In this issue— A splendid long School Tale, entitled—

The Magnet Library

THE CLIFF HOUSE GUEST. By Frank Richards.

No. 140 | Grand, Complete School Tale of Harry Wharton & Co. | Vol. 5.

A Splendid School Tale and a Thrilling Detective Serial in this Issue.

SEE PAGE 28.

A Complete School-Story Book, attractive to All Readers.

The Editor will be obliged if you will hand this book, when finished with, to a friend.

The Cliff House Guest

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

— BY —

FRANK RICHARDS.

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THE FIRST CHAPTER.
Who's Wanted?

"ALL boys will keep their places!" said Mr. Quelch, the master of the Remove at Greyfriars, glancing at his Form.

The Remove sat still.

Morning classes were over, and the juniors were simply alive with suppressed eagerness for dismissal. It was a fine, clear day, and the sun on the windows of the dusky old Form-room seemed to call them out of doors. Mr. Quelch's quiet words came as a surprise to them. And not a pleasant surprise.

They sat still.

Mr. Quelch had turned to look towards the door, and the Removites ventured to look at one another, and they read alarm and indignation in each other's faces.

"What on earth is the matter?" muttered Harry Wharton. "I thought everything went off particularly well this morning."

"The thoughtfulness was also thus on the part of my

honourable self," assented Hurree Singh, the Nabob of Bhanipur.

"No rows—not even a line," said Frank Nugent. "What on earth does he mean by telling us to keep our places?"

"It's rotten!"

"The rottenfulness is terrific!"

"Hush!"

"I say, you fellows," muttered Billy Bunter, blinking through his big spectacles, which did not enable him to see that Mr. Quelch was looking directly towards him—"I say, you fellows, I think——"

"Bunter!"

"Oh!"

"Silence, Bunter!"

"Oh, sir! Yes, sir!"

"The Head," said Mr. Quelch, with a severe glance at Billy Bunter—"the Head is going to address a few words to you before the Form is dismissed."

Many glances were bent upon Harry Wharton. Harry was Form-captain. The fellows wanted to know what was the matter, and they looked to their Form-captain to obtain light. Wharton coughed, and coloured, and rose to his feet.

"Please, sir——"

"Well, Wharton."

"Would you mind, sir, telling us what—ahem!—what is the matter, sir?"

"The matter?"

"Yes, sir."

Mr. Quelch smiled slightly.

"Nothing, Wharton."

"Oh!"

"As a matter of fact, I believe Dr. Locke has some slight favour to ask," said the Form-master. "That is all."

"Thank you, sir."

Wharton sat down.

There was a buzz in the class. It expressed relief and curiosity. The juniors were glad to know that there was nothing the matter, and that the visitation from the Head was neither in sorrow nor in anger.

But what could he want? What favour could Dr. Locke, the Head of Greyfriars, possibly have to ask of the Lower Fourth—the Remove?

The Remove, of course, was a most important Form—in the Remove's opinion. But they had never been able to make anybody outside the Form accept that opinion, and it was hardly likely that it was held by the Head. What could the Head possibly have to say to the Remove?

"It must be a ragging of some sort," murmured Bulstrode.

"Quelch says not."

"But——"

"Perhaps the Head wishes to thank us for our attention to lessons, or something of that sort," said Alonzo Todd, that cheerful junior who rejoiced in the name of the Duffer of Greyfriars. "He may be so pleased with us that he is going to give us a special address of thanks."

There was a chuckle in the Remove at the suggestion, which was really worthy of Alonzo Todd. Anything was likelier than that.

Mr. Quelch glanced round.

"I think I said silence," he remarked.

And there was silence.

The boys waited.

They knew that the Head had been taking the Sixth that morning, so he would not be able to come to them till the top Form was dismissed.

They could hear the feet of the Upper Fourth pattering away in the flagged passage, and they stirred restlessly.

Whatever the Head had to say, they felt that it was not worth staying indoors for, even if it were an address of thanks, as Alonzo suggested. Specially to Harry Wharton & Co., the detention was irksome. They were going to see Marjorie & Co., the girls of Cliff House, that afternoon.

The doorway of the Form-room was darkened by a familiar and majestic figure at last.

The Head strode in.

Dr. Locke gave his boys an affable bow as they rose respectfully at his entrance. A look at the doctor's face was sufficient to show that he was in good humour, and that there was nothing to dread.

"Ah, I think that Mr. Quelch has told you I have a few words to say to you, my boys," said the Head, turning a letter in his hand. "I have here—ah—a letter."

The Remove waited.

The thought flashed into certain minds that it was perhaps a letter from Farmer Jones relating to certain trespasses on his land, but the Head's expression was too good-humoured for that to be the case. Nugent whispered to Tom Brown that somebody had written to the Head to say what really nice boys the Remove were, and Tom chuckled so loudly, and tried to suppress it so suddenly, that he almost choked.

"A letter," resumed the Head, "from a lady you are all acquainted with—er—no other than Miss Primrose—the respected Miss Penelope Primrose, the head-mistress of Cliff House School."

Harry Wharton made a movement of interest. Anything in connection with Cliff House naturally interested him.

"Miss Primrose is giving a kind of—of party," said Dr. Locke, referring to the letter. "Yes, an evening entertainment of some sort to the parents and relatives of her pupils. Yes, that is it."

The Remove looked eager.

They remembered an occasion when Miss Primrose had given a dance at Cliff House, and the whole of the Remove had been invited, and they had enjoyed themselves exceedingly. Was this another invitation of the same sort?

"This is all right," murmured Bob Cherry.

"Serene, eh?" said Hazeldene.

"What-ho!"

"Ahem!" went on the Head. "Miss Primrose has acquainted me with this fact, because it appears that she has heard—so it seems, ahem!—has heard that there is a junior in the Remove Form at Greyfriars who is skilled in entertaining—an amateur entertainer of some sort, whose services on this occasion would be a great—ahem!—a great desideratum."

"Oh!" said a dozen Removites.

It was not an invitation for the Form, after all. It was a request for the amateur entertainer of the Remove to be sent over to entertain. That was all. Only who was the fellow meant by Miss Primrose?

"Miss Primrose has asked me to request this—this clever youth to visit Cliff House on the evening of the entertainment, and help her entertain her guests. She will give the—er—the youth a cordial welcome, and hopes that he will pass a—er—a pleasant evening. I am sure I hope so, too, and I have no doubt that the—er—youth in question will be quite willing to offer his services."

"Certainly, sir," said Billy Bunter.

"Eh?"

"I am quite willing, sir."

"What!"

"It will be a great pleasure to me to offer my services to Miss Primrose, sir, and I will do my best to entertain her guests," said the Owl of the Remove modestly.

There was a stage-whisper from the whole Form:

"Sit down, you ass!"

Bunter blinked round at his kind advisers.

"Oh, really, you fellows——"

"Sit down!"

"I'm jolly well not going to sit down. If Miss Primrose wants my services, she's not going to be deprived of them by any petty jealousy of you fellows!" exclaimed the Owl of the Remove indignantly.

"Ass!"

"Sit down."

"Yes—er—I think you had better sit down, Bunter," said Dr. Locke, surveying the fat junior with a far from admiring expression. "You can—er—hardly be the person to whom Miss Primrose refers."

"But, sir——"

"Pray sit down."

"But——"

"That will do, Bunter."

Billy Bunter sat down, glowering with indignation. He felt that he was being unjustly passed over, as usual.

Dr. Locke looked at Harry Wharton.

"Miss Primrose does not mention the—er—the name of the youth who has this gift of entertaining," said the Head. "Perhaps you can tell me which member of the Lower Fourth Form it may be, Wharton?"

THE SECOND CHAPTER.

The Great Man!

HARRY WHARTON looked dubious.

As President of the Junior Dramatic and Operatic Society, a pretty good singer, and a very fair performer on the violin, he might have considered that he himself was undoubtedly the person alluded to by Miss Penelope Primrose.

But lacking the sublime conceit of Billy Bunter, he did not feel inclined to put himself forward as the probable person.

He glanced round the class.

"I don't know, sir," he said. "It might be Wun Lung, the Chinee, sir. He's very clever at conjuring."

"Ahem!"

"Or Nugent, sir. He plays the concertina."

"Ahem!"

Dr. Locke looked over the class.

"If any boy present thinks that he is the person referred

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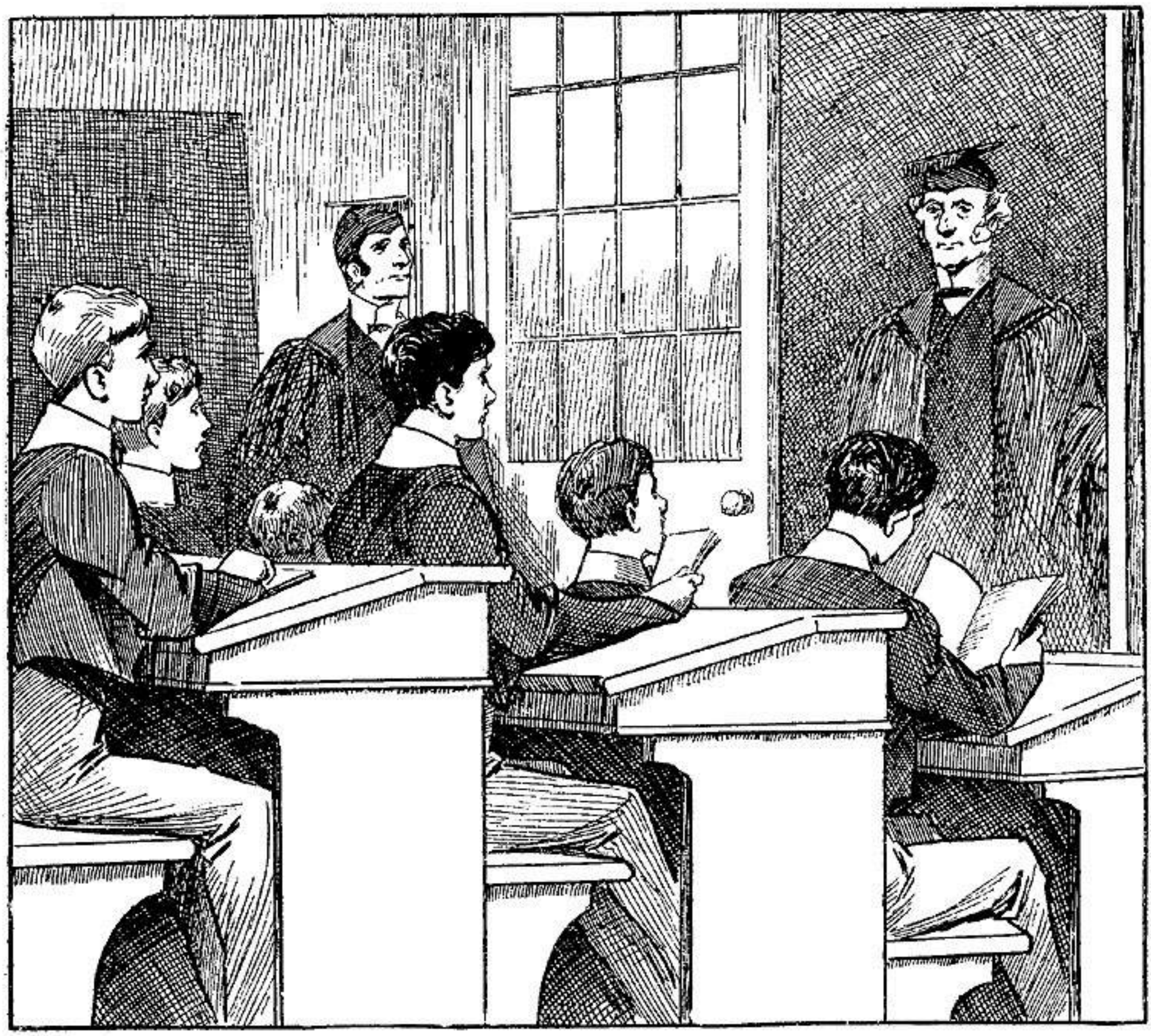

The door of the Form-room was darkened at last by a familiar and majestic figure. The Head strode in.
(See page 2.)

to, I shall be glad if he will announce himself, and tell me what he can do," he said.

Up jumped Bunter like a jack-in-the-box.

"If you please, sir——"

"Sit down, Bunter!"

"But you said——"

"I was not referring to you, Bunter."

"But——"

"Silence!"

Bunter subsided once more. He glowered more indignantly than ever as the Head glanced over the class. Alonzo Todd rose to his feet. Skinner, the practical joker of the Remove, had been whispering to him.

Dr. Locke looked at Todd.

"Well, Todd?" he said.

"I think I am probably the person alluded to, sir," said Alonzo modestly. "Skinner thinks so, too."

"Oh, indeed!"

"Yes, sir. I should be very pleased to do anything I could to help Miss Primrose on this occasion. My Uncle Benjamin, sir, always impressed upon me to oblige everybody whenever possible."

"Very good, Todd. But what can you do?"

"I can do the sword-dance, sir," said Todd, after a moment's reflection.

"Ahem! I hardly imagine that Miss Primrose intends to amuse her guests by an exposition of the—the sword-dance" said Dr. Locke drily.

"I can sing, sir."

"Ahem! I hardly think you are the person designated," said the Head. "Has anyone else anything to say?"

"If you please, sir——" said Bunter.

"Silence."

"Do shut up, Billy," whispered Hazeldene. "It stands to reason that Miss Primrose wouldn't have you over there at any price."

"Oh, really, Hazel——"

"Ring off, you young ass!"

Dr. Locke referred to the letter again.

"Ahem! Miss Primrose mentions that the—the youth is a clever ventriloquist," he remarked. "I should say that that was a clue to the person."

Up jumped Bunter.

"Ventriloquist, sir? Did you say ventriloquist?"

"Yes, Bunter. Sit down at once."

"But, sir——"

"Bunter!"

"I'm the ventriloquist, sir!" shouted Bunter desperately. "Ask the fellows, sir. They all try to keep me in the shade, sir, but they can't deny that I'm a first-class ventriloquist; they can't really, sir."

The Remove sat silent

There was no doubt that Bunter, who couldn't do nearly everything, could do one thing well—he was an expert ventriloquist. If Miss Primrose had asked for the ventriloquist of the Remove, she meant Bunter.

Dr. Locke looked fixedly at Bunter.

"So you are the ventriloquist, Bunter?"

"Yes, sir."

"Ahem! In that case, you can give me some samples of your powers in that direction," said the Head distrustfully. He knew Bunter—not as a ventriloquist, for if that circumstance had ever come to his knowledge he had forgotten it—but as an untruthful boy and a boaster. He had not forgotten that; Bunter never allowed it to be forgotten.

Bunter blinked eagerly through his big spectacles.

"I should be glad to, sir."

"You may do so."

"Very well, sir."

As a matter of fact, he was a little out of practice. The Remove had been fed up, as they expressed it, with his ventriloquism. Besides, Bunter generally used it to play ill-natured tricks, and it had often led to his getting a severe thumping. He had not practised it very much of late. But he did not wish to make a blunder now, and lead the Head to pass him over.

"Well, I am waiting, Bunter," said the Head. "Dear me! Oh!"

That last exclamation was caused by a sudden growl, which made him look down with the impression that there was a dog at his feet.

Gr-r-r-r!

The sound receded behind Mr. Quelch's desk.

"Dear me!" exclaimed the Head, who had given quite a start. "Dear me! Is it a custom of yours to have dogs in the class-room, Mr. Quelch?"

"Certainly not, sir!" exclaimed Mr. Quelch, looking very much annoyed. "I cannot imagine how the animal came here."

Gr-r-r-r!

"The animal is behind your desk now," said Dr. Locke majestically. "I should recommend its being driven out."

"At once, sir!"

And Mr. Quelch caught up a heavy pointer, and stepped round to interview the dog. He frowned and peered in the shadow behind his desk, but could not discover any dog there.

Gr-r-r-r!

Mr. Quelch followed the growl round the desk.

It seemed to die away into the cupboard in the corner of the room, in which the Form blackboard and other articles of use in the Form-room were kept. The cupboard door was half open now, the blackboard having been just put away.

The growl receded behind the lumber in the cupboard.

"Bless my soul!" exclaimed the Head. "The dog is in the cupboard!"

Mr. Quelch looked puzzled.

"I did not see him get there!" he exclaimed.

Gr-r-r-r!

"Well, he is certainly there now, unless there is something decidedly wrong with the acoustics of this room!" exclaimed the Head.

"It appears so."

The Remove were grinning. Mr. Quelch dragged out an easel and a rolled map, and there was a sharp yelp from the cupboard. He dragged out article after article in great excitement and anger, the yelping and yapping dying away more faintly. At last the cupboard was nearly empty, and nothing was left to conceal a dog. But Mr. Quelch looked for the dog in vain. It was not there.

He stood looking into the cupboard with staring eyes.

"Bless my soul!" he ejaculated.

"Well, Mr. Quelch, why do you not drive the dog out?"

"There is no dog here, sir."

"Come, come!"

Mr. Quelch flushed very red.

"There is certainly no dog here, sir."

"But I heard it."

"So did I, but——"

Gr-r-r-r!

The deep growl from the cupboard interrupted Mr. Quelch as he was speaking. He whirled round towards the cupboard again.

"There!" exclaimed the Head triumphantly. "Did I not tell you so, Mr. Quelch?"

"Ye-e-es!"

"The dog is there?"

"No."

"What!"

"Look for yourself, sir."

The Head strode to the cupboard.

As in the case of the well-known lady of the name of Hubbard, the cupboard was bare.

The Head stared into it blankly.

"Bless me!" he exclaimed. "Extraordinary!"

The Remove could contain themselves no longer. A roar of laughter burst from the whole Form.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The Head turned angrily towards the class.

"Boys, how dare you?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Harry Wharton rose quickly.

"Excuse us, sir!" he exclaimed. "There is no dog there, sir!"

"What do you mean, Wharton?"

"It is Bunter's ventriloquism, sir."

"Bless my soul!"

THE THIRD CHAPTER.
Billy Bunter is Pleased with Himself.

BILLY BUNTER stood smirking with self-satisfaction. There was no doubt that his ventriloquial effort had been a success, and that the sample he had given the Head of his powers was a convincing one.

Dr. Locke looked at him dubiously. Mr. Quelch was very red. He realised that he must have looked very absurd in the eyes of the boys, as he searched the cupboard for a dog that did not exist. His glance, as it fell upon Bunter, was not pleasant. But Bunter was too short-sighted, and too self-satisfied, to take note of that.

"So it was you, Bunter!" said the Head rather grimly.

"Yes, sir."

"How dare you play such a trick upon your head-master?"

"You—you told me to, sir," stammered Bunter, in dismay. "You told me to give you a sample of my powers, sir."

"Dear me! So I did! I did not mean that you should play such a ridiculous trick, however. But I will let it pass," said the Head. "You are certainly a very clever ventriloquist, Bunter."

"Thank you, sir! I have been told so before, sir, and I must admit that it is the truth; though I am very much kept in the shade here, sir, by personal envy."

"Nonsense, Bunter!"

"I assure you, sir——"

"You are, I suppose, the person whom Miss Primrose alludes to," said the Head. "Is there any other boy in this Form who can ventriloquise?"

Todd rose.

"Ah! Are you a ventriloquist, Todd?"

"I don't know, sir."

"Eh?"

"I am willing to try, sir," said Todd modestly. "I dare say I could do it, sir, if I tried."

The Remove grinned. The Head frowned.

"Sit down, Todd."

"Oh, certainly, sir!"

"Bunter, you are undoubtedly the boy referred to. I presume that you are willing to oblige Miss Primrose in the way she desires."

"Quite willing, sir."

"Very well; I will reply to her note to that effect. The entertainment is given next Friday, at seven in the evening, and you will present yourself at Cliff House in time for that. That is all."

And the Head rustled from the Form-room.

"The class is dismissed," said Mr. Quelch.

The Remove poured out of the Form-room.

In the passage there was a babble of tongues at once. All the Remove were interested in the Cliff House entertainment, and most of them were indignant at the idea that Bunter should be selected to represent the Remove in the capacity of entertainer.

There was no denying that Bunter was a clever ventriloquist. But Bunter was such a swanker that nobody ever felt pleased at his success.

Bunter put it down to personal jealousy; but as a matter of fact it was his own manner and his own nature that stood between him and the esteem of his Form-fellows.

There were plenty of fellows who admired Wharton's violin-playing, and Wun Lung's conjuring, and Nugent's singing, and Tom Brown's late cut, and Bob Cherry's sure kick at goal. But nobody admired Bunter's ventriloquism, which was as clever as any of these things. It was simply because Bunter was an intolerable swanker.

"I call it rot," said Ogilvy emphatically. "Fancy that fat oyster going over to be a guest at Cliff House! The girls can't stand him."

"Oh, really, Ogilvy——" said Bunter.

"Faith, and you know they can't," said Micky Desmond. "Marjorie would walk a mile not to see you, any day."

"She'd walk two miles to see me, you mean."

"Rats!"

"Yes, rats!" exclaimed Nugent angrily. "You've been

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warned on that subject, Bunter. None of your rot, you know."

Bunter snorted.

"It's not my fault if I'm attractive to the girls," he said. "I know those long-legged beasts like Bob Cherry think they carry all before them. But they don't. It's us good-looking, medium-sized chaps that girls like."

"Good-looking! My word!"

"Girls admire a figure," said Billy Bunter, strutting in the passage, and looking a great deal like a barrel, rolling about on two fat pegs. "That's where I score."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I'm not surprised at Miss Primrose sending for me. I can do things, you know. You fellows can't."

"Go it, Bunty!"

"What a blessed swanker!"

"Well, you know I'm a jolly good ventriloquist, anyway. I'm a good footballer, too, only Wharton won't give me a chance for the Form eleven."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I can play the violin beautifully, only Wharton won't let me use his violin, and my people won't let me bring mine here. It's a real Strad., you know, and too valuable to knock about at school."

"Liar!"

"Oh, really, Bulstrode——"

"You know you haven't one, and couldn't play it if you had," said Harry Wharton. "You tried mine one day, and didn't even know how to hold it."

"Oh, really, Wharton——"

"Still, you can ventriloquise," said Harry. "I don't see why you shouldn't give a decent entertainment at Cliff House. They'll have to feed you, of course, and that won't be a small job."

"The bigfulness of the job will be terrific!"

"If you fellows behave yourselves, I'll use my influence to get some of you invited to the party," said Bunter loftily.

"You—you blessed worm——"

"Oh, really, you know——"

"Oh, let's get out, and leave him to strut," said Bob Cherry. "We shall never hear the end of Bunter now that he's been asked to make an ass of himself in public."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Oh, really, Cherry——"

The juniors walked into the Close, leaving Billy Bunter alone. The Owl of the Remove blinked after them indignantly.

"Rotten jealousy!" he murmured. "It's curious that a chap can't be good-looking and clever without a lot of fellows setting against him like this. I suppose it's human nature."

Harry Wharton & Co. put in half an hour on the footer-ground before dinner. When they came in to that meal Billy Bunter's place at the table was empty. This was a surprising thing in itself—Bunter was seldom or never known to be late to a meal.

"Where is Bunter?" said Mr. Quelch.

The fat junior came puffing in at the door as he spoke.

"You are late, Bunter."

"I'm sincerely sorry, sir. I've been practising."

"Practising?"

"Yes."

"Practising what, Bunter? I can hardly suspect you of practising anything useful," said the Form-master.

Bunter blinked at him.

"My ventriloquism, sir."

"Oh! Very well!"

Bunter smiled triumphantly as he sat down to dinner. Even the Form-master recognised the importance of his ventriloquism, and, in consequence, of Billy Bunter himself. Bob Cherry declared in a whisper that Bunter was swelling visibly. But that may have been due to the quantity of boiled beef and carrots that Bunter was stowing away, as if he were laying in provisions for a long siege.

THE FOURTH CHAPTER.
Left Behind.

AFTER dinner, Harry Wharton, Bob Cherry, Nugent, and Hurree Singh left the School House together. It was a half-holiday at Greyfriars, and they were to take Marjorie and Clara that afternoon for a quiet walk in the country lanes. The weather was cold but very fine, and the roads good for cycling, and there was not likely to be much more cycling to be had. The Famous Four wheeled out their machines, and as they went down to the gates Bunter met them. The fat junior was wearing his most agreeable smile.

"Going down to Cliff House, I suppose?" he remarked.

"Yes," said Harry shortly.

"I'll come."

Wharton reddened.

He did not want to take Bunter to Cliff House. Bunter was not liked by the girls there. Bunter had a way of being too familiar, and a conviction in his mean little mind that that was what girls really liked, and that made him very unpopular with Marjorie & Co.

"You haven't a bike," said Harry, at last.

"I'll have your old jigger."

"Look here, you can't come!"

Bunter blinked at him angrily.

"What do you mean, Wharton? Why can't I come?"

"The girls don't want to see you," said Harry bluntly. "You know they don't. You oughtn't to want to force yourself on them."

Billy Bunter turned crimson.

"That's not true——"

"What!"

"I—I mean, you're mistaken," said Bunter, backing away a pace. "Marjorie is always glad to see me. She keeps up appearances, you see, before you chaps, but, as a matter of fact, I'm the only one she really wants to see—— Yow!"

Bob Cherry's knuckles were grinding into the back of Bunter's neck.

"Yow! Yarooh! Leggo!"

"Shut up, then, you worm!" said Bob Cherry, with a very red face. "Another rotten word from you, and down you go!"

"Oh, really, Cherry——"

"Come on, Bob!" said Harry. "You can't come, Bunter. If ever you learn to talk and think like a decent chap we'll take you to Cliff House."

"Look here, Miss Primrose herself has asked me——"

"For next Friday. Shut up, now!"

The chums of the Remove wheeled their bicycles out into the road. Billy Bunter watched them through his big spectacles in speechless indignation.

They mounted in the road and pedalled away, and Bunter stood glowering. Harry Wharton wore a slightly troubled look as he rode away. He disliked refusing anybody, and Billy Bunter, insufferable as he was, was his study-mate in the Remove. Frank Nugent glanced at his clouded face, and laughed.

"You don't mind saying no to Bunter, surely, Harry?" he said. "Blessed if I could stand him, anyway. There's talk about opening another study in the Remove passage, to relieve some of the studies that are overcrowded now. If they do, we shall be entitled to have one less chap, as we have four now. And I think we'll make an effort to plant Bunter in the new study."

Harry Wharton laughed.

"That might be rough on Billy," he said. "He wouldn't get other fellows to stand him as we do."

"It would be an education for him. Now he's been asked over to Cliff House to entertain there'll be no standing him."

"Yes, I think so." Harry Wharton glanced back over his shoulder. "My hat! There he comes!"

Nugent looked back.

"He's coming after all!"

"The cheek!" exclaimed Bob Cherry indignantly.

"Oh, you'll never get it out of his head that the girls like him," said Harry Wharton. "He'll come over as sure as a gun."

Bob Cherry compressed his lips.

"Will he!" exclaimed he. "We'll jolly soon stop him!"

"How?"

"Ride back, and make out that we're going to run him down," said Bob, with a grin. "Scare the fat bounder out of his wits."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The juniors had reached the cross-roads, where there was ample room to turn at the wide corner. In the centre of the cross-roads rose a sign-post, with a sign upon it indicating that one road led to Friardale and Greyfriars and the other to Pegg and Courtfield.

The cyclists slackened down purposely, and Wharton glanced back again. Billy Bunter was puffing on on foot, very red in the face from his exertions.

"Turn back now," said Bob.

"Right-ho!"

The four cyclists swung round and rode back towards Billy Bunter.

The fat junior blinked at them.

"Oh, you're coming back for me, are you?" he grunted. "I thought p'r'aps you might be decent, after all. You see, Marjorie would miss me so much if I didn't come, and it's really out of kindness to the girls that I'm going at all. I—— Oh! You duffers! You'll ride me down if you're not—— Oh!"

Bunter made a wild leap aside to save himself.

The four bikes, close together, shot past him with a whiz.

Bunter stood panting and palpitating.

"Oh, really——"

Harry Wharton & Co. did not answer.

They rushed on a short distance, swung round in line, and came riding back at top speed directly towards the spot where Billy Bunter was standing.

The Owl of the Remove gave a wild gasp of astonishment and alarm.

"Look out!" he roared. "Have you gone off your rockers? You'll run me down! You'll—— Oh!"

He leaped out of the way again.

The cyclists rushed by, so close that the wind of the riders as they rushed swept Bunter's cap from his head.

He staggered against the sign-post, gasping.

"Oh! Ow! You're mad—mad as hatters!"

No reply, but once more the cyclists swung round and rode him down.

Right at him they dashed.

Billy Bunter hopped, skipped, and jumped, but wherever he hopped the bikes followed him fast, turning as he turned, and twisting as he twisted.

In wild alarm, and fully convinced that the Famous Four had taken leave of their senses, Bunter made a wild spring at the sign-post, and clambered up.

Bunter was not a good climber. He was not active, and he was not a light weight. But he climbed that wooden post in record time.

Up he clambered, till he hung on to the crossed signs at the top with his arms, and gasped there like a landed fish.

"Ow! Ow! Ow!"

The four riders circled round the sign-post, and if Billy Bunter had dropped from his perch he would certainly have been ridden over.

He clung on for dear life.

"Oh, really!" he gasped. "I say, you fellows! Oh!"

"Come down!" roared Bob Cherry, riding furiously round and round the fat junior on his perch.

"Ow! Ow! I won't!"

"Come down at once!"

"W-w-w-what for?"

"I want to ride you down!" roared Bob Cherry, with a ferocious look.

"Ow! Oh, really, Cherry——"

"Come down!"

"I w-w-won't!"

"Come down at once!"

"The cheefulness is terrific!"

"I—I—I——"

Bunter clung on desperately, gasping. The Famous Four turned their bicycles in the direction of Cliff House once more, and rode away. Not till the high hedges hid them from Billy Bunter did they burst into a roar of laughter.

The Owl of the Remove did not venture to leave his perch of safety till the four cyclists were well out of sight.

Then, gasping and grunting, he slid down the post to the ground.

"The—the beasts!" he groaned. "The beasts! I jolly well won't go to Cliff House with them now! No, not if they ask me on their bended knees—so there!"

And he didn't.

— — —

THE FIFTH CHAPTER.

A Strange Alarm.

"HELP!"

"Oh, help!"

"Oh-h-h-h-h-h-h!"

"Great Scott! What's the matter?"

"Goodness gracious!" exclaimed Marjorie Hazeldene. "Whatever is it?"

The chums of the Remove were walking along the stretch of yellow sand which lay bare at low tide, at the foot of the Shoulder, the great rock that stared out over Pegg Bay.

Harry Wharton & Co. had left their bicycles at Cliff House, and they were rambling along the sea-shore with Marjorie and Clara, when those startling cries burst upon their ears.

"Help!"

It was a painful, gasping cry, as of someone in pain or terror, and it echoed strangely among the lonely rocks.

The chums halted.

"What on earth does it mean?" exclaimed Harry Wharton looking about him in bewilderment.

"Somebody in trouble," said Nugent; "but where the dickens is he?"

"Help!"

"He's in the cave," said Marjorie Hazeldene, pointing towards a deep, dark cleft in the rock at a short distance. "Listen!"

There was no doubt about it.

The cry came from that deep fissure, where there was nothing to be seen but piled sand and frowning black rock.

The juniors looked towards it uneasily. What was happening in that deep, dark recess, said to be of old, the lurking-place of smugglers.

"Help!"

Marjorie made a quick movement towards the cave.

"We must see," she exclaimed.

"Yes, rather."

The four juniors ran towards the cave. They could not imagine what was the matter, unless someone was being murdered, and that seemed very unlikely. But whatever it was, it was better to look into it.

Harry Wharton was the first to reach the cave. He ran in under the rugged arch of black rock, and looked quickly about him.

There was no one to be seen.

But from the deep dark distance up the cave came a cry.

"Help!"

Wharton ran along the cave into the gloom. The change from the daylight to the deep dusk blinded him, and for some moments he could see nothing.

"Oh! Help! I'm suffocating."

"Where are you?" shouted Harry Wharton, his voice rumbling with a thousand echoes in the rocky recesses. "What is the matter?"

"Help!"

"Where are you?" roared Bob Cherry, his deep bass adding to the echoes till the cavern seemed thundering with sound.

"I'm suffocating."

"Where are you?"

"Here."

"Here! Where?" exclaimed Harry, staring about in amazement, for he could see no one.

There were a hundred recesses in the cave where anyone could have been hidden, and it would have required a long search to unearth one who wished to remain concealed; but there was no reason to suppose that one who was calling for help was purposely concealing himself.

But where was he?

"Quiet, you chaps," said Wharton quickly. "We can't tell the direction of the voice. Wait till he calls again."

"Right-ho!"

"The rightfulness is terrific."

The chums and the girls became quite silent. Marjorie and Clara were looking very much alarmed. Deep silence descended on the cavern, broken only by the faint wash of the sea on the sand outside.

The voice did not call again. The silence became creepy.

Harry Wharton broke it at last.

"Where are you?" he called out.

"Here."

"Tell me where?"

"In the fissure here. I've fallen in and broken my leg. Help!"

"Good heavens!"

The chums of the Remove stepped towards the fissure that split the floor of the cavern. It was a deep and dark opening, of an unknown depth, and faintly below could be heard the wash of water. At high tide, when the cave was flooded, the fissure was filled, and apparently at low tide it was not dry.

Wharton knelt on the edge and peered downwards.

"Be careful, Harry," murmured Marjorie.

"I'll be careful, Marjorie."

The junior looked down into the darkness without the tremor of a nerve.

"Are you there?" he called out.

"Yes."

"Can't you get out?"

A deep groan replied.

"All right," said Harry, "I'll come down to you."

"Harry!" exclaimed Marjorie.

"I can do it," said Harry quietly. "I climbed down there with a rope once, some time ago, and it can be done without a rope."

"But in the dark——"

"I can do it."

A deep groan came from the fissure.

"We must help the poor chap, whoever he is," said Harry Wharton. "If I can't get him out, I'll stay with him while some of you cut off for help to Pegg. Anybody got any matches?"

Bob Cherry had a box of wax vestas. He bunched five or six of them together, and struck them, and held the little torch over the sullen abyss.

Marjorie shuddered as she looked down.

"Harry! It is terribly dangerous."

"I can do it, Marjorie."

"Oh! Be careful! Be careful!"

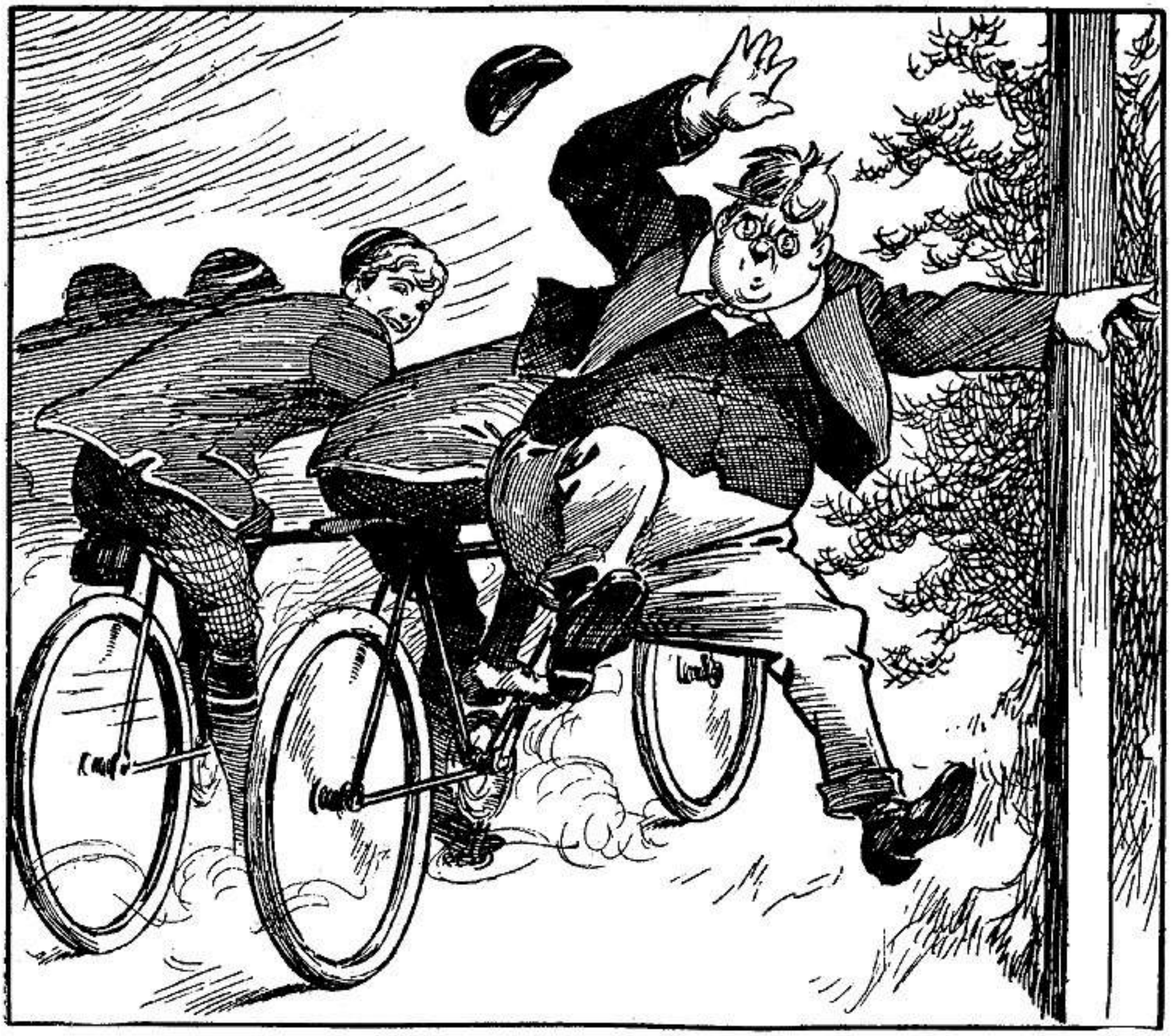
"Trust me."

Wharton stripped off his jacket and his boots to make the climbing easier. Then he swung himself over the edge of the fissure.

His chums watched him in tense anxiety.

They knew how strong and active he was, but they knew the danger he was running, too. He had climbed into the fissure with a rope and a light before, but that was a different matter. Without a rope, he was likely to slip on

THE EDITOR'S CHAT ON PAGE 28 WILL INTEREST YOU. ➤



"Oh, you duffers," yelled Billy Bunter, as he made a wild leap to avoid the cyclists. "You'll ride me down if you're not care—— Oh!" The cyclists, close together, whizzed by. (See page 6.)

the smooth rock, worn and wet from the tides. In the darkness he might make a false movement, which would hurl him to the bottom, to ragged rocks and sullen pools.

They watched him tensely as he disappeared beyond the rocky edge.

The matches had burned out, but Bob Cherry struck match after match to light him as well as he could.

There was a sound below of a sudden rushing, and Nugent cried out:

"Harry! All right?"

There was no reply for a moment. Clara pressed Marjorie's hand. Marjorie's face was very pale.

"Harry!"

"It's all right," came a low voice from below. "All serene! I slipped on the rock—it was smooth as glass—I'm at the bottom now."

"But are you hurt, Harry?"

"No. Only a bit shaken."

"Thank Heaven!"

There was a splash in the darkness below. Harry Wharton was standing knee deep in a pool of water. He suppressed a sound of pain that rose to his lips. He had hurt his wrist in slipping down, in making a wild clutch at the rocks, but for the moment he did not realise that he was hurt.

"Can you see the chap, Harry?"

'It's as dark as pitch here. But I can't hear him, either. He may have fainted."

Harry looked round him in the deep gloom, and fumbled for the matchbox in his pocket. His right wrist pained him so much now that he could not hold the box in his hand to strike the match. He extracted a wax vesta, and struck it on the rock. The light shone out.

Slight as it was, it served to dimly illumine the fissure. On either side of him rose gaunt rock; the fissure was not three yards wide. One end was closed in with rugged rock, the other extended into the cliff, gradually narrowing to an end. In the thick rock were smaller fissures and openings, through which the water gurgled from the sea.

But of the man who had called for help he could see nothing. The match went out.

"Where are you?" said Harry. "Answer me, if you are able! Where are you?"

But only the echo of his own voice, and the swirling sound of the water round his feet answered him.

THE SIXTH CHAPTER.
A Little Ventriloquism.

"I SAY, you fellows!"

Bob Cherry was peering down anxiously into the fissure, when the familiar voice fell upon his ears.

He swung round.

Billy Bunter was standing in the cavern, with a grin on his fat face, blinking through his big spectacles at the anxious juniors.

He grinned cheerfully at Bob.

"Who's done this time?" he inquired.

"Don't bother now, Bunter," said Nugent crossly. "There's somebody in the pit here, and Wharton's gone down after him."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Billy Bunter gave a yell of laughter, while the juniors stared at him in amazement and rage.

"You worm!" shouted Bob. "What are you laughing at?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Shut up!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"By George!" exclaimed Bob. "I'll shake you to a jelly if you don't shut up. You rotter! Is there anything funny in a chap falling down a hole and breaking his leg?"

Billy Bunter fairly shrieked.

He was so convulsed with merriment that he could not stand, and he leaned against the wall of rock and howled with laughter.

"Ha, ha, ha!" he yelled. "He, he, he!"

"Bunter——"

"Ho, ho, ho!"

Bob Cherry snorted with anger. He ran towards the fat junior, grasped him by the shoulder, and shook him fiercely.

"You young rotter!"

"Ow! Ha, ha! Yow! He, he!"

"Stop it!"

"I—I c-c-can't! Ow! He, he, he! Yow! Stop it, Bob Cherry. If you shake me like that my glasses may fall off, and if they get—ow, ow! If they get b-b-broken you'll have to pay for them."

"Will you shut up?" roared Bob Cherry.

"Ha, ha! All right! He, he, he!"

Bunter fairly gasped for breath.

"And now," said Bob Cherry, glowering at him, "what were you cackling at, you pig? There's a chap down there with his leg hurt."

Bunter gave a fresh yell.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Why, you young——"

"Hold on! I—I can't help it! You see, there—there isn't anybody!" gasped Bunter.

"What!"

"He, he! There isn't anybody there!"

"What do you mean?"

"He, he! What I say, that's all!"

A suspicion flashed into Nugent's mind. He ran fiercely towards the Owl of the Remove.

"Do you mean to say this is some more of your rotten ventriloquism?" he roared.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Bob Cherry jumped.

"Ventriloquism!"

"My hat!" said Nugent. "Of course! If we had known the fat brute was here, we should have guessed before! There was nobody in the fissure. This beast was hiding among the rocks, and playing a rotten trick on us!"

"He, he, he!" giggled Bunter.

"I'll teach you to 'He, he, he!'" roared Bob Cherry. "You—you——"

Billy Bunter promptly dodged behind Nugent.

"Oh, really, Cherry——"

"Hold him, Nugent!"

Frank made a grab at Bunter. But Bunter, fat and unwieldy as he was, could be very active when he liked. He dodged quickly round the girls.

"I say, you fellows, keep off!" he exclaimed. "I hope you're not going to be so ill-bred as to start fighting in the presence of ladies. Of course, if Marjorie and Clara weren't here, I'd take you on at once!"

"Let's go outside, Marjorie," said Miss Clara, with a far from favourable glance at the Owl of the Remove.

"I—I mean I'll fight you if you like when we get back to Greyfriars," stammered Billy Bunter. "Look here, it was only a jape——"

"You've made Wharton go down into that ghastly place!" said Nugent wrathfully.

But Bunter, instead of showing any signs of repentance, only burst into a fresh giggle.

Wharton's voice was heard from below, and Bob and Frank left the fat junior alone for the moment.

"What's all that about?" called out Harry.

Frank Nugent explained.

"It's only Bunter! There's nobody down there! It's one of his rotten tricks, the young cad!"

"Not so bad as riding a fellow down and leaving him behind on a sign-post!" said Billy Bunter, with a giggle. "He, he, he!"

"Shut up!" roared Bob Cherry.

"Oh, really——"

"He ought to be licked," said Miss Clara, in her Loyish way. "If I were a boy, Bunter, I would punch your head. You've made Harry spoil his clothes."

"He, he, he!"

Bob Cherry made a movement towards the fat junior, and Bunter dodged round Marjorie and Clara again. Nugent leaned over the rocky edge of the fissure.

"Harry! It's all right now! You can come up!"

There was no reply for a moment.

When Wharton's voice came, it was altered.

"I'm sorry, Frank. You'll have to go to Pegg for a rope after all. I hurt my wrist in slipping down, and I can't climb."

"Great Scott!"

"Oh, Harry!" cried Marjorie.

Billy Bunter giggled once more. Bob Cherry rushed at him, and caught him this time. His boot was planted fairly behind the fat junior, and Bunter went spinning and bumped down on the rocky floor with a yell.

"Ow!"

"Now you'd better be quiet!" shouted Bob.

And Bunter thought so, too.

"I say, that's rotten, Harry," said Nugent, peering down into the blackness. "Bob can go to the village for the rope, and I'll come down to you."

"No, no!"

"Why not?"

"You mayn't be able to climb out. The rocks are as slippery as glass. You see, they're still wet. You might slip, too, and have worse luck than I did."

"I'm coming."

"Stop!"

Wharton's voice was so earnest that Frank Nugent paused in spite of himself.

"Harry! I will come! What do you mean?"

"You mustn't!" came the voice from below again.

"But why——"

"Frank, you're not to come! Keep him up there, Bob—and one of you cut off to Pegg as fast as you can and get a rope!"

"The cutfulness is terrific!"

"You go, Inky," said Nugent hurriedly. "You're as fast a runner as any of us—or faster. Cut off, old son!"

"The cutfulness is terr——"

"Just so! Buzz!"

And Hurree Jamset Ram Singh ran out of the cave. They heard his swift footsteps pounding the sand outside for a few moments.

Nugent leaned over the edge again.

"Look here, Harry, I'm coming down. You'll want help when the rope comes."

"No, no."

"Why, can't I come?"

"I don't want you to."

"Well, that's polite, I must say!" said Nugent, a little huffed. "If you'd just as soon be alone, I'll stay here, of course!"

"It isn't that, Frank," said Wharton quickly, his voice sounding strangely eerie as it came from the blackness that had swallowed him up, "but it's no good two of us—I mean, it's better for you not to come."

"Oh, all right!"

"I say, you fellows——"

"Shut up!" roared Bob Cherry, turning fiercely towards the fat junior.

Bunter backed away, blinking.

"But I say——"

"Get out!"

"I'm jolly well going to," said Bunter. "You'd better get out, too, I think. The tide——"

"What!"

THE EDITOR'S CHAT ON PAGE 28 WILL INTEREST YOU.

"The tide's coming in."

And Billy Bunter, having made that startling announcement, rolled out of the cavern, and rolled away along the path under the cliffs. Bob Cherry gave a start, and ran to the mouth of the cave.

Billy Bunter was right.

The tide was coming in.

Long reaches of white foam were stealing over the ribbed sand and receding, and stealing on again, and at every advance they came further in.

Bob Cherry turned back to his chums with a face like chalk.

"The tide!" was all he said.

Marjorie turned deadly pale. Miss Clara gave a cry. Nugent leaned over the edge of the fissure.

"Harry! The tide!"

"I know it," said Harry Wharton quietly. "I felt it rising round my knees some minutes ago, Franky."

"And that's—that's why you won't let me come down! Harry, I'm coming!"

"Don't, Frank! You can't do any good! You——"

But Frank Nugent was not listening. He was swinging himself down the rugged rock into the darkness below.

THE SEVENTH CHAPTER.
In the Shadow of Death.

"FRANK, you ass!"

That was the greeting Frank Nugent received, as, slipping and scraping, he swung down the rock and dropped into the pool of water beside Harry Wharton.

"Pair of us, then!" said Frank cheerily.

Bob Cherry struck a match, and it flickered above.

"Any chance of climbing up?" he asked. "Could I come down and help, Frank?"

"No chance without a rope. Get the girls away, Bob."

"My hat, yes!"

Marjorie shook her head.

"We won't go!" she said.

"The tide's coming in," said Bob Cherry, with an anxious glance towards the mouth of the cavern. "You know how quickly the water piles up in front of the cavern here, Marjorie."

"I know," said the girl quietly.

"Soon it won't be possible to go, excepting in a boat," said Bob. "Come on, now, and let me see you safe."

"And you?"

"Oh, I shall come back!"

"Better keep away, Bob!" sang out Nugent from below. "No good getting caught in the cave by the tide!"

"You'll be caught."

"That can't be helped, but——"

"But rats!"

"Look here, Bob——"

"Couldn't see you if I did. I'm staying."

"Ass!"

"Duffer!"

"Get out, you chump, while you've a chance!"

"Rats! I'm sticking here!"

"And so am I," said Marjorie quietly.

"No, you're not," said Bob Cherry firmly. "You're not going to run any such danger, Marjorie."

"Stuff!" said Miss Clara. "Do you think girls haven't as much courage as boys? I'm not going to stir a step!"

"Yes, you are," said Bob grimly. "Miss Primrose trusted you to us, and we're going to keep you safe and sound. Come on."

"Do go, Marjorie!" called out Harry. "Do go, there's a good girl! You can't do any good by staying!"

"But——"

"It will be a tussle at the finish, when Inky gets here with the rope," said Bob. "You would only be in the way, really. You don't mind my saying so?"

Marjorie hesitated. Her impulse was to share the danger of her chums, but she was a sensible girl, too.

"Very well," she said, in a trembling voice, "I will go. It is better, Clara. Harry—oh, Heaven help us!"

"It will be all right, Marjorie."

The girls went slowly from the cave. Bob Cherry urged them to get on the cliff-path, where they would be in safety. Marjorie shook her head.

"We can get there easily as the tide comes in," she said. "We are safe here."

"And we're staying here," said Miss Clara.

Bob Cherry gave in. Like most big, kind-hearted fellows, he always did give in where girls were concerned.

"Mind you run back as soon as the water comes near," he exclaimed. "Mind you keep out of reach of the tide."

And he rounded the big rock again, and the shoulder of it hid him from the sight of the two anxious girls.

Bob Cherry tramped into the cavern, with the curling foam from the incoming tide whitening about his boots. Billy Bunter had disappeared. The Owl of the Remove was not likely to stay in danger.

Bob looked down into the fissure.

"Inky not come back yet?" asked a voice from below.

"Not yet."

"All serene."

"I suppose the water's coming in there pretty fast," said Bob, in vain trying to penetrate the gloom below with his eyes.

"It's not deep yet. Go and watch for Inky, Bob, and hurry him up."

"He'll hurry; he'll see the tide coming in. But I'll go and see if he's in sight."

The waves were curling round Bob's feet as he tramped over the sand at the mouth of the cavern again. Deep down in the fissure in the cave Wharton and Nugent shivered and waited.

The bottom of the fissure was far below the level of the cave, and through the subterranean channel the water was gushing in.

The highest part of the rocky bottom was now three feet under water, and it was splashing round the waists of the two juniors.

They had found the highest point, and were standing upon it, holding on to one another and to the rocky wall as the tide splashed and gurgled into the fissure.

"M-m-my hat!" murmured Nugent. "It's cold."

"I wish you hadn't come down, Frank."

"Oh, stuff!"

They waited.

When the water was deeper they would be able to swim, though whether they could keep on swimming till it reached the level of the cave floor was a question. But even if they could, it would not serve them, for by that time the mouth of the cave would be blocked up by the incoming tide, and all escape would be cut off.

They could only wait, with the grim shadow of death over them. Wait, while the water gurgled and sang in the crevices in the blackness round them. Bunter's thoughtless prank was being dearly paid for—not by Bunter.

Bob Cherry, like Sister Anne, watched for someone to come. It seemed an age before the dusky features of the nabob reappeared round the big rock.

The whole of the stretch of sand before the cavern was now under water. As Inky came round the bulging rock, the water was above his knees, and it was foaming round Bob's knees as he stood in the mouth of the cavern.

"Here you are!" exclaimed Bob, as the nabob came splashing and panting up. "At last!"

"The herefulness is terrific!" gasped the nabob.

"The rope—quick!"

Hurree Jamset Ram Singh had a coil of thick, strong rope upon his arm. He tossed it to Bob, who caught it and rushed into the cavern. Hurree Singh followed quickly, the water splashing after him as he ran.

Bob stood on the edge of the fissure. The water, flooding the sloping floor of the cavern higher and higher, had reached the fissure now, and was splashing over the edge upon the juniors standing below, whenever a great wave rolled inwards. The fissure was filling fast now, and the water was up to the shoulders of the juniors below, and swirling round their necks.

"Here's the rope!" shouted Bob Cherry.

"Thank Heaven!"

The wave came rushing in again. Impelled by the force behind it, it swept up the cave, and a great sea of water rolled over into the fissure. Then it receded again, and the sands on the cavern floor sparkled wet.

Bob knew it would soon return, and he took advantage of the moment's pause to fasten the end of the rope round a point of rock. Then he threw the other end into the fissure.

The wave came rolling in again.

Right up the cavern, thundering with a thousand echoes, it swept, and Bob and Inky had to cling to the rocks to avoid being swept over the edge of the fissure.

Crash went a great sheet of water into the abyss, splashing on the water that gurgled below, and on the dazed juniors there.

Then back swept the sea.

Bob staggered to the fissure, clinging to the rope for safety.

"Can you get up?" he shouted.

There was no reply. But there was a jerking on the rope. The juniors below were out of their depth now, and swimming. Nugent was clambering up the rope hand over hand, having fastened the other end round Harry under his shoulders.

Bob Cherry leaned over and grasped his collar, and dragged him out. Then——

"Look out!" he yelled.

They clung to the rope as the wave thundered in again, choking up the cavern, swelling and roaring, and thundering down in masses into the fissure.

It passed—it swept away. Nugent bent anxiously over the chasm.

"Harry! Harry!"

A choked and gasping voice replied:

"I'm all right! Pull away!"

Grasping the rope, and setting their feet hard on the rough rock, the three juniors in the cave pulled.

Wharton assisted the pull by catching at the rocky wall with the hand he could use, and he came quickly up to the edge.

There Bob Cherry knelt and grasped him, and dragged him up to the sandy floor, and they both sank down half-dazed.

"Hold on!" yelled Nugent.

They all clung to the rope as the billows thundered in again. Outside on the sands the sea was not rough. But choked in the narrow space of the cave, it raged and swelled and thundered with every successive wave.

It swept on and over the juniors, and but for the rope they would have been swept bodily into the fissure, or over and beyond it into the black recesses of the cavern.

Back rolled the sea again.

"Quick!" shouted Harry.

He was on his feet in a twinkling.

Together the four juniors rushed towards the mouth of the cavern, helped along by the receding water; and out of the cave they dashed, with the swirling sea up to their armpits.

"Look out!"

The wave had ceased to recede. It was coming back, and the juniors scrambled desperately round the shoulder of rock, to avoid being swept into the cave again. They felt that if they were swept into those black depths once more they would never be able to fight their way out again.

The wave came crashing on, and tossed and flattened them against the rocky face of the cliff, and they clung to each other and to the rugged rock, and fought for safety and for breath.

It seemed as if the swelling water must cover them, and choke and drag them back to death; but they clung on, and the wave receded.

Battered and breathless, they scrambled on round the cliff, to the high spot where the two girls were standing and waiting in white terror.

Marjorie and Clara ran forward to help them; and they needed help, for all four were exhausted.

Boys and girls together ran for it, with the next wave thundering at their heels, and gained the higher rocks.

The wave broke close behind them, covering them with stinging spray, and fell sullenly back, as if disappointed.

They were safe!

But it had been a very narrow escape, and for some minutes the juniors and the girls stood silent, with pale faces, watching the sea that had so nearly claimed them as victims.

THE EIGHTH CHAPTER.

Taking Care of Wharton.

"SAFE!" said Harry Wharton, breaking the silence. "But it was a jolly close shave, you fellows."

"And all the fault of Billy Bunter," said Bob Cherry, remembering the fat junior again, as soon as the stress of the danger was over.

"Bunter didn't think about the tide."

"He ought to have thought of it," said Miss Clara indignantly; "and he has run away and left you alone in danger, too."

"I'm afraid it can't be denied that Bunter is an awful worm," Nugent remarked.

"The wormfulness of the esteemed Bunter is terrific?"

"If I were a boy I would punch his nose," said Miss Clara.

"Oh, Clara!"

"So I would, Marjorie. I would punch his—his boke."

"Well, I'm a boy, and I think I'll do it," said Nugent, laughing. "I say, we'd better go and get dry, you know. You girls are wet."

"Yes, dreadfully!" said Miss Clara. "Miss Primrose will be frightened out of her wits when she sees us. Let's run, Marjorie."

"We'll see you to Cliff House, and get our bikes," said Harry. "It's rather a rotten ending to an afternoon's ramble, Marjorie; and we haven't had tea at the Sea Inn, either."

"I'm only glad it's ended no worse," said Marjorie fervently.

They ran to Cliff House.

Miss Penelope Primrose was in the garden, and she held up her hands in horror as soon as she saw the state of the girls and the juniors.

"Bless me, what has happened?" she exclaimed.

"Splashed in the tide, that's all, Miss Primrose," said Harry Wharton. "We're all very sorry, but I hope you won't blame Marjorie and Clara. It was all the fault of a chap belonging to Greyfriars."

"Oh, dear, dear! Run in at once, my dears, and tell Miss Locke. You will catch cold! Oh, dear, dear!"

Marjorie and Clara smiled to the juniors, and ran in. Miss Primrose gazed at the Famous Four in great alarm.

"You are all wet!" she exclaimed. "You will catch cold! You——"

"We'll get back to Greyfriars on our bikes, Miss Primrose," said Harry quickly. "It's all right. It takes only a few minutes, and riding will keep us warm."

"Ah, but——" Miss Primrose looked at Harry's wrist, which was bruised and discoloured, and broke off with a cry. "What is the matter with your wrist, my dear boy?"

"Oh, nothing," said Harry, hastily sliding his sleeve over it. "Only a knock."

"It looks like a dreadful bruise."

"No, no; it's nothing."

"Let me see it." Miss Primrose took possession of Wharton's wrist. "My dear child, it is a terrible injury! It must be seen to at once. You must come in——"

"But I've got to change my clothes."

"You can go to bed till some clothes are sent for, and I will send for the doctor," said Miss Primrose.

Wharton looked dismayed.

"But I'm all right," he protested. "It's only a bruise, and——"

"Nonsense! I insist!"

"But——"

"Come, come, you cannot refuse me, my dear lad! Come!"

"But—but—I say——"

"Come!"

Miss Primrose seized Harry by the arm and hurried him towards the house. She called to the gardener, who was at work near at hand, to fetch the doctor. The man ran off at once, and Wharton was taken, willy-nilly, up to the house.

His chums followed him dubiously.

"Hang it!" gasped Bob Cherry. "We'd better cut off, too, in case we get collared. I know I've a bruise on my head."

"And I've one on my esteemed elbow."

"Ha, ha, ha! Let's cut!"

"Buzz off, you chaps!" said Harry Wharton, after an unavailing attempt to shake off Miss Primrose. "It's all right; I'll come later."

"Right you are!"

And the three juniors wheeled their bicycles hastily out into the road, and mounted and rode off.

Harry Wharton was taken into the house.

Miss Primrose, without relinquishing her grasp upon his arm, made him go upstairs, and fairly ran him into a bedroom.

"There, get into bed, my dear child!" she exclaimed.

"Bed!"

"Yes. I will send to Greyfriars for some dry clothes for you."

"But——"

"You cannot remain in your wet ones."

"But——"

"The doctor will be here soon."

"But I don't want to see a doctor," panted poor Harry; "I'm not ill! Really, Miss Primrose, you know——"

"Get into bed. I will not leave you till you promise to get into bed."

Wharton was crimson with exasperation. But he could not remain in his wet clothes, and Miss Primrose was evidently determined that he should not go.

"Very well," he said. "I—I'll get into bed."

"That's a good little boy."

For a sturdy youth of fifteen, the captain of the Remove Form at Greyfriars—the unruly Remove—to be called a good little boy, was as exasperating as anything else. Miss Primrose left the room and closed the door, but she did not go away. Wharton kicked off his soaked boots.

In two minutes, a voice was audible through the keyhole.

"Are you in bed?"

"No!" roared Harry.

"Then I shall come in——"

"Here, don't come in!" shouted the junior, who had taken his jacket and waistcoat off, and was unfastening his collar.

Miss Primrose had the door half open, but at the sight of a shirt she shrieked and jumped back again, and slammed the door so hard that she seemed to really want it never to come open again.

"Sorry!" gasped Harry. "It's all right."

The door remained hermetically shut.

"Go to bed!" came the voice through the keyhole.

"I'm going."

THE EDITOR'S CHAT ON PAGE 28 WILL INTEREST YOU.

Billy Bunter hung on the top of the sign-post and gasped like a newly-landed fish. "Ow, Ow, Ow!" he yelled. "Come down," roared Bob Cherry as he rode round the post. *(See page 6.)*

"Are you in bed?"

"In a minute."

A pause. Then: "Are you in bed?"

"I'm towelling," said Harry, laughing in spite of himself. "No good getting into bed wet, I suppose."

"Certainly not. You are quite right. But I will bring you a hot-water bottle for your feet as soon as you are in bed."

"My hat!"

"Are you in bed?"

Wharton turned in and resigned himself to his fate.

"Yes," he said.

Miss Primrose timidly opened the door. She was evidently afraid that there might be a glimpse of shirt.

"I have told Ann Jane to get the hot-water bottle," she said.

"I don't need it, thank you!"

"I know all about children," said Miss Primrose, with a sweet smile. "Don't fret, my little dear. I will take care of you till the doctor comes."

Harry Wharton groaned, and mentally promised Billy Bunter all sorts of things when he got safely back to Greyfriars.

THE NINTH CHAPTER.

Bunter is Anxious.

THREE cyclists, steaming from their exertions, rode in at the gates of Greyfriars, to be stared at immediately by the fellows in the Close.

"What on earth's the matter?" demanded Tom Brown. "Have you fellows been taking a bath with your clothes on?"

The three did not reply.

They jumped off their bicycles, piled the machines up against the astonished Brown, and ran into the house. They almost ran into Billy Bunter in the Remove passage as they dashed up to the dormitory. The Owl of the Remove staggered aside.

"I say, you fellows!" he shouted.

Nugent, Hurree Singh, and Bob Cherry ran on without replying. They had ridden themselves into a sweat, and they were in a hurry to get their wet things off, or they would be in danger of colds, if not pneumonia.

"I say," shouted Bunter—"I say, you fellows, where's

Wharton? Don't you start pretending that he's been drowned, you rotters!"

They dashed into the Remove dormitory, and Bob Cherry slammed the door. Billy Bunter was labouring up the stairs after them.

"Did you hear that?" ejaculated Bob Cherry, as he breathlessly peeled off jacket and vest. "Bunter doesn't know we got Harry out."

"My hat!"

"The hatfulness is terrific!"

"He thinks Harry's drowned. Let him think so; a jolly good punishment for his rotten tricks, and his deserting us like that. Not that he would have been any good if he had stayed; but it was cowardly and mean, and like——"

"Like Bunter."

"Exactly! No fibs, you know, but don't say a word; let Bunter think what he likes."

"Good!"

"The goodfulness is terrific!"

"Solemn chivvies, mind," said Bob Cherry.

"Ha, ha, he!"

"Quiet—here he is."

Billy Bunter opened the dormitory door and came in. The fat junior's usually ruddy face was very pale, and his eyes had a frightened look behind his big spectacles.

"I say, you fellows," he began.

"Don't talk to me!" said Bob Cherry.

"W-w-why not?" stammered Bunter.

"After what you've done."

"What I—I—I've done!"

"Yes, what you've done," said Bob Cherry grimly. "Mind, if you're arrested, it's no good asking me to say anything for you."

Bunter staggered against the door.

"Arrested!" he gasped.

"What do you expect?"

"A-a-a-arrested! W-w-why?"

"Don't pretend you don't know. You made poor Wharton ——"

"Poor Wharton!" repeated Bunter dazedly. Bob said "poor Wharton" as if Harry had been dead and buried with tombstone complete.

"Yes, poor Wharton! You made poor Wharton get down into the fissure, and you knew how hard it was to climb out. He hurt his wrist and couldn't climb. You knew the tide was coming in."

"Oh, really, Cherry——"

"We just got out of the cave in time," said Bob. "Don't ask me about Harry. Poor, poor Harry!" Bob covered his face with his hands, and gave a heart-breaking sob. "Poor—poor Harry! To think of it!"

Hurree Jamset Ram Singh wailed disconsolately.

"P-o-o-o-or Harry! The awfulness is terrific!"

"So young!" groaned Nugent.

"So h-h-handsome," mumbled Bob.

"But I think he'll make a beautiful c-c-corpse," sobbed Nugent.

"Ow! Oh! Boo!"

"Boo-hoo!"

"Don't cry," said Bob, rubbing his eyes. "It can't be helped now. Bunter's not crying, and it was all his doing. He'll be hanged, that's one comfort."

"Oh!" roared Bunter.

"Yes, that's what's the matter with you, Bunter, and I hope you'll think of poor Harry when the time comes, and ——"

"Ow!"

"Think of him where he's lying now," said Bob Cherry. Harry Wharton, at that moment, was lying in a bed at Cliff House, but Bob did not feel called upon to mention that little circumstance. "Think of him—lying there——"

"Oh!"

"You've passed the limit this time, Bunter. I could almost be sorry for you," said Bob compassionately. "So young—so fat—to be hung up like a side of bacon!"

"Ow!"

"Serve him right!" said Nugent indignantly.

"The rightfulness is terrific!"

"I didn't mean it," groaned Bunter. "I—I didn't know that Wharton would go down into the pit, you know, and how was I to know he'd be such a silly idiot as to hurt his wrist? Besides, I hadn't noticed the tide was on the turn."

"You can tell that to the judge."

Bunter shuddered.

"I—I say, you fellows, you'll stand by me, you know. I—I really went into the cave to practise ventriloquism, you know, for the Cliff House entertainment—because it was a quiet spot. Then, when I saw you fellows had heard me, I thought I'd jape you, you know, for the rotten trick you'd played me. I—I never thought Wharton would be drowned. Don't you chaps say anything about it, and they'll never know."

"They ask all sorts of questions at a coroner's inquest," said Bob Cherry, which was certainly a perfectly true statement.

"You—you needn't go."

"I don't see how you can ask us to shield you. You might have drowned the lot of us."

"I—I didn't mean it. I—I can't go to prison, you know!" wailed Billy Bunter. "People never have enough to eat in prison, and——"

Bob Cherry gave a roar.

"Blessed if he isn't thinking about eating now, with Wharton lying there—ahem——"

"And you lying here," murmured Nugent.

Hurree Singh nearly gave the game away by a chuckle. But he managed to turn it into a sob just in time, and nearly choked in the effort, and the tears came into his eyes as he choked—real tears. He couldn't help it.

"Oh, dear!" groaned Bunter. "I'm sincerely sorry about Wharton. I—I say, you fellows, I'm expecting a postal-order this evening——"

"What's that got to do with it?"

"I—I'll give it to you chaps, if you'll shut up, that's all. I——"

"What!" roared Bob Cherry. "You want to bribe us to conceal your crime——"

"Hush! Hush! Somebody will hear!" gasped Billy Bunter, in an agony of terror. "Don't speak so loud!"

"I don't care if anybody hears! I'll tell the whole school ——"

"Hush!"

"And the Head——"

"Oh, hush!"

"And the police——"

"Stop! Don't! Have mercy!" shrieked Bunter. "You know I didn't mean it. Besides, I didn't make Wharton get down there, I ain't responsible. Ow! Hush!"

Bob Cherry looked solemnly at Nugent and Hurree Singh.

"There's something in that," he remarked judicially. "Of course, there's no doubt that if Bunter had his deserts, he would be hanged!"

"Of course," agreed Nugent, at once.

"The of coursefulness is terrific."

"But, after all, it would be a fearful disgrace to Greyfriars."

"Fearful!"

"The fearfulness would be——"

"Terrific," said Nugent.

"Well, suppose we keep Bunter's secret, as far as we're concerned," said Bob Cherry.

"Oh, please do!" wailed Bunter. "I—I didn't mean it, you know. I'll never ventriloquise again—I mean, until—until Friday. Ow!"

"What do you chaps say? Shall we agree not to tell anybody that Bunter was the cause of Wharton's lying where he is now?"

"Ye-es," said Nugent slowly.

"Do you agree, Inky?"

"The of-coursefulness is terrific."

"Very well, Bunter. We promise not to inform the police against you," said Bob Cherry solemnly.

"And—and the other fellows?" stammered Bunter.

"All right. We won't say a word about Wharton's death being due to you—in fact, we won't tell anybody that he's been drowned."

"Oh, thanks, thanks!" said Bunter. "Thanks. Nobody will know I was even there if you fellows don't mention it. I—I say, it's rotten about Wharton, of course, but I don't see what he wanted to get down there for, and—and it can't be helped. Mind you don't say anything!"

And Bunter left the dormitory greatly relieved. The chums of the Remove stared at one another in silence for some moments.

"Well," said Bob Cherry at last, with a deep breath. "He thinks Wharton's dead—drowned, through his action—and that's how he takes it. Only thinking of his mean, dirty little self, and not a thought for Harry!"

"The utter rotter!"

"My hat! I don't think I was overshooting the mark when I said that he'd been hanged if he had his deserts," said Bob Cherry in disgust. "Of all the blessed worms—he makes me sick."

That was the impression which William George Bunter, in the long run, succeeded in making upon all his acquaintances.

THE EDITOR'S CHAT ON PAGE 28 WILL INTEREST YOU. ➔

THE TENTH CHAPTER.

A Guilty Secret.

TOM BROWN waylaid the chums of the Remove as they came downstairs, newly changed and brushed, and looking quite fit, but very grave. Several more Remove fellows were with the New Zealander, curious to know what had happened. The four chums had gone out together, and three of them had returned soaked with water, and there was no sign of the fourth. The fellows naturally concluded that something had happened to Harry Wharton, and they wanted to know all about it.

"What's the row?" demanded Tom Brown.

"Row," said Bob Cherry.

"Yes. Where's Wharton?"

"Oh, Wharton!"

"Yes, Wharton. Why hasn't he come in?"

"Come in?"

"Yes!" roared Tom Brown, growing a little excited. "Where is he? Has anything happened to him?"

"Happened to him!"

"You—you ass! You're picking up Alonzo's way of parroting!" exclaimed Tom Brown. "Tell us what's happened."

"An accident?" asked Mark Linley.

"Oh, no!"

"Where's Wharton?" queried Ogilvy.

"Better ask Bunter?"

"Bunter!"

"Certainly."

"Was Bunter with you?"

"Ask him."

"Look here," exclaimed Hazeldene, "has anything happened?"

"Ask Bunter."

"What does Bunter know about it?"

"Ask him."

"Look here——"

"My dear chaps, it's no good talking to us. We've promised to keep Bunter's guilty secret, and we're not going to say a word."

There was a shout at once.

"Bunter's what?"

"Guilty secret!" said Bob Cherry blandly.

"What on earth——"

"What the dickens——"

"No good talking to us," said Nugent. "It's Bunter's guilty secret, not ours, and you had better ask him."

"You're rotting, you bounders," said Lacy.

"Ask Bunter."

"What are you driving at, anyway?"

"Ask Bunter."

"Where is Bunter?" exclaimed Skinner. "Let's ask him."

"In the tuckshop, I expect," grinned Bulstrode.

"Ha, ha! Most likely."

The crowd of juniors rushed off to the tuckshop in search of Billy Bunter. The fat junior was standing there. He was eyeing a pile of tarts disconsolately. He had hoped to borrow some money of Wharton that afternoon, and sample those tarts; and so he probably regretted the untimely death of the captain of the Remove.

"Here he is!" exclaimed Ogilvy.

The fat junior looked alarmed.

"I say, you fellows——"

"Where's Wharton?" exclaimed half a dozen voices at once.

Billy Bunter turned a sickly hue.

"W-w-w-Wharton!" he stammered.

"Yes, W-w-w-Wharton!" mimicked Bulstrode. "Where is he?"

"I—I—I—I don't know."

"Haven't you seen him?"

"No."

"Sure?"

"Quite sure," said Billy Bunter, lying with the ease and volubility that comes of long practice. "I was just going to ask you fellows if you'd seen him, because he owes me two bob, and I wanted it."

"Owes you two bob!" said Skinner. "That's rather new."

"Yes, he was hard up, and he promised it back for this evening," said Bunter. "I couldn't very well refuse."

"You awful young fibber," said Ogilvy. "You know jolly well you've never lent any money to Wharton."

"Oh, really, Ogilvy——"

"Bob Cherry says we're to ask you where he is," exclaimed Russell. "What's the giddy mystery? Is it a jape between you and Cherry?"

"Not at all. I don't understand what Cherry means."

"He said you had a guilty secret."

Bunter turned such a sickly hue that the juniors stared at him in amazement. He certainly looked at that moment like a fellow who had a guilty secret.

"Great Scott!" exclaimed Ogilvy. "What's the matter, Bunter?"

"N-n-n-nothing."

"Then what are you looking so rotten for?"

"I—I—I'm hungry, that's all," stammered Bunter. "I say, you fellows, I'm getting into a low state from want of nourishment. I am expecting a postal order this evening."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"If one of you fellows cares to cash it in advance——"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Oh, really, you know——"

"Look here, where's Wharton? What's the secret Bob Cherry was talking about?" demanded Bulstrode. "He called it a guilty secret, too. Have you done anything to Wharton?"

Bunter's knees knocked together.

"Of c-c-course not!" he gasped. "I—I haven't seen him. I didn't know he wasn't here. In fact, I was expecting him to step into the tuckshop at any moment, to—to pay me that two bob I lent him, you know."

"Liar!" said Ogilvy cheerfully.

"Oh, really, you know——"

"Blessed if I can make it all out," said Bulstrode. "I suppose Wharton is all right, and I don't see that it matters much if he isn't. Where are you going, Bunter?"

"To—to see if my postal-order's come."

Billy Bunter scuttled out of the tuckshop, leaving the juniors surprised and perplexed. He found Bob Cherry and Nugent and Hurree Singh in the doorway of the schoolhouse. He blinked at them with burning indignation.

"You promised not to tell the fellows!" he exclaimed.

Bob Cherry stared.

"Well, we haven't told them," he said—"in fact, I said plainly when they asked me that we had promised to keep your guilty secret."

"Ha, ha, ha!" yelled Nugent involuntarily.

"Shut up, Nugent! I wonder you can laugh at such a time, with poor Wharton lying where he is. Those were my very words," went on Bob, turning to the Owl of the Remove again. "I said I was going to keep your guilty secret. What more could you want?"

"Oh, really——"

"Nobody will ever learn your guilt from us," said Bob Cherry. "It's as much as you can expect. We haven't said you caused Wharton to be drowned."

"What's that?" exclaimed a sharp voice.

Bob Cherry started. Ionides the Greek, of the Sixth Form, had come along with his usual noiseless tread, which was so like a cat's. Ionides was like a cat in other respects, too.

Billy Bunter cast an agonised look at Bob Cherry.

But Bob was equal to the occasion.

"Oh, it's all right!" he exclaimed. "We were only rotting Bunter, you know."

Ionides looked at him suspiciously, and walked on. Billy Bunter gave a great gasp of relief.

"Saved you that time, Billy," said Bob solemnly.

And Billy Bunter rolled away, trembling. The chums of the Remove waited till he was out of hearing before they chuckled.

THE ELEVENTH CHAPTER.

A Delirious Patient.

BOB CHERRY left Greyfriars a little later with Nugent and Hurree Singh, and with a bundle under his arm. The bundle contained a change of clothes for Harry Wharton, and it was a bulky one. The three juniors cycled over to Cliff House, and arrived there in a very short time. There was no danger of Billy Bunter following this time.

Bob Cherry rang the bell at Cliff House.

He thought he detected a faint glimmering of a smile upon the features of the trim maidservant who answered his ring.

"I've brought some togs for Wharton—clothes, I mean," said Bob Cherry. "Take me to him, please!"

Miss Primrose came out into the hall.

"Ah, you have brought the clothes!" she said. "The doctor is with your friend at the present moment, and you must not disturb him."

Bob Cherry stared.

"The doctor, ma'am?"

"Yes. I sent for Dr. MacFee. He is examining Wharton at the present moment. I hope and trust that he is not seriously ill."

"He's as fit as a fiddle, ma'am!" exclaimed Nugent.

Miss Primrose shook her head.

"Dr. MacFee looked very serious," she replied. "Of course, if he is going to be really ill he shall remain here, and have every care."

"But——"

"I should look after the poor boy as if he were one of my girls," said Miss Penelope Primrose.

"You're awfully good, ma'am; but, really, Wharton isn't any more ill than I am!" exclaimed Bob Cherry, in dismay.

"You must not set your judgment up against a professional gentleman's, my boy," said the school-mistress, with a gentle smile. "Dr. MacFee is a very learned man. He has frequently discovered cases of illness which were totally unknown to the sufferers themselves until he detected the symptoms. You may go up to the room and wait outside, but take care not to disturb Dr. MacFee."

"Very well, ma'am."

The maid showed the juniors up to the room. The door was ajar, and the boys, as they paused outside the door, could hear the murmur of the professional voice. Dr. MacFee was celebrated for his bedside manner and his bedside voice.

"Ah! Very fast—very rapid, indeed!" said the voice, from which the juniors guessed that he was feeling Wharton's pulse.

"I'm all right, sir."

"You don't know anything about it, my lad. I had a patient once who was all right, as he thought, before he came into my hands, and he died three days after I commenced my treatment!"

"My hat!" murmured Bob Cherry, in alarm. "I hope he won't give Wharton the same treatment!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Hallo! You chaps there?" called out Wharton. "Come in! Dr. MacFee won't mind!"

The doctor hadn't much chance to say whether he minded or not, as the three juniors entered immediately on Wharton's invitation.

Harry Wharton was sitting up in bed, and looking very much worried and alarmed. Dr. MacFee, a stout little gentleman in a black frock-coat, with wide shoulders and short, fat, little legs, was sitting beside the bed, with a solemn expression upon his face.

That Harry Wharton was the picture of health, and had suffered no harm whatever from his wetting, did not matter at all to the medical gentleman. Dr. MacFee drew a very meagre living from Courtfield, where the inhabitants were nearly all agricultural and healthy, and from Pegg, a fishing village, where the dwellers were in a most disgraceful state of perfect health. And Dr. MacFee was well known never to let a patient slip through his fingers if he could help it.

"We've brought your clothes, Harry," said Bob.

"Thanks!" said Wharton eagerly.

"The clothes won't be wanted just yet," said Dr. MacFee. "Wharton had better not get up. I have some fear that his chest is affected."

"My hat!"

"My chest is as sound as a bell," said Harry indignantly. "I can say ninety-nine so that it could be heard as far as Greyfriars. Why——"

"My dear boy, I am responsible to your school-master and your parents," said Dr. MacFee. "I am going to take care of you. Miss Primrose has kindly given you permission to stay here——"

"I can't stay here."

"You must if you are ill."

"I'm not ill."

"I hope you are not going to set your judgment up against mine in that matter, boy!" he said, with a great deal of dignity.

Wharton gave his chums a helpless glance. To be shut up, a supposed invalid, in a girls' school, was too bad.

"How long is he to stay here, then?" said Nugent, in dismay.

"I hope he may be moved in a week's time," said the little medico, rubbing his hands.

Wharton gave a shout.

"A week!"

"Yes; I hope so."

"But I'm all right. I haven't even a cold—not a sneeze."

"I fear complications."

"Well, that's a good word, and might mean anything!" murmured Bob Cherry. "Of all the blessed spoofers——"

"What did you say?"

"Oh, nothing, sir!"

"You are exciting my patient," said the medical man. "I think you had better retire. Wharton looks very feverish."

"But——"

"I should not be surprised if delirium supervened," said Dr. MacFee, lowering his voice. "The patient must be kept very quiet."

"Oh!"

"A diet of thin gruel——"

"Of what?" gasped Wharton.

"Thin gruel and beef tea——"

"I'm jolly well not going to have any of that muck!"

"Wharton!"

"It's all rot, I say!"

"Boy!"

"I'm not ill, and I'm not going to pretend to be!" roared Wharton.

Dr. MacFee glanced significantly at the chums.

"Delirium coming on!" he murmured. "This is through the excitement caused by your visit! You had better retire at once!"

"Look here——" shouted Wharton.

"Good-bye, Harry!" said Bob, approaching the bed—the doctor having risen from his chair—and as he bent his head, he whispered: "If you're delirious, old chap, you may as well have the game as the name. Jump up and give him one!"

Wharton chuckled.

"Good!"

"Pray retire at once, and leave my patient to me," said Dr. MacFee, rubbing his fat little hands.

"Suppose he becomes violent, sir?" said Bob Cherry seriously.

"Oh, that is all right!"

"He's awfully strong, sir."

"I can manage him."

"He might biff you with the bolster, sir," said Nugent, with a wink at Harry.

"I think I can look after him."

"Oh, very well, sir!"

The doctor opened the door for the juniors to pass out. And as he did so Wharton grasped his bolster, and sent it whirling through the air. It caught the medical man on the back of the neck, and curled round his ears, and the doctor, with a howl of surprise, rolled over on the floor.

He sat up in amazement.

"W-w-w-what was that?" he said.

THE TWELFTH CHAPTER.
Wharton is Missing.

HARRY WHARTON leaped from the bed. Dr. MacFee staggered to his feet, waving him back. The chums of the Remove crowded in the doorway, choking with laughter. Wharton had a nightshirt on that was three sizes too large for him, belonging to an uncle of Miss Primrose's who stayed in that room sometimes. It caught round his feet as he jumped out of bed, and he went rolling on the floor and collided with Dr. MacFee, bringing him to the carpet again.

"Oh!" gasped the medical man.

"Ha, ha, ha!" yelled Wharton, acting the character he was assuming with all the skill of the President of the Remove Dramatic Society. "I'm delirious! I'm mad! Ha, ha, ha!"

"My dear boy——"

"I'm delirious!"

"But——"

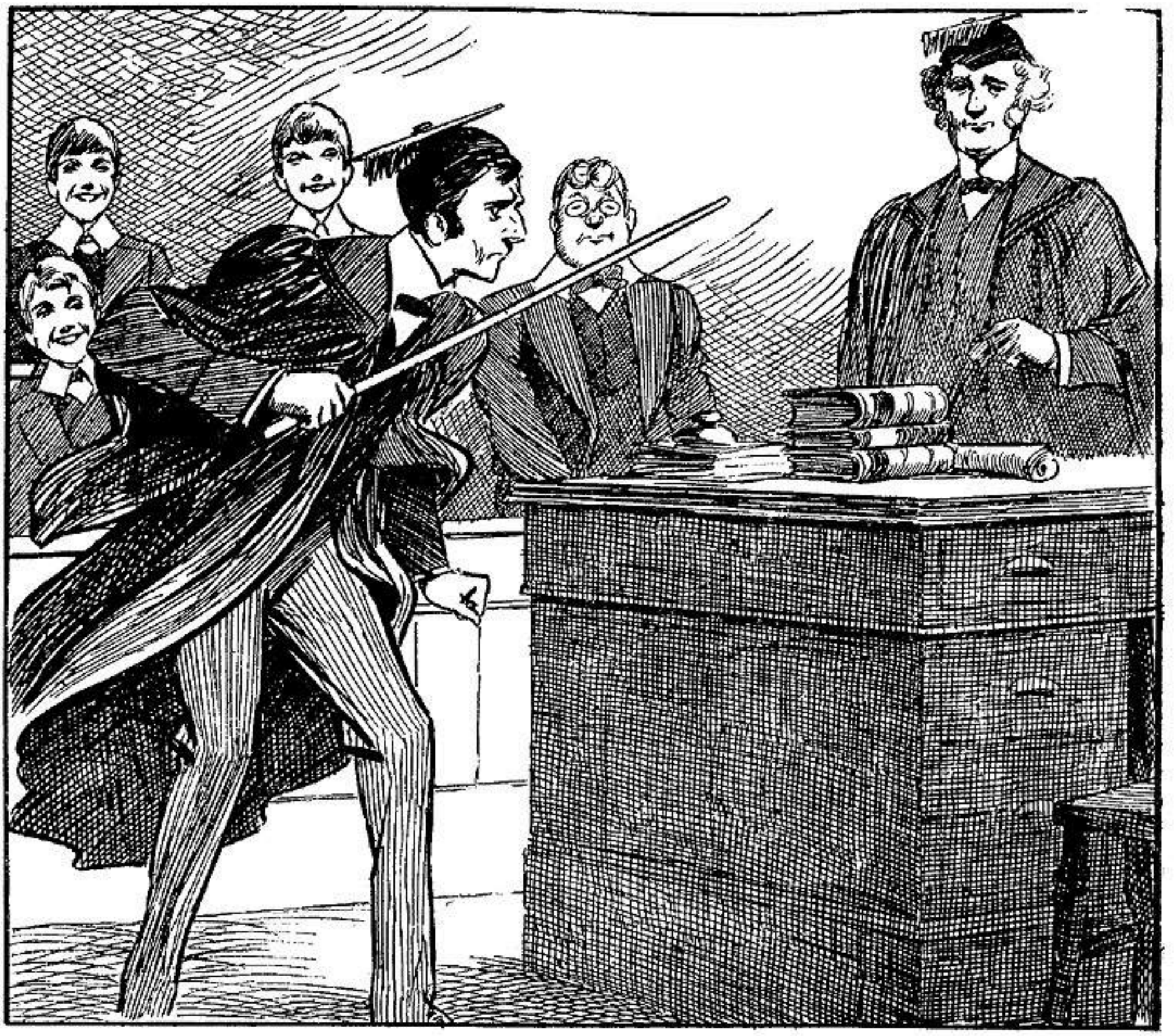
Swipe!

Wharton had his pillow in his hands. He swept it through the air, and caught the medical man on the side of the head. Dr. MacFee was bowled over like a ninepin.

He yelled as he went down.

Wharton danced round him, smiting and swiping with the pillow, and the little, stout gentleman reared and howled as he received swipe after swipe.

He squirmed out of the room at last, and dashed downstairs.



Gr-r-r-r! "The animal is behind your desk now," said the Head. Mr. Quelch, with a pointer in his hand, stepped round the desk to interview Billy Bunter's ventriloquial voice. *(See Page 4.)*

with his collar torn out and his coat half off, and his hair towsled and his face crimson.

Wharton threw down the pillow, and gave a yell of laughter.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Bob Cherry sank on the bed, sobbing with merriment.

"My only hat!" he gasped. "It's too funny! But he said you were delirious, and he ought to have known."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"The ha-ha-ha-fulness is terrific!"

"Better get into your duds quick, Harry," said Nugent, chuckling.

"Right-ho!"

Wharton winced a little as he dressed. His wrist was still hurting him, and in the excitement of the moment he had put some strain on it in handling the pillow. But he dressed very quickly. In record time he was in his clothes, down to the boots.

The doctor, meanwhile, was downstairs, and they could hear his angry voice mingling with the surprised and distressed tones of Miss Penelope Primrose.

"Let's go down and make a rush for it," said Bob Cherry.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"If MacFee wants to collar you again, have another attack of delirium."

"Good egg!"

The chums of the Remove went down. Dr. MacFee was in the hall, trying to put his collar straight while he talked. But his neck was short and fat, and his arms were likewise, and the collar would not meet easily. He was growing purple with his exertions. He glared at the juniors.

"Here are the young scoundrels!" he exclaimed.

The Famous Four looked shocked.

"Dr. MacFee!" they exclaimed together.

"I have been treated infamously!" bellowed the doctor.

"My dear boys——" said Miss Primrose feebly.

"Outrageously, madam!"

"I am quite well, thank you, ma'am," said Harry Wharton, "and very much obliged to you! Dr. MacFee said I was delirious, and I think I acted rather wildly for a minute or two, but it has passed off."

"My dear lad, I am so pleased."

"I'm all right now, doctor?"

Wharton asked the question with a slight grin. If the doctor attempted to detain him as a patient, he was quite prepared to be delirious again.

The little medico started back.

"Yes, yes, quite well, confound you!" he exclaimed.

"Oh, doctor, before ladies!" remonstrated Nugent.

The medical gentleman turned purple.

"I—I beg your pardon, Miss Primrose," he exclaimed, "but—but——"

"My dear Dr. MacFee—"

"Thank you so much, Miss Primrose," said Harry. "We will not trouble you any more. I will send for my wet clothes. Thank you so much!"

"Not at all, my dear boy!"

And the juniors departed, leaving the little medical man still fuming. They roared with laughter as they wheeled their bicycles out into the road.

"Jolly narrow escape!" said Nugent. "Fancy being shut up for a week! Ugh!"

"It would have been a lot of trouble for Miss Primrose, too," said Harry. "But I don't think Dr. MacFee will want me for a patient again."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The juniors rode laughing towards Greyfriars. As they drew near the school Bob Cherry suddenly burst into a renewed chuckle.

"Back pedal, you chaps. You're not to show up at the school yet, Harry."

Wharton looked at him in surprise.

"Why not?"

"Because you're dead."

"Eh?"

"You were drowned in the smugglers' cave."

"What?"

"And all through Billy Bunter."

"What the dickens——"

"Dead men tell no tales," chuckled Bob Cherry. "I know that, because I read it in a newspaper serial. Likewise, they don't ride bicycles. Hence, and thusly, you're not to show up in Greyfriars."

"But——"

"Explain, Bob, you ass!" chuckled Nugent.

And Bob Cherry explained.

Harry Wharton burst into a laugh.

"Do you mean to say the young ass really believes that I've been drowned?" he exclaimed.

"Yes, rather. And he's chiefly worried now because he can't borrow any more money of you. We've promised to keep his guilty secret."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I want you to keep out of sight for a bit," said Bob. "It's too good a joke to be spoiled. Lay low for a bit."

Wharton laughed again.

"That's easy enough," he said. "I've got to see that chap at Courtfield about arranging the footer match. I'll ride over there now instead of coming back to Greyfriars. I can get some tea there."

"Good egg!"

And Wharton turned off from the road before they reached the school. Bob Cherry and Nugent and Hurree Singh rode on to Greyfriars.

When they came in they found Billy Bunter looking very disconsolate.

"Guilty secret weighing on your mind?" asked Bob Cherry, giving him a slap on the shoulder that made him jump.

"Oh, really, Cherry!" gasped Bunter, blinking at him. "You startled me!"

"Thought it was a policeman, eh?" grinned Bob Cherry.

"I—I—I——"

"It's all right; we're keeping your guilty secret."

"Oh, really, Cherry, I wish you'd shut up!" said Bunter peevishly. "Look here, I haven't had tea yet."

"Tea?"

"Yes. I'm hungry, you know; it's more than an hour after our usual tea-time, and you know I've got a delicate constitution. I only keep going at all by taking constant nourishment."

Bob Cherry looked at him in something like admiration.

"And you're thinking about tea!" he said. "With Wharton lying—ahem!—with Wharton where he is, you're thinking about tea!"

Bunter grunted.

"Of course, I'm very sorry for Wharton," he said—"sincerely sorry. But I can't help him by going hungry, can I? Besides, a chap's duty is to the living, not to the dead. I hope I shall always do my duty."

"My hat!"

"I suppose you chaps won't be having tea, under the circumstances?" said Bunter. "I know you must feel horribly cut up. I suppose you haven't forgotten there's a pork-pie and a cake in the study cupboard. You've got the key, Nugent. You don't trust me."

"Rather not!"

"Well, I suppose you chaps are too cut up to want to eat," urged Bunter. "You'd better give me the key of the cupboard, Nugent. I feel I ought to eat to keep up my strength."

The chums looked at him silently. As Bob Cherry remarked afterwards, they had always known that Bunter was Bunter, but they had never known him to be so Bunter as this before.

"My hat!" said Bob Cherry, at last.

"Can I have the key, Nugent?"

"The key?"

"Yes, the key of the study cupboard. You chaps won't want the pork-pie or the cake as you're so cut up about Wharton, and——"

Billy Bunter got no further. The three chums seized him, and swept him off the floor, and bumped him hard. Once, twice, thrice, they bumped him, hard and harder, and then they walked away and left him gasping.

THE THIRTEENTH CHAPTER.
A Ghost in No. 1 Study.

"WHERE'S Wharton?"

"Anybody seen Wharton?"

It was supper-time for the juniors, and such of them as were in the habit of eating before going to bed were turning up for bread-and-cheese. Billy Bunter, needless to say, was one of the first. He had missed his usual tea in the study, and although he had had tea in Hall, that did not make much difference to the fat junior. Bread-and-cheese was not much to an appetite like Billy Bunter's, but it was better than nothing, and he was prepared to do full justice to the supper.

Harry Wharton did not come in to supper.

His absence during the evening had considerably surprised his Form-fellows. His three chums said nothing of his going over to Courtfield to visit the Rovers. They guessed that he was spending the evening there, no doubt getting a friendly entertainment from the Rovers, but they did not explain. No one but the three knew where Wharton was, and Billy Bunter least of all.

The general unanswered inquiry as to what had become of Wharton would have satisfied Bunter, if he had had any doubts. He had a guilty knowledge of what had become of the captain of the Remove.

Needless to say, he did not utter it.

Mr. Quelch was at the supper-table, but he made no remark upon Wharton's absence, as the juniors missed supper when they liked. Neither had he been marked absent at calling-over, as it transpired that he had a pass out of gates.

But Bunter knew—or thought he knew—why he did not return, and Bunter trembled every time he heard anyone inquire for Wharton.

But it did not interfere with his appetite. He demolished whole stacks of bread-and-cheese as if he had no burden upon his conscience.

After supper the juniors had a short time to themselves before going to bed. Billy Bunter rolled into the junior common-room, where Ogilvy tapped him on the shoulder.

Bunter gave a guilty start.

"Oh!" he gasped.

"What's the matter with you?" demanded the Scottish junior, looking at him in amazement.

"N-n-nothing!"

"You look frightened out of your wits."

"Oh, really, you know, I—I'm not."

"I know you're not—you haven't any to be frightened out of," said Ogilvy. "Look here, where's Wharton?"

"Eh? Wharton?"

"Yes, Wharton."

"I—I—I don't know."

"I believe you do," said Ogilvy. "It's very queer about his not turning up all this time. It's getting near bed-time now, and he hasn't been in all the afternoon and evening. Has anything happened to him?"

"How s-s-should I know?"

"I believe you do know."

"Oh, really——"

"So do I," said Elliott. "There's some mystery about it, and Bunter knows it all."

"Oh, really!" murmured Bunter feebly.

He escaped from Elliott and Ogilvy, and sat down in a corner by himself. He was feeling extremely uncomfortable. He felt that he was suspected already.

Wingate, the captain of Greyfriars, put his head into the room.

"Bed-time! Tumble up!"

The juniors went upstairs to the dormitory. There was a buzz of comment on Wharton's absence all the way.

"Wharton's not come in yet," said Bulstrode. "I wonder what's become of him?"

"Something must have happened to him," said Skinner.

"Bunter knows," Ogilvy remarked.

The fat junior turned pale.

"I—I don't know," he stammered. "I—I haven't seen him, you know. I don't know anything about him, you know."

"Oh, I dare say he's in the dorm.," said Lacy.

"He's not."

"How do you know, Bunter?"

THE EDITOR'S CHAT ON PAGE 28 WILL INTEREST YOU. ➤

"I—I mean, very likely he is," stammered Bunter. "That was what I really meant to say."

"You blessed fibber!"

"Oh, really Ogilvy——"

Bunter paused outside Study No. 1 as the juniors went on to the second staircase to go to the dormitory. He cast an appealing look at Frank Nugent, and Frank stopped, too, and so did Hurree Singh and Bob Cherry.

"What is it?" asked Frank.

"I—I say, you fellows——"

"You want to go into the study?"

"Ye-e-es."

"What for?"

"You might step in a moment," said Bunter.

"All right."

The juniors entered the study, and Bunter lighted the gas. The three chums remained grimly silent. They knew very well what Bunter wanted, but they affected not to understand.

"I—I say, you fellows, I'm awfully sorry about Wharton," said Bunter.

"Oh, you are, are you?"

"Yes. I'm fearfully cut up."

"You look it."

"I don't show my grief," said Bunter. "It's just the same with my hunger—I don't show that. People think because I'm a bit plump that I have plenty to eat, but I don't. It's the same with my grief—it's awful!"

"Is it?"

"Yes, only my face doesn't show it. It's eating away within, you know."

"Rats!"

"Oh, really, Cherry! I'm sure I shall dream about poor Wharton to-night, especially if I don't have any more supper. I always dream when I'm hungry. It's weighing on my mind fearfully."

"What, your hunger?"

"No, Wharton, you ass! But look here, now he's drowned he won't want that pork pie, will he?" asked Bunter, appealingly.

The chums exchanged glances. It seemed almost impossible that even Billy Bunter could talk like this. They were curious to see what he would say further.

"It would be a waste to leave it locked up there," said Bunter. "I'm sure poor Wharton wouldn't want it wasted."

"You—you—you——" began Bob Cherry. "Oh, there ain't a word! I can't call you by your proper name without blackguarding. Imagine all the names I could possibly call you, and a hundred more, Bunter, and that's you."

"Oh, really, Cherry——"

"You—you fat beast!"

"Oh, really! I don't think you ought to slang me like this because I'm sorry about Wharton's being drowned. I suffer a great deal through thinking of others. I was always very fond of Wharton."

"You took a very curious way to show it."

"You fellows came between us," said Bunter. "Wharton and I were just built to chum up, only you fellows made trouble. Often and often Wharton used to say to me, how comfy we might be in this study, if it wasn't for you others."

"My hat!"

A face was looking in at the half-open door of the study, but Bunter had his back to the doorway, and did not see it. Harry Wharton grinned to his chums, and stepped into the study, Bunter quite unconscious of his arrival.

"I used to cheer Wharton up," went on Bunter. "I used to lend him money——"

"What!"

"I used to lend him money," said Billy Bunter firmly. "He owes me a lot of money, only I haven't said anything about it. I'm not the sort of fellow to talk about things like that. Only I think I ought to have the pie. That's only fair. Besides, as it happened, Wharton spoke to me about it before he went out this afternoon. His words were 'If anything happens to me, ask Nugent for the key of the cupboard.'"

"My only hat!" ejaculated Bob Cherry.

"And I'm awfully hungry," said Bunter. "Grief always makes me hungry. I remember when my Uncle James died, I was frightfully hungry. I think you fellows ought to treat me decently for Wharton's sake, now he's gone. I know I made him happy while he was at Greyfriars, and he always had a sincere friendship for me. Often and often he said, what a comfort it was to him to have one true chum he could always rely upon."

"You awful Ananias!" said a voice behind Bunter.

The fat junior jumped clear of the floor with a yell of terror.

"Ow! Ow! Ow!"

He swung round with a face like chalk, and blinked at Harry Wharton. Then with a wild howl he dashed headlong from the study.

THE FOURTEENTH CHAPTER.

Bunter Knew It All Along.

"HALLO!"

"What the——"

"Oh!" roared Bulstrode.

Billy Bunter came tearing into the Remove dormitory. He ran right into Bulstrode, and rolled him over like a battering-ram.

Bulstrode crashed on the floor, and Bunter rolled on him. Then he darted to his bed, and plunged into it, and pulled the bedclothes over his head.

Bulstrode staggered up. He was more amazed than hurt. The other fellows were simply astounded.

They stared at the fat junior, trembling and shivering under the bedclothes.

"He's mad!" said Ogilvy.

"Hydrophobia!" said Tom Brown.

"Seen a ghost, Bunter?"

"Oh! Oh! Oh!" came quavering from under Bunter's bedclothes.

Bulstrode grasped the bedclothes, and dragged them off. Bunter clung to them desperately, and was dragged off, too, and came with a bump on the floor.

"Oh! Ow!"

"What's the matter, you young ass?" roared Bulstrode angrily. "What do you mean by bolting into me?"

"Ow! Oh! Shut the door!"

"What for, you blitherer?"

"His g-g-ghost."

"Ghost! Whose ghost?"

"Wharton's."

"What are you jabbering about?"

"Off his rocker," said Hazeldene.

The Famous Four came into the dormitory, and the juniors stared at them. Harry Wharton looked a little red and dusty from a cycle ride, but he did not look much like a ghost.

"Wharton! He's come back."

"Where have you been, Wharton?"

"What's the game?"

"What's Bunter raving about?"

"Keep off!" shrieked Bunter. "I didn't do it! I didn't make you go into the cave. It was only a jape. I couldn't help your getting drowned."

"Drowned!" gasped Bulstrode.

"Ow! Ow! Help!"

Bulstrode grasped the fat junior and shook him.

"Shut up, you young chump!" he said angrily. "You'll have the prefects here in a minute. What makes you think Wharton is a ghost?"

Bunter was recovering from his terror a little, as he saw that the other fellows treated Wharton as if he were made of flesh and blood.

"Isn't it a g-g-ghost?" he gasped.

"Of course not, you ass!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Bob Cherry.

Bunter grew crimson with indignation.

"You rotter!" he panted. "You—you told me Wharton was drowned in the cave——"

"I didn't," said Bob Cherry. "I said I wouldn't tell the fellows he was drowned, and I didn't."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"The ha-ha-ha-fulness is terrific."

"Oh, really, Cherry——"

"What does it all mean?" asked Hazeldene, mystified.

Harry Wharton laughed.

"I've been over to Courtfield to see about the footer match there," he said. "They kept me for the evening. Bunter thought I was lying at the bottom of the fissure in the smugglers' cave. He got me into a fix there, and scuttled off when the tide came in, leaving the other fellows to help me out. We had a jolly narrow escape. A lot that fat rotter cared, too. He thought I was drowned, and only thought of getting my pie out of the cupboard in the study as I was drowned."

"Oh, really, Wharton——"

"Shut up, you worm!" said Harry angrily. "I know just how you would take it if I were drowned, now. You fat bounder! Get to bed, and shut up!"

"I—I knew it all along——"

"What!"

"I knew it all along," said Billy Bunter. "I knew the chaps were stuffing me up, you know. I just let them do it."

"My hat!" ejaculated Bob Cherry.

Bunter sniffed.

"Of course, you thought you were taking me in," he said; "and, of course, you weren't. You'd have to get up jolly early in the morning to pull the wool over my eyes."

"You—you——"

"I knew it all along. I saw it all from the first."

"My only hat!" said Nugent. "Of all the fibbers——"

"Oh, really, Nugent——"

"I just pretended to take Wharton for a ghost, to keep up the joke, you know," Billy Bunter explained. "Funny, wasn't it? Ha, ha, ha!"

The chums simply stared. They had not expected this even of William George Bunter.

"Oh, you can't take me in!" said Bunter. "I thought I'd just fool you to the top of your bent, that's all."

"You—you——"

"And so you pretended to be frightened, did you?" asked Bulstrode.

"Yes, certainly."

"And you came bolting into the dorm. just to keep it up, I suppose?"

"Exactly," said Bunter, with a nod.

"And you biffed into me, I suppose, just to keep up appearances?" queried Bulstrode, with a dangerous gleam in his eyes.

"Exactly."

"Then, by Jove——"

"I—I didn't mean just that," stammered Bunter, dodging round his bed as Bulstrode made a rush at him, "I—I—I meant——"

"I'll——"

"I—I meant I—I didn't do it to keep up appearances," yelled Bunter. "That's what I really meant to say, you know."

Bulstrode cornered the fat junior between two beds, and collared him. At that moment Wingate came into the dormitory.

"Not in bed yet? Hallo, Bulstrode, bullying again, I see!"

"I——" began Bulstrode.

"Let Bunter alone."

Bulstrode obeyed.

"You'd better get in quick," said Wingate. "I'll come back in two minutes, and I shall bring a cane with me."

The hint was enough.

When the captain of Greyfriars looked into the dormitory two minutes later, all the Remove were in bed.

He grinned as he extinguished the light.

"Good-night, kids!"

"Good-night, old Wingate!"

The door closed.

Then the voice of Billy Bunter was heard.

"I say, you fellows——"

"Oh, shut up, and let's go to sleep!" growled Bob Cherry.

"Yes, only you see——"

"Ring off!"

"I'm hungry."

"Cheese it!"

"If Nugent likes to give me the key of the cupboard, I'll go down and get the pork pie and the cake now."

"Aren't you afraid of seeing a ghost in the study?" asked Nugent. And there was a general chuckle.

"Oh, really—— Look here, I'm hungry, you know, and as Wharton's not drowned, I don't see why I should go hungry. Of course, I was so cut up that I couldn't eat, but now——"

"Why, you said just now that you knew all along that he wasn't drowned!" exclaimed Bob Cherry.

"So I did," said Bunter promptly.

"Why, you awful Ananias——"

"What I really meant to say was——"

Bob Cherry sat up in bed.

"I don't know what you really meant to say," he remarked, "but this is what I really mean to say—that if you say another word I'll get out of bed, and throw a jug of water over you. That's flat!"

Bob Cherry's tone showed that he meant business. There was an indignant grunt from Billy Bunter's bed.

But the fat junior did not say another word.

THE FIFTEENTH CHAPTER.

A Question of Clothes!

"I SUPPOSE you chaps are going to be decent about this."

Billy Bunter made the remark.

He made it with an injured expression, as he came into No. 1 Study about tea-time the next day.

Frank Nugent was clearing books and papers off the table, preparatory to laying the cloth, and Hurree Jamset Ram Singh was making toast.

"About what?" asked Harry Wharton.

"About this Cliff House affair."

"What affair?" asked Nugent innocently.

Bunter snorted.

"I mean the entertainment on Friday evening."

"Oh, I see! Let me see, you're going, aren't you?" said Nugent.

"You jolly well know I am! I've got to do the entertaining for a large and distinguished company of guests. It's a bore, but I'm going to do it."

"Noble Bunter!"

"Oh, don't rot!" said the fat junior peevishly. "Look here, the question is, are you chaps going to be decent about it?"

"We've nothing to do with it, that I know of," said Harry Wharton. "Nobody at Greyfriars is asked to the entertainment. It's for grown-up people."

"I know that, and I don't know whether I could take you fellows, anyway. You see, it will be rather a distinguished company, and you fellows—well, of course, you're all right here, but I don't know whether I could answer for you in distinguished company. You don't mind my speaking plainly."

"My hat!"

"But what I was thinking of is this, about keeping up appearances before the Cliff House people. I suppose you don't want me to go over there in rags."

"I'm sure I don't care," said Harry. "But surely you're not thinking of doing so."

"Well, I don't know exactly about rags," said Bunter. "What I mean is, a fellow ought to go in evening-dress. Owing to a disappointment about a remittance from a titled relation, I haven't been able to get my new evening rig-out this term, and unfortunately I had already given away my old lot."

"Awfully unfortunate!"

"Especially as you never had any," remarked Nugent.

"Oh, really, Nugent——"

"What on earth's the good of fibbing to us, when we know all about it?" demanded Nugent. "Don't we know that you've never gone anywhere in evening-dress without borrowing the things?"

"The last time I borrowed anything," said Bunter, leaving that matter undiscussed, "there was a rotten fuss about it."

"No wonder! You'd split anybody's things with your fat carcase," said Frank unceremoniously. "You never asked permission, either."

"Look here, are you going to be decent about it? I can make Wharton's evening clothes do, with a little letting out, and I can manage that with the help of the Friardale tailor."

Wharton stared.

"And what am I to do when I want them myself?" he said.

"Oh, I suppose the tailor could let them in again!"

"Well, of all the cool cheek!" said Nugent.

"I don't see it. I suppose you want a fellow from this study to make a respectable appearance. I'm thinking of the honour of the school. That's a matter you fellows never seem to take into consideration."

They could only stare.

"Am I to have the things or not?" asked Bunter. "I suppose I can't go over to Cliff House in shabby etons, and show Greyfriars up!"

"I dare say Greyfriars could survive it," said Nugent.

"Oh, really——"

"You can have my second best lot, if you like," said Harry, after a pause.

Bunter sniffed.

"Now, that's just like you, Wharton. You think because a chap hasn't as much money as you have that he's got no proper pride. I'm not the sort of fellow to wear anybody's old clothes, I hope!"

"You—you fat bounder! Do you think I'm going to let you alter and cut up my new clothes?" demanded Wharton indignantly.

"I think you might be decent for once, on a special occasion like this. It's not often that I ask a favour, I think."

"Something wrong with your thinker, then," said Nugent.

"Look here, Wharton, am I to have the new things or not?"

"Not!"

"Oh, really——"

"The old suit is a jolly good one, and I should have worn it a term more at least myself," said Harry. "You ought to be jolly glad to get it. You'll spoil it in altering, and in any case, you know you'll stick to it. That's enough."

"Oh, I suppose I can make it do," said Bunter. "I'm accustomed to meanness in this study."

"And the study's accustomed to meanness in you, Bunty," said Nugent. "When they open the new study in this passage, I shall make a special request to the Head to have you shoved into it."

"I'd like to see how this study will get on without me, that's all. You say I'm to have the evening clothes, Wharton. Of course, they'll want a lot of altering to fit me."

THE EDITOR'S CHAT ON PAGE 28 WILL INTEREST YOU. ➤

"I imagine so," assented Harry, with a disparaging glance at the fat, stumpy figure of the Owl of the Remove.

"It might be more satisfactory to have an entirely new suit. I could get a regular rig-out for five guineas."

"Can you get the five guineas, though?"

"Well, perhaps, by using my influence I could manage it for three."

"Jolly good idea, if you can afford it!" said Wharton heartily.

Bunter grunted.

"Well, perhaps I can make the old things do with altering. No objection to the tailor coming here to do the work, I suppose?"

"None at all, if he doesn't bother us. He'll want paying."

"That's my business," said Billy Bunter loftily. "You can worry about that when I ask you to, Wharton."

"That won't be long, I expect."

"I shall want a dress shirt," said Bunter. "Your dress shirts fit me very well, Nugent. I suppose you'll have one to lend me?"

"I suppose so."

"I think I ought to wear some diamond studs. Do you think Ionides would lend me his diamond studs if I asked him?"

"Better ask him."

"Well, he's such an ill-tempered beast. I could manage with plain gold ones, perhaps, if you will lend me yours, Wharton."

"Anything else?" asked Harry resignedly.

"Yes. I shall want your shoes. And look here, I've been thinking that on the occasion of a special entertainment, an eyeglass would look better than spectacles. What do you think?"

"I think it's time to make the tea. The kettle's boiling."

"I was talking about eyeglasses."

"You can go on if you like."

"Don't you think an eyeglass would be more effective. I rather fancy myself in an eyeglass, too. I tried one on when I was visiting a titled relation of mine last vac., and it suited me. An eyeglass always suits an aristocratic cast of countenance."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Blessed if I can see anything to cackle at. The question is, whether anybody would lend me a couple of guineas for a short time to stand the expense of it. I could return the money next week."

"I should inquire, if I were you," said Wharton. "You won't get it in this study, but there may be fellows simply dying for a chance to lend you two guineas."

"Perhaps I'd better go in the spectacles. After all, an eyeglass would be some trouble. About cash——"

"Butter the toast, Bunter!"

"All right. About cash——"

"And buck up!"

"I'm bucking up. About cash——"

"Bloater paste, Harry?"

"About cash——"

"Pass the sardines!"

"About cash——"

"Now, I think you've talked quite enough, Bunty," said Nugent. "Give us a rest while we have tea."

"I was going to say——"

"Well, don't!"

"About cash, I shall want——"

"Let's hear about the footer arrangements with Courtfield, Harry."

"Certainly!"

"About cash——"

"We play them on Saturday, I suppose?"

"Yes; kick off at half-past two."

"About cash——"

"Shut up!" roared Nugent.

"Yes, but about cash——"

"If he says another word, Inky, lend me a hand to sling him out!"

"Certainfully!" said the nabob cheerfully.

And Bunter glowered and devoured his tea in silence. The question about cash was not settled that evening.

THE SIXTEENTH CHAPTER.
Bunter's Tailor.

THE Owl of the Remove had never been celebrated for his modesty. He had always had an excellent opinion of himself, and had never been slow to show it. Without having any qualifications to boast about, he had always swanked. But now that he really had something to found his pretensions upon, his swanking was astounding. The fellows had thought that Bunter was pretty near the limit before. But they found that they had been mistaken. The full possibilities of Bunter as a swanker had never been revealed to them till now.

Bunter had been specially asked to Cliff House to entertain. He had been requested by the Head to oblige. His powers as an entertainer had been acknowledged in public. And after that, Greyfriars, large establishment as it was, seemed scarcely large enough to hold William George Bunter.

He swelled visibly.

His rolling walk took on a new strut, and he looked down through his big spectacles patronisingly at the Remove. He spoke in a tone of lofty condescension even to fellows in the Fifth.

His self-satisfaction was so great, that it seemed to ooze like oil through the pores of his skin.

If Bunter had been insufferable before, he was doubly and trebly insufferable now. He filled up No. 1 Study with himself, and anything that was said with a view to putting him in his place he chose to attribute to personal jealousy.

"I'm sorry you fellows can't come," he would say, with a patronising wave of his fat hand. "But it's no good cutting up rough about it. You wouldn't take me to Cliff House to see the girls the other day, and I accepted it with quiet dignity. That's what you fellows ought to cultivate—quiet dignity and independence. By the way, I shall have to have some cash, you know——"

"Oh, cheese it!" said Nugent, in disgust. "And if you don't grow a few sizes smaller when you come into this study, you'll get the order of the boot."

"The orderfulness of the esteemed boot will be terrific."

"Oh, I say, you fellows, you ought to keep this rotten jealousy within bounds, you know! Of course, I expect envy in this study——"

"Get out!"

"Oh, I'll get out! I don't want to stay here and be jawed at by envious and jealous bounders!"

"How do we stand that chap?" Nugent would ask, looking round.

And Hurree Singh and Harry Wharton would have to confess that they gave it up. How anybody could stand Bunter was a mystery. Yet nothing would have eradicated from Bunter's mind the firm belief that he was a popular fellow.

He was never to blame for anything, of course. If anybody found fault with him he attributed the fault-finding to personal jealousy, and was perfectly satisfied that it was so. As Bob Cherry had remarked, it was quite impossible to get through Bunter's thick hide, and he had given up trying.

Among the other trials to which the Remove fellows were subjected at this time was the constant ventriloquial practice Bunter thought it necessary to indulge in. At various times the Remove passage resounded with snorts, groans, gasps, and squeaks, and if anybody objected to the noise, Bunter wanted to know whether he wished the entertainment at Cliff House to be a failure.

No. 1 Study was the scene of the greater part of this practice, and the chums of the Remove were driven from their own quarters by it.

They forced Bunter to be quiet at mealtimes, but at other times they took refuge in the common-room, and let him have the study to himself.

The tailor from Friardale came to the study, too, to do the altering for Billy Bunter, and was busy there for hours at a time.

To alter Wharton's elegant clothes to suit the tubby figure of Bunter was not easy, but the tailor managed it, and made a pretty good success of the matter, and on Friday he finished the task, working with Bunter in the study, after morning school.

Billy Bunter tried on the clothes, and called in the chums of the Remove to ask their opinion.

They were certainly tight in places; but, as Nugent said, anything but a flour-sack would have been tight upon Billy Bunter.

"How do I look?" asked Bunter, strutting up and down the study.

"Much the same as usual," said Frank. "Like a barrel rolling about on a couple of fat pegs."

"Oh, really, Nugent——"

"It's all right," said Harry Wharton. "Mind you don't burst anywhere, that's all. You'd better not have any dinner to-day."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Thank you very much, Mr. Twiddles," said Bunter. "You'll let me have your bill —er—later, won't you?"

"I've brought it with me, sir," said Mr. Twiddles.

"Leave it on the table, will you?" said Bunter. "I'll send you a postal-order this evening."

"Ahem!"

"I suppose it will be all right if I send you a postal-order made payable to myself. I'm expecting one this evening, and it will save time if I send it directly on to you."

"Ahem!"

"Good afternoon, Mr. Twiddles!"

"The fact is——"

"Was that the dinner-bell?" said Bunter, with an appealing glance at Wharton.

"No, it wasn't," said Harry.

"I think I heard it!"

"Quite a mistake," said Nugent, glancing at his watch. "It's ten minutes to dinner yet."

"Ahem!" said Mr. Twiddles. "My account——"

"I'd better go and get these things off now," said Bunter. "Leave your bill on the table, Mr. Twiddles. Don't forget, as I like to pay up my accounts promptly."

"The bill's receipted, sir!" said Mr. Twiddles, with emphasis.

"Oh!"

"So I should be obliged with the cash now," said Mr. Twiddles. "It's sixteen shillings and threepence, Master Bunter. Very reasonable, I am sure."

"Oh, all right!" said Bunter, with a resigned air. "If you'd prefer to have the cash now, Mr. Twiddles, I'm sure it's quite immaterial to me."

"If you don't mind, Master Bunter."

"Hand me my jacket, will you, Nugent?"

Nugent handed Bunter his jacket. Billy made an elaborate ceremony of going through the pockets in search of money. The chums of the Remove, who knew perfectly well—as well as Bunter—that there was no money there, watched him curiously, in silence.

"H'm! It's not here," said Bunter. "Give me the trousers."

Wharton handed over the trousers.

Bunter searched through them with the same result. He looked puzzled.

"I suppose you don't know where I laid that sovereign, Wharton?" he said.

"What sovereign?"

"The one I had this morning."

"I didn't know you had one."

"Oh, really, Wharton——"

"In fact, I'm jolly sure you didn't!" said Wharton mercilessly.

"I—I must have left it in—in the dormitory," said Bunter. "Upon the whole, Mr. Twiddles, I had better send you a postal-order."

Mr. Twiddle's jaw set very squarely.

"I'd prefer the money now, sir," he said. "As a matter of fact, I've got a little account to meet to-morrow myself."

Bunter made an irritable gesture.

"I'm afraid it's impossible. I've mislaid the last sovereign, and I don't get my week's remittance till Saturday."

Bunter's tone certainly did not convey that his week's remittance amounted to exactly one shilling every Saturday.

Mr. Twiddle's jaw seemed squarer than ever.

"I want the money now, if you please," he remarked. He knew Bunter! There was an old account already, for which Mr. Twiddles had never been able to get any satisfaction.

"Well, I suppose one of you fellows can lend it to me?" said Bunter. "I'll let you have it back out of my remittance to-morrow."

"Subtract sixteen shillings and threepence from one shilling, and how much will you have left?" said Nugent, as if propounding a problem in mental arithmetic.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Oh, really, Nugent! As a matter of absolute fact, I am expecting a postal-order this evening. It is from a titled relation of mine, and cannot be for less than a pound. Mr. Twiddles, if you care to take that, you can have the whole pound and regard the three-and-ninepence as interest. I think I cannot say fairer than that."

"I only want my due," said Mr. Twiddles, "and I want it now, please."

"Settle up with him, will you, Wharton?" said Bunter. "I must get these things off, or I shall be late for dinner."

"I haven't the money," said Harry, "and I'm blessed if I'd settle such an account for you if I had. You could have gone to Cliff House in otons quite well."

"Oh, really——"

"Besides, you said yesterday that I wasn't to worry about the tailor's bill."

"Till I asked you," said Bunter. "You remember now I said till I asked you?"

"Well, you can ask for a week, and it won't make any difference."

"I don't see what's to be done, then," said Bunter. "I'm short of money. It's absurd, but you've caught me just at a moment when I'm short of money, Mr. Twiddles."

"Sixteen shillings and threepence," said the tailor—"and hard-earned, Master Bunter. I'll trouble you for it now."

"Didn't you hear what I said?"

"I don't care what you said, Master Bunter. You promised me when I came that it was to be a cash job."

"Yes, but owing to unforeseen circumstances——"

"Unforeseen circumstances won't pay my rent, Master Bunter. I'll trouble you for sixteen shillings and threepence."

"You are a very unreasonable man, Mr. Twiddles," said Bunter, with dignity. "If you treat me in this manner, you cannot expect me to employ you again."

"Which I'd rather not be employed if I'm not going to be paid," said Mr. Twiddles, growing rather excited.

"Of course, you will be paid in time."

"That won't do."

"It looks to me as if it will have to do," said Harry Wharton bluntly. "You oughtn't to have trusted Bunter, Mr. Twiddles. You've dealt with him before, and you know his word's no good. Besides, in a case of debt, the creditor is as much to blame as the debtor. A chap never wants to run into debt unless he has no money, and if he has no money he can't pay his debts, and the creditor ought to know it. That's logic."

"The logicfulness is terrific."

"Yes, but Master Bunter explained that you young gentlemen were all in it, and that if he happened to be short of money you had promised to pay the bill, Master Wharton, as you were anxious for him to make a good appearance on this occasion."

"What!"

"Oh, really!" murmured Bunter feebly. "I—I didn't put it exactly like that, you know, Mr. Twiddles."

"You awful young spoofer!"

"Oh, really——"

"And I've expended ready money, too, and taken the food out of my children's mouths——"

"Then you were a silly ass to do it," said Nugent. "Still, under the circumstances, we'd better raise the money, Harry."

"I suppose so."

"A whip-round," said Nugent, feeling in his pockets. "The worst of it is that there's no chance of getting a shilling back from Bunter."

"I shall pay every penny," said Bunter with dignity, "when my postal-order comes."

"Oh, cheese it!"

The chums of the Remove raised ten shillings between them, and handed it to Mr. Twiddles. The six and threepence Wharton promised to send on Saturday—and as Wharton's word was as good as gold, Mr. Twiddles was quite willing to take it. And he departed, with the comforting assurance that if he ever trusted Bunter again, he could take the consequences himself.

"Will you fellows have this back out of my postal-order this evening?" asked Bunter, when the tailor was gone, "or shall I put it down to the account?"

"Oh, shut up!" growled Harry, who was feeling very sore at losing so much money. He had intended to have a little jollification in the study that evening, while Bunter was away, and the idea had to be given up now.

Bunter blinked at him.

"I mean to repay the money, Wharton. It is impossible for me to accept it as a gift."

"Shut up, I say!" shouted Wharton.

"I'm not going to shut up. I know your little game."

"Little game! What do you mean?"

"You know very well what I mean. You fellows have tried lots of times to force me into a dependent position in this way, and I'm not going to stand it," said Bunter indignantly. "I'm not going to accept a gift of money from anybody. I'm going to pay back every shilling when—when I'm in funds. I've got every shilling down that you fellows have ever lent me, and I hope shortly to be able to clear up the whole amount. As to allowing you to give me money, that's impossible, and I tell you plainly that I'm not going to have you undermining my independence."

The chums gave him a look that might have brought a blush to the cheek of a stone image. It had no perceptible effect upon Bunter.

"So I'll put this down to the account," said Bunter, "and while I'm on the subject, I must say that it's jolly mean of you. But I'm on my guard, that's all, and——"

He got no further.

Three indignant pairs of hands seized him, and he was bumped on the floor of the study with a bump that took his breath away.

"There!" exclaimed Nugent. "I—— Oh! Ha, ha, ha!"

There was a sharp, splitting sound.

The tight evening trousers had been unable to resist the strain put upon them by the sudden bump.

They had given way!

The three chums rushed from the study roaring with laughter, leaving Billy Bunter gasping, and twisting round in a vain endeavour to see exactly how much damage had been done.

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THE SEVENTEENTH CHAPTER.

Bunter Provides for Unforeseen Circumstances.

DURING afternoon lessons that Friday, Billy Bunter made it a point to be absentminded and careless. It showed that he was thinking of the heavy responsibility of the Cliff House entertainment that had fallen upon his fat shoulders. But Mr. Quelch was very patient with him. Bunter escaped without any lines. As the Remove came out of the class-room, he tapped Wharton on the shoulder.

"I suppose you wouldn't mind scudding down to Friardale on your bike for me, Wharton?" he said.

"What for?"

"To take those trousers to Mr. Twiddles. There's a split in them that will want sewing up."

"Can't you do it?"

"Oh, really——"

"Well, I'm jolly well not going to Friardale."

"I think you might be obliging on an occasion like this, Wharton. However, if you like to give me the half-crown, I will take them."

"What half-crown?"

"Mr. Twiddles charges half-a-crown for a mend like that."

"Stuff!"

"Oh, very well, if you want me to go to Cliff House in rags and tatters——"

"I haven't half-a-crown," said Wharton impatiently. "You've cleared me out of money, Billy. I've only a shilling left."

"Well, I dare say Mr. Twiddles would do it for a shilling, as it's a special case. In fact, now I think of it, I remember his having done a mend something like that for a shilling once before."

Wharton placed the shilling in Billy Bunter's fat palm, and shook him off. A little later the chums of the Remove, after some practice on the footer field, looked in at the school shop for liquid refreshment, Bob Cherry being in funds, and happening to know that No. 1 Study were stony, and nobly coming to the rescue.

They found Billy Bunter there.

The Owl of the Remove was slowly working his way through a large plate of tarts.

Wharton clapped him on the shoulder.

"You young spoofer! I understood you were broke."

"So I am, Wharton."

"Where did you get these tarts from, then? Don't tell me Mrs. Mimble is trusting you, because I know jolly well she isn't."

"Master Bunter has paid for the tarts," said Mrs. Mimble.

"You see, I—I had a shilling," said Bunter. "I—I decided that I should be too tired for the entertainment to-night if I walked to Friardale; and besides, on second thoughts I considered that I could do the mending quite as well as Twiddles could. So in justice to myself I thought I had better expend my shilling in having a snack here, just to keep up my strength."

"Your shilling! Mine, you mean," said Harry indignantly. "My last one, too."

"Oh, really, Wharton, I don't see how you make that out. The shilling was a loan to me."

"Oh, it's no good talking to you!" said Harry. "I wish there were an entertainment at Cliff House every day, and you went to every one, and hadn't time to come home."

"Oh, really——"

"Oh, scat!"

Bunter finished his tarts indignantly. The chums of the Remove discussed ginger-beer, and Bunter came over to them when the tarts were gone.

"Jam tarts make you thirsty, don't they?" he remarked casually.

"Do they?" said Bob Cherry.

"Yes, rather! I suppose you haven't a bottle of ginger-beer to spare."

"Quite right; I haven't."

"I'm pretty dry."

"Your conversation is, anyway."

"Oh, really, Cherry! Upon the whole, you know, ginger-beer bucks a fellow up for giving a ventriloquial entertainment, doesn't it?"

"I don't know," said Bob Cherry cheerfully. "Never been a ventriloquist."

Bunter blinked at him doubtfully.

"I've got some sewing to do," he remarked. "You're awfully clever at sewing, Nugent. You remember how well you altered those costumes for the play we gave once?"

"Yes, I remember."

"If you would care to mend those trousers for me——"

"I shouldn't."

"You are so—so neat, and——"

"Thanks!"

"I should be willing to help you, of course."

"Rats!"

"I think you're very selfish. I say, Wharton, will you ask Ionides if he'll lend me his diamond studs?"

"Ask him yourself."

"Well, he's such an ill-tempered beast, you know, he might kick me out."

"Serve you right."

"Oh, really——"

"Better go and get changed, Billy. It's very near time for you to start for Cliff House," said Nugent.

"I was just thinking about that. Er—did you say I was to have a ginger, Cherry?"

"No."

"Oh! Well, about the cab to Cliff House."

"Cab?" said Wharton. "It's not a quarter of an hour's walk, and it would take longer than that for a cab to come from Friardale."

"Well, there's the look of the thing, you know. There's going to be a decent entertainment—distinguished guests, and all that sort of thing, and it would look rotten sneaking in on foot. A fellow with my social connections ought to keep up a decent appearance."

"Oh, you'll never look decent, under any circumstances, Bunter," said Nugent consolingly.

"Oh, really, you know! Besides, the Head would telephone for a cab from Friardale, and it would be here in time. The question is about the fare. It would only be half-a-crown, you know, including coming from Friardale."

"Rats!"

"Well, if you're going to be mean——"

"Ring off!"

"I think I ought to have a cab to Cliff House. I know jolly well that you fellows want to spoil the whole thing, from sheer jealousy, and I'll tell you what I think about it," said Bunter warmly. "I think it's mean."

Harry Wharton looked harassed.

"Bunter, old man, you've cleaned me out to the last copper. Do be reasonable, and give us a little peace."

"I'm not talking to you, Wharton," said Bunter loftily. There was no need to waste politeness on Wharton, if he was cleaned out to the last copper, and Bunter did not waste any. "But you, Cherry, you're a decent sort."

"Thank you!" said Bob, so scornfully that it brought a tinge of red even to Billy Bunter's face.

"Well, I think I ought to have a cab. I'll pay every penny out of my postal-order to-morrow."

"Oh, you can have the cab, but get off the postal-order," said Bob Cherry resignedly. "We shall never hear the end of it if you don't have the cab. I'll stand it."

"Good! Three shillings will be enough, and——"

"Half-a-crown!"

"Well, there's a tip for the cabby, you know. I suppose you don't want me to treat an honest and hard-working man with disgusting meanness."

"Well, three bob, then; and now shut up, for goodness' sake."

"You haven't given me the money."

"I'll give it to the cabby when he comes."

"Oh, really——"

"Shut up! No three bobs'-worth of tarts for you."

"I don't know that I can accept it on those terms. It would look, to the cabby himself, as if you couldn't trust me."

"Don't accept it, then," said Bob.

"H'm! I'll ask Gosling to telephone for the cab at once," said Bunter, changing the subject. "I think—ahem! —I think it might have occurred to you fellows that I ought to have a bob or so in my pocket, in case of unforeseen expenses. It's rotten to go to an entertainment stony."

Bob Cherry handed the fat junior a shilling.

"Now get out!" he said.

"H'm! Upon the whole, it might be advisable to have another snack, instead of—— Ow, ow, ow! Beast! Yow!"

Bunter departed from the tuckshop on the end of Bob Cherry's boot. Bob came back to his friends with a rather flushed face.

Billy Bunter dispensed with the snack. He did not care to enter the tuckshop again while Bob Cherry was there.

He met Bulstrode as he went to the School House.

"Hold on, Bulstrode!" he said. "I say, I'm starting for Cliff House soon, to give my splendid entertainment. Bob Cherry's standing me a cab, but I—I think I ought to have a bob or two in my pocket, in case of unforeseen expenses. Don't you think so?"

"Yes, if you can get it," said Bulstrode, with a grin.

"Well, you're such a generous chap, Bulstrode——"

"Oh, cut the cackle, and here's the bob!" said Bulstrode rudely. "I suppose you'll pester me till you get it."

He threw a shilling to Bunter, and walked on. The fat junior blinked at him, and pocketed the shilling. Bulstrode's manner could not be called friendly or flattering, but a shilling was a shilling, and Bunter was not particular.

He entered the house, and ran into Alonzo Todd. He caught the Duffer of Greyfriars by the sleeve.

"I say, Todd, old man, I suppose you know I'm going to Cliff House?"

"Oh, certainly, Bunter."

"It's rather rough going to a place without a bob in your pocket, in case of unforeseen circumstances, don't you think?" said Bunter pathetically.

"Yes, indeed!" said Alonzo. "I really wish I could lend you some money, Bunter. My Uncle Benjamin— "

"A bob would do."

"My Uncle Benjamin always impressed upon me to help the needy whenever I could, and I am sorry that I have no money, you know. Why not ask Bulstrode? He had thirty shillings this morning from his uncle in Manchester. I saw him showing it to the fellows."

"If you could manage a tanner——"

"I'm so sorry——"

"Look here, a threepenny-bit——"

"So sorry, but——"

"Oh, rats! I can't waste time standing here talking to you, Todd. Blessed if I ever met such a frightful bore."

And Bunter rolled on, leaving Alonzo Todd looking very much surprised. He caught Wun Lung, the little Chinee, on the stairs.

"I say, Wun Lung, old fellow!" said Bunter affectionately. "I'm going over to Cliff House, you know, and it's rotten going to a place with nothing in your pocket, isn't it?"

"No savvy," said the little Chinee softly.

"You see, a chap ought to be provided in case of unforeseen expenses. If you could lend me a couple of shillings ——"

"No savvy."

"A bob would be very useful, old chap."

"No savvy."

"Look here, Wun Lung, you might lend me——"

"No savvy."

"It's rather an important occasion, old fellow. I wouldn't ask you if it wasn't; you know I'm not a borrowing sort. But if you could lend——"

"No savvy."

"Oh, you stupid heathen rotter, blessed if I know what I'm wasting time on you for!" said Bunter. "Get out of my way, do!"

Wun Lung chuckled as Bunter rolled on. He did not "savvy," but he seemed to find something very amusing in his descent from an old chap to a heathen rotter.

Bunter looked in at No. 13 in the Remove passage, where Mark Linley was busy on a Greek exercise. The Lancashire lad looked up.

"Could you oblige me with a bob till to-morrow morning?" asked Bunter. "I'll let you have it back without fail out of my postal-order."

Mark shook his head.

"You know I am poor," he said. "I can't afford to give you a shilling, Bunter, and you know you never repay a loan."

"This is a special occasion. I'm going over to Cliff House to give an entertainment, and it's rotten going to a place like that without a cent in your pocket. I think you might manage it for once, Linley, I do really."

Linley drew a shilling—one of the very few he had—from his pocket.

"Very well," he said, "I hope you will repay this, Bunter."

"Out of my postal-order," said Bunter, slipping the shilling into his pocket. "It may not come till Monday, perhaps, but you shall have this back when it does come."

Mark's eyes dropped on his work again. Bunter rolled out of the study. There was no gratitude in Bunter's looks, or in his heart.

"Rotten factory bounder," he muttered. "Fancy his daring to doubt the word of a gentleman—me! This is what comes of letting the lower classes into a decent school to mix with fellows like me! It's not good for them!"

And the reader will agree that it could not possibly be good for anybody to mix with Billy Bunter, though that was not exactly what Billy meant.

THE EIGHTEENTH CHAPTER.
Bunter Goes.

BILLY BUNTER mended the rent in the evening trousers, and arrayed himself in them and in the rest of the tailored garments, to his great satisfaction. They were a tight fit, but that only made them show off the graceful curves of his figure—so Bunter considered. Nugent's white shirt looked brilliant upon him, adorned as it was with Wharton's gold studs, and Hurree Singh's handsome sleeve-links. Many articles from various quarters had been borrowed to complete Bunter's outfit.

It was very curious how Bunter succeeded in borrowing all the things he wanted. Many fellows who never lent things to others lent them to Bunter, whom they liked less than anybody else. Bunter had reduced borrowing to a fine art, as a matter of fact. Arrayed in his borrowed plumes, he surveyed himself in the glass, and was satisfied.

"Not very often they have a chap like me at a girls' school entertainment," he muttered. "It will be a treat for them. My word, won't the fellows be jealous when they see me go!"

Billy Bunter had asked Gosling to telephone for the cab from the village, and the vehicle was expected every minute now. Bunter put on Wharton's dress overcoat, which was rather a tight fit across the shoulders; but, as Bunter said, it would do, as Wharton was too selfish to let the tailor alter it, and pay him for doing so.

Ogilvy's hat, too, had been called into requisition. Ogilvy was well known never to let anybody touch his Gibus hat, yet he had lent it to Bunter. It was rather small for Bunter, and, indeed, seemed to be perched on top of his very fat head; but Bunter was pleased with the effect. Owing to the general meanness in No. 1 Study, he was still wearing his spectacles instead of a two-guinea monocle. Bunter had offered to attempt to get an eyeglass for a guinea, and even for half a guinea, if No. 1 Study found the money; but they hadn't done so. Bunter said he was used to this selfishness. He descended, looking quite gorgeous.

Half the fellows had gathered in the hall to see him off.

"Here he is," said Russell.

"Hurrah!"

Bunter blinked at them. Skinner and Bulstrode were whispering and grinning as they waited for the cab to appear. Bulstrode groped in his pocket, and showed Skinner half-a-sovereign, and they both chuckled. The half-sovereign passed into Skinner's possession, and Skinner stepped out into the Close.

There was a rumble of wheels

"Here comes the cab!"

"Go it, Bunter."

"On the ball, Fatty."

"I say, you fellows——"

"Bravo, Bunter!"

"I say, you fellows, it's raining! One of you might hold an umbrella over me while I get in, you know."

"Certainly," said Bulstrode. "I should be awfully sorry if you got wet. I'll do it, with pleasure."

"Thank you."

Bulstrode handed Bunter to his cab as if he had been a lady of the most fragile description, holding an umbrella over him carefully. Bob Cherry handed the fare to the cabby. Bunter leaned back in the cab, and blinked at the crowd of juniors in the lighted doorway.

"Good-bye!" he said languidly. "Sorry I can't take any of you fellows, but—ahem!—distinguished company, you know. A fellow has to be careful. Drive on, cabby."

The cabby drove on. Skinner jumped up on the box beside him, and drove away with him. The Removites were left staring.

"My hat!" said Ogilvy. "The cool cheek of him!"

"The cheekfulness is terrific!"

"What's your little game, Bulstrode? What did it matter if the fat bounder got wet?" demanded Elliott.

Bulstrode chuckled.

"He'll get wet enough before he gets to Cliff House," he replied.

"How do you know?"

Bulstrode replied only with a chuckle.

"But why should he get wet, in the cab?" asked Harry Wharton.

"Suppose the cab had an accident?"

"An accident?"

"Yes. Suppose it were to be upset in a ditch, for instance?"

"Why should it be?"

"Well, it might happen."

And Bulstrode declined to say any more on the subject. But he had said quite enough. There was a general chuckle, and the Removites waited for what would happen.

Meanwhile, the cab rolled out of Greyfriars gates, and took its way along the dark and windy road towards Cliff House. The rain was descending in a thin drizzle, and the wind dashed it against the glass windows.

Skinner pulled his overcoat about his ears as he sat beside the driver. He was talking to the latter in low tones. Bunter did not even know that he was on the cab.

"You've got your fare?" said Skinner.

"Yes; Master Cherry paid me in advance."

"Bunter owes you a fare from the beginning of the term, doesn't he?"

"Oh, I sha'n't get that!" said Mr. Pilkins. "I've give up

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expecting it. I wouldn't take Master Bunter without the fare paid in advance."

"It's jolly easy to get upset in a lane like this, in the dark, with a ditch on both sides," said Skinner.

"I s'pose so, Master Skinner."

"It might happen without damaging the cab.

"It might."

"How much does Bunter owe you?"

"Four shillings, Master Skinner."

"Suppose a chap was willing to pay it for him?"

"I'd be very glad," said Mr. Pilkins, becoming very respectful. "I've got a wife and family to keep. And the time Master Bunter had my cab, Master Skinner, I missed a three-bob passenger in taking him."

"Just like Bunter! Look here, Mr. Pilkins, if you should happen to upset Bunter in a ditch, I know a chap who'd pay that four bob, and six bob over."

Mr. Pilkins whistled.

"Oh, come, Master Skinner!"

"It's a fact! Of course, an accident might happen on a dark night!"

"Of course," agreed the driver.

"And half-a-sovereign isn't to be sneezed at."

"Not by a pore man with a wife and family."

"And Bunter will never pay you himself."

"That he won't."

"Well," said Skinner briskly, "is such a thing likely to happen? I can't come very far, Mr. Pilkins. But if Bunter get stranded half-way to Cliff House, and your horse bolted, and he was left there, it would serve him right for not paying you."

"That it would."

"And there's half-a-sovereign."

"Where?"

"Here!" Skinner showed a glimmer of gold in the light of the lamp. "Now, is there likely to be an accident, Mr. Pilkins?"

"Werry likely, sir."

"If it's certain, here's the half-sov."

"It's quite certain, Master Skinner."

"Here you are, then."

The half-sovereign was stowed away into one of Mr. Pilkins's capacious pockets, and Skinner dropped off the box and disappeared. Billy Bunter, quite unconscious of what was going on, reposed at his ease on the musty cushions of the cab, and thought of his coming triumph at Cliff House.

His dream of triumph and glory was suddenly interrupted.

THE NINETEENTH CHAPTER.

Not Admitted.

BUMP!

Crash!

Billy Bunter gave a sudden jump. The four-wheeler had bumped into a tree beside the lane, and Bunter was thrown forward. He jumped up, his head knocking against the roof of the cab, and Ogilvy's opera hat shut up with sudden unexpectedness.

"Oh! Ow! What's the matter? Help!"

Bump!

Bunter opened the door of the cab, and jumped out. He forgot the rain for the moment. The bumping was too much for his nerves.

The moment Bunter was in the road, the horse bolted. Whether Mr. Pilkins gave it any assistance in the shape of a touch from the whip, or whether the horse was scared, we cannot undertake to say.

It bolted.

The four-wheeler went whizzing down the road.

Bunter stood in the rain.

"Come back!" he roared. "Ow! Oh! You villain! Come back!"

There was no reply.

If Bunter had not got out of the cab, all would have been well; and for once the fat junior had to suffer himself for his poltroonery, without being able to lay it upon anybody else's shoulders.

"Come back!" he shrieked.

But the rumbling four-wheeler was gone.

"Oh, dear!" gasped Bunter. "The villain! Oh, dear! I'm getting wet! Oh, dear, the umbrella's left in the beastly cab! Oh, dear!"

The rain came down steadily.

Bunter's trousers—the trousers that had caused so much trouble—were muddy all over, and his coat and head were dripping with rain. The opera hat had fallen off in the cab.

"Oh, dear! Oh, dear! Oh, dear!"

Standing in the rain and mud, and saying "Oh, dear," did not seem to mend matters. Billy Bunter started towards Cliff House at a run.

Even in the dark he knew where he was. He was not five minutes' walk from Miss Penelope Primrose's school.

He ran as fast as his little fat legs could carry him.

He came at last into the lights at the gates of Cliff House. The windows through the trees were lighted up for company. Vehicles were arriving, and there was a general confusion of hacks and carriages and umbrellas and voices.

Bunter dashed up breathlessly.

The iron hand of the porter at the gate dropped upon him, and swung him back.

"Out of 'ere you young ragamuffin!"

"Fellow——"

"Get away, you young wagrant, or I'll give you in charge!"

"I am——"

"Get hout!"

Bunter's appearance was certainly against him. Muddy and wet from head to foot, his clothes dripping and draggled, his hair towsled, he certainly did not look like a guest for the evening.

The porter was worried and hasty with the rain, and the thick-coming visitors and the general confusion. It was no wonder that he had no time to waste upon the muddy, disreputable figure that had come out of the gloom.

With a swing of his arm he sent Bunter out of the gates. The fat junior staggered back out of the way of the horses, blinking and dismayed.

"Oh, dear—oh, dear!"

He did not venture to return to the attack. He realised, too, that in his present state he was hardly fit to give the entertainment. Owing to the delay, he was late already, and most of the guests had arrived. But there was yet time to cut back to Greyfriars and change. If the entertainment were delayed a little, that could not be helped.

The fat junior set out for Greyfriars. By running all the way, and changing at lightning speed, and getting a cab again somehow, he would manage to be in something like time. He ran down the lane, and crossed the stile to take a short cut through the fields.

But taking a short cut after dark, in the rain, was not like taking it by daylight. Billy Bunter splashed through wet grass, and weeping hedges, and muddy ditches, and soon lost all sense of direction.

It seemed to him hours and hours before he found himself upon a high road again, and was able to drag his weary limbs towards Greyfriars.

He rang furiously at the school gates, but Gosling was not in a hurry to come out in the rain and open them.

He appeared at last, after repeated ringings, and he almost fell down when he saw Bunter.

But Bunter did not wait. He bolted across the Close, and dashed into the house. There were still some Removites waiting for him, and their roar of laughter drew others to the spot.

Bunter came into the light—an awful figure.

The Removites simply roared. Billy Bunter stood, the picture of dismay. Fellows were gathering from all sides to look at him, and there were yells of laughter at his appearance that rang all over Greyfriars.

"Dear me! What is this disturbance?" exclaimed Mr. Quelch, coming out of his study. "Why—bless my soul!—is that Bunter?"

"Oh, really, sir——"

"Dear me! Have you had an accident driving back, Bunter?"

"N-n-n-no, sir! I—I had an accident driving there, sir," stammered Bunter.

"Bless my soul!"

"I—I think I'd better change and go again——"

"Nonsense, Bunter, it is too late," said Mr. Quelch. "You will find Miss Primrose's guests departing. You had better write a letter of apology, and go to bed."

Mr. Quelch went back into his study. The fellows shrieked. Billy Bunter made his way slowly up the stairs to the Remove dormitory. Half the fellows in the Remove had been put to some loss by the spoiling of Bunter's attire; but they didn't think of that just then. They simply yelled.

Miss Primrose received Bunter's letter of explanation the next morning, at the same time that Dr. Locke received a letter from Miss Primrose, expressing her surprise that Master Bunter had not appeared as arranged. The Remove laughed loud and long over the adventure of the Cliff House guest who had not been admitted to Cliff House, and after the swank of Billy Bunter, no one had any sympathy to waste upon him. And for some days after the Cliff House entertainment it was noticed that William George Bunter's manner was much more subdued—in fact, it was nearly a week before he began to swank again like the old Bunter.

THE END.

(Another splendid, long, complete Tale of Harry Wharton & Co. next week by Frank Richards, entitled "THE NEW FIRM." Order your copy of the "Magnet" in advance. Price One Penny.)

STANLEY DARE
The Boy Detective

INTRODUCTION.

Stanley Dare, the Boy Detective, is engaged by Miss Ruth Palgrave to investigate a strange case. Miss Palgrave's fiance—Geoffrey Winfield—has quarrelled with his guardian, Jasper Marlowe. In the heat of anger Winfield had left home, but some weeks later had received a letter purporting to come from Jasper Marlowe, begging the young man return and make peace. On his return he enters his guardian's room to find the old man lying dead on the floor. When Winfield gives the alarm his story is disbelieved and he is arrested for murder and committed for trial. Stanley Dare sets to work immediately, and James Cooper—John Marlowe's nephew and successor—and a man named Fennimore become involved in the mystery. These two men have their reasons for fearing the young detective, and one night attack him and throw him down a well. Fortunately for Stanley Dare, Professor MacAndrew rescues him, and takes him to a farm labourer's cottage. The young detective regained consciousness about an hour later, but MacAndrew would not allow him to talk until he had had a sleep. *(Now go on with the Story.)*

The Vigilance of the Professor—A Hiding-Place for the Documents—The Ebony Idol Disappears—A Chase Through London.

A draught which Professor MacAndrew had prepared from some herbs and given to the patient had the desired effect, and then the professor composed himself for a few hours much-needed rest himself.

It was late in the afternoon when Dare woke up, feeling all the better for his refreshing slumber. The farm labourer's wife brought him some beef-tea, and the professor sat by the bedside, devouring a chop which he had ordered for his own dinner.

"Tell me all that has happened, old chap," said Dare. "I remember the murderer striking me down in the library, but nothing after that."

"The murderer!" exclaimed the professor.

"Yes," replied Dare simply. "He is passing himself off as the nephew of the late Jasper Marlowe, but it was he who murdered him. All that is firmly impressed on my mind to the exclusion of everything else almost, except that we shall have some difficulty in proving that he is an impostor. I had secured the will and the death certificate of Marlowe's real nephew, but I suppose they are in that scoundrel's possession now."

"No, laddie, they're in mine," said the professor. "I followed you down to Elmwood, and was hiding in the grounds, when I saw the two envelopes come flying out of the window; they dropped almost at my feet, and I promptly secured them."

He then went on to relate all that had happened afterwards, and as he finished Dare clasped him by the hand.

"You saved my life, MacAndrew," he said. "I can't find words to thank you——"

"Don't try to find them, laddie," interrupted the professor hastily. "We understand each other without all that. But there's just something I'd like ye to make a bit more clear to me. You said just now that the man who calls himself James Cooper murdered Jasper Marlowe. You have got some reason for saying that—some proof, I suppose?"

"Reason enough," replied Dare, "but not enough legal proof at present to have him arrested. You may remember Winfield's statement that he only wore that Borgia ring once, because it caused a sore on his finger which did not heal for weeks?"

"I remember."

"You know the cause of the sore?"

"Ay, laddie! I told you the ring was a real Borgia, and we may assume contains, or did contain, poison."

"Exactly. The gold had worn very thin, and an infinitesimal quantity of the poison had soaked through—not enough to do any permanent injury to the wearer, but enough to cause an inflammation that would not be easily got rid of. There is such an inflammation at the base of the middle finger of the right hand of the man who is passing himself off as James Cooper," said Dare. "If my eyes had not been fixed so closely on that I might have warded off his blow when he struck me."

"Laddie, is that so?" cried the professor excitedly. "We have him, then—we have him, sure enough!"

"Yes, he is in the net," replied Dare; "but we have much to do yet ere the time will be ripe for drawing the meshes close about him so that he cannot escape. I can see now, almost as if I had been present, how the murder was committed. The Borgia ring still contains poison, which is injected under the skin by a tiny needle worked by a spring. Cooper knew the properties of the ring, and had gained possession of it after Winfield quitted the Grange. Then he arranged an interview with Jasper Marlowe on some pretence or other, despatched the letter written with invisible ink to Winfield in London, and, choosing his time with the cunning of a skilled criminal, struck Jasper Marlowe lightly on the back of the neck with the poison ring, causing almost instant death."

"I knew the meaning of that slight discoloration around the puncture at the back of the neck," said the professor, "and I could have told those numskulls at the inquest that there was poison in the case, but they thought too much of their own opinion to care for that of others. But what about that cry for help and the shriek that young Winfield heard just before he became unconscious in the library?"

"It was necessary to raise the alarm, for those villains are too clever to leave anything to chance," replied Dare. "The cry and the shriek were done by Cooper and a confederate."

"It is as dastardly a crime and as cunning a scheme to throw the blame on to an innocent man as ever I heard of!" exclaimed the professor.

Three days elapsed before Dare was able to bear the fatigue of a journey up to London, and then he went straight to MacAndrew's house, sending to his office for any letters that might have come for him during his absence.

The will and the death certificate of Marlowe's nephew, the real James Cooper, a perfectly genuine document, were placed inside the ebony idol, from which the steel phial had been permanently removed.

"They'll be as safe there as anywhere," said the professor, "and we shall have all the things connected with the case together. It's as well to be careful in these matters."

The professor's unwonted fit of caution and care—for in his own affairs he was a most careless individual—led in this instance to disaster. When they arose on the following morning it was found that the house had been broken into during the night, and, to their dismay, the ebony idol had been stolen. The mere loss of the idol itself would have been of little consequence, but the will and the death certificate were in it, and had gone, too, and that was a far different matter.

"As nothing else has been stolen," said Dare, "it is evidently the work of the Cooper gang."

"But they could not have known that we had secreted the documents in the image," objected the professor.

"No. They were evidently after the idol only," replied the young detective. "But they will find out fast enough, you may be sure. It is a knock-down blow to us if we can't recover the will and the certificate."

"It was announced in the 'Saintbury Herald,' the day before yesterday, that Mr. James Cooper, of Elmwood, was starting that day for a short holiday on the Continent," pursued MacAndrew.

"His Continental holiday will be spent in London, I expect," said Dare; "though he will take care not to show himself where he is likely to be known."

It had occurred to Dare that the idol had been bought

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originally from one of the curio dealers who do business near the docks in the East-End of London, so he made his way that afternoon to the neighbourhood of Poplar to make a few careful and guarded inquiries.

Alighting from the omnibus at the corner of the East India Dock Road, he was proceeding along that thoroughfare in the direction of the dock gates, when, on the opposite side of the way, he caught sight of a man whose face seemed familiar to him.

A few moments of puzzled thought, and then he remembered who the fellow was. It was the man who had attacked him on the Saintbury Road on the night when he had first visited Elmwood, and had come away with the idol in his possession.

"You are one of the gang," thought Dare, "and, as you tried to get the idol once before, it is more than likely you made the second attempt last night; therefore you are worth following."

The fellow, whose name was Lucas, after walking to the end of the road, shadowed by the young detective, who was now retracing his steps, hailed a hansom from the rank, and, jumping in, was presently being driven off in the direction of the City. Quick as thought, Dare hailed a second hansom, and, giving directions to the driver to keep the first cab in sight, started on a chase that was to lead half across London, and end in a manner that he little anticipated.

Lucas stopped his cab opposite to a tobacconist's in Fenchurch Street, and purchased some cigars in the shop. Then the cab proceeded up Lombard Street, past the Mansion House, down Queen Victoria Street, over Blackfriars Bridge, and eventually into the Kennington Road.

The cab pulled up at a house a little way beyond the baths on the right-hand side. Lucas did not alight on this occasion, but he was presently joined by Cooper, and the hansom started off again, this time making towards London Bridge. The man who went by the name of Cooper was carrying a small parcel about the size of the idol, but Dare was too far off to be able to distinguish the shape.

The end of the cab journey was at a wharf in Wapping, from which the Antwerp steamers sailed. Cooper and Lucas went on board. Fennimore was already there waiting for them.

"The Continental trip is not a myth, after all," thought Dare. "Believing that I am at the bottom of the well, they have, no doubt, thought it advisable to make themselves scarce in case any unpleasant inquiries are made about my disappearance."

Discharging his cabman with a liberal tip in addition to his fare, he inquired at the wharf office when the steamer would sail.

"Six o'clock sharp, sir," was the reply.

Fortunately, he had enough money in his pocket to pay his fare to Antwerp second-class, and leave a little over. Having obtained his passage-ticket, he found that he had an hour to spare before the boat started, so he utilised the time in purchasing a rough suit of clothes and a soft felt hat from a second-hand clothes dealer, from whom he also obtained a battered leather bag for a small sum, in which to pack the garments that for the time being he had discarded. With a muffler round his throat, his coat-collar turned up, and the soft hat pulled well down over his eyes, he would escape recognition by the men he was shadowing.

He had neither the means nor the time at his disposal for further disguise, but, as Cooper and his associates believed him to be dead, he had nothing to fear from them if he kept out of their way as much as possible.

At the last moment, before the mooring-chains were cast off, Lucas went on shore. He was not going to accompany them, then.

Dare scribbled a telegram addressed to the professor, which he gave to one of the wharf clerks to despatch for him. There was the hoot of the steamer's siren, hoarse orders, the rattle of chains, and then the steady "Thump, thump!" of the engines.

The Curlew had started on a voyage that was fraught with strange and startling results for three of her passengers.

A Quick Move—Overboard—Back in London—A Tragedy.

The Curlew had got no more than a couple of miles below Gravesend when a mist settled down on the river, which necessitated a considerable reduction of the speed.

The Nore Lightship was passed, and then the fog settled down more thickly. There were very few passengers on board. The first saloon dinner was over, and Cooper was smoking a cigar on deck. Fennimore joined him after a bit, bringing with him a small package that Dare had noticed in Cooper's possession previously.

The young detective drew closer to them, hidden in the shadow of a pile of baggage on the after-hatch.

"Here is the idol," said Fennimore, in a low voice.

"The sooner we get rid of it the better. It was a smart bit of work on Lucas's part getting hold of it again from the professor's house, for it is a bit of evidence that might tell against us."

Cooper made a gesture of impatience.

"We have silenced the only person who is at all dangerous——"

"Hush, you fool!" whispered Fennimore, in alarm. "You never seem to know the value of caution."

"You have enough for both of us," retorted Cooper drily. "Unfasten the thing, and let us have a look at it before we consign it to a watery grave."

"What do you want to look at it for?" demanded the other. "It is a dangerous possession. I will throw it overboard at once."

"Wait!" snapped Cooper. "Unfasten the paper from round it. I didn't open the thing when Lucas brought it to me, but it has since struck me that it is lighter than usual. That professor may have found out the secret, and extracted the steel phial containing the drug."

Stanley Dare's feelings on hearing these words can better be imagined than described. The will and the death certificate were still inside the idol, then, and Cooper had no idea of the prize that was within his grasp. But he would know in another minute, unless Fennimore threw the image overboard without further discussion.

Dare did not wish either event to happen; but of the two the latter would be most disastrous. A moment's reflection decided him how to act.

Fennimore grumblingly complied with his companion's demand, and stripped the paper covering from the image.

"It does feel light," he said. "Here you are; take a look at it, and then pitch it overboard."

He held it towards his confederate, and Cooper was about to take it, when Dare stepped from his hiding-place and snatched it from Fennimore's hand.

"I think I will take charge of this idol for the time being," he said coolly.

There was nobody else on that part of the deck, and with an oath Cooper turned upon him. The light from a lantern fell directly on the young detective's face, and as Cooper's eyes fell upon him the curse froze upon his lips, and he reeled back with a cry of horror, staring at Dare as though he were looking upon one newly risen from the dead. And indeed, as he believed that he had killed him and safely disposed of the body, he might very well come to that conclusion.

As Cooper was a man of strong nerve, he would naturally soon have recovered himself, and understood that his victim had escaped the fate intended for him. How he would have acted then can only be a matter for conjecture, as at that moment there came an interruption from Fennimore which had the effect of changing the course of events into an entirely different channel.

He had, of course, also recognised Dare; and, looking upon his appearance as a sort of ghostly visitation, he had been unable to control his terror, but, with a wild shriek, turned to fly on to the bridge, which he evidently regarded as a haven of refuge.

Cooper realised that the danger to himself—he cared nothing about anybody else—would be considerably increased if his associate was not silenced at once. As Fennimore made a rush along the deck Cooper sprang upon him, and a short struggle ensued.

"You fool, keep quiet!" hissed Cooper.

They were close to an open gangway—which ought by rights to have been closed—and suddenly, with a stifled gasp, Fennimore threw up his arms and fell backwards.

There was a splash, and he had vanished from sight in a moment. Cooper stood peering over the side into the mist-covered water, with a curious expression on his face. He alone knew whether the tragic event was an accident or not.

Anyhow, he made no attempt to inform the ship's officers of what had happened; but Stanley Dare was prompt to act.

Shouting at the top of his voice "Man overboard!" he rushed aft, flung a lifebuoy into the water, and then, thrusting the precious idol into his coat pocket, he took a header into the sea.

A man was in danger of drowning, and he did not pause to consider that the man he was now risking his own life to try and save had, not so long ago, aided, however unwillingly, in what he had supposed at the time was his murder.

When Dare rose to the surface after his dive the steamer had been swallowed up in the mist. He could hear the shouts of the people on board, and the preparations being made for the lowering of a boat; but he knew even then that the chances of his being picked up were very remote indeed. However, he shouted with all the strength of his lungs, so as to give the men in the boat an idea of the direction in which they were to pull, and then struck out for the lifebuoy, which was floating a short distance away from him.

It was impossible to see more than a few yards in any direction, and he feared that, after all, he had risked his life to no purpose, when he heard a faint cry away on his right.

Swimming in that direction, and pushing the lifebuoy before him, he at length came in sight of Fennimore, struggling feebly to keep himself afloat. A couple of minutes later he had him hanging on to the buoy by his side.

"Curlew, ahoy! Aho-y-y!"

Again and again he shouted with all his strength, but there came no response. The boat when lowered must have pulled in the wrong direction, not an unlikely event in that bewildering mist. There was nothing in sight. All objects were hidden by the grey veil and the darkness. Now and again, far away in the distance, the hoot of a steamer's siren could be heard, but too far away for the sound of a human voice to reach those on board.

An hour passed; Fennimore was almost unconscious. Dare still had his wits about him, but his limbs were becoming numbed through being so long in the water.

The fog was thinning a bit, and the churn of a steamer's paddles broke upon the silence, coming nearer and nearer. Dare saw the faint glimmer of her masthead and side-lights. Once more he raised his voice in a shout for help.

The steamer—it was a tug—came to a stop, and the young detective heard a gruff but kindly voice exclaiming:

"There's somebody in the water! D'ye see 'em, clinging to a buoy? Down with the boat, lads! Quick about it! I dunno how they managed to get in, but we've got to fish 'em out."

In a dazed, semi-conscious fashion, Dare heard the splash of the boat as it was water-borne, and the rattle of the oars in the rowlocks.

Then strong, kindly arms were placed around him, and he was lifted into the boat. Very soon afterwards he was helped on to the deck of the tug. Hot coffee was given to him, and he was wrapped up in a hot blanket.

"Is Fennimore getting on all right?" he asked.

"What, the other chap?" responded the mate of the tug, to whom the remark had been addressed. "Oh, yes; he's as right as a trivet."

These words were the last sound that he heard before he sank into a deep, refreshing sleep.

. . . . . .

"I think, laddie," said Professor MacAndrew, as he surveyed the Hindu god that was perched on the table before him, "that the fellow who calls himself, or miscalls himself, James Cooper has slipped through our fingers. He'll hardly venture back to England now."

"Unless he thinks, for a second time, that I am dead," replied Dare.

"He can hardly do that, with the papers giving half-column descriptions of your rescue," returned the professor. "He is sure to see one of the accounts, at least."

"England has extradition treaties with all the Continental Powers," Dare continued. "I don't think he will escape us."

Two days had elapsed since the young detective and Fennimore had been picked up by the tug; and Dare, after reaching London, had taken up his quarters temporarily at the professor's house.

He was so soundly asleep when the tug reached Gravesend that the skipper decided not to rouse him. And when he did awake he learnt, to his surprise, that Fennimore had landed at once, saying to the tug captain that he would have to cable at once to Antwerp, to give the news that they had been saved, or their friends would be mourning their loss.

"It was an artful dodge to get away like that," said Dare, when he told MacAndrew of his adventure, "although I hardly expected him to wait to thank me for having rescued him. It would have been running too great a risk, from his point of view; for, having assured himself that I was really flesh and blood, and not a ghost, he probably supposed that I should hand him over to the police when I got on shore."

"Hallo! Hey! Why——"

Professor MacAndrew was at the window, and staring out of it in utter astonishment.

"What's the matter?" exclaimed Dare. "You haven't seen a ghost, surely! Besides, they don't appear in the daytime, you know."

"I wouldn't have been more surprised if I had seen one," replied the professor. "Who do you think is just entering the gate?"

"Can't say."

"One of the men we have just been talking about."

"Which one?"

"Fennimore."

"What!"

Dare sprang to his feet, and joined the professor at the window. It looked out into a garden of fair extent; for, like many of the old houses in that part of London, it stood in its own grounds, and, being MacAndrew's own property, he had taken care not to have it encroached upon.

Fennimore, who was glancing from side to side nervously, like a man who fears pursuit, was in the act of closing the front gate behind him as Dare looked through the window. Then he walked swiftly along the garden path towards the street door.

"What has he come here for?" said the professor.

"To give information against his associates," replied Dare. "There can be no other reason. I dare say he believes that Cooper flung him overboard on purpose. Good heavens, they have settled him!"

There was a shrubbery on the right of the path, and from the midst of it a report had rung out. With a wild cry Fennimore lurched forward, and then dropped face downward on the gravel.

Dare and the professor raced down the stairs and out of the front door side by side. A man at that moment had cleared the garden wall, and dropped over on to the other side, out of sight; but not before the young detective had caught a glimpse of his face.

It was Lucas!

The professor bent over the wounded man, while Dare blew his police-whistle loudly. A constable came rushing up, and Dare pointed out the direction in which Lucas had gone. Other men joined in the pursuit, while a crowd

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gathered about the gate, gaping wonderingly and awe-stricken into the garden.

"Help me here, laddie; there is something he wants to tell us particularly."

Between them they carried him into the house, and laid him on a couch in the study. The bullet had pierced his lungs. He was not bleeding much outwardly, but it was evident that he could not live many minutes.

"Ten minutes at the outside I give him," said MacAndrew, as he busied himself over this unexpected patient, doing what was possible for him, though that was little enough. He revived after a draught of weak brandy-and-water, and attempted to sit up, though the effort was too great for his waning strength, and he sank again with a groan.

"I'm done for!" he panted. "It was Lucas—fired the shot. He got wind—I was coming to you—to make a clean breast—of everything. Have they caught him?"

"Not yet," replied Dare. "But what is it that you were coming here to tell us?"

Fennimore glanced up at him, with a queer expression on his ghastly-pale face.

"You're a good plucked 'un," he said, speaking in painful gasps, "and you would have beaten us in the end, anyhow. How you scared us on board the Curlew!" A wan smile flitted over his face at the recollection. "I thought you were a ghost. I should like to know how you got out of the well; but I was right against the business——"

He paused for breath, and the professor gave him another stimulating draught. He spoke again.

"You saved my life," he went on, fixing his glazing eyes on Stanley Dare; "though I haven't gained much benefit by it. Perhaps it's better I should go now. I want to repay you. It was Cooper that -that——"

His head fell back, and he heaved a deep sigh.

"He is dead!" exclaimed Dare. "Died with the information he was so anxious to give us actually on his lips as he gasped out his last breath."

Professor MacAndrew was bending over the body, with an eager look in his keen, grey eyes.

"It may succeed," he muttered. "If no time is lost, it may succeed."

"What do you mean?" asked Dare.

"It is all a chance," pursued MacAndrew; "but it is an experiment I have wanted to make, though I feared I should never have the opportunity. You have heard of radium, the mysterious metal whose internal fires must have been at work when the earth itself was sun, and will continue until the end comes, and all life on our planet is extinct."

Dare nodded his head.

"Few even of the cleverest scientists can predict what future radium has in the service of mankind," the professor went on; "few even are aware of the uses it can be put to now; of its amazing, almost magical, power. I have studied it for months past, and I can venture to say, without boasting, that I have discovered some qualities in it which, at least, have not been referred to by other scientists. It has a wonderful vitalising power. By means of it, I believe it would be possible to bring a dead man back to life——"

"Bring the dead to life!" gasped Dare. "No, no; it could not have that power!"

"I am not speaking generally," continued the professor calmly; "but only in some particular instance. And then only for a few minutes. The subject of the experiment must have only just died. Here we have the conditions favourable for the operation."

"I can't believe that anything of that kind is possible," said the young detective.

He knew that Professor MacAndrew was a man of marvellous attainments, and his researches into what might be called the darker realms of science had caused scientists who never strayed from the beaten track to shake their heads and say that "Seth MacAndrew dabbled in matters that were better left alone." But this seemed to be going beyond the bounds of reason. His wildest and most startling theories had never yet gone so far as this.

"I am going to make the experiment," said the professor, "and I shall want you to assist me."

A Weird Experiment—A Dead Man Speaks—The Last Act—A Sensation in Court—Acquitted.

"We must have the room in absolute darkness," said the professor. "Draw down all the blinds and close the shutters. Who is that coming up the garden path?"

"An inspector of police," replied Dare.

"Good! We must have him in. It will be as well to have an independent witness."

The inspector was admitted, and the nature of the intended experiment was briefly explained to him. He evidently regarded it as an act in which a police-officer ought to take no part, even indirectly; but his curiosity got the better of his scruples, and he remained. He did not, of course, believe that it would succeed; but he had read something of radium in the papers, and had a proper veneration for its mysterious qualities.

Every particle of ordinary light had been excluded from the room when Professor MacAndrew entered with the glass-ended metal tube containing the particles of radium.

The darkness was dispelled by a weird radiance, and the ghastly experiment commenced. The rays of light given off continuously by the radium seemed actually to penetrate right into the rigid body lying there so still and silent on the couch; and as they watched, Dare fancied he could detect the colour gradually creeping back into the dead man's cheeks.

"My idea is this," said the professor, speaking in low, earnest tones. "Fennimore died with a profound desire to speak out something in his dying moments. Therefore, his brain must now be fixed and set, so to speak, with that desire firmly stereotyped within it. He was eager to finish what he commenced to tell us when death intervened. You can see that even now in the expression of his eyes."

He paused, and Dare, leaning forward breathlessly, certainly saw, or believed that he saw, an eager, longing expression in Fennimore's eyes, as of a man who desires to say something, but finds he has not the power to do so.

The inspector shuddered, and muttered something under his breath.

"I cannot hope to revive all the organs of the body into life," pursued MacAndrew—"the shock and damage caused by the bullet would render that impossible; but I can revive the other parts—the brain and nerve centres. Two minutes would suffice for him to tell us all that is fixed upon his brain now; and I think that for two minutes I can keep him conscious."

The further details of the great experiment need not be given here; they are purely technical. But at the expiration of about fifteen minutes they saw a faint tremor of the dead man's lips, and his eyelids flickered slightly.

Still the radium light poured on to him, and his body seemed to absorb the rays so that, with the exception of the space immediately around the couch, the room was in darkness.

The colour seemed to quicken in his cheeks, and Dare, watching with strained attention, presently saw the lungs begin to heave.

"He is beginning to come to himself again," cried the professor, in a tense whisper. "The experiment will succeed."

The inspector drew back, half horrified at what he saw, but Dare had almost forgotten now whether the man was dead or alive. Everything had given place to his desire of learning what Fennimore had to tell them. His professional instinct was uppermost.

A thrill passed through the frame of the dead man. There was a moment of terrible suspense. The eyes opened, and Fennimore gazed forth at them with an awful look from those cold, glazed eyes of his. It was a mere vacant stare at first, but presently he seemed to look about him with an air of recognition.

"Quick!" cried the professor. "He won't remain long conscious. Speak to him."

Dare bent forward eagerly, and spoke clearly and slowly into the dead man's ear.

"Fennimore," he said, "do you hear me?"

The man turned his glassy eyes so as to fix them on his questioner, and answered, in a low, far-away voice:

"I thought I was dead. What does it mean? Can the dead come to life?"

"We have found a means to communicate with you, Fennimore," pursued the young detective. "But you must be quick to answer. You were about to tell us something when—when the end came. What was it?"

There was a pause. The dead man's eyelids half closed, and Dare feared that he would not remain conscious for a sufficient length of time to give the information they were so anxious to obtain. But presently, with a terrible effort at concentration, he spoke once more.

"It was Cooper who murdered Jasper Marlowe," he said, "with the poison ring. Cooper is an escaped convict from Australia. His right name is Mark Larrigan. Communicate with the Sydney police. Put-up job. Lucas is really Joel Grimwood: convict, too——"

"It is over," whispered the professor. "He has spoken his last word."

Fennimore's face grew white again. The slight flush which had coloured it faded away. He fell back on to the pillow.

"He is dead!" exclaimed Dare hoarsely. "Dead for good and all time."

"Yes, he is dead," replied the professor, in a tone of regret, as it seemed.

Perhaps there were some questions he would have liked to ask him which no living man could answer. For he must

have crossed the borderland into the spirit world when he was called back for a brief space into his earthly tenement of clay.

The inspector's face was almost as white as that of the corpse. He staggered out of the room with a look of horror in his eyes. Dare pulled up the blinds and flung open the shutters, letting a flood of daylight into the chamber of death.

. . . . . .

Lucas or, to give him his right name, Joel Grimwood was still at large, for he had contrived to escape capture on that afternoon when he shot Fennimore, and the police had lost all trace of him since.

Cooper, alias Mark Larrigan, was still in hiding at Antwerp, but the police of that city were keeping a vigilant look out for him, and his capture was now only a matter of time.

Dare was on the track of Lucas, for he believed that worthy knew exactly where Cooper could be found; and he was pretty certain that if he found himself run to earth, he would betray his associate without the smallest compunction.

There is an old saying to the effect that there is "Honour among thieves," meaning criminals generally; but no adage was ever farther from the mark than that, as detectives of all sorts and conditions and members of the police force could testify.

"Lucas, as he calls himself, has got to the end of his money," said Dare to the professor, the day after the weird experiment on Fennimore had taken place; "and the only method he has of obtaining any more, now that his one-time associate is unable to provide him with a further supply of money, is to steal it. I have heard something of his record as Joel Grimwood from the police, and I have learned that he is one of the cleverest and most daring cracksmen of the day. He will return naturally to his old vocation, and the crib that he will crack will be Elmwood Grange."

"What makes you think so?" asked MacAndrew. "There is no master there now, and there is no reason to suppose that there are any valuables or money on the premises."

"On that point I must differ from you," replied Dare. "When Cooper, or Mark Larrigan, quitted the Grange, it was with the full intention of returning in a few days. He always kept a large sum of ready-money in a safe in the library."

"Exactly," replied the professor. "You believe, then, that Lucas will seek to replenish his stock of money by a visit to Elmwood?"

"Yes; and I don't think he will lose any time about it, either."

"I have noticed that the trio—or a pair only now—of consummate scoundrels are very prompt in all their actions," said the professor. "You will be making another excursion down to Saintbury very shortly, then?"

"To-night," Dare replied.

"Will you want me? I was to have attended a meeting at the Geological Society, but I can put that off."

"By no means," laughed Dare. "I don't think you will have to fish me out of the well again."

"I hope not," returned the professor. "I got a crick in my back that night which I can feel still."

As soon as it was dusk the young detective made his way once more to Elmwood Grange, and secreted himself in the grounds.

Exactly at midnight he heard a stealthy footstep on the path, and Lucas presently appeared.

He set to work at once on the dining-room window, and in a very short space of time had it open. As he entered the house by that way the young detective darted across the lawn on to the terrace, and followed in his wake. Two or three dark forms moved to and fro in the shrubbery like shadows, and then everything became still again.

Lucas certainly knew his way about, as Dare had suggested, and, having gained the library he set a dark-lantern on the floor, so that the beam of light fell exactly on the lock of the safe, and a loaded revolver beside it.

"It won't take long to get into this safe; it's a pretty old-fashioned affair," murmured Lucas.

"Rather longer than you think, Joel Grimwood, alias Lucas!" said a voice behind him.

With a bound he was on his feet; then he reached down for the revolver, which he had placed beside the lantern. It was no longer there. He found himself facing the young detective.

"You!" he hissed.

"Yes," replied Dare. "And you needn't trouble to look for your revolver; I have got it. I was waiting to secure it before interrupting you, as I did not wish you to add another murder to your list of crimes. But for that I should have arrested you as you were breaking into the dining-room."

"Perhaps I should have had something to say to that!" snarled the fellow. "And if you think you can take me single-handed——"

"Oh, I'm not alone!" interrupted Dare. "Knowing the sort of gentleman you are, I've made every preparation for you."

He put a whistle to his lips and blew upon it shrilly.

The tramp of heavy feet sounded on the stairs, and an inspector entered accompanied by two constables.

"There is your prisoner," said Dare.

"I'll go quietly!" exclaimed Lucas. "The game's up; but if it hadn't been for that young fellow"—he pointed to Dare—"you would never have caught me."

. . . . . .

The trial of Geoffrey Winfield had been fixed for the following day, and the courthouse was crowded.

The public certainly got their full share of sensation, especially when Professor MacAndrew gave a description in plain but vivid language of the revival of the dead man to life, and the important information which they had obtained.

Stanley Dare then got into the witness-box and narrated his strange adventures.

As he paused, amid a breathless silence, Mark Larrigan, recently masquerading as James Cooper, was brought into court, having been captured by the Antwerp police, and sent over under an extradition warrant.

It was not found difficult to prove that both he and Joel Grimwood were convicts who had escaped from the Sydney gaol while undergoing a sentence of penal servitude.

The climax of the sensation was, perhaps, reached when Professor MacAndrew held up the blank piece of paper on which the letter had been written in invisible ink which Geoffrey Winfield had received in London, and treating it with a solution, caused the writing to appear once more upon the surface.

A bottle of the chemical preparation known as invisible ink had been found among the effects which Larrigan had left behind at Elmwood Grange; and it was also proved that it was he who had purchased the postal-order at Horsham, which had been enclosed in the letter.

Amidst the greatest enthusiasm, Geoffrey Winfield was acquitted "without a stain upon his character." Stanley Dare and the professor also coming in for quite an ovation.

Mark Larrigan and Joel Grimwood met the punishment which their misdeeds had earned them.

The will which the young detective had discovered, was proved to be the last one made by the late Jasper Marlowe, and in accordance with its terms Geoffrey Winfield succeeded to all the property, for Marlowe had no living relative.

So Geoffrey Winfield is now Master of Elmwood Grange, and his winsome bride Ruth is pronounced to be one of the loveliest young married women in the county.

An ebony idol occupies a conspicuous place in the library; and among the guests who visit the Grange, none are made so welcome as Stanley Dare and Professor MacAndrew.

(Another instalment of this splendid story next week.)

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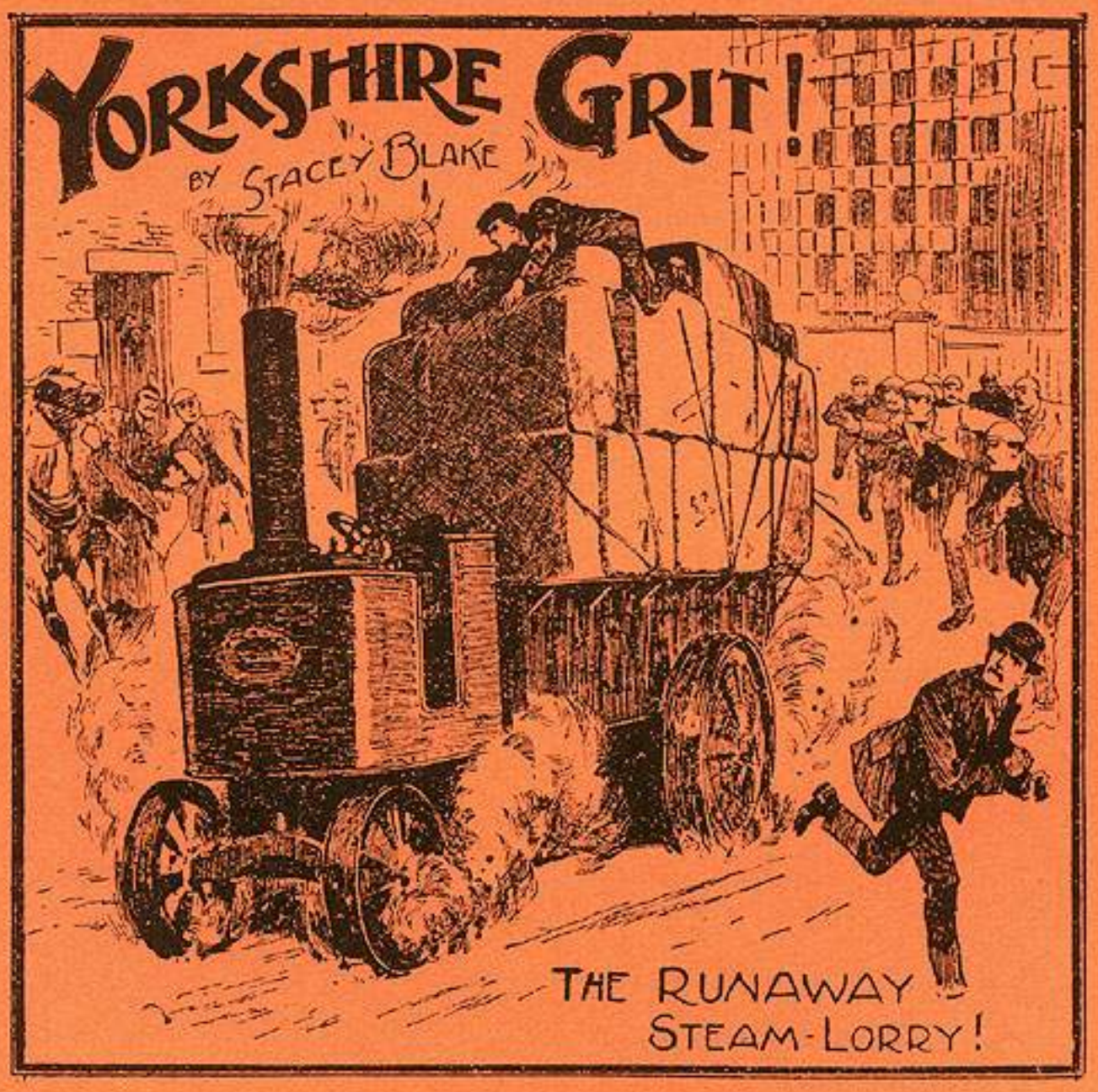

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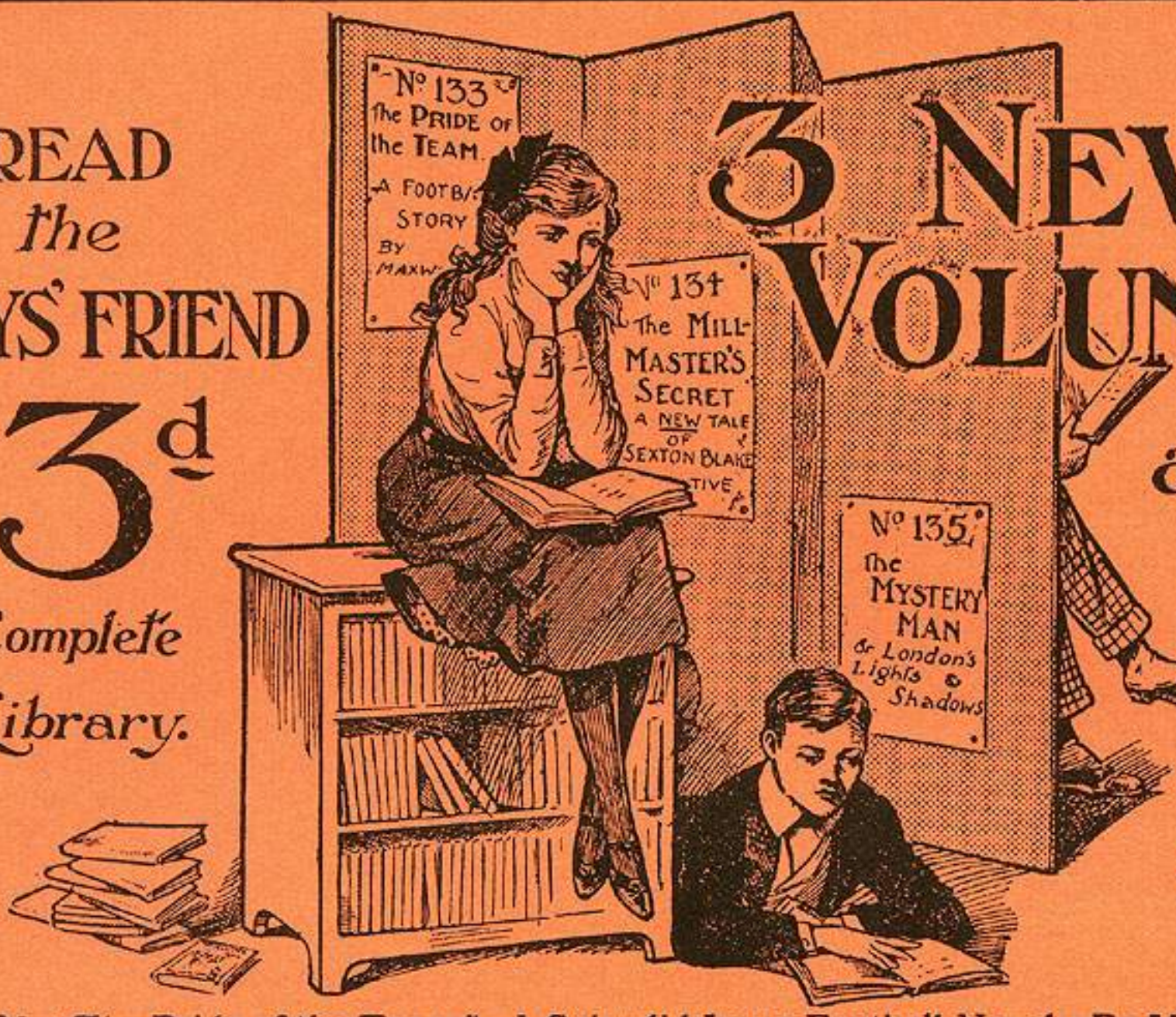

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