

"THE SECRET OF THE SCHOONER!"

This Week's Fine Story of Harry Wharton & Co. inside.

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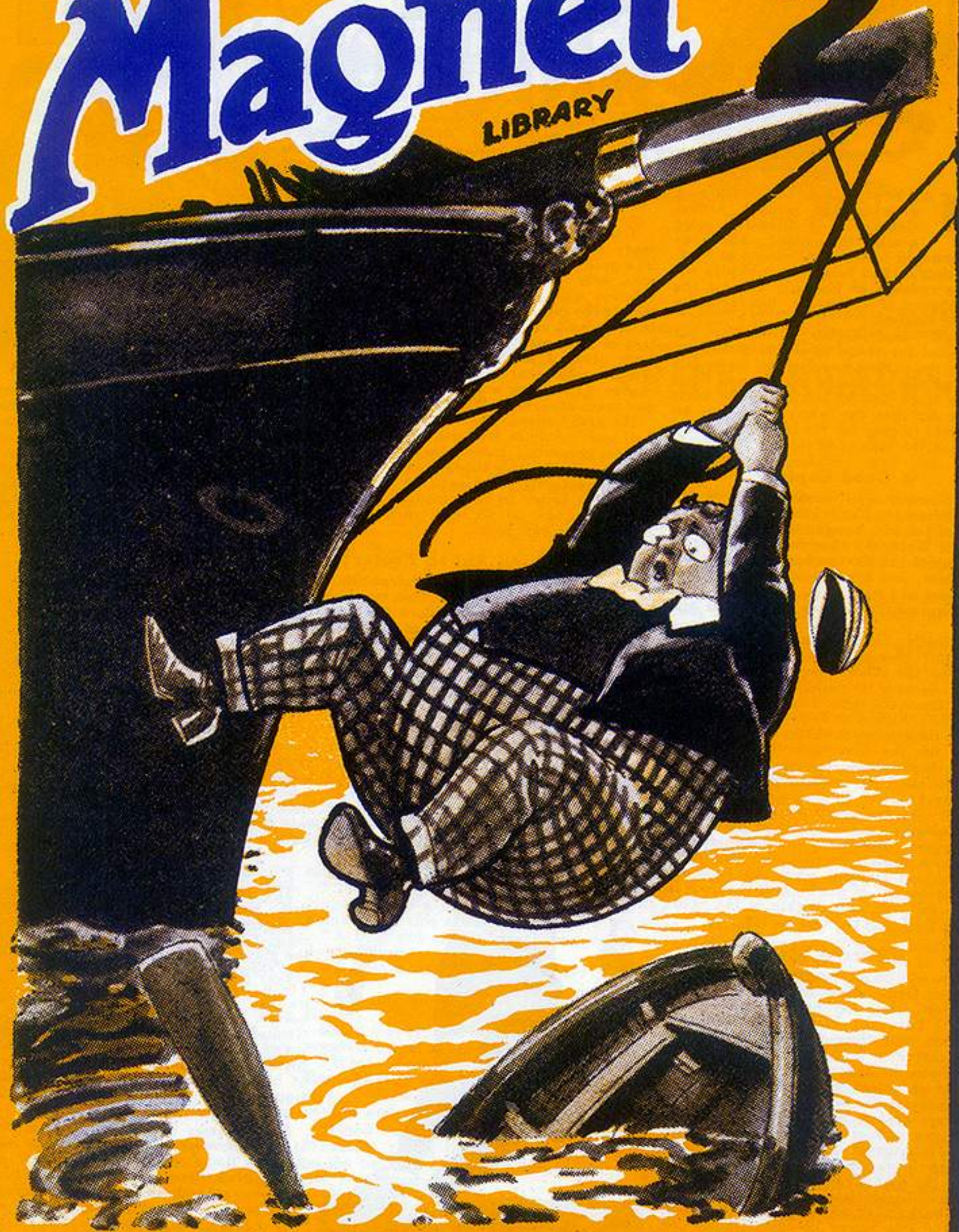
Week Ending October 6th, 1928.

EVERY
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BUNTER'S DESPERATE BID FOR SAFETY!

(A thrilling incident from this week's grand story of the Chums of Greyfriars.)

Our Special Football Feature!



MANY years ago the heart of a growing lad named Arthur Grimsdell throbbed more quickly than usual. The news was brought to him in his home at Watford that he had been chosen to play for the schoolboys of England against the schoolboys of Wales at his favourite game—football.

Since then Arthur Grimsdell has travelled far—even to the very limits—along the pathway to football fame, but he has told me more than once that never since has he felt quite the same as he did that day when he stepped on the field to play for the lads of England against the lads of Wales.

A Good Capture!

The career of Grimsdell has been full of interest. Until 1912 he had not played for any League team outside his native Watford. One day, however, an official of the Tottenham Hotspur Club saw him, and thought him so good that he there and then made the club an offer for Grimsdell's services and signed him on.

Actually, that official of Tottenham Hotspur exceeded the powers given to him by the other directors. There was a row because Grimsdell had been signed on without the other directors being consulted. And it is even whispered that when these other directors saw Grimsdell play for the first time they felt they were justified in having made a row. He did not seem to them to be worth the money.

But this selfsame Arthur Grimsdell rose quickly up the ladder of fame. He captained England in International games against Scotland, was captain of Tottenham Hotspur when they won the championship of the Second Division in 1920, and was also captain of the Spurs when they won the Cup in 1921.

Thirteen Stone!

It would be an exaggeration to say of Arthur Grimsdell to-day that he is the greatest wing half-back in the game. But I have put him in my series of masters and their methods because he has certainly been the greatest wing half-back in the game we have produced in recent years. He is not now so young as he used to be, but he is still a great player, and here I propose to tell you some of the things which made him great—which enabled him to rise to the very top of the tree.

In the first place, he is well built for the half-back's job. You know that the half-back must do some grim tackling, and is also better equipped if he can administer a good shoulder charge. Almost through his career Grimsdell has weighed something like thirteen stone, and that weight has enabled him to shift many opponents with those big, square shoulders of his.

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This week "Referee" lets you into the secrets of Arthur Grimsdell's success—Grimsdell, as most of you know, being the famous Tottenham Hotspur and English International half-back.

But though Grimsdell has bowled many a man over, I have never seen him guilty of an unfair charge. I have seen him penalised, because not all referees will permit the fair charge—more's the pity. And I have also seen a most pained expression come over the face of Grimsdell when a free kick has been given against him for no other offence than that of a good shoulder charge. Charging a man off the ball is one point of Grimsdell's strength.

He also believes that it is the wing half-back's duty to feed the men in front of him properly. I don't know whether he has ever put this thought into words, but he certainly plays as if he believes that it is better to run the risk of not making a pass at all than to make a hurried and bad pass.

Dancing as an Aid to Footer!

I once asked him what he thought the weakness in modern play. This was his reply: "The tendency to place faith in shock tactics and kick-and-run football, which is neither pretty nor effective."

Grimsdell has certainly tried his best, throughout his career, to remedy this defect in modern half-back play. He gets the ball down to his toes, and pro-

gresses with it towards goal until he is in a position to make a good pass, or until a colleague is in a good position to receive the ball, which is the same thing.

He, of all the half-backs I have ever seen, remembers, too, that a half-back should be a half-forward. He is a great believer in the dribble through by a half-back and the surprise shot at goal.

In a victory International between England and Scotland, just after the War, he scored two goals, though he was playing at left-half. That's the sort of fellow he is—unorthodox, original, not bound by ordinary rules. When he gets the ball defenders can't afford to wait for him to pass. They have to go to him, otherwise he will run through and be taking a shot at goal before they can stop him.

This means, of course, that when at his best he is one of the game's finest close dribblers. With his shoulders he keeps off his opponents, and with his feet he keeps the ball so close that they haven't a chance to get to it. For a man so heavy he is wonderfully nippy on his feet, and I am going to tell you the secret of this nippiness; he believes in dancing as an aid to football.

Don't misunderstand me. Grimsdell doesn't dance away the early hours of the morning, when all athletes should be asleep. But he dances often in the early hours of the evening. Between many dancing movements and football there is this difference only—that at football you have a ball at your feet.

Avoiding the Crowd!

The honours which have come Grimsdell's way are borne modestly, and here is another proof of real greatness. Sometimes I have come back to London with the players of Tottenham Hotspur, after the team has won a notable victory. There have been hundreds of people waiting to welcome the conquering heroes. But not that sort of stuff for Grimsdell. I have seen him sneaking out of a London station by the back way, his coat-collar turned up and the brim of his hat turned down, fearful all the time that he would be spotted by the waiting crowd.

Other games interest this captain of the Spurs, who hopes to help the side back to the First Division again. All through the summer he plays cricket. As batsman and wicket-keeper for Hertford he has done notable things.

If Grimsdell has not been the greatest half-back since the War, we can truthfully say this of him—he would have been the greatest wing-half of all time if he had been capable of living right up to his ideals of the game as it should be played.



ARTHUR GRIMSDOLL, of Spurs fame, the greatest wing half-back produced in recent years.

FUN! MYSTERY! ADVENTURE! THRILLS! Drifting aimlessly into Kent waters comes the dilapidated schooner *Castile*. No sign is there of life aboard her; her tattered sails bespeak tragedy and an eerie mystery such a mystery as Harry Wharton & Co. have never before encountered!

The Secret of the Schooner!



A Magnificent New Long Complete School Story of Harry Wharton & Co., the World-Famous Chums of Greyfriars.

By **FRANK RICHARDS.**

THE FIRST CHAPTER.

Bunter's Bluff:

"FOOTER!"

Harry Wharton gazed out of the window in Study No. 1 in the Remove, and made that ejaculation.

"Too hot!"

"The hotfulness of the esteemed weather is terrific!"

Frank Nugent and Hurree Jamsset Ram Singh were unanimous in their opinion, even if the quaint English of the latter left a lot to be desired. And Johnny Bull and Bob Cherry, having glanced out of the window at the quad, bathed in all the glory of a late summer sun, remarked with emphasis:

"Much too hot!"

Harry Wharton grinned. As a matter of fact he was in full accordance with his chums' opinion of the weather. It was much too hot for footer. But, as captain of the Greyfriars Remove Eleven, it was his duty to keep his players in practice. It was Wednesday, and it was a half-holiday, and as King Cricket had long since departed and football had taken its place, it really was the duty of the Remove players to turn out for practice. But duty is not always a pleasant thing. Certainly duty in the form of chasing the leather about on Little Side under the sweltering rays of the sun seemed a little too strenuous.

"Call it off for to-day, old scout," said Bob Cherry.

And the rest of the Famous Five, with the exception of Wharton, nodded vigorously.

"It's all very well," said the captain of the Remove slowly, "but what about the St. Jim's match?"

"Oh, we'll send the Saints home with their tails between their legs!" said Nugent confidently. "No need to put in a practice to-day to do that."

"But Tom Merry's crowd are hot stuff!" said Harry Wharton. "Look at the way they licked the Rookwood chaps in their second match of the season!"

"They'll find us a different proposition on Saturday," ventured Bob Cherry.

"Rather!"

Harry Wharton's chums looked at him appealingly. All of them were keen, very keen on footer, but there were limits to their keenness. Footer on a day like this was anything but an inviting prospect. From the study window Harry Wharton & Co. could see a constant stream of juniors sauntering out of gates, bound for the river for a picnic in the woods. Apparently, football in such glorious weather had been given a back seat, so to speak, so far as they were concerned.

"Well, I'm not keen on practice myself," remarked Wharton, at length.

"Then call it off!"

"Hum!"

The captain of the Remove was weakening. He glanced at his chums, and then his handsome face broke into a smile.

"Right, we'll call it off," he said. "But if we don't lick Tom Merry & Co. on Saturday, you chaps will hear about it!"

"Oh, we'll lick 'em!" said Bob Cherry confidently.

"The next item on the agenda," said Nugent, with a smile, "is what are we going to do this afternoon?"

"A boat out on the river!" suggested Johnny Bull.

"A picnic in the woods!" said Bob Cherry.

"A spin on our bikes!" ventured Nugent.

But it was Hurree Jamsset Ram Singh's suggestion that caught on.

"What about a pull over to Black Rock Island, my worthy chums?" he said. "We will take the esteemed tuck-basket, and—"

"Good man, Inky!" said Harry Wharton, giving his dusky chum a slap on the back. "That's a jolly good idea. Are you chaps on?"

"Rather!"

"The onfulness is terrific!"

Inky's idea was adopted unanimously. A pull over to Black Rock Island, a dip in the briny, and then tea on the island, seemed an ideal way of spending that glorious afternoon.

"Shell out, you men!" said Wharton

briskly. "Franky and Bob will cut down to the tuckshop and lay in supplies."

The Famous Five shelled out. They pooled their resources, and a few minutes later Bob Cherry and Frank Nugent were scudding down to Mrs. Mimble's little shop and ordering delicacies on a lavish scale.

They came back to Study No. 1 loaded, and dumped their parcels on the table.

"You've been quick," remarked Wharton. "Shove the grub into that cricket-bag, Franky."

"What-ho!"

And Nugent proceeded to pack the cricket-bag, with great enthusiasm.

"I say, you fellows—"

A fat face, adorned with a pair of glimmering spectacles, suddenly appeared round the door of the study. It belonged to William George Bunter, the Owl of the Remove. Bunter's eyes glistened as he saw the tempting array of tuck, and his mouth watered. There were two things that mattered most in Bunter's life—sleeping and eating. In the latter line he had no equal at Greyfriars. Where Bunter managed to put all the food he consumed was a marvel, yet there seemed to be no limit to the fat junior's gargantuan appetite.

"I say, you fellows—"

"Buzz off!"

"Skedaddle!"

"Run away, old fat man!"

"Vamoose!"

Apparently Bunter's room was preferred to his company, judging by the emphatic remarks that greeted his entry. But William George Bunter was not a sensitive fellow. Indeed, he had a hide that would not have disgraced a rhinoceros. Instead of departing from Study No. 1 Bunter came in and closed the door behind him, oblivious of the deadly glares bestowed upon him by Harry Wharton & Co.

"I say, you fellows—"

"Get out, you fat barrel!" exclaimed Wharton.

"Oh, really, Wharton, old chap—"

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"If you call me 'old chap' I'll skin you!" said Harry Wharton.

Billy Bunter blinked, and then his podgy face broke into a smile.

"He, he, he!" he chuckled. "I can take a joke!"

"You can?" asked Bob Cherry.

"Certainly, old fellow!" said Bunter, with one eye on the tuck.

"Then take it outside!" growled Bob.

"Eh? What do you mean?"

"You're the joke," said Bob. "Now run away, old fat man, and take it with you!"

"Oh, really, Cherry!" said Bunter. "I say, those tarts look good, Nugent!"

And Bunter reached forward a podgy hand to sample one of Mrs. Mimble's freshly-made tarts. Really, that was injudicious of Bunter, for Johnny Bull had picked up a cricket-stump, and as Bunter reached for a tart Johnny Bull reached out with the stump.

Whack!

"Yoooooooooop!"

Bunter had not got the tart, but certainly he had got the stump. And, judging by the noise he made and the way he sucked at his damaged knuckles, Johnny Bull's aim had been dead on the bullseye.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The Famous Five roared with laughter as Billy Bunter danced up and down the study sucking at his knuckles and howling at the top of his voice.

"Whooooop! You beast, Bull! Wow! Ow!"

"Shove that fat idiot outside!" grunted Johnny Bull. "That awful row gets on my nerves!"

"Outside, Bunter!"

Bob Cherry seized one of Bunter's fat ears and Harry Wharton fastened a grip on the other. Then they urged the fat junior towards the door. Bunter didn't want to go. The idea of leaving all that tuck gave him a heart-ache. But, really, there was no option. With Wharton pulling on one ear and Bob Cherry the other, resistance was hopeless and certainly painful.

Bunter went, a gentle kick from Johnny Bull speeding him on his way.

The study door slammed to, and Bunter slammed in a heap on the cold, hard, unsympathetic passage with a bump and a roar.

"Yaroooooh! Beasts!"

Had Bunter been a fighting-man he would have rushed into Study No. 1 and wiped up the floor with Harry Wharton & Co. But Bunter was not a fighting-man. Indeed, it was rumoured that Dicky Nugent of the Second Form had pulled Billy Bunter's fat nose, and "got away with it." Still, there were other ways and means of squaring accounts with Harry Wharton & Co.

Bunter looked up and down the passage. There was no one in sight. Then he coughed—a little preliminary to one of his ventriloquial efforts.

Harry Wharton & Co., meantime, were continuing their packing, all thoughts of William George Bunter having passed from their minds. But they jumped as the well-known tones of Mr. Quelch broke in upon them.

"Wharton, Nugent, Bull," snapped the master of the Remove, "Cherry, and Hurree Singh, follow me to my study at once!"

Harry Wharton & Co. looked at each other blankly. There was no mistaking the voice. It belonged to Mr. Quelch, their Form master. Why he should command them to go to his study was a puzzle. Each of the juniors wondered

what fresh sin of omission or commission had come to light.

"Oh, lo'r'! I mean, yes, sir!" gasped Wharton.

The fact that Mr. Quelch had not troubled to open the door of Study No. 1 did not excite any suspicion, Harry Wharton & Co. having been swept off their feet, as it were, by the suddenness and unexpectedness of that summons.

There was the sound of footsteps retreating along the Remove passage as Harry Wharton turned the handle of the study door and gazed out, but there was no sign of Mr. Henry Samuel Quelch.

The passage was deserted.

"He must have gone on," said Wharton. "Wonder what he's got up against us?"

"Blessed if I know!" said Bob Cherry. "But he sounded in a royal wax."

"Perhaps Loder has reported the booby-trap we fixed up for him," said Nugent, "although how the rotter found out that we were mixed up in it beats me."

Wharton nodded gloomily. If Loder, the unpopular prefect of the Sixth, had reported the incident of the booby-trap a licking, at least, was to be expected. Added to which Mr. Quelch would probably gate them for the half-holiday.

"Oh crumbs!" murmured Wharton. "This will mean that the picnic on Black Rock Island is off."

"Very much off!"

"The off-fulness of the esteemed and ridiculous picnic will be terrific!" added Hurree Jamset Ram Singh gloomily.

The Famous Five halted at the door of Mr. Quelch's study. Wharton tapped on the panels.

"Come in!"

There was a note of irritation in Mr. Quelch's voice as he issued that invitation which caused Harry Wharton & Co.'s spirits to sink to zero. And with chastened expressions, as if butter wouldn't melt in their mouths, they filed in.

THE SECOND CHAPTER.

"Open Confession—"

"WHAT—what!"

Mr. Quelch's lean features wore an expression of irritation mingled with amazement as five juniors trooped into his study. The master of the Remove had been deep in the works of Sophocles, the half-holiday presenting an opportunity not to be missed of becoming more closely acquainted with the works of that learned and very verbose gentleman. It wasn't often that Mr. Quelch allowed himself such indulgence, his time being principally taken up with instructing the Remove in the way they should go.

But a half-holiday was different. For over an hour Mr. Quelch had sacrificed his leisure time to correcting the Latin papers of his pupils, having done which he naturally considered that the rest of the afternoon was his—to do with what he liked, so to speak. Really, to be interrupted in this fashion when deep in the enjoyment of Sophocles was enough to send a spasm of irritation through the most meek and passive of gentlemen.

Harry Wharton & Co. stood before him in uncomfortable silence. As Mr. Quelch had ordered them to his study, they naturally expected that the first word would emanate from him. But for at least three minutes there was dead silence in the study. It was Mr. Henry Samuel Quelch who broke it, however, and his first words hardly gave the Famous Five a "pointer."

"Well, are you all stricken dumb?" Then Harry Wharton found his voice. "You see, sir, I—that is—we—I mean to—"

"Most lucid, I'm sure!" snapped Mr. Quelch.

Frank Nugent came to the rescue. "You see, sir, I—we—us—I mean Loder—"

Mr. Quelch passed a hand over his forehead.

"Bless my soul!" he gasped. "Are you all gone mad?"

Johnny Bull, in his blunt way, took up the tale.

"We're all in it, sir!" he said stoutly. "That rotter Loder—"

"Loder!" said Mr. Quelch faintly.

"Yes, sir," went on Johnny. "He fairly asked for that booby-trap, so we gave it to him!"

"That's it, sir!" chimed in Bob Cherry, fidgeting on his rather big feet. "It was only flour and soot—"

"Only f-flour and soot!" stuttered Mr. Quelch dazedly.

"And a little ink and gum," added Wharton helpfully.

"A little ink and gum!" gasped Mr. Quelch, wondering whether he was dreaming.

What all these incoherent statements meant he was for the moment at a loss to understand.

"But we think we were justified, sir," said Wharton. "Without going into details, Loder of the Sixth fairly asked for it. Didn't he, you chaps?"

"Rather!"

There was no doubt in the minds of the Famous Five that Gerald Loder had "asked for it." But they little dreamed that they themselves were asking for it.

A peculiar expression settled on Mr. Quelch's face as he surveyed the five delinquents before him. The master of the Remove was beginning to piece the story together, although why five juniors should suddenly burst into his study to confess to the offence of "swamping" a prefect was beyond his comprehension.

He rose to his feet, and the Famous Five, with many misgivings, saw him reach for a cane.

"Am I to understand that you boys have had the unparalleled audacity to prepare a—ahem—a booby-trap for a prefect of the Sixth?"

Harry Wharton & Co. jumped. They realised then that they had been a little hasty in jumping to the conclusion that Mr. Quelch already knew of this affair.

"I am amazed," went on Mr. Quelch in thunderous tones, "that boys of my Form should be guilty of such a heinous offence! But may I ask why you saw fit to come here and acquaint me with the facts?"

"You see, sir," said Wharton lamely, "when you ordered us to come here, we—"

"What—what!" snapped Mr. Quelch. "I was not aware that I had summoned you here."

Harry Wharton looked astonished. "But I—we all distinctly heard you, sir, tell us to come to your study at once a few moments ago."

Mr. Quelch seemed as if he were on the verge of an apoplectic fit.

"What!" he gasped. "I ordered you to come here?"

"Yes, sir," answered Wharton, wondering whether the sun had affected Mr. Quelch's brain.

"Are you out of your mind, boy?" thundered the master of the Remove.

"Nunno, sir! But we all heard you!" stammered Wharton. "Didn't we, you fellows?"

"Yes!"

It was a regular chorus. Mr. Quelch's brow grew grim. "I don't profess to understand why you should present yourselves here," he



As Billy Bunter reached for the tart, Johnny Bull reached out with the cricket-stump. Whack! "Yaroooooop!" The Owl of the Remove did not get the tart, but he certainly got the stump. And judging by the noise he made as he sucked at his damaged knuckles, Johnny Bull's aim had been dead on the target. (See Chapter 1.)

said acidly, "because I certainly did not order you to come. But since you are here, this matter of assaulting a prefect must be dealt with!"

And Mr. Quelch swished the cane ominously. Really, it was too bad, he considered, that juniors should "butt" into his leisure moments like this; and the fact that Harry Wharton & Co. persisted in the story that he had ordered them to present themselves at his study did not improve his temper. He cast a longing glance at Sophocles, as if deploring the waste of precious moments the "correction" of these juniors demanded, then beckoned to Harry Wharton.

"Touch your toes!" commanded Mr. Quelch sternly.

Wharton did so.

"Since you confessed of your own accord, I will make your punishment more lenient than I would otherwise have done," said Mr. Quelch.

"Thank you, sir!" said Harry Wharton demurely.

Swish, swish, swish, swish!

The master of the Remove was not an athletic gentleman, but he possessed an arm that was not lacking in strength and vigour. Certainly Wharton considered, when Mr. Quelch had finished, that he had been anything but lenient.

The captain of the Remove suffered the castigation without a murmur, although his face was pale when Mr. Quelch passed on from him to Frank Nugent.

And for the next five minutes the sounds of steady swishing was all that could be heard in the Remove master's study.

Mr. Quelch was breathing a trifle heavily when he finished, but he felt that duty had been done.

"You may go!" he said coldly. "And should you ever have the temerity to

indulge in such an iniquitous practice again your punishment will be doubly severe!"

At the moment none of the Famous Five entertained further prospects of swamping a prefect, not even such an unpopular and tyrannical prefect as Gerald Loder. They crawled from their Form master's study sadder and wiser juniors, and, with dismal faces, wended their way towards Study No. 1.

"Oh, dear!" murmured Wharton. "Quelchy laid it on hard!"

"Ow!"

"Groooooough!"

Once outside Mr. Quelch's study a little of the fortitude they had displayed inside that apartment deserted them. Nugent turned on Johnny Bull, whose face was creased in pain.

"You burbling idiot!" hissed Nugent.

"It was all your fault!"

"Eh?" demanded Johnny Bull, with a ferocious glare.

"You let on about Loder and the booby-trap," said Nugent, "you thumping idiot!"

"I like that!" snorted Johnny Bull.

"Why, it was you in the first place——"

"Rats!" exclaimed Nugent.

"Why, I'll smash you!" roared Johnny Bull ferociously.

And for the moment it looked as if two members of the Famous Five would come to blows.

"Let not the wrathfulness exceed the wisdom of my esteemed and ridiculous chums!" said Inky, coming between Johnny Bull and his victim. "Let me make a suggestive remark."

"If you mean a suggestion, say so!" growled Wharton, who was not feeling in the best of tempers. "But I'm not in the mood to listen to fatheaded suggestions!"

Hurree Jamset Ram Singh smiled a dusky smile. With all the fatalism of

the East, he had taken his punishment and forgotten all about it. But he had not lost sight of the fact that Mr. Quelch had denied ordering them to his study. Yet the summons they had obeyed had been voiced in Mr. Quelch's tones, not one of the juniors was in doubt about that.

"Bunter!" said Inky, as if mention of that name cleared up the whole matter.

The Co. stared at him crossly.

"What the thump do you mean?" demanded Wharton.

Hurree Singh smiled.

"We all know the ridiculous Bunter possesses the execrable gift of imitating other people's voices," he explained.

Harry Wharton & Co. started, and for the moment forgot their aches and pains.

"Oh!"

"The fat rotter!"

"The spoofer!"

"Bunter!"

It dawned upon the minds of the Co. that once again Bunter's peculiar gift of ventriloquism had brought trouble on their devoted heads. Mr. Quelch had stated positively that he had not ordered them to his study. It was not to be thought of for one moment that Mr. Quelch would descend to telling falsehoods.

Yet the fact remained that Harry Wharton & Co. had been firmly convinced that they had obeyed his orders when Mr. Quelch's voice had reached them through the thickness of the door of Study No. 1. There was only one fellow at Greyfriars who could imitate Mr. Quelch's voice well enough to deceive anyone, and that was William George Bunter.

"The fat cad!" exclaimed Wharton

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furiously. "It was Bunter right enough. That was why we found no one in the passage when we came out of the study."

"I'll burst him!" roared Bob Cherry, whose usually sunny face was now clouded with wrath.

"Come on!" snapped the captain of the Remove. "That was a dodge of Bunter's to get us out of the way, and—"

"The tuck!" panted Nugent.

"Oh, my hat!"

"If that fat worm has pinched it I'll pulverise him!" exclaimed Bob Cherry.

In an excited stream the five juniors raced towards Study No. 1. Bob's large feet banged the door open.

The study was deserted, and a glance into it revealed the fact that the cricket bag full of tuck had vanished.

"Gone!" roared Harry Wharton. "Bunter's boned it!"

"Oh, my hat!"

Five dismayed juniors looked at each other, and then on the study table where the cricket bag had reposed, as if expecting it to materialise again before their eyes. But there was no doubt about it—the cricket bag containing the tuck had disappeared.

"Oh, I'll skin the fat rotter when I get my hands on him!" growled Johnny Bull.

"The fat rotter!" breathed Nugent.

"Come on, you chaps!" said Wharton suddenly. "He can't be very far away. Search the studies and the box-rooms."

"Good egg!"

With warlike expressions on their faces, the Famous Five dashed out of the study, and began a frantic search of the studies and the box-rooms. It boded ill for William George Bunter when he fell into their hands. But Harry Wharton & Co. had reckoned without the wily resource of that fat junior, for the moment they had gone the tablecloth covering the study table rustled. A moment later a fat leg came into view, to be followed by a fat face and an unwieldy carcass, that answered to the name of William George Bunter, so to speak. And following the Owl of the Remove was the missing cricket bag laden with tuck!

"Beasts!" muttered Bunter. "They thought they were going to leave me out, did they? Stingy beasts! I'll teach the rotters a lesson!"

The lesson commenced. It took the form of first locking the door of Study No. 1 on the inside, then an investigation of the good things the cricket bag contained—an investigation that lasted but a few seconds. A moment more, and Billy Bunter's fat jaws were working at full pressure.

"This is prime!" muttered the fat junior; and thereafter the only sound that broke the silence was the steady munching of his jaws.

THE THIRD CHAPTER.

Billy Bunter Bargains!

"BUNTER! Bunter! Bunter!" Bob Cherry's stentorian tones rang out through the old quad. He and the rest of the Co. had made a thorough search of the studies of the box-rooms and the Form-rooms, but sign of William George Bunter there was not. William George had vanished as completely as if the earth had opened and swallowed him up. Now the Famous Five were in the quad, hot and exasperated after their fruitless search.

"Bunter!" bawled Bob Cherry for the fourth time.

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"Fathead!" grunted Johnny Bull. "What's the good of calling him? That'll only give him warning that we're on his track."

Which was reasonable enough. Certainly the Owl of the Remove, in view of all the circumstances, was not likely to emerge from his hiding-place at sound of Bob Cherry's voice. But Bob Cherry refused to see it, for he bellowed afresh:

"Bunter!"

"Oh, where, oh, where can he be?"

It was Harold Skinner's voice. In company with Snoop and Stott, his study-mates, the cad of the Remove had just reached the top of the School House steps. The sight of Bob Cherry, with hands raised to his mouth, foghorn fashion, yelling for Bunter, struck Harold Skinner as something decidedly funny. Skinner could always see the humour in other people's misfortunes, and in the present case he knew all about the purloined sack of tuck, for the Famous Five in their search for Bunter had called at Study No. 11.

Skinner, Snoop, and Stott sauntered towards the Famous Five. The cads of the Remove were setting out for a quiet smoke and a game of banker in the Friardale Woods, which to Skinner & Co. was an ideal way of spending a half-holiday. They were not the slightest bit interested in Wharton's tuck, except perhaps to wish that Bunter "got away with it," which would be one up against "his magnificence," as Skinner was wont to call the captain of the Remove.

"What's that dingy rotter cackling about?" growled Johnny Bull as Skinner approached, with a supercilious smile on his crafty features.

Johnny Bull was dying to hit someone, and Skinner's face tempted him.

"Funny, isn't it, you men?" said Skinner, as he came within earshot of the Co. "His Magnificence has lost a bag of tuck. Fancy our high and mighty skipper being concerned about the loss of a little grub! Shockin', ain't it—Yoooooooooop!"

Harold Skinner had not meant to include that ejaculation in his remark; but really he had no chance to stifle it. Johnny Bull's boot was a hefty one, and it had caught Skinner on the seat of his trousers as he passed. The supercilious smile faded from Skinner's face on the instant.

"Have another, you cackling dummy?" asked Johnny Bull.

But Skinner had had enough. He walked on with his cronies at an increased pace.

In a state of great wrath, the Famous Five returned to their study. Already half an hour of the afternoon had been wasted.

Wharton made to swing the door open as he turned the handle, but although the handle moved, the door itself remained firmly wedged, with the result that Wharton scraped his nose on the panels.

"Yowp!" he gasped, caressing his damaged nasal organ. "The blessed door's jammed!"

"He, he, he!"

Harry Wharton & Co. started as that familiar cachinnation reached their ears.

"Bunter!"

"He's been here all the time!"

"He, he, he!" cackled Bunter, safe on the other side of the door.

"You fat rotter!" roared Wharton. "Open this door!"

"We'll skin you, you fat villain!" hissed Johnny Bull.

"I'll slaughter you!" exclaimed Bob Cherry ferociously.

"Open the door!"

In view of those threatening remarks it was not surprising that William George Bunter did not open the door of Study No. 1. The Owl of the Remove was several sorts of an idiot, but really he was not quite foolish enough to admit five wrathful juniors whose one aim in life at that moment was to be within punching distance of him. Bunter cackled afresh.

"Thought you'd leave me out of the picnic, did you? Mean, I call it! You fellows are sorry now, I fancy!"

"You awful rotter!" said Wharton.

"You shut up, Wharton!" said Bunter. "For two pins I'd come out and wipe up the floor with you!"

"Eh?"

"I've just about had enough of you and your airs and graces," continued Bunter, who was courage itself behind a locked door. "You swank too much!"

"Why—" began the captain of the Remove, almost overcome.

"And as for that milk-sop, Nugent," continued Bunter, with refreshing candour, "he ought to be at a girl's school!"

Frank Nugent crimsoned with rage. "I'll skin the hide off you!" he spluttered.

"Like to see you do it, you blessed funk!" said Bunter scornfully. "Why, I could lick you with one hand tied behind my back!"

"You—you—you—" Words failed Nugent.

"Is that soft idiot, Bull, there?" inquired Bunter.

There was a snort of wrath from Johnny Bull.

"Oh, you're there, are you?" said Bunter. "I say, why don't you get something done to your face—"

"There'll be something done to your face when I get within hitting distance of you, you fat barrel of lard!"

"That's enough of that, Bull!" exclaimed Bunter, who was thoroughly enjoying himself. "If I had a face like yours I'd wear a mask."

"Brrrrrr!"

"Bust the door in!" growled Bob Cherry.

"You keep quiet, Cherry!" said Bunter. "A fellow with feet like an elephant's ought to be seen, and not heard."

Bob Cherry blushed in confusion. He was well aware that his pedal extremities were on the generous side, but to be chipped about them by a fat freak like Billy Bunter was the limit.

"I'll burst you, you fat clam!" hissed Bob.

But as the door between Bunter and the Famous Five still remained locked that threat passed Bunter by like the idle wind.

"I will getfully get a crowbar from the esteemed and ridiculous Gosling," said Hurree Jamset Ram Singh. "Then the proper caper will be to force the ridiculous doorfulness."

"Yah!" snorted Bunter. "You're only a blessed nigger! Why they ever let you into Greyfriars beats me. Go back to your own half-witted pals in India!"

Hurree Singh's dusky face did not crimson, naturally, but it flushed at Bunter's insulting words.

"Don't take any notice of the silly idiot!" said Wharton. "He's only talking out of the back of his neck."

"Yah!" roared Bunter.

"Open the door!" bawled Bob Cherry.

"Go and fry your face!" was

Bunter's cheeky retort. "I say, these tarts are good!"

The Famous Five could have groaned. They were within arm's length, almost, of their tuck, and yet they were helpless to touch it. And inside the study Billy Bunter was going strong. Already he had consumed half a dozen eclairs, a sponge cake, three bars of chocolate, and eight jam tarts. Unless something was done, that cricket-bag full of tuck would be a thing of the past.

"Bust the door in!" advised Nugent.

Wharton shook his head.

"Can't be did," he said. "You fellows remember the lecture Quelch gave us last week about the studies being damaged? He'd be extra hot if he got to know that we'd busted the lock of ours."

"What's to be done, then?"

"Blessed if I know."

William George Bunter had heard these remarks, and his fat wits had been working. He knew that he was in for the ragging of his life once he fell into the hands of the enraged juniors. True, the prospect was not an immediate one, but it was in the very near future. Now that Bunter had had his money's worth, as it were, he was feeling apprehensive as to the consequences.

"I say, you fellows——"

"What do you want?"

"I tell you what I'll do," said Bunter. "I'm a generous chap. I'll overlook everything if you'll promise to take me with you on the picnic. There!"

It was uttered in such a magnanimous fashion that Harry Wharton & Co., despite their anger, felt almost inclined to laugh.

"Can it, Bunter!" growled Johnny Bull. "Open this door!"

"Only on condition that you make it pax and promise to take me with you on the picnic," said Bunter. "If you don't I'm not going to open this blessed door. Why should I, anyway? There's enough grub here to keep me going until bed-time."

Really, it was an astute way out that the Owl of the Remove had hit upon. Something like thirty shillings had been expended on the provisions the Co. had laid in for the picnic on Black Rock Island. To part with that sumptuous spread without putting up a fair fight for it did not appeal to Harry Wharton & Co. Yet what could they do? Bunter held the whip hand. Either the Famous Five gave in to his demands and shared the grub or stood outside the study whilst William George Bunter consumed it.

Hurree Singh drew Wharton on one side. There was a gleam in Inky's dusky face.

"What is it, old scout?" asked the captain of the Remove.

"Agree to what the esteemed and ridiculous Bunter says," whispered Inky.

"What?" asked Wharton in surprise. "Not likely! I——"

But Hurree Singh whispered a few words in the ear of the captain of the Remove which had the effect of bringing a smile to his face.

"Good for you, Inky!" he said quietly.

"I'm waiting for your answer!" Bunter's dulcet tones reached the Co. again. "If I open the door will you promise not to rag me for pinching—I mean, having a snack from the bag?"

"We promise!" said Wharton steadily, whereat surprised glances were bestowed upon him by Nugent, Bob Cherry, and Johnny Bull. But the leader of the Famous Five ~~sneaked~~

knowingly, and his chums waited for the next move.

"Honour bright?" asked Bunter.

"Honour bright!"

"Oh, good! I mean, you know which side your bread is buttered," squeaked Bunter. "You also promise to take me with you to the picnic?"

"We promise," replied the captain of the Remove. "Honour bright!"

"Oh, good!" Bunter felt a wave of relief sweep over him. He was about to open the study door when he called to mind all the charitable things he had said about Wharton and his chums.

"Look sharp, Bunter!" said Wharton impatiently. "We don't want to waste all the afternoon hanging about here."

"I say, Wharton," said Bunter, rather anxiously. "You promise not to rag me for—for calling you names? I mean for speaking my mind?"

"I promise!"

"And you're not going to cut up rusty, are you, Nugent?"

At a sign from Wharton and Inky, Nugent agreed that he was not going to cut up rusty.

"And that applies to Johnny Bull, Cherry, and that rotter—I mean, old Inky?" added William George Bunter cautiously.

"We promise," said those juniors, although it went against the grain to do so.

"Right!" said Bunter, in great relief, and he rolled across the study, turned the key in the lock, and scuttled back from the door.

Despite their assurances to the contrary, Bunter was afraid that the Famous Five might fall upon him and smite him hip and thigh. Really, it was surprising how Bunter's courage evaporated, once the key had been turned in the lock.

The Famous Five swarmed in. They were tempted to give Bunter the ragging of his life, but they remembered their promise in time, and satisfied the yearning to punch him by bestowing freezing glances on his podgy face. The Owl of the Remove did not mind that, however; freezing looks had about as much effect upon Bunter as water on a duck's back.

"Expect the fat worm's eaten half the tuck," said Bob Cherry.

"Oh, really Cherry——" began Bunter.

"Shut up!" hissed Bob. "We've promised not to punch you for calling us names and for bagging this tuck, but I didn't promise not to touch you for bagging me four from Quelch!"

"Oh!"

Bunter jumped back. He had quite forgotten how he had lured the chums of the Remove away in order to raid the tuck, but apparently his victims hadn't—at least, now that Bob had reminded them. They closed round in a warlike group, and the Owl of the Remove fairly wilted before their wrath.

"Cluck it, you fellows!" said Wharton. "No time for ragging Bunter now. I want to get off for the afternoon."

It was fortunate indeed for William George Bunter that nearly an hour had been wasted of that glorious afternoon, for any further delay would ruin the excursion to Black Rock Island. Certainly, the pleasant task of giving Bunter a record ragging could keep.

"Grab hold of that bag, Franky!" said Wharton. "I'll take the other handle. Ready? Off we go, then!"

The Famous Five moved off. Bunter, feeling quite safe now, rolled after

them, puffing and blowing like a grampus.

"I say, you fellows," he panted, as the juniors strode out along the cliff path to Pegg, "don't walk so fast, You're leaving me behind!"

"Jolly good job!" grunted Bob Cherry.

The Co. quickened their pace. They had agreed to take Bunter with them on the picnic, but, after all, it was up to Bunter to keep pace with them. And the Owl of the Remove was perspiring profusely when Pegg Harbour came in sight. It was only the thought of the glorious feed that was to come that stimulated Bunter's physical efforts, and when the Co. dumped the bag down by the water's edge and Wharton arranged with a boatman to hire a boat, William George Bunter was only a dozen yards behind them. Billy Bunter had made his bargain, and he meant to stick by it, but there was an unattractive side to his bargain which the fat and fatuous junior had overlooked in his greed and eagerness.

THE FOURTH CHAPTER.

Poetic Justice!

"JUMP in, Fatty!"

"Groooough!"

The Famous Five were in the boat, and Wharton and Nugent were getting out the oars, but Billy Bunter was still on the shore. Naturally, the members of the Co. had taken their places first. And it seemed the only available spot for Bunter to disport his carcass was in the narrow bows of the boat.

"I can't sit there!" howled Bunter peevishly.

"Sit on the shore, then," said Bob Cherry. "And wave good-bye to us."

"Beast!" hooted Bunter. "If you were a decent chap, Cherry, you'd give me your seat."

"Well, I'm not a decent chap," grinned Bob. "At any rate, I'm keeping my seat."

"What about you, Inky?"

"Nothing about me, my ridiculous Bunter."

"I say, Johnny, old chap, you might oblige a fellow," said Bunter, blinking at Johnny Bull.

"I'll oblige you with the business end of this boathook if you call me 'Johnny, old chap!'"

"Beast!"

Bunter glared through his spectacles at the grinning faces of the Co. Really, it was surprising, he considered, how selfish some people were. But there was no help for it. If Bunter wanted to accompany the juniors to Black Rock Island, the only place in the boat for him was up in the bows, in company with the wet and slimy kedgo anchor that reposed there.

"Are you coming or not?" demanded Wharton.

"I'm coming, old chap."

And Bunter came. His movements at any time were more representative of a baby elephant than of a ballet dancer. Yet in this instance he tried at least to emulate the latter. Poised on one foot, and that amongst a mass of wet rope curled up in the bow, Bunter wobbled and rocked like an acrobat, the difference being that Bunter's evolutions were unintentional.

"Put the other foot down, you fat dummy!" roared Bob Cherry. "You're rocking the boat."

"Groooough! I'm falling!"

"Steady, you clumsy idiot!" bawled

Johnny Bull. "You'll capsize the boat!"

Somehow or other Bunter managed to drag his other foot into the boat, and then he collapsed in the bows like a newly-landed fish.

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Harry Wharton & Co.

"Don't fall in, old lard barrel," grinned Bob Cherry, "or there'll be a tidal wave!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Beasts!"

Billy Bunter, looking very uncomfortable, wedged in the bows of the boat, glared savagely at his grinning companions. But Bunter's glares had little effect upon Harry Wharton & Co. The old boatman, who was enjoying the joke, signalled to the captain of the Remove, and then he ran the boat out into deeper water, a movement which made Bunter double up like a penknife.

"Beast!" he hooted. "You nearly pitched me out!"

"Shut up, Bunter!"

"You rotters—"

"Shut up, Bunter," roared Johnny Bull, "or I'll pitch you overboard!"

And there was such a grim expression on the face of Johnny Bull that Billy Bunter wisely shut up.

"Give way!" sang out Wharton at the oars.

"Ay, ay, skipper!" chuckled Nugent, and a moment later the boat was moving out to sea, pulled by two pairs of lusty arms.

The sun glinted and sparkled on the heaving waters of Pegg Bay, and a cloudless sky foretold the good weather that was to come. Away to starboard rose the sharp rocks that marked Black Point, a danger spot that had lured many a vessel to its doom. But Wharton and Nugent, at the oars, gave those treacherous, jutting rocks a clear berth. To the east of Black Point was Black Rock Island, rising out of the sea with increasing clearness as the Greyfriars boat neared it. A headland of rock from which the island gained its name loomed up, grey and majestic in the afternoon's sun. Over the headland a number of seagulls squawked and frolicked, whilst stunted trees reared their heads heavenwards as an occasional fitful breeze stirred their foliage.

"Topping, isn't it?" said Wharton, pausing for a moment to take in the scenery.

"Top-hole!"

"Spiffing!"

Bunter merely grunted.

The Owl of the Remove had no eye for the beauties of Nature. The object that demanded all his attention was the cricket bag laden with tuck.

"Put some beef into it, Wharton," called out the fat junior peevishly. "We're hardly moving."

"We're running into a cross-current here," said Wharton. "That's why the pace has slackened down."

"Rot!" sniffed Bunter. "Own up, you're tired,—played out!"

"You'll be thrown out, my fat pip-pin, if you don't stop that chinwag," said Bob Cherry ominously.

And once again William George Bunter relapsed into silence.

"Pull round to the east of the island," said Johnny Bull. "We get a good view of the Channel from that side."

"Right-ho!"

The course of the boat was changed a little, and the juniors at the oars pulled afresh. After another five minutes of rowing Johnny Bull and Bob Cherry took Wharton's and Nugent's place at the oars. Being fresh, Bob and Johnny fairly made the boat fly.

The island was rounded, and the boat

rocked to a fairly fast tide on the east side. From here the juniors caught a glorious view of the Channel, although the mainland was now shut off from sight.

A few wisps of smoke trailing across the sky bespoke the presence of tramp-steamers, but it was not that which arrested the attention of the juniors as they ran their boat in and hauled it high and dry on the sandy beach. It was the approach of a sailing vessel—a large sailing vessel—about two miles distant.

"Don't often see a sailing craft as hefty as that these days," remarked Johnny Bull, staring at the vessel.

"No fear!" said Bob Cherry, shading his eyes with his hands. "It's a schooner."

"You're right, Bob," assented Wharton. "A four-masted schooner!"

"I say, you fellows," squeaked Bunter, "never mind about the blessed schooner. What about tea?"

"Tea?"

"Yes, tea," snorted Bunter. "I'm jolly peckish!"

Harry Wharton laughed, and winked at his chums.

"There's no tea for you, old fat man," he declared firmly.

"Eh?" Bunter's eyes nearly goggled out of their sockets. "No tea?"

"Not for you, anyway."

Billy Bunter snorted with indignation.

"You rotters!" he roared. "You promised that you would take me with you and let me share in with the grub."

Wharton shook his head.

"Think again, old bean," he remarked. "We promised you that we'd take you with us on the picnic."

"I know. That's what I keep saying," hooted Bunter wrathfully.

"But we didn't say anything about sharing in the grub," said Wharton. "We've carried out our bargain. We've taken you with us on the picnic. You can watch us have tea, if you like."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The consternation in the Owl of the Remove's podgy face drew howls of laughter from the Removites.

"You awful rotters!" shrieked Bunter at last. "You swindling beasts! Nun-no tea! Oh, crikey!"

Bunter could have wept at the thought that he had accompanied the Famous Five only to be allowed to see them demolish the good things the cricket bag contained. That was the unattractive side of the bargain which, in his eagerness and greed, he had overlooked.

"And you spoofing rotters have dragged me all this way for nothing!" howled the fat junior, almost shaking with wrath and indignation.

"Just that, old fat man," said the captain of the Remove, with a grin. "You asked for it, you know."

"Oh dear!"

Bunter collapsed on the sands and gasped, and the vision of a first-class, top-hole spread began to fade from his mind like a beautiful dream. The Owl of the Remove had been hoist with his own petard, in a manner of speaking, but it afforded him little consolation—a matter over which Harry Wharton & Co. differed, for it afforded them considerable consolation and satisfaction.

THE FIFTH CHAPTER.

Adrift!

"BEASTS!"

Billy Bunter blinked and growled at the Famous Five, but Harry Wharton & Co. were in no way perturbed. In fact, now that they had "landed" Bunter on the

island his presence was almost forgotten. That he would have to amuse himself the best he could until it was time for the party to make a return to the mainland was obvious, for roughly five miles of sea lay between Black Rock Island and Pegg village.

"Make that mooring rope fast to a tree," sang out Wharton. "Then who's for a dip in the briny?"

"Good egg!"

The mooring rope was secured round the trunk of a near-by tree, an operation which Billy Bunter blinked at in great indignation. He had not yet recovered from the shock of the last few minutes.

"Look here, you rotters!" he exclaimed peevishly. "If there's no tea I'm going back!"

The Co. grinned.

"Good-bye, Bunter!"

"It's a fine swim to the village."

Billy Bunter snorted.

"I'm not swimming!"

"No?" inquired Wharton sarcastically.

"No!" bawled Bunter. "You beasts had better pull me back to Pegg!"

Harry Wharton & Co. roared.

"I can see us doing that, old fat frog," chuckled Bob Cherry, divesting himself of his clothes.

"Rotters!" Billy Bunter scrambled to his feet and shook a podgy fist at the grinning Removites. "I'm going to take the boat back myself!"

But Harry Wharton & Co. had no intention of allowing Billy Bunter to do that.

"Hands off that boat, fatty!" exclaimed Wharton, as the fat junior rolled to the tree which served as a mooring for the boat and began fumbling with the rope.

"Oh, really, Wharton—"

"And the grub," called out Johnny Bull, as an afterthought.

"Oh, really, Bull—"

"Don't worry about the grub," said Nugent cheerily, "I've locked the bag. Even Bunter couldn't open it short of using a cold chisel."

Bunter's fat face fell. At the back of his podgy mind was the hope that he could help himself to the good things the bag contained whilst the Removites were disporting themselves in the sea. But, apparently, Nugent had anticipated him, so to speak. That cricket bag was locked, and Bunter's hopes were dashed to the ground.

"Why don't you have a dip, old bean?" asked Bob Cherry. "You haven't had a wash this term."

"Oh, really, Cherry—"

Billy Bunter was not particularly enamoured of water. Indeed his ablutions were of the scantiest. His face was a picture of wrath as he watched the Famous Five getting into their bathing costumes.

"Ready?" sang out Wharton.

"Aye, aye!"

In a laughing, cheery group the Co. lined up for their dash into the briny.

"I say!" ejaculated Nugent suddenly. "That schooner is bearing right down on the island."

"So it is!"

The four-masted schooner was much nearer now, sailing in a direct line towards the island. It carried full sail, but even at the distance there was something peculiar about the general aspect of the craft.

"That boat gives me the creeps," said Nugent, eyeing the oncoming vessel with intent gaze. "There's something eerie about it."

"Eh?"

"Don't be a silly ass!"

Nugent crimsoned.

"I've got a premonition, or something



"Are you coming in or not?" demanded Harry Wharton. "I'm coming, old chap!" Poised on one foot, Billy Bunter wobbled and rocked like an acrobat. "Put the other foot down, you fat dummy!" roared Bob Cherry. "You're rocking the boat!" "Groooogh!" wailed Bunter. "I'm falling!" (See Chapter 4.)

or other," he confessed. "That schooner is—well, I don't know, queer. Why, there's not a sign of a living soul aboard."

The Co. gazed hard at the schooner, and even Johnny Bull, most sceptical of juniors, grunted in amazement.

"There's no one on deck, at any rate."

"Perhaps the skipper's lashed the tiller while he takes a nap," said Bob Cherry, with a grin.

"Look at the topsail," said Nugent, pointing. "Unless n.y. eyes are playing me tricks it's broken away."

"You're right, Franky," said Wharton at length. "The topsail is adrift."

"Queer!" muttered Bob Cherry. "Blessed if I can understand it. Blow it, let's have our dip."

"Come on, then!"

The juniors ran down the sandy beach, and, in the thrill of plunging their healthy bodies in the cold seawater, the schooner was for the nonce forgotten.

"Race you to the headland," called out Bob Cherry, striking out with great vim.

"That's a go!"

A challenge was always accepted by any member of the Famous Five, and in a few moments the Co., swimming strongly, were a hundred yards or more away from the spot where they had plunged in.

Billy Bunter sat with his back to a tree, a lugubrious expression on his podgy face. He watched them until they were almost out of sight. Then he rolled to his feet and made his way over to the boat. His piggy little eyes glistened as he beheld the locked cricket bag in the stern of the vessel.

"Rotters!" he muttered savagely.

"Fancy locking the bag. Just as if they couldn't trust a fellow. Suspicious beasts!"

He plumped his considerable figure down on one of the stern seats and eyed the cricket bag wolfishly. Then he began to fumble with the lock. For at least ten minutes he wrenched and pulled and pulled and wrenched. But the lock held, and in disgust the Owl of the Remove gave it up.

"This is awful!"

Bunter was suffering the tortures of the damned as he eyed that bag of good things, and with every passing minute his wrath grew and grew until it had almost reached boiling point.

Suddenly he chuckled. A brainwave had pierced Bunter's podgy intellect. At least, he considered it a brainwave.

"I'll take the boat back myself," he muttered. "I'll show the rotters."

Having come to that decision Billy Bunter rolled out of the boat to the tree around which the mooring rope was fastened. For five minutes the fat junior's clumsy fingers were busy. At the end of that time the mooring rope was free. Rolling up the loose rope in a coil, Bunter dumped it in the bows of the boat, and then began to drag the boat down to the water's edge.

Bunter's amiable intention was to pull back to the village of Pegg, and make off with the cricket bag. That Harry Wharton & Co. wouldn't be able to get back to the mainland without their boat never occurred to Bunter at the time, Bunter seldom being concerned with anyone else in the world but William George Bunter. Once on the mainland Bunter was certain that he would find a means of breaking open the lock that baffled him.

Grunting and perspiring freely from his exertions the fat junior shoved the boat into deep water and clambered in, well-nigh capsizing the craft as he did so. Then he seized the oars and began to row. What Bunter didn't know about rowing would have filled volumes. Certainly the splashing he made suggested that there was ample room for his improvement as an oarsman.

For five minutes Bunter lugged and pulled and splashed with the oars. Then his fat face fell. Instead of rounding the island and thence to the mainland, the course Bunter was taking was sending him out to sea.

"Oh crumbs!" Bunter glanced over his shoulder and saw the long stretch of Channel water. In front of him, half-right, was Black Rock Island. In front of him also, beyond Black Rock, was the village of Pegg. Far from making the village of Pegg Bunter was drifting away from it.

"Oh dear!"

The fat Owl of the Remove was thoroughly alarmed now. Even Black Rock Island was over two hundred yards distant. He tried to turn the boat's nose in an endeavour to pull back to the island, but the boat was in the grip of cross-currents and Bunter's efforts were abortive.

Shivering like a jelly, Bunter rested on his oars. Behind him loomed up the shape of the four-masted schooner. The big sailing vessel seemed to be at a standstill now, and Bunter vaguely wondered why it was that the sails were still set if the schooner was indeed at anchor. But that thought was only transitory; Bunter was more concerned about his own craft. He turned in his

seat, and, shading his eyes with his hands, blinked back towards Black Rock Island. It lay three hundred yards or more astern. As Bunter blinked he made out the bobbing heads of Harry Wharton & Co., who were doubtless returning from their race to the headland for a rub down and tea.

"Oh crumbs!" breathed Bunter fearfully, and then he gave voice to a piercing howl, for while he had been shading his eyes with one hand an oar had slipped its rowlocks and was floating away on a wave well out of Bunter's reach.

In those dangerous waters only an experienced oarsman could have managed his craft, and that, of course, with two oars. What chance Bunter stood of controlling the boat was quickly made known to him as, with one oar, he vainly tried to turn the nose of the boat. Bunter's fat heart was beating like a steam-hammer against his ribs. He was really frightened now. Thoroughly out of control, the boat was drifting towards the schooner, absolutely at the mercy of the waves.

"Help!" shrieked Bunter.

But a fitful gust of wind caught up the yell and dissipated it. Certainly it never reached the ears of Harry Wharton & Co., as Bunter intended.

Nearer and nearer the schooner drifted the rowing-boat, Bunter huddled up on his seat, terrified out of his fat wits. At that moment he wished from the bottom of his heart that he had not taken the boat, that he had cast out all thoughts of the bag of tuck from his mind. But, as was usual with the fat and fatuous Owl of the Remove, repentance came too late.

He began to whimper. A fearful glance over his shoulder told him that the boat was practically certain to collide with the schooner.

"Help!"

Bunter's piercing yell rang over the water; but it attracted the attention of no one on board the schooner, whereat Bunter's terror increased. He waggled the single oar in frantic haste, but his puny efforts made scant difference to the course the boat was taking. If anything, they served to set him in a direct line with the schooner.

"Help!" In a thorough panic, Bunter dropped the remaining oar, and, with increasing horror, saw it slip out of the rowlock and drift away.

"Help!" Bunter eyed the schooner, only twenty yards distant now, with beseeching gaze. Surely his cries had been heard on board? Why didn't someone appear on deck?

But there was no sign of life on board the schooner, Bunter could see that. The sails were flapping gently in the wind, but the hull of the schooner did not appear to move an inch.

Then it dawned on Bunter's fat wits that the schooner must have run aground. In that Billy Bunter was right. As the small rowing-boat drew nearer, the Owl of the Remove could hear the creaking of the tackle as the sails, filling out to the wind, strained and tugged. But the nose of the schooner was buried deep in a sandbank.

"Wow!" gasped Bunter. His boat was only ten yards distant now. A collision was inevitable; and as that terrible truth dawned in on his mind Bunter lost complete control of himself.

He couldn't swim, although in the Remove he boasted that he was the finest swimmer at Greyfriars. Now he wished that he could swim. But it was too late.

Two yards away!

"Help!" shrieked Bunter.

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Still there was no sign of life on board the schooner. Another wave would carry the rowing-boat full into the bows of the schooner. It was a matter of seconds now. Bunter shut his eyes and groaned.

Crash!

The rowing-boat smashed against the hull of the schooner. There was a splintering and rending of wood. Next moment Bunter felt the cold sea water surging in the boat.

"Oh dear!"

He opened his eyes and blinked. The rowing-boat was leaking. Two planks had been stove in by that collision, and the water was pouring in at a great rate. With wildly-beating heart, Bunter blinked about him. He found himself directly under the bowsprit of the schooner. A trailing rope dangled a foot away from him, and, with despairing energy, the fat junior clutched at the rope and held on for dear life.

He was only just in time. The rowing-boat filled with water and sank under his very feet in a gurgle of hissing water. And Bunter, like a fat monkey on a stick, peered down at the swirling water a foot below him, and then at the deck of the schooner thirty feet above him.

"Oh dear!"

Bunter groaned aloud. He couldn't remain at the end of that friendly rope indefinitely, he knew. The only other alternative was to climb. Never an athlete, recollection of Bunter's frantic efforts for the next ten minutes were likely to stay in his fat mind for all time. More than once his podgy fingers lost their hold and he came within an ace of falling into the sea; but his luck held good, and at last, panting and puffing, he curled a fat leg round the base of the bowsprit and wriggled on to the deck of the schooner.

Then he collapsed in a heap, whacked to the wide, in a faint.

THE SIXTH CHAPTER.

Missing!

"PUT a spurt on, Harry!"

Bob Cherry sang out that encouraging advice as the Famous Five neared the headland. Until then Bob had held the lead, but the pace he had set himself was too much, and he had been compelled to ease up. Wharton, swimming strongly, had passed him, two yards ahead of Hurree Janset Ram Singh.

The dusky Nabob of Bhanipur was thoroughly at home in the water, and the rest of the Co. saw that it was going to be a tight finish between him and the captain of the Remove. Johnny Bull, Nugent, and Bob Cherry were taking it easy now, content to watch the finish of the race.

"Go it, Inky!" roared Johnny Bull.

"Stick it, Harry!" called out Nugent.

Inky and Harry Wharton were both "going it" and "sticking it." The latter put on a terrific spurt, which Inky tried hard to beat; but the captain of the Remove reached the agreed-upon winning-post a clear yard ahead of his dusky chum.

"Bravo, my esteemed chum!" panted Hurree Janset Ram Singh, as he trod water. "The ridiculous spurtfulness was too terrific for me."

Wharton grinned.

"Wasn't much in it, old scout," he said consolingly. "Let's take it easy going back, and then tea."

"The tealfulness is the proper caper, my worthy chum," said Inky, with a dusky smile.

The two juniors turned and rejoined Bob Cherry, Nugent, and Johnny Bull.

"Take it easy going back," said Wharton.

"What-ho!"

The Famous Five, looking the picture of health and good spirits, swam back to their starting-place.

"Hallo, hallo, hallo!" bawled Bob Cherry, as he trod on the firm sand.

"Where's Bunter?"

Then Wharton gave a start.

"Where's the boat?"

"Oh crumbs!"

There was no sign of the boat, neither was there sign of William George Bunter.

The Co. blinked and rubbed their eyes. They had left the Owl of the Remove sitting, with his back to a tree, a few yards away from where they had moored their boat.

"I suppose this is the spot we started from?" said Bob Cherry.

"Of course it is!" said Wharton, with a frown. "There are our clothes."

It was the right spot, for a heap of clothes belonging to the Famous Five were still in the same place where they had been dumped when the juniors had stripped.

"Well, I'm blessed!"

The Famous Five clambored up the beach in dismay.

"Bunter!" roared Wharton; and the rest of the Co. took up the shout: "BUNTER!"

Their voices echoed and re-echoed over the island. Certainly if William George Bunter was within earshot he could not possibly have failed to hear that stentorian yell. But there came no answering hail.

"Where's the silly ass got to?" grumbled Nugent.

"Blessed if I know!" grunted the captain of the Remove. "Surely the silly duffer hasn't tried to get back to the mainland on his own?"

"Oh, my hat!"

The thought of the Owl of the Remove trying to row back to Pegg gave the juniors quite a turn, for they knew what a clumsy and inexperienced oarsman the fat Removeite was.

"The silly chump will get drowned!" said Wharton anxiously. "He couldn't row back to Pegg on his own."

The juniors were silent, and their faces grew grave.

"Perhaps he's hidden the boat for a lark," said Nugent, but there was not much conviction in his tones.

"Let's hunt round!" said Wharton. "I'm growing uneasy about the fat fool!"

The juniors scattered and began a frantic search of the island, calling out Bunter's name at intervals. But they came across no sign of the fat Removeite, and they were forced to the conclusion that he had attempted to row back to Pegg on his own.

Wharton climbed the highest tree on the island and gazed towards Pegg Bay. Several craft were in sight, most of them small sailing dinghys, and the few rowing-boats certainly did not hold a passenger who could be possibly taken for William George Bunter.

"He's not in sight!" called out the captain of the Remove from his lofty perch.

"Look the other way," said Bob Cherry. "Perhaps the cross-currents have taken him out to sea."

"Oh dear!"

The juniors shivered at Bob's words. What would happen? What might have happened to their fat companion if he had drifted out to sea they shuddered to think.

THE SEVENTH CHAPTER.

Pedro Montana!

Wharton looked out to sea.

"There's no sign of him," he said. "That schooner is the only craft in sight, and she seems to have run aground on a sandbank."

"Blow the schooner!" growled Bob Cherry. "The thing is—where's Bunter?"

The juniors were silent. Where, indeed, was Bunter?

Harry Wharton shinned down the tree and rejoined his chums. The captain of the *Remove* was looking anxious and alarmed.

"I wonder what's become of the silly ass?" he said.

His chums shook their heads gloomily. Dread thoughts were running through their minds, but they were reluctant to voice them aloud.

"Let's make another search," said Harry Wharton. "Perhaps the silly ass has pulled the boat into a small cove to give us a scare."

"I'll jolly well give him a scare if that's the case!" growled Johnny Bull, with scowling face. "A joke's a joke, but this is a bit too thick!"

The juniors nodded. If Bunter was indeed lying doggo, it was high time he showed himself.

"Bunter!"

Once again the five juniors tramped the island, calling out for their fat companion. But when they met again not one of the Co. had anything to report except failure.

William George Bunter and the boat had disappeared just as thoroughly as if the sea had swallowed them up, which, as applied to the boat, was the exact truth.

With anxious faces the Famous Five gathered on the sandy strip of beach and gazed out to sea. Of their own plight they had as yet not given a thought. That they were cast away on an island five miles away from the mainland had not occurred to them, for their one concern was for the safety of William George Bunter.

Suddenly a cry, faint but yet familiar, rang across the water from the direction of the schooner.

"Help!"

Harry Wharton & Co. started, and their combined gaze was fixed on the schooner still with all sail set, which had jammed upon the sandbank.

"Help!"

Once again the cry rang out.

"That's Bunter's voice!" exclaimed Harry Wharton excitedly.

"Bunter's for a pound!" agreed Nugent, who was equally excited.

"Help!"

"That's Bunter's fat yelp," said Bob Cherry confidently. "I'd know it anywhere!"

The juniors strained their eyes towards the schooner. They could make out a fat figure in the bows of the vessel, which undoubtedly was Billy Bunter. What he was doing on board the schooner was a mystery to them. But that he needed help was obvious, for he was waving his arms and yelling at the top of his voice.

"Come on, you chaps!" said Wharton grimly. "I don't profess to know what's wrong, but we'd better swim out to the schooner."

"The swimoutfulness is the proper caper," purred Hurree Jamset Ram Singh.

A moment more and the Famous Five were splashing into the sea; the next, and five sturdy juniors were swimming strongly towards the grounded schooner, in the bows of which Billy Bunter still continued to wave his arms frantically and to yell for help.

"Oh dear!"

Billy Bunter blinked and then stared round him in amazement. For the moment he wondered where he was as he saw the deck of the schooner stretching before him, the flapping sails overhead, and heard the creaking and rattling of the tackle. And then in a flash recollection came back.

Bunter shivered.

He knew he must have fainted. Scrambling to his feet, he peered over the side of the schooner. The waves lapped idly against her hull, and her nose remained buried in the sandbank.

A creepy sensation came over Billy Bunter as he peered about him. The schooner appeared to be deserted. Certainly not a sign of life was there aboard her.

Away on the starboard quarter was Black Rock Island. Beyond the island was the mainland, almost obscured in the haze that hung like a pall over the sea.

"Oh dear!"

With fast-beating heart the Owl of the *Remove* rolled along the deck. Then he jumped as he saw a figure huddled against the bulwarks.

"I say," began Bunter, "can you—"

His words ended in a shriek, for even Bunter, short-sighted as he was, could see that the figure before him was lifeless. It was propped up against the bulwarks in a heap. With goggling eyes Bunter stared fascinatedly at the pale face, at the crimson patch which stood out from under the peaked cap.

"Dead!"

Bunter breathed the word in a hushed whisper. Then he backed away from the gruesome figure in horror, his breath coming short and fast, his eyes dilating.

But a fresh surprise awaited him, for as he moved along the deck, the fat junior saw four more lifeless figures stretched out in various attitudes.

"Oh lor'!"

In a state of panic Billy Bunter rushed to the bows of the vessel and blinked over the side. At that moment the fat *Removite* would have given everything he possessed in the world to be able to swim—anything to get away from that frightful scene of death and desolation.

But Bunter couldn't swim. The thought of being left alone on that terrible deck, with its five corpses staring at him with unseeing eyes, nearly sent Bunter out of his senses.

"Help!"

The fat junior's voice rose in a shriek as he stood at the bows of the schooner and frantically waved his arms in the direction of the island. Dimly he could see Harry Wharton & Co. moving about the island, but as yet they had not heard his cries.

"Help! Help!" roared Bunter.

"Help!"

With straining eyes he made out the figures of Harry Wharton & Co. standing on the beach.

Bunter waved his arms backwards and forwards in a frantic endeavour to attract attention.

He saw Harry Wharton & Co. turn and look in his direction, saw them spring down the beach and plunge into the sea, and then for the second time in ten minutes William George Bunter fainted.

There was the rattle of a sliding door from the stern of the schooner, then an evil-looking face, with eyes that glowed like live coals, peered over a hatchway.

Slowly the head was raised, revealing a tousled mop of black hair, a grimy face with a livid scar running down one cheek, and a mouth that parted in a snarl over dirty, broken teeth.

Next moment, with scarcely a sound, the full figure came into view. It was that of a Spaniard, clad in dirty dungarees and a patched blue shirt. A greasy red handkerchief swathed a lean neck, and a long sash stained with grime and grease encircled the waist; and from that sash peeped the butt of a revolver and a long, curving knife with an ivory handle.

"Carambo!"

The Spaniard hissed the word in a sibilant whisper as he drew himself out of the hatchway and peered cautiously about him.

"I heard something!"

With lips drawn back like unto a snarling dog, the Spaniard drew the long knife from his sash and trod cautiously along the deck. He chuckled evilly to himself as he came abreast of the four inanimate figures sprawling on the weather-stained deck boards, and spurned the nearest one with his foot.

"Maledictos!" he muttered. "How they sleep!"

With all the caution of a hunted man the Spaniard moved along the long deck of the schooner, his black eyes peering to right and left.

"Aground!" he muttered, noting how the tide swirled round the hull of the stationary schooner. "Carambo! And yet land is in sight!"

He chuckled softly and continued his reconnoitring. Then, with a sharp intake of breath, he saw the huddled figure of William George Bunter.

In a moment the Spaniard had dodged as silently as a ghost behind one of the masts. His glittering eyes fastened on that still form of the *Remove* junior savagely.

"Carambo! A boy! Then those cries I heard in my sleep were not imagination!"

For the space of a few seconds he stood watching the fat figure of Billy Bunter, like a cat watching a mouse.

"He no move! A boy!"

With an unearthly chuckle the Spaniard left his place of concealment and crept towards the bows. Knife in hand, he reached the inanimate form of Billy Bunter and stood staring down at him intently.

"He faint!" muttered the Spaniard, noting Bunter's white face and also his chest rising and falling as he breathed.

"He yell for help!"

Taking his eyes from Billy Bunter, the Spaniard stared fiercely out to sea, evidently to discover to whom the fat junior had been shouting. But, keen as his gaze was, the Spaniard saw nothing except Black Rock Island and away in the distance the dim outline of the mainland. Certainly he did not observe the bobbing heads of the Famous Five as they swam vigorously towards the schooner.

"Carambo! Ah!"

The Spaniard made a quick movement with his knife as Billy Bunter's eyes flickered open.

The fat *Removite* in his waking consciousness saw that dreadful face peering into his, saw the sun glinting on the long, curved blade of the knife, and wondered whether he was experiencing a nightmare.

"Carambo! You come cheat me? Pig!"

Bunter's eyes dilated in horror. It was no nightmare. The dirty, ferocious figure bending over him was real—terribly real.

He blinked up at the leering face of the Spaniard, with gaping jaw and horrified eyes.

"D-don't!" howled Bunter, as the knife began to move. "S-spare me! Help! Help!"

"Pig of a dog! Carambo! Am I to be cheated by a boy?"

The knife moved nearer, and Bunter, whose head was in a whirl, felt that his last moment had come.

Crash!

A tackle block, swinging at the end of a rope, whizzed past. It missed the Spaniard by a matter of inches, but it caught Bunter a stunning blow over the head. The fat junior crumpled up like a log and lay still. A big bruise already was beginning to stand out on his podgy forehead.

"Ah!"

The Spaniard chuckled evilly to himself as he stared at the unconscious junior, and then he stiffened as a boyish voice reached his ears:

"Bunter! We're coming!"

"Carambo!"

The Spaniard dropped on all fours and peered cautiously over the bows of the schooner. About thirty yards away from the vessel he could see five swimmers; another few moments and they would be aboard the schooner, for it was obvious to the Spaniard that it was to these swimmers that Bunter had been calling for help.

"Carambo!"

The Spaniard watched the oncoming swimmers with a savage face. A strange maniacal light glowed in his black eyes, and a cunning leer formed round his mouth. At that moment he looked more like a wild animal than a human being.

With scarcely a sound he dropped to the deck and began to pull the unconscious junior along to the nearest hatchway. Arriving there, he dumped the fat junior unceremoniously through the hatch, followed him through, and then with a surprising strength lifted Bunter as if he were a baby, and made his way amidships.

Below the deck the air was thick and heavy, and a worse state of desolation reigned. Coils of rope, buckets, and tackle, were littered about, and pools of bilge water were everywhere in evidence.

Muttering to himself, the Spaniard carried his burden through the schooner until he reached the holds aft. Into one of these, dark as a dungeon and evil-smelling, he dumped Billy Bunter, having first hastily secured his wrists and ankles together, and wedged a dirty handkerchief into his mouth to serve as a gag.

The door of the hold was shut and the Spaniard, knife in hand, stood waiting in the gloom for the arrival of the five swimmers. He had not long to wait.

THE EIGHTH CHAPTER.

In the Hands of a Madman!

"BUNTER!"

Harry Wharton yelled the name as he and his chums swam under the tapering bowsprit of the schooner.

"Bunter! Bunter! Where are you, fatty?" roared Bob Cherry.

But the only sound that came to the five juniors was that of their own voices and the gentle murmur of the sea.

"Where's the silly ass got to?" said Wharton testily.

"Blessed if I know," grunted Johnny Bull. "And where's the crew of this schooner got to?" he added.

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"Schooner ahoy!" bellowed Bob Cherry.

But there was no sign of life on board.

"That's rummy," said Wharton, treading water and scanning the rakish-looking craft critically. "There doesn't seem to be a soul on board."

"That's impossible," said Nugent. "If they won't answer our hail let's climb aboard without waiting to be asked."

In the circumstances that seemed to be the only thing to do.

"There's a trailing rope here," said Wharton, indicating the rope which had served Bunter earlier. "Come on, you chaps."

The captain of the Remove hauled himself out of the water and began to swarm up the rope like a monkey. His chums followed him. In five minutes all of them were on the deck of the schooner.

"I say, what's wrong with this ship?" said Nugent, staring about him uneasily.

"Where's—where's everyone?"

"Blessed if I know," grunted Johnny Bull. "And why is she carrying full sail when she's run aground; that's only serving to drive her deeper into the sandbank."

"Ask me another," said Wharton slowly. "Let's give a hail!"

"Ahoy! Ahoy!"

Five lusty voices rang out in full blast, and their combined volume would have awakened the celebrated seven sleepers. But despite that, no one appeared on deck.

The juniors stared at each other in amazement.

"Where's Bunter, anyway?" said Wharton, with knitted brows. "He must be here. Why doesn't he show himself?"

The chums of the Remove shook their heads. At the moment they couldn't make head nor tail of the whole business. Here was a schooner, with full sail set, hard aground. That, in itself, suggested that something was wrong. But where were the crew of the vessel? And where was Billy Bunter?

"There's something fishy about this ship," said Nugent. "You chaps remember I told you I had a premonition that there was something wrong."

Nugent's companions nodded. Of the whole party, Nugent was perhaps the most sensitive and imaginative, traits which had earned him an amount of good-natured chipping. But it seemed here that Nugent was right.

Something was wrong, decidedly wrong.

In a silent group the five juniors moved forward, noting with growing wonder the state of delapidation the vessel was in, the loose blocks and tackle, the dirty decks, and the general air of desolation.

"Oh, Heavens!"

It was Wharton who first sighted the dead figure propped up against the bulwarks. He drew back, his face blanched in horror.

"Look at that, you chaps!"

The juniors looked, and their faces paled. The man in the peak cap was dead, there was no doubt about it. And following closely upon that initial discovery, Bob Cherry sighted the other four corpses.

"Five of them," muttered Wharton. "What treachery has been going on aboard this ship?"

"Heaven alone knows," murmured Nugent. "These poor chaps have been dead some time, too."

Wharton nodded.

"But how has this ship reached here?" he asked. "If there's no one aboard, how on earth—"

"Must have drifted," said Johnny Bull. "That's why all sail is set even though the blessed thing's run aground. No one to manage her. Might have been drifting about the seas for weeks like this—"

"But that's rot," said Bob Cherry, "a ship this size wouldn't last a day without a crew to handle her."

Johnny Bull smiled grimly.

"There's more than one case on record where the entire crew of a ship has been stricken down with scurvy and yet, by some strange chance and freak of nature, the ship has drifted into a port thousands of miles away with scarcely any damage to it."

Nugent whistled.

"That's a bit steep, old scout," he said softly.

"Not a bit," replied Johnny Bull. "In the case I came across the captain's log told its own tale. Every member of the crew was down with scurvy, the captain himself was also in its grip. That was off the coast of Australia, and yet his ship drifted into a French port five or six months later."

Whether that story was true or not mattered little to the Greyfriars juniors. Their chief concern was to find Bunter, and then to put as much distance between themselves and the tragico schooner as was possible.

"Bunter! Bunter! Where are you, Bunter?"

Harry Wharton & Co. awoke the echoes with their yells. Still there was no sign of Bunter.

"I suppose the silly ass hasn't fallen overboard?" muttered Wharton anxiously. "This ship is beginning to get on my nerves."

"Same here," said Bob Cherry. "There's been some frightful business going on."

He shuddered.

"Let's explore the cabins," suggested Wharton. "Perhaps the fat duffer has found a cosy spot and fallen asleep."

"Not likely," said Nugent, shaking his head. "Keep together, you chaps."

In silence the five juniors made their way to the companion-way. A black void was all that greeted their gaze. Wharton, who was in the lead, paused.

"Careful down these steps," he muttered. "Wish we'd got some matches."

He began to descend the wooden stairs, his heart beating rapidly, his nerves taut. Behind him came the rest of the Co. equally strung up. The juniors winced as the stuffy, offensive atmosphere of the place assailed their nostrils, as they gingerly felt their way along.

Very little light percolated the well of the ship, for all the hatches were on and the portholes were closed, their thick plate glass grimed with thick layers of salt and dirt.

"Steady," whispered Wharton. "We are in a cabin of some sort. Might find a light here, if we're lucky."

Slam!

Nugent, who was the last one of the party, jumped as a movement came from behind him. In the gloom he saw the shadowy figure of a man. Next minute the figure was blotted out as the door of the cabin was slammed home.

"What's that?" gasped Wharton.

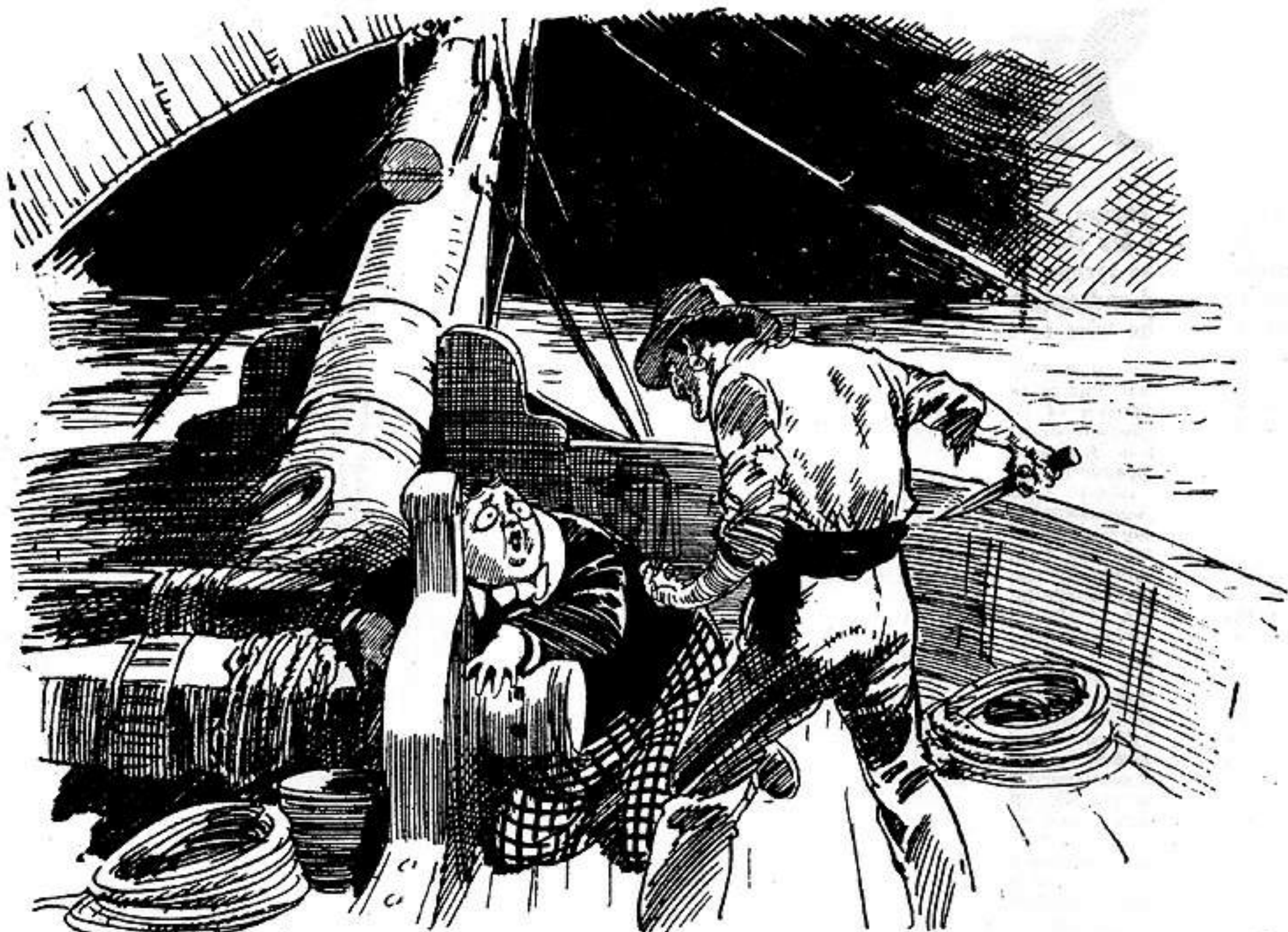
Nugent licked his dry lips.

"Someone's locked us in," he said. "I saw somebody in the darkness, and then the door was slammed to."

"Oh, rot!" said Johnny Bull, in an attempt to comfort Nugent. "I expect the door swung to of its own. You imagined the rest."

"I tell you I didn't," said Nugent.

Johnny Bull moved to him and tried



"Carambo! Ah!" The Spaniard made a quick movement with his knife as Billy Bunter's eyes flickered open. In his waking consciousness, the fat Removite saw that dreadful face peering into his, saw the long blade and shivered. "Carambo! You come cheat me? Fig!" (See Chapter 7.)

to open the door of the cabin. But it resisted his efforts. The door was firmly jammed.

"Here's a go!" muttered Wharton. "I say, Bob, let's see if we can get these portholes open."

"Right-ho!"

On one side of the cabin was a row of portholes, seven in number, through which a weak light filtered. The moment those portholes were opened the cabin became flooded with the afternoon's sunlight. The juniors were temporarily blinded by the glare after the darkness, but when their eyes became accustomed to it they looked about them with interest.

It was a spacious cabin they were in, about eight feet square. In the centre was a table bolted to the floor. On it were two cups and saucers half filled with some liquor that once might have been tea. At the far end of the cabin were two bunks, but it was the general untidiness of the cabin that struck the juniors most. Lockers had been emptied of their contents, for the floor was littered with papers and nautical instruments. The panelled walls had been ruthlessly slashed with a hatchet or similar weapon, great weals being visible on every panel. Some of the panels, indeed, had been wrenched completely away.

"What a story this cabin could tell," said Wharton, as he peered round. "I say, Bob," he added in a note of horror, "look at those bunks!"

"Oh, Heavens!"

The juniors looked towards the bunks. Bedclothes were tossed above over them in untidy heaps, and under the bedclothes, lying still and deathlike, were two figures. In horrified silence the Removites gazed down at the gruesome

sight. There was no visible sign of a wound on either of the still forms to suggest how they had come by their end. But the glance Wharton gave the half-emptied cups on the table suggested a possible theory of poisoning.

"Poor beggars!" he muttered.

The juniors drew back in horrified silence and eyed each other in alarm. Then they jumped as an unknown voice broke in upon their thoughts.

"Ha, ha, ha! So you see sleepers? Carambo! So sleep all who cross Pedro Montana's path!"

Harry Wharton & Co. wheeled sharply as that foreign voice smote their ears. Then they jumped as they saw an evil-looking face leering at them through a small panel high up in the wall of the cabin.

"Who are you, you scoundrel?" said Harry Wharton. "What does all this mean?"

"It means that Pedro Montana be a rich man some day," said the Spaniard in lisping accents. "But you boys interrupt. You are my prisoners!"

"Are we, you rotter?" growled Johnny Bull. "We'll see about that! Where's Bunter?"

The Spaniard smiled and then chuckled horribly.

"Beeg fat boy, yes? Oh, he safe!"

"You scoundrel!" snapped Harry Wharton. "If you've harmed a hair of his head you'll pay dearly for it! Where is he?"

"That is the business of Pedro Montana," came the sibilant reply. "But I waste time. You," he added, pointing a grimy finger at Bob Cherry—"you will favour me by securing your friends with this rope."

Through the panel came whizzing

several pieces of rope. They fell at Bob Cherry's feet.

"Do you think I'm going to tie up my friends, you scoundrel?" demanded Bob warmly. "You think again, old bean."

A nasty expression flitted across the Spaniard's dusky face.

"I don't think, I know," he answered. "I give you five minutes to secure all your friends."

"Go and eat coke!" said Bob stoutly.

"You refuse?"

"Of course!"

The Spaniard's eyes glittered with rage. To the horror of Bob's chums the scoundrel brought into view a revolver.

"You refuse," he lisped. "Very well. I will not kill you this time, but to show you that my aim is good I will send a bullet within an inch of your foot."

"Stop!" called out Harry Wharton; but even as he spoke the revolver rang out.

Crack!

Bob Cherry paled as he felt the whistle of the bullet, then he glanced at his feet. No more than an inch from where he stood there was a hole in the flooring; the Spaniard had kept his word.

"You see, my young friend," he lisped, "I can shoot. Should you refuse to obey, then I will shoot you to death by inches."

Bob Cherry set his lips firmly.

"Do your worst, you yellow scoundrel!"

Again the revolver was raised, but Harry Wharton stepped forward and seized Bob by the arm.

"Don't be a fool, Bob," he said

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(Continued from page 13.)

hastily. "The rotter's got the whip-hand. Do as he says."

The Spaniard laughed harshly.

"You advise well," he said, "if you would have your lives. I am waiting!"

Much against his will Bob proceeded to bind his chums' ankles and wrists together.

"See that they are made secure, my young friend," lisped the Spaniard, "or it will go hard with you."

Bob Cherry did not reply. He gave his chums appealing glances and obeyed the Spaniard's order. When Nugent, the last one of the party, had been bound, the panel in the wall closed to and the face of the Spaniard disappeared. Three minutes later the door of the cabin was opened and Pedro Montana peered into the room, a savage grin on his grimy, dusky face.

"You do well," he said, eyeing his prisoners with a gloating smile. "You are— Ah, would you, my young friend?"

For Bob, driven to desperation, had launched himself at the man. A stinging right that would have felled him to the floor of the cabin had it landed whizzed past the Spaniard's chin, missing him by the fraction of an inch. Next moment, to the horror of Bob's chums, the Spaniard reversed his revolver and dealt Bob Cherry a stinging blow with the butt end of it over the head.

Without a groan Bob sank in a heap at the man's feet, unconscious.

"You fiend!"

"You coward!"

The Removites struggled in their bonds as they saw their chum struck down, but poor Bob had done his task too well.

The Spaniard leered down at them.

"You keep the wise tongue," he said.

"Have I not told you that I am Pedro Montana, the killer? Ha, ha, ha!"

He broke into a fit of maniacal laughter, and Harry Wharton & Co. shuddered as they looked at the man, half animal, half human. As he saw the expressions on the faces of the Removites the Spaniard pulled himself up and an expression of extreme cunning crossed his dusky face.

"You know not why I here?" he asked. "I kill one three five grown men. What for? Ha! You could not know that aboard this accursed vessel there's a fortune of well nigh half a million."

"He's mad!" muttered Johnny Bull.

The Spaniard caught his words.

"You say I mad?" he chuckled.

"Maybe—maybe. Who would not be mad with diamonds worth half a million pounds within arm's reach somewhere—somewhere—somewhere!"

He crooned the last words several times to himself, and with a bland, childlike expression gazed at all four walls.

And Harry Wharton & Co., with a sinking of the heart, realised that they were prisoners in the hands of a mad-man.

THE NINTH CHAPTER.

Bunter Dares!

"MUMMMM!" Billy Bunter groaned as effectively as the improvised gag would allow. The fat junior had just come to. There was an ache in his head which he likened

unto red-hot knives being plunged into him.

"Mummmm!"

The fat junior's eyes blinked into the stuffy blackness of the hold, but they saw nothing. Then, for the first time, Bunter became aware that his ankles and wrists were tied, and that a piece of rag had been wedged into his mouth as a gag.

He started to work his jaws, and after a painful five minutes he succeeded in displacing the gag.

"Oh dear!" he muttered. "My head! Grough!"

For once in a way Bunter really had something to groan about, for on his forehead was a bump the size of an egg. Bunter couldn't see that, of course, but he knew it to be there. He shuddered as he recalled his unexpected meeting with the Spaniard; he shivered as he pictured the evil face of the man and the long, curving knife. Bunter did not know it, but he owed his life to the stray tackle-block that had struck him.

"Groooooough!"

Bunter groaned afresh, and doubtless found some comfort in it, for he continued to groan. But groaning has its limits, and the fat Owl of the Remove gave it up at last and concentrated upon his position. Where he was, except that he was aboard the schooner, Bunter hadn't the foggiest idea.

"Oh dear!" he murmured, blinking into the darkness. "I hope that rotter doesn't come back. I believe he was going to kill me. Why doesn't Wharton and his crowd come along? Mean beasts to leave a fellow in a hole like this!"

It was in Bunter's mind to shout for help, but he recalled the savage face of the Spaniard, and shuddered to think what would happen if he drew that swarthy-looking gentleman on the scene. For once in a way common-sense came to Bunter. He simply must get free of his bonds. But how to set about that task presented a problem which Bunter found difficult of solution.

He wriggled and twisted until he was out of breath, but the cords still held him, although he had managed to loosen them a trifle. At that moment Bunter's extreme fatness served him well, for a fat subject is more difficult to bind securely than a healthy subject, and Pedro Montana had not had much time at his disposal to secure the fat junior safely. The cords bit deep into Bunter's podgy flesh, but they could be moved, although such movement brought considerable pain to the fat junior.

He rolled his wrists one upon the other until he had succeeded in shifting one loop of the cord on a level with his knuckles. If that one loop could be slipped, the rest would not be too difficult.

"Oh dear! My wrists! Wow!"

Bunter's fat wrists suffered severely, but he persevered, a mental picture of the Spaniard with the long knife serving to stimulate him to further effort when he felt the pain more than he could stand.

The fat junior's wrists were raw by this time, yet still he laboured on, and, with a supreme effort, which entailed a deal of pain, and drew a howl from him, Bunter managed at last to slip that one loop of cord.

"Oh dear! Wow!"

Bunter rested for five minutes after that; he felt that he deserved a rest. Then, filled with hope, he started afresh. But that one loop had done the trick; it was quite a simple matter to shed the rest of the cord, and, with a

feeling of exquisite pain in his wrists, Bunter at last worked them free.

Feverishly he started to fumble with the cord that bound his ankles. This was knotted securely, and Bunter picked at it until he had broken all his finger-nails. A knowledge of knots would have helped him in that extremity; but a knowledge of knots, like many other things the average fellow knew, was not possessed by William George Bunter. Yet his persistency met with its reward, for within ten minutes the fat junior had succeeded in freeing his ankles.

"Ow!"

A moan escaped Bunter as he tried to stand up, for his circulation was returning, with all its attendant pains of "pins and needles." Bunter never was a fellow to bear pain quietly. He moaned and groaned to his heart's content now, until the worst of the pain had worn off.

"This is awful!" The fat junior blinked to right and left, but all that met his gaze was darkness. Then, of a sudden, Bunter remembered that he had a box of matches in his pocket.

He struck one.

The light flared up, and Bunter blinked, but he saw enough to get his geographical position, so to speak. He was in a hold, or, to be more precise, the ship's sail "locker," an apartment about the size of the Remove Form room. On every hand he could see great spreads of sail and rope. Another match flared into the darkness, and the fat junior fastened his gaze on the door of the hold.

Cautiously he approached it.

He found the loop handle, and began to slide it back as quietly as he could. The runners on the sliding door were in need of oil, for they creaked, and Bunter's heart beat a tattoo against his fat ribs for fear that the Spaniard would hear him and come rushing on the scene.

The door was wide open at last, and Bunter paused on the threshold, listening. To his ears came the sound of blows, as if someone were chopping wood.

"That must be that awful rotter with the knife," mused the fat junior. "Oh dear! I wish I had a revolver or something."

Blinking in the semi-gloom, he crept forward until he found a staircase. At the top of the staircase was a vision of blue sky and sunshine. Bunter mounted the stairs, and trembled every time they creaked under his considerable weight. At last he was on deck—on deck amongst those grim, silent corpses.

For the moment the fat junior was tempted to plunge overboard and chance his luck in an effort to swim to the island, but he knew that he was incapable of swimming three hundred yards. Three, in fact, would have been his limit.

"Oh dear! What shall I do?"

The Owl of the Remove came to a halt near the figure of the dead man in a peak cap propped up against the bulwarks, and stared at it in fascinated horror. From his uniform Bunter imagined that the man was a naval official of some description, for there was a gold band round the sleeves of his jacket, and a curious ornamental design on the peak cap. Had Bunter only known it, the uniform was that of the Revenue men of Spain.

It was not the uniform that attracted the fat junior, however, it was the sight of a shining piece of metal that

protruded from one of the jacket-pockets.

"A—a revolver!" breathed Bunter, his eyes blinking furiously at his find. "If—if only I could dare—if—"

He shut his eyes and made a frantic grab at the weapon, and, with a shudder running through his fat frame, managed to withdraw it from the jacket-pocket.

It turned out to be a Colt automatic. Gingerly Bunter fingered it, and then common-sense took command of him. With this weapon, never mind whose fingers had held it last, he would be able to keep the villainous Spaniard at bay until such time as he—Bunter—was rescued from his awful predicament. Really, it seemed that Billy Bunter's luck was in.

Now that he was armed, Bunter's courage, always an uncertain quantity, came back with refreshing vigour.

"Let that rotter touch me," muttered Bunter savagely, "and I'll drill him!"

Suddenly Bunter heard the pattering of feet.

It was the Spaniard returning, without a doubt. Here was a chance for Bunter to try out his new-found courage.

"Oh crumbs!"

With a peculiar feeling trickling down his spine Bunter bolted for cover as those pattering footsteps became more pronounced. And when Pedro Montana, knife in hand, appeared on deck, William George Bunter, with the automatic shaking in his trembling fingers, was concealed under a friendly tarpaulin not more than five feet away.

"Carambo!" ground out the Spaniard. "I could have sworn that I heard— No, it must be my imagination!"

He scrutinised the deck and seemed satisfied, for he went down below again, and Bunter, as he heard his pattering footsteps grow fainter and fainter, breathed a huge sigh of relief, and remained where he was, shaking like a fat jelly.

"Help!"

Billy Bunter jumped as that voice, faint and weak, smote his ears. For the moment he was inclined to break from his cover and bolt for his life. Fear of encountering the Spaniard, however, held him where he was.

"Help! Water! Give me water!"

It was an English voice, a fact which afforded Billy Bunter some consolation, and it seemed to proceed from the wheelhouse, a few feet away from where Billy Bunter crouched.

It was not valour but curiosity that prompted Bunter to crawl from his hiding-place to the wheelhouse. With beating heart and nerves strung to their highest tension, the Owl of the Remove listened at the door of the wheelhouse.

"Help!"

It was from within that the voice emanated. Softly, cautiously, Billy Bunter turned the handle of the door. It gave to his touch.

Bunter peered in.

The sight that met his gaze drew a cry of horror from his lips, for bound to the big wheel was the figure of a seaman in the last stages of exhaustion. A deep wound ran down the full length of the man's face—a face deeply lined with suffering and anguish.

The seaman, bound as he was, was sprawled over the wheel, evidently unable to keep his feet any longer. A scarf drooped round his chin, which told Bunter that the unfortunate man had been gagged and that he had succeeded at last in freeing himself of it. He

could not turn his head as Bunter crept in, but he knew of the presence of the fat junior.

"What! Thank Heaven someone has come!" he gasped.

"Oh, good Heavens!"

Billy Bunter was not in the habit of bestowing sympathy on his fellow creatures, being far too occupied with the welfare of William George Bunter, but he could not restrain the cry of pity and horror as he blinked at the man lashed to the wheel. Next minute, forgetful of the Spaniard, the Owl of the Remove was trying to pick the knots of the ropes that held the seaman. But this was a task beyond Bunter's powers, and after a few minutes of it he gave it up.

The seaman, whose head was lolling on one side, tried to indicate that there

was something in his trousers pocket that would serve the purpose, and Bunter understood it at last.

He dived a fat hand into the pocket indicated, and withdrew a knife. It was the work of a few moments after that to free the unfortunate man. He collapsed in a heap on the floor of the wheelhouse the moment his bonds were free, and Bunter, his podgy heart beating nineteen to the dozen, stared down at him.

"Who are you?" asked Bunter, after a lengthy pause. "And who tied you up like this?"

It was three minutes or more before the man spoke. Propped up against the wall of the wheelhouse he gave Bunter a faint smile of gratitude. Then he spoke in weak, laboured accents.

"Pedro Montana he—"

Bunter jumped.

"The chap with the long knife?" he asked.

The seaman nodded.

"Bolt the door of the wheelhouse," he said faintly, "in case Pedro should return. He would kill both of us!"

"Oh crikey!"

Bunter leaped to the door of the wheelhouse, closed it, and drove a long iron bolt home. Then he returned to the seaman.

"I have been lashed to that wheel for a week, without food or water," said the man faintly.

Bunter grew more sympathetic than ever. To be lashed to a wheel for a

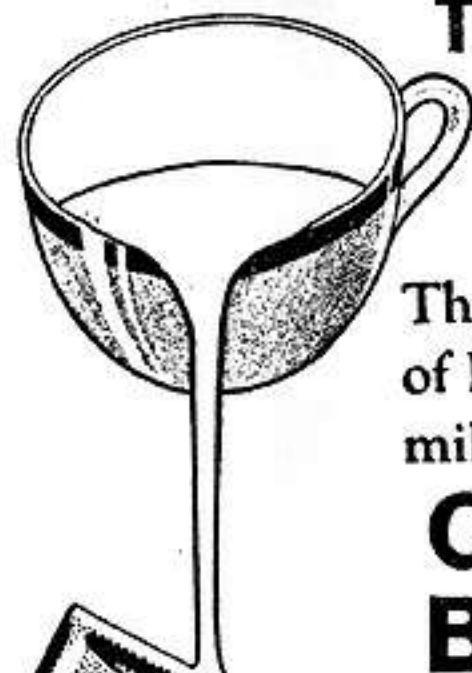
whole week without a morsel of anything to eat and nothing to drink was to him about the worst conceivable form of torture.

"Oh, I say," he said sympathetically. "You must feel awfully peckish."

The seaman smiled faintly, and Bunter, whose fat wits were trying to visualise what a week of such treatment would do for him, started to search through his fat pockets in the hope of finding something of an edible nature which he could offer to the exhausted man. But all Bunter discovered was a stray piece of toffee mixed up with bits of fluff and paper. Still, it was all Bunter possessed and, to do him credit, he gave it to the exhausted man willingly.

The man almost snatched it from
(Continued on next page.)

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Bunter's hand and commenced to masticate it feverishly. When he had finished he smiled his thanks, and Bunter waited for him to talk, oblivious now of his own peril on board the schooner and the passing of time.

"This is the schooner Castile," said the seaman. "I only joined her at the Cape, for I wanted to work my passage to Spain, where she was due to unload. She's supposed to be a cargo-boat, but I tumbled to the fact that the skipper was more interested in cargo consisting of diamonds than ordinary grain and copra—"

"Diamonds?" Bunter's eyes sparkled. The man nodded.

"Del Reano, the skipper, had been at the game for years, and had made a comfy living from illicit diamond buying for his employers. But the revenue men got wind of his activities off the coast of Spain, and boarded us. There was a fight, and the Revenue men were killed; but in the scrap six of the crew who were in the captain's confidence were killed also."

Bunter shivered.

"That left only the skipper and his mate, Pedro and myself," went on the seaman. "But it was Pedro who turned the tables on the captain, for he poisoned both him and the mate."

"Poisoned them?" quaked Bunter.

The seaman nodded.

"Doped their tea," he said weakly.

"You see, Pedro knew that there was a fortune on board of close on half a million quid in diamonds, straight from the mines."

"Half a million!" stuttered Bunter.

"Oh, great Scott!"

The seaman laughed softly.

"But Pedro will never find them," he said. "Hear him smashing the cabin in an effort to locate them?"

Bunter listened, and quaked, for plainly to his ears came the chopping sound which he had heard when he had first made his break for liberty from the hold.

"He'll never find 'em," muttered the seaman, "because I've hidden 'em!"

"You have?"

"Ay, my boy—half a million of the best. The skipper knew that he was a gonner when he drank that tea, and he beckoned me. Under his pillow was an automatic pistol. He gave me the automatic, and said that the diamonds were in the feed-chamber of the gun. Wily old dog was the captain. Then the old cove cashed in his checks."

The seaman paused, and it was a few moments before he resumed.

"Pedro had got the killing lust," he said, "for he had a go at me. But I beat the dirty Spaniard. I hid the blamed gun before he got me. And since then it's been my job to steer this accursed vessel the best I could. We're aground, aren't we?" he added.

"Yes," said Bunter, whose knowledge of the sea was very limited. "The head of the boat is jammed into a sandbank off Black Rock Island."

"Where's that," asked the seaman, "for I've been well-nigh unconscious for two days?"

"Off the village of Pegg, in Kent," explained Bunter.

"Good! I feel better now. Pegg, you say. I know it—I know it!"

He sank back, smiled weakly at Bunter, and closed his eyes.

The Owl of the Remove grew alarmed. "I say," he babbled, "you're not—"

"Not dying, messmate, no," came the reply. "Just taking forty winks. Rest easy and keep the door of the wheelhouse barred up."

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"Bet your life!" said Bunter.

Not for all the wealth in the kingdom would he have ventured outside that wheelhouse after having heard the story of the Castile and the part Pedro Montana had played in it.

And while the seaman sank into a deep slumber Billy Bunter dozed, his imagination conjuring up afresh the horrors of the schooner's voyage from the Cape.

THE TENTH CHAPTER.

"Swim for It!"

"MALEDICTOS!"

The Spaniard swore lustily, and followed it up with a string of Spanish words with which Harry Wharton & Co. were not familiar.

For half an hour or more they had watched their captor, who seemed to become more crazed with every passing minute.

Armed with an axe, the scoundrel had smashed down practically all the panelling in his savage efforts to locate the hidden diamonds. But, so far, no trace of them had he come across. The sweat was pouring down his dirty cheeks as he paused and bestowed a baleful glare on Harry Wharton & Co. Bob Cherry, who had not yet recovered consciousness, was moaning softly.

The cabin was littered with wreckage, proof of the Spaniard's maniacal energy, but his efforts to find the diamonds had been fruitless.

"Half a million!" he muttered. "Ha, ha, ha!"

The trussed juniors shivered as that demoniacal laughter rang through the cabin.

"Half a million," went on Pedro, "and I cannot find them!"

He started to rummage through the bunk in which the dead skipper lay, tossing the blankets aside in feverish haste.

The mate's bunk was similarly treated, and again Pedro Montana drew blank.

"Carambo, the fates are against me!" he hissed. "Ha, ha, ha!"

He swung the axe in a wide sweep, and rushed from the cabin shrieking at the top of his voice.

Harry Wharton & Co., lying there helpless, wondered what fresh devilry he was up to.

They soon knew, for to their nostrils came the odour of burning wood.

"He's set the ship on fire," breathed Wharton.

"Oh, Heavens!"

The faces of the juniors paled. Trussed up as they were in that wrecked cabin their plight was well-nigh hopeless. True, they might be able to wriggle to the door of the cabin, but they would never be able to negotiate the steps that led to the deck. And even if they could, what then? Besides, there was Bob Cherry to consider. He was still unconscious, and if the Co. were to perish each one of them was determined that he would perish with his chums.

"Ha, ha, ha! Ho, ho, ho!"

The wild laughter of the Spaniard from below reached the bound juniors, and closely atop of it came the first outward sign that the ship was really afire. Smoke was beginning to fill the cabin, whilst below could be heard the crackling of the timber as the flames spread to do their ghastly work.

Billy Bunter, in the wheelhouse, was awakened from his doze by the wild laughter of Pedro Montana. He crouched

by the door in a shivering heap and heard the Spaniard rushing up and down the deck, like a fiend possessed. Then Billy Bunter caught the smell of burning timber and he trembled afresh as he realised that the Spaniard had fired the schooner.

"Oh, crumbs!" gasped Bunter.

He shook the seaman roughly, but the poor fellow was deep in slumber. It was to be doubted whether a bomb would have awakened him in his exhausted state. Bunter gave it up at last and went back to the door, shivering in every limb. To rush out of the wheelhouse was unthinkable. There was that crazy, murderous Spaniard! To remain in the wheelhouse while the ship was ablaze spelt death either from burning or from drowning—or both.

"Oh, good heavens!" muttered Bunter, licking his dry lips.

"Ha, ha, ha!" The Spaniard rushed past the wheelhouse, shrieking at the top of his voice. "Ha, ha, ha! Farewell, my dear Chawson. You can leave the tiller now."

Bunter, in a blue funk, dragged out the automatic with shaking fingers. If Pedro Montana looked into the wheelhouse—

But the Spaniard did not. He raced past, his maniacal laughter floating out behind him, and stood in the bows of the schooner. Then he turned.

"Half a million! Ha, ha, ha!"

Another nerve-shattering shriek and then—

Splash!

Pedro Montana had cleaved the waters of the Channel and was striking out for Black Rock Island.

Billy Bunter heard the splash and looked out through the windows of the wheelhouse. Ahead of the schooner, striking out strongly, was Pedro.

"He's gone!" gasped Bunter, in tearful relief, and he dragged at the bolt securing the door. But he leaped back in dismay as a great cloud of smoke came pouring into the wheelhouse.

"Oh, groooough!" Bunter spluttered and coughed and darted hither and thither like a caged rat.

"Help! Help!"

He jumped as he heard those cries for help.

"Help!"

"That was Wharton's voice," muttered Bunter. "Surely he can't be on this awful schooner?"

It was Wharton's voice, Bunter was assured of that, and in the knowledge that Wharton might be able to help him out of the present awful situation Bunter plucked up courage and scuttled out of the wheelhouse.

"Where are you, Wharton?" he roared, heedless now of the billowing clouds of smoke.

"Here!" came the answering cry. "Quick in the main cabin."

"I'm coming!" Bunter hadn't the faintest idea where the main cabin was, but Wharton's cries drew him to the companion way. There Bunter jibbed as he heard the crackling of the burning timber and saw the rolling clouds of black smoke that gushed up to meet him.

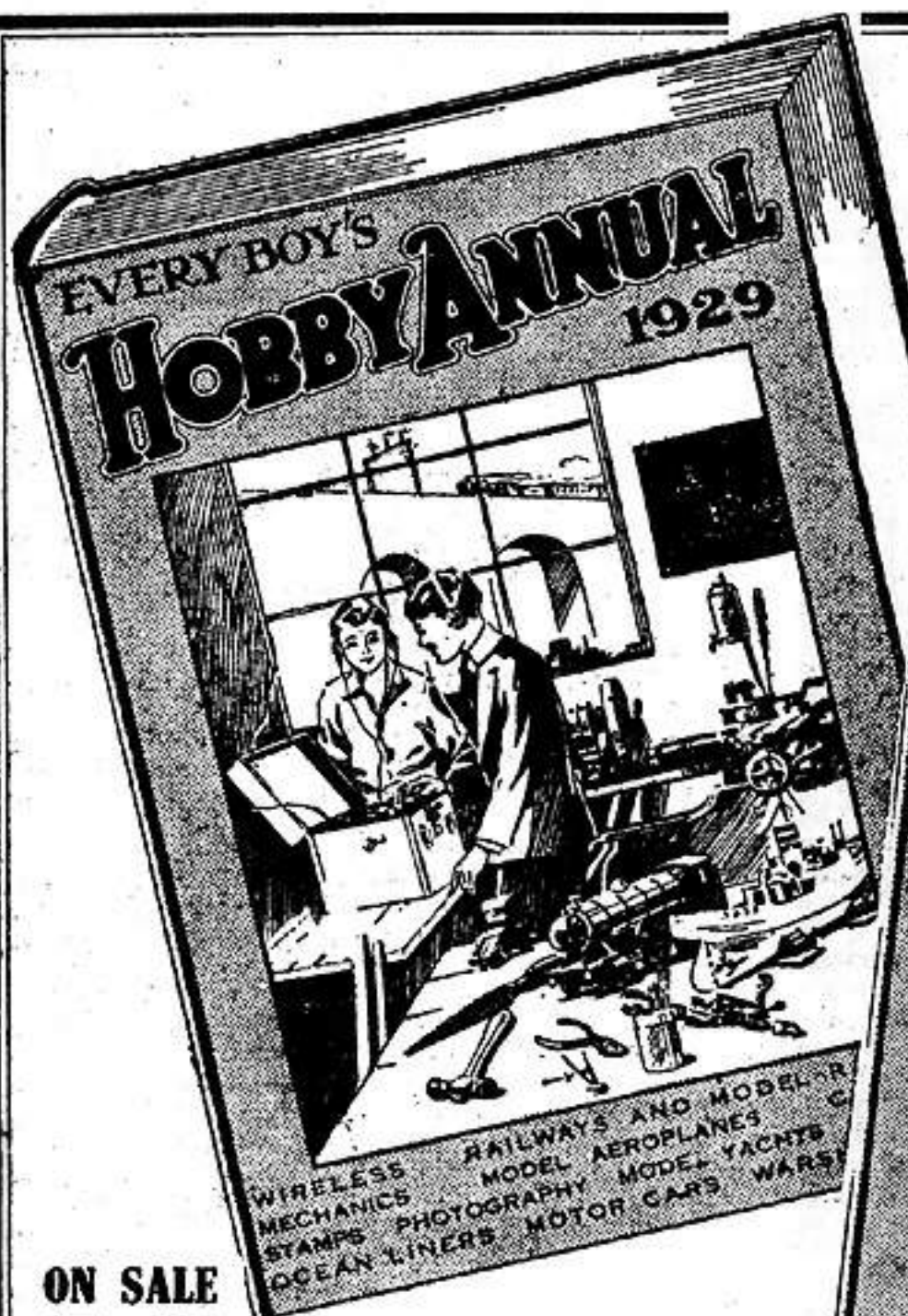
"Quick!"

Bunter had been labelled a funk by practically everyone in the Remove at Greyfriars, but he rose to the occasion in grand style now. With courage that surprised even himself he dashed down the stairs of the companionway and blundered into the smoke-filled cabin.

"Here, Bunter!" gasped Wharton. "A knife! Quick!"

Fortunately for all concerned Bunter had pocketed the seaman's knife. It

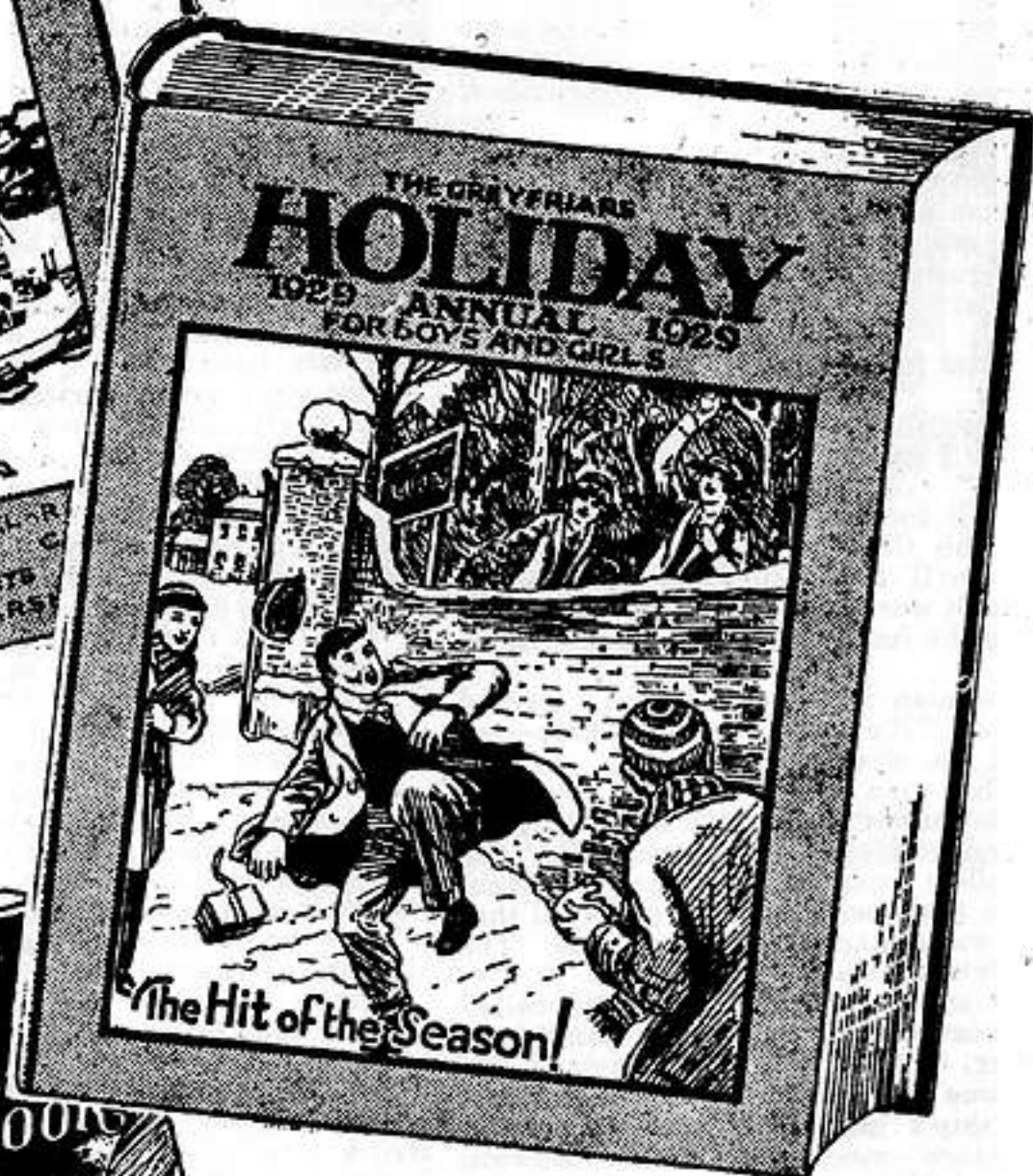
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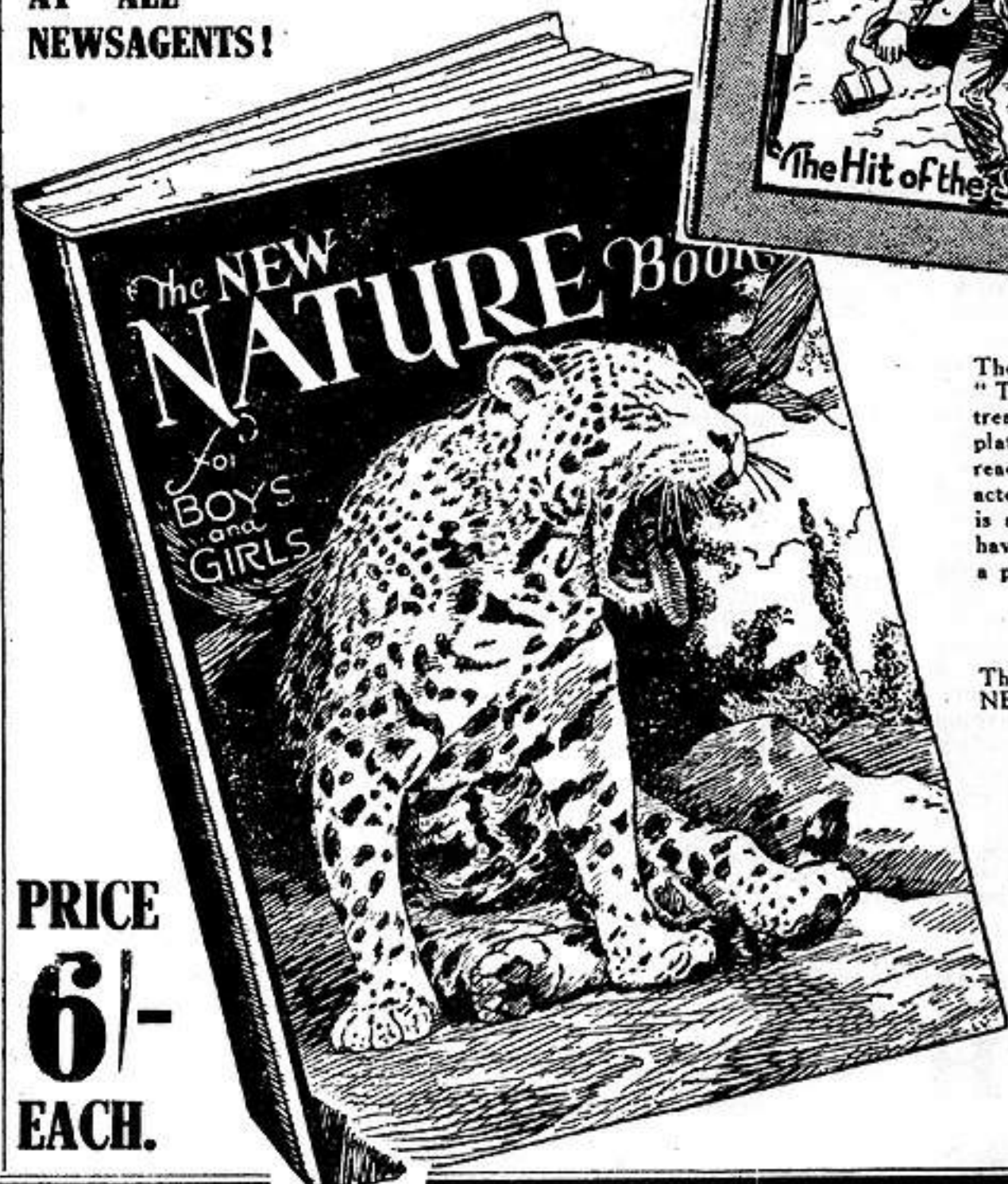
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The SECRET of the SCHOONER!*(Continued from page 18.)*

served a useful purpose now. Hurriedly he slashed through Wharton's bonds.

"Oh, good-man," breathed Wharton. "Now the others. Quick!"

But the flames and smoke were too much for Bunter then. He shoved the knife into Wharton's hands and flew from the cabin to the deck. The captain of the Remove slashed through the cords that held Nugent. Then he freed Inky and Bob Cherry and Johnny Bull.

"Thank Heavens!" cried the juniors fervently.

Then, with Bob Cherry, who had come round, in their midst, they stampeded for the companionway and scrambled out on deck.

The ship was well ablaze by now. In twenty minutes or less it would break up, that much was certain.

"I say, you fellows," Billy Bunter came rushing up to the Famous Five. "how are we going to get off this awful boat?"

"Swim for it, Fatty," replied Johnny Bull.

Bunter broke into a howl.

"But I can't swim from here to the island!"

"We'll look after you, old fat man," said Bob Cherry. "You've saved our lives—we'll save yours between us."

"Don't worry, Bunter!" said Wharton, taking the fat junior by the arm. "Come on!"

"The man in the wheelhouse," gasped Bunter. "We can't leave him here—"

The Co. stopped.

"What man?"

And Bunter explained as quickly as he could. Harry Wharton & Co. did not follow much of what their fat companion told them, but they gathered that there was a man in the wheelhouse. The juniors went there in a rush.

The seaman whom Pedro had called Chawson blinked up at the juniors in wonder.

"Come on," said Wharton briskly, "the ship's ablaze."

"Ablaze, messmates," said Chawson faintly. "More of Pedro's devilry. You'd best get off while it's safe and leave me."

"Not likely," said Wharton stoutly. "We're not leaving you here."

He jumped forward as he spoke and with the aid of Johnny Bull dragged the exhausted man to his feet. Then as quickly as they could the juniors made their way to the side of the ship. A rope was fastened round Chawson's waist and he was lowered into the water, to be received by Hurree Janset Ram Singh. That sturdy youth, turned Chawson on his back and began to pull him, in the correct life-saving fashion, away from the blazing ship. A moment more and Johnny Bull had dived in after his chum and was giving him assistance.

Bob Cherry was the next to go. He still felt dizzy from the blow on the head, but his senses were clearing rapidly.

"Will you be all right, Bob, old chap?" asked Wharton anxiously.

"Right as rain," said Bob cheerily.

"You two look after Bunter."

"Yes, don't leave me behind, Wharton—" began Bunter.

Harry Wharton smiled.

"We're not likely to do that, old fat man," he said cheerfully. "Hop in, Franky," he added to Nugent, "and get ready for Bunter."

"You're sure I won't drown?" asked

the Owl of the Remove, blinking fearfully at the leaping waves and the distance between the blazing ship and the shore.

"Of course you won't!" said Wharton.

"Hop down that rope. I'll follow you."

It went against his will to trust himself in the sea with even such good swimmers as Wharton and Nugent, but Bunter had no alternative. It was either that or a fearful fate on board the schooner Castile.

Shutting his eyes Bunter dropped off the end of the rope and plumped into the water.

Splash!

"Groooooough!" howled Bunter. "I'm drowning!"

"No, you're not," came Nugent's voice in tones of reassurance. "Just keep still—float if you can."

"Yaroooop!"

"What's the matter now?" asked Wharton, as he swam by the side of Bunter ready to take him over from Nugent when that junior should tire.

"I've lost my glasses!" howled Bunter.

"Never mind about your glasses," said the captain of the Remove. "We ought to be thankful that we've escaped with our lives."

"But my glasses," shrieked Bunter. "I think you might go back and look for them, Wharton."

"Eh?" Wharton was taken aback by that cool request.

"After I've saved your lives, too," said Bunter peevishly. "Getting my glasses is the least you could do."

"We'll buy you a new pair when we get back to Greystriars," said Wharton, with a grin.

"You mean it?"

"Of course."

Billy Bunter, floating on his back like a big bladder of lard, reflected.

"Mind, I want a good pair. None of your cheap and shoddy stuff. That lost pair of mine cost—cost—"

"Seven-and-sixpence?" asked Nugent.

Bunter snorted.

"Certainly not!" he said. "Three pounds seventeen-and-six, you mean!"

"Right-ho, old fat man!" said Nugent.

"You shall have 'em."

And Bunter, feeling that he had struck a bargain in a clever fashion, no longer mourned the loss of his seven-and-sixpenny glasses.

In any case, he had a spare pair in his pocket.

Thereafter the juniors swam in silence to the beach of Black Rock Island. When Bunter landed, or, rather, when Nugent and Wharton landed him, the rest of the juniors were already on the beach attending to the seaman Chawson.

"Hallo, hallo, hallo!" exclaimed Bob Cherry suddenly. "There goes the schooner!"

In a silent group the Greystriars juniors gazed seaward. The Castile, enveloped in flames and smoke, was gradually settling in the water. Of a sudden the flaming stern heaved high in the air, then down went the bows of the vessel. Came a hissing and gurgling of rushing water. Then, when the juniors looked again, all sign of the schooner Castile had disappeared.

THE ELEVENTH CHAPTER.**The Escape!**

"HALLO, hallo, hallo!" sang out Bob Cherry. "There's a couple of motor-boats putting out to the spot where the schooner was!"

The swirling clouds of smoke had evidently attracted the attention of the

coastguards, for leaping through the sea came the coastguards' boat and the Pegg lifeboat.

"Give 'em a hail!" said Wharton.

"Boat ahoy!" yelled the Famous Five. But for the moment the speeding boats took no notice of the juniors on the island.

Round and round the spot where the schooner had sunk the two boats circled, on the look-out for any of the vessel's crew who had escaped from that swirling vortex. They could have saved themselves the trouble if they had only known as much as did Harry Wharton & Co. As it was, twenty minutes elapsed before the coastguards' launch came purring over to Black Rock Island, the Pegg lifeboat still patrolling the spot where the Castile had broken up.

With eager faces the Famous Five rushed down to the beach and hauled the launch high and dry.

The two coastguards stepped out and regarded the Greystriars juniors with astonishment writ large in their weather-beaten faces.

"What's the idea, young fellows?" asked the senior officer. "What are you doing here? Where's your boat? I take it you're not swimming back to the mainland?"

The questions were rattled off like bullets from a machine-gun, and then Harry Wharton explained. The coastguards listened to the strange story in growing wonder and astonishment.

"You're not trying to pull my leg, are you, young fellow?" asked the senior officer when Wharton had finished.

For answer Wharton pointed to Chawson, who was sprawled on the beach, still in a state of semi-collapse.

"You can get the full story from him," said the captain of the Remove.

"He was one of the crew of the Castile, and unless I'm very much mistaken that scoundrel Pedro is still lurking about the island, for Bunter says that he was swimming here when he last saw him."

"Well, this beats the band!" said the coastguard. "Illicit diamond-running, eh? Swab my decks!"

He motioned to his subordinate to stand by the launch, and then he accompanied the juniors to the spot where Chawson, who was being looked after by William George Bunter, had been left.

In faltering tones Chawson told his story again, and this time the coastguard did not doubt it.

"You say there was half-a-million in diamonds on board?"

"Yes," replied Chawson faintly. "But they must have gone down with the schooner, for I hid them—"

His voice trailed off, for his strength was failing fast.

The coastguard supported him on his arm and pulled a brandy flask from his pocket. The exhausted man sipped the potent liquor and recovered somewhat. All the juniors hung on his next words, and so intent were they that they failed to see the evil face that glared at them from behind a thicket not more than three yards away.

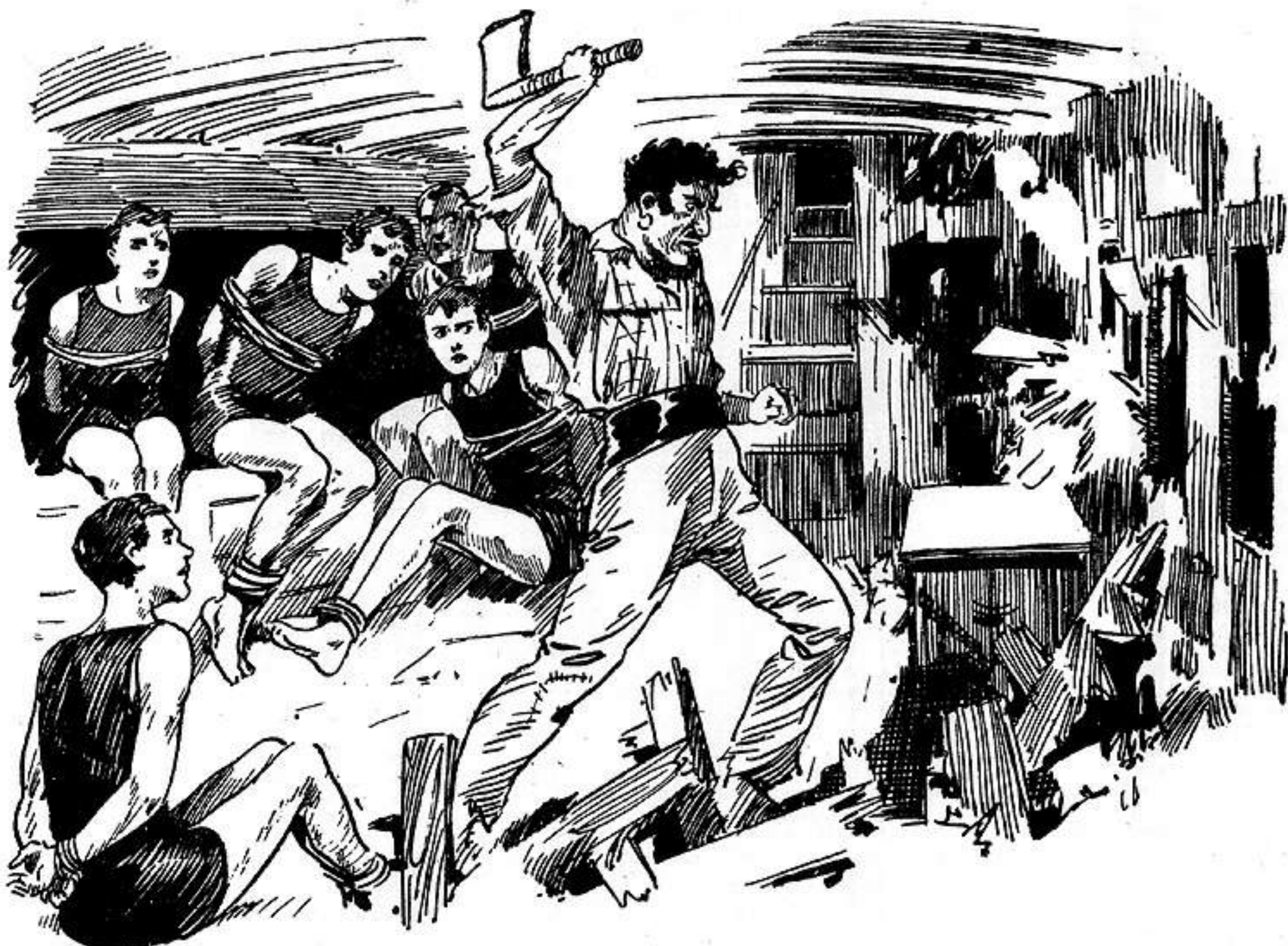
It was Pedro Montana!

With lips parted in a snarl like some savage animal he overheard every word that was said.

"They were in the feed chamber of the automatic," said the coastguard officer helpfully. "And you hid the gun—"

Chawson pulled at the brandy-flask again before he replied.

"I dropped the gun in the pocket of the Revenue officer as I raced by with that villain Pedro not more than five feet behind me."



"Maledictos!" The Spaniard swore lustily as Harry Wharton & Co., bound and helpless, watched him smash down practically all the panelling in his savage, maniacal efforts to locate the hidden diamonds. "Half a million!" he muttered.

"Ha, ha, ha!" (See Chapter 10.)

"The Revenue officer?" queried the coastguard.

Chawson nodded.

"He was a gonner," he said. "Been a gonner for a week or more. And Pedro, for some reason, wouldn't chuck him overboard. He propped him against the bulwarks."

There was a sudden yell from William George Bunter: That fat youth looked as if he were on the verge of bursting from excitement.

He jumped forward and dragged Chawson by the arm.

"Was the Revenue officer in a peaked cap, gold bands on his jacket-sleeve, and—"

Chawson nodded.

"He was."

"Oh, great Scott!"

To the amazement of all present, Billy Bunter backed away from the party and fumbled in his pocket.

"What's this silly game?" hooted Johnny Bull.

"You keep quiet, Bull!" said Bunter, with great dignity. "You're talking to a chap with half-a-million of money in his pockets!"

"What do you mean?"

For answer Billy Bunter drew the automatic from his pocket. At that moment he would have given anything he possessed to have been able to dislodge the feed chamber of the gun, for, according to Chawson, that chamber contained diamonds worth, roughly, half-a-million pounds.

"Here's the automatic!" said Bunter proudly. "I snatched it from the dead man's pocket to defend myself if that

awful villain Pedro tried any tricks with his blessed knife."

"Gammon!" exclaimed the Famous Five.

Bunter held the automatic aloft.

"It's true, I tell you! It's— Oh, crumbs!"

The thicket behind Billy Bunter stirred. The evil face of Pedro Montana flashed into view. Next second the automatic was snatched from Bunter's podgy hands and he was hurled spinning to the ground.

"Pedro Montana!"

The Famous Five and Chawson echoed the name simultaneously. The whole thing had happened so swiftly and unexpectedly that Pedro had seconds start of them. With a maniacal laugh he raced down the beach straight at the man in charge of the coastguards' launch.

"Look out, Tompkins!"

The coastguard who had been gazing out to sea heard the pounding of feet behind him, and turned sharply. Too late! There was a flash of steel as Pedro's knife caught the sunlight, and the coastguard sank to the beach with a moan.

Crack!

The senior coastguard pulled out his heavy service revolver and took quick aim. Pedro seemed oblivious of his danger, for he laughed as the bullet whined over his head, and with superhuman strength ran the boat out into sufficient water to float it. A moment later and the engine broke into motion.

Crack!

Another bullet flew from the coastguard's gun. But Pedro appeared to

have a charmed life, for it missed him by the fraction of an inch. Then, with a mocking laugh, the launch was headed out to sea, its powerful little engine responding to full acceleration.

Too astonished to speak, so quickly and unexpectedly had everything happened, Wharton & Co. rushed towards the wounded coastguard. He smiled up at them.

"Caught me napping," he said. "It's all right, young men; it's only a flesh wound."

"Thank goodness!" breathed Wharton huskily.

He did what he could for the wounded coastguard, and then turned his eyes seaward. The launch was carrying Pedro Montana farther away, with his haul of diamonds, with every lapsing second. Billy Bunter was inconsolable. He danced up and down the beach, yelling at the top of his voice, and shaking his podgy fists at the receding launch.

"Come back, you rotter!" he roared. "Come back, you rotten thief! You villain! You blackguard! Oh crikey!"

But all that floated back to William George Bunter was the Spaniard's mocking laughter.

"I say, isn't it awful?" said Bunter, dragging Wharton by the arm. "Those rotten diamonds would have fetched me a whacking reward. And now I shan't get a penny. Rotten, I call it!"

As usual, Bunter was full of his own troubles. Of the fate of the Revenue men, of the captain of the Castile, of Chawson, and, lastly, of the wounded coastguard, he gave not a thought. Bunter had lost a "whacking" reward,

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and, like Rachel of old, he mourned and would not be comforted.

"We'll get him yet," said the senior coastguard grimly, as he signalled to the Pegg lifeboat to pull in to the island. "I'll wireless the Channel patrol. They'll soon settle Mister Pedro Montana's hash!"

He spoke confidently, but the juniors did not share his optimism. They rather fancied that Pedro Montana would elude all pursuit, and Chawson shared their belief.

"The slippery cuss would get through the eye of a needle!" he muttered.

While the Pegg lifeboat was speeding towards the island, Harry Wharton & Co. hurriedly dressed. None of them felt the worse for the afternoon's tragic experiences, except Bob Cherry, but he made light of his injured head.

The lifeboat pulled in, and the party helped Chawson aboard. Then they clambered in after him. Once again the story of Pedro's treachery was told, this time to the lifeboatmen, who, until they had the coastguard's assurance that the story was not a fabrication, plainly showed their disbelief.

In silence thereafter the party sped back to Pegg Bay. Once there, Harry Wharton & Co., and the man Chawson, to say nothing of Billy Bunter, made a statement which was duly signed and forwarded to the proper quarter. After that there was a painful interview with the owner of the boat which Harry Wharton & Co. had hired. As Bunter was really to blame for the loss of this craft, it was up to him to make some offer of compensation. But Bunter refused to see where he was to blame.

"If you hadn't tried to keep me out of the mouldy feed, after having promised me a share, I wouldn't have taken the rotten boat—see?" he exclaimed indignantly.

And he rolled away as if that finally settled the matter, as indeed it did, so far as he was concerned. Certainly Wharton & Co. never saw a penny of Bunter's money when the time came round for compensating the boatman for his loss.

THE TWELFTH CHAPTER.

Bravo, Bunter!

"IF those fellows had backed me up I should have been a wealthy fellow now!"

William George Bunter was distinctly peeved. It was after prep, and the story of Harry Wharton & Co.'s adventures had spread throughout the school, mainly due to the loquaciousness of the Owl of the Remove.

Bunter liked the limelight, and he was certainly getting his full share of it now. A crowd of Removites surrounded him in the Common-room, all eager to hear once again the story of Billy Bunter's misfortune. Their eagerness was doubtless inspired by the fact that at each retelling of the afternoon's adventures Bunter brought his imaginative powers into full play. He had told how he had grappled with Pedro Montana—how he had fought for his life—how he had saved the lives of Harry Wharton & Co. at great risk to his own, with a complete disregard of facts or truthfulness. Really, Bunter was convinced at the end of each story that he had played a hero's part—that but for Harry Wharton & Co.'s "funkiness" he would have bagged a substantial reward. Skinner & Co. listened to Bunter's modest account of his adventures with grave faces, and the fat junior was too obtuse to observe that they were pulling his leg.

"So you grappled with this Pedro Montana—eh?" inquired Skinner solemnly.

Bunter's fat chest expanded. "I fought for my life," he said valiantly. "The fearful scoundrel throw a knife at me that passed within—within an inch of my head."

"Sure it wasn't a quarter of an inch?" asked Snoop.

Bunter considered afresh. "On second thoughts, it was nearer than that," he said. "I actually felt the blade touch my hair."

Skinner & Co. stifled a giggle. "And what did you do then, old chap?"

"I felled him to the ground!"

"Eh?"
"I grolled him to the found—I mean, I felled him to the ground," replied Bunter. "He was a great hulking fellow, over six feet in height. But was I afraid? Not likely! You chaps know how plucky I am."

"We do!"
"We does!"
Bunter blinked at his audience. "If Wharton and his funky crowd had played up, the rotter would never have got away."

"Hard lines, old fat man," said Skinner gravely. "Where were they when you were grappling with this awful fellow Montana?"

"They were lying in the cabin," said Bunter. "And you're lying here!" murmured Snoop.

"What did you say, Snoop?" demanded Bunter suspiciously.

"N-nothing, old chap. Go on!"
"They were lying in the cabin, like a silly set of funks," went on Bunter. "And if it hadn't been for me all of 'em would have perished!"

"Bravo, Bunter!" exclaimed Skinner, with well-assumed enthusiasm. Bunter smirked.

"Yes, I fancy they wouldn't have been here now but for me," he remarked. "The ship was an awful blaze of smoke and—and flames, you know. I rushed down the companion, regardless of the flames, and—and rescued them."

"But where was Montana all this time?" asked Skinner.

"I dodged into the wheelhouse—I mean, I sprang at him like a lion and felled him—"

"What, again!"
"I felled him with such force," said Bunter gravely, "that the awful rotter lost his balance and toppled over into the sea. My first thought after that was for—"

"Yourself?" asked Skinner sweetly.

"Oh, really, Skinner! I hope you don't think that I'm that sort of chap. My first thought was for Wharton and his crowd. The smoke was gushing out of the companion. The flames were leaping high. But what did I care? You know my style. If there's any danger, I—"

"Usually make yourself scarce," said Bolsover major.

"Oh, really, Bolsover! I'd like you fellows to have seen me there. It would have opened your eyes."

"Oh, we know how plucky you are, old fat man!" said Snoop. "But you want to be careful. If that chap Montana's a vengeful fellow, he'll be after your blood. He's the sort of chap who wouldn't stop short of breaking into the school and knifing you—"

"Ow!"
Bunter's jaw dropped.

"Do—do—do you think so, Snoop?" Snoop nodded gravely.

"I do. What do you think, Skinner?" he asked.

"I think the same," replied the cad of the Remove. "Still, Bunter's not afraid of him, are you, Bunter?"

Bunter gulped something in his throat. "Nunno, of course not!"

"You've felled him once," said Skinner comfortingly, giving Bolsover a meaning nod and a wink. "You'd do it again. Still, you want to keep on the watch."

There was a sudden commotion in the doorway of the Common-room. Next moment Bolsover major, who a few moments earlier had quietly withdrawn

EDITORIAL!

Do you like a joke?

Of course you do! But do you like to be the victim of it? That depends, of course, on circumstances.

But everyone at least likes reading about the efforts of a practical joker—that's if he's a star performer!

And a star performer in the practical joke line is due to arrive at Greyfriars next Saturday, chums. He answers to the name of Christopher Clarence Carboy, and he's the absolute limit. Bunter and Harry Wharton are his first victims; even Mr. Quelch, the learned master of the Remove, is not immune from the joking activities of Christopher Clarence. But "old Quelchy" is a downy bird, as the new boy discovers to his cost. A terrific swishing for trying to pull "Quelchy's" leg doesn't deter Christopher Clarence; life to him is one long, continual round of practical joking. In

"THE JAPER OF GREYFRIARS!"

your favourite author, Frank Richards, has excelled himself. This masterpiece would cure the bluest of blues; it's so invigorating that it would transform the world's worst pessimist into an optimist! It's your treat, remember, for next Saturday.

The wise reader will take the precaution of ordering his "Magnet" well in advance. There's nothing worse than missing a treat which the next fellow is enjoying to the full. Take the tip, then, boys, and give that order to-day.—ED.



"Here's the automatic," said Bunter proudly. "I snatched it from the dead man's pocket to defend myself against that awful villain Pedro and his blessed knife." "Gammon!" exclaimed the Famous Five. "It's true," said Bunter. "It's—oh crumbs!" The evil face of Pedro Montana appeared from the thicket behind Bunter, and the automatic was snatched from his podgy hand. (See Chapter 11.)

from the group of Removites, came rushing in. There was a terrified expression on the burly junior's face.

"Look out!" he panted, rushing up to Billy Bunter.

"Eh?"

"Montana!"

"Wow!" gasped Bunter.

"You said he'd break into the school, Snoop," gasped Bolsover. "Save us, Bunter!"

"Groooooogh!"

Billy Bunter stood rooted to the floor for the space of a few seconds. The thought of Pedro Montana being in the school almost paralysed him.

Skinner and Snoop and Bolsover clung to Bunter in mock terror.

"Save us, Bunter!" they exclaimed.

"Wow! Oh dear! Keep him off!"

Action suddenly returned to William George Bunter. He tore himself free and made a frantic bolt for the table. Shaking like a fat jelly, he crouched under it.

"Keep him off!" he yelped. "He's dangerous! Wow! T-t-tell him that I'm not here! Oh crikey!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Bunter's spectacles nearly toppled off his nose as that hearty roar of laughter rang through the Common-room. Gone from the faces of Skinner & Co. was the terror that the very name of Montana had inspired a few seconds earlier.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The Removites enjoyed the joke to the full, but it took Bunter three or four minutes before he realised that his fat leg had been pulled.

He peered out cautiously from his hiding-place.

"Is he gone, you chaps?"

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Bolsover. "He wasn't here, you fat duffer! We were pulling your leg!"

And, as that fact dawned in on the

obtuse mentality of the Owl of the Remove, the Removites roared with laughter at the peculiar expression that settled on his podgy face.

"He, he, he!"

Bunter's well-known cachinnation swelled the roar of laughter as he emerged from underneath the table. Now that he knew Pedro Montana was not at Greyfriars it was surprising how Bunter's courage returned.

"He, he, he!" he cackled, rolling over to the Removites, albeit keeping a wary eye on the door of the Common-room. "I knew you were only joking. I completely took you in, what? Thought I was funky, eh? He, he, he!"

But that was more than Skinner & Co. could stand. They fell upon William George Bunter and bumped him hard. Even that did not cure the Owl of his boastfulness, however. And when eventually news came through to Greyfriars that the coastguard's launch had been run down in mid-Channel at dead of night, and that its single occupant had perished Bunter felt more courageous than ever. It transpired that the vicinity of the collision had been searched for two hours, but no further trace of Pedro Montana was found.

Despite all his black treachery, his cunning and his ruthlessness Pedro Montana had failed, for at best he had taken his ill-gotten gains with him to the bottom of the sea, where they would serve him little purpose except perhaps to haunt his guilty conscience.

The affair caused quite a nine days' wonder throughout the world when all the newspapers "featured" it as their especial "story" or "scoop," and the names of those who had played a part in the drama of the schooner Castile were talked about wherever newspapers

circulated. Which was poor comfort for William George Bunter, he being in his own private opinion a "principal" character in the drama.

But it was a long, long time before the Owl of the Remove gave up telling how he had once held a fortune within his grasp; how he had battled to the death with a murderous Spaniard. How he had saved the lives of Harry Wharton & Co., and how he had almost saved the Castile from her untimely fate. And at each reiteration of the story Bunter's deeds of daring grew and grew like the little apples in the orchard, until no one who had read a newspaper account of the affair would have realised that Bunter's account and the newspaper account were supposed to be one and the same.

Fellows told William George Bunter exactly what they thought of him on this score. But it made no difference. When Bunter began to roll out whoppers there was no stopping him. In fact, he began to believe in them himself.

All the same for that on more than one occasion the Owl of the Remove's sleep was troubled by nightmares which centred round the evil, savage face of Pedro Montana, and no one was more thankful than William George Bunter when daylight broke, for he knew then that Pedro Montana was at the bottom of the sea—besides which daylight meant that breakfast was near at hand—a matter of far more importance to Bunter than anything else in the world!

THE END.

(Next week's ripping story of Harry Wharton & Co. is entitled: "The Japer of Greyfriars!" This is the first of a magnificent new series of Greyfriars yarns, featuring an amazing new boy.)

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THE SPORTING 'TEC! People are accustomed to hailing Ferrers Locke as a hundred per cent. detective, and now he gives them something to talk about as a hundred per cent. Soccer player!

The Toughest Team in the League!



A Brilliant New Footer and Detective yarn, featuring Ferrers Locke, the 'cutest 'tec in the world, and Jack Drake, his boy assistant.

(Introduction on next page.)

On the Right Track!

TAP! Samuel Bigways frowned with annoyance as there came a gentle knock at the oak panels of his library door.

Fred Bulsome, seated opposite his managing director, watched him anxiously. For over ten minutes Bigways had paced restlessly up and down the expensive Turkey carpet, deep in thought.

Tap!
"Come in!" Mr. Bigways' tone was not pleasant as he came to a halt, his big frame standing directly in line with the door of the room.

Thompson, his butler, padded in noiselessly.

"There's a gentleman to see you, sir!" Bigways' already crimson features assumed a deeper hue than ever. His eyes blazed with violent wrath. No one looking at him then would have reconciled the picture with Mr. Samuel Bigways, managing director of the Athletic—the "sportsman's philanthropist."

"Did I not tell you, 'Thompson,' he stormed, "that on no pretext was I to be disturbed? Did I not give you definite instructions that I was not at home to anyone?"

Thompson coughed.
"You see, sir, this gentleman is persistent."

"Tell him to go to the devil!" fumed Bigways. "And Thompson—"

"Yes, sir!"
"Go with him! Ugh!"

Thompson bowed his head, slightly turned, and was about to close the door of the library when his master's voice boomed out again.

"Thompson! Who is the caller?"
"Mr. Ferrers Locke, sir!"

Both Bigways and Fred Bulsome started violently. The latter half rose to his feet, his hands clenching and unclenching themselves on the brim of the felt hat which he nursed in his lap.

Thompson stood like a statue, apparently oblivious of the sensation his words had caused.

"Ferrers Locke?" By now Bigways had recovered his composure.

"Yes, sir! He begs the favour of an interview!"

Bigways looked at Fred Bulsome. Some unspoken message seemed to pass between them, for after a few seconds, Bigways turned to his butler.

"Show him in—in two minutes!"
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"Very good, sir!"
The door closed upon the soft-footed butler, and then Fred Bulsome jumped to his feet.

"What in the name of goodness does that meddling hound want here?" he said hoarsely.

His face was the picture of alarm and it found reflection, so to speak, in the heavy features of his director.

"Heaven alone knows," muttered Bigways. "He's not suspicious. You surely weren't fool enough to leave a clue of last night's affair?"

Bulsome shook his head.
"I'm certain of that," he said. "But, chief—I'm not staying here while that merchant's around. I can't stand those lynx eyes of his."

Bigways smiled.
"Don't worry, my lad," he said reassuringly. "No one, not even your own grandmother would recognise you now. Certainly that nobby parker Locke wouldn't."

"I'm not so sure," said Bulsome uneasily.

Bigways took him by the arm, and marched him briskly to another door.

"Just hang around in this room until I tell you to come out. No need for Locke to know you're here."

Bulsome disappeared from view about as swiftly as a rabbit down its burrow. Bigways seated himself in the shadow, first placing a seat that commanded the light from the windows for the especial benefit of his visitor. A moment or so later a big Havana cigar was glowing between his thick lips.

"Mr. Ferrers Locke, sir!"
Thompson stood back respectfully to allow the admittance of his master's visitor.

Bigways rose from his chair and a genial smile overspread his face.

"Good-morning, Mr. Locke," he said easily. "And to what do I owe the honour of this visit?"

He waved Locke to the chair, and then reseated himself.

The detective's expression was friendly, but for all that his keen eyes had taken a quick and all-embracing survey of the room. They did not fail to note the half-burnt cigarette that was still smouldering in the ash-tray; neither did they fail to note the inverted felt hat that was on the chair in which Bulsome had been sitting a few moments earlier. Two metal initials pierced the inner brim of leather—"F. B." But so quick was Locke to see these things

that Bigways never observed the glance or noticed its significance.

"I was passing this way, Mr. Bigways," began Locke, "so I thought I'd call in. Firstly to inquire about the progress of young Harold Wentworth."

Bigways started slightly—a movement which Locke did not fail to see.

"Secondly, I have a proposition—say, rather, a favour to ask of you."

Mr. Bigways rubbed his big hands together.

"A favour, Mr. Locke. Well, now, let me say 'yes' to that immediately. It would be a pleasure, indeed, to render so famous a man a service."

Locke inclined his head gravely.

"Thank you, Mr. Bigways. But perhaps you won't be so eager to comply when you have heard the nature of it. Still, returning to the first object of my visit, how is Wentworth? I phoned up Dr. Waltham of Harley Street, the specialist recommended by the club doctor, and discovered he was out of town."

"Ah, yes," replied Bigways. "I had to engage another surgeon—my own specialist, to be precise. Wentworth is doing as well as can be expected, but it is essential that he should have complete quiet. The doctor suggests, too, that he should be removed to a warmer climate just as soon as his condition will permit. I'm arranging that for the poor lad. In fact Bulsome is down at Southampton now, fixing up things."

"You are very good to your boys," said Locke. "No wonder the sporting scribes refer to you as the 'Sportsman's Philanthropist!'"

Bigways shook his head modestly.

"Newspaper talk, you know," he said modestly. "I'm just an ordinary man, like my next-door neighbour."

Locke smiled.

"I would say an extraordinary man in many ways," he returned. "But seriously, Mr. Bigways, do you think I'm too old to renew my acquaintance with Soccer?"

Bigways laughed.

"You're not serious!"
"Never more serious in my life," said Locke. "Without blowing my own trumpet let me say that I got my Soccer Blue at Oxford—"

"Yes, I know that!" interpolated Bigways. "They still speak of you as the fastest winger Oxford ever fielded. But surely footer has long since ceased to interest you?"

"Not a bit of it," said the detective.

"In fact, I'm keener than ever. In short, I want to sign forms as an amateur for the Athletic."

For the space of a few seconds, Bigways sat eyeing the detective with a penetrating scrutiny. Locke returned it without flinching.

"You're really serious?" smiled Bigways.

The detective nodded.

Bigways rubbed his hands together with great satisfaction.

"Then it's a deal!" he exclaimed heartily. "Ferrers Locke, the world's famous detective playing for the Athletic! Mr. Locke, what publicity for the club! And the gate-money! You see, I'm not the philanthropist the sporting world thinks me. I'm commercial—commercial right down to every opportunity."

"It suits me," said Locke simply.

The managing director of the Athletic rose to his feet, a broad smile lighting up his heavy features.

"It will suit me, Mr. Locke," he said jovially. "Consider it done. You can sign forms to-morrow, and if you care to turn out for us against Portsmouth on Saturday, just say the word."

"I should like nothing better in my life," said Locke earnestly.

"Then shake!"

The two shook, each with a smiling gaze fixed on the other in the manner of two boxing champions weighing up each other prior to a big fight.

"I'll be at the club first thing to-morrow morning," said Locke, "to sign on, and, if there's a practice on, to take part in it."

"Good man!" said Bigways, with a cheery grin. "This is a rare stroke of luck. I'll get my Press agent on to it straight away."

He walked with Ferrers Locke to the door, and saw him out personally. Then, his face no longer wearing its genial expression, he tramped back into the library.

"Come out of that funk hole, Fred!"

Bulsome came out. His face was strained and pale.

"What did you say 'Yes,' for?" he said thickly. "That man knows something. He's on the trail. And you're letting him in on the ground floor."

Bigways fixed his companion with a savage glare.

"Shut your mouth, you big idiot!" he said domineeringly. "I've done the right thing. Anyone with half an eye would see that. If he's suspicious, we'll be able to deal with him better now that he's signing on for the club. The boys'll look after Mr. Ferrers Locke. Now that Wentworth's big mouth has been stopped, everything should be all right."

Bulsome licked his dry lips.

"I don't like it," he murmured. "That man Locke's a fiend. He'll tumble to our game, mark my words!"

Bigways raised his big fist as if he would strike his companion.

"Quiet, you windy fool!" he exclaimed. "I tell you we've got him. Got him in the hollow of our hands. No need for any more clumsy blunders."

"I hope you're right," began Bulsome, and then a cry escaped him. He stood staring at his own hat in the arm-chair, and the curling wreath of smoke that wound ceilingwards from the still smouldering cigarette.

"What on earth is the matter with you, man?" demanded Bigways, shaking Bulsome like a terrier shakes a rat. "What the devil are you staring at?"

"My hat!" babbled Bulsome. "He's seen it—must have seen it. And my

cigarette—I was fool enough to leave it in the tray when you bundled me into the other room."

"Well, what of it?"

"Locke saw them for a certainty," said Bulsome huskily. "It wouldn't take him long to put two and two together. You told him I was down at Southampton arranging about Wentworth's trip abroad. Well, there's my hat with my initials in it. And he'd know that that wasn't your cigarette 'cos you never smoke them."

Bigways started.

"What does that matter?" he said angrily. "Those initials might stand for anyone. And even if I had a visitor, surely there's nothing in telling him to make himself scarce while I interviewed Locke?"

"No, except for the fact that you said I was down at Southampton," said Bulsome uneasily. "You've told him a lie and he knows it!"

Bigways' face muscles worked savagely.

"He can never know the truth about Wentworth," he said hoarsely. "I'd shoot him on sight if I thought he had half a suspicion."

"I tell you he knows something already," persisted Bulsome. "He knows that I'm still here. He knows that—"

But that was more than the ungovernable temper of Samuel Bigways could stand. He lunged out a bulky fist which took Bulsome clean on the point of the jaw, and the centre-half's words ended in a faint moan as he collapsed to the floor.

"Take that, you windy, yellow cur!" snarled Bigways. "And I wish Ferrers Locke were beside you."

Had the Athletic's managing director turned his head to one of the windows that looked out over a small balcony to the well-laid lawn and gardens below, he would have seen the brim of a felt hat disappearing rapidly from view.

Ferrers Locke was not so very far from Bulsome, for the felt hat belonged to the famous detective, and he had overheard practically the whole of the conversation between Samuel Bigways and his centre-half.

As he trod quietly to a little wicket-gate in the wall that encircled Bigways' house, Ferrers Locke smiled grimly to himself.

"I'm glad I returned," he reflected. "That little eavesdropping was decidedly profitable."

He slipped a skeleton key in the lock of the gate and let himself out quietly. Five minutes later a taxicab was speeding him to his rooms in Baker Street.

WHAT HAS GONE BEFORE.

Barely has Ferrers Locke, the celebrated Baker Street detective, taken on the job of rounding up a mysterious gang of cracksmen which has been operating in the West End when a fruitless attempt is made on his life. A chance clue, however, leads him to suspect Clifford Morgan, an ex-convict who is employed as a groundsman at the Sparsdale Athletic Football Club. Accompanied by Jack Drake, his boy assistant, Ferrers Locke pays a visit to the Sparsdale ground to witness the home team's fixture with the Arsenal. During the match, Wentworth, the Sparsdale's outside-right is making tracks for the Arsenal's goal when he suddenly collapses with a gun-shot wound in the chest. Before he can make a statement he is whirled away in a car belonging to Samuel Bigways, the Managing Director of the Athletic. Convinced that the shot had been fired from the box in which the Managing Director had been sitting with a friend, Ferrers Locke details Drake to shadow Bigways. In consequence of what the youngster learns the Baker Street detective decides to get a place as a playing member with the Sparsdale team.

(Now read on.)

Drake awaited him there.

"What luck, gov'nor?" were Jack's first words.

The great detective smiled.

"The best!" he replied. "We're on the right track, my lad, to solving what looks like a first-class case—"

"But have you signed on for the Athletic, gov'nor?"

"I sign on to-morrow," returned the detective. "And I turn out for the Athletic on Saturday at Portsmouth."

"Gee-whiz!" ejaculated Locke's assistant, in undisguised admiration. "You're a marvel!"

"Tut-tut!" admonished Locke. "Flattery is something that should be handled discreetly."

But for all that, Drake's youthful face still continued to wear an expression of hero-worship whilst his chief recounted the events of the morning.

The Try Out!

"IN the first place," said Locke, lighting up his favourite briar, "I took the step of inquiring at Dr. Waltham's. It appears that he was never approached by Bigways to attend Wentworth."

"So that's lie number one!" said Drake.

"And lie number two, my lad," said Locke, "came when Bigways told me that he'd sent Bulsome down to Southampton to arrange about Wentworth's trip abroad. I saw Bulsome's hat on the chair, and, as he admitted himself, his cigarette burning in the ashtray. That's what made me return by the back gate."

"Jove, gov'nor, what's behind all this?"

Ferrers Locke contemplated for a moment.

"Why, one of the cleverest gangs we've ever struck!" he said. "Undoubtedly the gang which has been plaguing society for months."

"And who's at the head of it?" asked Drake.

"Bigways, for a certainty," replied Locke. "And, unless I'm mistaken, the whole Athletic team is in it, too!"

Drake sat bolt upright in his chair.

"The Athletic—all of them?"

The detective smiled grimly.

"My conclusions are only drawn from theory, practically," he answered. "Bulsome's voice is familiar to me—very familiar. If memory serves me right, Fred Bulsome is 'Thrush' Gregory, convicted of robbery, violence, and almost every known crime in the calendar."

"Oh, great Scott!"

Drake bounded to the big index and hurriedly began to turn the pages.

"Here we are, gov'nor," he said, bringing a photograph of Thrush Gregory for his chief's inspection. "That's nothing like Fred Bulsome, the Athletic's centre-half."

Locke gave the photograph a quick glance.

"Not now," he said. "But that was taken ten years ago, and plastic surgery was almost in its infancy then."

"Plastic surgery?" echoed Drake.

Locke nodded.

"Are you suggesting that Fred Bulsome is really Thrush Gregory; that his face has been altered beyond recognition by plastic treatment?"

Locke nodded again.

"I most emphatically do!" he retorted. "But where Bigways appears in our Crime Gallery I'm at present at a loss to fathom."

"By Jove," exclaimed Drake, "this is a go!"

"It is, as you remark," smiled Locke. "We've got to watch our step. We're up against an organisation that works like a machine under the guidance of Mr. Samuel Bigways and the name of the Sparsdale Athletic."

"My hat! What a team of toughs!"

Locke nodded grimly.

"A team of toughs sums them up pretty aptly," he said, "and it's our job to round them up. How do you like the prospect?"

Drake's eyes shone with enthusiasm.

"Why, it's a case that happens only once in a lifetime, gov'nor!"

"Not a word just yet to friend Pyecroft," said Ferrers Locke. "I have great belief in him, but he is apt to blurt out things if they don't coincide with his own pet theories."

"It's a certainty that your theory wouldn't fit in with his," grinned Drake. "The Sparsdale Athletic—a team of toughs—a team of crooks! Why, I find it hard to believe myself!"

"Rather shatters your faith in them now—what?"

"Faith, yes," said Drake. "But my interest is doubled."

For a few moments the detective was silent.

"Look up the records of all surgeons, quacks, and others interested in the art of plastic surgery," he said, at length. "That's a job that will keep you busy for a few hours, my lad."

"Right-ho, gov'nor!"

Drake immediately made himself scarce, whilst Locke settled himself comfortably in the armchair and gave himself up to meditation.

It was three hours before Drake returned. In his hands he carried several sheets of paper, bearing the names of celebrities and nonentities interested in plastic surgery.

"That's the lot, gov'nor," he said; "and I fancy I've spotted the merchant who's been working for Samuel Bigways."

"Good for you, my lad!"

"Charles St. Leger Boothroyde," continued Drake. "Sent to prison for seven years six months ago, for embezzlement. Samuel Bigways was the man who gave thousands of pounds to assist him in his studies and experiments."

"Looks like a winner," remarked Locke. "I remember the man now. He came of good family, and had a promising career in front of him until he went off the rails, and the Medical Association struck him off their rolls. After that he went down hill rapidly. So that's where Bigways made use of him—eh? The clues are coming along splendidly!"

"What do you propose doing now, gov'nor?" inquired Drake.

Locke pulled out a couple of matinee tickets for the Savoy Theatre.

"We're going out to have a snack of lunch," he said, "and then we'll drop in and see the show at the Savoy."

Drake looked surprised.

"But the case—"

"That can wait until to-morrow, when I begin my amateur career with the Athletic," replied Ferrers Locke. "All work and no play makes Jack a dull boy. If you're keen to come along grab your hat, and—"

But Drake was already "grabbing" his hat.

And five minutes later Locke and his assistant were bowling up in a taxi to a quiet restaurant in Piccadilly for lunch.

"Let me introduce you to the boys, Mr. Locke!"

Mr. Samuel Bigways carefully scanned the official form Ferrers Locke had

filled up and folded. Then he rose to his feet and walked towards the door.

It was the following day. Locke had turned up at the club's offices as arranged. Jack Drake accompanied him.

"You come, too, Drake," said Locke, turning to his assistant. "You've always wanted to see the Athletic at close quarters—now's your chance. Drake's just crazy about this club!" added the detective to Bigways as they made their way along the passage to the dressing-rooms.

Bigways smiled.

"Well, they're a set of boys to be proud of!" he remarked. "Not another team like them in the country! They'll win the Cup this year for a certainty, mark my words!"

"Glad you're so optimistic!" said Locke aloud. And then to himself: "They'll win a 'stone jug' apiece, or my name's not what it is!"

"Here we are!"

Bigways thrust open the door of the dressing-room and ushered in his visitors. The Athletic were in various stages of undress. One and all stared hard at Ferrers Locke and Jack Drake, and the latter, noting now the shifty expressions on their faces, wondered why he had never observed them before. They looked a team of crooks, every man jack of them.

Fred Bulsome did not let his eyes linger on the detective for long. He turned away and bent his head over a pair of new footer boots.

"Boys," said Bigways genially, "allow me to introduce to you our new team-mate, Ferrers Locke, the famous detective. And young Drake, here, is his assistant."

There were murmured greetings which to Locke and Drake did not ring true.

"Pleased to meet you, boys!" said Ferrers Locke. "I hope we shall soon get to know one another. Hallo, Bulsome!" he added, turning to the centre-half. "Did you fix up things for young Wentworth at Southampton yesterday?"

A look of fear crossed the burly centre-half's face, and for a moment he seemed tongue-tied.

"Oh, yes," he said falteringly. "The gov'nor's got a yacht there, and the skipper's signing on a full crew, ready to take poor old Wentworth away."

The centre-half's eyes dropped before Locke's cool gaze, and in a mirror on the wall in front of him the detective saw the scowling face of Samuel Bigways reflected in it. That scowl was obviously in disapproval of Bulsome's weakness and lack of control. But as Locke turned to Bigways again that individual registered a most benevolent and genial expression with commendable swiftness.

"Will you change here, with the boys, Mr. Locke?" he asked.

"Why, of course!" said the detective. "That is, unless the boys have any objection."

"Oh, they won't mind," smiled Bigways. "Will you, boys?"

"No."

"Welcome!"

But the replies that came from the team were half-hearted. Each one of them there had a rooted objection to being within a mile of Ferrers Locke, let alone sharing the same dressing-room with him.

Ferrers Locke speedily changed, but

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Boomp! It was a fast, rising shot that travelled goalwards like a rocket, straight for the corner of the net. The goalie leapt sideways in an endeavour to save, but his outstretched fingers missed the ball by inches. (See this page.)

for all that, the rest of the team had passed out on to the ground before he had laced up his footer boots.

Drake was about to comment on their unfavourable glances, but Locke seemed to sense that, for he gestured the boy to keep silent. Then, with scarcely a sound, he reached the door of the closed dressing-room.

"Come on, my lad!" he called out suddenly, at the same time pulling open the door with more force, perhaps, than was necessary. "I— Oh, I'm awfully sorry!"

As the door came open a figure, bent double, pitched into the room and slid along the floor in an ungainly heap.

It was Clifford Morgan, the groundsman.

Ferrers Locke helped him up.

"Sorry, Morgan!" he said apologetically. "I didn't know you were coming in. 'Fraid I gave that door too strong a tug. Not hurt?"

Morgan mumbled something unintelligible, and Locke and Drake left him dusting himself down. As they strode out on to the pitch the detective whispered in his assistant's ear.

"Just shows you how careful we've got to be," he observed. "I sensed there was someone listening at the door. We shall have to be on the alert all the time in this case."

"Good luck!" exclaimed Drake enthusiastically for the benefit of Mr. Bigways, who came abreast of them. "Bet you a cigar you don't score a goal!"

"You're very lavish with your cigars," said the detective, "but I'll take it on!"

Pheep!

Josh Blankiron, the trainer who was acting as referee, whistled the players to the centre.

"You'll play on the wing for the first eleven, Mr. Locke," he said. "Are you ready, boys? Then get to it!"

The ball rolled away from Ted Warner's feet to the inside-left. Jacob Blactor, a wiry individual with a

Semitic cast of countenance, took it in his stride and lofted it to his wing. Followed a sharp tussle for possession, in which the right-half of the second eleven neatly tricked his man and, with a well-placed kick, shifted the play to the other end of the pitch.

Ferrers Locke, running up and down the touchline, according to where the line of play drifted, waited patiently. At last a chance came his way. A terrific kick from the full-back, Huff Wilkins, landed the ball a couple of feet in front of Ferrers Locke.

"Now, guv'nor!" yelled out Drake, quite forgetting, in his enthusiasm for footer, the nature of the team in which Locke was playing. "Show 'em what you can do!"

Ferrers was already doing that. He got to the ball, steadied it, made as if to pass to his inside man—a trick that deceived the opposing half—then raced on.

Another half-back rushed at him and attempted to charge him off the ball, but the nimble-footed detective slipped his man like an eel and raced on.

"Good man!" yelled Bigways from the touchline. "Stick to it!"

It was not love of the man that prompted the encouragement, but sport is a funny thing; it seems to bring out the best in everybody. At that precise moment Samuel Bigways was, in all reality, the Soccer enthusiast. He was a being transformed as Locke dashed away down the wing, beating the full-back who rushed at him, and then his companion, in similar fashion.

"Shoot, man—shoot!"

Bigways plucked at the arm of Clifford Morgan, who had joined him.

Locke, now nicely placed for a shot, steadied himself for the fraction of a second, sighted the goal and the eager custodian, and then:

Boomp!

It was a fast, rising shot, that travelled goalwards like a rocket, straight for the far corner of the net.

The goalie leaped sideways in an endeavour to save his citadel. His outstretched fingers missed the ball by inches, and, to his mortification, he saw the leather spinning in the back of the net.

"Goal!"

"Played, guv'nor!" sang out Drake.

"Played, Locke!" bawled Bigways excitedly. "That was a stunner!"

Then, in an aside to Morgan: "Jove, that man can play! He's worth his weight in gold to us, man!"

Clifford Morgan's unprepossessing features broke into a snarl.

"Guv'nor, you're running away with yourself. That hound ain't one of us, remember. He's Ferrers Locke, the cutest tee in the world! Wot yer shouting about?"

"Oh!"

Bigways' jaw dropped as it came home to him how he stood in relationship to his amateur outside-right.

And for the remainder of that trial game his features were clouded. Not even when Locke notched another goal—a more brilliant piece of work than his first one—did Bigways open his mouth to voice appreciation or further encouragement.

For Ferrers Locke was a thorn in his path—a man to be feared; a man to be removed at the first opportunity. Samuel Bigways needed no further reminder of that fact from Clifford Morgan!

When the players came off, after the full time, Mr. Samuel Bigways was gone. He was speeding back to his house in Cavendish Square, asking himself repeatedly whether he had done right in signing on Ferrers Locke. And somehow, in his heart he felt that he had signed his own death warrant.

(It's a daring move on Ferrers Locke's part to join up with the Athletic, and exciting things are going to happen mighty shortly. Don't fail to read next week's gripping instalment, whatever you do, chums.)

Dr. Birchmall's Legacy!*(Continued from page 15.)*

grinned the lawyer. "So long as you give me plenty of grub and a nice comfortable bed I shan't worry, believe me!"

"Then in that case please stop by all means!" said the Head, assuming an air of hospitality that he certainly didn't feel. "And I venture to proffess that in a very short time you'll be convinced that I have a hart of gold, and that I fully deserve every penny of Aunt Betsy's legacy!"

No sooner had the Head said that than there came an interruption to the proceedings in the form of a tap on the door. Bang!

"Come in!" yelled the Head.

His jaw faroly dropped as Jack Jolly & Co. and Tubby Barrell entered the study. In the eggitement he had forgotten all about ordering them to return in half an hour to be flogged. Obviously it was out of the question to do that in the prezzence of the eagle-eyed lawyer. To do so would mean that he would lose his legacy immejately.

"Please, sir, we've come to be walloped," said Jack Jolly in trembling axcents.

Mr. Cheetem started violently, and Dr. Birchmall turned a garstly white for a moment. Then the latter recovered his song-froid, and putting a look of kindly benevvolence on his dile, said:

"You must be mistaken, Jolly! As you are aware, I have never walloped anyone in my life!"

"Wha-a-at?" yelled Jack Jolly & Co. in amazement.

"You know how kind and nice I always am to you, don't you, boys?" asked the

Head, frantically endeavoring to make signals to the juniors behind Mr. Cheetem's back.

"First time I've heard about it," remarked Jack Jolly, frankly. "I always thought you were a beastly——"

"Hush! You mustn't be cheeky to your good, kind skoolmaster!" said the Head, wagging an admonishing four-finger at the kaptin of the Fourth. "If you are, I shall be cross with you, and then I shan't play with you any more!"

"M-m-m-my hat!" stuttered Jack Jolly in utter astonishment.

"Just you be a good boy and talk

nicely to your dear, kind Uncle Birchmall!" said the Head, with a fond smile at the startled junior. "Do as Uncle tells you now. Here's tuppence for you to go and buy some sweets with!"

He handed two copper coins to the skipper of the Fourth.

"Now run away and play, there's good boys!" said Dr. Birchmall, his eggpression becoming sweeter every minnit now. "Here's a penny each for the rest of you!"

"Dear me! What a good, kind skoolmaster you are!" observed Mr. Cheetem. "I can see that you'll get the money without a shaddo of doubt at this rate."

Hardly knowing weather they were on their heads or their heels, the Fourth Formers staggered out of the Head's sanktum, leaving the Head still smiling sweetly, and Mr. Cheetem nodding with approval.

"It's come at last!" said Jack Jolly, tapping his napper significantly. "Mad as a hatter!"

"Not the slitest dout about it!" agreed Bright.

"Who cares how mad he is if he gives money away insted of floggings?" grinned Tubby Barrell. "I'm off to buy some bulls-eyes. Ta-ta, you chaps!"

Tubby buzzed off, and Jack Jolly & Co. returned to their quarters, wondering what the dickens had come over the Head.

Before many hours had passed they were destined to wonder still more, for the surprise they had just had was nothing in comparison to what was to follow.

THE END.

(The next story in this magnificent series is entitled "Dr. Birchmall, The Good!" If you miss it, chums, you'll regret it.)

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DR. BIRCHEMALL'S LEGGACY!

The leopard cannot change its spots, nor the Ethiopian his skin. Neither can Dr. Birchmall, the tyrant, become Dr. Birchmall the kind and considerate Head of St. Sam's. Yet he tries to make the change.

“END Jolly, and Merry, and Bright and Barrell of the Fourth to me innocently—and look slippy about it, Binding!”

“Yesir! Gaspod Binding, the page, assembling a slippy appearance, and dashing off to execute the command.

Needless to say, it was Dr. Birchmall, the Headmaster of St. Sam's, who gave the order. Judging by the brootal and booying tones in which it was uttered, the Head was in a frightful wax. And that impression was strengthened by the fierce eggression he wore on his skelly dilo.

While he waited for the juniors to appear, he tugged savidly at his beard, and munched his teeth with rage. Undoubtedly, something had happened to disturb the usual serenity of his demeanour.

Five minutes passed. Then came a timid, hesitating sort of tap on the study door.

“Crash! Bang! Wallop!”

“Trot in!” roared the Head.

The door opened, and Jack Jolly & Co., the heroes of the Fourth, walked meekly in, followed by Tubby Barrell, the fat boy of St. Sam's.

“You sent for us, sir,” said Jack Jolly, quietly.

“I did!” growled Dr. Birchmall, glaring savidly at the four newcomers. Probably you have guessed the reason already!

Jack Jolly & Co. tried to look blank, while Tubby Barrell, who wasn't egactly of the stuff that heroes are made of, cowered and trembled.

“Haven't you anything on your consciences?” thundered the Head, as they made no reply.

The juniors' hands went up instinctively to their consciences, then they shook their heads.

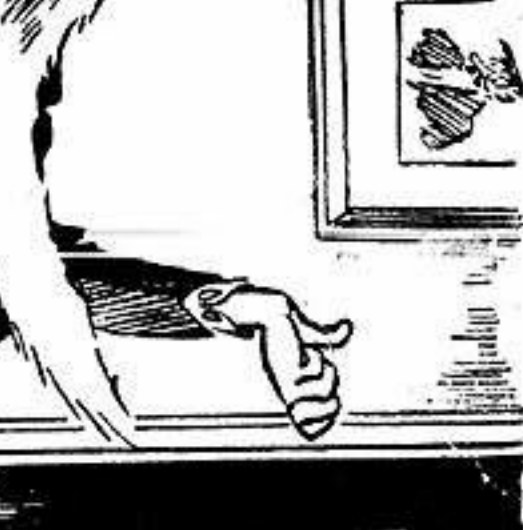
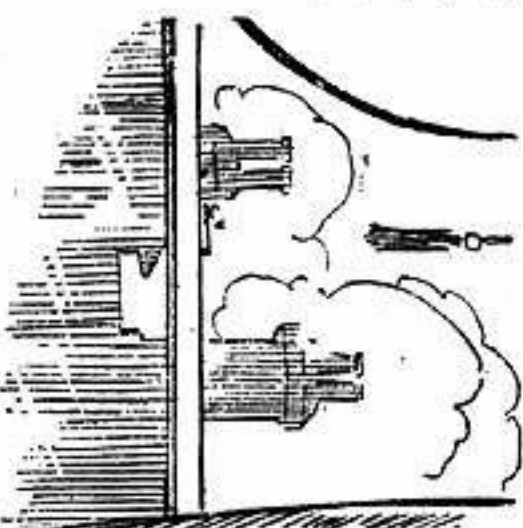
“Mine's got nothing on it, anyway,” said Jack Jolly. “How about you, chaps?”

“Same here!” cursed Merry and Bright.

Dr. Birchmall snorted furiously. “Wretched boys! Don't seek to escape the consequences of your crime, for it won't come off with me. But I won't argue the toss about it any longer. Instead, I'll tell you why I've yanked you up here on the carpet this morning. A couple of hours ago, when I went to my study cupboard for a little snack, I found that a massiff seed-cake which I had prepared for me was missing. Since then it has come to my ears that you young villains were seen feeding your faces on a similar cake after morning lessons, and I innocently guessed that you four were the marionettes. So don't dare to deny it now! I know jolly well that you took the cake!”

“But there's no harm in taking the cake, sir!” protested Jack Jolly. “People are often telling me I take the cake. Why, only last week, when I scored 99 on the miniature range, someone made that very remark!”

“I'm like that, too, sir!” said Bright. “When Mr. Tickham saw my eggssamina. THE MAGNET LIBRARY—NO. 1,077.



tion paper this morning he told me I fairly took the biscuit!”

“Silence!” hooted the Head. “How dare you indulge in pleasantries at my eggss- Come here, Barrell!”

Tubby Barrell, with his fat knees knocking together, stood fourth.

Dr. Birchmall fixed a hip, nottock look on the fat junior's dilo, and a thumb and fourfinger on his ear.

“Yow-ow!” yelled Tubby in anguish. “Silence, Barrell! This is a meor trille compared with what you are going to get! Before you leave this study I am going to ring a full confession from you. Denials will be useless. Now, Barrell, confess the truth! You and these other young raskals pinched my cake, didn't you?”

“No, we didn't!” roared Tubby Barrell. “Yow-ow-ow!”

“You jolly well didn't!”

“The tooth, Barrell, the tooth!” barked Dr. Birchmall, reaching out for a crook-looking birch-rod. “It was you and Jack Jolly & Co. who berged my seed-cake, wasn't it?”

“Yaroooooop!” howled Tubby Barrell in agerry. “Oh, crickey! I confess, sir. You're quite right. We're the gilly parties!”

“Good!” grunted the Head, putting down his birch-rod and rubbing his hands together with satisfaction. “I am very glad indeed that the mystery has been cleared up so easily. I will now proceed to fog you all black and blue!”

“Oh, crumbs!” murmured Jack Jolly & Co., beginning to look blue already.

“And kindly refrain from the use of such childish eggsspressions as ‘Oh, crumbs!’” added the Head severely. “To indicate dismay, educated persons always say: ‘Oh, my giddy aunt!’ Now, Jolly, you first!”

“But suppose I say I am innocent!” exclaimed Jack Jolly, indignantly. “Am I to be punished on the word of Tubby Barrell, sir?”

“Undoubtedly, Jolly! In any case, I am convinced of your gile myself. Any body with half an eye can see that you are looking seedy. It is obvious that some of my cake has found its weigh into your anatomy!”

“But, sir, I haven't eaten so much as a jam puff since brocker—”

“Enough!” cried the Head tartly. “Beard over immediately and be walloped!” Jack Jolly, with a hopeless gesture, bent over and waited with resignation

for his wallop. While his pale looked on with simperly in their hearts, hoping that the Head would fire himself out on their leader, and let them off lightly in consequence.

The Head, with a malshus smile hovering about his crook lips, selected a fearsome instrument of torcher, and swished it through the air approvingly.

“This will do, I think!” he murmured. “Prepare yourself for the harrying of your life, Jolly!”

He raised the birch aloft and took careful aim.

The spectators waited eggsspectantly, antissipating that at any moment the room would echo with the thunderous crash of birch meeting trousers.

But by a miracle it never happened! Before the Head could strike a single blow the door opened, and Binding, the page, looked in.

“Sorry to interrupt, sir!” he cried. “A gentleman wants to see you on urgent business.”

“Oh, rats!” snorted Dr. Birchmall. “Can't he wait?”

“Which he said it was far fully important,”

Dr. Birchmall, with a weary sigh, replaced



“Me?” echoed the Head, turning suddenly pale. “Look here, Mr. Cheetern, if you've come here to accuse me of forgery and embezzlement, I can assure you you're mistaken. The gilly person is one of the other masters. Injun!”

Mr. Cheetern chuckled.

“Don't worry your fat, Doctor Birchmall! I haven't come about anything like that. My business is of a much pleasanter natcher. It concerns a legacy!”

“A legacy?” repeated the Head, his bendy eyes opening wide. “You mean some spendulix or, as it is vulgarly eggsspressed, some money?”

“Hoony!” yelled Dr. Birchmall, jumping to his feet and doing a wild war-dance all round the study. “The greatest wish of my life has come true at last! Now I shall be rich beyond the dreams of avararis! Crocus will be nowhere in it with me! Hip-hip-hoony!”

“Wait a minute!” grinned Mr. Cheetern. “You haven't got the spendulix yet! Let me eggssplain matters to you, sir.”

Dr. Birchmall ceased his wild career and returned to his desk looking a little anxious.

“Look here, if you try to diddle me out of my legacy—” he began, threateningly.

“Set your fears at rest, sir!” interrupted the solicitor, with a reassuring posture. “I may be a scoundril of the deepest dye, eggssperienced in blackmail, robbery, and fraudulent conversions, but I should scorn to diddle people out of their legacies. I was merely going to eggssplain that you are only entitled to your legacy if certain conditions are fulfilled.”

“Oh!”

“You see, Doctor Birchmall, it's like this here. The legacy was left by your diseased aunt, Betsy Birchmall.”

“Good old Aunt Betsy! I always thought I was the apple of her eye!” murmured the Head.

“Betsy Birchmall,” continued the solicitor, in a thrilling whisper, “was well known as a hewmontarian. She used to stave her household and rob the poor and needy, so that she could give money to deceiving causes.”

“That is so!” nodded the Head. “She was always a very charitable old

lady, giving money to societies for the prevention of crookery, and so fourth.”

“Eggssactly! That being so, you won't be surprised to hear that when she left her fortune to you she did it only on condition that it didn't go against her principles in any weigh.”

“You mean?” cried the Head anxiously. “I mean that she left the money to you on condition that you turned out to be a kind-hearted and sweet-temperd skoolmaster, treating your boys with tender affection and care on all occasions.”

“Oh, my giddy aunt!” ejaculated Dr. Birchmall.

“If you can prove that such is the case, all will be well, and Betsy Birchmall's entire fortune will be yours. But if, on the other hand, it turns out that you are a beastly rotter and a booying cad, and that you treat the boys with savidgo crookery, the money will be given to the Society for the Persecution of Skoolmasters instead!”

“Grato pip!” murmured the Head faintly.

“So before I hand you over the jimmy-gobline, sir,” eggssplained Mr. Cheetern, “I shall have to satisfy myself that you fulfil the conditions of the will. Is that quite clear, sir?”

Now while the solicitor had been chewing the mop the Head's brain-box had been working furiously. He realised immediately that it wouldn't do to give himself away to Mr. Cheetern. He must pretend to be good and kind-hearted, and not a bit dismayed to learn what was required of him. Consequently, by the time Mr. Cheetern had finished, he had managed to conceal his shagrin and was grinning all over his dilo as the legacy was already as good as his.

“Thank you for eggssplaining the position, Mr. Cheetern,” he said, gratefully. “Everything is quite clear to me now, and I can assure you I shall have the slightest difficulty in proving that I am the kindest skoolmaster in Grate Britain, bar none! If you'll kindly wait a minute I'll just call in one or two of my friends—”

But Mr. Cheetern shook his head. “I'm afraid that's not enough. Unfortunately your diseased aunt was a somewhat distrustful lady, and she stipulated in her will that I should investigate your character myself.”

“And how the thump do you propose to do that?” asked the Head.

“By staying at the skool for a few days and studying your behaviour!” answered the solicitor, without hesitation. “With your permission, sir, I will remain here as your guest and thoroughly satisfy myself that you are kind enuff to deserve the legacy.”

“Surely you are not afraid of the verdict?” asked Mr. Cheetern with a slie frown.

“Oh no, not at all!” said Dr. Birchmall hastily. “I was just thinking that it seemed a pity for a bizzy man like yourself to waste his time pottering about a giddy skool—”

Bless you, I don't mind that! (Continued on page 28.)

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GOOD morning, sir! Doctor Birchmall, I presume?”

“It is, it is!” replied the Head. “Please take a seat.”

“Where shall I take it to?” asked the Head's visitor, looking slightly surprised. “Nowhere, you silly ass!” roared Dr. Birchmall. “I mean sit down on a seat yourself—equally-woo, if you understand that better!”

“Oh, of course! I didn't think of that!” grinned the newcomer, excepting the invitation. “And now to business, my dear sir! I am a solicitor. Here is my card.”

Dr. Birchmall glarnced at the eggssquinting spectacles at it, read:

CHARLIE CHEETERN, SOLICITOR, Cheetern Chambers, Swindle Street, London.

“Glad to meet you, Mr. Cheetern!” remarked the Head, with a court nod. “But what the dickens

is all this about?”