"JOHN BULL JUNIOR."

Splendid School Tale of Harry Wharton & Co.

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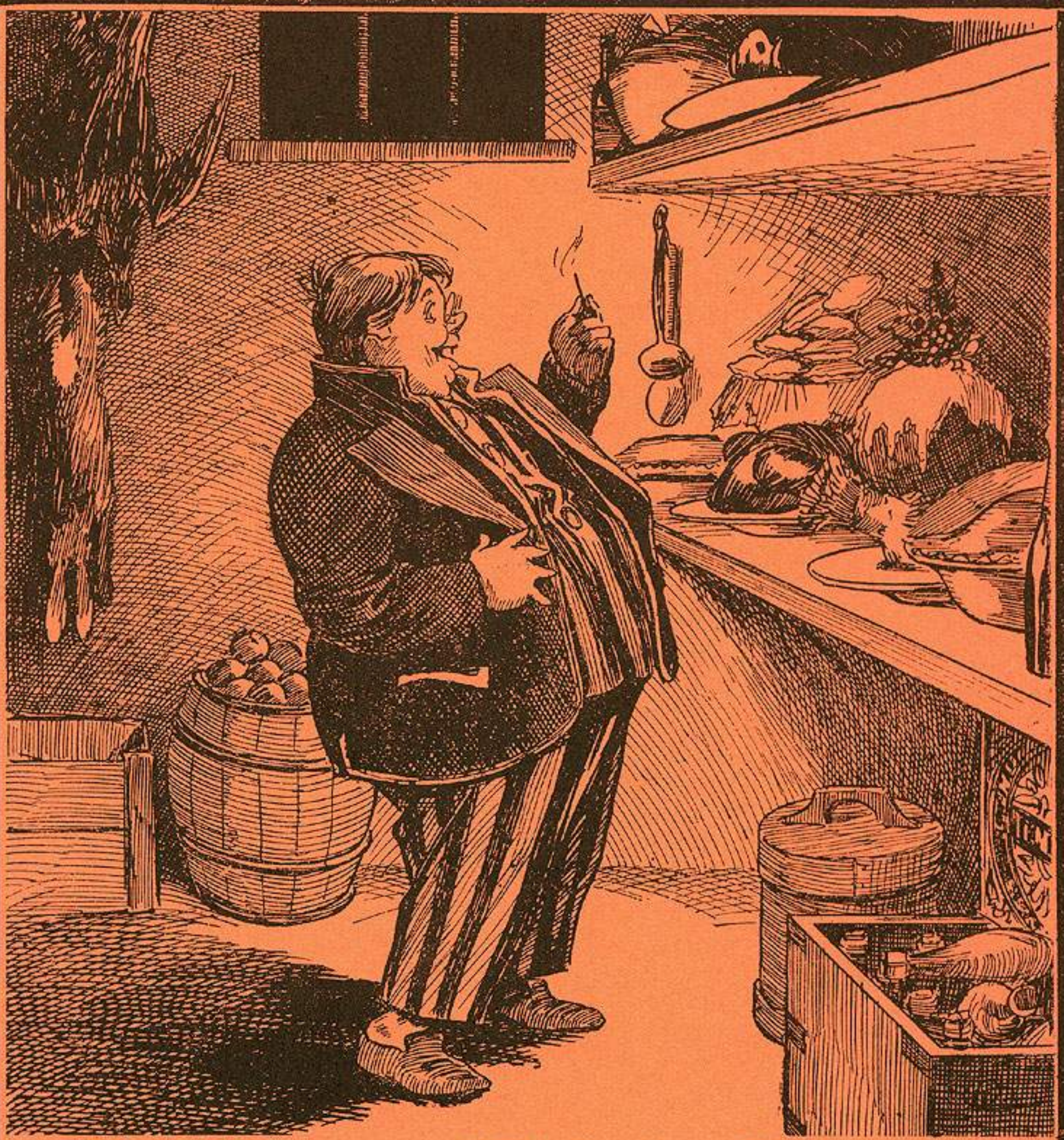


"My hat!" murmured Billy Bunter. "This is ripping! They can put it down to the cat in the morning."

Next Week. → "FORWARD, FISH!"

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

John Bull Junior

A Splendid Long, Complete School Tale of

Harry Wharton & Co.

at Greyfriars.

— BY —

FRANK RICHARDS.

****

THE FIRST CHAPTER.
Pay Up!

"I'VE got a suggestion to make to you, lads!"

It was Colonel Wharton who spoke.

Dinner was over at Wharton Lodge. It was a bitterly cold night, and outside the flakes of snow were driving against the window-panes. The wind wailed through the old red chimneys of the lodge.

The colonel was enjoying his after-dinner cigar, and Harry Wharton & Co. were gathered round the fireside.

Miss Wharton, Harry's aunt, was embroidering—busily engaged upon some piece of work that was never finished or likely to be finished. The colonel had been smoking in silence for some time. Harry Wharton & Co. were chatting. Hurreo Jamset Ram Singh was playing chess with Frank Nugent. Bob Cherry, and Harry, and John Bull, the new boy, at Greyfriars, were discussing footer prospects for the new term, which was shortly to begin at Greyfriars. The chums had spent the Christmas vacation at Wharton Lodge, and they had had a good time. But they were looking forward a little to the return to the old school, too.

As the colonel spoke, all eyes were turned upon him. The Greyfriars fellows had the greatest respect for the bronzed old soldier, and most of them envied Wharton his uncle. Indeed, Bob Cherry, in a humorous moment, had offered to swap two aunts for him.

"Yes, sir?" said Nugent.

The colonel had removed his cigar. There was a thoughtful expression upon his bronzed face, and at the same time a humorous twinkle in his eyes.

"We're in the New Year now," he remarked.

"The New-Yearfulness is terrific," murmured Hurree Jamset Ram Singh, the Nabob of Bhanipur, in his peculiar English.

The colonel smiled.

"Well, my lads, you know what the New Year is—a time for good resolutions," he went on.

The juniors looked a little blank.

"Ahem!" said Bob Cherry. "Certainly."

"The certain-fulness is terrific."

"Suppose," went on Colonel Wharton slowly—"suppose you were to make some good resolves for the New Year, my lads, and stick to them as long as you could. I have tried it myself, and I think it has a good effect. It is also great fun keeping up to the mark, and keeping the other fellows up to the mark."

The juniors grinned.

"Well, that's not a bad idea, sir," said Nugent, "but—but we're pretty well up to the mark now, ain't we, chaps? But if anybody can point out any room for improvement——"

"Oh, don't be funny, Frank!" said Bob Cherry. "Go, on, sir!"

"I do not mean to hint that there is room for improvement," said the colonel, smiling, "but in our mess in India we tried the idea once. Every man who swor—ahem!—every man who used a too emphatic expression was fined a rupee, and the money was to be devoted to a regimental charity. That regimental charity was in quite a flourishing condition that year."

Harry Wharton laughed.

"It was a jolly good idea, uncle. But—but we don't use—ahem!—too emphatic expressions at Greyfriars, you know."

"But there are other things. For instance, I think you are all somewhat addicted to the use of slang," said the colonel.

The juniors looked at one another.

"Slang?" repeated Harry.

"Yes, slang. Don't you think so?"

"Blessed if I've ever spotted it myself," said Bob Cherry; "but if you've caught on to it, sir, I suppose it's so."

There was a laugh.

"'Blessed' is slang, 'spotted' is slang, and 'caught on' is slang," said Colonel Wharton merrily. "I am afraid you have transgressed three times in that one remark, Cherry."

"My hat!"

"That is slang."

"Great Scott!"

"And that is slang, too," said the colonel, laughing.

Bob Cherry whistled.

"Blessed if a chap can open his mouth at all, then," he exclaimed.

"My worthy chum should endeavourfully try to speak the pure and uncorrupt English, in the same manner that I self-fully contrive," remarked the Nabob of Bhanipur.

"Ha, ha! We can't all speak English as you do, Inky."

"But the tryfulness should be terrific."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Now," resumed the colonel, blowing out a cloud of smoke. "Suppose you made a resolution never to be late for classes, never to neglect your preparation, never to cut footer practice, never to use slang, never to fight, and so on; and each time you break the resolution, you pay a forfeit."

"That would be easy enough, sir."

"Then try it. The forfeit, say, to be threepence," said Colonel Wharton, with a smile. "That is not a large sum, but I think it would mount up."

"Agreed."

The juniors grinned at the idea.

There would certainly be fun in it, especially in watching the others to catch them napping, and making them pay the forfeit.

"I will draw up a list of sins, and every sin is to cost threepence," said the colonel, taking out a pencil. "Now, first, lateness for class—missing prep.—missing footer practice—fighting—using slang—threepence a time. I will add, losing temper, as that is a more serious matter than any of the others. You pay sixpence for that."

"Good!"

"A good, strong money-box should be taken, and the money put into it, to be opened at the end of a fortnight," said the colonel. "It can be devoted to charity, or to the juniors' sports club, or anything of the sort."

"Jolly good idea!"

"The jollygoodfulness is terrific."

"Now, I have such a box," said the colonel. "I obtained it for the purpose, and it is here. Will you begin to-night?"

The juniors laughed.

"Certainly, sir."

"Place the box on the table, then, and take care to use no more slang, and not to lose your tempers."

"Ha, ha, ha! That's not likely to happen here, sir."

"We shall see."

The box, a strong wooden one with brass corners, and a slit in the top for coin, was placed on the table.

The juniors were grinning over the idea, regarding it as a good joke

Miss Wharton beamed benevolently on the juniors. The kind old lady was very fond of Harry Wharton and his friends.

"It is an excellent idea," she said, "and very suitable for the New Year. I hope you will have quite a sum of money at the end of the fortnight."

"My hat!" said Bob Cherry.

There was a roar at once.

"Forfeit!"

"What?"

"Forfeit!"

"But——"

"Forfeit!" shouted the juniors in chorus. Colonel Wharton laughed till his eyes were wet.

"Quite right!" he exclaimed "'My hat' is slang, Cherry, as I said before."

"Well, I'm blowed!" said Bob Cherry.

"Forfeit!" shrieked Nugent. "It will be two threepences now—a sixpence, please."

"Look here, I'm not going to spring a tanner——"

"Forfeit!" shouted Wharton.

"Ha, ha, ha! Ninepence now!"

Bob Cherry opened his mouth to speak. He was going to say "You bounders!" but he checked himself in time. It would have cost him another threepence.

With a grimace he dropped ninepence clinking into the money-box.

It was the first forfeit.

The juniors laughed heartily over it, and Bob Cherry joined in the laughter after a moment or two.

"I'll catch some of you soon!" he remarked.

"No fear!" said Bull.

Bob Cherry yelled.

"Forfeit!"

And amid loud laughter John Bull dropped threepence into the money-box.

THE SECOND CHAPTER.

Bunter Looks In.

COLONEL WHARTON'S idea caught on very much with the juniors.

It was certainly productive of a great deal of fun.

The boys were extremely careful to allow no slangy expressions to escape them, but the words jumped to their lips, as it were, involuntarily, and every five minutes or so there was a shout of "Forfeit!"

The slang rule, at least, was likely to be very productive of forfeits, and whether the other rules would have the same result would be seen as soon as the juniors returned to Greyfriars.

As for losing tempers and fighting, that was not likely to happen during the vacation, but such things had happened at Greyfriars, as Nugent remarked.

"What-ho!" assented John Bull.

And the juniors yelled:

"Forfeit!"

And John Bull junior paid up cheerfully.

John Bull was a new boy at Greyfriars, but the chums of the Remove had taken to him very much.

He was a quiet, good-tempered fellow, but he had a nature of the most obstinate determination, all the same, and anyone who wished to impose upon him had all his work cut out for him.

"It's a wild night," Frank Nugent remarked, as he drew aside the curtain and look out into the park, where the snow was flying in clouds before the fierce wintry wind.

"By Jove, yes!" said Harry Wharton, looking out.

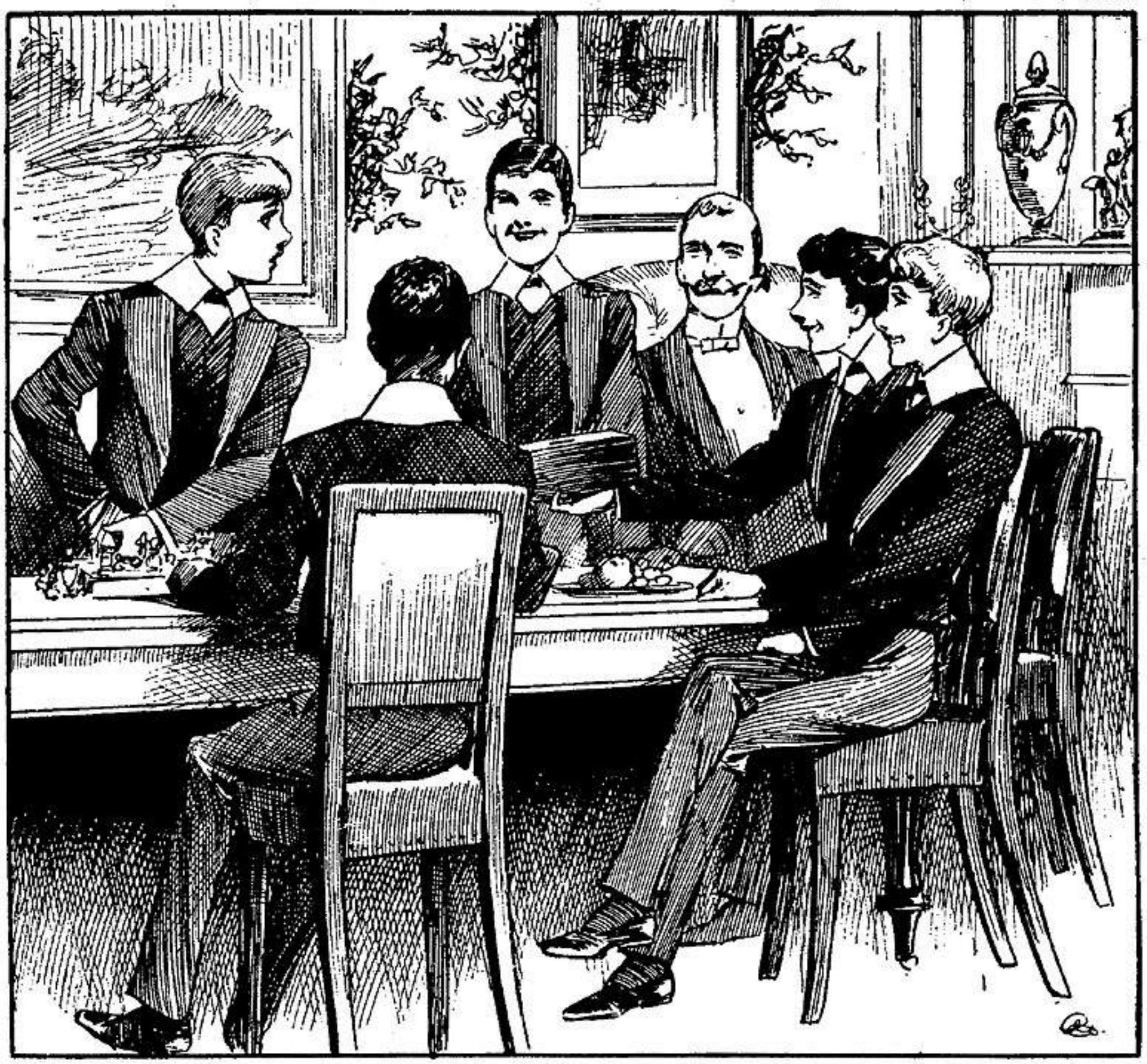
"Forfeit!" shouted Bob Cherry.

"Oh, draw it mild!" expostulated Harry. "'By Jove' isn't slang. A fellow must say something."

"Colonel Wharton's referee," said Bob.

The colonel laughed.

"'By Jove' isn't slang," he said; "but 'draw it mild' is decidedly slang, so you must pay up, Harry."



"My hat!" exclaimed Bob Cherry. There was a roar at once. "Forfeit!" "Well, I'm blowed!" said Bob Cherry. "Forfeit!" shouted the juniors again, in chorus. *(See page 2.)*

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Threepence clinked into the money-box.

Wharton had just paid up when there came a ring at the bell. The house was very quiet, and the sound rang through the place sharply.

The colonel gave a slight start.

The hour was growing late, and he was not expecting any visitors that night, especially as it had turned out so stormy.

The juniors heard the outer door opened, and then a visitor was ushered into the lighted room.

The Greyfriars chums stared at him.

"My only hat!" ejaculated Wharton. "It's Bunter!"

And for once the slang exclamation passed without any claim for the forfeit due, so surprised were the juniors.

Billy Bunter stood wrapped in thick coat and muffler, snow on his boots and shoulders, his fat face red, and his big spectacles covered with film by the sudden warmth of the room.

"Bunter!" exclaimed Colonel Wharton.

The fat junior of Greyfriars gasped.

"It's awful weather," he said.

"What are you out in it for?" asked Bob Cherry pointedly. "I thought you were a hundred miles away at least."

"Oh, really, Cherry——"

Colonel Wharton looked nonplussed. Billy Bunter had once shared Harry Wharton's study at Greyfriars, and at that time he had usually imposed himself upon Wharton for the holidays. Billy Bunter was a first-class swanker, and a first-class sponge at the same time. While he was dragging an unwilling invitation from Wharton he would impress upon Harry the fact that he had passed over several titled friends in order to come and spend a holiday at Wharton Lodge. But since he had changed into another study Wharton had been blind to hints and openly regardless of requests, with the result that Bunter had not been able to come home with him for that Christmas vacation.

The chums of Greyfriars did not expect to see Bunter again before the new term at Greyfriars.

The sudden appearance of the Owl of the Remove at Wharton Lodge amazed them. They had not dreamed that even Bunter would have nerve enough for that.

"I say, you fellows, it's awfully cold," said Bunter. "I—I couldn't pass the whole vacation without seeing you again, so I thought I'd run down."

"Like your cheek!" said Bob Cherry.

"Oh, really, Cherry! Of course, I knew I should have a warm welcome here. You see, at Christmas time one ought to—to banish all ill-feeling, you know, and go in for—for peace and goodwill, and that sort of thing."

"H'm!" said the colonel."

He had never liked Bunter, but he had been kind to him as a schoolfellow of Harry's. But he could hardly pretend to be pleased by this impertinent visit unasked.

"I say, you fellows, you might speak to a chap!" exclaimed Billy Bunter, in an aggrieved tone. "I'm cold."

"Rats!"

"It's awful weather."

"Br-r-r-r!"

"The train was delayed in the snow——"

"Serve you right!"

"And I've had to walk from the station."

"Jolly good thing, too!"

"Oh, really! I—I say, I'm ill, you know," said Billy Bunter, beginning to gasp. "I've—I've caught a fearful chill. Oh!"

He sank heavily into a chair.

Miss Wharton was on her feet at once in alarm.

"My poor boy!" she exclaimed.

"It's all right, auntie," said Harry Wharton reassuringly. "He's only spoofing."

"Forfeit!" yelled Bob Cherry.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I mean, it's all humbug——"

"Forfeit!"

"I say, you fellows, I—I think I'm dying!" murmured Billy Bunter faintly. "I'm sincerely sorry to come and die in your house, colonel, but I feel quite overcome. I forgive all you fellows."

"Thank you for nothing——"

"Oh, really——"

"Oh, dear!" exclaimed Miss Wharton. "The poor boy must be put to bed at once. Call John and Thomas to carry him up——"

The juniors exchanged quick glances.

"It's all right; we'll carry him up, auntie," said Harry.

"Yes, rather!"

"The ratherfulness is terrific!"

"Lend a hand, you fellows!"

And the fellows lent a hand with great pleasure.

THE THIRD CHAPTER.

Very Ill.

BILLY BUNTER squirmed out of the chair with wonderful agility for a dying person as the juniors ran towards him.

But he had no time to escape their grasp.

They seized him and swung him off his feet, and whirled him out of the room in next to no time.

"Upstairs with him!" said Harry.

And up the stairs they went, and Billy Bunter was carefully bumped on every stair as they went up.

Bump—bump—bump!

"Yow—yow—yow!"

At every bump Bunter let out a yell.

Then he was rushed into the boys' bed-room, with nearly all the breath knocked out of his fat carcase.

The juniors swung him to and fro in the air by his arms and legs.

"Ow!" roared Bunter. "Yow! Lemme down!"

"Aren't you ill?" demanded Bob Cherry.

"Ow!"

"He must have recovered, or he couldn't yell like that."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Open the window, and we'll pitch him out!" said Bob Cherry, giving Bunter another swing in the air.

"Good!"

"The goodfulness is terrific!"

"Ow!" roared Bunter. "Help! Murder! Fire! Ow!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Ow!"

"Bump him!"

Bump!

Billy Bunter descended upon the floor with a heavy concussion.

"Oh! Yarooh!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Bless my soul! Whatever are you doing?" exclaimed Miss Wharton, looking in at the door. "My dear boys——"

"It's all right, auntie. We're only curing Bunter; he's ill, you know!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Ow!" gasped Billy Bunter. "I—I'm all right! It's passed off now. I—I'm all right now; I feel ripping!"

"Oh, rats!" said Bob Cherry. "You're not ripping yet. Wait till we've given you a few more bumps, and then you'll rip."

"Oh, really——"

"Now, then, here goes——"

"Ow!"

"Please do not—er—bump him," said Miss Wharton anxiously. "He may be suffering from the cold, my dear boys. You had better put him to bed, I think, and I will bring him some soothing medicine."

"Yes, please!" gasped Billy Bunter. "I—I'm ill! I—I wish you would stay with me, ma'am."

"So I will, my dear boy. Put him to bed, Harry, and I will fetch the medicine at once."

And the kind old lady hurried away.

The juniors looked at one another expressively.

"The blessed fat spoofer!" exclaimed Bob Cherry.

"My hat!"

"Forfeit!" shouted Nugent.

"Oh, blow the forfeits now!" said Bob Cherry. "We shall have to make a relaxation of the rules where Bunter is concerned."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I say, you fellows, I—I'm ill, you know. I'm suffering fearfully, chiefly from hunger. I suppose you're going to give a fellow some supper, Wharton?"

"You can't eat if you're ill, Billy. You're in Miss Wharton's hands now. She's going to give you some medicine."

"Ow!"

"We've got to put him to bed," said Bull.

"Ha, ha! Shove him in!"

"And Johnny Bull can play him to sleep with his concertina," grinned Nugent.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I shouldn't mind," said Bull modestly. "If Bunter has a taste for music, I'd play him to sleep with some soft tunes. If he isn't ill——"

"That would make him, and serve him right——"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Look here——" began Johnny wrathfully.

"Never mind the concertina," said Bob Cherry. "It's enough to have one invalid. Shove Bunter into bed. Shall I take your boots off, Bunter?"

"Yes, please," said Bunter, in a feeble voice. "I'm very ill. It's always an exertion to me to take my boots off."

"You don't see much of your boots, do you?" asked Nugent sympathetically. "Have you ever seen your knees, Bunter?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The fat junior grunted.

"I say, you fellows—— Mind, careful with my boots, Cherry. Take care how you undo the laces, and don't break them. They're a new pair."

Bob Cherry grinned and opened a pocket-knife. He unfastened Bunter's bootlaces by slashing them through down the front of the boot. Then he jerked off the boots.

"You—you beast!" gasped Bunter.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Get his things off."

"Oh! Be careful! Yow! Mind what you're doing! I'm ill. Oh!"

In spite of Billy Bunter's frantic expostulations, he was undressed at express speed. Coat, jacket, waistcoat, trousers, and other things were yanked off him, and then he was hurled into the nearest bed.

He lay there, gasping like a landed fish.

"Ow! Oh! Ow! Groo!"

"Can we do anything more for you, Bunter?"

"Yow!"

"Is Bunter in bed?" came Miss Wharton's gentle voice at the doorway.

"Yes, aunt."

"Very good. I have your medicine here, Bunter."

"I—I—I'd rather have some supper, Miss Wharton, please, if I may," murmured Billy Bunter feebly. "You—you see, I—I——"

"But you are ill."

"Yes; but——"

"Then you have lost your appetite," said Miss Wharton.

"Yes; but it's—it's coming back," said Bunter. "I'm recovering fast."

"H'm!" said the old lady, eyeing him doubtfully. "You might have a little light supper, perhaps, after the medicine. What would you like?"

"Oh, I'm not particular, ma'am! Anything will do, so long as—as it's good, and—and there's plenty of it, you know!"

"My dear child——"

"Suppose we say a cold chicken," suggested Billy Bunter, "and—and some beef, and any vegetables you happen to have. I'm not particular about pudding. I prefer Christmas pudding, but anything would do. As to dessert——"

"Bless the boy!"

"You see, when I'm ill I get hungrier," Bunter explained.

"But——"

"I could manage about half a turkey, perhaps, and——"

"Oh, dear!"

"Give him the medicine, and let him sleep, Miss

Wharton," recommended Nugent. "Bunter always has these fancies about wanting something to eat."

"Yes; I am sure it is only a sick boy's fancy," said Miss Wharton. "You shall have the medicine, Bunter, and I will send for a light biscuit for you to eat afterwards."

Bunter blinked.

"A—a light biscuit, ma'am!"

"Yes. My dear child, you would be seriously ill if I allowed you to eat a heavy supper in your present weak condition. Now, be guided by me."

Billy Bunter gasped.

But as there was nothing else to be done, he had to be guided by Miss Wharton. He swallowed the medicine with a hideous grimace, and then slowly munched the light biscuit. He made it last as long as possible; and when it was gone, he could hardly muster up enough politeness to say good-night to Miss Wharton when she left him.

THE FOURTH CHAPTER.

Bunter is Hungry.

"YOU did not expect Bunter, Harry?" Colonel Wharton remarked to his nephew a little later, before they parted for the night.

Harry shook his head with a troubled expression.

"No, uncle. You see, Bunter used to be in my study at Greyfriars, but since he changed in Study No. 14, with Fish and Bull, I didn't see why I should be bothered with him. But I expect he had been swanking to his people about being asked here, and he's come here to keep up appearances."

The colonel smiled.

"Then you don't like him, Harry?"

"Well, I don't see how anybody could like Bunter, uncle. But he's such a duffer that, what he does isn't half so bad as if it were done by a sensible chap. He's always lying and playing mean tricks, but we don't get so wild with him as we do with a fellow like Snoop, for instance. Bunter always works it out in his own mind that he's quite right in what he does."

"Well, as he wants to be with you, Harry, you had better let him stay to the end of the holiday—only two or three days now. Wharton Lodge has a reputation for hospitality, you know."

"Yes, uncle. Thank you!"

"And you could add that to your resolves for the new year," said the colonel—"to bear with Bunter patiently, and try to make a better fellow of him."

Harry laughed ruefully.

"We've tried that before," he said. "But you're right, uncle; we'll try again."

And he bade his uncle good-night.

When the juniors went up to bed, Billy Bunter appeared to be sleeping peacefully. He was snoring, at all events, filling the large room with unmusical sounds.

A new bed had been placed in the long, lofty room, so that there were now six there.

No one was anxious to have the bed next to Bunter's, and Harry Wharton, as host, took it for himself.

"The fat bounder!" said Bob Cherry, looking at the Owl of the Remove with an expression of disgust upon his face.

"The bounderfulness of the honourable and disgusting Bunter is terrific!" remarked the dusky Nabob of Bhanipur.

"Fancy a blessed bounder poking himself in where he's not invited! I should have thought even Bunter would have stopped at that."

"Oh, never mind!" said Harry. "We're close to the end of the vac. now."

"There's the last dance to-morrow night," said Nugent. "Bunter knows about that, and he's come in time."

Wharton looked troubled for a moment. The juniors had all been looking forward to that New Year's dance, when they were to meet some of the girls of Cliff House, their near neighbours at Greyfriars.

Billy Bunter certainly would not be a welcome addition to the party on that occasion.

"Well, it can't be helped," said Wharton. "Perhaps Bunter may prefer to stay at home, though."

"Oh, really, Wharton——"

"Hallo, hallo, hallo!" exclaimed Bob Cherry. "I thought you were asleep."

"I—I've just woke up."

"You fat fraud! Spoofing, as usual!"

"Forfeit!"

"Oh, rats!"

"Forfeit encore!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"This money-box will soon be filled at this rate," grinned Nugent, as Bob Cherry's cash rattled into it.

Billy Bunter sat up in bed, adjusted his spectacles, blinked at the money-box, and then at the juniors.

"I say, you fellows, what's all that? What do you mean by forfeits? Is that a Christmas game?"

Bob Cherry explained as he kicked off his boots. Billy Bunter listened with great attention.

"And if we make you pay a forfeit every time you tell a lie, we shall soon be rolling in money," Bob concluded.

"Oh, really, Cherry——"

"Or every time you play a mean trick, or over-eat yourself, Billy," Nugent remarked.

"I think I'll join in this," said Bunter thoughtfully. "Of course, we shall all share out equally at the end of the time stipulated?"

"The money goes to the sports' club," said Wharton.

"Oh, what rot! Better devote it to standing a big feed when we get back to Greyfriars next week," said Bunter.

"Rats!"

"Forfeit!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Well, if the money's going to the sports' club, I'm not going to join," said Bunter. "The sports' club doesn't matter to me. I'm kept out of the junior eleven by jealousy."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"But I'll tell you what I'll do. I'll mind the money-box, if you like," said Bunter.

"And the money, too, I suppose?" said Nugent sarcastically. "I'll jolly well bet you'd find a way of opening the box!"

"Oh, really, Nugent, I hope you don't mean to insinuate that I would touch other people's money!"

"I don't mean to insinuate it; I mean to state it as a plain fact!" said Nugent bluntly.

"Oh, really——"

"Br-r-r! Go to sleep!"

"I don't see how I can go to sleep when I'm so frightfully hungry!" said Billy Bunter. "I think Wharton's very inhospitable. I wouldn't have come here if I'd known he was going to starve me!"

Harry Wharton laughed.

"It's your own fault," he said. "You pretended to be ill, and I can't get you anything to eat now without displeasing my aunt. It was your own fault; you will tell lies!"

"Well, I was ill, but the—the medicine has cured me."

"Bosh!"

"Look here, has anybody got a stick of toffee, or a bar of milk chocolate, or anything?" asked Billy Bunter pathetically.

The juniors searched through their pockets. They did not feel very sympathic for Bunter, but they wanted to keep him quiet. It was probable that he was not so hungry as he made out; and, in any case, he deserved the punishment for lying.

Nugent found some toffee, and John Bull some chocolate, and they were handed to Billy Bunter.

He devoured them, and settled down to sleep again; and by that time the other juniors were in bed.

Wharton extinguished the light.

"Good-night, you fellows!" he said. "Remember, early in the morning. We're going for a long tramp, and we can't be up late."

"Right you are, old son!"

"The rightfulness is terrific!"

"I say, you fellows——"

"Oh, go to sleep!"

Bunter snorted, and began to snore. The other juniors were soon fast asleep. The old house was very quiet.

Bunter slept and woke by starts. As a matter of fact, he was somewhat hungry, and by letting his thoughts run on it he became more hungry.

Then, when he slept, he dreamed of Christmas turkeys, Christmas puddings, mince-pies and cakes and jam, and waking to the stern reality was simply terrible.

The last sound of the closing door had died away when Billy Bunter sat up in bed. From somewhere in the distance midnight had chimed out.

"I say, you fellows——" said Bunter softly.

There was no reply, save the regular breathing of the juniors.

The fat junior sat quietly for a moment or two. He was too hungry to sleep without supper, and he had formed a plan of descending into the lower regions in search of provisions.

As he was pretty certain that the other fellows would stop such an excursion if they were awake, Bunter wanted to make sure that they were asleep before he started.

There was no reply to his words, and he repeated them after a few moments in a louder tone. Still silence.

Bunter snorted angrily.

"Beasts!" he murmured. "I expect they're pretending, just to catch me, but I'll jolly well catch them!"

Billy Bunter was a skilful ventriloquist, and he brought his gift into use. He made a sound of a latch clicking, and then imitated the deep voice of Colonel Wharton.

"You boys asleep?"

Bunter listened anxiously.

If any of the juniors had been awake they would certainly have taken that voice for the colonel's, and would have replied.

Silence.

Bunter was satisfied.

He crept silently out of bed, and drew on his trousers and jacket, and a pair of slippers. He was shivering with the cold, and he borrowed a coat of Wharton's to put on in addition. Then he stole towards the door.

— — —

THE FIFTH CHAPTER.

A Little Ventriloquism.

BILLY BUNTER opened the door, and then paused to listen.

Only regular breathing came from the room behind him.

Ahead was darkness and silence. The whole household, apparently, was in bed. There was not a glimmer of light to be seen anywhere.

Billy Bunter had stayed at Wharton Lodge before, and he knew his way about pretty well.

He knew where the pantry was situated, and he had no doubt of his ability to grope his way there in the dark.

He descended the stairs cautiously.

The silence and stillness of the house scared him a little, and as he passed deep, shadowy corners he could not help thinking of ghosts and burglars.

But he was hungry, and he kept on.

He reached the head of the kitchen stairs, and blinked down into the darkness.

There was no sound below.

He groped downward, and the warm atmosphere told him that he was in the kitchen. He knew his way to the pantry then.

Ere long his fat hand was gliding over a door.

It was locked.

Bunter uttered a snort of annoyance.

Locked!

He certainly might have foreseen that, but he had not, and he stood in the darkness, with his hand upon the door, in a very bad temper indeed.

"Beasts!" he murmured.

That was Billy Bunter's favourite epithet for everybody when things did not go exactly to his liking.

What was he to do?

Wild thoughts of getting the kitchen poker and smashing the lock passed through his mind, but he abandoned them. He could hardly hope to get the lock open that way, and he would certainly arouse the whole household in attempting it.

But to return to bed after all his trouble without a supper! Surely that was not to be thought of.

"Beasts!" murmured Bunter again.

Suddenly he started.

A sound came to his ears—the sound of a footstep!

The blood went thrilling to the heart of the fat junior. The sound was unexpected and terrifying in the dead, still silence of the night.

Who was it?

Had one of the juniors awakened and followed him, or was it a burglar? The thought made the Owl of the Remove shiver. He crouched back into a dark recess in the wall, where the curtains of a window afforded him concealment. He was in the darkness still, but if the new-comer was a burglar there might be a light shown at any moment.

Dragging the curtains round him for concealment, in case a light gleamed out, the fat junior listened intently.

The footsteps came nearer, and then receded.

They died away.

Bunter remained where he was, shivering with fright and cold.

Who was it that had passed him in the darkness? He remembered that the passage in which the pantry was situated had a door at the end giving egress to the kitchen garden at the back of the house.

Had someone left the house that way?

But why should an inmate of Wharton Lodge leave the building in the middle of a bitter January night?

A cold draught of air playing upon him made the junior certain that a door had been opened; but if so, it had been silently closed again.

Billy Bunter remained where he was, shivering, and wondering whether he could venture to leave his hiding-place.

It seemed to him that he could hear strange, faint sounds in the distance, but so faint and uncertain that he was not sure whether it was not the wind in the trees.

He remembered a story he had heard when at the Lodge before of the ghost of Wharton Lodge—a wild, white figure that shrieked in the park of a night, on the scene of some terrible murder of centuries since.

Bunter had heard that story from the Lodge gardener long ago, and had grinned at it, but he did not feel like grinning now.

Ghost stories are more impressive when one thinks of them in the silence and darkness of the night—alone.

Bunter stood trembling, as much with fright as with cold, and his teeth began to chatter. He was making up his mind to venture out, to steal back to the bed-room, when a sound of footsteps came upon his ears again, and his eyes were dazzled by the gleam of a light.

"Oh, dear!" murmured the fat junior.

He was certain it was burglars this time. A man was coming along the passage with a lamp in his hand, and Bunter vaguely made out his form through the curtains. Another figure was behind, carrying another lamp, and a poker.

They paused in the passage, close to the window in the recess of which the trembling Bunter crouched behind the curtains.

"Nothing 'ere, Mr. Plummy," said a voice.

Bunter almost gasped with relief.

He knew that the butler of Wharton Lodge was named Plummy, and the man who spoke was another servant.

They were not burglars. But Bunter's desire to remain undiscovered was just as keen. The moment he knew that Mr. Plummy was there a curious idea had flashed into his brain. Mr. Plummy had the key of the pantry.

"No, nothing 'ere, James," said Mr. Plummy. "Yet I'd almost swear that I 'eard something, James."

"Listen, Mr. Plummy!"

"What is it?"

"Can't you 'ear something from—from outside?"

"It's the wind."

"It don't sound like the wind, Mr. Plummy."

"Don't be an idjit, James!" said Mr. Plummy, in a voice wherein the anger was no more perceptible than the nervousness. "Do you think you're going to make me believe in the ghost at my time of life?"

But James was persistent.

"Which they say, sir, that it 'aunts the park at Christmas-time, and shrieks and tosses its arms," he said.

"Hall nonsense, James!"

"'Ark, sir!" ejaculated James, with a snort of fright.

Mr. Plummy started, and almost dropped the lamp.

From the big oaken door of the pantry, near which he was standing, came a deep and thrilling sound. It was a moan, as of someone shut up inside the pantry.

"Good 'evings!" said Mr. Plummy, turning pale.

"There's someone in the pantry, sir," said James, in an awed voice.

The Greyfriars ventriloquist, behind the curtains, grinned softly.

"It must be a burglar!"

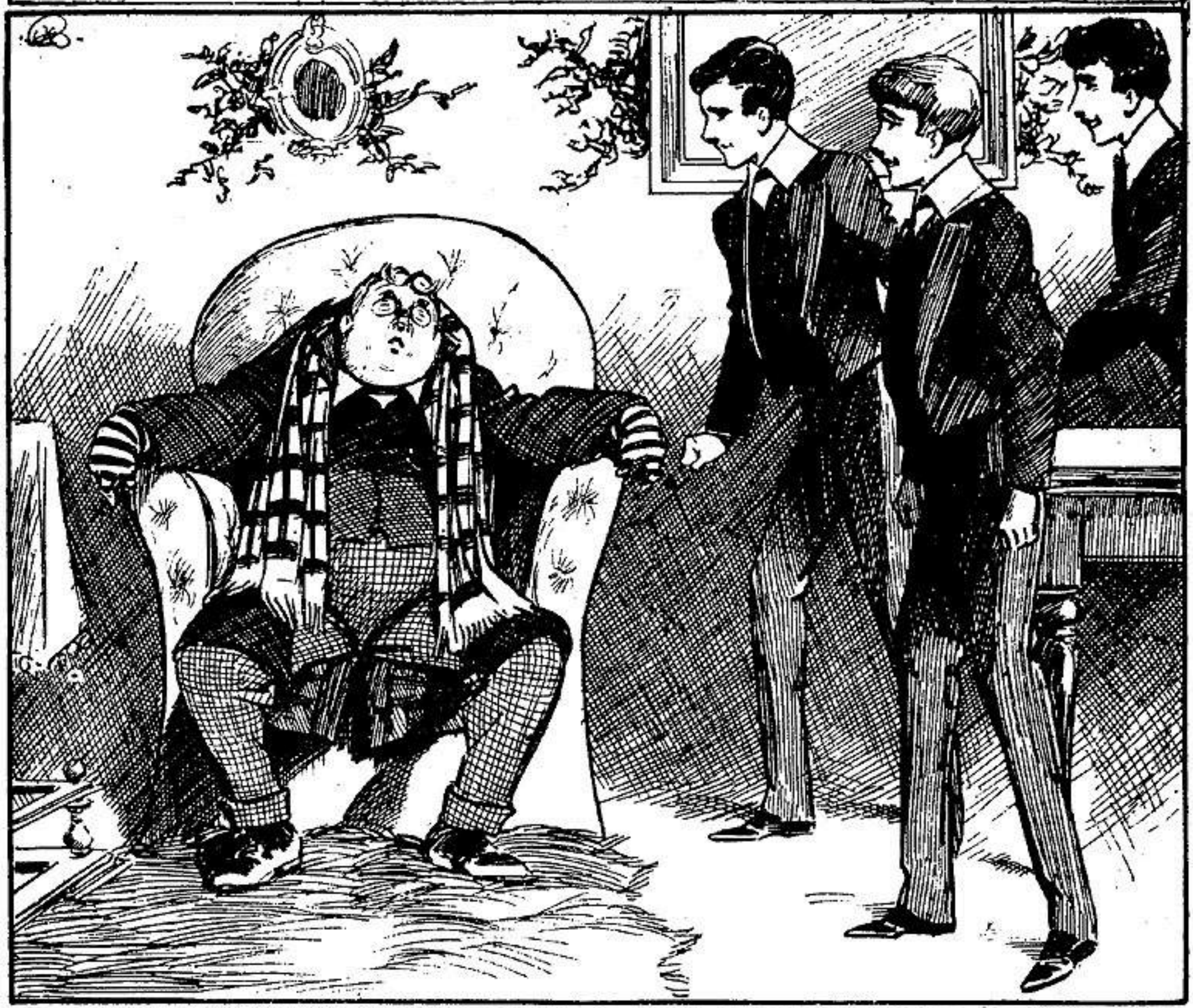
"'Ow could a burglar git in there, sir? The door's locked."

"I'll soon halter that!" said Mr. Plummy. "Why, if anybody's in there he must be well-nigh suffocated. Surely one of the maids can't 'ave been in the pantry when I locked up for the night? I'll never believe it!"

"Better see, sir."

"You stand there with the poker ready, then, James."

"Suttingly, Mr. Plummy."



"I—I—I say, you fellows, I think I'm dying!" murmured Billy Bunter faintly. "I'm sincerely sorry to come and die in Wharton's house, but I feel quite overcome. I forgive all you fellows!" "Thank you for nothing," said Harry Wharton. (See page 4.)

The butler inserted a key and unlocked the pantry door. The moan was repeated as he did so. He threw the door wide open, and sprang back. James held the poker ready to smite the denizen of the pantry if it should prove to be a foe.

But there was no sound in the pantry now.

Mr. Plummy, taking his courage in both hands, so to speak, drew nearer and looked in. Nothing but the usual interior of a pantry met his eye.

"My word!" he murmured. "There ain't nobody!"

"I—I—I don't understand it, Mr. Plummy." faltered James.

"You 'eard 'im moan, James?"

"I'll take my davy on it, Mr. Plummy!"

"'Ark!" exclaimed Mr. Plummy.

From the upper end of the passage come a deep voice. It was that of Colonel Wharton—or, at least, seemed to be.

"What does this mean? Why are you not in bed, Plummy? Come here at once, both of you!"

"Yes, sir!" gasped James.

The two men hurried up the passage.

In a twinkling, as soon as the lamps were gone, Billy Bunter darted across the passage and ran into the pantry. He crouched down in an obscure corner there, with palpitating heart.

But Mr. Plummy and James did not return. They were looking for Colonel Wharton, quite amazed that they did not find him at the end of the long passage or on the stairs. Billy Bunter rose to his feet, recovering his courage. He drew the door of the pantry shut, and then struck a match. He felt that he was safe in doing so now.

He was in the midst of plenty.

The match glimmered upon shelves stacked with things that made his eyes dance behind his big spectacles.

"My hat!" murmured Billy Bunter. "This is ripping! They can put it down to the cat in the morning."

How the cat was to be supposed to have broken open jars of preserves and devoured the contents Billy Bunter did not stop to consider.

He started operations. He was too hungry to think of anything but eating. The match went out, but Bunter did not need a light to eat. He could have done that in the dark at any time.

He had reached his fifth jar when a sound fell upon his ears. It was a footstep outside the pantry.

In a moment the fat junior was crouching down in a dark corner, with palpitating heart.

But the door did not open.

Click!

It was the sound of a key turning in the lock.

Then footsteps receded.

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THE SIXTH CHAPTER.
John Bull Lends a Hand.

FOR several seconds the fat junior remained where he was, too surprised and taken aback to move. Then he jumped up.

The door was locked on the outside.

He was locked in.

"Beasts!" murmured Bunter. "Oh, really——"

His hand glided over the door.

It was fast. From the inside there was no way of opening it; and from the outside only the butler could open it,

if he had taken the key away with him, as was undoubtedly the case.

Bunter stood aghast.

Doubtless, after looking for the supposed colonel, the two men had come to the conclusion that a trick had been played upon them, or had attributed the thing to fancy. In any case, they were gone now, and Mr. Plummy had locked the pantry door again before going. He had done so, of course, without the faintest suspicion that anybody was there, and he had not taken the trouble to glance inside.

Billy Bunter was in the midst of plenty, and for an hour or so he could be quite happy. But after that?

To remain shut up in the cold till morning—he shivered at the thought. To make a disturbance and wake the household was not a pleasant thing, either. It was quite likely that James would use the poker before Bunter had time to explain that he was not a burglar.

"Oh, dear!" murmured the fat junior. "I wish I'd stayed in bed. It's all the fault of those rotters. Oh, dear!"

He struck another match, and then went on eating. He might or might not escape from the pantry; but, in any case, there was no reason why he should not have the supper he had come there for. Billy Bunter could be a philosopher at times.

But even eating palled upon him at last.

He was feeling cold and scared, and he began to debate in his mind whether he should hammer on the door and wake the house, when he heard the sound of a footstep in the passage outside.

The sound brought hope to his heart.

Even if it was James with the poker, it was better to risk anything than to remain shut up in the pantry all night.

He tapped quickly on the door.

"I say there!" he called out.

He heard a gasp outside.

"Stop a minute!" called out Bunter.

"Who—who's that?" asked a shaking voice.

Bunter uttered an exclamation.

"Is that you, Bull?"

"Yes," said the voice of John Bull, a little steadier now. "It that you, Bunter?"

"Yes, rather!"

"Where are you?"

"In the pantry."

He heard a chuckle.

"Blessed if I can see anything to cackle at," growled Bunter. "It's jolly cold in here, I can tell you, and I want to get back to bed."

"How did you get in?"

"Walked in, you ass. Do you think I wriggled in under the door?" howled Bunter.

"Then why can't you walk out?"

"Because that beast Plummy has locked the door."

"My hat!"

"Get it open somehow, there's a good chap."

John Bull groped over the lock.

"Can't," said the junior presently. "The key's gone."

"Can't you open it somehow?"

"Not much good trying to pick a lock with my fingers, I think," chuckled Bull. "You will have to stay there till morning."

"Oh, really——"

"There's plenty to eat, you know. What more do you want?"

"Look here——"

"Good-night!"

"Hold on, Bull. I'm co-cold."

"Well, I'm cold, too. Good-night!"

"Stop!" yelled Bunter, hammering on the door. "Go and call that beast Plummy, or some other beast, and get him to let me out."

"Hadn't you better stay there? It will be more considerate than waking a chap up after he's gone to bed."

"You—you villain! If you don't call Plummy, I'll make a row and wake up the whole house!" roared Bunter.

John Bull chuckled.

"I don't believe they'd hear you if you made ever so much row here," he replied.

"Oh, really, Bull. Do go and call Plummy, there's a good chap."

"I don't know where he sleeps."

"You can find out. Ask Wharton. Don't let me stay here all night, old chap, there's a good fellow."

"Oh, all right. Wait a bit, then."

"Be as quick as you can, Johnny."

"Oh, rats!"

John Bull departed.

Billy Bunter waited with what patience he could muster. He filled in the time with another attack on the preserves.

It seemed to him an age before he heard steps in the passage again.

A key clicked in the lock, the door opened, and a lamp shone in his face. Billy Bunter blinked in the light like a startled owl.

Mr. Plummy, in shirt and trousers, glared into the pantry.

"Ho!" he said indignantly. "It's you!"

"Yes, Mr. Plummy," said Bunter. "I—I came down to help you, and you shut me up in the pantry."

"What!"

"I'll explain in the morning," said Bunter hurriedly. "I'm afraid the cat has been at the preserves, Mr. Plummy."

He scuttled off, leaving the butler staring into the pantry in amazement.

The fat junior was soon back in his bedroom. He lighted the gas, and blinked round him. All the juniors were asleep, or appeared to be so.

"I say, you fellows——"

There was no reply.

"I say, Bull, old man."

John Bull snored.

"Look here, Bull, it's no good pretending you're asleep. I jolly well know you're not," said Bunter. "What were you doing downstairs at this time of night?"

Snore!

"Look here, Bull, you beast——"

Snore!

"I jolly well know you're not asleep. Look here, Bull."

Snore!

Billy Bunter grunted and went to bed. There was evidently nothing to be got out of John Bull. And in a few minutes the Owl of the Greyfriars Remove was snoring himself!

THE SEVENTH CHAPTER

The Walkers!

"WAKE up!"

"Ow!"

"Time to get up, Bunter!"

"Groo!"

"Out you come!"

Billy Bunter grunted as he sat up in bed. The grey winter dawn was creeping in at the windows.

Bunter rubbed his eyes.

He was very sleepy still, as was only to be expected after the amount of sleep he had lost on the previous night.

"I—I say, you fellows, I don't think I'll get up yet," he said. "I'll have another hour or so; I'm very tired."

"Rats!" said Bob Cherry.

"Forfeit!" shouted Nugent.

"Oh, blow!"

"Forfeit!"

"Pay up, Cherry!"

"Yes, shell out, old man," said Harry Wharton, laughing.

Nugent shrieked.

"You shell out, too—shell out is slang!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Threepence, please."

"My hat!"

"Sixpence!" yelled Nugent.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Billy Bunter snuggled down under the clothes again, while the juniors were settling the forfeits.

But the Owl's comfort did not last long. Bob Cherry caught hold of the bedclothes, and with a mighty yank, stripped them from the bed.

Bunter shivered and sat up.

"Ow, beast!"

"Turn out, then!"

"Look here, I'm sleepy——"

"Dab him with the sponge, Bob."

"Right-ho!"

"Hold on!" yelled Billy Bunter, hopping out of bed. "Hold on! I'm getting up! Yow! I tell you I'm getting up!"

And the fat junior scrambled into his clothes.

The chums of Greyfriars went down cheerfully to breakfast. Bunter was frowning, but his frown gave place to a smile when he smelt the appetising scent of bacon.

His fat face beamed as he sat down at the breakfast table.

Fried bacon and eggs, and fish cakes, and kidneys, and various other things, vanished at express speed before the fat junior.

His raid upon the pantry the previous night did not seem to have had any effect in the way of impairing his appetite.

Harry Wharton & Co. did not linger over their breakfast. They had agreed to start early that morning for a long tramp across the moor, to get back by lunch-time; and so they did not stay long at the breakfast table.

"Where are you fellows going?" Bunter asked, as Harry Wharton rose.
"Walking."
"Oh, wait for me, then."
Wharton looked resigned.
"Would you like to come?" he said.
"Certainly," said Bunter.
"It will be a long walk—two hours there and two hours back."
"That's all right; I'm a dab at walking, you know."
The juniors exchanged glances. If Billy Bunter started walking with them, and they accommodated their pace to his, they would certainly not reach their destination before it was time to return.
That was exactly like Bunter. He never would be left out of anything, whether it was anything he liked or not, and he never stopped to reflect whether he was wanted.
"Well, of course, you can come," said Harry. "We're going to take some lunch, so you can cut brekker now."
"I've hardly started," said Bunter.
"Well, buck up, then."
"I'm bucking up as fast as I can," said Bunter. "I had better make a solid meal. I always walk much better after a solid meal."
"Oh, all right!"
And the Greyfriars chums drummed their heels while they waited for the fat junior to finish his breakfast.
Billy Bunter did not take the trouble to hurry himself.
He ate at leisure, and he ate plentifully, and the juniors chafed, and exchanged impatient looks, as he went on.
"Aren't you finished yet, Bunter?" asked Nugent.
"I think I'll have another cup of tea."
"Look here——" said John Bull.
"It takes me a lot of time to answer you, Bull. Why don't you let a fellow eat in peace? It will get over it much quicker."
The juniors glared.
But Billy Bunter was not to be moved, and they did not want to attract any attention from the grown-ups at the table. They waited, determined to make Billy Bunter sorry for himself afterwards.
Bunter was finished at last.
He rose from the table, and they went out into the hall.
"Perhaps it would be better to wait and have a bit of a rest before starting," the fat junior remarked, as he sat down on a seat in the hall.
"We're starting now," said Harry Wharton curtly.
"Oh, really, Wharton!"
"Come on, you fellows!"
Billy Bunter jumped up in a hurry.
"Look here, I'm not going to be left behind!" he exclaimed.
"Come on, then."
Bunter grunted, and joined them outside.
The air was keen and frosty, and there was a thin powdering of snow on the ground. It was just the morning for a long, sharp walk.
Billy Bunter puffed after the juniors down to the gates. He was never a great walker, being far too fat and unwieldy for pedestrian exercise; and after the enormous breakfast he had disposed of, he was less than ever inclined for it.
"I say, you fellows, hold on!" he exclaimed, as they swung out of the gates into the road. "Don't go ahead like a blessed train, you know."
"We've got a long way to go," said Harry.
"Yes; but hold on."
"Bosh!"
"I say, you fellows, you know——"
"Rubbish!"
The juniors strode on in line. Bunter panted after them, growing redder and redder and shorter of breath at every step.
The Greyfriars chums did not even look round at him. If Bunter wasn't in a fit state for the walk, he shouldn't have started, and it was no business of theirs. That was how they looked at it. The fat junior could go back whenever he chose, at all events.
"I say, you fellows——"
No reply.
The five juniors tramped on, the powdery snow flying from under their boots.
"Wharton! I say, Wharton!"
Tramp! Tramp! Tramp!
"Bob Cherry! I say, Cherry, old man! Cherry, you beast! I say——"
The juniors grinned.
But they did not look round. The distance between them and the fat junior was steadily increasing.

"I say, you fellows—— Oh! Ow! Stop for me!"
Tramp! Tramp! Tramp!
Billy Bunter came to a halt.
He was gasping and gasping, and he felt that he would fall down if he took another step. He glared after the tramping juniors with speechless indignation.
As soon as he found his voice, he yelled:
"Wharton! Bull! Nugent! Stop! Yah! Cads! Beasts!"
There was no reply. The juniors tramped steadily on, leaving the fat junior alone on the snowy road. Billy Bunter snorted, and turned his steps back in the direction of Wharton Lodge.

THE EIGHTH CHAPTER.
Fancy Dress.

"HALLO! Left behind?" asked Colonel Wharton, as he met Billy Bunter on the drive.
The fat junior grunted.
"I suppose you couldn't keep the pace?" the Colonel remarked.
"Oh, no, not at all!" said Bunter. "I'm a dab at walking, sir. The fact is, they couldn't keep up with me, and I dropped out, out of sheer good nature, because I didn't want to fag them out."
"Hum!"
Colonel Wharton walked on without any further reply than that monosyllable, and Billy Bunter went in to rest. Upon the whole he was not sorry he had been left behind. He enjoyed a sound sleep that morning, on a sofa, and he woke up as the juniors came back from their long tramp, just in time for lunch.
Billy Bunter blinked at them as he met them at table. They were looking a little tired, but very rosy and healthy, a contrast to the sickly look of the fat junior, who had spent the morning indoors. They had brought back excellent appetites with them, too, and they proceeded to make the lunch fly in a manner almost worthy of Bunter himself.
"I hope you had a nice walk," said Bunter sarcastically.
"Yes, thanks," said Harry.
"You left me behind."
"I noticed you didn't keep up," said John Bull. "What was your motive in dropping behind, Bunter?"
"Oh, really, Bull——"
"You couldn't have been outpaced, because you've told me that you're the finest junior walker at Greyfriars," said Bull.
Bunter only grunted in reply to that, and devoted himself to his lunch. He found that more satisfactory than arguing with John Bull.
After lunch the juniors drew round the fire to discuss the evening. They were going to a dance at a place a couple of miles from Wharton Lodge, and as some of the Cliff House girls were to be there, the event was decidedly interesting to the juniors.
Billy Bunter had pulled up an easy-chair to the exact centre of the hearth, and was sitting in it with his feet on the fender.
"I say, you fellows," he remarked, "what time is the dance?"
"We leave here at seven," said Harry.
"I'm coming with you, I suppose?"
"If you like, of course."
"Is Marjorie to be there?"
"Yes. Hazeldene is bringing his sister, and Miss Clara, who is staying with her for the vacation."
"Good!" said Bunter, with a fat smile. "It will be a jolly surprise for them, meeting me unexpectedly, won't it?"
"It will be a surprise," said Nugent. "I don't know about being a joyful one."
"Oh, really Nugent!"
"In fact, Marjorie won't be pleased at all, and I don't suppose anybody else will be," said Bob Cherry.
Bunter sniffed.
"Oh, I can make allowances for jealousy," he said. "I know how you feel when Marjorie gives me a sweet look! Yow!"
Bob Cherry's finger and thumb had closed like a vice on Bunter's ear, and he gave a terrific squeal.
"You know what?" asked Bob quietly.
"Ow! Yow!"
"Sorry?"
"Yes! Ow! Yow! Yes!"
"Awfully sorry?"
"Yow! Yes! Ow!"
Bob released the Owl of the Remove.
"I'll give you a real twister next time," he said warningly.
Bunter blinked at him furiously.
"Ow! Beast!"
"Shut up, Bunter," said Nugent. "Curious thing you must always be making a row."

"Yow! I'm hurt!"

"Well, shut up!"

"Ow! Look here, you fellows, I was going to speak about the dance. I haven't brought any evening clothes with me. I suppose it's evening dress?"

"Evening or fancy dress, just as you please," said Wharton. "Most will be in fancy dress, I expect."

"Oh, good! I'm a dab at making up in character," said Bunter. "What would you suggest my going as?"

"As an ass," suggested Nugent. "That would save you the trouble of making up for the part, you know."

"Oh, really, Nugent!"

"Or if you want to assume a really difficult disguise for a chap like you, you could go as a gentleman."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Look here, Nugent——"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The fat junior snorted.

"Well, if you don't help me, I shall jolly well go in an Eton jacket," he said. "I don't care, if you don't. I think you might treat me with some decency, though, Wharton, after getting me here like this."

Wharton stared.

"Getting you here!" he repeated.

"Yes. Look here, I want a fancy dress of some sort—I think a cavalier dress would suit me best."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The juniors roared at the idea of Billy Bunter as a cavalier. The Owl of the Remove blinked at them indignantly.

"Blessed if I can see anything to cackle at!" he exclaimed.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I suppose you've got some costumes here to select from?" said Bunter. "I think I'll look over them, and take my choice."

"We may as well look over the costumes, chaps," said Harry, rising. "We ought to try them on before deciding, and I've had a good selection sent down from London."

"Good egg!"

"The good-eggfulness is terrific."

The juniors quitted the fireside, and Bunter, after a little hesitation, followed. The fat junior loved easy-chairs and blazing fires, especially in winter. But the desire to cut a great figure in fancy dress at the dance was stronger.

In a room above, the fancy costumes were ready for the juniors.

There were a dozen dresses to select from, as well as masks and dominos for those who preferred a plainer attire.

There was a cavalier dress, which Harry Wharton had intended for himself, but Billy Bunter pounced upon it at once.

"I suppose I can have this?" he remarked.

"If you like," said Harry.

"H'm! It'd be a bit big for me—in length, I mean."

"Not in width," grinned Bob Cherry.

"Oh, don't let's have any of your rotten jokes now!" said Bunter. "Perhaps, after all, I'd better have this John Bull rig-out."

"That you jolly well won't!" said Bull. "That's mine!"

"Oh, really, Bull!"

"That was specially ordered for Bull," said Wharton. "You can't have it, Bunter."

"Look here——"

"Oh, shut up!" said Bull.

"Oh, really——"

"Dry up!"

John Bull was unfolding the costume. It was a garb such as that worn by farmers a hundred years ago, and still used in pictures of the typical "John Bull." The new junior of Greyfriars donned it with some satisfaction. His thickset, sturdy figure, and round, healthy face set off the costume well, and he looked the character to the full.

"Well, you are 'John Bull Junior' now, and no mistake!" grinned Bob Cherry.

Bull looked at himself in a glass.

"This suits me," he said.

"The suitfulness is terrific."

"It would have suited me," said Bunter, in an aggrieved tone.

"Rats!"

"Forfeit!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The juniors tried costume after costume. Bunter was not satisfied with any. As a matter of fact, although he had his choice, there was nothing that would have done for him without a great deal of alteration. The costumes had been ordered for the others, and there was nothing suitable for Billy Bunter's fat, stumpy figure.

"I suppose I shall have to wear a domino," growled Bunter, at last.

"And a mask!" said Bob Cherry.

"Yes, a mask, of course."

"You see, it's more merciful to the girls," Bob Cherry explained. "And I think you ought to fasten it on so that it cannot possibly come off, you know; there might be casualties."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Oh, really, Cherry——"

"But if you'd rather stay at home, Bunter——"

"I jolly well wouldn't rather stay at home," said Billy Bunter emphatically. "I'm coming to the dance. You know how jolly cut-up Marjorie would be if she knew I might have come, and didn't—and—— Yow!"

Billy Bunter sprawled on the floor, and the juniors went downstairs and left him to pick himself up.

The Owl of the Remove sat up and gasped.

"Beasts!" he snorted. "Beasts! It's sheer, rotten jealousy! Won't I make them sit up at the dance, that's all! I'll jolly well keep all the girls looking after me, so that they won't have a look in! Let 'em wait till to-night, that's all!"

THE NINTH CHAPTER
The Dance.

"YOU fellows ready?"

"The readyfulness is terrific, my worthy chum."

"Where's Bull?"

"Bull! Bull!"

It was almost time to leave for the dance, and the juniors were ready—with the exception of John Bull.

He was not to be seen.

"Bull! Bull!"

"Johnny!"

"John Bull!"

"Where's the duffer?"

"I can't hear the concertina," said Nugent, listening. "He's not playing that. Where has he got to?"

Harry Wharton laughed. John Bull had brought his concertina with him to the lodge, for Bull never went anywhere without taking his concertina. But the chums of Greyfriars did not appreciate the kind of music he ground out of it. After the first day, when Bull had given them a selection of melodies, the juniors had solemnly threatened to smash the concertina, and its player as well, if they ever heard its unmusical strains again. Whereat John Bull, sniffing disdainfully, told them that they had no ear for music, and put the instrument of torture away.

But they knew that he was always longing to grind away at the concertina, and when he failed to turn up for the start now, Nugent's first idea was that he had gone off to practise.

"Bull! Bull!"

"Johnny!"

"Hallo!"

John Bull came running up with a slightly flushed face. There was mud on his boots, as if he had just come indoors.

"You ass, where have you been?" exclaimed Wharton. "We're ready to go."

"Sha'n't be a jiffy."

"Forfeit."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Wharton and Bob Cherry helped John Bull into his things. In the costume of the old original "John Bull," the Greyfriars junior looked the part to the life.

The juniors tumbled into the roomy old coach, with the colonel and Miss Wharton, and it rolled away down the drive.

Billy Bunter had contented himself with a domino and a mask in the end. None of the costumes came up to his demands.

He was disposed to grumble, but no one was disposed to listen to him, so that did not matter very much.

The carriage rolled on through the dark January evening, through a thin powdering of snow.

Billy Bunter had a couple of rugs over his knees, and a coat on, and a cloak over his shoulders, but he sniffed and snorted considerably, so as to let it be fully understood that he was not quite comfortable.

"Got a cold, Bunter?" asked Bob Cherry, presently.

"Yes, I think I'm getting a bit of a cold," said Bunter, who would never disclaim any possibility of extracting sympathy.

"Perhaps Bunter had better ride outside," said Bob. "It won't do for us to catch his cold."

"Oh, really, Cherry——"

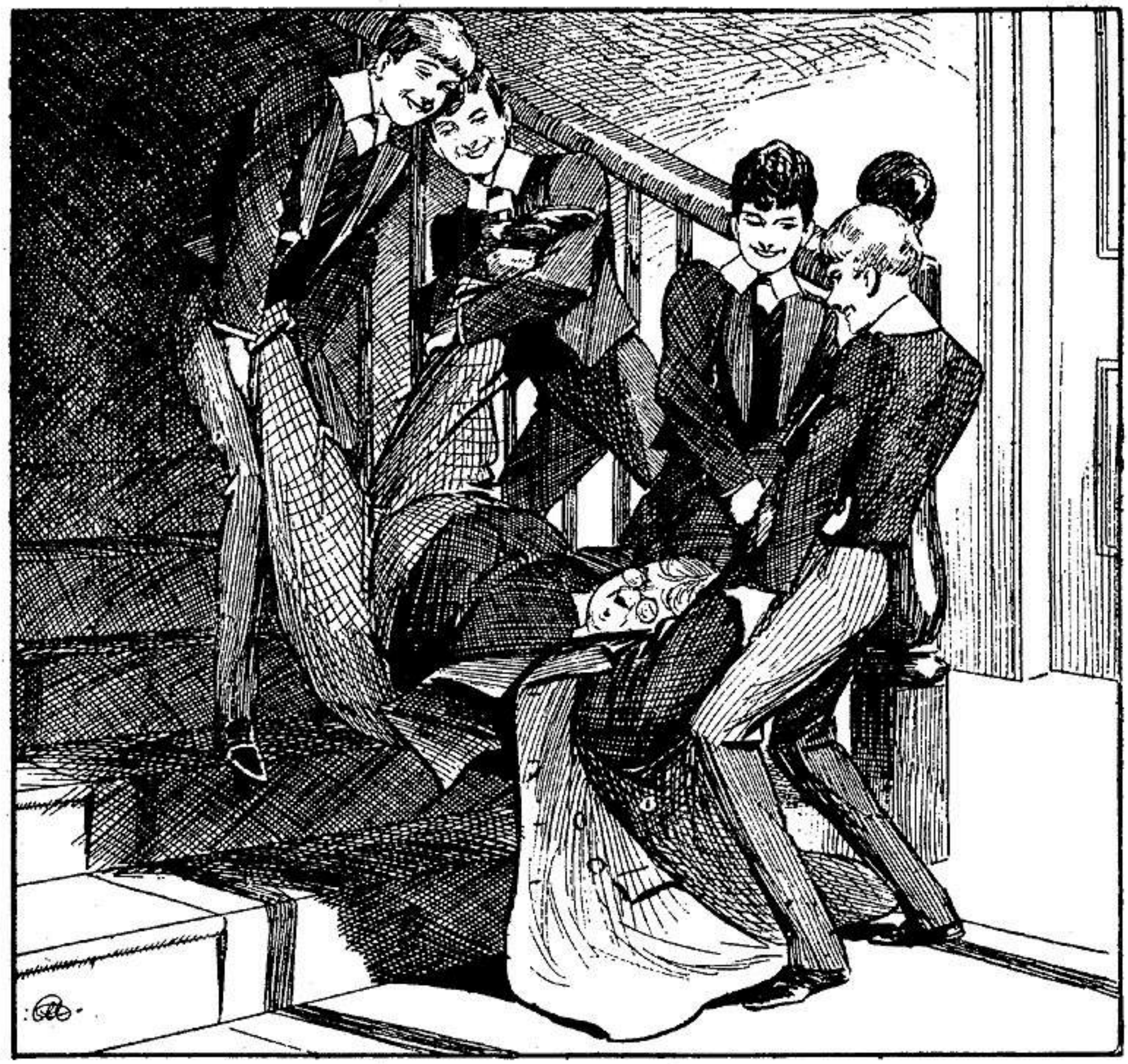
"Or it might do him good to walk," Nugent suggested.

"Look here, Nugent——"

"Good," said John Bull. "If he sniffs again, let's shove him outside."

"Agreed."

Billy Bunter did not sniff again. He sat glowering with indignation, till the carriage rolled up to a wide portal, where numberless other vehicles were stopping in turn, and horses were tramping and coachmen and footmen shouting.



Up the stairs went the four juniors with Billy Bunter in between them. On every stair he was carefully bumped, and at every bump he let a yell. "Ow! Yow! Lemme down!" he yelled. *(See page 4.)*

"Here we are, my lads!" said Colonel Wharton.

And the party alighted.

The dance had already commenced when the Wharton Lodge party entered. The spacious ball-room, decorated with holly and mistletoe, was ablaze with lights, and ringing with the crash of the band.

"I say, you fellows, I think I ought to have a little refreshment," Bunter remarked. "I say—— Hallo! Where are you? I say, you fellows!"

But the fellows were gone.

They had not come to a dance merely in order to see Bunter eat. They could have seen that at home, at any time, as Bob Cherry remarked.

The fat junior was left alone.

"I say, you fellows——"

"Don't get in the way of the dancers, please," said a steward in passing.

And Bunter grunted and rolled away.

He was somewhat comforted a little later as he saw that many of the gentle sex were glancing at him.

He had been sure all along that his distinguished bearing would attract general admiration, and now that was quite confirmed.

As a matter of fact, the fat, stumpy junior bore a great resemblance to a barrel as he rolled along in his domino, and the gleam of his spectacles through the holes in his mask, too, had a somewhat striking effect.

Bunter was being looked at, but certainly not on account of his beauty.

He jostled against a youthful Cavalier, who had a lady on his arm, and had just left the whirling dance to seek a seat.

Bunter knew that Wharton was in a Cavalier dress, and he had no doubt that he had spotted Harry and Marjorie.

"I say," he exclaimed, grasping at the cavalier's ruffles, and tearing them—"I say, hold on a minute!"

"Bai Jove! What the dickens do you mean?"

Bunter started.

It was not Wharton's voice, but a voice he knew well—that of a junior belonging to St. Jim's, who had frequently visited Greyfriars for footer or cricket matches.

"My hat!" exclaimed Bunter. "Is that you, D'Arcy?"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"I'm Bunter."

"Oh, you're Buntah, are you?" said the Cavalier. "Well, pway don't gwasp me in that wuffianly mannah, Buntah."

"I say——"

"Wats!"

And Arthur Augustus D'Arcy jerked himself away, and piloted the lady to a seat.

Billy Bunter snorted.

It really looked as if the swell of St. Jim's was not anxious for his society.

Bunter drifted away.

He could not find his friends, but he found the refreshment department, and as all refreshments were to be had for nothing, Bunter's impecuniosity did not stand in the way of a big feed.

So he started.

The attendants looked on in wonder and great admiration at the powers of Bunter in the gastronomic line.

Billy Bunter did not heed them.

The refreshments were good, and as he had an early start, there was not the usual crush, and he put in a really good half-hour.

Then he drifted back to the dance.

Billy Bunter rather fancied himself as a dancer. As a matter of fact, he could waltz clumsily, and that was about all he could do.

A waltz was just beginning, as it happened, and Bunter found a partner. It was Miss Wilhelmina Limburger, of Cliff House, whom Bunter knew by her proportions and her accent. The mask she wore covered up a very small part of her fat, full-moon face, and her shepherdess dress showed off her plump figure to very great advantage.

Partners were rather shy of Miss Limburger, as a rule.

She did not dance well, her dancing consisting of a series of kangaroo-like hops and jumps, in which she was wont to drag her unfortunate partner about with great violence.

As Miss Limburger was heavier than any fellow present, excepting Bunter, and stronger than most, Miss Limburger was irresistible—in that way, and fellows who had been dragged, and jerked, and bumped, did not ask Miss Limburger to dance twice.

But Wilhelmina, of course, was glad to dance, and Bunter came in good time for her, so the meeting was lucky for both of them.

"Tat is ferry good, pefore," Miss Limburger remarked. "I tinks tat I likes te to dance, ain't it?"

"It's very jolly here," said Bunter. "Dancing is a bit of a fag, ain't it?"

"I tink so not."

"I'm a bit fagged, anyway. I've been at it the whole evening since I came," said the veracious Owl of the Remove. "The girls like a good dancer, and a chap who can really dance never really gets a rest."

"Ja, ja, tat may be so; but vy should you be tired den?" asked Miss Limburger, quite innocently.

Bunter snorted.

He considered Miss Limburger a decidedly bad dancer, and she had the same opinion of him, and they were both quite right.

"Rotten orchestra, ain't it?" said Bunter, finding fault with the band after the manner of poor dancers. "Did you ever hear such time?"

"I tinks it is pretty goot, pefore."

"Well, I think it's rotten. Can't keep to it."

"No, I notice tat."

"Let's go our own way, and blow the band," said Bunter.

"Just as you like, mein friend."

"Come on, then!"

Waltzing on those lines led to trouble. The ball-room was crowded, and Bunter and Wilhelmina, not in the least keeping time to the music, rolled and pranced and floundered about in everybody's way.

There was a sudden crash as Bunter went right into a young Cavalier, and Wilhelmina fell, clutching at a youthful John Bull to save herself. Bump!

John Bull went down, and Miss Limburger sat upon him, and there was a gasp of anguish from John.

Bunter was hanging upon the cavalier.

"Ow! I'm hurt! I——"

"You'll be hurt more if you don't let go!" growled Wharton, in an undertone. "Leggo!"

"Oh!" groaned John Bull. "Help! Rescue!"

THE TENTH CHAPTER.

A Terrible Plot.

MISS LIMBURGER was quite out of breath, and she seemed to have no desire to rise. Perhaps she found John Bull softer to sit upon than the floor.

But two or three pairs of hands lent her assistance, and she was dragged up.

"Mein Gott!" said Wilhelmina. "I tinks tat tat Punter is ein fat duffer, ain't it, pefore. I tinks I dances mit him no more after"

"Oh, really, you know——"

"Buzz off, Bunter——"

"Look here, Bob Cherry——"

"You'll get chucked out, you know."

"Oh, really——"

Bunter was helped, or rather shoved, out of the way; Miss Limburger was conducted to a seat, and there left to fan herself.

She gave Bunter a glance of great scorn when he joined her.

Bunter, in spite of his many fascinations, found it impossible to get other partners. The Cliff House girls might have felt bound to give him a dance if he had been able to recognise them, but Miss Limburger was the only one he knew.

And Marjorie and Clara were not likely to make themselves known to Bunter if they could help it, though they had already done so with the other Greyfriars juniors.

"Hot, ain't it?" said Bunter.

Miss Limburger grunted.

"Think you'll have another go?" asked Bunter.

"Not mit you."

"Oh, really——"

"I tink you clumsy duffer!" said Miss Limburger, with German frankness.

"Well, it wasn't my fault. Wharton cannoned into me, you know——"

"You vas cannon mit Wharton pefore, I tink."

"Oh, really, you know!"

"I tink I dances no more, ain't it."

"Suppose you come and have some coffee?" suggested Bunter. "Good coffee here, and the grub's all right. I've sampled it."

Miss Limburger could not resist that invitation.

"Vell, I tink tat tat is a goot idea," she exclaimed.

And she accepted Bunter's arm.

They moved off together.

Billy Bunter was not particularly proud of his partner, but he didn't want the other fellows to consider him as a wallflower, and so he was glad enough to take Wilhelmina to the supper-room.

But when he was there he found that Miss Limburger was very exacting.

She had a love of good things that ran Bunter's very close, and the sight of the plentiful refreshments, all ready, and to be had for the asking, made her eyes sparkle.

The number of things she wanted, and the quickness with which she disposed of them, made even the Falstaff of Greyfriars open his eyes.

The fat junior found an excuse for leaving her at last, and he left her contentedly munching, and hurried off for a quiet feed himself.

He chose a quiet corner under the shadow of a group of palms, and there he started on cold chicken and several other delicacies, and he was soon very busy.

He was plying a very active knife and fork when two dancers in masks and dominos came and stopped very near to him.

They had glasses in their hands, and were partaking of liquid refreshment, and they stood near the palms, apparently, without seeing the fat junior on the other side.

They took up their position with their backs to him, watching the dancers pass and repass the wide doorway that gave access to the ball-room.

One of them wore a blue domino and the other a pink one, and from their stature they might have been either boys or young men.

Bunter, who never lost an opportunity of listening to any conversation, however private, pricked up his ears.

But he need not have taken the trouble, for when the two dominos began to speak they spoke quite loudly enough for him to hear without difficulty.

"Where is he now?" asked the blue domino.

"I don't know."

"Do you know what he has come as?"

"No, I don't, but I suppose it will be some fancy costume. He certainly isn't here in evening clothes, or I should have recognised him."

"No; but if he is masked we shouldn't know him from the others, unless we could see his spectacles, of course."

Bunter started a little.

He wore spectacles himself, and he wondered whether the two dominos could be speaking of himself.

He did not recognise their voices, but both of them were speaking in low and husky tones, as if they had colds, or perhaps were desirous of disguising their voices to deceive chance listeners.

At all events, he was sure they were not Greyfriars fellows, as all the latter had come in some kind of character costume, not in simple dominos.

"You could see his spectacles through his mask," the blue domino observed.

"Yes, perhaps."
"Then you would know him by his figure—so round and fat."
Bunter started again.
Certainly he would never have applied that description to himself, regarding his figure personally as plump and well-proportioned, but he knew that envious persons had described it as round and fat.
He listened intently, forgetting even to eat in his interest in the conversation of the two dominos.
"Well, I haven't seen him."
"But—you know whom—he knows him?"
"Oh, certainly!"
"And the work will be done?"
"Yes, that's arranged."
"How will it be managed?"
"One of the waiters has been bribed. The deadly draught will be placed in any liquid he may order, you see, or if he doesn't drink, it will be worked into any food he has, such as a cold chicken."
"Good!"
A cold perspiration broke out over Bunter.
He had nearly finished a cold chicken now.
"There will be no more trouble from that fat bounder!" said the blue domino. "He will never go back to Greyfriars!"
Billy Bunter shuddered.
Greyfriars! The mention of that word was proof enough that he was the subject of the conversation. Spectacles—fat bounder—Greyfriars! He could not want more proof than was furnished by those words.
He staggered to his feet.
As he did so the two dominos moved away and disappeared into the conservatory.
Billy Bunter gasped.
He realised that he was the victim of a terrible plot, and that he must have already swallowed the fatal draught if it was mixed up in the chicken.
"Oh!" he groaned. "Ow! I'm poisoned! I've got a fearful pain! Ow!"
He pushed his table away, and it tottered, and the plates and knives and forks went to the floor with a crash.
The crash, of course, attracted general attention.
Bunter groaned deeply, and held on to his chair for support. His terrors had been so aroused by the fear that he had been poisoned that he imagined he already felt a terrible pain in his interior. As a matter of fact, he had been stuffing himself so grossly all the evening that it would not have been surprising if he felt some internal qualms.
Groan—groan!
"Good heavens! What's the matter?"
"Are you ill, sir?"
Groan!
"Whatever is the matter?"
"Hallo! That's Bunter! What's the matter with him?"
"Hallo, hallo, hallo! Seedy, Bunter? Overdoing the grub department again?"
"Ow! I'm dying!"
"Ha, ha, ha!"
"I've been poisoned!"
"What?"
Bunter groaned again, and sank to the floor.

THE ELEVENTH CHAPTER.

A St. Jim's Little Joke.

THERE was a crowd round the fat junior at once.
Bunter's terrors were so strong, and his imagination so vivid, that he acted the part to the life, and it was difficult to hear his terrible groans without believing that he was in serious pain.
"What is it, Bunter?"
"Poisoned!"
"Nonsense!"
"Good heavens!"
"The nonsensefulness is terrific!"
"Poor old chap!"
"He's spoofing!"
Groan—groan!
Bunter's mask had fallen off, and it revealed his fat face damp with sweat. There was no doubt that the Owl of the Remove was in dire terror, if not in dire pain.
Harry Wharton knelt beside Bunter, and Arthur Augustus D'Arcy was on the other side of him. The dancing was going on in the next room, and the strains of the band came gaily through.
"Bunter!" whispered Harry.
Groan!
"Are you really ill or spoofing again, you young fraud?"
Groan!
"Bunter, you chump! Tell me the truth! I hoped you'd have the decency not to make a scene here for nothing when I've brought you with me," said Wharton hurriedly.

Groan!
"Bai Jove, he sounds vewy bad," said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy with great concern. "Some of you wun for a doctah. Blake is here somewhere, and so is Lowthah. Blake! Lowthah! Wun for a doctah, deah boys—wun like anythin'."
But Blake and Lowther, of St. Jim's, did not seem to be forthcoming.
"Wun for a doctah, somebody!"
"Hold on," said Wharton. "No need for a doctor if this is spoof. Look here, Bunter, tell me what's the matter with you."
Groan!
"If you don't tell me, I'll jolly well shake you!"
"Bai Jove!"
"Ow!" groaned Bunter. "Yow, I'm poisoned!"
"What?"
"I've been poisoned by two villains, who bribed the waiter to put the deadly drug in the cold chicken!"
There was a general chuckle.
"Don't be an ass!" exclaimed Wharton half laughing and half angry. "You have been spoofed by somebody!"
Groan!
"It's all rot, Bunter!"
"Look here, I suppose I ought to know whether I'm dying or not," exclaimed Billy Bunter indignantly.
"Ha, ha, ha!"
"You're a set of heartless beasts; but I forgive you. I hope you won't miss me when I'm gone."
"I don't suppose we should," said Bob Cherry with his usual candour, "but you're not likely to go yet, Bunty."
"Oh, really, Cherry——"
"Buck up, you ass, you're all right!"
"I'm poisoned."
"Get up, you dummy. You're attracting everybody's attention."
"I do not mind if they see me expire."
"Ass!"
"Oh, really, Wharton——"
"Chump!"
"Look here, if you can't talk a little more civilly to a fellow who's expiring, you'd better shup up!"
"Fathead!"
Groan!
"Bless my soul! Whatever is the matter?" exclaimed Colonel Wharton, hurrying up. "Who is that? Bunter?"
Groan!
"The young ass says he's poisoned, sir."
"Nonsense!"
"I'm poisoned," groaned Bunter. "It's a horrible plot; I suppose it's due to jealousy—some fellow jealous of the way the girls look at me. Ow!"
"You young duffer!" said Nugent.
"Bai Jove! I wegard him as an ass, you know."
Groan!
"Look here, Bunter, what is the matter?" exclaimed the colonel. "If you are really ill, I will send for a doctor."
"I'm dying."
"Stuff!"
"I've been poisoned."
"Nonsense!"
"I heard them plotting it."
Colonel Wharton started.
"You heard whom?"
"The two murderers," groaned Bunter. "They didn't know I was near, and they talked it over. They bribed a waiter to poison the chicken."
"Bai Jove! Why should they want to poison a chicken?" exclaimed D'Arcy in amazement. "What had the chicken done, deah boy?"
"Ow! I mean the cold chicken."
"Oh, bai Jove!"
"This is mere nonsense," said Colonel Wharton frowning. "Who were the two persons you imagine you overheard discussing this absurdity, Bunter?"
"They were masked, sir. I only know that one was in a blue domino, and the other in a pink one."
"Gweat Scott!"
"Do you know them, D'Arcy?" asked the colonel.
The swell of St. Jim's grinned.
"Yaas, wathah, sir."
"Who are they?"
"I know that Blake came in a blue domino, and Lowthah in a pink one, and this looks to me like a jape, sir."
The colonel smiled.
"Oh, I see! You think they knew that Bunter was listening to them, and they pitched this absurd story to frighten him?"
"Yaas, wathah, sir."
Billy Bunter suddenly sat up.
"I—I feel better now," he said faintly.

"Ha, ha, ha!"
"Oh, really, you fellows——"
"Ha, ha, ha!"
"Bai Jove! There are the two boundahs!" exclaimed Arthur Augustus.
A blue and a pink domino had joined the crowd round the fat junior. Arthur Augustus beckoned to them.
"Blake! Lowthah! You boundahs!"
The two juniors pushed up their masks.
Two grinning faces were disclosed.
"Hallo!" said Monty Lowther. "That's Bunter, isn't it? What's the matter with him?"
"Looks rather run to seed," Blake remarked.
The Greyfriars fellows were grinning. They could guess now the kind of jape that the Owl of the Remove had been a victim of.
Bunter blinked at the two St. Jim's juniors.
He realised the facts now himself. He rose to his feet, blinking at the juniors through his big spectacles in wrath and indignation. The terrible pains in his inside had vanished all of a sudden.
"Beasts!" he ejaculated.
"Ha, ha, ha!"
"What's the matter?" asked Lowther blandly.
"Yah! Rotters!"
"Ha, ha, ha!"
"Weally, Bunter, you are scarcely polite to my fwiends," said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy with a great deal of dignity. "I wegard you as a wude boundah."
"You don't mean to say you overheard what I was saying to Lowther a while ago, and what Lowther was saying to me!" exclaimed Blake in great astonishment. "Surely you are too honourable a chap to listen to a private conversation, Bunter."
Billy Bunter was fairly caught. His fat face went crimson.
"You are a bad boy, Bunter," said Miss Clara, who was looking on with Marjorie. "Listeners never hear any good of themselves, you know."
"Oh, really, Miss Clara——"
"Yaas, wathah! I wegard Miss Twevlyn as bein' quite wight," said Arthur Augustus. "You had bettah go back and finish the chicken, Buntah."
"Ha, ha, ha!"
Billy Bunter was being unmercifully laughed at. Even Bunter realised how ridiculous he looked, and he did not stop to finish the chicken. He retired to the conservatory, to hide his blushes there among the palms.

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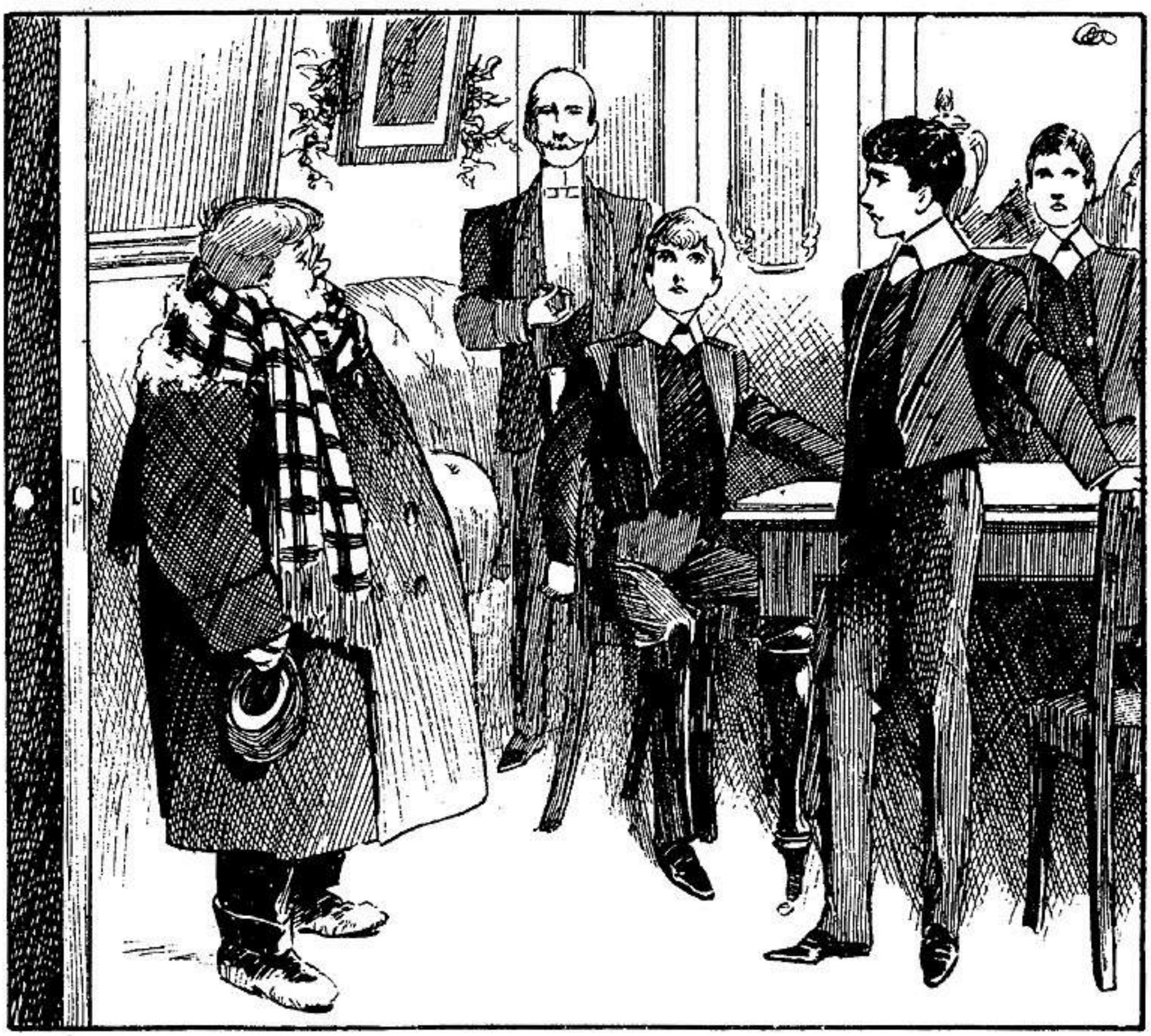
THE TWELFTH CHAPTER.
After the Ball.

HARRY WHARTON & CO. had seldom enjoyed a dance more, and the Cliff House girls were of the same opinion. Of the party that came from Wharton Lodge, one only did not regard the evening as a success, and that one was Billy Bunter. But the others were firmly agreed that Billy Bunter did not matter.
At supper the juniors made a merry party. Harry Wharton and Bob Cherry, Nugent and John Bull and Hurree Jamset Ram Singh chummed up with Blake, Lowther, and D'Arcy, and the Cliff House girls, and Hazeldene, Marjorie's brother, who was also at the dance. Hazeldene was looking well, and he was glad to see the chums, and Wharton thought he looked all the better for being away from the influence of Vernon-Smith at Greyfriars. The boys and girls were very merry, and they danced till they had to leave. Then it was with mutual regret that they parted.
Billy Bunter said good-bye to Marjorie with a very dignified air. He felt that he had been done out of several dances. He had not found an opportunity of asking Marjorie until her card was full, and when he had asked Miss Clara, who had a dance left, Miss Clara informed him, with charming frankness, that she couldn't dance with him.
"You see," Miss Clara had remarked, "you are so conceited, Bunter, and you think girls are dying to dance with you, so I sha'n't dance with you at all."
And Bunter had nothing to say.
Miss Clara had plenty of other partners, or she might not have been so hard upon Billy Bunter. As a matter of fact, Bunter's conceit and smugness made him always unpopular with girls; but sometimes when, as may often happen, partners were scarce, he had been able to fill up his evening. But Bunter would never have realised that he was taken as a makeshift, and simply because he was considered better than nothing. Many young gentlemen, who pride themselves upon their success in the ball-room, would be very much astonished if they knew the light in which they were really regarded. As Miss Clara had remarked in her frank way, girls go to dances to dance, not to be wallflowers if they can help it, and they will dance with any thing or anybody for that reason; but the self-satisfied youth who plumes himself upon his success seldom stops to reflect upon the real explanation of the value placed upon him.
Bunter left in a discontented spirit.
He had been mercilessly japed by the St. Jim's juniors, been neglected by the girls, and even the feed had not been wholly satisfactory, for his fright had disturbed his digestion.
He was not, therefore, in an amiable mood when he entered the carriage for the drive home to the Lodge.
But the rest of the party were very merry.
Colonel and Miss Wharton were quietly satisfied, and the Greyfriars juniors were very much inclined to sing as the carriage rolled through the darkness along the snowy roads.
The lights of the great mansion vanished behind them, and darkness and snow lay round as they rolled on.
Bunter went to sleep in his corner, and his unmusical snores sounded through the hum of conversation and laughter.
"By Jove!" said Colonel Wharton as they rolled through a village street, and the chime of a clock came through the frosty air. "One o'clock!"
"Never mind, sir," said Bob Cherry. "It isn't Christmas all the year."
"No fear," said Nugent.
"Forfeit!" exclaimed John Bull.
"Ha, ha, ha!"
"Oh cheese that now——"
"Forfeit!"
The juniors laughed heartily. The carriage rolled up the drive through the park, and they looked out on the silent wood, the gaunt, leafless trees standing up like spectres in their garb of white.
"Just the night for the ghost," remarked Nugent in an undertone.
Colonel Wharton laughed.
"Yes, and by all accounts the ghost has been heard, if not seen lately," he remarked. "I have heard several curious statements from the keepers."
"By Jove, sir! I'd like to see him, too," said Bob.
"What is the story, sir?" asked John Bull. "I have never been to the Lodge before, and I don't know the tale."
"The story runs that a Wharton was killed in a duel in the park, some centuries ago," said the colonel. "He was killed by foul play, and his ghost is said to haunt the spot where the crime took place, and to shriek there—presumably for vengeance. I certainly have neither seen nor heard the ghost myself, but many of the people about here have fancied they have heard it. Lately, the last few nights I mean, several of the keepers have mentioned hearing what seemed to them dreadful shrieks in the park."
"And did they investigate?" asked Bull.
"No," said the colonel smiling. "I fancy they did not care to attempt to track the sounds to their source."
"It would be a good dodge to have a ghost hunt one night," Harry Wharton remarked. "I should like to see the spectre."
"Good egg!"
"You would probably catch a cold, and nothing else," said the colonel with a laugh. "But here we are, home again."
The carriage stopped.
"Wake up, Bunter!" shouted Bob Cherry in the fat junior's ear. "Wake up!"
Bunter jumped.
"Ow! Oh! W-w-what——"
"Home!"
"Ow! Leggo! You needn't have startled me like that, you ass!"
"There's gratitude for you," said Bob Cherry with a sigh. "Never mind—I'll always treat you as the same old Bunter! Look here, if you're tired we'll carry you upstairs."
"That you jolly well won't," said Bunter.
"My dear fathead——"
"Leggo, you ass!"
And Bunter jerked himself away, and walked in unaided. He had had quite enough of being carried up to bed.
The Greyfriars chums went to bed, but ere they slept, Wharton referred again to the idea of a ghost hunt.
"What do you fellows say?" he asked. "We could have a run in the park to-morrow night, and have a look for the spectre."
"Ow!" said Bunter.
"Hallo! What's the matter?"
"Nothing."
"Then what are you grunting about?"
"What are you talking about ghosts for now?" demanded Bunter peevishly.
"Ha, ha, ha! So you believe in spooks?" chuckled Nugent.



Billy Bunter, wrapped up in a thick coat and muffler, with snow on his boots and shoulders, stood gasping in the doorway. "My only hat!" ejaculated Wharton. "It's Bunter!" *(See page 3.)*

"No, I don't."

"Then what does it matter if we talk about them?"

Bunter did not reply to that question. He snored instead.

"It's a jolly good idea," exclaimed Bob Cherry. "I suppose midnight is about the most appropriate time. What do you fellows say?"

"Good," replied Nugent.

"The goodfulness is terrific."

"What's your idea, Bull?"

"Oh, bosh," said John Bull.

"Don't you like the idea?"

"No!"

"Why not?"

John Bull yawned.

"What's the good?" he asked.

"Oh, it will be fun."

"Rats!"

"Forfeit!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Well, I don't think much of the idea," said Bull. "But go ghost-hunting if you like. You can leave me in bed."

"You seem to be jolly fond of your bed lately," said Harry Wharton. "You used to be an early riser at Greyfriars, and now you're up late every morning."

John Bull did not reply to that remark. He turned over to go to sleep.

"Well, it's all right," said Harry. "If Bull doesn't want to come, he can stay in bed, and the rest of us will go. Shall we fix it for to-morrow night?"

"Yes, rather."

"The ratherfulness is terrific."

"That's settled then."

"I say, you fellows——"

"Oh, go to sleep, Bunter."

"Oh, really, you know——"

"Sleep, baby, sleep," said Bob Cherry, "and don't jaw. Good-night, you fellows."

"Good-night!"

And the juniors slumbered.

THE THIRTEENTH CHAPTER.

A Letter for Bunter.

JOHN BULL was up as early as the rest on the morning following the dance, which was not very early. At Greyfriars Bull had been a regular early riser, and he was one of the few who went down to the Sark for early ducker, fair weather or foul. But since he had been staying at Wharton Lodge he had developed different habits, and showed a desire to cling to his bed in the morning that was worthy of Billy Bunter. Indeed, sometimes Bob Cherry or Nugent had had to persuade him to rise with the aid of a hockey club or a wet sponge.

But all were up late on the morning after the ball. It was nearly nine o'clock when Harry Wharton sat up and yawned.

"By Jove, it's late!" he exclaimed, jumping out of bed. "I say, wake up, you chaps! It's nearly nine! Buck up!"

"Forfeit!" came a sleepy voice from Nugent's bed.

And there was a sleepy chuckle.

"The lateness is terrific," said Hurree Jamset Ram Singh, as he sat up. "There is an honourable and esteemed proverb which declares that earlyful to bed and earlyful to rise is the way to appertain to wealth and to health and to the esteemed wisdom."

"Go hon! Turn out, then," said Bob Cherry. "I'll stay a little longer."

"No, you won't," said John Bull, slipping out of bed. "I'll help you. One good turn deserves another."

And he dipped a sponge in a jug of water.

Bob Cherry blinked at him sleepily.

"Don't be a beast, Bull!"

"Get up!"

"I'm sleepy."

"Up with you!"

"Give him a tune on the concertina, Johnny," said Harry Wharton, laughing "I believe that would make the dead rise."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

John Bull snorted.

"You fellows have got no ear for music," he said. "I've made people cry with the way I play that concertina."

"No wonder."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"What did they cry," asked Bob Cherry, "murder or help?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

John Bull did not answer that question. He rushed at Bob Cherry with the sponge. Bob rolled out of bed on the other side, but his feet caught in the bedclothes, and he fell on the floor. Then the wet sponge descended upon his face.

"Groo!" gasped Bob. "Yow! Gerrooh!"

"Want any more?" asked Bull, grinning.

Bob Cherry scrambled up.

"You chump! No! I—I'd almost rather have the concertina."

Billy Bunter was still peacefully reposing, or appearing to do so. It could never be told whether the fat junior was sleeping with one ear open, to hear what was going on.

"Better not wake Bunter," said Nugent, with a wink. "The poor dear chap is so tired, after the tremendous amount of dancing he put in last night. I suppose you all noticed how the prettiest girls were all mashed on Bunter."

"Yes, rather!"

"The ratherfulness is terrific."

Bunter's snoring ceased. Perhaps in his sleep he wanted to make sure of hearing those complimentary remarks about himself.

"Yes, I never saw Bunter look so well as last night," went on Nugent. "Makes such a lot of difference to a chap having a mask on."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Bunter grunted, and snored again.

"Well, we'll let him rest now," said Nugent sympathetically. "I'll give his face a coating of soot, and as he never washes in the morning, he'll look quite interesting when he comes down. Why, he's awake!"

Billy Bunter was sitting up in bed, glaring.

"Beast!" he said.

"Hallo, hallo, hallo! Bunter, do you hear things in your sleep?" exclaimed Bob Cherry, in great surprise.

"I say, you fellows, I'm too sleepy to get up yet, but if that beast puts any soot on me, I'll—I'll——"

"You'll do anything but wash it off," suggested Nugent.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Up you get!" said Bob Cherry, jerking the bedclothes off the fat junior. "Early to bed, early to rise, makes a pig grow to a very large size; so up you get!"

"Ow! Oh, really——"

"Out you come! Hand over that sponge, Johnny."

The fat junior was out of bed before the sponge could be handed over. Billy Bunter could be very quick sometimes.

"Still freezing," said Harry Wharton, looking out of the window. "What do you say to a run on the lake before brekker?"

"Good! Give us an appetite."

"I've got an appetite already," said Billy Bunter peevishly. "It's too jolly cold to go skating."

"Oh, rats! It will do you good."

"I'm not going."

"It will bring your fat down, Bunty," said Bob Cherry persuasively; "and after the amount of dancing you did last night, you need something invigorating, you know."

"Oh, really, Cherry——"

Bob grinned and went downstairs. The other juniors followed, and Bunter, who had been dabbing his fat face very gingerly at his washstand, cast his eyes towards bed again. He meant to have another snooze.

But Bob Cherry's voice rang up the stairs.

"Letter for Bunter!"

"Oh, bring it up, will you, Cherry, there's a good chap! It must be the postal-order I'm expecting."

"No fear!"

"Send it up, then, will you?"

"What for, when you're coming down?"

"Well, I sha'n't be down for some minutes, and——"

"Have you gone to bed again?" roared Bob Cherry.

"No, no!" said Bunter, hurriedly retreating from the bed, in case Bob Cherry came up. "But—but——"

"Well, here's your letter."

"Oh, I'll come down for it. I think you're a beast."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Billy Bunter dressed and went down. He found the juniors in the breakfast-room, and after saying good-morning to the Colonel, he inquired for his letter.

Bob Cherry turned a blank stare upon the Owl of the Remove.

"Letter!" he repeated.

"Yes; where is it?"

"Where's what?"

"My letter."

"What letter?"

"Look here, Cherry, you said a letter had come for me," exclaimed the fat junior, exasperated. "Hand it over, and don't rot."

"I didn't say anything of the kind," said Bob Cherry stoutly. "I simply said, 'Letter for Bunter.'"

"Well, that's the same thing, isn't it?"

"Not a bit of it!"

"Hand it over, anyway," said Billy Bunter peevishly. "Don't be an ass. I've been expecting a postal-order, and I think it must be in that letter. Was there a crest on the letter?"

"Ha, ha! No."

"I'm expecting one from a titled friend. But give it to me. I am sure the postal-order is in it."

"I'm sure it isn't."

"You've been opening the letter."

"No, I haven't. It won't open."

"What!"

"Here it is," said Bob Cherry cheerfully.

He fumbled in his pocket, and drew out a sheet of paper. On the paper was written sprawlingly the letter "A."

"There you are, old son!" said Bob.

Billy Bunter blinked at the letter through his big spectacles, not comprehending Bob Cherry's little joke.

"W-w-what is that?" he gasped.

"The letter."

"The what?"

"The letter. Didn't I mention that it was an alphabetical letter?" said Bob Cherry innocently.

Billy Bunter gave him a look. His feelings were too deep for words. The juniors burst into a roar of laughter, in which Colonel Wharton could not help joining.

The fat junior sat down at the breakfast-table, and consoled himself for the disappointment with the biggest breakfast that had ever been eaten within the hospitable walls of Wharton Lodge.

THE FOURTEENTH CHAPTER.

An Alarm in the Night.

THE vacation was drawing to its close, but Harry Wharton & Co. were keenly enjoying what was left of it. Billy Bunter was a trouble, certainly, but as he was generally sat upon, he did not interfere with them very much. So long as Bunter had plenty to eat and an easy-chair by the fire, he could be kept quiet. And the terror of the juniors—John Bull's concertina—had been quiet ever since the first day of the vacation. Harry Wharton, as host, could not have taken it upon himself to explain to Bull that his music was horrid discord, but the other fellows had been quite frank about the matter.

And the voice of the concertina, as Nugent put it poetically, was heard no more in the land.

"What about the giddy ghost?" asked Frank Nugent, when they went to bed that night. "It's snowing."

"The ghost is?" asked Bob.

"No, ass! It's snowing, and I don't suppose the ghost goes out in the snow. He wouldn't if he had the ghost of a brain."

Bob Cherry looked out of the window.

White flakes were sailing through the darkness on all sides, and were blown in little clouds against the window by the bitter wind.

Dimly, through the darkness, the gaunt trees could be seen, laden with thick snow on their branches.

Bob Cherry shivered.

"It doesn't look inviting," he remarked.

"Too jolly cold, I should think," said Nugent. "What do you think, Inky?"

The Nabob of Bhanipur shuddered. There was a blazing fire in the bed-room, and the house was well warmed. But to the Oriental the English winter was very hard.

"The jolly coldfulness is terrific," said Hurree Singh. "I think that as far as my esteemed self is concerned, I should prefer to remain in the warmfulness of my honourable bed."

"Same here," said Bob. "But I stick to the idea if the others do."

"Oh, go to bed!" said Bull.

"Aren't you going ghost-hunting, Johnny?"

"No fear!"

"Forfeit!" said Nugent, rattling the money-box.

"Pay up, Johnny!"

John Bull junior paid up, with a grin.

"All serene!" he said. "I——"

"'Nother threepence, please."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Oh, rats!"

"That makes nine D.," said Nugent.

"Threepence yourself, then," shouted Bull. "Nine D. is slang."

"Phew! So it is!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"But what about the ghost hunt?" asked Bob Cherry.

"Well, I'm not going," said Bull, turning into bed. "And if you fellows have any sense, you'll stay in bed."

"Well, it does look a bit snowy for hunting ghosts."

"Besides, it will turn out to be a frost," said Nugent. "You remember the time we hunted the ghost on the island at Greyfriars, and it turned out to be Hazeldene and the Bounder on the ran-dan."

"Forfeit!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Well, you don't seem very keen about looking for the ghost," said Harry Wharton, laughing. "Yet I'm sure that there's something or other rather mysterious going on. I've spoken to several of the servants about it, and they all think they've heard mysterious discordant shrieks outside the house of a night lately."

"Rot!" said John Bull.

"Well, that's what they say. I can't say I've heard anything myself; but then this room is pretty high up."

"The highfulness is terrific; but once or twice when I have wakefully opened my eyes, it has seemed to me that I heard the mysteryful sounds you speak of," the Nabob of Bhanipur remarked.

"Bosh!" said John Bull.

"Well, let's chuck up the idea, and go to bed," said Harry.

And as it was snowing thickly, the juniors agreed.

They turned in. Bunter was already asleep, and the rest were soon in the land of dreams.

Harry Wharton had intended to wake up about midnight, to go on the ghost hunt; and though he had given up the idea now, perhaps some lingering thought of it made him wake. Or perhaps there was some noise in the room.

At all events, Wharton's eyes opened in the darkness, and he sat up in bed, with a vague feeling that he should get up.

He rubbed his eyes.

The room was in the blackest darkness, not even a glimmer of red being left in the fire-grate.

"You fellows asleep?" asked Harry, in a low voice.

An echoing snore announced that Bunter, at least, was asleep.

"Groo!" murmured Bob Cherry, half awake.

"Bob, old man!"

"Groo! Oh! Hallo!"

"Are you awake?"

"No, I'm asleep," said Bob Cherry, with sleepy sarcasm. "What's the row—besides the row that Bunter's making, I mean?"

"Did you hear anything?"

"Yes, Bunter."

"I mean anything else?"

"I don't see how a chap could hear anything else when Bunter's top notes are going on," said Bob. "But what else do you mean? Now I come to think of it, I suppose something woke me up."

"I wonder——"

"Eh?"

"I wonder if—— I'm going to see, anyway."

Wharton jumped out of bed and ran to the window. It was open at the top, and Wharton threw up the lower sash. A gust of bitter wind, laden with particles of snow, came into the room.

"Ow!" said Bob Cherry, pulling the bedclothes round him.

"Listen, Bob!"

"What is it?"

"The ghost!"

"W-w-w-what?"

"Listen!"

The two juniors listened intently.

From the darkness without, borne upon the wind, and sometimes dying away upon it, as it changed its direction, came a strange sound.

It was a wild, wailing, discordant sound, hard to analyse; but it sounded weird and very ghostly in the silence of the night.

"Great Scott!" ejaculated Bob.

Wharton was shivering, but his face was flushed with excitement.

"What do you think now?" asked Harry.

"Blessed if I know."

"It's the ghost!"

"Rats!"

"What do you think it is, then? I suppose it can't be anybody playing a jape, on a night like this?"

"I suppose not. But it ain't a ghost."

"Well, I suppose it isn't a real ghost; but it's something or other, and look here, Bob, I'm going out to look for it."

Bob Cherry was silent for a moment. The weird sound rose and fell upon the changing wind. It sounded wild and eerie.

"I'll come," said Bob at last.

"Good! Jump up."

"What's on?" asked Frank Nugent, sitting up in bed, awakened by the voices of his chums.

"The giddy ghost!"

"What?"

"Listen!"

"My only hat!"

Nugent slid out of bed, and listened at the window. He remained silent, listening, for a full minute.

"We'll go and see into this," he remarked, as he turned back to his chums.

"Yes, rather!"

"Wake the other chaps, and let's all go."

"Good! Better let Bunter alone. He won't be any use, and he won't get up, anyway."

"Right-ho!"

Hurree Jamset Ram Singh was already awake, and he rose quietly. Wharton made his way in the deep gloom towards John Bull's bed. He put out his hand to touch Bull on the shoulder, to awaken him.

Then he uttered an exclamation.

His hand touched only the pillow.

"By Jove!"

"What's the matter, Harry?"

"Bull——"

"Well?"

"He's not here!"

"John Bull not there?"

"No; he's gone!"

THE FIFTEENTH CHAPTER.

No Ghost.

FRANK NUGENT struck a match; and lighted a candle. He held it up to show a light upon John Bull's bed.

There was no doubt about it; the bed was empty. John Bull was gone!

The Greyfriars chums stared at the bed, and then at one another, in blank amazement.

It was a total surprise to them.

Where was John Bull?

"By Jove!" exclaimed Harry at last. "Bull must have heard the sound himself, and gone out to investigate, without waking us."

"My hat!"

"The hatfulness is terrific."

"Jolly nerve of him, anyway," said Bob Cherry. "But I suppose there can't be any doubt about it. That's what he's done."

"Well, he might have woke us up," said Nugent.

Wharton looked anxious.

"He may get into some trouble," he said. "We'd better go and look for him. I wish he had called us to go with him."

"He might be walking in his sleep," Nugent suggested. "You remember that ass Bunter did once at Greyfriars."

Wharton shook his head.

"Yes; but I don't think Bull's like that. He's dressed, too. You see, his clothes are gone. Of course, he might be a somnambulist."

"We'd better look for him, anyway."

"Yes, rather!"

The juniors dressed themselves quickly.

They put on their coats and scarves as well, for the cold

was bitter. Billy Bunter snored peacefully through it all. Harry Wharton & Co. left the bed-room quietly.

Outside there was a glimmer of moonlight, but within the house all was intensely dark, and they had to feel their way downstairs.

"This way!" said Harry, in a whisper. "Careful! Don't let the door bang."

"Right-ho!"

But it slipped from Bob Cherry's hand, and banged.

"Sorry!" said Bob.

"Never mind."

"My hat, it's cold!" said Nugent, pulling his scarf tighter round his neck as he faced the wind.

"Yes, rather!"

"Which way now, Wharton?"

"Listen for the ghost!"

The juniors listened.

The wind was chopping and changing continually, and the sound was no longer borne to their ears.

But a gust came blowing into their faces in a few minutes, and upon the wind was borne that wild, wailing sound.

Harry Wharton started, and held up his hand.

"There is is!" he exclaimed.

"I hear it now."

"It comes from the park."

"No doubt about that."

"Hark!"

The juniors stood listening.

In the gloom, broken only by the glimmer of the moonlight upon the falling snow, surrounded by the grim, gaunt trees, the scene was desolate and eerie.

The strange sound from the park struck a strange chill to them.

Was it possible, after all, that there was something in the ghost story of the lodge—that a shrieking phantom did really haunt the dim recesses of the frozen wood?

It was impossible! Yet——

The juniors shivered as they looked among the dark, shadowy trees.

"We've got to stick it out," said Harry.

"Yes, rather!"

"Besides, Bull's gone, and we've got to look for him. He might lose his way in the park, you know, as he doesn't know the place."

"Phew!"

"Come on!"

Harry Wharton led the way, and the ghost-hunters plunged into the snowy darkness of the park.

At intervals, borne upon the wind, came the wailing sound from the distance.

What was it?

Could it be caused by the wind howling in the creaking branches, or by some animal in distress. It was like nothing that Wharton remembered hearing before; but, then, the sound was changed by being tossed to and fro in the wind.

Wharton scanned the snow once or twice in the hope of finding footprints. But the freshly falling flakes covered up their own tracks almost as soon as they were made.

As they advanced into the shadowy park, the sound from the distance became clearer.

They were evidently approaching it.

Their hearts beat faster.

"I remember now, there's a summer-house in the park near here," said Harry. "It's never used in the winter, and I'd forgotten about it. It's close to the spot where the duel was supposed to have taken place. The ghost——"

"He's under cover, then," said Bob, with a slight chuckle.

"So I think."

"Then he's a spoof ghost."

"It might be the wind whistling in some cranny of the summerhouse, though."

"It doesn't sound like it."

"It doesn't; but we'll soon see."

Harry Wharton knew the way well, even in the darkness. He led the juniors on almost without a pause. The wailing noise, too, was a guide. It was growing louder and nearer, but still tossed to and fro upon the wind in a strange, uncertain fashion.

Suddenly it ceased.

The juniors listened for it, but the sound did not come, and they pressed on their way in silence, broken only by the moan of the wind.

A dim building loomed up before them, and Harry Wharton paused.

"Here's the summer-house!" he said.

All was dark and silent.

"There's no ghost now," Nugent muttered.

"But come on!"

They entered the little building. The door was not locked; it opened freely to their touch.

Within, all was dark.

The juniors could not help shuddering as they looked round them in the dense gloom.

It was here that the sound had drawn them; it was from this dark recess that the mysterious wailing had proceeded.

What had caused it?

Harry Wharton struck a match.

The light flickered out into the dense gloom, and the chums of the Remove cast quick and apprehensive glances about them.

But there was nothing to be seen.

Nothing but bare walls, and rusty, snowy ivy.

The summer-house was empty, save for themselves.

"Nobody here!" said Harry, in a voice that trembled a little in spite of himself, as the match went out.

"Let's get out," said Bob Cherry.

They stood in the open air again, in the falling snow.

"What on earth does it mean?" muttered Nugent.

"It's a giddy mystery."

"The mysteryfulness is terrific."

"One thing's jolly certain," said Harry Wharton quietly, "the sound we heard wasn't produced by natural means—the wind, or anything of that sort. It stopped when we came near the summer-house. It must have been our coming that stopped it."

"I suppose so."

"You—you don't mean to say you think it's a real ghost?" muttered Bob.

"I'm blessed if I know what to think."

The juniors retraced their steps.

They listened several times as they went for the sound of the wailing from the park, but it did not come to their ears.

Only the wind broke the silence of the night.

"Better get in," said Bob Cherry.

"What about Bull? We haven't come across him," said Harry; "and if he went into the park to investigate, he may be still there."

"My hat!"

Harry turned and looked towards the black mass of the park, broken only by the glimmer of the snow in the rays of the moon.

"Not much good looking for him there," he said. "There are no marks in the snow to follow."

"But—but if he's there he'll be frozen to death," faltered Bob.

"He may have gone in; we'll see."

In silence the juniors re-entered the house.

They made their way quietly up to the bed-room, and as soon as they had entered, Harry Wharton struck a match.

Then he uttered a low exclamation.

John Bull lay in his bed, his face resting peacefully upon the pillow; his eyes were closed, his breathing quiet and regular. He was fast asleep.

THE SIXTEENTH CHAPTER.

Mysterious!

HARRY WHARTON and his chums stared at the calm, peaceful face of the sleeper, till the match burnt down to Wharton's fingers, and he started, and dropped it.

The room was in darkness again.

Wharton drew his chums out on the landing, and closed the bed-room door quietly. He did not wish to waken John Bull just then.

"You saw him?" he whispered.

"Yes, rather, fast asleep in bed."

"The fast-asleepfulness was terrific."

"But he's been out!" said Harry.

"That's certain."

"What does it mean?"

"Walking in his sleep," said Bob Cherry, with conviction; "the same that Billy Bunter did once at Greyfriars, when you prevented him from breaking his neck on the old tower."

"I should never have taken John Bull for a sleep-walker. It's different with Bunter. He eats so much before he goes to bed, and that disturbs him. But Bull——"

"Well, it looks like it to me."

"The lookfulness to myself is also great."

"He may have gone out looking for the ghost, and come back and gone to bed without missing us at all," Nugent remarked. "He wouldn't see that our beds were empty unless he struck a light. You see, we didn't know he was gone, before we went out, till you went to his bed to wake him."

"That's true."

"Well, if that's how it is, he'll tell us about it of his own accord in the morning," Harry Wharton said, in a low voice. "If he's been ghost-hunting, he'll say so."

"Naturally."

"And if he doesn't mention it——"

"Then it will be a pretty clear proof that he's been sleep-walking, and remembers nothing about it."

"That's right."

"Shall we tell him, then?" asked Bob Cherry.

"No," said Harry quickly. "It must be pretty rotten for a chap to be told that he's a sleep-walker, I think. It might work on his mind, and make him much worse, knowing that he might walk into danger any night. You know, he might have fallen downstairs, or wandered off into the park without being able to find his way back again."

"He might do that another night, if we don't tell him."

"We'll keep an eye on him, and see that he doesn't. I'll fix up something to-morrow night, without him knowing it, to make a row and wake us if the door opens."

"Good!"

"We shall see in the morning whether he's a somnambulist or not. Go to bed quietly, and don't wake him."

"Right you are!"

The juniors re-entered the room.

Wharton closed the door without a sound, and they undressed silently and crept into bed.

There was not a sound from John Bull junior, save the low and regular breathing of the unconscious sleeper.

He did not awake.

The juniors lay awake for some time, thinking over the strange events of the night. They listened, too, for the mysterious sound to float in at the windows from the park. But it did not come.

The voice of the phantom of Wharton Lodge was silent now.

The juniors slept at last.

They were tired out, and they slept soundly till morning, and did not awaken till there was a knock at the door, and their hot water was brought in.

Then Harry Wharton sat up and rubbed his eyes.

"By Jove, I'm sleepy!" he remarked.

"The sleepyfulness is terrific," remarked Hurree Jamset Ram Singh. "Is our esteemed friend John Bull awakeful yet?"

"Wake up, John Bull!" grinned Nugent.

"Groo!"

"Hallo, hallo, hallo! Aren't you getting up?" asked Bob Cherry.

John Bull turned in his bed and yawned.

"Yes, I suppose so," he said; "but I'm sleepy."

"So are we all," said Harry. "The ghost woke us up last night."

John Bull started.

"The ghost!" he exclaimed.

"Yes. Didn't you hear it?"

"I certainly didn't hear any ghost. What are you up to—trying to pull my leg?" demanded Bull.

"No. We heard it—the ghost, or something, at all events, which has been taken for the ghost," said Nugent. "We went out looking for it."

Bull started again.

"You went out in the night?"

"Yes. Didn't you know?"

"I? I had no idea."

"Well, we did," said Harry, looking closely at the junior. "I thought you might have missed us, you know."

"Not a bit. I hadn't the faintest idea you had gone out," said Bull. "I thought you had agreed to give up the idea."

"We changed our minds again when we heard the ghost."

"What was it like?"

"A sort of wild, howling, screeching sound."

"Oh, rot!" exclaimed Bull sharply.

"That's what it sounded like," said Harry, surprised at Bull's nettled tone. "It was a horrid, discordant noise, anyway."

"Rats!"

"Forfeit!" exclaimed Nugent.

"You didn't find the ghost, I suppose?"

"No; he had vanished."

"You'd better stay in bed another time."

"You've never been ghost-hunting, I suppose?" Bob Cherry remarked.

Bull shook his head.

"Certainly not!"

"Well, all serene."

The juniors exchanged a quick glance. They were pretty well convinced, by this time, that Bull remembered nothing of the events of the previous night.

John Bull was a sleep-walker!

There did not seem to be any doubt about it, and for that reason the juniors forbore to mention that they had missed him from his bed. If he had gone out of his own accord, there was no reason why he should not have mentioned it. He had denied going ghost-hunting, so there was only one conclusion to be drawn—that he had walked in his sleep. So, at least, it appeared to the juniors.

Bull looked a little tired, and rose with the unwillingness he had shown the past few mornings. But this was fully accounted for now to the juniors. If he was a somnambulist he would naturally not get a full night's rest.

"I say, you fellows, you might have called me last night," Billy Bunter grumbled. "I expect I should have discovered the mystery."

"Rats!"

"Forfeit!"

"Oh, really, Cherry! I'm pretty sure I should have been keen enough to see how the matter really stood. You chaps are rather dense, you know."

"You wouldn't have got up, Fatty."

"Of course, I should have jumped up at once. Ow! Leggo those bedclothes! I don't want to get up now. I'm of a delicate constitution, you beast, and I need more sleep than you fellows. Yow!"

Bunter rolled out of bed, assisted by Bob Cherry's boot.

"If you could have jumped up last night, you can jump up now," Bob Cherry remarked.

And Billy Bunter said "Beast."

But he did not clamber back into bed. Bob Cherry's boot looked too dangerous.

THE SEVENTEENTH CHAPTER.

Very Smart!

"FISH will be here to-day," Harry Wharton remarked. "He promised to look in for the last two days of the vac."

Bunter grunted.

"Blessed if I know what you want that Yankee here for, Wharton," he said. "You know jolly well that I don't get on with him."

"You could go away," Bob Cherry suggested.

"Oh, really, Cherry——"

"Fish was invited before the vac. began," said Harry. "I want him to come. As for your not getting on with him, Billy, you don't get on with anybody."

"Oh, really——"

"We'll all walk down to the station and meet him after brekker," said Nugent.

"Good egg!"

And after breakfast they turned out into the snowy, frosty air. The snow was still falling, and house and walls and trees had disappeared under one great mantle of white.

"Ripping morning!" said Bob Cherry. "Are you coming, Bunter?"

Bunter put his nose out into the air, and sniffed, and drew it in again.

"Yough! It's too cold."

"You'll get warm walking."

"Id rather get warm before the fire."

"Come on, you chaps. Sorry you can't come, Bunter. Don't you think you could possibly make an effort to come?" asked Bob Cherry persuasively.

The other fellows looked at Bob in astonishment. They had never known him so anxious for Billy Bunter's company.

"Well," said Bunter, somewhat surprised himself, but beginning to swank as usual when he imagined himself valued by anybody. "I might come, you know."

"Do, there's a good porpoise!"

"Oh, really——"

"I want you to come, Bunty. It won't be the same without you."

"Well, if you fellows will walk slowly, and not make me over-exert myself——"

"Done!"

"And—and stand me a decent feed when we get to the station——"

"Agreed!"

"Well, I might come."

"Do, Bunter—do!"

"Well, some of you fetch my coat, then," said Bunter.

"Fetch his coat, Nugent."

"Rats!"

"Threepence, please—forfeit!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Fetch his coat, Inky."

"The ratfulness is terrific."

"After all, you won't need a coat, Bunter," said Bob Cherry. "The exercise will keep you warm. You see, if you come, I'm going to snowball you all along the road. I think it's a ripping exercise, to snowball a chap along a road. Don't you?"

Bunter glared.

"Beast!"

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

"I say, you fellows——"

"Won't you come?" urged Bob Cherry. "Do come! It won't be the same without you—not half so much fun. You see, you're as easy to shy things at as a barn door. Nobody else here is double width. Do come!"

Bunter snorted, and went in. All Bob Cherry's blandishments were in vain.

"Come on," said Harry, laughing. "Fish said that he would come by the second train if he came at all, and it's nearly due."

"Right! Let's buzz!"

And they buzzed.

They ran most of the way to the village, snowballing one another—to say nothing of inoffensive strangers who came in their way. But nobody was out of temper—a few snowballs did not hurt anyone, and the juniors, of course, did not bestow that kindly attention upon old people or women. But all boys were fair game, they considered, and as they generally received as good as they sent, it was all right.

They reached Wharton Magnus, the little village where the quiet old station was. The train had not yet come in, and the juniors stamped up and down the platform to keep warm.

"Here she is!" exclaimed Nugent at last.

The train snorted and rattled in.

A carriage door opened, and a somewhat thin, keen, American face looked out—the face of Fisher T. Fish, of the Remove Form at Greyfriars.

Fisher T. Fish was really a new boy at Greyfriars, having arrived there only a week or so before John Bull.

But from his cool manner, one would have supposed that Greyfriars, half England, and most of the continents and oceans belonged to him.

Fisher T. Fish was possessed with two ambitions—never to get "left," as he called it, and always to score over the played-out and effete race which inhabited this old island. He wanted to show the Greyfriars fellows things, and so far he had not succeeded in doing it. Whenever he undertook to show them things, it generally worked out in a way that proved that there was something left in the Old Country yet, and that there were people who knew things, outside the borders of the great United States.

As he looked out of the carriage, while the train came whizzing in, the juniors knew by instinct what he was going to do.

"The ass!" muttered Nugent. "He's going to jump!"

"Stop!" shouted Wharton involuntarily.

The American junior grinned.

The other fellows were always content to wait till a train stopped before alighting. But Fisher T. Fish wanted to show how a smart American could do things.

He swung the door wide open, and jumped, as the train rushed up along the platform.

Crash!

The American alighted—but not on his feet as he had intended. He alighted in a sitting posture on the platform, and then rolled over, and finally came to a stop with his head among the wheels of a trolley, and his feet extended, his legs stretched out—his hat a yard away, and the contents of his pockets jingling out on the platform.

"Ow!" he gasped.

THE EIGHTEENTH CHAPTER.
Not Hurt!

FISHER T. FISH lay spread-eagled on the platform, too breathless for the moment to make even an effort to rise.

And the Greyfriars juniors could not help him.

They were doubled up with merriment.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Their shouts of laughter rang along the platform, and the merriment was joined in by the porter and the other passengers alighting from the train.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Left, this time!" grinned Bob Cherry.

"The left-fulness is terrific!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Fisher T. Fish disengaged himself from the trolley, and sat up on the platform, looking considerably dazed.

"Ow!" he said.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I—I guess I jumped a second too soon," said Fish, blinking at them. "I reckon my foot slipped, too."

"I guess you're a giddy ass, and I reckon you're a duffer," said Frank Nugent. "You might get killed, playing those silly tricks."

"I guess it's all O.K."

"You must have a few bruises about you, I think," said Harry Wharton, lending the American junior a hand to rise.

Fisher T. Fish grunted as he got up.

"I guess I'm all right," he said.

He was not likely to admit that he was hurt. That was not the way of Fisher T. Fish of New York. But the juniors had their own opinion about it.

"Well, I'm glad to see you, anyway," said Harry, shaking hands with the American. "I'm glad you've come."

"Ow!"

"What's the matter?"

"Nothing."

"Sure you're not hurt?"

"Surely."

"Oh, good! Sounded as if you had a pain."

"Oh, piffle!" said Fish. "I'm all O.K. Ow!"

"What's that?"

"Nothing, I guess, only—only a little out of breath."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I guess I don't see where the cackle comes in."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Look here, Fishy, if you're hurt, there's a doctor in the village, and——"

"I guess I've got no use for doctors. Are you going to drive to your shebang?" asked Fish.

"To my what?"

"Your house, I mean."

"We were going to walk it," said Harry Wharton. "But if you're feeling sore after that tumble——"

"I guess not—I'll walk it with anybody."

"Better have your bag sent on, then, save carrying it——"

"Great snakes!"

"What is it now?"

"My bag—I left it in the train!"

"Phew!"

Fisher T. Fish dashed along the platform. The train was already in motion, and was moving out of the station.

"Come back!" yelled Harry Wharton. "It's too late!"

Fisher T. Fish did not heed.

He rushed on, with the evident intention of boarding the train while it was in motion, and recovering the bag he had left in the carriage.

But the railway porter was ready for him, and he caught the American junior by the shoulder and swung him back.

"Leggo!" roared Fish.

"Too late, sir!"

"Yah! Leggo! Left bag in train!"

"Too late, sir! Can't be 'elped!"

"Bosh! I'm going——"

"Sorry, sir—too late!"

The train vanished from the station, and the porter released the irate Yankee, with a benevolent smile.

"Sorry, sir," he repeated. "You can leave a description of the bag with the station-master, and I've no doubt that you'll get it back in a few days."

"A few days!" snorted Fish. "Of all the blessed slow-going old countries, I think this little island takes the cake! A few days!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Bob Cherry. "What did you forget it for? We should have stepped out of the train after it had stopped, and brought the bag out. That's our slow English way. Ha, ha, ha!"

Fisher T. Fish sniffed.

"I guess I'll leave a description with the station-master," he said.

And that was done, and then the juniors left the station. Fisher T. Fish was looking a little annoyed still.

He could not help realising that he had not succeeded in giving the intended exhibition of American smartness.

His jump from the train while it was in motion had led to disaster, and to his leaving his bag in the carriage; and if that was the rapid American way of doing things, Bob Cherry remarked that he thought the slow English way would really be quicker in the long run.

Fisher T. Fish limped a little as he tramped down the snowy lane.

There was not the slightest doubt that he had bruised himself considerably in falling after his reckless jump from the train, but he would not admit as much even to himself.

But the juniors slackened speed, accommodating their pace to Fish's, without saying anything about the matter. They did not want to be hard upon the Yankee. But their good nature in this respect met with the frequent reward of good nature in this ungrateful world.

"This what you call walking?" asked Fisher T. Fish, with a yawn. "Why, our frogs hop along quicker than this, over there."

Harry Wharton laughed.

"We'll put on a little speed if you like," he said.

"I guess I would."

"Oh, all serene!"

The juniors put on speed. Fisher T. Fish limped manfully for a hundred yards or so to keep up with them, and then he had to give in.

"I guess I'm not used to walking on snow," he remarked. "May as well ease up."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Can't see where the cackle comes in."

The juniors slackened down again.

"Oh, come off, Fishy!" said John Bull, in his direct way.

"Why don't you own up that you're sore after playing the giddy goat, and that you can't put on steam?"

"The why-notfulness is terrific, my worthy Yankeeful chum."

Fisher T. Fish snorted. But he vouchsafed no other reply.

At an extremely easy pace, the juniors walked back to Wharton Lodge.

"You'll have to lend me some things, I guess, Wharton," said Fisher T. Fish, as they turned in at the lodge gates. "I've got nothing but what was in that bag. My box has gone on to Greyfriars."

"All serene. That's quite easy."

"You've got some water here, I see," Fish remarked, as he glanced from the drive over the expanse of frozen lake surrounded by trees.

"Yes; we get some skating there, now it's frozen."

Fish's eyes gleamed.

"Skating!" he exclaimed. "I guess I'm some at skating."

"I rather reckon we're a few, too," said Nugent, in a bland tone.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"If you're not too tired, Fish, we might get some skating after lunch," Harry Wharton remarked. "The weather's ripping for it."

"I guess I'm not tired. I'll show you the way we skate over there," said Fish. "I guess I'll open your eyes some."

"Do you skate as well as you jump off trains?" asked Bob Cherry innocently.

And Colonel Wharton, coming out to meet the juniors, saved Fisher T. Fish from the necessity of replying to that question.

THE NINETEENTH CHAPTER.

How Not to Skate.

FISHER T. FISH, during lunch, was heard to grunt several times in an expressive way, and observed to rub a bone here and there, as if it ached. But he assured his friends that he was not in the least hurt, so it must be assumed that those demonstrations were simply an American way of passing the time.

After lunch, the juniors went out to skate.

It was a bright, sharp afternoon. The snow had ceased to fall, and the ice on the lake was frozen as hard as steel.

Harry Wharton had an extra pair of skates that suited Fisher, and the American youth carried them out on his arm.

There was a businesslike gleam in Fisher T. Fish's eyes.

He meant to show the Greyfriars juniors things when he once started skating. What reason Fish had to suppose that he was a specially good skater was not clear. He had never given any exhibition of extraordinary powers. But no doubt he concluded that, as a matter of course, he could skate much better than any fellow in an effete old country like England.

"Look out for the ice, Fishy," said Bob Cherry, as they stopped on the brink to put their skates on.

"What's the matter with it—thin?"

"Oh, no!"

"Cracky?"

"No."

"Then what is there to look out for?"

"It's slippery," said Bob blandly.

And the juniors grinned.

Fisher T. Fish sniffed. He meant to have the joke all on his side as soon as he got going on the skates.

"I say, you fellows, you might fasten my skates," said Billy Bunter.

"Rats!"

"Forfeit threepence."

"Pay up, Bob."

"I'll pay up, but I jolly well won't fasten Bunter's skates," said Bob Cherry. "Why can't you fasten them yourself, Fatty?"

"Oh, really, Cherry——"

"Besides, you can't skate!"

"Oh, really, you know, I'm rather a dab at skating. Besides, one of you fellows can skate with me and hold me."

"Catch us!"

"It's all right, Bunter. I guess I'll look after you," said Fish patronisingly. "You keep near me, and I'll give you a hand."

Fisher T. Fish had his skates on. He slid on the ice, and turned his head to bestow a final mocking wink upon the English lads.

"I guess—— Oh!"

It was rather reckless of Fish, turning his head in that way. The ice was, as Bob Cherry had said, slippery.

Fish's feet suddenly seemed to run away with him.

With a whiz his right skate started off at top speed, and his left skate followed it more slowly, with the result that Fisher T. Fish shot away in a somewhat straddled attitude.

He gave a wild gasp.

"Ow! Holy smoke!"

The juniors stood on their skates, and roared.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I say, you fellows, is that an American kind of figure skating?" Billy Bunter asked, blinking after the Yankee chum through his big spectacles.

"If it is, it's a kind we sha'n't import into Greyfriars," said Bob Cherry, grinning.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Ow! Hellup!" gasped Fisher T. Fish.

"My hat! Watch him!"

"The watchfulness is terrific!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Go it, Fishy!"

"Wake snakes and walk chalks! Ha, ha, ha!"

Fisher T. Fish paid no heed to the derisive remarks of the Greyfriars juniors. He needed all his care to save himself from a catastrophe—and he did not save himself, either. One of his skates jerked upon a rough lump in the ice, and Fisher T. Fish went flying.

For a moment the juniors could see nothing but a cloud of powdery snow, mingled with skates, arms, and legs.

They roared.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Good old Fish!"

Fisher T. Fish sat on the ice.

He hardly knew how he had got there.

But he was there, and he was feeling a separate and distinct ache in nearly every bone in his body.

"Ow!" he gasped. "Great snakes! Ow!"

The juniors skated out towards him.

They skated in a circle round him, laughing. They could not help laughing. They hoped Fish wasn't hurt. But after all his swank, they could not help laughing at his absurd disaster.

"Is that how you skate in New York?" asked Bob Cherry, with an air of great interest.

"Ow! Crumbs!"

"The latest American rinking style, I suppose?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Jevver get left?" asked Nugent.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"M-m-my hat!" gasped Fish. "I—I—I think that——"

"You found the ice slippery?" asked Bob Cherry sympathetically. "I warned you, you know. I told you distinctly that it was slippery."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I guess I'm out of practice a little," said Fish, staggering up. "I kinder reckon I can lay over anything you guys can do, anyway, on the ice."

"You can lie over, you mean on the ice," suggested Bob Cherry.

And the juniors roared again.

"Feel hurt, Fishy?"

"I guess not."

"Going on?"

"Surely."

And the American junior skated on.

This time he was more careful not to allow his skates to run away; and he kept his feet. Each drive forward he took looked as if he were trying to dig his way to the bottom of the lake. But he kept up, and that was something.

His motions could not be called graceful.

He was, as Nugent said, all knees and elbows, and the contortions he went through were quite acrobatic.

But Fisher T. Fish was quite satisfied with himself.

"I guess you can't do that," he shouted to the Greyfriars fellows.

Bob Cherry roared.

"You've guessed right; we can't. We skate, you know."

"What do you call this, then?"

"Names," said Bob.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Oh, I guess you don't know good skating when you see it," said Fisher T. Fish. "Here, get out of the way, Bunter!"

"Ain't you going to take me round?" demanded Billy Bunter.

He was plodding along to the American on his skates. Every now and then he made a wild dip, and nearly went over, but just saved himself. As a matter of fact, Billy Bunter, in spite of his statement that he was a dab at skating, skated about as well as he danced, and danced about as well as he did anything else.

Fisher T. Fish hesitated.

He did not want to burden himself with the fat junior, and it was already dawning upon him that he would be hard put to it in skating with the Greyfriars juniors, in any case. But he had said that he would help Bunter, and he was being held to his word.

"Oh, all O.K.," he said. "Gimme your paw."

"Oh, really——"

"Yow! Don't collar a fellow round the neck in that

way!" growled Fisher T. Fish. "Don't you know how to hold on. Now, quiet!"

"I—I—I don't feel safe," mumbled Bunter, as Fisher T. Fish grasped his hands, and started off with him.

"Stuff! You're safe enough!"

"Ow! I—I—I don't——"

"Look out!" roared Bob Cherry.

"I guess—great Columbus!"

Billy Bunter's feet flew skyward, and he threw his arms round Fisher T. Fish's neck. The American junior crashed down, and Billy Bunter crashed on top of him.

The ice was pretty thick; but it was not likely to stand a concussion like that. There was a loud, rending crack, and it broke.

Splash!

"My hat!" roared Bob Cherry. "They're in!"

"Ow! Help!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

THE TWENTIETH CHAPTER.

Bravo!

THE water was shallow, and there was no danger of drowning. Harry Wharton & Co. skated up quickly, and soon dragged the two misadventurers out upon the firm ice. Both of them were soaked. Fisher T. Fish had gone under head and all, and came up spluttering and gasping. Bunter was roaring with cold and fright.

The juniors laughed as they dragged them out; they could not help it. It was so utterly ludicrous an ending to Fisher T. Fish's swank.

"Ow! I'm catching cold! Ow! I know I shall die! Yow!" moaned Bunter, as he was laid on the ice.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Ow! I guess I'm wet!"

"Right again," grinned Bob Cherry. "Never knew a chap whose guesses were nearer the mark. Here you are, safe, sound and sober."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Fisher T. Fish shook water drops from him like a mastiff. He was already nearly blue with cold. Bob and Nugent were shaking Bunter, who showed a strong inclination to lie still and groan, instead of moving. Had he been allowed to have his way, he would probably have frozen in a lump.

"Keep moving, Bunty."

"Ow! Leggo! I'm expiring. Yow!"

"Shake him, you fellows!"

"Yarooh! Ugh! Yowp!"

"Go it!"

"Yow! Chuck it! Yarooh!"

"Cut off to the house as quick as you can, and tumble into bed, or you'll catch a beastly cold, as sure as a gun," Wharton exclaimed. "I'll come with you, and get you something hot to drink. Buck up!"

"I guess you're right."

"Buck up, then!"

And Fisher T. Fish and Billy Bunter were rushed to the house, and fairly hurled into bed at top speed, and Wharton piled blankets on them.

Thanks to his energetic measures, they did not catch cold; but Bunter complained of feeling very poorly, and did not recover till Wharton said that he would fetch some of Miss Wharton's medicine for him.

Then the Owl of the Remove discovered that he did not feel so very bad, after all, adding a statement that if Wharton brought him any rotten medicine, he would fling it at his head.

The Greyfriars juniors skated till dusk, and when they came in, they found that Fisher T. Fish and Billy Bunter had come down, and were not looking any the worse for their ducking in the lake.

One might have expected Fisher T. Fish to show a little modesty, or, at all events, to have a slightly subdued manner, after his disaster.

But that was not the way of the American junior.

He greeted the juniors with a nod and a grin as they came in, evidently just as thoroughly satisfied with himself as ever.

"I guess I'm sorry about Bunter's accident," he remarked.

"Oh, I'm all right now, Fish," said Bunter.

"I guess that's no great matter," said Fish, with his usual coolness. "I mean it prevented me from showing these chaps how to skate."

"Oh!"

"You showed us how not to skate," remarked Bull. "That was really just as valuable, you know."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Fish grinned.

"Very smart," he said condescendingly, "but I wish I could have had a better chance to show you how we do things over there. It would wake you up a bit, I reckon. But I'll show you at Greyfriars, if we get any skating there."

"Do!" said Bob Cherry generously. "We're not greedy—we don't want to keep the laugh all to ourselves."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

And Fisher T. Fish did not continue the argument. Later in the evening he offered to show the fellows some conjuring tricks, and, among others, started keeping six balls in play with his hands. The balls rolled all over the floor, and Fish never kept more than two going at once; but he seemed quite satisfied with his performance.

"Blessed if I think we want to learn how they do things over there," Bob Cherry remarked privately to John Bull. "It seems to me that Fish's wonderful smartness consists in pretending to do things he can't do."

And John Bull grinned assent.

Failure did not abash Fisher T. Fish. He would go on from one failure to another with the greatest sang-froid.

"I guess there's the balancing trick you've never seen," he remarked, when he felt it was his duty to contribute another item to the general entertainment—and he seemed to feel that to be his duty pretty frequently. "Would you like to see it?"

"Why, certainly," said the colonel with a smile.

He was beginning to know Fish. Miss Wharton also expressed a smiling desire to see the balancing trick. The juniors assented with a general grin. They expected to see the American junior play the "giddy goat" again, as Bob expressed it.

"I guess I want four chairs," said Fish.

"Here you are."

"The herefulness is terrific."

Fisher T. Fish drew the chairs towards him, in a clear space in the large drawing-room. He stood upon two of them, making Miss Wharton tremble for her chairs, and took the other two in his hands.

"I guess I hold out these two at arm's length," said Fisher T. Fish, "and, at the same time, stand on the backs of the lower two, and balance myself. Ever seen it done?"

"On the stage," said Harry Wharton. "Be careful, for goodness sake."

"Oh, I guess it's all O.K."

"It doesn't look all O.K. to me."

"Dear me," said Miss Wharton nervously.

"Oh, it's all right—you watch me."

And Fisher T. Fish essayed the difficult trick.

The juniors did watch him.

They expected him to come a fearful cropper every moment. The colonel tugged at his white moustache, and Miss Wharton looked worried. The old soldier was afraid that Fish would hurt himself, and Miss Wharton feared that he would damage the chairs.

Fish rose on the backs of the lower chairs.

He balanced himself well, and it seemed a miracle that the chairs did not tip over. Then he slowly raised the other two at arms' length.

"The ass!" muttered Bob Cherry. "He's going over, as sure as a gun!"

"He'll be down in a minute."

"The downfulness will be terrific."

"Watch me, people," said Fisher T. Fish. "This is how we do things over there——Oh!"

One of the chairs tipped over.

There was a terrific crash!

The chairs crashed and rolled in various directions, and Fish, fortunately falling clear of the chairs, bumped on the floor.

The carpet was thick, but it did not save the American junior from a hard concussion. Fisher T. Fish gave a wild howl.

"Yarooh! Yowp!"

The juniors burst into a roar.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

They ran to pick the American up.

Fish was limping when he stood upon his legs again. He was not seriously hurt, but he had a variety of pains in various parts of him.

"I guess I don't see where the cackle comes in," he remarked crossly. "I slipped up on it that time, but I can do it."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I'll try again——"

"My dear boy——" began Miss Wharton

"——at Greyfriars——"

"Ah!"

"And then I'll show you something," said Fish.

"Ha, ha, ha! Are you hurt?"

"Oh, no, I guess not."

And the juniors roared again.

Fisher was grunting and rubbing his legs, and he certainly looked as if he was hurt; but as he said he wasn't, there was no harm in laughing, and they laughed.

It was Fish's last performance for the evening.

The American junior was still rubbing his limbs surreptitiously when the boys retired for the night, and, as a matter of fact, he had several aches about him that lasted through the night, though he would not admit their existence, perhaps not even to himself.

THE TWENTY-FIRST CHAPTER.
On the Track.

HARRY WHARTON had told the American junior of the incidents of the previous night, and the American junior fully agreed that John Bull must undoubtedly be a sleep-walker. In fact, Fish stated that he had already noticed many things about Bull which indicated as much. When Harry asked what those things were, the American was a little vague.

"I guess a keen chap can see these things," he remarked. "I don't know exactly that I can describe the symptoms. But I'm not surprised—not surprised at all."

Whereat Harry Wharton smiled. He knew that Fisher T. Fish always knew everything—after it had happened.

John Bull junior, went to bed quite unconscious of the fact that his comrades were taking a great and unusual interest in his movements.

Perhaps he had his own matters to think about, too.

Harry Wharton's idea was to place something near the door that would be knocked over when the sleepwalker opened it, and thereby wake the other fellows.

Then they would be able to get up and follow the somnambulist, or stop him and get him back to bed, as seemed more advisable.

Wharton was last in bed, and he turned the light out. After he had done so, he leaned a hockey club against the door.

Then he went to bed.

"I say, you fellows," said Billy Bunter, "are you going to hunt that blessed ghost again to-night? Upon the whole, you needn't wake me up if you do. I think I can't waste my time over such rot."

"Oh, blow the ghost!" said Bob Cherry. "The ghost is a back number, and we're finished with him."

"The backfulness of the number is terrific."

"I expect you were only frightened by the wind, you know," went on Bunter. "That was really why I ought to have been with you, to keep up your courage. The presence of one really brave chap in a party makes a lot of difference."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Oh, really, you fellows——"

"You're too funny to live, Bunter. Go to sleep."

"Look here, Cherry——"

"Rats!"

"Forfeit!" said Nugent.

"Oh, blow——"

"That makes it sixpence. I'll remind you in the morning," Nugent chuckled.

And Bob Cherry snorted.

"I say, you fellows, you'll have quite a nice sum in that moneybox by the time you get back to Greyfriars," said Bunter. "I've got a suggestion to make. I have a splendid idea for making money, if I had a little capital to start with. Suppose you place the money in my hands——"

"Oh, ring off!"

"Well, then, I've another wheeze. Let's have a splendid feed to celebrate the opening of the new term——"

"Go to sleep!"

"Oh, really, you know——"

"Chuck a boot at him!"

"It's all right. I'm going to sleep," said Bunter hurriedly.

And he went to sleep—and snored!

The juniors were all asleep soon after Bunter, with possibly one exception. Harry Wharton, at all events, was sound in slumber, when a sudden crash awakened him.

He started up.

A cold draught of air in the room warned him that the door had been opened, and he knew that the crash must have been made by the hockey-stick falling down.

He did not utter a sound.

But he strained his ears and listened. He did not hear the door close, and he guessed that it had closed already. Someone had gone out of the room, taking no notice of the noise made by the fall of the stick.

Wharton, as he strained his ears, thought he heard a faint sound from the distance, as of someone going quietly downstairs.

He had not the slightest doubt that John Bull had gone.

He whipped out of bed.

"You fellows awake?" he asked hurriedly.

"Hallo, hallo, hallo!"

"Groo!"

"Get up, you chaps! Bull's gone out!"

"My hat!"

"Threepence," said Nugent sleepily.

"Buck up!" said Harry, groping for a matchbox.

He found one, and struck a match. He was right. John Bull was gone. His bed was empty, and his clothes had been taken. It was clear that he had dressed himself, to his boots and overcoat, before going; but that, of course, was not an unusual proceeding with a somnambulist.

Fisher T. Fish yawned and sat up.

"What's the row?" he asked.

"Bull's gone!"

"Great snakes! What did I tell you?"

"Blessed if I remember."

"Oh, come off! I knew he was a sleepwalker."

"So did we. Buck up! We shall have to get after him before he gets out of doors."

It was impossible for the juniors to go out into the bitter cold without their clothes; but they bundled their things on at express speed. Billy Bunter did not move. He preferred his warm bed. But Harry Wharton, Bob, Nugent, Fish, and Hurree Singh dressed at top speed, and in a couple of minutes were ready to go.

They descended the stairs quietly.

Harry Wharton had lighted a dark lantern, but he had the light of it turned off now. The juniors trod cautiously. They did not wish to awaken any of the other inmates of the house, or to alarm John Bull himself. They knew that it was dangerous for somnambulists to be awakened suddenly.

Which way the missing junior had gone could not be told; but if he had left the house, Wharton knew that he could not have opened the great door. Harry made his way first to the little door, by which he had left the previous night to hunt for the ghost. It was unfastened!

"He's gone out this way," said Harry, in a whisper, as the door opened to his touch.

"I guess so."

"This opens direct on a path into the park."

"My hat! If we don't catch him he may get lost there!" said Bob anxiously.

"Well, he's been out before, and come back safe."

"True."

"I guess it's all O.K. Sleepwalkers can look after themselves," said Fisher T. Fish. "He'll turn up, you bet."

The juniors stepped outside, and closed the door. The ground was thick with snow, but the flakes were no longer falling. Their feet sank deep into the soft mass.

Wharton held up his hand as they stood in the clear, cold air, and listened.

"Hark!" he said.

From the deep silence of the trees came a strange, wailing sound, wafted to and fro on the cold wind.

It was the mysterious wailing they had heard before—the unearthly shriek of the phantom of the park!

In spite of themselves the Greyfriars juniors turned pale as they heard it.

THE TWENTY-SECOND CHAPTER.
Tracked Down!

"GREAT snakes!" muttered Fisher T. Fish. "What's that?"

"The giddy ghost," murmured Bob Cherry, "at it again! Regular nightly performance!"

"B-b-b-but——"

"Come on, Fishy, let's see you capture a ghost, in the way you do it 'over there.'"

"I guess——"

"Hold on!" said Harry Wharton. "We're looking for Bull now, not for the ghost, Bob. The ghost can wait."

"Can't see Bull?"

"We must find him."

The juniors glanced round them.

The moon, almost at the full, was sailing in the clear, cold sky. The light glimmered on the snowy trees, and the ground covered with white.

The trees stood up like gaunt spectres in the moonlight.

There was nothing to be seen of John Bull, junior. He had certainly left the house by the same door that the chums had used. But he was gone!

"Let's look for tracks," said Nugent. "We haven't been Boy Scouts for nothing. We can follow tracks in the snow."

"Good egg!"

The snow was soft from a recent fall. It received deep and clear impressions from the boots.

A track led away from the house towards the park, and it was easy to follow. John Bull's boots had left clearly printed traces.

"This way," said Harry Wharton. "Unless the snow falls again before we've found him, we shall run him down all

right. And I don't think there will be any more snow just yet."

The juniors started on the track.

It led them directly to the park, and they plunged in among the shadows of the trees.

The track was still quite clear, though in the dimness of the wood it required more careful scrutiny to keep to it.

As the juniors proceeded, the strange wailing grew louder to their ears. The wind was so uncertain, tossing the sound to and fro, that they could not hear it connectedly for more than a few seconds together. But it was persistent, and the increase of volume showed that they were nearing it.

"Blessed if it doesn't sound like some musical instrument," Bob Cherry exclaimed.

Nugent shook his head.

"Never heard a musical instrument make a row like that," he said. "It's nothing like a cornet, anyway, or a fiddle, or a flute!"

"It might be a lot of instruments playing together out of tune, to judge by the sound," said Harry Wharton; "but it's not loud enough for that. But one thing's jolly certain—it's not a voice of any sort. A row like that couldn't come from a human throat."

"My worthy chum is right," said the Nabob of Bhanipur. "If the blowfulness of the esteemed wind was not so unsteady, we could place it better."

"We shall soon see about it; the track leads straight towards the summerhouse," said Wharton sharply; "and the sounds comes from there."

"My hat! I guess that Johnny Bull is there. He's heard the row in his sleep, and gone to investigate," said Fish.

"H'm!"

"It's quite possible he's gone ghost-hunting," said Harry seriously. "Somnambulists, I believe, go over in their sleep anything that has been impressed on their mind in the daytime. We have been talking a lot about ghost-hunting, and that may have started him off."

"Here's the place."

The juniors were in sight of the little summerhouse now—a dark mass, with a roof of gleaming white, looming up in the gloom of the wood.

The sound had ceased.

The juniors paused for a moment and looked at one another.

The track in the snow led straight up to the summerhouse, right up to the half-open door.

Wharton's eyes gleamed.

"Bull is there?" he whispered.

"Yes, rather."

"The track goes right up to the door, and there is no track leading away. He must be still in there."

"Right!"

"And the ghost, too, I guess," said Fisher T. Fish. "Unless the chap who's making that row can get out without leaving footprints, he's there still."

The juniors hearts beat hard.

On the previous night they had been too late to find the maker of the mysterious sounds in his haunt.

But they had evidently caught him napping this time.

Whoever and whatever he was, he was certainly in the summerhouse at this moment, and could not leave it without passing under their eyes.

They were upon the brink of a discovery.

"He must have heard us coming, and has stopped for that reason," Nugent muttered.

"But Bull—what is he doing?"

"Blessed if I know."

"The blessfulness is terrific."

There was no sound from the little building.

The juniors stood in the snow, looking at it dubiously. They were not afraid, though they were startled and alert. But they hesitated a little before approaching the mysterious spot.

And as they hesitated, the strange sounds burst forth again.

Wharton started violently.

"Hark!" he cried.

From the summerhouse came the crash of barbaric sound—and now, close as they were, they heard it plainly, and recognised it.

"My only hat!" ejaculated Bob Cherry, in astonishment.

"It's Bull!"

"The concertina!"

"The concertinafulness is terrific!"

"Great Scott!"

Crash-s-s-s-s-s-ash!

Gro-ro-ro-ro-ro-rooh!

Gri-i-i-i-i-nd!

It was certainly Bull's concertina, playing something that was perhaps very classical, for there was no hint of a tune about it.

The juniors stared at one another blankly.

Then altogether they burst into a laugh.

The thing was too absurd!

What they had taken for the wailing of the phantom was the sound of John Bull's tuneless musical instrument.

The sound, broken and tossed to and fro on the breeze, had been unrecognisable for what it really was, until the listeners were close at hand.

But they knew it now.

"The concertina," murmured Harry Wharton. "Great Scotland Yard!"

"Forfeit!" grinned Nugent.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I guess I expected it would turn out like this," said Fisher T. Fish. "You see, the blessed concertina was on Johnny Bull's mind, and you wouldn't let him play it about the house. He's walked out here in his sleep to play it."

"By Jove!"

"Come on," said Wharton abruptly.

The juniors moved on to the summerhouse, and Wharton led the way in.

THE TWENTY-THIRD CHAPTER.

Not Asleep.

JOHN BULL was seated there. He had a candle burning in a corner, and he was seated with his thick coat on, and another coat over his knees.

He had the concertina in his hands, and was grinding out music at a great rate.

His face was partly turned from the juniors. His head was a little on one side. They remembered that attitude of old. There was a rapt look on his face. Perhaps his soul was so musical that he found some great charm in the terrific noise he was jerking out of the concertina. Or perhaps he was musically deaf.

"My hat!" said Bob Cherry. "First time I ever heard of a sleep-walker playing a concertina!"

"I guess I knew it all along. I could have told you at any time that Bully was a sleep-walker."

"Rats!"

"I guess so, sir."

"I wonder the row doesn't wake him up," said Nugent.

"Oh, sleep-walkers can sleep through anything!" said the American junior. "I guess I knew Johnny Bull was a sleep-walker the first time I saw him."

"I wish you'd take George Washington for your model, Fishy!" murmured Bob Cherry.

"I guess——"

"We'd better wake him up," said Harry Wharton. "He can't be left here. I never expected to find John Bull and the ghost at the same time. I suppose he's been doing this every night. No wonder the keepers thought it was the giddy ghost. Shall we wake him up?"

"Yes; he may catch cold."

"Bull! I say, Bull!"

John Bull turned his head towards the juniors.

He gave a start.

Then he lowered the concertina and stared at them blankly.

"My only hat!" shouted Nugent. "He's awake!"

"Awake!"

"The wakefulness is terrific."

John Bull glared at them.

"Of course I'm awake!" he said. "Do you think I came here to practice the concertina in my sleep, you silly duffers?"

"Oh!"

Fisher T. Fish's jaw dropped.

"Well, carry me home to die!" he murmured.

"Then—then you're not a sleep-walker!" stammered Wharton, staring at the midnight performer on the concertina.

"A what?"

"A somnambulist!"

John Bull snorted.

"What put that idiotic idea into your head?" he demanded.

"Well, we—we——"

"Blessed if I know why you should be such a silly ass."

"Oh, draw it mild! You see——"

"You see, Fishy knew it all along," said Bob Cherry, with a grin. "Fishy knew the moment he saw you that you were a somnambulist."

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

"I guess——"

"What utter rot!" said John Bull. "I'm not a somnambulist, and never have been one! Fisher is a silly ass!"

"I guess——"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"It's no good, Fishy!" howled Bob Cherry. "Jevver get left?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You've put your foot right into it this time, Fishy. Ha, ha, ha!"

"What are you silly asses doing out of bed at this time of night?" demanded John Bull ungratefully.

"Looking for you," said Wharton, with some indignation. "We thought you were walking in your sleep."

"Oh, bosh!"

"You were out last night, and you never mentioned it!"

"I was keeping it dark!" snorted Bull. "I've been out nearly every night to practice the concertina here."

"What on earth for?"

"I want to keep up my practice, ass. I'm going to give public performances with the concertina when I'm proficient."

"My hat!"

"Last turn, I suppose, to clear the house," suggested Bob Cherry.

John Bull did not deign to reply to that remark. He carefully placed his concertina back in its case."

"But what did you want to sneak out of a night for, to practise?" demanded Wharton. "You might have caught cold."

Bull sniffed.

"You fellows made such a fuss about my practising in the daytime," he replied, "I could never touch the concertina without a row."

"Ha, ha, ha! Quite right!"

"The rowfulness was certainfully terrific."

John Bull gave a grunt.

"I mean, without you fellows making a row; but you know what I mean well enough. You barred the concertina, and as you couldn't appreciate good music, I determined that I wouldn't give you any. It's no good casting pearls before —ahem!—I mean, it's no good wasting one's musical gifts on Philistines. So I came out here of a night to practise, all on my lonesome. I never expected any silly ass to imagine that I was a sleep-walker."

"One for you, Fishy!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Fishy knew you were a somnambulist the first time he saw you—I don't think."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Jolly cold here," said Fisher T. Fish. "I guess we'd better get back."

And he started off.

The juniors yelled with laughter. The smart American, who knew everything, had over-reached himself once more.

"I suppose I'd better come in," growled John Bull. "I don't see why I couldn't practise without being disturbed, though, when I chose such a time as this."

"You should have explained, you ass; and there's no need to make that awful row at midnight, either," said Wharton severely. "No wonder people thought the park was haunted."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The juniors marched John Bull back to the house.

Fisher T. Fish was in bed when they entered, and he was

either asleep, or affecting to be so. He did not want any further chipping on the subject of his great knowledge of somnambulism.

"Asleep, Fishy, old son?" asked Bob Cherry.

Snore!

"Oh, he's asleep!" said Nugent, with a wink. "Look here, we'd better tie him to his bed, I think. He's a sleep-walker. I knew he was a sleep-walker the first time I saw him. A keen chap like me can always see these things. It's the way we do it over there."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Fisher T. Fish snored more emphatically than ever.

The juniors, chuckling, turned in.

. . . . . .

The next day was the last at Wharton Lodge, and one morning later, the juniors prepared for the return to Greyfriars. John Bull packed up his precious concertina very carefully, thus disappointing the other fellows, who had entertained a lingering hope that he might forget it, and leave it behind.

Colonel Wharton drove the juniors to the station, bright and cheerful in the keen weather; sorry the holidays were over, but keen, upon the whole, to get back to the old school and the old faces again.

"I fancy we shall have a good bit in the money-box when we get to Greyfriars," said Frank Nugent, taking the money-box out of his pocket on the platform, and rattling it. It certainly sounded pretty full of money. "It will be a leg up for the sports' fund."

"Yes, ratherfully."

"I say, you fellows, what do you say to a big feed with that tin, as soon as we get to Greyfriars?" suggested Bunter. "What do you say, Nugent?"

"Rats!"

"Forfeit!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"What do you say, Wharton? I think it's a jolly good idea," persisted Billy Bunter. "But, what do you say about it?"

Nugent held the money-box ready, but Harry Wharton did not say "rats." He grinned cheerfully.

"I say that I regard the suggestion with extreme disapproval, and that I decline to entertain it on any grounds whatever," he replied solemnly.

"Oh, really, Wharton——"

"No forfeits from me!" grinned Wharton. "No jolly fear!"

"Ha, ha!" yelled Nugent, holding out the box. "Forfeit!"

And Wharton had to admit that he was caught. He paid up with a grin. A few minutes more, and the juniors had shaken hands all round with the kind old colonel, and the train was bearing them swiftly back towards Greyfriars.

THE END.

STANLEY DARE
The Boy Detective

INTRODUCTION.

Stanley Dare, the Boy Detective, is visited one day by a man named Martin who has had sent to him at different times four raven's feathers accompanied by a warning letter. Dare promises to try and find the sender, but the same night Martin is mysteriously poisoned. The young detective's investigations lead him to a Jew's house, where he is thrown into an underground vault. Finding Dare does not return, Professor MacAndrew sets out in search of him. He enters the same Jew's house, and is questioned as to whether he is a doctor. He replies in the affirmative, and is requested to attend a man who is lying ill in the house. The professor finds he is unable to be of service, when the invalid denounces one of the men, who have accompanied MacAndrew into the room, as a murderer

(Now go on with the Story.)

The Man Who Lived Under the Earth—A Queer Companion—In the Nick of Time.

"Well, it's a good thing that I am blessed with fairly strong nerves," muttered Stanley Dare, as he stood in the damp, unpleasant vault, with a skeleton swinging on a movable frame just behind him, and the sounds of the horrible and mirthless laughter dying away in front of him. "It is a bit of a trying ordeal to have such sights and sounds sprung on one. I should almost imagine that the man who sang that gruesome ditty and laughed that unpleasant laugh must be mad. He is alive, at all events. I have certainly read of the ghosts of dead people indulging in wild bursts of laughter occasionally, but these phantoms generally manage to disappear when a detective starts investigating."

As neither the song nor the laughter were renewed, the young detective pushed on again towards the light, which showed steadily amid the darkness. The passage narrowed, and at length he came to an opening about two feet in width by one in depth. He peered through, and saw a plainly-furnished room.

For a few moments he hesitated as to the course of action he should pursue. The fellow might be one of the Raven gang, and Dare had no desire to fall into a second trap. There might be a number of his associates within hail. Up to the present, the singer of the gruesome song had remained invisible; but it was chance, after all, that decided the matter.

He slipped on the pile of rubble on which he was standing, and fell with a clatter. There was an exclamation from the man within the room; a wooden shutter was lowered, and a wizened old head peered forth from an aperture which was now big enough to easily admit a man.

"Have we got dead men rising from their graves?" shouted a cracked voice. "Have at ye, then! I care little enough for either living or dead. Come, show yourself, whoever ye are!"

He flourished a formidable-looking club as he stood just within the opening.

Dare rose to his feet.

"Put your club down!" he said. "I am a living man, with a revolver!"

"You are the first living man who has ever come along that passage since I have been here!" exclaimed the strange individual. "How did you get there?"

"I can tell you that afterwards. First, let me claim your hospitality. This is not a cheerful place out here, with the bones of dead men all around one."

"A man with a revolver! You are modern, then. Come in!"

"Oh, I am modern enough!" replied Dare, with a short laugh.

He climbed through the opening into a chamber of moderate size, furnished plainly, yet with a certain degree of comfort. His host was as strange a specimen of humanity as he had ever seen. His age might have been anything between sixty and eighty, for his face was the colour of old parchment, and grotesquely lined and wrinkled. A mere frame of a man he was, who seemed to be only skin and bone, and the faded costume that he wore was of a past age. It might have at one time belonged to a buck who lived when George the Fourth was King.

The pair regarded each other curiously.

"Where may you have come from?" demanded the strange old man. "You are not one of the Ravens."

"No," replied Dare, dropping his hand on to the butt of his revolver. "Are you?"

The old man gave one of his queer, cackling laughs.

"Take your hand from your weapon," he croaked. "I am not one of them, but I know all about them. I have heard their most secret councils, and I have heard them discuss nearly all their planned robberies and worse crimes before they were committed. But yet they know nothing of my existence."

"If you heard them planning their crimes, why did you not give information to the police?" demanded the young detective. "It was in your power to prevent murder being done."

"The police!" The man shook his head. "I know nothing about them. I know nothing about the world of to-day. I live down here always, and here I shall remain until I join those others yonder." He pointed to the vaults. "Oh, we shall be a very gay company together down here!

"'Down in the vaults the dead men lie,
And their fleshless lips are grinning.'"

He croaked out the lines of the weird song, cracking his fingers at the same time like castanets. Dare brought him back to a less gruesome subject by an abrupt question.

"How do you learn the secrets of the Ravens' gang?"

"By listening to them while they talk."

"But how about your food?" pursued Dare. "You must eat and drink."

"There is one man who knows of my existence," was the reply. "He keeps me well supplied. But I shall not give you his name."

"Will you give me your own name?"

"There is no reason why I should not," he answered, with an elaborate bow. "It is Gaston Venables."

Having made this announcement, he turned away, muttering to himself. He appeared to be sane enough at times, but every now and then the light of insanity gleamed in his eyes.

Dare asked him for a drink of water, and his queer host began to place food upon the table.

"Here you are, lad," he said. "It is seldom that I have a guest."

The young detective was quite ready for the meal, which, indeed, might be a favourable opportunity for gaining some information which he believed Venables could give him.

The old man put a bottle and glasses on the table, and some cold beef, bread, and pickles. Dare did justice to the meal. When it was nearly ended, he put the question which had been in his mind all the time.

"You say you know the secrets of the gang," he said. "Do you know why they arranged the murder of Lawrence Martin, and who did the deed? Above all, at whose instigation it was carried out? For the Ravens had been given some false information, which led to the crime."

Gaston Venables drained his glass, and his black eyes gleamed cunningly. He leaped to his feet, and beckoned Dare to follow him. They crossed the room to a door that was let in so skilfully to the wall that it was not visible until one got close to it.

It opened at his touch, and he led the way along a low and narrow tunnel, in which they were unable to stand upright.

"This place seems to be honeycombed with passages and vaults," said Dare.

"It is," replied Venables. "And of the thousands of people who are for ever passing and repassing overhead, there is only one, save us, who knows of their existence. The Raven gang are only acquainted with a very small part of them. The Ravens—— Ha!" He gripped the boy detective by the wrist, his eyes burning again with that gleam of insanity which seemed to come at intervals. "You are their enemy?"

"Yes," replied Dare.

"Good! Then we will sweep them away yet! Have at them, the rogues! We will clip the Ravens' wings!"

He ran on, and the young detective stumbled after him. A solid wall seemed to block their further progress. Venables passed his hands over it, and then pressed at a certain spot. There was a soft "click," and then a beam of light shot through the wall. The old man beckoned him onward, and the next moment he was looking through an opening into a fair-sized chamber, where a strange scene was being enacted.

A man was lying on a truckle-bed, apparently dead. Another man, whom he recognised as Professor MacAndrew, was struggling with three others, who had forced him, face downwards, on to a table; while a fourth—the Jew, Isaac Cohen—was endeavouring to fasten a pair of handcuffs on to his wrists.

With lightning quickness, Dare whipped out his revolver and fired, sending the handcuffs flying. Then it was that he gave the order, in his clear, ringing voice:

"Hands up, you miscreants! I have you covered, and the man who does not obey will be shot!"

Gaston Venables laughed shrilly.

"This way," he whispered hoarsely—"this way! We have them now. I hate them, and I am glad to see them baffled! This way! We will now go and clip the Ravens' wings."

He had swung back a slab of stone which moved on a pivot. Dare crept through the opening, revolver in hand. Venables followed, and in a moment they were facing the astounded ruffians.

"Stanley Dare!" cried the professor, with delight. "Weel, noo, laddie, ye're just in the nick o' time. I'm richt glad to see ye're alive and unhurt. Will ye just keep these scoundrils wi' their hands up until I disarm them?"

"All right," replied Dare. "Fire away!"

MacAndrew thereupon deprived each man of such weapon or weapons that he possessed, and calmly dropped them all into his capacious pockets.

"Ye may put your hands doon the noo," he said.

The young detective had secured a pocket-book which had dropped upon the floor, after which he made a systematic search of the apartment. He did not find anything else that would be likely to prove of any value as evidence in the case. The men watched him sullenly.

"Whaur's your queer-looking friend?" demanded MacAndrew suddenly.

Dare cast a hasty glance round. Venables had disappeared as quietly as a phantom of one of those long since dead men, among whom he led his strange existence.

"He has gone back to his tomb," said Dare quietly. "It is useless to attempt to follow him, and these fellows can do him no harm."

"What are you going to dae aboot them?" asked the professor.

"We must leave them here for the present," replied Dare. "They have only one avenue of escape, and I will take care that it is blocked. We have work to do elsewhere."

He turned upon Bassett.

"I accuse you of the murder of Lawrence Martin," he said. "And on that charge you will be arrested, unless you prefer to stay down in these vaults and starve!"

"You will find some difficulty in proving the charge!" sneered Bassett.

Dare turned away without another word. From somewhere near at hand the weird song sounded again, though the man who sang was invisible.

The Jew was grey with terror, and his associates were evidently in the grip of superstitious fears.

They stared about them uneasily as the words of the old man's uncanny song, which Dare had first heard when he was groping his way through the vaults, broke upon their ears:

Dare and the professor quitted the chamber, and closed the door after them, leaving the ruffians with their dead victim, and the words of the gruesome song haunting them, and leaving them a prey to vague and nameless terror.

The Tenant of Priory House—A Warning from Innocent Lips—Unwelcome Visitors.

"I was a fool! I ought to have contrived to place the book somewhere in his rooms before—before that evening. Now it is too late. And the book—hang it!—is still in my possession. If they were to find out I should be murdered. There is no possibility of escape when once they get on a man's track! No possibility of escape!"

Philip Garstone, the tenant of Priory House, which stood at the very edge of Marplesdon Woods, in Suffolk, with the nearest house at least two miles distant from it, was pacing the floor of the library with an anxious and troubled look upon his face.

It was not a prepossessing face at any time, but the expression which now darkened it added to the habitual scowl which contracted his heavy brows, and had already set two deep, vertical wrinkles in the centre of his forehead, although he had not yet reached middle age.

His wife had died five years ago, when Philip Garstone was still struggling with poverty. Sometimes in those days money had been fairly plentiful for a week or two, but he never ventured to tell his unhappy wife—for the marriage had been far from a happy one—how he had obtained the money.

She, poor lady, found out quite by accident, that her husband was a forger, an unconvicted one certainly; but that did not alter the fact of his felony, and the knowledge brought her to an early grave.

There was one child of the marriage—a girl named Alice, who was now eleven years of age.

And now Philip Garstone was a comparatively rich man, living in a large house, and keeping a number of servants. Perhaps there were times when the face of his dead wife rose up before him, gazing at him with reproachful eyes; but if he ever repented any evil that he had done in his life, it was simply because the risk of detection was not yet absolutely removed—that there was a lurking danger of some one of his past acts being found out.

He had paused opposite a maple-wood cabinet, from which he took a decanter of brandy and a glass. He poured the spirit out with a trembling hand, then tossed it off without the addition of any water. It gave him fresh courage—of a kind—and he laughed at his previous fears.

"I must destroy that book," he muttered. "I have kept it hitherto because I thought it might give me a hold over them in case of need. But that need has passed now that I have inherited Lawrence Martin's money. The book is now a dangerous possession. I will burn it this very evening."

He crossed the room to a bureau, where this book, which he seemed to consider so dangerous a possession was kept. He had fitted a key into the lock, and was about to turn it, when there was a timid knock upon the door, and a childish voice said:

"May I come in, papa?"

"Oh, is it you, Alice?" exclaimed Philip Garstone impatiently. "Yes, you can come in. What is it you want?"

The door opened, and a sweet-faced little girl of eleven, with curly brown hair, entered the room. She was the living image of her dead mother.

Philip Garstone's hard face softened a little as the girl ran to his side and clasped her hands about his arm.

"I was at the end of the kitchen-garden sitting under the hedge nearest the wood," she said, "when two gentlemen came along the road and stood on the other side talking."

"Well, and what were they talking about?" asked Philip Garstone, with a slight smile. "We don't have many visitors to the Priory. Were they talking of coming in to see me?"

"Yes."

Philip Garstone looked surprised. It was certainly not usual for any visitors to Priory House to come by way of Marplesdon Woods. The road was the nearest route to the village, and the little country railway station.

"It is curious that they have not rung the bell yet," he said. "They have had plenty of time to go round to the door. What were they saying?"

"I didn't quite understand what they meant, for they said such funny things," replied Alice. "One of them said, 'Do you think Philip Garstone will be caught napping?' I suppose he meant would they find you asleep."

"Eh? Yes, yes! Of course—that's what he meant—expected to catch me taking an afternoon nap. Some friends, I expect, who think of having a bit of fun with me. Ha, ha! But what else did they say? You are a good girl, Alice; try and remember all they said."

The child opened her blue eyes widely as she glanced up into her father's face. He had laughed—not a very merry laugh, certainly—and said that these gentlemen meant to have a bit of fun with him, but was it the prospect of fun that had turned his face so grey all at once, that had brought

the big beads of perspiration out on his forehead as though the evening was hot?

She was puzzled, but was too young to guess the hidden meaning of such a change, and as she had never been encouraged by her father to ask questions about himself, she refrained from doing so now, but went on to repeat the fragments of conversation which she had overheard.

"Some of the things they said I did not hear properly," continued Alice. "And one of them talked like our gardener—he's a Scotchman, isn't he?—so I couldn't understand much that he said; but the other one said you would fall into the trap unless you were on your guard. What do they mean by 'falling into a trap?' What trap can you fall into, papa?"

What trap?

Philip Garstone wished that he knew the trap which would be laid for him. Who were these men? What had they found out? Well, whoever and whatever they were, he was to a certain extent on his guard against them.

There was a loud ring at the front door-bell, a pause, then the sound of footsteps on the stairs.

"Run away now, little one!" said Philip Garstone to his eleven-year-old daughter, who had unconsciously rendered him so great a service, "and tell nurse to buy you a box of chocolates. These—ah!—these friends—I must see alone."

"And they won't catch you asleep, papa, will they?" laughed Alice.

The girl vanished, and a few seconds later a servant ushered the visitors into the library.

"Mr. Smith and Mr. Johnstone," were the names by which they were announced, and they were represented to be a solicitor and his client. Really, "Mr. Smith," was Stanley Dare, cleverly-disguised as a middle-aged man, while "Mr. Johnstone" was the professor.

Garstone bowed with stiff formality, asked them to be seated, and inquired their business. All the time his eyes were furtively scanning their faces to try and find out who they were, or whether they were men whom he had ever seen before. His scanning, however, availed him little.

"Our business, Mr. Garstone," replied Stanley Dare, playing his part of Mr. Smith's solicitor to perfection, "is in connection with the property which you have inherited from the late Lawrence Martin. You are a cousin, and inherit as next-of-kin."

"Precisely," replied Garstone coldly.

"My client, Mr. Johnstone," pursued Dare, with an introductory wave of the hand towards Professor MacAndrew, "has instructed me to take a legal action, and dispute your title to the property."

"On what grounds?"

"This will explain."

He laid a long official-looking envelope on the table. It was not sealed up. Philip Garstone opened the flap, and a raven's feather dropped out.

Dare was watching him keenly. For one instant a gleam of terror shone in Garstone's eyes, but it was so fleeting as hardly to be noticeable. He had been put on his guard, and he had now a wonderful command over himself.

"What is the meaning of this?" he demanded, holding up the black feather. "If you mean this as a practical joke, I can only say that it is ill-timed, and I do not appreciate it."

"We dinna play practical jokes, sir," exclaimed the professor in his character of "Mr. Johnstone," "as nae doot ye'll find. There's a meaning tae yon feather, which, if ye canna understand, will, I'm thinking, be rather bad for you."

"I must still plead ignorance," replied Garstone. "What meaning can there be in a raven's feather?"

Outwardly he was calm and indifferent, standing there unflinchingly before the two men whom he knew were his enemies, although he did not know exactly the precise form of danger to fear from them. But inwardly he was quaking with fear.

"We must leave you to find out," said Stanley Dare. "We have nothing further to say on this present visit."

"You have said little enough," observed Garstone drily.

Stanley Dare, as "Mr. Smith, solicitor," had picked up his hat and gloves, and taken a couple of steps towards the door. On the threshold he paused.

"I forgot to mention," he said quietly, "that a discovery has been made regarding the death of the late Lawrence Martin, your cousin, which, I believe, will necessitate an alteration of the verdict of the coroner's jury of 'Death from misadventure' to one of 'Wilful murder!'"

Philip Garstone was standing with his hand on the back of a chair, and as the young detective uttered the last words his grip tightened with a spasmodic movement, as might be the case when a man is startled out of a forced equanimity. But his face remained immobile as ever. His command over his features was wonderful, considering the tornado of doubt and dread that was raging within him.

"I regret to hear it," he said, in hard, metallic tones. "My regret is, of course, that there should be any suspicion that my late relative came to his death by violent means. I can hardly bring myself to believe that it was so. What is this remarkable discovery which has been made?"

"A quantity of the poison which caused Martin's death has been found in the house of a Jew named Isaac Cohen, who lives in Denyer Street East," replied Dare. "And elsewhere, some entries in a book to the effect that unless Martin complied with certain conditions—which, by the way, he was quite unable to comply with—he would have to be removed by means of this poison. He was removed. It was no accident. You will be glad to hear that the murderer has been traced to his lair, and that he will shortly be arrested. That is all."

The door closed softly, and Philip Garstone was left alone. For a long time he stood there motionless, his eyes fixed, and staring into vacancy.

"They have discovered the murderer!" he said at last. "If he is put upon his trial, how much will he tell—how much will he dare to tell?"

He dropped into a chair.

"Bah!" he continued. "What is the matter with me! My nerves are getting shaky, I think. Whatever happens, I have nothing to fear. But who were my visitors? They called themselves Mr. Smith and Mr. Johnstone, but that tells nothing, and I am inclined to think the names were false ones. If I only knew who they were I should be easier in my mind."

He sat there far into the night, pondering many things. More than once he had recourse to the decanter of brandy. By the time he rose to go to his bed-room his hands were so unsteady that he might have had some reason for supposing that his nerves were getting shaky.

. . . . . .

"Our stratagem was not a success, MacAndrew," exclaimed Stanley Dare, as he and the professor sat at supper that night at the King's Hotel, Ipswich, whither they had gone after quitting Priory House, so as to be ready to proceed to town by the first train in the morning.

"Philip Garstone did not betray himself by word or act, as we expected he would do. Except in one slight particular he carried himself as though he were entirely ignorant or innocent of the whole business connected with Martin's murder."

"What was the slight particular you refer to?" asked MacAndrew, helping himself to salad.

"During the whole of the interview he stood in front of the bureau," replied Dare. "The key was in the lock, so he had evidently been looking into it just before our arrival. I must find out what the bureau contains, MacAndrew. Perhaps the very thing we want, the last link that would complete our chain of evidence. It was not mere chance that he stood there. He mistrusted us from the first, and he had something hidden in that piece of furniture which he feared to let others see."

(To be continued next Tuesday. Order your copy to-day.)

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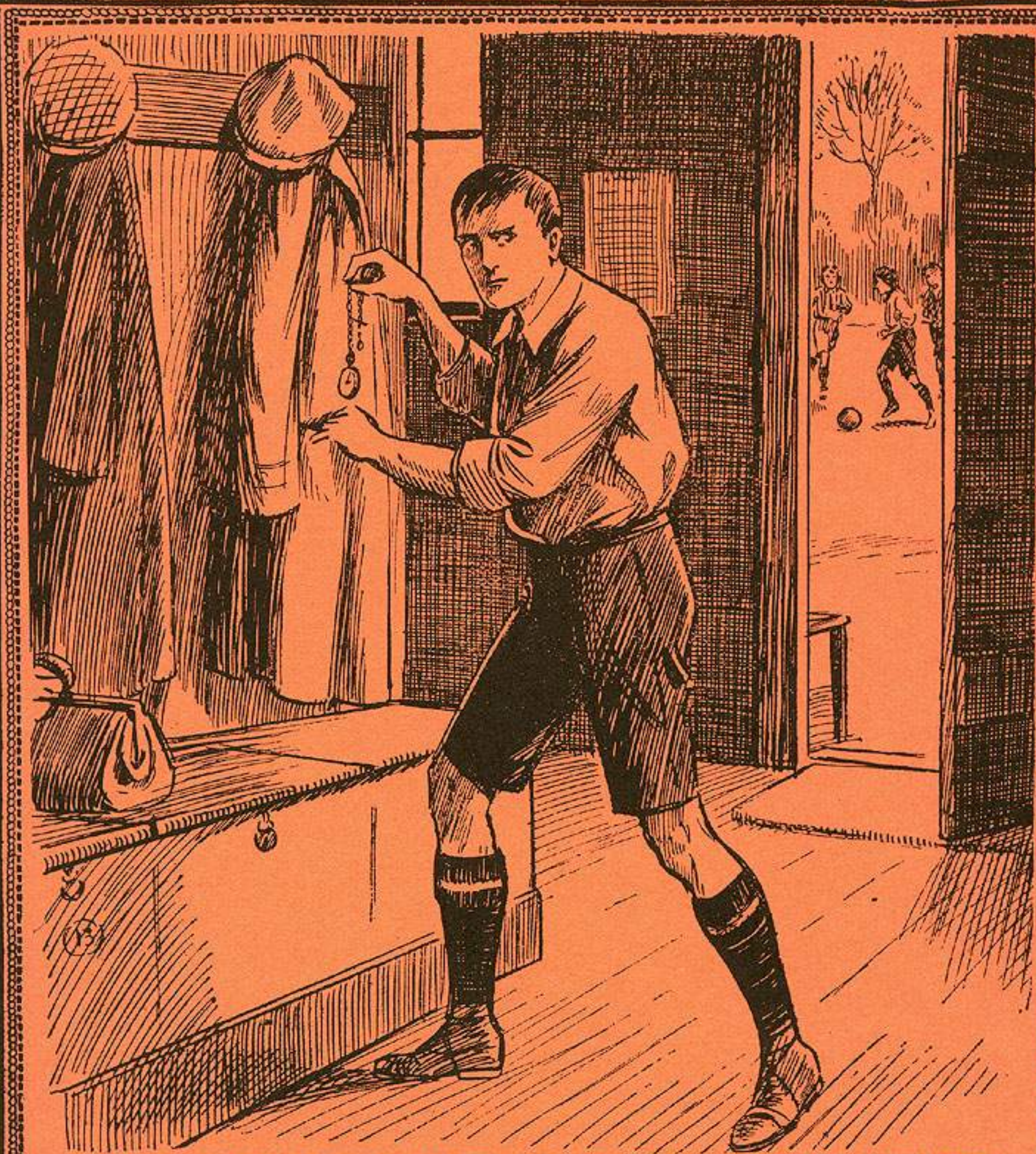

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