllable:

"Rats!"

"Well, that's what I think," said Bulstrode defiantly. "I think every chap ought to have a chance. From what we hear, Bunter's a good deal better than some chaps who are playing for the Form."

"More rats!"

"Then you're not going to give him a chance, Wharton?"

"Yes, if he shows here what he can do—where we can see him," said Harry drily. "I don't care a rap what he's done or hasn't done at Courtfield. Let him put up a decent show here, and we'll see."

"Well, you'll make some of us think that what Bunter says is quite correct, and there's personal jealousy in the matter, that's all."

Harry Wharton laughed.

"You can think what you like, Bulstrode."

And he said no more on the matter.

"Oh, very well," Billy Bunter said to a crowd of Removites, when Bulstrode reported this to him, "I refuse to play for Greyfriars, that's all! If the Remove wants one of its best players to play for an outside club, all serene; I don't mind. But if this Form knew what was what, there would be a new election, and I should be chosen for football captain!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Nugent.

Bunter left most of the juniors laughing as he rolled indignantly away. Alonzo Todd poked him in the ribs, and Bunter stopped and gasped. Todd was fresh from the sanatorium, and Bunter's new fame was a surprise to him. Todd did not quite understand it.

"This is very surprising news, Bunter," he said.

"Oh, is it?" growled Bunter. "You needn't puncture my ribs!"

"I heard that you are captain of Courtfield Rovers."

"Well, suppose I am?"

"I suppose you could give me a place in the team? Wharton does not want me to play for the Remove, and Temple has declined my services for the Upper Fourth, for some reason. I should be glad to play for you—either as centre goalkeeper or right-back forward. I think those terms are correct?"

Bunter grunted.

"You're no good, Todd."

"My dear Bunter—"

"Better drop the subject. I can't do anything for you."

"But your relation—"

"Eh?"

"I suppose it was through your relation that you got into the team—the chap the same name as yourself?" said Todd innocently.

Bunter gasped. He was cunning in his fat, slow way, but his stupidity was as great as his cunning. While Todd was in the sanatorium, Bunter had left him out of his calculations entirely; and now that he reappeared among the Greyfriars fellows, it struck the fat junior with a sudden shock as he realised that Alonzo knew enough to give him away from end to end.

He simply gasped as this suddenly presented itself to his mind.

"Here, shut up!" he exclaimed hastily.

Alonzo looked at him in surprise.

"What is the matter?" he asked.

"Come over here," said Bunter. "I don't want the fellows to hear you. Shut up about that chap the same name as myself."

"Why?"

"Because—because"—Bunter cudgelled his brains for a reason—"because—because he's a relation of mine, you see."

"But, surely—"

"He—he's left Courtfield now," stammered Bunter.

"Left Courtfield?"

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"Yes. He—he robbed his employer, and he's sloped!" said Bunter, astonishing himself by the fertility of his imagination. "You see, he—he had been gambling, and he robbed his employer of a hundred pounds!"

"Dear me!"

"It's an awful disgrace to the family," said Bunter, going on more easily, now that he had once started. "Of course, I'm trying to keep it dark."

"Naturally, my dear fellow," said Todd sympathetically. "You can rely upon my discretion. How very unfortunate!"

"Yes, isn't it? And the Courtfield fellows asked me to become skipper in his place. I couldn't very well refuse. I'm not saying anything about my cousin—"

"Your cousin?"

"Yes; he's my cousin. I'm not saying anything about him here, you see, and—and I'd be obliged if you never mentioned him."

"Certainly, Bunter. I will be very careful. Bunter"—

Alonzo dropped his hand solemnly on Bunter's shoulder—"Bunter, my Uncle Benjamin always told me that any misfortune of this sort should be a warning to us. I trust, Bunter, that you will let this happening—this terrible happening—be a warning to you!"

"Eh?"

"Take warning of it, my young friend," said Alonzo, releasing Bunter's shoulder, and solemnly wagging his forefinger at him. "Take warning! If you are inclined to slip into falsehood or dishonesty—"

"Oh, shut up!"

"If you are inclined to begin the primrose path of dalliance, even by the whitest of white lies—"

"Chuck it!"

"If the temptation comes upon you to deceive, either for the purpose of profit or of vain glory, take—"

"Get out!"

"Take warning in time."

"Oh, really, Todd—"

"And I have noticed," pursued Alonzo, in his best Uncle Benjamin manner—"I have noticed, Bunter, that you are of a somewhat dishonest nature."

"What?"

"You do not mind my mentioning it?" said Todd anxiously. "I do not mean to offend, but my Uncle Benjamin always says one should serve one's friends, even at the cost of a temporary injury to their self-love. I have noticed that you have dishonest and untruthful tendencies, Bunter."

"You—you ass—"

"You are very careless in money matters—generally other people's money—and you are careless in your statements. You are boastful; and I have observed you exaggerate most unscrupulously for the sake of bragging. This is very wrong, Bunter."

Bunter stared at him speechlessly.

"You don't mind my mentioning it, of course?" said Alonzo. "My only desire is to be useful. My Uncle Benjamin—"

"Look here, Todd—"

"Always told me to be useful and obliging, especially to those who needed it; and I am sure you need it in this case, Bunter. You are in danger of following in the footsteps of this unfortunate relation of yours. Bunter, Bunter, take warning!"

"You chump!"

"Take warning!" Alonzo laid his hand on Bunter's shoulder again. "Dear friend, take warning by this. You are naturally dishonest and untruthful, and—"

Billy Bunter gave him one furious blink, and hit out.

The blow was quite unexpected. It caught the Duffer of Greyfriars on the chest, and he sat down with a heavy bump that knocked all the wind out of his body.

"Oh, dear!" gasped Alonzo.

Billy Bunter rolled away. The Duffer of Greyfriars slowly scrambled to his feet. He was in a state of great astonishment.

"Oh, dear!" he murmured. "I wonder why Bunter did that?"

And Alonzo shook his head and gave it up.

THE NINETEENTH CHAPTER.

Bunter's Kick-Off.

BILLY BUNTER had never been what could be called modest or unassuming. He had always had an excellent opinion of himself, and had never been slow to show it. But since the report from Courtfield that seemed to confirm his claims to be considered as a great footballer, the fat junior had developed a surprising amount of "swank," which astonished those who knew him well.

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A new strut had come into his walk, and he carried his nose high in the air. Nature had elevated it considerably, but Billy elevated it still more; and he cultivated a contemptuous sniff for special use when football was being discussed. His sniff implied that fellows could talk football as long as they liked, but if they really wanted to know anything about the game they had better ask him.

He took to watching footer, and sniffing while he watched, and confiding to everybody that Greyfriars play wasn't much, anyway. He even looked on at the Sixth-Form fellows playing, and sniffed. He said that it was all very well for the fellows to brag about old Wingate, but he, Bunter, knew something about football. In fact, he grew so swankish and so insufferable that the Remove found him harder to stand than ever before.

But Nemesis was lying in wait for the boaster of the Remove.

It was Bunter's little failing that he would tell the most enormous falsehoods without reflecting that the slightest incident might tumble over his mountain of fabrication. A word from Alonzo would have been sufficient; but Alonzo, who believed Bunter's absurd explanation, as he believed everything that was said to him, kept his promise about not mentioning the other Bunter.

Billy considered himself secure. The only trouble was that he was under the necessity of making the journey to Courtfield every Saturday afternoon, in order to keep up the deception. But the deception was not to last so long as the Owl of the Remove anticipated, and he was never under the necessity of making that journey again, as it turned out.

Bulstrode, for the sake of annoying Harry Wharton more than for any other reason, held that Bunter ought to be played in the Remove eleven. There was a match on for the Saturday of that week, and Bulstrode tried to raise feeling in the Form on the subject.

Billy Bunter, of course, took a lofty tone. Wharton could play him if he liked, and he would get uncounted goals for Greyfriars; but if Wharton chose to leave him out—well, the loss would be the Remove's, not Bunter's.

"I think I ought to kick off," Bunter remarked. "I'm willing to play centre-forward, and you can find some other place for yourself, Wharton. I—"

It was Saturday when Bunter made that remark, and Wharton, who had his business as footer captain to think about, cut him short.

"Oh, shut up, Billy!" he exclaimed.

"I'm not going to shut up," said Bunter, blinking round. "I'm putting the thing straight to you, from a sense of duty to the Remove. If I kick off for Greyfriars to-day, we shall win. If you fellows are left alone, I know what sort of a muck you'll make of the match!"

"Hear, hear!" said Bulstrode.

"Faith, and there's somethin' in it, Wharton," said Micky Desmond. "If Bunter can play so well for Courtfield, why can't he play for Greyfriars?"

"I'm sure I'm willing," said Bunter. "I'll send a telegram to Courtfield, to say I can't come, if Wharton wants me this afternoon."

Wharton smiled sarcastically.

"It would be a pity to disappoint the Rovers," he remarked. "We'll manage without you, Billy."

"Oh, really, Wharton—"

"Look here, you'll jolly well get a kick-off if you don't shut up!" said Harry. "I'll kick you off the ground. I don't care what we hear from Courtfield. I don't believe a word of it, and you can't play footer for toffee!"

"Oh, really—"

Billy Bunter broke off suddenly.

A lad had entered the gateway, and was walking up towards the School House, outside which the juniors were standing.

No one noticed him particularly till he was close at hand, and then Billy Bunter and Alonzo Todd recognised him simultaneously.

It was Walter Bunter, the captain of Courtfield Rovers. Alonzo stared at him in amazement, astonished that a fellow who had robbed his employers of a hundred pounds should dare to walk up so boldly and openly.

Bunter stared, too, and his jaw dropped. In his wildest anticipations he had never supposed that Walter Bunter would come to Greyfriars. What on earth did he want there? The fat junior stared at him as if fascinated.

Wharton followed Bunter's glance, and gave the stranger an inquiring look.

The Courtfield fellow coloured a little under the gaze of many eyes.

"Hallo, hallo, hallo!" said Bob Cherry.

"Dear me!" said Alonzo.

"I came over to see you chaps," said the Courtfield lad quietly. "Some of you came to Courtfield the other day, and were hustled. I'm sorry for it, though I must say it was only what you might have expected, coming to a place and running a chap down behind his back, for that's what it amounted to."

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"Look here—" began Bulstrode blusteringly.

"Well, I'm sorry it happened," said the Courtfield captain. "I came over to say that, and to say something else. That's the second time we've had a visit from Greyfriars, and the first was more cheeky than the second. I want to say that if you feel inclined to come over and play footer, we'll give you as much as you want. We've had a lot of blessed cheek from you, and we'd like to see if Greyfriars produces anything beside gas."

Harry Wharton coloured.

"I don't see what we've done to call for that," he said. "Bulstrode came over to ask some questions the other day, and as for Bunter—"

"Bunter!"

"I say, Wharton," began Billy hurriedly, "better kick this chap out. He—"

"Oh, there he is!" said Walter. "That's the specimen who came over and offered to join our club, and told us we ought to be pleased to have him, because it was so nice for a working lads' club to have a gentleman in it! My word!"

"Did the cad say that?" asked Nugent.

"Oh, really, Nugent—"

"Yes, and we gave him the order of the boot."

"Then—then— My hat! He hasn't joined you?" shouted Bob Cherry.

"Joined us? Not much!"

"Then—then—"

"I—I say, you fellows," stammered Billy Bunter, "there's a mistake! This chap isn't reliable! He's—he's fibbing, you know—"

"What's that?" exclaimed Walter fiercely. And Billy dodged behind Wharton.

But Alonzo Todd threw himself into the breach, as it were.

"You must not rely upon the statements of that person," he said, with a wave of the hand towards Walter. "He is, unfortunately, a criminal. I think I am justified in speaking out now, Bunter, for your sake. That youth has robbed his employers of a hundred pounds, and—"

"What?" yelled Walter.

"He is Bunter's cousin, and Bunter was keeping it dark to save disgracing the family—"

"Bunter's cousin?"

"Yes. His is the same name as Bunter, you know."

"Oh, really—" murmured Billy feebly.

A light broke on Harry Wharton. He clapped his hand on the Courtfield captain's shoulder in his excitement.

"Is your name Bunter?" he shouted.

"Yes."

"W. Bunter?"

"Yes—Walter Bunter. What about it?"

"Are you captain of Courtfield Rovers?"

"Of course!"

"My hat!" shouted Wharton. "We've got to the truth at last! This chap is the W. Bunter who was in the paper. Billy knew his name, and—"

"The fraud!"

"The cheat!"

"The rascal!"

"The fraudfulness is terrific!"

The Remove understood at last. The truth was dawning even upon Alonzo Todd.

"I—I say!" stammered Alonzo. "Isn't he really Bunter's cousin? I—"

"Of course I'm not!" said Walter angrily. "Do you think I could be related to that worm? So he told you I had robbed my employers, did he?"

"I—I—I was only joking!" feebly gasped Billy Bunter. "I—I didn't expect Todd to believe it. He's such a duffer, you know."

"My dear Bunter! My Uncle Benjamin says—"

"So you're bowled out, Billy!" said Harry Wharton grimly. "You never joined Courtfield Rovers at all, and you've never played for them."

"Did he say he had?" exclaimed Walter.

"He said he was your skipper!"

"My hat!"

Bunter made a strategic movement to the rear, but Bob Cherry grasped him and whirled him back.

"No, you don't!" he remarked.

"Oh, really, Cherry—"

"I say, I'm sorry that toad came over to you and cheeked you," said Wharton to the Courtfield captain. "You understand now how it was that Bulstrode gave offence—he was talking about this Bunter, not about you."

"Yes; and I'm sorry."

"It's all right," said Bulstrode. "It's the fault of that rotten fraud! My hat! He ought to be ragged baldheaded for this!"

"Oh, really, Bulstrode! I—I— It was only a joke!"

"Joke!" said Harry Wharton sternly. "It was a string of

rotten, mean lies from beginning to end! But it's no good expecting you to be ashamed of yourself!" He turned to Walter Bunter. "Look here, we'll play your team with pleasure if we can fix up a date, and I've no doubt we can. As for what this toad did and said, we're sorry for it, and we'll make him sorry, too!"

Walter laughed.

"That's all right," he said. "I must be off—we're playing this afternoon. Good-bye!"

Wharton shook hands with him. As the Courtfield captain left, Billy Bunter made another attempt to squirm away, but the juniors surrounded him in a grim ring. There was no escape for the Munchausen of the Remove.

Wharton shook him by the shoulder.

"Now, then, Bunter—"

"Oh, really, Wharton, I—I wish you wouldn't shake me like that! You might make my glasses fall off, and if they get broken you'll have to pay for them—"

"Look here, Bunter! You wanted a kick-off to-day, didn't you?" said Harry Wharton grimly. "Well, you're going to get one! Form up in two rows, you fellows, and Bunter shall run the gauntlet—and every fellow is to get in at least one kick. That's the kind of kick-off Bunter deserves."

There was a roar of approval.

"Good!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"The goodfulness is terrific!"

"I—I say, you fellows! I—I—"

But Bunter was not listened to. The double row of juniors waited for him. Bob Cherry helped Bunter to start, using his football boots with great effect. The fat junior ran desperately.

He yelled at every step. The fellows kicked away cheerfully, and though some of them, in their haste, kicked one another, Billy Bunter got the greater number of the kicks.

Gasping and grunting and groaning, the fat junior reached the end of the line, but he did not stop. He ran on at top speed, still yelling, and disappeared round a corner of the House. A roar of laughter followed him.

And for a long time after that the Greyfriars fellows chuckled when they thought of Billy Bunter's Kick-Off.

THE END.

(Another splendid, long, complete school tale of Harry Wharton & Co. next Tuesday, entitled: "Only Alonzo," by Frank Richards. Please order your copy of THE MAGNET LIBRARY in advance. Price One Penny.)



STANLEY DARE

The Boy Detective

INTRODUCTION.

Stanley Dare, the Boy Detective, is engaged by a nameless client to look after the safety of a girl named Violet Castleton, who is going on a pleasure voyage on board the s.s. Princess Ida. Several deaths have occurred on board during recent voyages of this vessel, and Dare's client suspects foul play. The young detective visits the City offices of the ship-owners, Messrs. Vardon, Traill & Co., to apply for a stewardship. He is shown into a waiting-room, where he observes a pair of eyes watching him through two slits in the wall. As they meet his, the eyes disappear, and the next minute the door opens.

(Now go on with the Story.)

The Owners of the Princess Ida.

A man entered whom Dare at once decided must be Mr. Abrahams, so pronounced were his Jewish features. He glanced at the young detective with a cunning, inquisitive look, and demanded his business.

"I wish to see Mr. Abrahams," he said, "to make application to him for the berth of an under-steward on board the Princess Ida."

"I am Mr. Abrahams," was the reply. "There are two vacancies in the stewards' department. Have you any testimonials?"

The young detective had taken care to come provided. There are places near the docks and shipping-offices where genuine discharges and testimonials can be purchased for moderate sums. Dare was fortunate in picking up a couple which bore the name Stanley. He meant to ship under his first name only. The Jew glanced through them, found them satisfactory, and told Dare that he might consider himself engaged.

"Join the ship to-morrow," he said, "and report yourself to the purser. I will telephone through to the docksh and give your name, so there'll be no mistake. That will do. You can go now."

He turned round and walked out of the office ahead of Dare. As he did so he drew a handkerchief out of a side pocket, and blew his nose loudly. A card fluttered to the floor.

Dare stooped and picked it up, intending to return it to Abrahams, but after he had glanced at it he decided not to do so.

It was an ordinary visiting-card, but instead of a name a black triangle was printed on it. Across it was written, in red ink, "To introduce Mr. Saul Bieroe. Special."

Saul Bieroe was Violet Castleton's uncle, and the man against whom the nameless client had made such grave charges. Why was such a strange-looking card of introduction used, and why was the word "Special" added?

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Dare made up his mind to keep the card, as it might be useful—might even form a valuable clue in the elucidation of the mysterious events which seemed to take place on board the Princess Ida.

Abrahams, giving no second thought to so unimportant a person as an under-steward, shuffled into the private office, while Dare regained the street.

"Not to start duty until to-morrow," he said to himself. "Well, that will be quite soon enough, but I will have a look over the ship this evening—not as a member of the crew, but as an intending passenger."

He carried out his resolve, taking care to disguise himself effectually to avoid all risk of after recognition. It was seven o'clock in the evening when he reached D Quay of the Victoria Docks, where the Princess Ida was moored.

On stating that he was a possible passenger, who wished to walk round the ship's decks to have a look at her, the quartermaster on duty at the gangway allowed him on board. A "tip" of half-a-crown stopped any objection he may have raised—that it was not the proper hour for viewing the ship.

She was certainly a splendid vessel, and was quite worthy the description of "Floating Palace" bestowed upon her in the advertisements. Dare loved ships, and very soon the pure delight of being on her decks put the fact temporarily from his mind that he was down there for quite another purpose than admiring naval architecture.

The sound of voices in one of the deck cabins brought him back to a recollection of his detective work. He did not wish to play the eavesdropper, but he could not help overhearing a few words of conversation.

"There is only one 'special' this voyage," a man with a rich, musical voice was saying, "so I can choose my own time. Between Malta and Beyrout would perhaps be best. We have four clear days at sea, then."

"Of course, I leave that matter in your hands," was the

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reply. "Don't act hastily, for we can't afford to take unnecessary risks."

"Did you get a good premium from Bierce?" asked the first speaker.

Dare did not catch the reply, and as the cabin door opened the next moment, he slipped back out of sight behind a ventilator.

Two men emerged from the cabin—one tall and sallow-complexioned, the other of medium height, and inclined to be stout. Dare recognised the tall man at once. He was a well-known figure in London society, reputed to be immensely rich, and, so far as his antecedents were concerned, something of a mystery. His name was Barton Merivale. The fact that he should be on board the *Princess Ida*, and talking to a man who the young detective afterwards found out was the ship's doctor, as though he was one of the owners of the vessel, was in itself sufficiently surprising; but it was nothing to the shock of surprise which Dare received from a different cause.

Merivale's eyes were the eyes of the unseen man who had been watching him in the Fenchurch Street office. Their expression struck him with a queer chill, it was so cold and cruel.

The two men went on shore together, and Dare followed, as soon as they had turned the corner of a goods shed.

What connection had this society man, Merivale, with the shipping firm of Vardon, Traill & Co.? And what was the meaning of the expressions, "There is only one special this voyage," and "Did you get a good premium from Bierce?"

Dare remembered that the card of introduction which he had picked up bore the word "special" on it. But, then, Bierce was not going on the voyage. Already the young detective began to believe that his nameless client's suspicions would fall far short of the terrible truth, if ever the truth became known.

A Startling Discovery—At Algiers—Two on the Trail—Caught.

The *Princess Ida* had been a week away from England, two days of which had been spent at Lisbon to allow passengers an opportunity of visiting the Portuguese capital. Now she was steaming through the Straits of Gibraltar, en route to Algiers, which was her next port of call.

The afternoon was hot, for there was scarcely a breath of air stirring, and the majority of the passengers were lounging about on the upper decks. There had been a strong demand for lemon-squash and other iced drinks, while those of the male portion of the passengers who preferred stronger liquid refreshment were quenching their thirsts with brandy-and-soda, whisky-and-apollinaris, or whatever suited their particular tastes and fancies.

The deck stewards had been having a busy time, but there presently came a period when the passengers seemed to have settled down for the quiet enjoyment of the scene. The almost calm sea sparkling in the sunlight; the grim outline of Gibraltar, the great rock being bathed in a shimmering haze; and on the opposite side of the strait the African coast grey and cloudlike in the distance.

Stanley Dare had been one of the deck stewards for that afternoon, and, having no passengers to attend to for the time being, he took his station close against one of the boats, which was swung inboard and resting on chocks, and fixed his eyes on the only passenger who had any interest for him.

This was Violet Castleton, the young girl whom he had been commissioned by his nameless client to watch over, and whose life was supposed to be in peril on board this gay, floating hotel, which to all seeming was purely and simply a pleasure craft where everybody devoted himself or herself to extracting as much enjoyment from life as possible during the voyage.

Violet Castleton was as perfect a specimen of young English girlhood as could possibly be met with—at least, that was the decided opinion of Stanley Dare, and it was an opinion that more than one man on board shared with him.

But he noticed, with some concern, and also with a slight feeling of dread, that the girl was much paler than when she joined the ship in London. And at times he fancied that her eyes shone with an unnatural brightness, such as is the case in some instances with persons who are in the habit of taking a stimulating drug.

That this fresh, young English girl was a victim of the nerve-shattering drug habit was not for a moment to be supposed; but if the nameless client's suspicions were well-founded, there was the dread possibility that a poisonous drug was being secretly administered to her in small doses, with the ultimate object of killing her.

But who could be doing this terrible thing? By whose hand was this dastardly scheme being carried out? The young detective found it difficult to fix his suspicions on any one of the ship's officers. The chief, second, and third officers were all dismissed from his thoughts as certainly not being concerned in the matter, and the same with the engineers.

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There remained, then, the captain, the doctor, and the purser, as being the three men on board the ship who were thrown more among the passengers than any others.

After turning the matter over in his mind, he struck the captain from the list. There remained the doctor and purser—the former, pleasant-mannered, genial, and rather a favourite with the passengers, because he was always so ready to assist in getting up entertainments to while away the evenings at sea; the latter, quiet and reserved, but an excellent officer.

"Could it be possible," Stanley Dare asked himself, "that either of these officers was, to all intents and purposes, a would-be murderer?"

The idea seemed preposterous. Yet he could not forget the few words of conversation which he had heard between Barton Merivale (the well-known society man) and Dr. Vallery (the ship's doctor), in the latter's cabin just before the *Princess Ida* sailed.

His musings were cut short by the voice of the very man who was at that moment in his mind. The doctor was standing at the door of his surgery, which adjoined his sleeping-berth, and was calling for a deck steward. Dare turned round and approached him.

"Ah, you will do, Stanley!" he said, in his rich, musical voice. "I wish you to take this glass of wine to Miss Castleton. She has been looking rather pale and out of sorts lately, and she wants a glass of good wine occasionally to pull her together. This is some really good stuff that I bought at Lisbon."

He placed a glassfull of a dark-coloured liquid that had the appearance of port wine on the salver which Dare held out. As he did so, he fixed his eyes with rather a peculiar look on the young detective. It was a sort of cold, measuring glance, as though he was trying to fathom how far the assistant steward—for, of course, he only knew him in that capacity—could be trusted, in case an emergency arose when a trustworthy, silent, and, perhaps, unscrupulous man would be of the greatest service.

"Very good, sir!" replied Dare, in the usual stolid, uninterested manner in which the average steward receives an order.

"Give Miss Castleton my compliments," pursued Dr. Vallery, "and tell her to be sure and drink the wine at once."

The young detective started on his errand, but he had, during the few minutes that the doctor was speaking to him, made up his mind to a plan of action.

Violet Castleton was seated in a long cane chair at the after-end of the deck, and as Dare made his way towards her with the glass of wine, he suddenly tripped and fell, dropping the tray on the deck with a tremendous clatter, and breaking the glass.

Regaining his feet, he made haste to wipe up the spilled wine with the napkin which he had over his arm. He also collected the fragments of the glass, which had been broken in three pieces. Two of these pieces he flung overboard, but the other—which was the bottom part of the glass, and contained still about a teaspoonful of wine—he secreted in his hand under the tray, much in the same way that a conjurer "palms" an article which he wishes to cause to vanish from the sight of the audience.

After this he hurried down the companion-stairs, as though to procure another glass, but during the time that he was down below he contrived to secrete the bottom part of the broken wine-glass, with the dregs of wine still in it, in his bunk.

Then he returned to the doctor's cabin, and was beginning to apologise for the accident, when the medical officer cut him short.

"You are a clumsy young fool!" he exclaimed, and there was a menacing gleam in his eyes which Dare had never seen there before. "You will have to be more careful in future, or you will be sent home from one of our ports of call."

"It was an accident, sir," protested Dare, assuming a submissive and contrite air, which went very much against his grain.

"Well, see to it that no more 'accidents' occur," pursued Dr. Vallery. "I will take the wine to the young lady myself."

Dare moved away, and watched the doctor a couple of minutes later making himself agreeable to Violet Castleton as she sipped the wine which he had taken her. All traces of his recent angry outburst had disappeared, and he was once more the genial, pleasant-mannered officer, whose thoughts were always for the welfare of the passengers.

"You are a hypocrite, my friend," Stanley Dare said to himself. "And that sudden outburst of anger just now, and the look of menace in your eyes, were far in excess of what the occasion warranted—if it was wine only in the glass. I wonder what you would think if you knew I dropped the glass on purpose? That trick which I practised so often of

dropping a glass and breaking it, and yet managing to retain a small portion of the liquid in the hollow of one of the parts, has come in useful at last. And now I may as well seize the opportunity of analysing those dregs of the wine, as it is my turn for an hour's spell of rest."

But as he was going down below, Dr. Vallery, who had left Violet Castleton's side, stopped him with a question.

"Are you sure you picked up all the broken pieces of that wineglass?" he said. "It is dangerous to let broken glass lie about on the deck, no matter how small the fragments may be."

"I picked them all up, sir," replied Dare. "You saw me throw them overboard."

"All right, that will do."

Dare descended the companion-ladder, and he was aware that he was being followed by the questioning and keenly-scrutinising glance of Dr. Vallery.

The young detective had brought with him what may be described as a "portable laboratory," which contained all things necessary for any purpose for which he would be likely to require it. The result of his analysis of the dregs of the wine revealed the startling fact that it contained traces of curarine, a deadly poison, obtained from a South American plant.

There was probably not more than one single drop in the whole glass of wine; but if the same amount was taken into the system every day for a fortnight, it would be sufficient to cause death.

Again some words of the conversation which he had overheard between the doctor and Barton Merivale flashed into his mind.

"There is only one 'special' on board this voyage. I can choose my own time. Between Malta and Beyrout would perhaps be the best. We have four clear days at sea then."

The best for what—a sea funeral? By that time the poison would have done its work, and the ship's doctor would be the person to give the death certificate.

"The very man who is, I am positive, poisoning her by slow degrees," thought Dare. "With what fiendish ingenuity the whole plot is worked out! And what a terrible power an unscrupulous ship's doctor has in his hands! I must take an opportunity of conveying a warning to Miss Castleton, but beyond that I can do nothing at present."

The opportunity did not come until about half-past ten that night, when Violet Castleton was on the point of quitting the deck to go to her berth.

"Miss Castleton," said Dare, in a low voice, "may I have a few words with you? It is a matter of the utmost importance. I can assure you—a matter, I may say, of life and death."

The girl paused, and stared at the young fellow whom she supposed to be a steward in astonishment.

"A matter of life and death!" she echoed. "You speak strangely. What is it you wish to say to me?"

"I desire to warn you that your life is in danger, and—"

"Are you in your right senses?" interrupted the girl, with a touch of anger in her tone.

"There is no one on board more sane than I am at the present moment," replied Dare. "I know exactly what I am talking about, Miss Castleton, and I beg that you will take heed of what I say, however strange my statement may appear to be."

"Proceed."

"I beg of you, as you value your life," continued Dare, "not on any account to take any medicine or wine, or, indeed, anything which Dr. Vallery may suggest in a friendly way, or prescribe for you in his capacity of medical officer."

"Oh, this is too absurd!" exclaimed Violet Castleton. "You surely can't understand the gravity of the accusation which you are making. Let me advise you not to repeat it, for if it reached Dr. Vallery's ears you would certainly get into very serious trouble."

At this moment the doctor's musical voice was heard on the other side of the deck. He approached the girl.

"Just about to retire, Miss Castleton?" he said cheerily.

"Nothing like a good night's rest, as I suppose you will be sightseeing all day to-morrow. We shall arrive at Algiers during the morning."

He raised his hat and bade her good-night, and as soon as she was out of sight the whole expression of his face changed.

Stanley Dare caught his glance directed towards him—a fleeting glance, but so full of menace and malignant fury that it sent a chill to the young detective's heart.

"He has overheard my words of warning to Miss Castleton," Dare muttered, "and he means mischief. I have made a dangerous enemy, and if my estimate of his character is right, he will stick at nothing to put me out of the way."

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Dare as a Stowaway—Marseilles—Two Fresh Passengers and a New Steward—The Professor's Surprise.

At ten o'clock on the following morning the Princess Ida came to an anchorage in the Bay of Algiers, and as the ship was going to remain there for twelve hours, the majority of passengers went on shore.

Dr. Vallery also went on shore, but he did not accompany any of the parties that were made up to view the sights of the semi-Oriental, semi-French town.

Shortly after midday Stanley Dare was sent ashore by the chief steward to deliver a letter to a native fruit merchant in the town. To reach this man's shop it was necessary to pass right through the worst part of the native quarter of the town, and in traversing one of the least reputable of the streets, Dare almost ran into the arms of Dr. Vallery, as the latter came hurriedly out of the door of an Arab drug-seller's.

He darted a sharp glance at the young detective, but took no further notice of him, and was lost to sight the next instant as he turned the corner of the street.

Dare pursued his way with his thoughts busy with the problem with which he was confronted—how to save Violet Castleton, now that she had refused to listen to his words of warning?

So deep was he in thought that he failed to notice that he was being followed by a couple of evil-looking Arabs; but in a narrow, empty street he awoke to the fact that he was being shadowed. Instantly he swung round and faced the men, but he was too late. They both sprang upon him, and although he struggled desperately it was of no avail. One of the Arabs was armed with a heavy stick, the other with a knife. While he was warding off a thrust with the knife, the stick descended on his head with such a crashing force that he was felled to the ground insensible.

It was still daylight when Stanley Dare recovered consciousness, and on rising to his feet and taking a survey of his surroundings, he found that he was in a square room, entirely bare of furniture, to which light and air was admitted through a narrow slit high up on one of the walls, which could not be dignified by the name of window.

"No escape that way," muttered Dare. "And the door, I suppose, is locked." He tried it, and found this to be the case. "I suppose I must consider myself lucky to be still alive," he went on. "Those Arabs must have been put on to that job, for it is certainly not a case of robbery with violence, as they have left me my watch and money. I should not be surprised if it is Dr. Vallery that I have to thank for this."

He glanced at his watch, and found that it was half-past two.

"Seven hours and a half before the ship sails," he mused.

"I must get out of this place before then, as it won't do for the Princess Ida to sail without me. How confoundedly my head aches! I must have been insensible for about an hour."

That the house in which he was imprisoned was situated in one of the streets of the native quarter was well assured, for occasionally he could hear the voices of the passers-by speaking in Arabic, and now and again he heard the soft, dragging footsteps of a laden camel, or the barking of some pariah dog. Once he thought of calling out loudly for help, but after a moment's consideration he dismissed the idea. The chances were that it would be more likely to be heard by foes than friends, and he by no means wished to attract the attention of the former.

Whether the man who had attacked him had been paid to take his life, he could not say, but as they had no doubt by this time received their blood-money, there was the possibility that they would not trouble any further about him after the ship had sailed. But at present they might be somewhere on the premises, although he could not hear any movements in the other parts of the house.

As the only means of escape was by way of the door, the young detective made a thorough examination of it. It opened outwards, and by putting a strong pressure on various parts of it, he soon discovered that it was not bolted—only locked. However, the lock was too strong for him to force open by sheer physical strength, even if it had been advisable to adopt that method, which it decidedly was not, on account of the noise that would be made.

But among other articles which he still had in his possession was a penknife with one large and very sharp blade, and with this he set to work to cut away that portion of the door-frame in which the socket into which the tongue of the lock shot was fixed.

This would be a less difficult task than cutting the lock clean out of the door. The wooden frame was very thick, but, fortunately, it was also very old, or his knife would have been hopelessly blunted before he could have cut half-way through. As it was, he did not get the piece cut

A Splendid Tale of Harry Wharton & Co.
By FRANK RICHARDS.

out until darkness had set in; and then, just as he was about to remove it, the sound of men's footsteps on the stairs came to his ears, and presently two men—it was easy to tell there were only two—came to a halt outside the door.

Here they entered into conversation, and from what they said it was evident they meant to make a prolonged stay. The pungent smell of native tobacco reached Dare's nostrils. The two men were smoking, and were no doubt squatting down on the floor, as is customary with Orientals when indulging in the soothing weed.

"The work for which we have been paid has to be finished," said one significantly. "Hadji Abdullah will see to it that it is done. It was from the white doctor on the steamer that he received his orders."

"And also much money," replied his companion. "Twice as much as we who do the work are receiving."

"We have not yet done the work," persisted the other.

"But we shall do it," was the answer. "There is no hurry. The youth is safe in this room. It is always better not to hurry, for the police have many eyes."

"But if he tries to escape—"

"How shall he try to escape? The door is locked, and the window is too small for even a dog to pass through. And remember, it is unlucky to kill while the new moon is still high in the heaven. We must wait until it is hidden beyond the mountains."

They went on talking in low voices, but on matters which had no special interest for the young detective. He had heard enough. These men meant to assassinate him, and they had been paid for their murderous work by a certain Hadji Abdullah, who in turn had been bribed to have the deed done by a white doctor.

If the young detective had before had any doubts as to Dr. Vallery's true character, the last remnant of them were swept away now. Evidently he had no more compunction about taking a human life than an ordinary person would have had in killing an animal.

Dare had learnt to speak Arabic fairly well when in Cairo on a former case, and his knowledge stood him in good stead now. He knew he was safe until the moon set, which would be shortly after ten o'clock. But by that time the Princess Ida would be sailing, and he had no intention that she should sail without him.

For another hour he waited in patient silence. From the distant harbour came the sound of ship's bells striking the hour at the end of the second dog-watch—eight o'clock. The droning voices of the Arabs had ceased, and one of them had evidently fallen asleep.

"I mustn't let this opportunity slip," Dare said to himself, "or I may not get another one. I wish I had some sort of a weapon, but I shall have to be content with my fists."

He meant to make a break for liberty. Bracing himself together for a sudden rush, he flung open the door, breaking away the piece which he had cut through in so doing, and also upsetting the sleeping Arab, and sending him head over heels down a flight of stone steps, very much to his amazement.

The second Arab made frantic efforts to bar his way, but Stanley Dare hit out straight from his shoulder, catching him fair between the eyes, and he followed his companion to the bottom of the stairs, only in much quicker time.

Before they could pick themselves up Dare had leaped over their fallen bodies, and was racing down the narrow street for all he was worth. He heard the yells of his two discomfited adversaries; he saw dark forms rush out from archways and courts and endeavour to intercept him; but he dashed on at tremendous speed, and in a very frenzy of strength hurled aside or overturned all who stood in his path.

He reached the Jews' quarter at length, and here he was safe, at least, from personal violence. He remembered that Professor MacAndrew had given him the name of an old Jew trader in Algiers who might prove useful to him in certain emergencies, and he sought him out. His name was Beni Ibrahim.

The Jew trader was in his shop, looking like a gaunt shadow in the dim light of the swinging bronze lamp that, in the days when Britain was but a land peopled by savages, had helped to light up scenes of Oriental splendour undreamed of in these degenerate times.

Dare explained who he was, and then sat by his side, surrounded by curiosities from many an Eastern land, and engaged in a long and earnest conversation, which need not be repeated here.

Shortly before ten o'clock there emerged from the shop of Beni Ibrahim a dark-complexioned man, with a black moustache and black hair, dressed in shabby clothes, and carrying a brown canvas bag in his hand.

The bag contained food and drink sufficient for twenty-four hours. The dark-complexioned man was Stanley Dare, in a most effective disguise, the materials for which he had obtained from the Jew.

He was going to stow himself away on board the Princess Ida until that ship reached Marseilles, and let it be supposed that "Stanley," the assistant steward, had quitted the ship at Algiers. Particularly he wished Dr. Vallery to suppose

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that the Arabs had carried out his infamous instructions, and murdered him.

There was a crowd of boats alongside the steamer's gangways now that she was on the point of departure, and the attention of every person on board was more or less occupied—officers and crew with unmooring the ship, passengers and stewards with satisfying the demands of boatmen—so that Stanley Dare, in the very small native boat which he had hired, was able to slip on board unobserved.

He had already decided that the safest place in which to stow himself away was the starboard lifeboat, which was only used in case of great emergency, and which always had a canvas cover laced over it as a protection against the sun in hot latitudes.

The port lifeboat would, of course, have done equally well but for the fact that the carpenter was making some slight repairs in it.

Watching his opportunity, the young detective unlaced one corner of the cover, slipped into the boat without being seen, and then replaced the cover as well as he was able to from the inside.

By the time he had settled down comfortably, the Princess Ida was under way, steaming away from Algiers en route to Marseilles.

The steamer arrived at the great French port exactly thirty hours after sailing from Algiers, and it was here that Stanley Dare ran the greatest risk of discovery.

It had been comparatively easy to slip into the boat in the darkness and during the confusion of the departure from Algiers, but now, in the daylight, with no confusion on board whatever, it was a difficult matter to get out of the boat unseen. And it was utterly impossible for him to wait for darkness, for he had much to do on shore in pursuance to his plans before the ship sailed again.

He waited until everything seemed quiet on that side of the deck, and then, cautiously raising the boat cover, he glanced fore and aft the upper deck. There were only two persons on it—the captain and a passenger—who were standing at the after-end conversing—at least, he could not see anyone else.

They were standing with their backs to him, so he determined to make the venture there and then, as so good an opportunity might not present itself again.

He was as agile as a cat, and he dropped on to the deck noiselessly. But no sooner had his feet touched the planks than he felt a hand laid upon his shoulder, and turning swiftly round, found himself looking into the keen and glittering eyes of Dr. Vallery.

"What is your game, my friend?" demanded Vallery. "Stowaway, I suppose, from Algiers? Well, you shall be handed over to the care of the Marseilles police! I noticed the corner of the boat-covering being lifted, so I got out of sight to find out who had been hiding."

"You not give me away to police!" replied Dare, in broken English, keeping up the part he was playing. "I run away from Algiers because I make help kill man."

"That appears to me to be a greater reason why I should hand you over to the police," returned Vallery.

"No, no!" said Dare, vehemently shaking his head. "Hadji Abdullah tell me come aboard here."

"Hadji Abdullah!" There was a curious glint in the doctor's eyes. "Who was the man you killed?"

"Not know," replied the pretended stowaway. "Hadji Abdullah tell me aska for doctor if there is trouble for me. You are doctor?"

"Curse the fool!" Dare heard Vallery mutter. "What did he do that for?"

But at the same time there was a gleam of satisfaction in his eyes as he received what to him appeared to be clear proof that Hadji Abdullah had faithfully carried out his orders, and that Stanley Dare was "safely removed," which, in the doctor's vocabulary, meant that a person was dead.

The young detective read the thoughts that were passing through the brain of this king of villainy, and with difficulty repressed a smile as he reflected that the doctor would be unpleasantly astonished if he suddenly became aware of the fact that the person he believed to have been murdered at his instigation was now standing before him.

"Hadji Abdullah is a man for whom I am always willing to do a service," pursued Vallery; "and since he told you to appeal to me in case of trouble, I will not give you in charge of the police. Now go, and don't let me ever see your face on board this ship again!"

The young detective did not waste any time, but crossed the deck, and made his way down the gangway plank to the quay, very much delighted at the manner in which he had baffled the astute Vallery.

As soon as he was clear of the docks he made direct for the Rue Bernadotte, where a French detective lived, to whom Dare had once been of considerable service.

He found Monsieur Jules Beranger at home, and was welcomed effusively by him. After removing his present disguise, having a bath, and an enjoyable breakfast, he took the Frenchman into his confidence so far as he deemed necessary, and made known his wants.

"For the fresh disguise? Parbleu! Is not everything in this house at your disposal?" exclaimed Beranger. "And for a letter recommending you for the position of assistant steward? Well, that should be easy also. Ma foi! It will be amusing if you again become a steward on the same ship, but under a different name and personality."

And so the garrulous French detective rattled on, while Dare made himself up in yet another disguise. This time he was Alfonse Rouvier, a dapper Frenchman, with small, neatly-trimmed moustache, imperial, and rather pale face.

The "credentials" with which Monsieur Beranger supplied him stated that he had been a waiter and a steward, and could speak English.

After having thanked his host for his kindness, he once again boarded the Princess Ida, and duly made application for the position of under-steward, "as he had heard that there was a vacancy." He was engaged.

"Jolly lucky that I have obtained the berth!" said Dare to himself. "If they had refused me, I should have had to join as a passenger, which is not what I wish to do just yet."

He took up his quarters in the same place he had occupied before, but, of course, he was unable to take possession of any of his effects, as clothes and everything had been locked up by the chief steward, while in the ship's log-book "Stanley," an assistant steward, was entered as having deserted at Algiers.

During the afternoon two fresh passengers joined the ship. The first was Barton Merivale, the supposed idler and wealthy man-about-town in London, who was so intimate with Dr. Vallery, judging from the interview which Dare overheard between them in the Victoria Docks, and who appeared to be connected in some mysterious way with the management of the ship.

If Dare was surprised to see this individual step on board, he was still more surprised to notice that, although Dr. Vallery met him face to face, he treated him as an utter stranger, and, indeed, afterwards the two were introduced to each other by the purser, as though they had never met before in their lives.

"It is a deep game they are playing," Dare told himself, "with a wider range to their villainous plots than I first imagined. And this Barton Merivale is in the thick of it. But what can be the reason that he and the doctor are pretending to be strangers to each other?"

Further speculation on this point was cut short by the arrival of the second passenger. Dare had expected him. It was Professor MacAndrew.

The young detective, in his steward's capacity, relieved the professor of his bag, and showed him to his berth, but did not make himself known to him at first.

MacAndrew presently sauntered round the various decks of the ship, closely scrutinising every steward that he came across, much to Dare's amusement. He had known how the young detective was disguised when he sailed from London, and, being unaware of the events which had since happened, was still looking for him in that disguise.

Presently he came back to the supposed "Alphonse," and said, with affected carelessness:

"Is there a steward on board this steamer of the name of Stanley?"

"I cannot say, sare," replied Dare. "Myself, I have but just joined. But perchance the one the m'sieu asks for is the assistant steward who deserted at Algiers."

"Deserted at Algiers!"

As the professor echoed the words a startled and alarmed look came into his eyes, but his face recovered its usual quiet, impassive look a moment later.

"Thank you!" he said. "I will make further inquiries."

He had turned to walk away, when Dare whispered in his ordinary voice:

"He is logged as having deserted, but he is still to be found on board by those who know where to look."

"Eh, what? Ma conscience!"

Professor MacAndrew swung round and stared at the pretended French steward, who was polishing a tumbler with great energy.

"Laddie, is it you?" he whispered.

"No one else," was the reply.

"Guid sakes! But what is the meaning o' this change?"

"It means that there was an attempt to murder," said Dare.

"Tae murder you? Who made that attempt?"

"Some Arabs at Algiers. But they were merely paid tools in the hands of a far greater villain—the ship's doctor. He believes his plan has succeeded. Be on your guard against him and a newly-joined passenger, Barton Merivale."

"It seems," murmured the professor, "that I have been missing some excitement by not coming on board before. Can ye tell me—"

"Nothing more at present. We mustn't be seen talking too much together," replied Dare.

As soon as it was possible to engage in a long conversation with Professor MacAndrew without attracting attention or exciting suspicion, Stanley Dare gave him a detailed account of everything of consequence that had taken place from the time the Princess Ida had sailed from the Victoria Docks until her arrival at Marseilles.

"It is a difficult matter," he concluded, "to aid a person who is in danger when that person refuses to heed any warnings, and persists in believing that her most deadly enemy is her friend."

"Laddie, that's often enough the way wi' weemen," said the professor. "I ken them weel. It's just their guidness o' heart that makes them hesitate tae think evil o' anyone; but once make it clear tae them that a mon is really bad, and they'll keep awa' from him fast enough. I'm speaking of guid weemen, ye'll understand."

"Violet Castleton is as pure and sweet a girl as could be met with anywhere," declared the young detective. "But she has not the knowledge of the world, or of the evil that is in the world, that an older woman would have. Her very innocence is in a measure a source of danger to her, for she will not believe it possible that Dr. Vallery would harbour even an injurious thought towards her. And I am quite certain that she regards that hypocritical scoundrel Saul Bierce—"

"Her uncle?" ejaculated the professor.

"Yes. As quite a benevolent individual who thinks only of her welfare. We shall have to bring forward very strong proofs to convince her that he is plotting against her life."


"Ye maun leave me tae tackle her," said MacAndrew. "Ah, here she is! Puir girl, she's looking unco thin and pale, which shouldna' be the case after a fine sea voyage."

"Those devils are at work, professor!" exclaimed Dare. "That insidious poison which Vallery still contrives to introduce into her food and drink is slowly but surely eating into her system. Between Malta and Beyrout they said, when the ship was four clear days at sea. They meant that during that period there would be a death and a burial at sea. As there is only one 'special passenger' this trip—and I understand the full significance of that term now—there can be no doubt as to who is to be the victim."

Professor MacAndrew had his eyes fixed on the lovely girl, who was in part the subject of their conversation. Very beautiful she looked, but frail and delicate, as she leaned over the ship's rail and gazed at the fast-receding shores of France, already grey-brown in the distance.

It was early morning, and the Princess Ida was steaming for Palermo, her next port of call. From the Sicilian port she went on to Malta, thence to Beyrout.

(Another long instalment of this thrilling story next Tuesday.)



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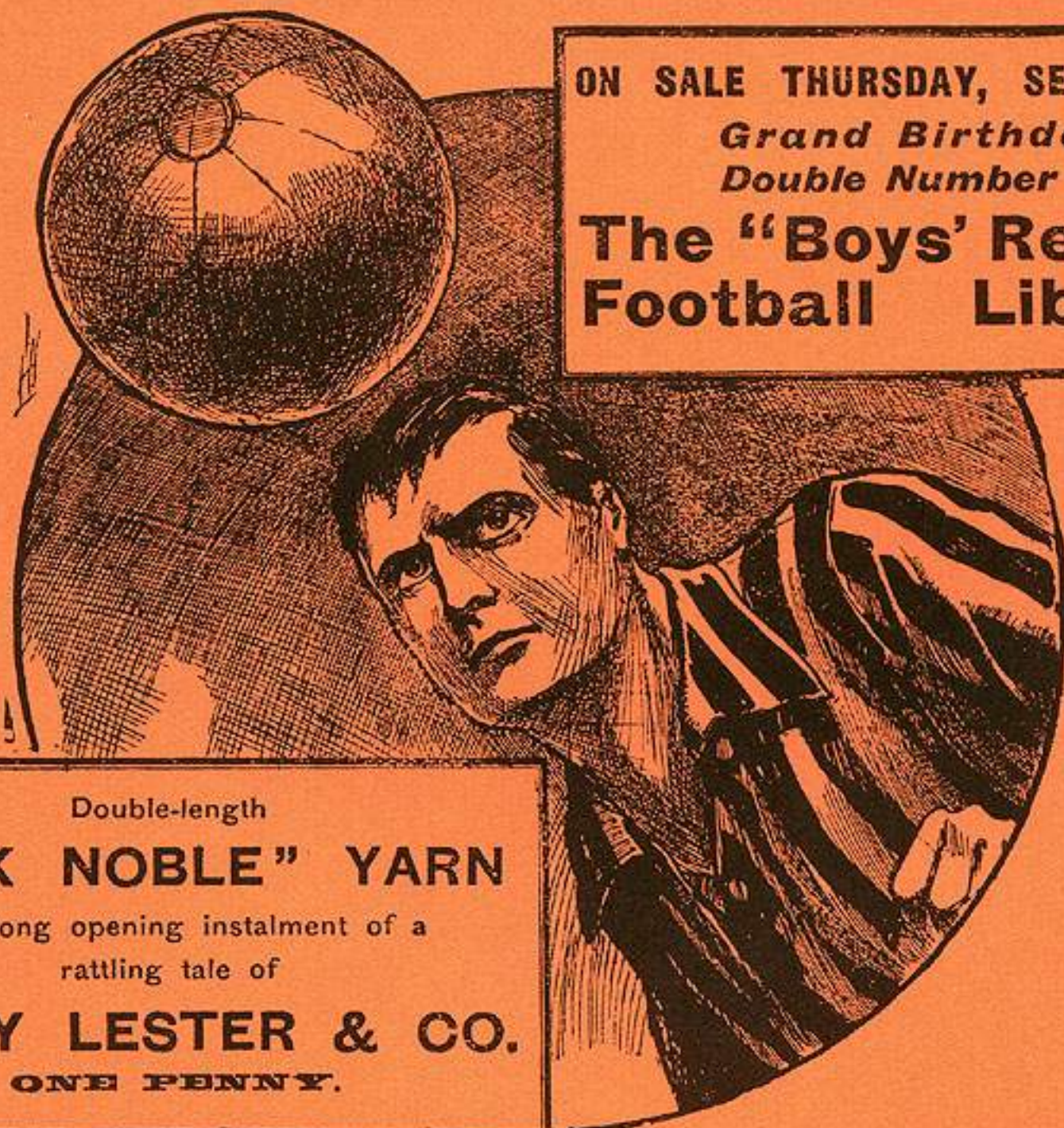


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