

"SPEEDWAY PALS!" BRILLIANT NEW "DIRT-TRACK"
SERIAL STARTS TO-DAY!

No. 1,104. Vol. XXXV. Week Ending April 13th, 1920.

The Magnet 2^D

LIBRARY EVERY SATURDAY.



FACING DEATH FOR THE FILMS!

A nerve-tingling incident from this week's long story of the Grayfriars Chums, which features Harry Wharton in the role of a sheikh.



Come Into the Office, Boys!

Always glad to hear from you, chums, so drop me a line to the following address: The Editor, The "Magnet" Library, The Amalgamated Press, Ltd., Fleetway House, Farringdon Street, London, E.C.4.

NOTE.—All Jokes and Limericks should be sent to c/o "Magnet," 5, Carmelite Street, London, E.C.4 (Comp.).

DID you enjoy yourselves last week, chums? I wonder how many of you went away for the Easter holidays? Anyway, whether you went away, or whether you stayed at home, I expect some of you will have run up against some holiday experiences worth relating. Don't forget that, as I told you a little while ago, I am giving MAGNET penknives in return for brief accounts of interesting experiences. I'm reminding you again this week, because those experiences will still be fresh in your minds. Sit down and write them out before you forget them.

In any case, I hope you don't run up against an experience such as befell one of our artists—who shall be nameless! He and a friend were on the Continent, and they went into a cafe in the sailors' quarter of a French port. Now, this cafe was a kind of place which Fisher T. Fish would call "a tough joint," and the proprietor was used to customers who "cut up rough." When the bill was brought to our artist friend he found that he was decidedly overcharged, and he told the proprietor what he thought of him in the best French he could muster—which wasn't much!

Now, on the Continent people don't carry money as we do. Instead of coins they have notes, and the artist had stowed away his notes in his hip-pocket. Not getting any satisfaction from the proprietor regarding his overcharge, the artist decided to pay his bill, and felt in his hip-pocket for his roll of notes. That innocent action

Started the Ball Rolling!

The cafe proprietor, used to "tough guys," put our artist down as one of them, and jumped to the conclusion that he was going to put an end to the discussion by pulling out a revolver.

"You never saw a cafe empty so quickly in all your life," said the artist, when he told me the tale. "The boss yelled at the top of his voice; his wife screamed 'Murder!' and 'Police!' and a jazz band that had been playing dropped their instruments and made one rush for the door, followed by the rest of the customers."

In a few minutes the whole street was in an uproar, and the police dashed into the cafe to give battle, as they thought, to the two desperate criminals. Judge of their astonishment when they found two innocent artists sitting there with a roll of notes in their hands, wondering what the dickens the whole row was about. The police had to be pacified, of course, and it took our artists some time to do it. But I don't think that particular cafe proprietor will make a practice of overcharging English tourists again.

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As for the artists—well, I don't think we fellows at Fleetway House have quite finished laughing at them yet!

THIS LIMERICK WINS A PRIZE!

Two fellows named Potter and Greene
With Coker can always be seen.

But when H. Coker rags
With a crowd of young fags,
They murmur: "We're going, old bean!"

A leather pocket wallet has been awarded to: G. W. Porter, 80, Harleyford Road, Vauxhall, S.E. 11.

A Query About Radium

comes from John Coxon, of Fence-houses. Is it dangerous? he asks. It certainly is! Scientists who use only the minutest quantities of radium have died painful deaths as a result of the harmful and invisible emanations which come from radium. Radium is one of those things of which even scientists have not yet discovered all the properties. It cures some diseases—and causes others. But no doubt the march of science will soon discover perfectly safe methods of handling this dangerous stuff.

Have You Ever Seen a Mirage?

is the question which George Greenly, of Redruth, asks me. As a matter of fact, I have, so I can tell George something about it. I was cruising once off the north-west coast of Norway, well up within the Arctic Circle, when we sighted a ship. We were cruising towards it, but we seemed to be a deuce of a long time in reaching it, and as we progressed, to our amazement the ship mounted slowly but surely into the air. Then suddenly we saw another ship underneath it, but upside down! It was a double mirage.

Eventually the actual ship came into sight, and we then had the unique experience of seeing the same ship three times—once in actuality and twice in the mirage. Mirages are caused by the atmosphere, and are not confined, as most people think, to the desert. But you can quite understand that a traveller in the desert could see the mirage of an oasis which was many, many miles away. In fact, if we had not been heading towards this particular ship, and she had not been heading towards us, we might never have seen the ship at all—only the mirage!

The Vulture's Eye

forms the basis of a question from Tom Danby, of Penarth. Can a vulture see tremendous distances, or does it locate its prey by its sense of smell? That is something which scientists have not yet settled; they are divided in their

opinions on this subject. But vultures can certainly locate the dead bodies of the animals on which they feed at a great distance—sometimes thirty miles away. They have been known to descend from a height at which they were almost invisible and fall upon the body of a snake which was only a few inches long.

One of my readers, Kenneth Waring, of Leeds, who has been reading some stories about the planets, wants to know

Is Time Always the Same

on the various planets? No. Time is based on the speed at which a planet revolves. The earth revolves, roughly, once a day, which gives us 365 days per year. But the planet Jupiter, for instance, takes twelve times as long to revolve. The result is that 365 days on Jupiter would be equal to twelve years in our reckoning.

HEARD THIS ONE?

A teacher asked her class to bring something to school to demonstrate the use of the word "Immaterial." Next morning a bright youth brought a stick. "Well," said teacher, "how does that demonstrate the word?" "I'll show you, miss," replied the lad. "Take hold of one end, and then the other; that's it. Now let go one end." "Which end?" asked the teacher. "Well, it's immaterial, miss," said the lad, "there's treacle on both ends!"

A pocket-knife has been awarded to: Louis A. Forward, Clearwood, Dilton, Westbury, Wilts., for sending in this joke. Now why don't you other chaps have a go at it?

I'm getting to the end of my space again, so I'm afraid that I shall have to leave a large number of questions unanswered until next week, while, in the meantime, I'll tell you what I have

In Store for You

next week. First and foremost, of course, comes Frank Richards' long complete yarn of the chums of Greyfriars. This is entitled:

"A Film Star's Vengeance!"

Myron Polk is the star in question, and the person towards whom his vengeance is directed is Harry Wharton, of Greyfriars. I'm not going to "let on" anything more about this story for next week, except to say that it's one of the best yarns in the Hollywood series. You'll read it, of course!

"SPEEDWAY PALS!"

By Carney Allan

you've already sampled, and I'll bet you're eagerly awaiting the next instalment. You'll find it in next week's issue—full of thrills and novel situations. Then comes a contribution from young Dicky Nugent, entitled:

"THE HEAD'S BOOBY-TRAP!"

There are heaps of laughs in this latest "shocker," so see that you share in them. Cheerio, chums!

YOUR EDITOR.

HARRY WHARTON'S PERIL!



A tip-top yarn dealing with the adventures of Harry Wharton & Co. in the film city of Hollywood.
By FRANK RICHARDS.

THE FIRST CHAPTER.

At Last!

"YOU, Bunter!"
"Eh?"
"You're wanted."
"Oh!"

"Riding act—ready in ten minutes," said Mr. Van Duck, assistant director of the Perfection Picture Syndicate.

Billy Bunter gasped.

"I say, you mean I'm going to be filmed?" he ejaculated.

"Yep!"

"Oh!" gasped Bunter.

Mr. Van Duck hurried away, his long legs whisking.

Billy Bunter smiled.

He smiled an extensive smile, extending almost from one fat ear to the other.

"I say, you fellows, it's come at last!" he said.

"Bravo, old fat bean," said Bob Cherry.

"Gratters, old man!" said Harry Wharton, with a smile.

"The gratterfulness is terrific, my esteemed fat Bunter," remarked Hurree Jamset Ram Singh. "The surprisingness is also great."

Bunter's fat lip curled.

He was not surprised. The only surprising thing to Bunter was that he had not been called upon before to display his grace, his good looks, and his wonderful acting before the cameras.

Bunter would willingly have kept all the cameras at the Perfection location, in Jack-Rabbit Canyon, busily occupied. He preferred a "sheikh" part. But he was willing to play any part that required good looks, graceful manners, and a distinguished presence. Hitherto, there had been no demand for his services.

Now he was wanted! Mr. Schootz, the Perfection director, had realised at last what an asset he was wasting.

"I say, you fellows, you needn't be jealous!" said Bunter, grinning. "It was bound to come."

"Fathead!"

"Old Schootz has passed me over for you duds," said Bunter. "But he was

bound to see reason in the long run. After all, a big Hollywood producer can't be an utter fool. He's found out my value."

"If any!" murmured Nugent.

"You fellows can come and look on," said Bunter patronisingly. "You can pick up some tips about film-acting by watching me. Old Schootz always makes you watch that fellow Polk when he's doing his stunts. You'll learn more by watching me."

"Modesty, thy name is Bunter!" remarked Bob.

"Well, facts are facts," said Bunter. "Facts speak for themselves. You fellows are left out of this, and I'm picked out for a special act. It was only to be expected, though, of course, you're green with envy."

"The greenfulness is not terrific," murmured Hurree Jamset Ram Singh.

Billy Bunter sneered.

He was determined to take the view that the whole Greyfriars party were green with envy. Without that his triumph would

Jealousy is the root of Myron Polk's intense dislike of Harry Wharton, for the Greyfriars junior has shown up the Perfection star as a funk. And from this jealousy springs an implacable hatred and the desire to do Harry Wharton an injury.

not have been complete.

"You did a riding act the other day, Wharton, on Polk's horse," he said. "Old Schootz seemed to be satisfied. As a matter of fact, I didn't think much of it."

"Thanks," said Wharton, laughing.

"You'll admit that I could have done it better?"

"Ha, ha! Not quite."

"Well, Mr. Schootz seems to think so," jeered Bunter. "He's picked me out for a special riding act this morning, and sent Van Duck to tell me so. He hasn't picked you."

Billy Bunter rose from the bench in the patio of the old adobe ranch-house, the headquarters of the Perfection Company on location.

He drew himself to his full height—which was not actually majestic—and blinked at the chums of the Remove loftily through his big spectacles.

The fat junior was immensely elated. What had happened was, of course,

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only his due; but it had been a long time coming.

Mr. Hiram K. Fish, who had brought the Greyfriars party out to Hollywood for the big "school" film, had scorned the idea that Bunter would be of any use.

Bunter had hooked himself on to the party, but he was simply a "passenger." As Fisher T. Fish had remarked, when it came to hooking on, a fish-hook had nothing on Bunter.

Bunter had explained to Mr. Schootz that he was a born film actor. He had explained to Mr. Schootz that he was the very fellow who was wanted. He had pointed out to Mr. Van Duck that he was the goods.

And all had been in vain.

Bunter was not sure whether it was sheer stupidity, or whether there was a conspiracy against him. Obviously, it was one or the other, for otherwise there was no accounting for the fat junior having been passed over.

But it had come right at last! Now he was going to witch the world with noble horsemanship; his exploits were going to be recorded on the film, and he was going to take his proper place as a film star, like the king coming into his own at last, as it were.

"Well, I can't stay talking here," said Bunter. "You fellows have time for jaw; I shall be rather busy this morning."

And Bunter rolled away, leaving the Famous Five grinning. Bunter in his hour of triumph was not without his comic side.

Bunter passed Vernon-Smith in the patio, and stopped to give him the glad tidings.

"I say, Smithy, I'm picked out for a special act this morning."

"Gammon!" said the Bounder.

"Oh, really, Smithy—"

"Rats!"

"Yah!" retorted Bunter elegantly; and he rolled on and stopped to confide the great news to Lord Mauleverer.

"Like to come along and see me do my act, Mauly?" he asked.

"Eh?"

"Special riding act, featuring me," explained Bunter.

"Oh, begad!" said Lord Mauleverer, in astonishment.

"Wharton thinks he can ride!" grinned Bunter. "He did a rather poor stunt on Polk's horse the other day. I fancy I shall rather knock that out. Come and watch."

Bunter rolled on, leaving Lord Mauleverer blinking. His lordship looked astonished, and he also looked concerned. Bunter had no doubt that when it came to riding he could beat the rest of the Greyfriars party hollow. But the rest of the party entertained serious doubts as to whether he could stick on a horse at all, unless he was glued there.

"Bunter, old man—" gasped Mauleverer.

Bunter blinked back at him.

"Mind your eye, old fellow," said Mauleverer. "If they stick you on that horse that Wharton rode somethin' will happen."

"Do you think I shall fall off?" hooted Bunter.

"Yaas."

"Yah!"

Billy Bunter rolled on his way. At the adobe archway of the rancho he came on Coker and Potter and Greene of the Fifth. Naturally, he paused to tell the Fifth-Formers. His triumph could not have too wide a publicity.

"I say, you fellows—" said Bunter. Coker of the Fifth glanced at him.

"Shut up!" he said.

"Oh, really, Coker—"

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"Sheer off!" said Coker, frowning. "I've warned you fags to keep your distance. Cut!" Coker of the Fifth was as 'Fifth-Formy' at Jack-Rabbit Canyon as in the old quad at Greyfriars.

"Look here—" hooted Bunter.

Horace Coker made a motion with his boot; and Bunter departed hastily, with his great news untold. Outside the rancho he came on Fisher T. Fish.

"I say, Fishy, I'm picked out for a special riding act this morning," he said.

Fisher T. Fish grinned.

"I'm sure wise to it," he said. "It's going to be some act, I allow. Search me!"

"Jealous, like the rest?" sneered Bunter.

Fisher T. Fish chuckled; and Bunter, with a sniff, proceeded. Leonora, the movie girl, was at hand, and Bunter felt that he could not leave her in ignorance of the big thing that was coming.

"I say, Miss La Riviere, you'd like to see me do my special riding act this morning," he said.

"I sure would!" answered Leonora, with a smile.

"I fancy it will be worth watching," remarked Bunter, with a smirk.

"You've said it," agreed Leonora.

"I've seen the burro already!"

"The what?" ejaculated Bunter. The word was new to him.

"The cayuse you're going to ride," said Leonora.

"Here, you Bunter!" called out Mr. Van Duck.

"Coming!" answered the fat junior.

And, like the deep and blue ocean in the poem, William George Bunter rolled on.

THE SECOND CHAPTER.

Bunter and the Burro!

HARRY WHARTON & CO. came out of the rancho.

Bunter had invited them to see his act; and they did not mean to miss it. They were quite interested, and a little perplexed.

Riding was only one of the many things that Bunter fancied he could do. But if there was anything a little worse than Bunter's cricket, and Bunter's football, and Bunter's swimming, it was Bunter's riding. A ride on a donkey at Margate was a wild adventure to Bunter. Harry Wharton had ridden the spirited black Arab that belonged to Myron Polk, the Perfection star. But if Bunter was placed on that steed, it was absolutely certain that the well-known law of gravitation would assert itself at once, and that Bunter would make a journey from the saddle to the solid earth, by the shortest way in the shortest time.

"Blessed if I can catch on to this," said Bob Cherry. "Bunter ain't safe on a horse. Schootz knows he can't ride!"

"I hope they've got a quiet animal for him, anyhow," said Harry. "He's about able to ride a clothes-horse!"

"We do not want to see the esteemed Bunter broken into preposterous pieces," remarked Hurree Jamset Ram Singh.

"He looks jolly pleased with himself," grinned Johnny Bull.

The juniors chuckled as they looked at Bunter. The Owl of the Remove undoubtedly looked pleased with himself. His fat little nose was high in the air, his plump chest puffed out, and he swanked in a way that quite put Myron Polk, the Perfection star, into the shade. Obviously, Bunter looked on himself as the "goods."

There was no "set" ready for Bunter. The cameras were ready, in the open space before the rancho; that was all,

No horse was to be seen, but a man was leading a small, wiry-looking donkey to the spot. As the juniors sighted it, a sudden illumination came into their minds.

"My only hat!" ejaculated Nugent. "Is that Bunter's fiery steed?"

"Oh crumbs!" gasped Bob Cherry. "Ha, ha, ha!"

Billy Bunter blinked round at the juniors. His fat lip curved in a sneer of contemptuous disdain.

"Jealous?" he asked. "You can cackle! Wait till I've done my act!"

Mr. Schootz came out of the rancho. The plump Perfection director glanced round.

"All ready, Van Duck?" he asked.

"Sure!"

"You ready, you Bunter?"

"Yes, rather!" answered Billy Bunter.

"I guess I'm going to give you a chance," said Mr. Schootz. "Fish allows you're too pesky a jay to be any good at anything; but I've thought a lot of times that your face is wasted off the films."

Billy Bunter smirked.

Mr. Schootz, whom he had hitherto considered an utter dud, rose in his estimation. He recognised at last that Bunter's good looks would be a big draw on the pictures.

"There's one thing, Mr. Schootz," he said.

"Spill it," said the director briefly.

"I don't care about riding Polk's horse," said Bunter, shaking his head.

"Polk's horse!" repeated Mr. Schootz, staring at him.

"Yes. I don't like the fellow, and I decline to ride his horse," said Bunter firmly.

No doubt a glimmering of what would happen, if he got on the back of that spirited Arab, was in Bunter's mind. Bunter might be a duffer; but he had not forgotten that self-preservation was the first law of Nature.

"Carry me home to die!" ejaculated Mr. Schootz. "Suffering cats and dogs! Did you figure that you was going to ride Polk's horse? Search me!"

"Well, that's all right, then," said Bunter. "Where's my mount?"

"Bring that burro here, Dick!"

The donkey was led to Bunter. He blinked at it.

"What's this?" he ejaculated, in astonishment.

"Don't you know a burro when you see one?" asked Mr. Schootz.

"You—you don't mean—" Bunter gasped. His fat face was crimson with indignation. "Do you think I'm going to ride a donkey?" he roared.

"I guess you're going to try," answered Mr. Schootz. "Stick on the cayuse if you can."

"Look here—" roared Bunter.

"Can it!" interrupted Mr. Schootz tersely. "I'm giving you a chance. I guess you was cut out by Nature for a comedy part, if you've got sense enough for it. That's the pint—have you? I'm going to see!"

Billy Bunter gasped with wrath.

"A—a—a comedy part!" he stuttered.

"What the thunder did you figure?" snapped Mr. Schootz. "You reckon you can hand out serious stuff, with a face like yours?"

Bunter spluttered. It was not, after all, for his good looks that he was wanted. Mr. Schootz was as blind as ever to his good looks.

"Look here—" he gasped.

"Aw, can it!" interrupted Mr. Schootz. "You reckon that I've got time to waste? I guess I'm filling up time with you while I'm waiting for Myron Polk to blow in. Now, then, you

get on that burro, and let me see whether you can stick on."

"I—I—I—" gasped Bunter. From his lofty visions, he had come back suddenly to common earth again.

He was wanted to put up a comic scene, mounted on a donkey! Schootz supposed that his looks suited him for such a part. Obviously Schootz was as big a fool as Bunter had ever thought him.

The fat junior was tempted to turn on his heel and stride away with all the dignity of insulted majesty. On second thoughts, however, he didn't. Second thoughts are proverbially best. This scene was not what Bunter had expected. It was miles beneath his dignity. A Valentino part would have suited him, if Schootz could only have seen it. But an undignified part was better than no part. As Hurree Jamset Ram Singh would have expressed it, a dinner of herbs in hand was better than a stalled ox in the bush. It was Bunter's only chance of being filmed at all; and he made up his fat mind to it.

"Well?" snapped Mr. Schootz. "You got any more to spill?"

"I—I—I'll do it!" gasped Bunter.

And even at that moment of disillusion, he was conscious of a gleam of comfort. He could stick on a donkey! Even Bunter had some lingering doubts about sticking on a horse.

"Get on!" grunted Mr. Schootz.

Bunter eyed the donkey warily. It stood very submissively and looked a quiet animal. But there was an expression in its eyes that Bunter did not wholly like.

Mr. Schootz waved a fat hand to wave the crowd back out of range of the cameras. Bunter climbed on the donkey, a good deal as if he were climbing a fence. Mr. Schootz grinned.

He signed to the camera men. The cameras began to click.

Apparently, Mr. Schootz considered that Bunter's style in mounting his steed was worthy of being placed on record.

Bunter plunged on the saddle, plunged over it, and slipped down the other side. The donkey stood firm, only turning his head to look at Bunter, as if surprised.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Great!" ejaculated Mr. Schootz. "Great! I guess this will tickle the film fans to death! Do that again!"

"Ow!"

Bunter climbed on the other side of the patient steed. This time he landed in the saddle and found the stirrups. He grasped the reins and held on with hands and knees, gasping for breath, his fat face crimson, his eyes rolling wildly behind his big glasses as the donkey got into motion.

That donkey, as Bunter had vaguely suspected, was not so quiet an animal as he had looked. He proceeded to "cavort" in a way that was disconcerting to a rider of Bunter's skill.

First he threw up his fore feet, and Bunter had a narrow escape of shooting over his tail. Then he threw up his hind legs, and Bunter almost shot over his ears. Then he threw up all four of his feet, jumping into the air, and came down again with a crash that lifted Bunter out of the saddle.

"Yaroooh!" roared Bunter.

He felt himself going.

"Yow-ow! Help! Yoooop!"

"Great!" yelled Mr. Schootz. "I guess I told Fish that he was the funniest guy ever! Great!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The cameras clicked without cessation, placing on record Billy Bunter's feats of horsemanship—or donkeymanship.



The spectators roared with laughter as the donkey threw up his hind legs and almost shot Bunter over his ears. "Yaroooh!" roared Bunter, as the cameras clicked without cessation. "Yow-wow! Help! Yooop! Hold him in! Oh crumbs! Help! Murder! Fire!" (See Chapter 2.)

All the spectators roared with laughter. Bunter roared with alarm.

"Yaroooh! Help! Stoppim! Hold him in! Yoooop! Oh, my hat! Oh crumbs! Help! Murder! Fire!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Great!" gasped Mr. Schootz, wiping away his tears. "Great!"

By some miracle of equilibrium Billy Bunter remained in the saddle for a minute. He had lost the stirrups, and was kicking the donkey frantically in the flanks. But a sudden jolt threw him forward, and he just saved himself by claspings the donkey round the neck. The startled steed jumped and hopped and reared and pranced, evidently in a state of astonishment and alarm.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Great!" roared Mr. Schootz. "This sure is the elephant's hind leg!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The donkey was prancing wildly now, frantically seeking to shake off his clinging rider. But Bunter was not to be

shaken off. He clung to the donkey's hairy neck like a limpet to a rock. He dared not relax his grasp for a single instant. His voice came in muffled howls from the hairy neck of his steed.

"Ow! I say, you fellows! Help! Yaroooogh! Stoppim! Ow! Wow!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

There was a sudden clatter of hoofs as the startled donkey dashed away.

"Here, stop him!" roared Mr. Schootz.

But the terrified donkey was not to be stopped. With Bunter clinging frantically to his neck, he tore away up the canyon and passed out of the range of the cameras.

"Oh, carry me home to die!" gasped Mr. Schootz, with tears of merriment streaming down his plump face. "Search me! It's the grasshopper's whiskers! Ha, ha, ha!"

"Get after that burro, some of you!"

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called out Mr. Van Duck, wiping his eyes.

There was a rush in pursuit of the runaway. But Bunter's steed was in a state of wild excitement now, and his hoofs fairly flashed as he flew. He clattered along the canyon, and vanished into a rocky gully that opened along the cliffs that shut in Jack-Rabbit. The tattoo of his hoofs died away in the distance.

Billy Bunter was gone. He left the whole Perfection company rocking with laughter.

THE THIRD CHAPTER.

Harry Wharton Declines!

"WHERE'S that Polk?"

Mr. Rigg Schootz growled out the question.

He was not addressing anybody in particular. He stood before the rancho in Jack-Rabbit, staring towards the road that ran by the bottom of the canyon—the road by which the Perfection star should have arrived from Hollywood.

Myron Polk did not choose to go "on location" with the rest of the Perfection Company. While the company were at Jack-Rabbit, the star still dwelt in his luxurious bungalow on the hill above Hollywood, and came along in his purple auto for his work on the pictures. Polk was too great a man to be argued with, and he very seldom turned up on time. If he kept the rest of the company waiting, that mattered little to the "handsomest man in Hollywood."

Mr. Rigg Schootz was rather an autocratic director, and the airy nonchalance of the Perfection star irked him sorely. But he could not afford to quarrel with the famous star who was featured as the sheikh in the "Lord of the Desert" film now under production. When Myron Polk "got his goat," Mr. Schootz's only resource was

to take it out of other members of the company.

But Mr. Schootz was very much annoyed now. He had planned a "big punch" for the Perfection star, and Myron Polk had not come. He was already late, and there was no sign of him on the road.

As often happened when Myron Polk kept the "Lord of the Desert" film waiting, the company were getting on with the Greyfriars School film. A school "set" had been put up, and Harry Wharton & Co. were busy, under the direction of Mr. Van Duck.

The juniors were a little uneasy about Bunter, and would have liked to go after him. But Mr. Van Duck told them that the burro would come back of his own accord when he got tired, and added that the juniors were there to do as they were told—a fact that the Greyfriars fellows did not dispute. So they hoped for the best for Bunter and devoted themselves to their work.

Mr. Schootz stared down towards the motor-road that ran at the foot of the hills, grunted, and growled. He was annoyed, and grew more and more annoyed with every passing minute.

At last he walked along to the set where the Greyfriars fellows were busy. Play stopped as soon as he arrived. Mr. Schootz stopped it with a wave of a podgy hand.

"That's enough shooting!" he said. "You kids can beat it—except you, Wharton! I guess I want to talk to you, kid!"

The set broke up, Wharton remaining behind, wondering what was wanted. Mr. Schootz addressed himself to Van Duck.

"That Polk ain't come in!" he growled. "I'm sure getting fed-up! That guy gets my goat!"

"He's sure late," agreed Van Duck.

Snort! from Mr. Schootz.

"I reckon it's cold feet again!" he said savagely. "He never liked the scene I put up to him! I guess we're

going to see Polk crawling down again!"

"I reckon he allows that he's got only one neck," remarked Mr. Van Duck, rather dryly.

Mr. Schootz snorted again.

"Ain't he paid for the risk? A galoot don't cinch fifty thousand dollars for sitting in an armchair, I guess. Besides, the thing's been done before. A Mexican galoot rode down the Hair-Trigger once, getting away from a lynch crowd."

Harry Wharton, who was standing silent, waiting till he was told what Mr. Schootz wanted with him, whistled softly. He looked away towards the western wall of the canyon. From where he stood, it looked as steep as the side of a house. Rugged rocks rose above rugged rocks to a little plateau half-way up the huge cliff. Above that plateau the hillside was still steeper, soaring to the rocky uplands beyond.

It was there that the Hair-Trigger ran—the name given locally to a path winding down the cliffs into the canyon.

Harry Wharton had climbed the path, and descended it again, on foot. He knew that, steep and impossible as it looked at a little distance, there was footing for a horse, and that a bold rider, with a nerve of iron, could ride it.

But a sure-footed horse would be needed, and a rider with a nerve that nothing could shake. For a single false step would hurl horse and rider from the dizzy path, to be dashed to death on the bottom of the canyon below.

And yet, as Wharton looked at it, he felt a beating of his heart, and a gleam came into his eyes. On a horse that he could trust—such as Myron Polk's black Arab—he would have liked to try that perilous ride.

But Wharton had little doubt that Myron Polk had no desire whatever to try it. The Perfection star had "jibbed" at a much less dangerous feat a week before, and sullenly refused to act in the "big punch" Mr. Schootz had planned for him. And this was a bigger punch, and a more deadly peril.

Mr. Schootz was great on realism in the pictures. By the well-known tricks of the film trade, a horseman can be made to appear to ride up an almost perpendicular wall, without the slightest danger in the actual performance. But that was not good enough for Mr. Schootz.

Polk, in his character of a film sheikh, had a world-wide reputation for masterly horsemanship and reckless daring. It was that reputation, as much as his good looks, that made him the idol of the film fans. Mr. Schootz did not see why he should not play up to it. Mr. Schootz wanted realism—stark realism. He did not want film-studio tricks—he wanted the "goods." And once, at least, he had found that Myron Polk lacked the nerve to play up.

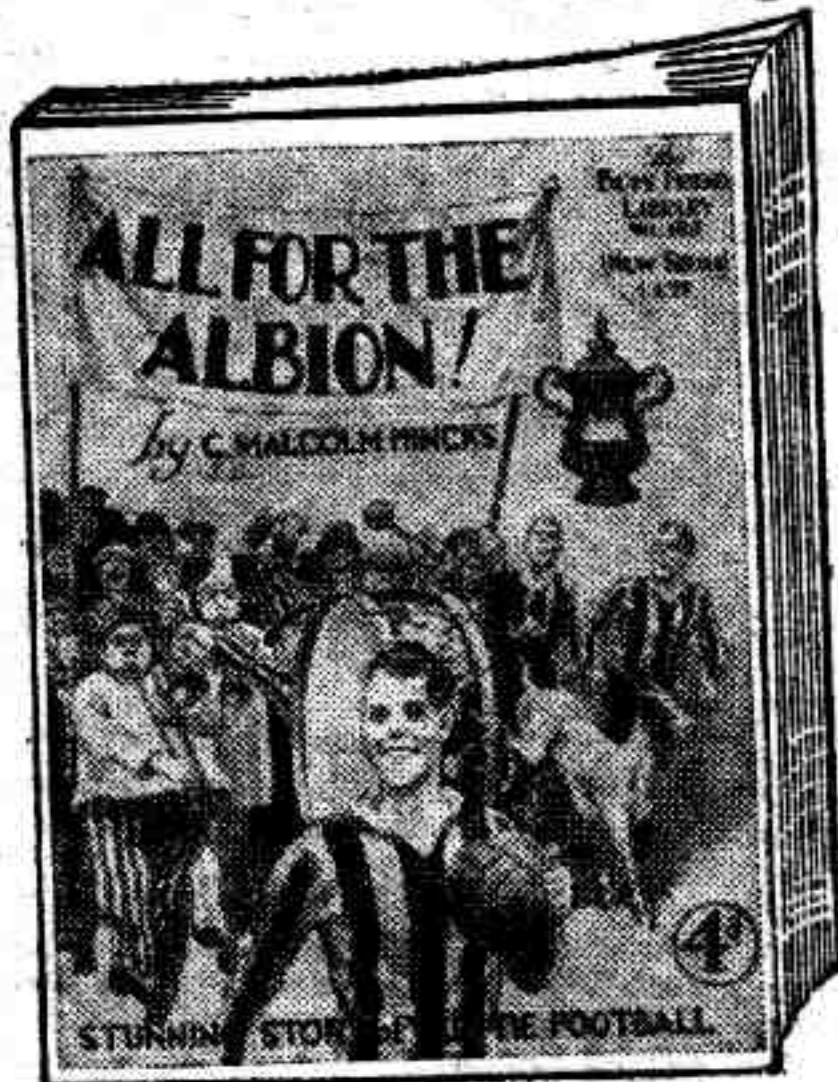
The Perfection director stared up at the canyon wall, tracing the track of the Hair-Trigger path. Then he looked at Wharton.

"Say, bo!" he grunted.

"Yes, Mr. Schootz?" said Harry, wondering what was coming.

"Last week Myron Polk crawfished at the act I fixed up for him," said the director. "You took it on, and you made the grade. You can sure ride! You make up as a dandy sheikh, and a bandage over the face makes you like enough to Polk to pass on the screen when the make-up man is through with you. You did that stunt for him, and you got home with it. Polk was sure

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mad about it, but I reckon that cuts no ice with me."

Wharton was silent.

Mr. Schootz waved his hand towards the scarcely-discernible path that dropped from rugged rock to rock down the steep side of the canyon.

"You've been over that path?"

"Yes," said Harry.

"You reckon you could ride it?"

"I think so—on a good horse."

"Polk's horse, same as before. That cayuse has got to figure in the scene. I guess the film fan wouldn't believe it was Polk, if they didn't see that cayuse."

Harry Wharton smiled. He was to make that dangerous ride, at the risk of his neck, and when it was filmed, it was to add to Myron Polk's reputation for reckless courage. The idea did not wholly appeal to Wharton. Still, such a scene would have been useless in the school film, in which Wharton acted in his own character. It was one of the desperate exploits of Ahmed Din, the Lord of the Desert, that Mr. Schootz wanted, and it was only in the character of the sheikh that the act would serve his turn.

But Wharton was not much pleased. Understudying the famous film star might be a distinction. But taking on risky acts, and leaving the credit to the man who disliked him and had striven to injure him, was what Harry would have described as rather "thick."

"Now," said Mr. Schootz impressively, "you've played up once, like a little man, and you sure got away with it. I guess Polk's jibbing at that ride on the Hair-Trigger path. He's sure going to crawfish, same as he did before. You got the nerve to do it?"

"I think I've got the nerve," said Harry slowly, "but—"

"But what?" snapped Mr. Schootz.

Wharton hesitated.

"Spill it!" snapped the director.

"Well, it's Mr. Polk's act, not mine," said Harry. "I can't butt into his business."

"Ain't my order good enough for you?" demanded Mr. Schootz gruffly. "I'm telling you that Polk is backing out, and I want you to make his ride. Ain't that good enough?"

The captain of the Greyfriars Remove shook his head.

"I don't like Mr. Polk, and he doesn't like me," he said. "I'd rather have nothing whatever to do with him or his business!"

"You'll be doing this for me!" hooted Mr. Schootz.

"I'd like to oblige you, Mr. Schootz, of course," said Harry. "But I can't butt into Polk's business. I'll do it if he asks me. I can't do it otherwise."

"Oh, guff!" growled Mr. Schootz. "You figure that that swanking guy will come down to asking you to take his place in an act he ain't got sand enough in his craw for?"

"Well, I can't do it without!" said Harry firmly. "If he wants me to do it in his place, he can ask me. If he doesn't want me to, I can't do it. It's his job, not mine!"

"Oh, carry me home to die!" hooted the exasperated Mr. Schootz. "He won't ask you, but he'll be mighty glad to get the credit of making a ride like that, all the same!"

Wharton's lip curled.

"Well, that's not good enough," he said. "Last time I took his place, I got a string of insults to my pains. I don't want to take his part. I've done it once, and Polk got his back up. I'll understudy him in that act if he asks me in plain English to do it."

"Ain't you here to do as you're told?" roared Mr. Schootz.

"In the school film—yes; but not outside it!" answered Harry. "I'm sorry, Mr. Schootz; but I can't say anything else. I'll take Mr. Polk's place if Mr. Polk makes it clear that he wants me to take it."

"Oh, beat it!" snarled Mr. Schootz. He had no expectation whatever that the Perfection star would lower his pride to the extent of asking such a favour of the Greyfriars junior.

Harry Wharton promptly beat it.

"Hallo, hallo, hallo! What was it all about?" asked Bob Cherry, as Wharton rejoined his friends at the rancho.

The captain of the Remove explained.

"Quite right!" said Bob. "Polk cut up rusty last time—and you can't butt in without his permission at least. He jolly well won't give it—and I'm jolly glad. You must be an ass to think of riding down the Hair-Trigger path!"

"A silly fathead!" agreed Nugent.

"The fatheadfulness is terrific!"

Harry Wharton laughed.

"It's been ridden before," he said. "It's risky, but I could do it—on that ripping horse of Polk's. But he's not likely to ask me—so it won't happen."

But on that point the captain of the Remove was destined to be undeceived.

WHAT NAME?

The following letters have been jumbled together purposely. Put in their proper order, they spell the name of a well-known junior at Greyfriars.

NEKTUNRFNAG

Who is it? The answer will appear in next week's MAGNET.

(Last week's solution was—
Johnny Bull.)

THE FOURTH CHAPTER.

Doggo!



"H jiminy!"

Billy Bunter's wild ride was over.

He clung to the donkey's neck, as the frightened burro clattered wildly along the rocky path. In vain the burro tried to shake him off. Bunter's grip was tenacious. He clung on for dear life. The burro, amazed and alarmed by the wild grip round his neck, and the wild sputtering and gasping of the fat junior, tried the effect of speed. But speed was no use to rid him of Bunter. The faster he ran, the tighter Bunter clung.

Whether the burro thought the matter out or not cannot be said, but all of a sudden he tried new tactics. He came to a sudden halt, with his forefeet firmly planted and his head down. That worked the oracle. Bunter shot over his ears like a pip from an orange.

William George Bunter sprawled on the hard, unsympathetic earth, and yelled.

The donkey stood for a moment blinking at him, and Bunter, sitting up, blinked dizzily at the donkey. Probably each regarded the other as a silly ass! Then the burro, relieved of his burden and feeling much better for it, opened his mouth wide, and let out a joyous bray.

"Hee-haw! Hee-e-e-haw!"

"Wow!" gasped Bunter.

"Hee-haw!" carolled the burro cheerily.

"Yow-ow-ow!" was Bunter's answer.

"Hee-e-e-e-hawwwwww!"

"Whooooooop!"

The duet finished, and the cheery burro threw up his heels and dashed away. Perhaps he suspected Bunter of intending to remount him, and he had had enough of Bunter's donkeymanship. At all events, he departed from the scene with a flourish of heels, and disappeared from Billy Bunter's dizzy gaze.

Bunter remained where he was. The donkey's misgivings were quite unfounded; Bunter had no intention of remounting him. He would as soon have mounted a hippogriff.

Bunter was breathless, and Bunter had several bumps distributed over his fat person. He sat and gasped and spluttered, and rubbed the places where he had established contact with the earth. For quite a long time Bunter's remarks were chiefly "ow" and "wow."

He picked himself up at last. The burro had vanished into space; not that Bunter wanted to see him again. His ride on that burro had been a wilder experience than any he remembered on the sands of Margate. But he would have been glad to know which way the brute had gone. It was probable that the burro had trotted back to Jack-Rabbit Canyon. That was Bunter's way—if he could find it.

As a matter of fact, he was not more than two or three hundred yards from the canyon. Had he followed the donkey he would have emerged into the canyon in a few minutes. But to Bunter's eyes the rocks and bushes that surrounded him were bewildering. He blinked round through his big spectacles and groaned dismally. Once before Bunter had been lost in the hills. Now he was lost in the hills again. Any other member of the Greyfriars party would have been able to pick his way, guided by landmarks that were in sight—a tall peak that overlooked Jack-Rabbit, a bunch of cottonwoods that reared tall crests over the rocks, and other signs. But the Owl of the Remove had never observed any landmarks. His vision was limited, and his intellectual powers, perhaps, still more limited. Bunter was lost!

But he could not stay where he was. Visions of Gomez and his gang came into his fat mind. The last time he had wandered he had been "roped in" by the gang of bootleggers that haunted the Santa Monica Mountains. Since it had become generally known that Carter, the Los Angeles detective, was hunting for the bootleggers, no sign of them had been seen. The impression at the location was that they had taken the alarm and cleared off from the vicinity. Certainly they had not attempted any further hostility towards the Greyfriars party. But Bunter, now that he was alone in the solitude of the hills, was in a state of deep alarm. Every bush, to his eyes, concealed a bootlegger—from every boulder he expected to see the fierce, black eyes of Jose Gomez watching him.

He started from the spot at last, hoping to find his way back to the location.

It was characteristic of Bunter that he should start with his back turned towards Jack-Rabbit.

He tramped on, his eyes blinking to right and left, fearful of seeing a bootlegger, and hoping to see the location. The latter, at least, he was not likely to see, as every step was taking him farther and farther away from it.

"Oh dear!" groaned Bunter.

He had been only two or three hundred yards from the canyon when he started. He was half a mile from it when he stopped to rest his weary fat limbs and blink round him dismally in

search of the way. He was hopelessly lost, and he knew it. Rugged hillsides met his view, without a sign of a path. He did not even know which way he had come, after turning round once or twice to scan the landscape through his big spectacles.

It was hot. It was only April; but the season is early in Southern California. The sun blazed down on the Santa Monica hills. Perspiration streamed down his podgy neck. Nasty insects persisted in buzzing round him and settling on his fat little nose. Bunter was not enjoying life.

Clink!

The sound of a falling stone startled him in the silence of the hills.

Bunter started and quaked.

It was a footstep!

In that solitude a footstep, to Bunter, spelled danger. The whole desperate gang of bootleggers rushed into his mind, as it were.

He blinked round hurriedly for a hiding-place.

Someone, unseen as yet, was coming over the hill, hidden from Bunter's sight by the rugged boulders. Another loose stone clinked under a heavy boot closer at hand.

Bunter suppressed a gasp of terror.

Near him were two tall rocks that leaned towards one another, with a narrow space between. Bunter darted into the opening. There was not room for him to stand up. There was just room to turn, and Bunter crouched in the farthest extremity of the recess, his eyes fixed in alarm on the opening.

Footsteps!

A burly figure came into view, passing the rocks. It stopped. In the deep shadow of the recess under the rocks Bunter was well hidden; but his fat heart almost died within him as he had a momentary glimpse of a swarthy, low-browed face—the face of a Mexican. It was Jose Gomez. Only for a moment Bunter saw that forbidding face. Then the Mexican moved out of his sight.

But the footsteps did not pass on.

Bunter listened for them with tense anxiety. But there was no sound. Had the beast stopped?

The scent of a strong cigar came to him. Evidently Gomez had stopped, for he was smoking, and Bunter could smell the cigar. The Owl of the Remove suppressed a dismal groan. Gomez was leaning against one of the tall rocks, within ten feet of Bunter, smoking his cigar. Why the Mexican had stopped there was a mystery to Bunter. Plainly he had no suspicion that the fat junior was at hand. Bunter was completely hidden from sight, unless the Mexican came close to the opening and stooped to look in.

Bunter waited.

Why didn't the beast go?

The beast showed no sign whatever of going. Minute followed minute—each one an age to Bunter. Still there was no sound of Gomez going.

The stump of a cigar circled in the air and dropped on the ground. Gomez had finished his smoke.

Now, Bunter hoped, he would go! But he did not go. The fat junior could hear him making movements and muttering to himself in Spanish. It dawned on Bunter at last that this was a place of appointment—that Gomez was there to meet someone, and that he was impatient. And when the sound of footsteps was heard again Bunter almost suppressed his breathing. In his mind's eye, he saw himself surrounded by the whole desperate gang. He did not see the newcomer; but he had no doubt that it was one or more of Gomez's gang.

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Then the voice of the Mexican came to his ears.

"You are late, senior."

"I believe so," came a drawling, nonchalant voice in reply, the tone indicating that the speaker cared little whether he was late or not. Billy Bunter almost gasped. It was the voice of Myron Polk, the Perfection star.

THE FIFTH CHAPTER.

Desperate Measures!

BILLY BUNTER crouched in the crevice between the slanting rocks, still as a mouse when the cat is at hand. He knew now why the "thug" of Spanish Town had waited there. And he knew now, beyond doubt, what the Greyfriars fellows had only suspected so far; that Myron Polk was hand in glove with the rum-running gang of the Santa Monica Hills. The hostility of the gang to the Greyfriars party had seemed inexplicable at first to Harry Wharton & Co. But they had guessed that the Perfection star was behind it.

Mr. Schootz had laughed the idea to scorn; Mr. Hiram K. Fish had snorted at the suggestion. Mr. Carter, the Los Angeles detective, had taken it seriously enough to induce him to shadow Myron Polk. But the matter did not admit of doubt now. In that hidden recess of the Santa Monica Hills Bunter was a witness to the secret meeting of the Perfection star and the chief of the rum-running gang.

That discovery brought no comfort to Billy Bunter. It added to the terror that thrilled his fat person from end to end. Suppose they found him there—in that lonely spot where there were no eyes to see what happened to him? Bunter shook like an aspen at the thought. He scarcely dared to breathe.

"I've waited for you, senior!" came Gomez's voice in sullen tones.

"Really?" said Polk.

"No importa," muttered Gomez. "since you are here! But these hills are not too safe, senior, now that I know that the police are wideawake. You yourself warned me that the detective, Carter, was on the trail."

Polk laughed contemptuously.

"Forewarned is forearmed," he said. "Now that you know the detective is looking for you, you can take precautions."

"They are taken, senior," said Gomez. "The camp is broken up—all the hooch has been removed—and my comrades have gone to a safe quarter. We shall not use these hills again until the coast is clear. The steamer will not come to this shore again at present—there will be no more landing of bootleg liquor at the cove. And your orders can no longer be carried out, senior."

"What do you mean?" snapped Polk.

"Carambo! It was through seeking to kidnap the schoolboys that the detectives have been brought down on us," growled Gomez. "We have run liquor under the eyes of the police long enough in safety. But kidnapping is a different matter. It has brought the police down on us—"

"Owing to your blundering!" snarled Polk. "But for that, three of them, at least, would have been put on the steamer and taken away. The rest might have followed. But you must lie low and leave them alone—for a time, at least. But the location in Jack-Rabbit Canyon will be broken up before long. You will have a better chance in another quarter."

"Si, senior."

"They shall never take the film for which that old fool, Fish, brought them out from England!" said Polk bitterly. "But let that pass now; I have something else to tell you. Your men are gone?"

"Si, senior."

"But you are not afraid—"

"I fear nothing, senior," said Gomez. "But it would be madness to attempt another kidnapping here. The detective—"

"I tell you I am not thinking of that. The boy Wharton—" Polk seemed to choke over the name.

Bunter was startled by the furious hatred in his voice. Coker, who had spoiled the Perfection star's beauty by his hefty punching; Mauleverer, who knew that he had played the poltroon in the fire at the studio in Hollywood, had hitherto been the object of Polk's bitter enmity. Now the venom of the film star seemed to be turned on Wharton.

"Wharton!" repeated Gomez. "I know the boy! I saw him riding your horse one day—I was watching from the hills—"

Polk ground his teeth.

"You saw—"

"He is a bold rider!" said Gomez, with malice in his tones. "From what I saw, it seems that he took your place, senior, in a dangerous act—leaping the torrent on your horse. You did the boy great honour in permitting him to take your place."

"You dog of a Greaser!" came Polk's passionate tones. "Are you daring to jeer at me? By thunder—"

"No, senior," said Gomez hastily. "No es nada—keep your temper, senior. What is it to me what the nino does?"

Polk was silent for a few moments, his handsome face white with rage. He knew that Gomez knew, what all the Perfection company knew, that Harry Wharton had taken his place because the Perfection star dared not essay the leap over the torrent. The humiliation of it brought the blood to Polk's cheeks whenever he thought of it.

It was impossible for him to forget. Since that episode there had been a difference in his position in the Perfection company.

From Mr. Schootz down to the men in overalls who shifted the sets, there was a difference. Had Polk simply refused that dangerous act, and had the act been cut, it would have mattered little. But the act had not been cut—a schoolboy had performed the feat from which the film star had shrunk. The Perfection sheikh was to appear on the screen, and all the admiring fans would believe that it was Myron Polk who had leaped the torrent on the black horse, under the roar of the waterfall. But all the Perfection company knew that the bold rider who was shown on the screen was not Polk, but the English schoolboy in his guise.

The company treated Polk with as much outward respect as before. But inwardly he could not fail to guess that there was derision, and that jests were made on the location about the daring sheikh of the films, who had allowed a schoolboy to take his risks for him!

Even in Mr. Schootz's eyes Polk had detected, or fancied that he had detected, a mocking gleam.

His reputation for reckless courage was as good as ever in the picture palaces. But all the Perfection company knew that it was a good deal of a sham.

The wound to his vanity had roused all the evil in the film star's passionate nature; and there was a great deal of evil in Myron Polk.



Myron Polk came up to the schoolboy sheikh, as he sat the black horse outside the rancho, his chums around him. "One word before you go, boy," he said. "I've warned you that you're throwing away your life to make that ride. Back out and own up that you've been bragging!" Wharton's lip curled. "I haven't the faintest wish to back out!" he answered. (See Chapter 7.)

He stood silent, his eyes glittering at the bootlegger. Even from this ruffian, in his pay, he had had to listen to mockery.

"Senor"—it was Gomez who broke the silence—"I am here to take your orders? What is it that you want?"

"The boy Wharton!" repeated Polk. "Listen to me, Gomez! He forced himself into my place that day—I did not believe for a moment that he would make good—it was a cunning scheme to put me to shame before all the company, and I let myself be fooled—"

He broke off. Gomez was listening quietly, but little as he desired to quarrel with his wealthy employer the ruffian could not keep the mocking gleam out of his eyes. He knew, what all the Perfection company knew, what Myron Polk himself knew, that the film star's courage had failed him. And he knew that it was that knowledge that inspired Polk with his almost insane hatred towards the boy who had outdone him.

"But never mind that!" snarled Polk. "Listen! Schootz is planning another mad act—a ride down the Hair-Trigger path in Jack-Rabbit Canyon. The old fool is loco on what he calls realism in the pictures. He would break my neck without caring a continental red cent."

"Madre de Dios!" ejaculated Gomez. "The Hair-Trigger path has been ridden once—by a man of my race. No American could ride it."

Polk spat out an angry oath. "You dog-goned Greaser! I could ride it if I chose! But I do not choose."

"The senor is wise not to choose,"

murmured Gomez. "It would need a hand of iron and a heart of ice."

"I could ride it, you Mexican thief!" snarled Polk. "I should ride it, but I have formed other plans!" He paused, glaring at the bootlegger. He knew that he dared not ride that perilous path and that Gomez knew it; yet his vanity impelled him to pretence that deceived neither himself nor his hearer. "I should perform the act," went on Polk. "But if I do not perform it the boy will take my place again."

"Carambo!" ejaculated Gomez. "He is a bold lad if he attempts it. But he may succeed—he rides like a Mexican vaquero."

"He will succeed," said Polk savagely. "If I refuse the act, he will take my place—and he will succeed—if he is not prevented."

"It is courage that is needed," assented the Mexican. "A hundred riders could perform the feat, if their nerve did not fail. But I—carambo!—I should not care to attempt it!"

"He will attempt it," said Polk bitterly. "He has Satan's own luck, and he will succeed—if he is allowed to succeed. You have been over the Hair-Trigger path, Gomez?"

"On foot, senor."

"Then you know it. Half way up is a plateau—fifty yards up the canyon's side. At the back of the plateau there is a cave in the rock—a little cave, amply large enough, however, to hide a man—"

"Do I not know it?" grinned Gomez. "I have hidden there, senor, when enemies were hunting me."

"You will be in that cave this afternoon, Gomez!" said the Perfection star in a low, hissing voice.

"Porque, senor."

"You will wait and watch there. The act will take place this afternoon. Wharton will ride my horse down the path from the summit of the canyon."

Bunter heard the Mexican draw a sharp breath.

"Once a horseman is started down that steep path he cannot stop," muttered Polk. "No man alive could pull in a horse on that path."

"I know it, senor."

"The boy will ride down," Polk lowered his voice, although he never dreamed that there were other ears than the Mexican's to hear. "Half-way down he will be on the little plateau. You will be ready. A word—a shout—a thrown rock, will be enough. What will happen then?"

"Por todios los santos!" muttered Gomez uneasily. "What will happen then is that horse and rider will go headlong down the cliff, to be smashed on the rocks below!"

There was a silence.

Gomez eyed the white, passionate face of the film star oddly. He was villain enough for the deed—more than one deed as dark as in the thug's memory—but he wondered that wounded vanity and wounded pride should inspire a man like Myron Polk with such ruthless hatred.

The Perfection star was wealthy, famous, the idol of picture-goers all through the United States. Men envied him, women admired him! Adoring glances followed him in the streets of Hollywood. Yet he had sunk to the

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level of the most savage member of the bootlegging gang—to the level of the most brutal thug in Los Angeles. In his set, savage face was not a sign of compunction.

"Well?" snapped Polk, at last.

"I am at your orders, senor," said Gomez.

"It will seem an accident," muttered Polk. "You will not be seen; and the boy, after his fall, can tell nothing."

"I shall not be seen, senor!"

"It would mean ruin if you were."

"Carambo, that is true!"

"Schootz will be blamed for giving the boy the risk to run," said Polk, with a sneer. "More than one man has gone to Hollywood hospital from the Perfection studio. He cares nothing so long as he brings off his stunts. He will be blamed for the—accident!"

"Sin duda!" said Gomez. "Many will be expecting to see the boy fall. They will not be surprised when the crash comes. I shall not be seen; no one will suspect. Senor, it is a safe game."

"You will do it?"

"Si, senor!"

A few more muttered words and the precious pair parted. Myron Polk strode rapidly away. The Mexican remained for a few minutes, lighting a cigar, before he left the rendezvous, in another direction.

The footsteps of both died away in the silence of the hills. But Billy Bunter did not emerge from his hiding-place.

The Owl of the Remove remained crouching in the crevice under the rocks, trembling in every fat limb, terrified out of his fat wits by what he had heard.

THE SIXTH CHAPTER.

Calling in Mr. Carter!

"BOTHER him!"

"The botherfulness is terrific!"

"Of all the asses——"

"Of all the chumps——"

"Of all the frabjous fatheads——"

The Famous Five, needless to mention, were discussing William George Bunter.

It was near lunch-time on the Perfection location. Bunter's fiery steed had wandered back to Jack-Rabbit. But, as Bob Cherry put it, the other donkey was still missing.

"The frabjous ass has lost himself again, of course," said Nugent. "He wouldn't lose a chance of losing himself. Why the thump couldn't he stick on the donkey and come back with it?"

"The whyfulness is terrific."

"If there's any trouble going, Bunter's sure to butt into it," growled Johnny Bull. "Bother him!"

"Oh, he'll wander home sooner or later," yawned the Bounder. "Leave him to it."

Harry Wharton shook his head.

"You know what happened last time," he said. "If those bootlegging scoundrels are still hanging about——"

"Oh, they're gone," said the Bounder carelessly. "Now they know the police are after them, it stands to reason they'll clear off."

"Likely enough," admitted Wharton.

"All the same——"

"Begad, you know, we can't leave Bunter to it," said Lord Mauleverer. "He's got to be found. Only how are we goin' to find the silly ass?"

"Echo answers, how!" said Bob Cherry.

"Last time we found him by sheer luck," said Frank Nugent. "That's not likely to happen again."

"The esteemed lightning never strikes twice in the same preposterous place!" remarked Hurreo Jamset Ram Singh, shaking his head.

"Bother him!" said Wharton.

"Bless him!"

"Blow him!"

Bothering and blessing and blowing Bunter was a relief to the feelings, but it did not get the juniors much "for-rarder."

There was a chance, at least, that the fatuous Owl had landed himself in trouble again, and the Famous Five were not the fellows to leave him to it.

At the same time, they could not leave the location to search for him. They were wanted for film work; and Bunter, of course, might find his way back and wander in at any moment. Moreover, a search without a clue in the pathless hills was not very hopeful.

"There will be a row with Mr. Schootz, if we clear off to look for him," said Harry. "We can't, on the bare chance that something may have happened. But——"

"Oh, he'll turn up all right," said the Bounder. "Bother the silly ass, anyhow."

And the Bounder strolled away, whistling.

"What about that detective man, Carter?" asked Bob. "He's asked us to let him know if anything fresh happens. He's awfully keen to get a chance at the bootleggers."

Harry Wharton laughed.

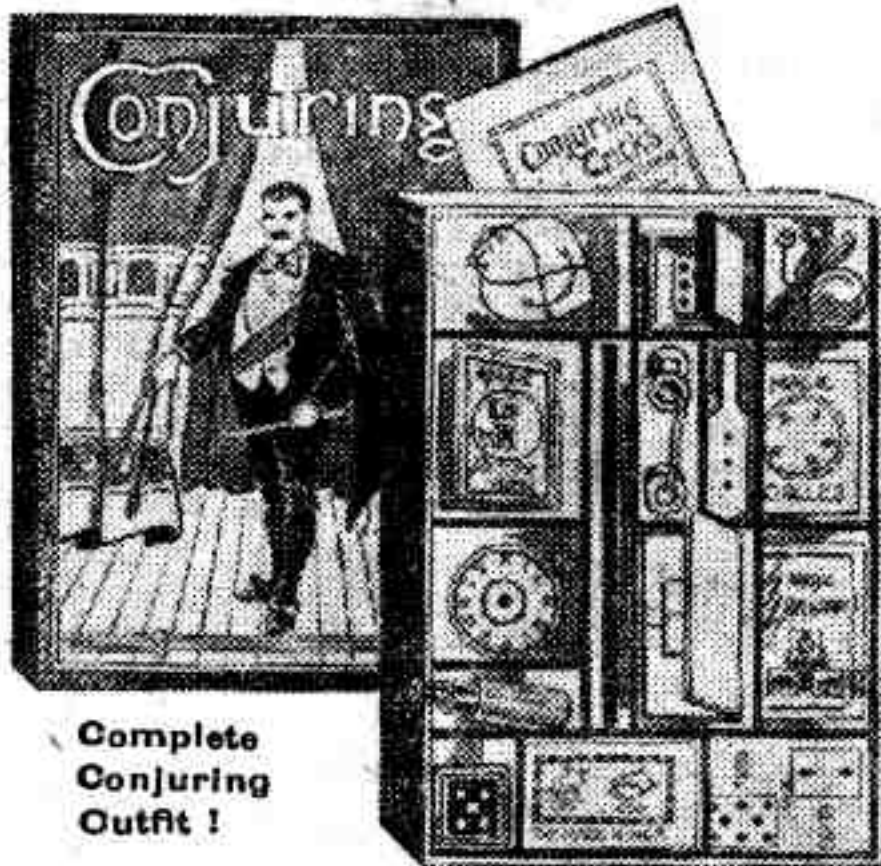
"I don't suppose he'd be very keen to come up here from Los Angeles to look
(Continued on the next page.)

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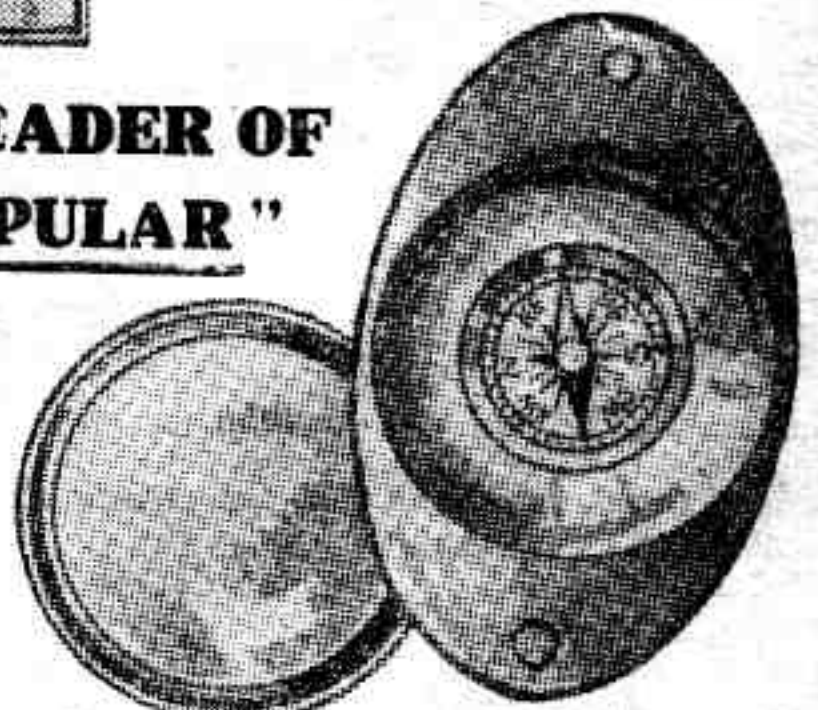
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for Bunter. Still, there's a chance that those bootlegging brutes have got hold of the fat idiot again; so Carter may like to know. He's a jolly keen man. He might have rounded up that gang the other day if Coker hadn't butted in and spoiled the whole thing."

"He struck me as being rather an ass," remarked Lord Mauleverer.

At which the Famous Five chuckled.

Detective Carter, of Los Angeles, was the fiance of Leonora, the movie girl, which accounted for Mauly's disparaging opinion of Mr. Carter.

His lordship's romantic regard for Leonora had had rather a jolt when he learned that the movie girl was engaged to Peter Carter. Good-natured as he was, Mauly could not quite like Peter.

"My dear chap, he's as keen as mustard," said Bob Cherry, "and it will give him a leg-up if he bags those bootleggers. There's going to be a jolly old wedding when he gets his promotion, and he may ask you to be best man, Mauly."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Oh, rats!" said Lord Mauleverer, less amiably than usual; and he walked away with pink cheeks, leaving the juniors grinning.

Bunter had not come in by lunch-time; and, as Bob remarked, it began to look serious. If Bunter missed a meal, it really looked as if something must have happened.

Harry Wharton requested Mr. Van Duck's permission to use his telephone, and rang up the police-station at Los Angeles. Mr. Carter was there, and Wharton was put through.

"Anything fresh up there?" inquired Mr. Carter.

There was a note of eagerness in his voice.

Harry Wharton explained that Bunter was lost again. That circumstance alone, he thought, was not likely to bring Mr. Carter all the way from Los Angeles to Jack-Rabbit Canyon. But Wharton had a shrewd suspicion that Peter Carter was rather keen to find any excuse for coming up to Jack-Rabbit, on account of his attachment to one member of the Perfection Company.

"I guess I'll come along," said Mr. Carter. "If there's a chance, I ain't losing it. You put Jane wise, kid."

"Jane?" repeated Wharton.

"Sure!"

"Oh, all right!" Wharton remembered that Miss Leonora la Riviere, of the films, was Miss Jane Snookson in private life. "Certainly, Mr. Carter! I'll tell Miss Leonora you're coming."

"It's a cinch!" said Mr. Carter.

Wharton hung up, and left Mr. Van Duck's office, and proceeded at once to "put Jane wise," as Mr. Carter expressed it. The movie girl rewarded him with a bright smile. What Leonora saw in Peter Carter was a mystery to Lord Mauleverer; but evidently she saw something, for she was quite pleased to hear that he was coming up to Jack-Rabbit that afternoon.

"Is he coming?" asked Bob, when Harry Wharton rejoined his chums at the lunch-table under the trees in the patio.

"He's coming," said Harry.

"To look for Bunter?" asked Nugent. Wharton laughed.

"I fancy he's going to look for Miss la Riviere first. But I suppose he has to give an official reason for making the trip, so he will have to look for Bunter, too."

"The fat idiot may wander in any minute," said the Bounder.

"Only—he may not," said Bob.

"The mayfulness is terrific, but the notfulness is also great," remarked Hurree Singh, shaking his head.

As a matter of fact, the Owl of the Remove did not wander in. After lunch he was still missing. Shortly after that meal Harry Wharton was called into Mr. Schootz's office.

He found the great producer frowning grimly.

"Polk ain't blown in!" said Mr. Schootz.

Wharton was aware of that.

"He ain't keen on that ride," said the Perfection director sardonically. "He sure ain't honing to ride down the Hair-Trigger. But his cayuse is here, and you're here, kid. Now, what about it?"

Wharton shook his head.

"I'm willing, if Mr. Polk agrees," he said, "but I can't borrow his horse and act in his name without his permission."

Snort, from Mr. Schootz.

The producer's heart was set on that "big punch." Polk, for the second time, had left him in the lurch. Wharton's scruples on the subject seemed altogether out of place and superfluous to Mr. Schootz.

Congratulations to F. C. Harper, of 6, Fort Road, Bermondsey, S.E. 1, who carries off a useful pocket-knife for the following joke:

The railway passenger seemed quite agitated as the ticket-collector came round, and began fumbling in his pockets for his ticket. A fellow passenger, noticing his disturbed condition, said to him: "You have your ticket in your mouth, sir." When the ticket had been duly handed to the collector, the fellow passenger remarked: "You suffer from absence of mind, don't you, sir?" "Absence of mind, be blowed!" said Pat. "Oi was sucking off last week's date, begorra!"

What about it, chums? There are more penknives waiting to be won!

There was the honk of a car down the canyon. Mr. Van Duck put his head into the office.

"Polk's blown in at last, boss," he said. "I guess his auto's here now."

"Eh?"

"I sure guess that was the toot of his auto. You heard it?"

Mr. Schootz grunted discontentedly.

"That guy Polk's got cold feet, Van Duck," he said to the assistant director. "That's what's the matter with him. I guess we coughed up a big figure to get him away from Pandora. I'm telling you, I ain't a whole heap pleased that we got him. We bought that guy on his reputation, and he sure ain't living up to it."

"He sure ain't," agreed Van Duck.

"Every film fan in the Yew-nited States believes that that hombre likes risking his neck for the fun of the thing," growled Mr. Schootz. "He's sure got them fooled good! You put up a real risk to Myron Polk, and it's good-bye, Polk! Search me!"

The purple auto stopped outside the rancho, and Mr. Schootz composed his frowning countenance to a welcoming grin as the Perfection star came into the office.

The "Handsome man in Hollywood" had been very late in putting in an appearance; but in Mr. Schootz's opinion, apparently, it was still necessary to humour him.

THE SEVENTH CHAPTER.

Myron Polk Does Not Object!

MYRON POLK nodded to Van Duck and shook hands with Mr. Schootz. The "handsomest man in Hollywood" was not looking his best. There was a deep line in his brow, and his eyes had an almost feverish glitter. Mr. Schootz eyed him.

"Look here, Polk, you been hitting the hooch too hard?" he demanded crossly.

"I had a little party last night," answered Polk. "I couldn't come up this morning, Schootz; I'm not feeling my best."

Mr. Schootz gave a grunt.

"That hooch you get from Gomez won't make you feel any better," he growled.

The Perfection star shrugged his shoulders.

"Well, to come down to brass tacks," said Mr. Schootz, "what about that riding act? I've got everything mapped out. I'm telling you, Polk, it's a daisy. It's the biggest punch ever! I'll tell a man, the film fans will simply rise to it. You got your reputation to live up to, Polk. You don't want to forget that."

"I've got only one neck," answered Polk sourly.

Mr. Schootz breathed hard.

"That means that you're backing out?" he snapped.

"I guess I've never backed out of any stunt that was possible," said Polk sullenly. "You go too far, Schootz. When I was acting for the Pandora Company they gave me some stiff propositions, and I came through. But there's a limit."

"I guess I'm beginning to think you might as well have stayed with Pandora," growled Mr. Schootz.

Polk's eyes flashed.

"They're keen enough to have me back, if that's how you look at it," he sneered. "You've sent more than one man to hospital, with your breakneck stunts. You're not sending me!"

"That Hair-Trigger has been ridden before. A god-darned Greaser rode it once."

"With a sheriff's posse after him," said Polk. "Nobody but a born fool would ride it in cold blood."

"That's where you slip up. That kid Wharton is willing to take it on."

"Let him!" sneered Polk. "His neck's his own, to do as he likes with."

"I guess he'd make the grade," said Mr. Schootz.

"I'm not raising any objection, if he's fool enough to take it on, and you're fool enough to let him," grunted Polk.

"Aw, forget it!" said the director. "I ain't denying that it's a bit dangerous. But I have been over that path on foot, and I sure know it can be ridden. It's a question of nerve. That kid Wharton has got all the nerve he wants."

"I wash my hands of it," said Polk. "I warn you, distinctly, that I think it's too dangerous. If you put another guy on to it the responsibility is yours."

"I ain't asking you to shoulder it, that I know of," said Mr. Schootz sarcastically. "Come down to cases—do you agree to the kid using your horse and making up in your part?"

"I don't choose to have anything to do with the matter," answered Polk. "But that cayuse is worth five thousand dollars."

"Perfection will foot the bill if anything happens to the critter," answered Mr. Schootz. "That cuts no ice. But

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the kid won't take your part without your leave. Call him in, Van Duck!"

Harry Wharton was called into the office again.

The Perfection star's eyes gleamed at the sight of the junior. His bitter animosity was not to be hidden.

"Now, you Wharton," said Mr. Schootz, "Mr. Polk's willing for you to play up as Ahmed Din in the riding stunt. You willing?"

Wharton looked at Myron Polk.

"Certainly, if Mr. Polk wishes it," he said.

Polk breathed hard.

"I've told Schootz that I've no objection," he muttered.

"That's good enough," said Mr. Schootz anxiously.

"Mind, I take no responsibility," said Myron Polk, a husky note in his voice. "I warn you, boy, that I reckon it's a stunt too dangerous for anybody to make the grade. But if you choose to take it on I leave the matter entirely to Mr. Schootz. If—if any accident happens, thank yourself."

"I'm not afraid of any accident happening," said Harry. "I've been over the path, and I'm sure I can ride it, with a good horse. If you say plainly that you're willing to let me take your place, and ride your horse, I'm ready to do as Mr. Schootz wishes."

"I do say so—if you're fool enough to try it on, and Mr. Schootz is fool enough to let you," snarled the star.

Harry Wharton smiled.

"That's good enough," he said.

"Then it's a cinch," said Mr. Schootz, in great relief.

"Yes, sir."

"Glory be!" said Mr. Schootz. "I guess, Myron, that if you stand behind the cameras, and watch, you'll see that it ain't so pesky impossible as you calculate."

"Oh, I guess I'll watch," sneered Polk. "If the boy can beat me at my own game, I'll sure be glad to see him do it."

And the film star left the producer's office.

Mr. Schootz grinned serenely.

"It sure does get his goat!" he remarked. "But that cuts no ice with me. He's turned it down, and I guess I ain't cutting out the biggest punch in the film! No, sir! You Wharton, you get busy! Harris will fix you up in Polk's rig, same as last time—with a bandage over your face, you'll pass all O.K., and no film fan who sees the act on the screen will ever dream that it ain't Polk himself. You hustle along to the make-up man."

"Right-ho," answered Wharton cheerily.

In the hands of Harris, the make-up man, Wharton was soon transformed into a sheikh of the desert.

A bandage across his face gave the finishing touch, hiding from the view of admiring film fans, when the picture came to be shown, that the face was not that of Myron Polk. Crimson stains on the bandage indicated that Ahmed Din, the Lord of the Desert, had been wounded in a desperate affray.

With his make-up completed, and mounted on the black Arab, Wharton certainly looked the part uncommonly well.

Wharton was in great spirits, but his comrades were rather grave. The fact that Polk had refused the act showed that it was dangerous enough. Brave, the Perfection star was not, but he could not be called a coward, and he had performed many stunts that looked perilous enough on the screen. The mere thought of being outdone by a

schoolboy, would have spurred him on to undertake the ride, had he believed that he could accomplish it with whole bones. And Harry Wharton's chums would have been much better pleased had the captain of the Remove not undertaken to do what the film star declined to do.

"It's all serene, you fellows," said Harry, noting the grave looks of his comrades. "I'm not quite an ass, you know. Any good horseman could ride that path, if his nerve didn't fail him."

"But the nervefulness requires to be truly terrific, my esteemed Wharton," murmured Hurree Singh.

"Seriously I wouldn't take it on, if I didn't believe that I could get away with it," said Harry. "I've got some nerve, you know, and a steady head. And it will be fun."

"Not the kind of fun that would amuse me," said the Bounder. "I think you're a fool to take it on."

Myron Polk came up to the schoolboy sheikh, as he sat the black horse outside the rancho, his chums round him. The Perfection star's face was very pale.

"One word before you go, boy," he said. "I've warned you not to make that ride. I warn you again. You're keen on making me look a fool and a funk before the company, I know that," he snarled. "But you're throwing away your life to do it. There's still time to back out and own up that you've been bragging."

Harry Wharton's lip curled.

"If you object to my taking your place, Mr. Polk, I'm bound to stand down," he said. "Nothing else will stop me."

"You won't get away on that!" sneered Polk. "I stand by what I've said. I guess I'm warning you that there's still time to back out."

"Then you're wasting your breath," answered Harry. "I haven't the faintest wish to back out."

"Well, I've warned you," muttered Polk. And he strode away.

"Now, then, you Wharton, get going," said Mr. Schootz. "It'll take you an hour to ride round for the start. You're wasting time."

"Right-ho!" said Harry, and with a wave of the hand to his friends, he rode away down the canyon.

Mr. Schootz proceeded to place his camera brigade in position for the "shot."

Riding down the Hair-Trigger path was the "act." Riding up it was impossible, and Wharton had to go a long way round to get to the summit of the canyon wall by easier paths.

He disappeared from sight of his chums, and they remained rather silent and anxious. Myron Polk's last warning had impressed them more than it had impressed the captain of the Remove.

Harry Wharton was quite confident. He knew what he could do, and he knew that he had the courage and nerve to do it. That there was danger in the stunt was certain, but a spice of danger gave a thrill to it that was not unwelcome to him.

He rode out of the canyon, and took the winding path over the hills that led, by easy stages, to the upland.

The way was long and winding, but Wharton had been over it more than once, and knew it well. He rode at a cheery canter, and came out, at last, on the high upland—a hundred yards above the bottom of the great canyon.

It was there that the Hair-Trigger path began—winding and sloping steeply down the rugged face of the canyon wall, on narrow ledges and

rugged rocks—a descent of three hundred feet, every foot of it fraught with peril—where a single false step, a single moment of fear or indecision, meant a crashing fall to the bottom of the canyon, and instant death.

But there was no fear in Harry Wharton's heart, no indecision in his steady mind, as he prepared to ride down.

THE EIGHTH CHAPTER.

Late for Lunch!

BILLY BUNTER groaned.

Standing in the bright sunlight, tired and dusty, and perspiring, the Owl of the Remove was going through all his pockets, one after another.

A faint, delusive hope was in his fat heart that one pocket or another might contain some forgotten fragment of chocolate, some overlooked remnant of candy.

He knew it was improbable. Bunter was not the fellow to overlook anything of an edible nature.

But it was past lunch time now, and Bunter was not merely hungry—he was ravenous. He could have eaten anything, from a railroad sandwich to a can of Chicago beef. It was unlikely that he had left anything eatable in any of his pockets—very unlikely. But he hoped! Hope springs eternal in the human breast.

The hope proved delusive. Not the most infinitesimal fragment of candy came to light. A groan burst from William George Bunter. Life, at that moment, seemed a weary burden—the universe a dreary desert. Round him stretched the hills—desolate, deserted, grub-less! Bunter groaned in anguish of spirit.

He had remained in hiding a good half-hour after Polk and the Mexican had gone. Then, convinced at last that the coast was clear, he had crawled out, and resumed his search for a way home. He was rather less alarmed now on the subject of the bootleggers. Gomez had said that his gang had cleared out of the Santa Monica hills, and the "thug" himself had apparently only come there for his secret meeting with Myron Polk. So Bunter was not much in fear of human foes now. What troubled him was the state of the inner Bunter. But that troubled him deeply.

Some fellows would have been deeply troubled by the knowledge of the dastardly plot that had been laid, of which it was impossible to convey a warning unless Bunter found his way back to Jack-Rabbit. No doubt Bunter would have been troubled by it, had he not been so awfully hungry.

But the greater contains the less. A big trouble washes out a little one. When Bunter was hungry, that was the one outstanding problem of the universe. He was hungry now—famished. He had forgotten about Wharton's danger. But a matter so trifling, in comparison, was naturally not foremost in his mind. His fat thoughts were concentrated on food.

How long he had wandered since crawling out of his hiding-place he did not know. It seemed like hours and hours—indeed, almost like days. But as it was still early afternoon, it could not have been quite so long as it seemed.

"Oh dear!" groaned Bunter.

Honk!

He jumped.

The hoot of a motor-horn in those desolate and deserted hills was enough to make any fellow jump.



Gomez's hand flew up, the rock in it. But before he could hurl the missile, Carter whipped out an automatic from his hip-pocket. "You want to drop that rock, Jose Gomez," he drawled coolly. "I guess you're my mutton, with the wool on!"
(See Chapter 11.)

Honk, honk!

"Oh, crikey!" said Bunter.

It dawned on Bunter's fat brain that he must be very near the motor road that ran at the foot of the hills, above the terraced shore of the Pacific. Otherwise, he would hardly have heard the hoot of a motor.

He blinked round him with renewed hope. He could see no sign of the road. A fold of the hill, and a patch of trees hid it from his sight. Had the Owl only known it he had been within a hundred yards of the road for some considerable time. Any fellow but Bunter would have found his way to it long ago. Now that he had heard the hoot of a passing motor, even Bunter was able to find his way.

He tramped in the direction of the sound. Twice he took a wrong direction, each time at the risk of starting on a journey into the heart of the Santa Monica mountains. Fortunately, however, there were several automobiles on the road at intervals, and Bunter heard another honk, and another, and another. At long last he found himself in sight of the road, and scrambled down the hill, and reached it.

Once out of the hills Bunter knew where he was. Even Bunter could not make a mistake about that, with the blue Pacific stretching before his eyes. The road ran between the hills and the sea. And far to his left he had a glimpse of Santa Monica and its dazzling beach and crowds of bathers. His way lay to the right to get back to Jack-Rabbit. And as he had only to follow a road, even the fatuous Owl of the Remove was not likely to miss his way.

He started. He groaned as he started, dismally. He had not less than five miles to cover before reaching Jack-Rabbit. Five miles on foot, in a state of famine, reduced him to the lowest possible spirits. He might get in by tea time, foot-sore and weary. That would be too late to warn Wharton of his peril. But Bunter was not thinking of Wharton. He was thinking of lunch.

Honk, honk, honk!

"Beast!" murmured Bunter, as he hopped out of the road to let a motor pass that was coming up the road from Hollywood.

It was a little car, covering the ground at great speed. As it drew near Bunter there was a whirring of brakes.

"Say, bo!"

Bunter blinked round.

A young man with a square jaw and a pair of keen, searching eyes was driving the car. He grinned at Bunter.

"You found yourself, bub?" he asked.

It was Mr. Carter.

"I guess they phoned me you was lost, bub," said Mr. Carter. "I reckon I was coming up to Jack-Rabbit to look for you. You found out where you mislaid yourself—what?"

"Oh!" gasped Bunter. "I say, Mr. Carter, give me a lift, will you? I—I haven't had any lunch."

Bunter's voice almost broke as he made that pathetic statement.

"Gee-whizz!" said Mr. Carter. "I'll say that's awful."

"Frightful!" groaned Bunter

"Hop in!"

Thankfully Bunter hopped in. Mr. Carter let out his engine again, and whizzed along the road to Jack-Rabbit.

At any other time Bunter would have been rather alarmed at the speed to which Mr. Carter let out the little car. Now, however, it was welcome to him. A motorist who was taking a famished Bunter to a meal could not travel too fast.

Mr. Carter's car fairly ate up the five miles to Jack-Rabbit.

As he neared the canyon a purple, highly-polished automobile turned out of it, and came swiftly down the road.

Mr. Carter glanced rather curiously at the man at the wheel.

"That's Polk!" said Bunter.

Mr. Carter did not reply. His eyes were fixed very keenly and curiously on the face of the Perfection star.

Polk was driving at even more than his usual reckless speed. His face was pale and set. He did not look at the detective's car—did not even seem to see it. He glanced neither to right nor to left, but drove on with white, set face like a man pursued. He flashed past and was gone, racing away down the road to Hollywood.

"Sho!" said Mr. Carter.

Billy Bunter blinked after the vanishing car. Even the Owl of the Remove had noticed something strange in Myron Polk's look as he flashed by.

"Sho!" repeated Mr. Carter. "I guess something has got that guy's goat, and got it bad. I surely do."

And Mr. Carter's keen face was thoughtful as he drove on to Jack-Rabbit, and turned into the road up the canyon.

(Continued on page 16.)

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DR. BIRCHEMALL

and the DRAGON!

by
DICKY
NUGENT

It's not often Jack Jolly & Co., our heroes of St. Sam's, get the chance to pull their headmaster's leg; but when they do, they make a thorough job of it!

I.

"**B**LESS my sole! What ever are you doing of?" asked Mr. Lickham, in surprise, as he trotted into the Head's study one day.

Dr. Birchermall, the reverend and majestick Head of St. Sam's, looked up, with a grin, from the dubble-barrelled gun which he was eggsumining.

"I am glarnsing over this sport-ing gun I have recently ackwired, Lickham," he replied. "You're just in time to help me, by looking up the barrels to make sure that they're all clear."

"Oh crumbs! If you don't mind, I'd rather not!" said Mr. Lickham hastily. "But what the merry thump do you want a rifle for, sir? Surely it's rather a dangerous weppon to be placed in the hands of a loonatic like yourself?"

"How dare you!" thundered the Head. "You know perfectly well that I was certified sane after my discharge from the Muggleton Asylum last year. Any more cheek from you, Lickham, and you'll incur the viles of my wrath—not to mention a dot on the boko."

"Oh, crikey! Sorry, sir!" gasped Mr. Lickham. "But to return to this gun. Are you eggsppecting berglers at St. Sam's, that you arm yourself like this, or has somebody been telling you about the dragon that has been seen flying over the skool lately?"

Dr. Birchermall stared.

"Dragon? I've herd nothing about a dragon, Lickham. What are you berbling about? There are no such things as dragons nowadays, are there?"

"Well, that was what I thought until recently, sir," answered Mr. Lickham. "I was always under the impression that dragons belonged to the barbarous past. In these enlitened days perlice regulations won't allow such monsters to roam about at will, I believe."

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"Eggsactly!" nodded the Head. "Why, the traffic congestion would be worse than ever if dragons were permitted to wander about breathing fire and slawter all over the place. What silly ass has been pulling your leg about one being seen over St. Sam's, then, Lickham?"

"Well, sir, there's been a roomer about an eggstraordinary monster having been seen flying in the air on several occasions lately," replied Mr. Lickham uneasily. "Natcherally, I dismissed the roomer as a lot of bosh!"

"A lot of bunk, I presoom you mean?" nodded the Head. "Go on!"

"But to-day I have had reason to revise my judgment slitely," said Mr. Lickham. "On looking out of my study window after brekker this morning, imagine my surprise and dismay when I perceeded a garstly serpentine

creature circling round in the air over the playing-fields."

"Grate pip!" said the Head, with a start.

"As I watched, this eggstraordinary-looking thing swooped down like a grate bird of pray, and disappeared behind the jimnynasium. I can tell you, sir, for a minnit it made me go all goosey."

"My giddy aunt! Surely you were suffering from a Lucy Nations?" cried Dr. Birchermall, frowning.

"Not at all, sir. On comparing notes afterwards, I found that Mr. Swishingham and Hair Guggenheimer had also witnessed the descent of this fowl creature of the air," answered Mr. Lickham.

The Head stroked his beard thoughtfully.

"This is very disturbing, Lickham. We can't possibly have a dragon buzzing about St. Sam's. I must ask Fossil to set his dog on the monster."

"I'm afraid a dog wouldn't be any use, sir."

"Then, Lickham, I must stalk the monster myself, and slay him with my dubble-barrelled gun," said Dr. Birchermall sternly.

"But—but won't it be rather risky, sir?"

The Head larfed grimly.

"Possibly it will, Lickham. But a Birchermall has never stopped to count the risk yet. I will brave this fearsome monster like a night of old. I will go fourth like St. George of Merrie England and fight the dragon till he squeals for the mersy he will never get."

"Bravvo, sir!" cried Mr. Lickham admiringly. "When will you perform this act of heroism, sir?"

"Well, it's like this, Lickham," said Dr. Birchermall. "At prezzent I am suffering from indigestion caused by my scoffing too many doennutts at breakfast-time, so I hardly feel like tackling the job just now. One duzzent go fourth to fight a dragon with indigestion, Lickham. It simply isn't done."

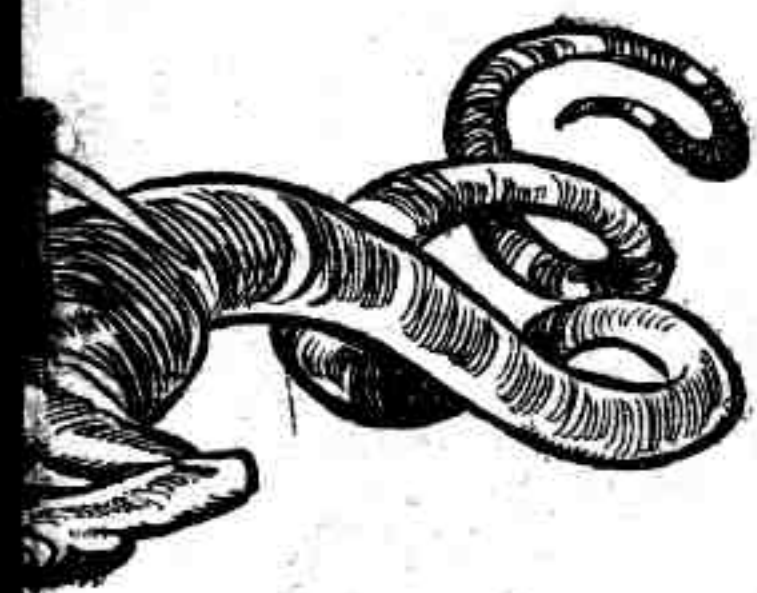
"No, I suppose not, sir," mermered Mr. Lickham. "Of corse, you are quite sure it is indigestion you are suffering from, and not bloo funk?"

Dr. Birchermall turned red with rage. "Why, you cheeky ass! Get out of my room immejately, before I am tempted to give you a thick ear!"

Mr. Lickham beat a hurried retreat, grinning all over his dile, and left the Head to resoom his interrupted eggsumination of the dubble-barrelled gun.

Outside the Head's study the master of the Fourth bashed into Tubby Barrell, the fat junior of St. Sam's, who had been listening at the keyhole. He gave the fat eavesdropper a terrifick box on the ears, then buzzed off in the





direction of Masters Passidge to tickle the rest of the masters with the story of what the Head intended to do with the dragon of St. Sam's.

Tubby Barrell, rubbing his injured oral cavities, rolled off to the Fourth passidge, where he ran into Jack Jolly & Co., the heroes of the Lower School.

"I say, you fellows, the Head's going to slay the dragon like a night of old!" he eggsclaimed eggsitedly.

"What?" yelled Jack Jolly & Co.

"It's a fact," said Tubby earnestly. "He's going to stalk it, and then shoot it dead, you know."

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Jack Jolly & Co.

For some reason Jack Jolly & Co. seemed to derive a lot of amusement from the idea of Dr. Birchermall setting out to fight the dragon. They didn't eggsplain the reason to Tubby Barrell, for the talkative porpuss of the Fourth might have spoilt the fun. But the reason for their larfter was a very good one.

As a matter of fact the "dragon" that Mr. Lickham had seen was nothing more than a Chinese kite that Jack Jolly had bought in Muggleton a few days before. It was a very eggspensive kite, made in Ping-Pong, in far-off China, and our heroes had had some good sport with it.

When they got back into the privacy of their study again, Jack Jolly & Co. discussed Tubby Barrell's news.

"It would be an awful pity to disappoint the old buffer," said Jack Jolly. "I vote we fly it over the Skool House when old Birchermall takes his usual stroll round the Cloisters after dinner."

"Oh, rather!" grinned the rest of the Co.

And so it was arranged.

II.

AFTER dinner that day Dr. Birchermall, in accordance with his usual practiss, went for a prow round the Cloisters. Usually he walked sedately round, reading Zonophone or some other classical orther, eggsept on the occasions when he relieved the monotony by peroosing a comic paper. But this time he was not reading. Instead of carrying a bundle of literacher he carried a dubble-barrelled gun.

Trooth to tell, Dr. Birchermall was by no means as brave, in his hart of harts, as he pretended to be in front of Mr. Lickham. He had no intention whatever of going fourth to fight the dragon, as he had proudly boasted he would. But he felt a lot safer with a loaded gun in his hands, in these days, when danger lurked in the air. Hence his reason for carrying it.

Now and again, as Dr. Birchermall stalked round the Cloisters, he glarnsed fearfully up, as though eggspecting

every minnit that the dreaded monster would fly over the Skool House roof, breething fire and fury, and attack him without warning.

Suddenly, as he looked up, he gave a horse yell of alarm, for sailing over the chimney-pots at the back of the skool buildings was a weerd-looking apparition, with grate, gaping jaws, and eyes that glittered in the sun. The Head's blod froze in his vains as he saw that awful sight.

"Yaroooo!" he yelled. "Keepimoff!"

Dr. Birchermall's neeze knocked together in his terror, and grate beads of inspiration stood out in his forrid. But he had sufficient prezzence of mind to take aim and fire.

With a thunderous roar both barrels sent out a powerful discharge of shot. And when the smoke had cleared away Dr. Birchermall was delited to see the dragon was falling, apparently mortally wounded, over the roof of the Skool House.

Instantly the Head's terror gave way to triumph. He waved his gun in the air and did a war-dance in his glee.

"Hooray!" he yelled. "Got him, first shot!"

A minnit later a grate crowd surged into the Cloisters, attracted by the din. They stared in amazement at the sight of the Head.

"Grate pip!" eggsclaimed the startled Mr. Lickham. "What ever has happened, sir?"

Dr. Birchermall ceased his dance and bestowed a patronising look on the master of the Fourth.

"I have fulfilled my promise, Lickham, that is all," he replied.

"You have slain the dragon, sir?" gasped Mr. Lickham, in amazement.

"Eggsactly!"

"Oh, my hat!"

The crowd stared admiringly. Everybody had herd by this time of the Head's boast that he would be a modern St. George and fight the dragon to the deth, but as they knew what a terribul funk Dr. Birchermall really was, that boast had been greeted everywhere with derisive grins. It began to look as if the Skool would have to revise its opinion of the Head, after all.

"But—but if you've slain something, where the merry dickens is the lifeless corpse?" demanded Burleigh, of the Sixth.

"The dead body of this fearsome monster, Burleigh, reposes, at this moment, on the other side of the Skool House," replied Dr. Birchermall, with dignity.

"Then you shot the creature in flight?"

"I shot it in the middle of its ugly fizzog, as a matter of fact, Burleigh," said the Head, glarnsing round at the grate throng. "Let me tell you the thrilling story of how it all happened."

Knowing full well that nobody had been prezzent to witness the troo state of affairs, the cunning old Dr. Birchermall saw an opportunity of gaining a tremenjous lot of presteege now that the fiery dragon was no more. He cleared his throat and spoke as loudly as possibul, so that everybody could hear.

"It was like this here," he began. "Having heard roomers of the appearance of a dragon in the vissinity of St. Sam's, I made up my mind I would bag the monster."

"What a hero!" said Tallboy.

The Head scowled fiercely.

"Silence, Tallboy! To proseed, having decided to bag this monstrous creature, I set out, like St. George of old, with a dubble-barrelled gun—"

"But didn't St. George have a sword, sir?" objected Mr. Swishingham.

"No, Swishingham, he did not!" snorted Dr. Birchermall. "St. George had a dubble-barrelled gun, unless I'm gratefully mistaken. Anyway, I set out bravely to do battle with this fiery visitor. Just as I was crossing the Cloisters the dragon appeared over the Skool House, flying along at a tremenjous speed, and breething fire and smoke all over the giddy place."

"Few!" said Merry and Bright and Fearless, who had just arrived on the scene.

"Catching sight of me, the evil monster swooped down like a bird of pray, and went for me bald-headed," said the Head, without turning a hair.

"Grate pip!"

"The dragon's hot breth blistered and scorched me," said the Head dramatically. "His evil, glittering eyes fascinated me, so that I was almost deprived of the power of action. But in the nick of time I recovered, and dealt him a smashing blow on the napper as he snapped at me."

"M-m-my hat!" gasped Frank Fearless, who, of course, knew the real facts about the "dragon." "Well, of all the romancers—"

"For severel minnits my life was in the balance," went on Dr. Birchermall, who was about as troothful as Ananias and Baron Munchowson rolled into one. "The ferocious monster fought despritly. His grate claws and teeth constantly tore at me. But I meerly larfed carelessly and waited my chance. Suddenly it came, and, seezing it with avidity, I fired a perfect shot at its dile, causing it to turn tail and fly for its life. But it wasn't able to fly far. No sooner had it got over the Skool House roof than it gave a last expiring shreek and fell lifeless to the ground. There you will find it, if you trot round and have a look."

"No you won't!" said Jack Jolly, coming up at that moment.

Dr. Birchermall glared.

"How dare you, Jolly?" he eggsclaimed wrathfully. "What the thump do you mean by saying the dragon's body is not there?"

Jack Jolly grinned.

"I happen to have brought it along with me, sir. I was there when it fell, you see."

So saying, Jack Jolly brought to light the mangled remains of his Chinese kite.

Everybody stared at it for a moment. Then there was a loud roar of larfter.

"Oh, grate pip!"

"It's only a kite!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"M-m-my giddy aunt! Is—is that what I shot down, Jolly?" gasped the Head.

"That's it, sir!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Is that the monster that fought despritly?" roared Mr. Swishingham.

"And breethed fire and smoke?" jeered Mr. Lickham.

"Ha, ha, ha!" yelled the crowd.

Dr. Birchermall's dile was a study as he realised how idiotic he made himself look. For a moment he was too flabbergasted to say anything. After that breef moment of hezzitation, however, he said quite a lot—and said it with a handy birch, which he produced from the folds of his skollastic gown.

It was the first time in his life that Dr. Birchermall had attempted to compete with the exploits of the nights of old—and probably it was going to prove the last!

THE END.

(Look out for another long laugh in next week's ripping story of St. Sam's, entitled: "THE HEAD'S BOOBY-TRAP!" You'll vote it the finest rib-tickler you've ever read!)

"HARRY WHARTON'S PERIL!"*(Continued from page 15.)***THE NINTH CHAPTER.****Wharton in Danger!****"HALLO! Hallo! Hallo!"****"Bunter!"****"The Bunterfulness is terrific!"****"You found him, Mr. Carter?"**

The Los Angeles detective halted before the old adobe rancho, and Bunter rolled out of the car.

"I say, you fellows—" he gasped.**"I guess I found him," said Mr. Carter. "I sure found him wandering on the road, and picked him up. All he wanted was a lift."****"Oh, my hat!" said Bob Cherry. "Then you've been brought up here for nothing, Mr. Carter?"****Mr. Carter grinned.****"Nope!" he answered. "I reckon I didn't come up jest wholly on that guy's account. I got other business up here."****"I say, you fellows, I've had an awful time!" gasped Bunter. "I—I—I haven't had any lunch!"****"If you have tears, you men, prepare to shed them now!" remarked the Bounder.****"Ha, ha, ha!"****"Beast!"**

Billy Bunter rolled in through the arched entrance of the rancho. He was only an hour late for lunch, after all. But that was a lot to a fellow to whom lunch always seemed a long time coming. Bunter was always ready for a meal at least an hour before it was due, even with a few snacks to help him out. There had been no snacks that morning. And he was an hour late. So it was no wonder that he was feeling like a shipwrecked mariner in an open boat at sea.

Food, however, was forthcoming, and Bunter sat down to it. Naturally, for the moment, he thought of nothing else.

"Say," Mr. Carter remarked, "I jest passed Mr. Polk as I was coming up! Any trouble up here?"**"Not that I know of," answered Bob Cherry.****"He sure looked as if something had got his goat bad."**

That haunted look on the face of the Perfection star lingered strangely in the detective's mind.

Bob Cherry chuckled.**"I fancy he's a bit annoyed," he said. "Wharton's taking his place in a film stunt. I suppose Polk doesn't like it."****Mr. Carter nodded. The look on the film star's face had been something more than annoyance. And he had half-expected to hear of some serious happening at the location. Nothing, however, seemed to have occurred.****"And nothing had happened to Bunter, after all?" asked Nugent.****"I guess not. He was hoofing it back along the road when I picked him up," answered Mr. Carter. And as a graceful figure became visible in the orange-grove by the frame house where the movie-girls had their quarters, Mr. Carter proceeded in that direction—apparently more interested in Leonora than in Bunter.****Bob Cherry looked at his watch.****"Half an hour yet before Wharton will get along to the top of the canyon," he remarked. "Let's go and see what's happened to Bunter."**

And the juniors went into the patio, where William George Bunter was already seated at a meal. Bunter was tucking into a dish of frijoles at a great rate.

"Hallo, hallo, hallo, old fat man!" said Bob. "Hungry?"**"Mmmmmmmmm!" Bunter's mouth was too full for speech.****"Must be famished," said Johnny Bull sarcastically. "The poor chap only ate enough for five or six at brekker."****"The famishfulness must be terrific!" said Hurree Jamset Ram Singh.****Billy Bunter bolted a big mouthful. "I say, you fellows—shove that pie this way—good! I say, tell Wharton I want him."**

The dish of beans had vanished as if by magic. Bunter started on the pie with an appetite scarcely diminished.

"Wharton's gone out," said Bob.**"I say, this is a good pie," said Bunter. "Not like the pies I get at home, at Bunter Court, of course. Still, it's good. I say, you fellows, go and fetch Wharton. It's important."****"Can't, fathead!" answered Bob. "He's on a movie stunt."****Bunter started.**

Now that the keen edge was off his appetite, he was able to give some attention to lesser matters.

"Gone out?" he repeated. "I say, he ain't riding Polk's horse, is he?"**"Yes. How the thump did you know?" asked Nugent, in surprise. "It wasn't mentioned before you went off on the burro."****Bunter helped himself to the pie again before he answered.****"Is he going to ride down that path they call the Hair-Trigger, down the side of the canyon?" he asked.****"Yes," said Bob, staring at the Owl of the Remove. "He's started already. It's a long ride round to get to the top—about an hour. He's been gone half an hour now."****"Well, cut after him and stop him," said Bunter. "Pass those spuds, will you? I think they might have let me have fried spuds. I told the man only yesterday that I preferred them fried. But I never get any decent treatment. You fellows had better cut after Wharton. That beast Gomez is hiding in a cave, on the Hair-Trigger path, to make him fall off as he rides down. Pass those tomatoes."****"What?" roared Bob Cherry. He did not pass the tomatoes. He stared blankly at the Owl of the Remove.****"What?"****"Tomatoes, old man."****"What?" gasped Nugent.****"Tomatoes!" roared Bunter. "They're out of my reach. I think you fellows might take the trouble to pass me the tomatoes when I come in famished."****"You fat idiot!" hissed Johnny Bull. "What do you mean about Gomez? Are you off your rocker?"****"Oh, really, Bull—"****"Explain what you mean, hang you!" roared Bob Cherry. "Get it out—quick! Before I bang your silly head on the table!"****"Oh, really, Cherry—"****"My esteemed, fat-headed Bunter, the—"****"Oh, really, Inky—"****Bob Cherry grasped the fat junior by the collar and dragged him from his chair. There was a howl from Bunter.****"Yow! Leggo, you beast! I'm hungry—"****"You fat villain!" hissed Bob. "Tell us what you mean. Have you seen anything of Gomez?"****"Ow! Leggo! Yes!" gasped Bunter. "I'm telling you as fast as I can, ain't I? A fellow must have something to eat. If you'd been wandering hours and hours without food—" Bunter broke off, spluttering, as Bob shook him savagely. "Groooogh! Ow!"****"Tell us what you mean—quick—"****"Groooooogh!"****"What's that about Gomez?" shrieked Johnny Bull. "Wharton's gone to ride down that path, and it's too late to stop him! Quick!"****"Groooogh! Give a fellow a chance to speak!" gasped Bunter. "I heard Gomez and Polk fixing it up. They say there's a cave half-way down that path—I don't know myself, I've never been up there, so—"****"I've seen it," said Bob. "I know all about that. But what—"****"Well, Polk's fixing it for Wharton to ride down the path, and Gomez is to hide in the cave and frighten the horse!" gasped Bunter. "I heard them say so. The beast is there by this time! Leggo my neck! If you call it pally to keep a fellow away from his lunch when he comes in famished, I don't. I can tell you I'm as empty as a drum."****"Good heavens!" breathed Bob. His face was as white as chalk. "If—if the horse was startled on that path— Oh, heavens!"**

In his mind's eye, Bob could see horse and horseman rolling down the slope, to be smashed on the rocks below.

"But—but it can't be!" panted Nugent. "Polk couldn't be such a villain—even Gomez couldn't—"**Bob calmed himself with an effort.****"Bunter, if this is one of your fairy-tales, I'll smash you into a jelly," he said, between his teeth. "If it is the truth, tell us how you know—quick!"****"Oh, really, Cherry—"****"It's the truth," said the Bounder soberly. "Bunter knew nothing about the ride before he lost himself. He's picked it up since. He must have heard something."****"I say, you fellows, if you'll let a fellow have a mouthful, I'll tell you all about it," said Bunter peevishly.****"Do you want me to smash you?" hissed Bob. "You fat idiot, tell us what you know without losing a second! Quick!"**

Bunter cast a longing blink at the table. But the horror and excitement in the faces round him, impressed even the obtuse Owl of the Remove. He spluttered out his story in haste.

Bob Cherry clenched his hands.**"Then that villain is hiding on the path already—and—and Wharton— It's too late to go after him. But—"****"But it's not too late to nail that scoundrel Gomez," said the Bounder quietly. "The cave on the plateau is half-way up—we can reach it before Wharton's due at the top. Keep cool! Let's get that man Carter—and—"****"Come on!"**

The chums of the Remove rushed out of the rancho. Billy Bunter blinked after them, and grunted.

"Beasts! Lot they care whether a fellow's simply sinking with hunger!" The Owl of the Remove sat down to his interrupted meal. "Fat lot they care! And that beast of a cook giving me boiled spuds, when he knows I like 'em fried—when I've told him distinctly that I like 'em fried! I shall jolly well complain to old Schootz about this! I'm jolly well not going to stand it!"

And Bunter resumed his late lunch; what time an astonished Mr. Carter was listening to the excited and alarmed juniors.

THE TENTH CHAPTER.**Getting Mr. Schootz's Goat!****M****R. SCHOOTZ grunted.**

The Perfection director had arranged the camera-men. All was ready for the "shot," when the schoolboy sheikh should appear on the winding path down the side of

the canyon. Twenty minutes, at least, remained to elapse before Wharton could possibly appear at the top of the path. But once he started on the downward ride matters would move quickly. Mr. Van Duck, looking up the steep side of the canyon, felt a doubt he did not venture to express. He did not wonder in the least that Myron Polk had "jibbed" at that stunt. He did not like the idea of the schoolboy attempting it. But Mr. Rigg Schootz's word was law on the Perfection location, and the assistant-director kept his dubiety to himself.

There was no doubt that, if Wharton succeeded, it would be a "big punch." The bold rider, dashing down that breakneck path on the black horse, would furnish a scene for the "Lord of the Desert" film, putting everything else in that film into the shade. Mr. Van Duck reflected, rather cynically, that Myron Polk's reputation as a daredevil rider would be greatly enhanced—the darling of the film-fans would be more admired than ever—if the schoolboy brought it off!

Mr. Schootz's angry grunt was called forth by the sight of Mr. Peter Carter coming along from the direction of the rancho at a rapid run.

After Mr. Carter came a bunch of juniors, also evidently in a great hurry.

The sight of Mr. Carter was not very welcome to Mr. Schootz. As Leonora's "beau" he tolerated him kindly enough, but as a keen and enterprising detective, Mr. Schootz did not like seeing him around.

The Perfection Company were at Jack-Rabbit to take pictures; and the trouble with the bootleggers had been a sheer irritation to Mr. Schootz. It interfered with business. It wasted time; and time was dollars. Mr. Schootz emphatically did not want a detective working up a "case" on the Perfection location.

"Search me!" he grunted. "What does that gink want now—and what's up, anyhow?"

Mr. Carter was heading for the Hair-Trigger path; but to reach the western side of the canyon he had to pass the spot where Mr. Schootz was standing with the camera outfit.

The director moved to intercept him, and held up a fat hand.

"Here, you, Carter!" he snapped.

Mr. Carter came to a breathless stop.

"What you horning in for?" asked Mr. Schootz disagreeably. "You keep back, Carter! Don't you know better'n to horn in in front of the camera?"

"Sure!" answered Mr. Carter. "But I guess I got to hustle up that path up the cliff yonder, Mr. Schootz!"

"Guess again!" said Mr. Schootz witheringly. "That's where the picture's going to be taken. Fifteen minutes, and a guy will be riding down that path from the top, and the cameras will be working. Forget it!"

Bob Cherry panted up.

"We've got to get up there, Mr. Schootz. There's a villain hiding in the cave half-way up—"

"What?" roared Mr. Schootz.

"It's Gomez!" panted Bob. "He's hidden himself there to frighten Wharton's horse as he comes down, and cause him to fall—"

"Guff!" snapped Mr. Schootz.

"I guess that's the news, Mr. Schootz," said Carter. "The kid Bunter says—"

"That fat gink!" said Mr. Schootz contemptuously. "How'd he know, anyhow? What?"

"I guess I ain't feeling sure he's got it right," confessed Mr. Carter. "But if it's like he says, Wharton's going to be killed as he comes down—and I got to see!"

"Oh, carry me home to die!" hooted Mr. Schootz, utterly incredulous and very angry. "I guess that guy Gomez is fifty miles away. You ain't horning in and spoiling my picture, Carter! Beat it!"

Peter Carter hesitated. He was far from placing implicit faith in Bunter's warning; which was natural enough, after what he had seen of the Owl of the Remove. In Jack-Rabbit Canyon Mr. Schootz was monarch of all he surveyed; and he waved the detective back.

But Harry Wharton's chums did not hesitate. They rushed on towards the canyon wall, unheeding.

"Here, you ginks!" roared Mr. Schootz. "You come back! You hear me yaup? What? Beat it, I'm telling you!"

The juniors raced on, unheeding, towards the canyon side. Mr. Schootz almost danced with rage.

"I guess I better go after them, sir," said Mr. Carter. "If that thug is there, I reckon he wants a man to handle him."

"He ain't there!" hooted Mr. Schootz. "It's all guff! I'll sure eat all the greasers you can find there; I sure will. What'd he be there for?"

"The kid Bunter says he heard Polk putting him up to it."

(Continued on next page.)



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2 WEEKLY

Mr. Schootz snorted.

"More Polk! I'm fed-up with these yarns about Polk! You taking stock in a fool yarn like that, Carter?"

"Not without more proof than that fat gink's word, I guess," answered Mr. Carter. "But—"

"If this ain't the elephant's hind leg!" exclaimed the exasperated Mr. Schootz. "Jevver hear such guff, Van Duck?"

"I sure never did!" agreed the assistant director. "But I guess it won't do any harm to search the path."

"Oh, go ahead, Carter; and then come back and own up that you're the prize boob of the Yew-nited States!" growled Mr. Schootz.

The Los Angeles detective ran on after the juniors. Bob Cherry and his comrades were making good. A thousand Mr. Schootzes would not have stopped them just then. Mr. Carter's long legs went like lightning, and he covered the ground like a deer. He passed the panting juniors, and started up the zigzag path up the cliff. After him clambered the chums of the Remove.

Mr. Schootz stared at the string of climbers, strung out on the face of the cliff, and snorted with angry contempt.

"Keep an eye open for Wharton, Van Duck," he said. "Signal to him to keep back if he shows up before them guys get clear."

"Sure!" said Mr. Van Duck. The assistant director had a flag in his hand with which to signal to Harry Wharton when the schoolboy sheikh should appear at the top of the cliff. There was no danger of Wharton starting to ride down while the path was blocked by the string of climbers; he was to wait for the waving of the flag before he rode down.

"This sure gets my goat!" said Mr. Schootz, staring up at the cliff. "It sure is the dog-gonedest guff I ever heard spilled."

The little cave half-way up the cliff was completely hidden from sight by the rocky plateau that jutted out before it. Certainly a man might have lain there in hiding, unsuspected by anyone in the canyon below.

But Mr. Schootz did not believe for a moment that anyone was there. All he saw in the matter was an unwarranted interruption of his work. And his wrath was great. With knitted brows he watched the string of climbers on the rugged cliff; and saw the Los Angeles detective leap on the plateau.

Bang!

"Great gophers!" ejaculated Mr. Schootz.

He jumped as the pistol-shot rang out far up the cliff.

THE ELEVENTH CHAPTER.

Getting Gomez!

GOMEZ, crouching in the little cave at the back of the plateau, waited and watched.

Hours had passed since the thug had crept down from the upland by the upper path, and reached his hiding-place, unseen and unsuspected.

The rocky plateau extended a dozen feet in front of the cave, and then dropped sheer to the canyon. It shut off the view below. Gomez, in the cave, could see nothing but the rocky shelf before him and the opposite wall of Jack-Rabbit Canyon, a mile away. But he did not need to watch below; he needed only to wait for the descending horseman from above.

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Exactly when the riding act was timed he did not know; but he had only to wait. Once within his hiding-place the thug was careful not to show himself; for as soon as arrangements were made for the "shot" many eyes would be turned on the cliff.

Crouching in the cave, like a wild beast watching for its prey, Gomez waited for the tramp of a descending horse. A jagged lump of rock was grasped in his hand.

When the schoolboy sheikh descended he had to ride across the plateau from the upper path to the lower; full in front of the waiting thug. The hurling rock would do the deed. A single shout, startling the horse on its insecure footing, would have sufficed; but the crash of the jagged rock would make all sure. Horse and horsemen would go whirling down to death under the eyes of the desperado.

With perfect coolness, the wretch waited and listened. He was in no danger; to remain unseen was to remain unsuspected. The fall of the rider would be taken as an accident; an accident probably not unexpected on the part of many members of the Perfection Company.

Gomez had nothing to fear. No one would dream that an assassin had been hidden there to cause the catastrophe. He had only to remain in hiding till all was quiet, and then creep away by the upper path—to claim the reward of his treachery.

With no more compunction than might have been felt by a jaguar lying in wait for an antelope, the thug crouched in the cave, waiting for the sound of hoofbeats.

And he was taken utterly by surprise when from the lower path an active figure suddenly leaped on the plateau.

Peter Carter gave one rapid glance round, at the same moment whipping an automatic from his hip-pocket.

"Carambo!"

The crouching ruffian in the cave started up with panting breath and rolling eyes, glaring at the detective, the rock convulsively clutched in his hand. Like a startled wild beast, he glared at the cool detective from Los Angeles.

Mr. Carter's keen eyes glinted over the revolver.

"It's a cinch!" he said. "It's sure a cinch!" he drawled as coolly as if he had been greeting an acquaintance on Hollywood Boulevard. "You want to drop that rock, Jose Gomez! I guess you're my mutton, with the wool on!"

"Por todos los Santos!" breathed Gomez.

"Santos nothing!" said Mr. Carter pleasantly. "I want you, Gomez! Kidnapping charge, feller—not to mention attempted murder! You don't want to give trouble, with this here gun looking at you."

Gomez's hand flew up, the rock in it. His intention to hurl the missile was obvious, and had it struck the detective it would have flung him from the rocky shelf, to be smashed to death fifty yards below.

But Mr. Carter, with all his drawling nonchalance, was as watchful as a cat. He fired as the ruffian's hand went up.

The rock clattered down, as Gomez's right arm dropped to his side, shattered by the bullet.

There was a terrible yell from the thug.

"I guess I warned you!" said Mr. Carter.

Gomez staggered, his swarthy face white, his arm hanging useless. Mr. Carter advanced on him grimly.

With a yell of rage, the desperate man leaped at him.

The barrel of the automatic struck him, but, unheeding the heavy blow, Gomez tore at the detective with his sound arm, dragged him aside, and rushed past him. Mr. Carter staggered and fell. Gomez leaped from the cave, to spring away by the upper path. He leaped fairly into the arms of Bob Cherry and the Bouncer, who had reached the plateau, and they fastened on him like bulldogs and dragged him down.

The next moment Mr. Carter's grasp was on him. And the rest of the juniors, scrambling up from the lower path, crowded round.

"Search me!" drawled Mr. Carter. "I guess this galoot is some hoodlum! But we've sure got him dead to rights now."

There was a metallic click as the handcuffs snapped on the swarthy wrists of the Mexican.

Half fainting with the pain of his wound, panting for breath, the captured thug glared up at his captors.

Bob Cherry's eyes blazed at him.

"You rotter!" he said between his teeth. "You scoundrel! We've got you! And we'll get Polk next!"

"The gotfulness is terrific!"

"We've sure got him," drawled Mr. Carter, taking a grip on Jose Gomez and dragging him to his feet. "I'll say we've sure got him. You want to take a leetle pasear along with me, feller."

And the captured thug, in Mr. Carter's strong grip, was hustled down the tortuous path to the bottom of the canyon. The Greyfriars juniors followed.

From rock to rock, by rugged slopes, they descended; and Jose Gomez was marched into the canyon, where Mr. Schootz stared at him like a man in a dream.

Even Mr. Schootz had to admit now that it was not all "guff."

"It's sure that thug Gomez!" said Mr. Van Duck.

"Carry me home to die!" mumbled Mr. Schootz. "What the thunder was the guy doing up there on the Hair-Trigger?"

"I guess that speaks for itself," drawled Mr. Carter. "He was waiting with a rock in his hand for that kid Wharton to come down!"

"Search me!" gasped Mr. Schootz.

"And Polk put him up to it!" roared Bob Cherry.

"Oh, guff!" said Mr. Schootz uneasily. "Hyer, you Gomez! You're sure cinched now, and I guess you can spill it. What was your game hiding on the Hair-Trigger? What?"

Gomez snarled. "Nada!" he answered. "I was there to watch the location; I was curious to see the pictures taken—that is all."

"With a big rock in your fist!" grinned Mr. Carter. "I guess that's too thin, Gomez!"

The ruffian shrugged his shoulders. "I guess I had to plug him in the fin, or he'd have made it last sickness for me," said Mr. Carter. "You want to think out a better story than that, Gomez—you sure do!"

"Did Polk have anything to do with it?" asked Mr. Schootz, eyeing the thug dubiously.

"Polk? Who is Polk?" asked Gomez.

"You sure don't know the name, what?" grinned Mr. Carter.

"No, senor."

"Oh, search me!" grunted Mr. Schootz. "Take the guy away, Carter! He's your mutton! You kids, get back!"

Don't you know better than to horn in in front of the cameras?"

On the summit of the high canyon wall a horseman in the guise of an Arab sheikh appeared against the skyline. Harry Wharton had arrived at the starting-point of the ride.

Mr. Carter led Gomez away. Mr. Schootz dismissed both Gomez and Carter from his mind. The schoolboy sheikh was ready for the riding act, and Mr. Schootz's thoughts concentrated at once on business. That a terrible tragedy had been narrowly averted, that the shadow of death had passed over the schoolboy's head "cut no ice"

was in readiness, and Mr. Van Duck's arm went up and the signal was given.

Many of the spectators would not have been surprised if, now that the crucial moment had come, the schoolboy had failed to meet the test.

But Wharton did not fail.

The cameras were grinding now, taking him in as a distant figure at the top of the cliff. Wharton rode down the path.

The juniors below caught their breath. It was neck-or-nothing now; for once a horseman was on that steep path there was no retreat, no drawing rein. From the top to the bottom he had to come, either riding or falling. Perhaps even Mr. Schootz at that moment felt a misgiving whether his

The black horse rushed past the opening of the cave, where a quarter of an hour ago, Gomez had lurked, whence the fatal rock was to have been hurled, when nothing could have saved horse or rider.

But the way was clear now. There was no danger, save from the natural perils of the path, which were dangerous enough. Wharton passed the plateau, and the black Arab slid, half-sitting, down a steep slope the rider leaning far back in the saddle.

At the foot of that slope was a sudden turn, and for an instant it seemed that horse and rider would shoot off into space.

Mr. Schootz wiped his perspiring brow. At that moment he ceased to

"Hats off!" said Bob Cherry, as the Greyfriars juniors approached Billy Bunter. Every hat was lifted, and Hurree Jamset Ram Singh, with a deep bow, presented the well-filled bag to the Owl of the Remove. "My esteemed and absurd Bunter," he said, "pray accept this ridiculous testimonial in execrable acknowledgment of your terrific and fatheaded services!" (See Chapter 13.)



with Mr. Schootz. He was a business man.

Mr. Schootz devoted his whole attention to the "shot."

THE TWELFTH CHAPTER.

Riding the Hair-Trigger!

HARRY WHARTON sat the black Arab horse at the summit of the canyon wall and looked down the steep, rugged slope.

Of what had happened on the Hair-Trigger path only a few minutes before he had no suspicion.

Looking down from the height, he could make out Mr. Schootz and Mr. Van Duck and the group of camera men, and behind them a group of juniors. His comrades were gathered there to see him ride down.

Wharton's hand was steady on the rein, his head steady and clear. He waited for the waving of Mr. Van Duck's flag as a signal to start.

Perhaps his heart was beating a little faster than usual; but his head was steady and cool. He knew that he could trust his horse, and he knew that he could trust his nerve.

He waited, looking down into the canyon.

Mr. Schootz was ready at last; all

keen desire for realism on the pictures had not led him a little too far.

If so, it was too late now. But the director's fat face was set and a little pale, and he breathed hard and fast.

Down the perilous path came the rider, a blur of white against the dark wall of the canyon. From below it looked as if a mountain goat could scarcely have found footing there. But the spectators knew that the path had been ridden at least once before, by a hunted fugitive with a sheriff's posse behind him. What had been done once could be done again. But the group of Greyfriars juniors hardly breathed as they watched.

Wharton was no longer looking down now. He was riding for his life.

For a dozen yards or so the path was a fairly easy slope. Then there was a leap to a ledge below, and the hoofs of the black Arab clattered on it, the sharp sound ringing across the silence of the canyon.

From the ledge a slant wound down, and the rider disappeared for a moment behind a jutting spur. He reappeared, careering down the cliff, his face set, his wrists like iron on the reins, leaping from ledge to ledge, till a longer leap landed him on the plateau half-way down the cliff.

The momentum of the horse shot him onward.

doubt whether he had not taken too many risks with the rider's life. He knew that he had.

But the schoolboy sheikh did not shoot from the cliff; he turned where the path turned, and again a bulging rock hid him for a few moments.

He came into sight again, white against the rock, and Mr. Schootz gasped with relief. Bob Cherry clutched Nugent's arm, unconscious what he was doing. Nugent was white as chalk.

Clatter, clatter!

Stones, dislodged by the beating hoofs of the Arab, rattled down the cliff, and dropped into the canyon.

The cameras ground on unceasingly, recording every movement of the daring rider.

Crash!

A leap to a ledge, with a sheer wall on the left, a drop to the earth on the right. The horse seemed to stagger, and Nugent groaned. But an iron grip on the reins steadied the Arab, and he leaped on to the next ledge, barely saved from a fall. From that point, he came down with a rushing gallop, and Harry Wharton rode out from the foot of the cliff—the wild ride over.

Mr. Schootz spluttered with relief. Van Duck drew a long breath.

"Bravo!" roared Bob Cherry. Bob

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found relief for his feelings in a tremendous shout: "Bravo!"

Harry Wharton rode up to the group. The cameras ceased to grind. The "act" was over.

Wharton slipped from the horse. Mr. Schootz gave him a thump on the back.

"Good man!" he gasped. "Oh, you surely are the goods, kid! You surely are the gilt-edged, genuine goods! I'll tell the world!"

"Thank goodness it's over!" breathed Nugent.

"All serene," said Harry, with a rather breathless laugh. "Right as rain, old chap!"

"I say, you fellows!"

Billy Bunter rolled on the scene. He had finished his lunch—or, rather, two or three consecutive lunches. Now he was able to give his attention to matters of less importance.

He blinked at Wharton, and blinked at the cliff.

"You've done it?" he asked.

"Yes, old fat man," said Harry, with a smile.

"Not much to make a fuss about, was it?" said Bunter.

"Fathead!"

"Oh, really, Wharton——"

"Ass!"

Harry Wharton walked away to the rancho with his friends to change in his dressing-room. Mr. Schootz was rubbing his fat hands with glee.

"I reckoned he could make the grade!" he said. "I sure told you he could make the grade, Van Duck! What? Where's Polk? He sure allowed that he was going to see the act! Where's Polk?"

"I guess he lit out for Hollywood," grinned Mr. Van Duck. "He sure wasn't keen to watch the stunt. I guess he won't be a whole heap pleased that the kid got away with it."

Mr. Schootz chuckled. He had no doubt that the Perfection star would be far from pleased; but that, as he would have said, cut no ice with him. In fact, he would rather have liked to "rub it in," had Myron Polk remained on the spot.

"I say, Mr. Schootz," squeaked Bunter. "It was Polk who——"

"Can it!" said Mr. Schootz, and he walked away.

"I say, Mr. Van Duck, it was Polk who——"

"Forget it!" said Mr. Van Duck, and he followed the director.

And Bunter snorted and rolled back to the rancho, in search of Harry Wharton. From Wharton, at least, the Owl of the Remove expected acknowledgment and gratitude, and he expected that gratitude to take a substantial form.

THE THIRTEENTH CHAPTER.

The Testimonial!

"MY hat!" said Harry. The "sheikh" had disappeared and Harry Wharton was himself again. He joined his chums to dispose of coffee and cakes under the trees in the patio, and then he heard the story of the capture of Gomez.

"My hat!" he repeated, and he gave a long whistle.

"If that brute had been there when you rode down——" said Frank Nugent, with a shiver.

"No good thinking of it," said Harry quietly. "That fat ass Bunter has come in jolly useful for once——"

"I say, you fellows——"

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"Hallo, hallo, hallo! Here's the jolly old fat man!" said Bob. "Have some of these cakes, Bunter?"

With three or four lunches packed away inside his circumference, Bunter was not so keen as usual on a feed. However, he condescended to accept a cake. He filled his capacious mouth before he proceeded.

"I say, Wharton! I suppose you know I've saved your life——"

"I've just been told," said Harry. "Much obliged, old chap!"

"It is a case of the esteemed mouse and the preposterous lion over again," remarked Hurree Jamset Ram Singh.

"Well, it's not very complimentary to call Wharton a mouse, Inky."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Blessed if I see anything to cackle at. Look here, you fellows! I'm not a chap to brag, as you know——"

"Not?" ejaculated Johnny Bull.

"No!" hooted Bunter. "But facts are facts! I've saved Wharton's life at the risk of my own! Not that I care anything about risk. I'm not the fellow to make a fuss about a bit of risk. But there you are——"

"Blessed if I see where your risk came in!" said Bob Cherry, with a stare. "You never went anywhere near Gomez. You were stuffing here while we got him!"

Bunter snorted.

"Who found out what those villains were plotting?" he demanded. "Who tracked down Gomez and Polk, and found it all out? Tracked them down, and got on to the whole thing, and frustrated their knavish tricks? I think, Wharton, at least you might be grateful."

"Well, so I am, old bean," said Harry. "I'm jolly glad you found out what those rotters were up to, anyhow."

"Where would you be, if I hadn't chipped in?" Bunter wanted to know. "I'm not the fellow to brag, but I think there might be some little acknowledgment, after I've run frightful risks to save a fellow's life."

"My dear chap——" said Wharton mildly.

"There is such a thing," said Bunter, "as gratitude! You know what Milton says about a serpent's thankless tooth, and——"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Oh, really, you fellows——"

"Let us pass an esteemed vote of thankfulness to the ludicrous and execrable Bunter," suggested Hurree Jamset Ram Singh.

"Hear, hear!" said Bob Cherry.

"That's all very well," said Bunter. "But after the fearful risks I've run, and after saving Wharton's life, and all that, my idea is that there ought to be a testimonial."

"A which?" ejaculated Bob.

"A testimonial," said Bunter firmly. "I should prefer it to take the form of cash."

"Oh, my hat!"

"The fact is, I happen, at the present moment, to be short of cash," said Bunter.

"Not really?" said the Bounder.

"Yes, really!"

"How did it happen?" asked Vernon-Smith, with an air of great interest. "How do you explain this rare phenomenon?"

"Beast! The fact is, I've given directions for my postal orders to be forwarded out to California," said Bunter.

"But owing to some delay, or something, they haven't arrived—not one of them!" added Bunter sorrowfully.

"Not one of them has reached Hollywood."

"And perhaps not even started on the way to Hollywood," said the Bounder, sympathetically.

"Beast! Now, about that testimonial," said Bunter briskly. "Your life having been saved, Wharton, I think you ought to start it—say with a hundred dollars."

"My only hat!" said Harry.

"Make it fifty," said Bunter generously. "Dash it all, I never was greedy!"

"He never was greedy!" said Bob, in a dazed sort of way.

"Never!" said Bunter. "Not like some fellows I could name."

"Oh, crumbs!"

"Gentlemen, chaps, and preposterous fellows," said the nabob of Bhanipur. "the testimonial to the ridiculous Bunter is a wheezy good idea. Let us pass round an excellent hat, and treat the preposterous Bunter as he deserves."

"That's right!" said Bunter approvingly. "I'll leave it to you men. Do the decent thing, that's all."

"Look here——" growled Johnny Bull.

"My esteemed Johnny, the wheezy idea is terrifically preposterous," said Hurree Jamset Ram Singh. "My excellent and execrable Bunter, deign to retire from this ridiculous spot while the cashful testimonial is prepared for your absurd acceptance."

"Right-ho!" said Bunter, and he rolled away, leaving the juniors to proceed with the proceedings.

The Famous Five and the Bounder and Lord Mauleverer proceeded to put their heads together. There was a good deal of grinning and chuckling.

Then the juniors went to their rooms. Bunter watched them with a beaming eye.

Apparently the juniors were going to fetch the cash that was required for the testimonial to Bunter, and the Owl of the Remove could only hope that they had plenty of ready money on hand.

Hurree Jamset Ram Singh came out of his room into the gallery, with a little bag in his hand.

The other fellows gathered round him and proceeded to drop contributions into the bag.

Clink, clink! Clink, clink!

Metallic clinking reached Bunter's ears, and he grinned. To judge by the sound, that testimonial was going to be worthy of his acceptance, even if it was only silver dollars that the juniors were dropping into the bag. And Bunter hoped that among the collected coins there would be a few eagles and double-eagles.

Bunter's fat face beamed.

He deserved this testimonial, of course, but he had hardly expected the fellows to catch on to the idea so quickly and so heartily.

"Say, bo!" Fisher T. Fish came into the patio and looked in surprise at Bunter's beaming face. "You sure look chippy! Somebody died and left you a veal-and-ham pie?"

Bunter blinked at him.

"Oh, really, Fishy! The fellows are getting up a testimonial," he explained.

"Search me!" said Fisher T. Fish.

"If you'd like to contribute, Fishy, you——"

"I guess that's some 'if'!" said Fishy derisively.

"Hallo, hallo, hallo!" shouted Bob Cherry from the gallery. "This way, Fishy! Small contributions thankfully received, larger ones in proportion!"

"What on earth is this game?" asked Fisher T. Fish, going up into the gallery. "What are you guys up to, say?"

"Testimonial for Bunter. We're

trying to treat him as he deserves," explained Bob Cherry. "The bag's nearly full, but there's room for a little more. Shell out!"

Fisher T. Fish squinted into the bag, and gave a chortle.

"Sure!" he assented.

And he went into his room.

Billy Bunter's fat face beamed like unto a full moon. Even Fishy, known to be the stingiest fellow ever, was going to contribute. That testimonial, evidently, would be worth having. Visions of hundreds of dollars danced before Bunter; visions of unlimited feeds in the cafes of Santa Monica and the teashops of Hollywood.

Fisher T. Fish came back from his room, and there was a loud clink as he dropped his contribution in.

The collection was finished.

Hurree Jamset Ram Singh closed the bag and fastened the button that secured it at the top. The juniors descended from the gallery and came across to Bunter.

"Hats off!" said Bob.

Bunter beamed on them.

Every hat was lifted, and Hurree Jamset Ram Singh, with a deep bow, almost to the ground, presented the well-filled bag to Billy Bunter.

"My esteemed and absurd Bunter," he said, "pray accept this ridiculous testimonial, from admiring and preposterous friends, in execrable acknowledgment of your terrific, and fat-headed services!"

"Hear, hear!"

Bunter extended a fat hand and accepted the bag.

"Thanks, you fellows!" he said loftily. "I must say that you don't often play up like this. Generally, you're ungrateful. I'm accustomed to ingratitude, but I'm glad to see you do the decent thing for once. Thanks!"

"No thanks are required," said Bob Cherry gravely. "Every man is entitled to his deserts. You've got 'em. That's all! Come on, you men, and leave Bunter to gloat over the plunder."

And the juniors walked out of the rancho, leaving Bunter grinning with glee over the well-filled bag. There was a sound of laughter as they disappeared. Why, Bunter did not know; there was nothing, so far as he could see, to cause risibility.

He rolled to the nearest bench, sat down, and opened the bag. It was heavy, it was crammed, and it clinked musically. Bunter's eyes danced behind his big spectacles as he opened it.

Then, as he blinked into the bag, his expression suddenly changed.

His fat finger and thumb drew out a large, rusty key! He blinked at it, and groped again. This time a dog-chain came to light. Bunter's face was not beaming now. Quite an extraordinary expression was spreading over his fat features. He turned the bag upside down, and the contents shot out on the bench, clinking as they fell—several more rusty keys, a number of nails and screws, an old watch-spring, a number of pebbles, a few rusty pen-nibs, and some other odds and ends of equal value.

Bunter gazed at them.

For some moments he was speechless. This was his testimonial! That musical clinking he had heard had not, evidently, been caused by silver dollars dropping into the bag!

He found his voice at last.

"Beasts!" roared Bunter.

"Ha, ha, ha!" came from the distance.

"I say, you fellows—" yelled Bunter.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Beasts! I say, you fellows—"

But the fellows were gone. Bunter was left with his testimonial, and such satisfaction as it afforded him. To judge by his expression, that was not very much.

THE FOURTEENTH CHAPTER.

The Shadow of Fear!

MYRON POLK paced the parquetry floor in the bungalow on the hill above Hollywood.

The Perfection star was unable to keep still.

His handsome face, white and drawn, hardly looked handsome now. His eyes had a haunted look; his hands trembled. More than once he had gone to the lacquer cabinet where his hidden supply of spirits was kept. But the fiery bootleg liquor he poured down his throat failed in its effect.

Nothing could drive from his haunted mind the vision of a horse and a rider rolling down the steep rocks and crashing to death.

It was done, and now it could not be undone. He hardly knew whether he wished it undone. But he knew that his nerves were in rags, and that he was pursued by remorse and fear.

He had not dared to stay at Jack-

Have you had a shot at bagging one of our leather pocket-wallets yet? What do you think of this winning Limerick?

Old Gosling looks after the gate.
He reports "young rips" who
are late,
Except those that can slip
in his palm, a fat tip,
And thus dodge an unpleasant
fate!

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Rabbit and watch the scene. His conscience had driven him away from the spot; he had felt that he would betray himself when the catastrophe came.

Again and again the hideous scene was enacted in his feverish mind—the horseman riding down the cliff—the hidden ruffian startling the steed from its precarious foothold—the crash in the canyon below—the shattered body lifted from the hard earth. He could not picture it without a shudder; but he could not drive it from his mind. The brand of Cain was on his brow, and it was a nervous wreck of a man who paced and paced, unrelenting, in the sumptuously-furnished room.

It had happened—it must have happened! Nothing could have saved the schoolboy, except fore-knowledge of the dastardly plot; and the plot had been laid in secret in the hills, where there were no ears to hear. Nothing could have saved Wharton, unless he had, after all, shrunk from making the dangerous ride, and Polk knew that he had not.

He was certain that it had happened—that it must have happened! But he was feverishly anxious for definite news. Schootz surely would phone him; or perhaps the director was too overwhelmed by the tragedy to think of it. Twice Polk approached the telephone. Once he picked up the receiver, but he put it down again. It would not do to seem too anxious; it would not do to seem to be expecting news of the boy's destruction; it might draw suspicion on him.

The wretched man was afraid of the merest shadow now.

He paced and paced. When a tap came at his door, he started as if the hand of a policeman had fallen on his shoulder.

He spun round, shaking from head to foot. It was only his Japanese servant, whose impassive face expressed nothing, though his slanting eyes dwelt, for a second, curiously on the white, drawn face of his master.

"What is it?" snapped Polk.

"What—"

"Mistel Caltel call—"

"Carter!" muttered Polk.

Fear fell on him like the grip of an icy hand. The detective—what did he want? Had something been discovered? Polk tried to pull himself together.

"Show him in," he said huskily.

The Japanese bowed gravely and retired.

Polk strove to calm himself. The detective's visit could not mean danger. What could be known? It was impossible that anything could be known. Carter, perhaps, had been at Jack-Rabbit, and had dropped in on his return to Hollywood to give him the news. That was it—that must be it!

Polk stood with his back to the window as the Los Angeles detective was shown in, and the Japanese closed the door softly again.

The detective's face was grave.

"What is it, Mr. Carter?" asked Polk irritably. "I am a busy man. I am studying a part now—"

"I guess I thought you'd like to hear the news from Jack-Rabbit, Mr. Polk," answered the detective, his keen eyes on the face of the Perfection star.

"News?" repeated Polk. He mastered his voice with an effort. "I hope nothing has happened to the boy—I forget his name."

"Wharton, sir," said Mr. Carter.

"Yes—Wharton! I warned him not to attempt the ride. I warned Schootz that it was too dangerous," said Polk. "If—if anything has happened, I am sorry. Such a foolhardy feat—"

"The feat was more dangerous than any guy guessed," said Mr. Carter. "Mr. Schootz never reckoned on Gomez being on the spot."

Polk staggered.

"Gomez!" he said faintly.

"But we've got Gomez!" said Mr. Carter.

Myron Polk sank upon a tapestried settee. His legs refused to support him. It was a face of chalk that was turned upon the detective.

"You've got Gomez?" said Polk, in a faint whisper.

"Sure!"

Polk tried to speak, but his lips were too dry. He could only stare at the Los Angeles detective.

Mr. Carter smiled grimly.

How much truth there had been in Bunter's story Mr. Carter had been unable to decide. The discovery of Gomez on the cliff had proved some part of it, at least. But Bunter did not claim to have seen the confederate with whom Gomez had plotted; only he had known Polk by his voice, and what he had heard left no doubt on the subject. But Mr. Carter wanted some evidence more reliable than Bunter's. He had it now. The evidence was in Polk's white, scared face.

There was a long silence in the room. Polk broke it at last in a dry, husky voice.

"You said—Gomez. I don't quite—quite get you. Who is Gomez?"

"A bootlegger," said Mr. Carter.

"One of a gang who worked in the

Santa Monica mountains. You know the name, I think."

"No," said Polk hoarsely; "it is new to me!"

"Sho!" said Mr. Carter. "I guess the guy knows you, Mr. Polk."

Myron Polk clasped his hands together to hide their convulsive trembling.

"If he says—" he faltered.

His brain was in a whirl. Gomez captured! Gomez in the hands of the law, red-handed from his crime! He would speak—of course he would speak! It was the electric chair for the thug, and he would say what he could to throw the crime upon another.

With a terrible effort, Polk calmed himself. If Wharton was dead, and Gomez had confessed, he needed all his nerve, to save his own neck. He had hardly realised before into what a fearful position his mad hatred of his schoolboy rival had driven him. He realised it now, and he derived a sort of courage from the very excess of his terror.

"If this man—Gomez—has mentioned my name, he lies, of course," he said, speaking in jerks. "I know nothing of the man. If he—if he has caused an accident to Wharton, I, of course, know nothing whatever about it."

Mr. Carter smiled again.

He had said nothing of the thug causing an accident to Wharton. The Perfection star was speaking from his own knowledge.

"You allow you don't know the guy?" he asked carelessly.

"Certainly not."

"You ain't met up with him to-day?" asked Mr. Carter.

Polk trembled.

"To-day? No, never! What—"

"Not by appointment, in the Santa Monica hills, this morning?" asked Mr. Carter. "Sort of rendezvous, I guess—spot where two big rocks lean together?"

Polk gave a choked cry.

"If Gomez says so, he lies!" he panted. "If you are fool enough to listen to the talk of a thug—a boot-legger—an outcast—"

"I ain't heard that from Gomez," said Mr. Carter. "There's another guy allows he was on the spot, and heard a whole lot of talk. He allows he was hidden under them rocks, when a galoot about your size, Mr. Polk, met up with Gomez, and sort of pew-wowed with him."

Polk sat as if turned to stone.

He was lost!

The Perfection star, the idol of the film fans, the darling of the "In Love with Myron" Society, was a lost man

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—doomed to leave his luxurious bungalow for a prison cell! He sat stunned—waiting for Mr. Carter to produce the handcuffs.

Only too willingly would Mr. Carter have produced them, and clicked them on the wrists of the film star—had the matter been as Myron Polk believed.

But Mr. Carter—much to his regret—had nothing to "go upon." He had satisfied himself of Polk's intended guilt. It was to ascertain that that the detective had come to the bungalow; and the Perfection star had betrayed himself completely enough. Now Mr. Carter was done with him.

He stood for some moments watching the chalky face of the "handsomest man in Hollywood," with a grim smile.

Polk could not speak. He seemed palsied by fear.

Mr. Carter broke the silence at last in his slow drawl.

"You'll sure be pleased to hear that Gomez never got away with it, after all, Mr. Polk."

"What?"

"He sure slipped up on it," drawled Mr. Carter. "That kid Wharton made the grade all right."

Polk started convulsively.

"You—you mean—there—there was no accident?" he stammered. He stared almost uncomprehendingly at the detective.

"I mean," answered Mr. Carter deliberately, "that there was no murder, Mr. Polk. That's what that thug was there for, skulking on the cliff. But he sure was roped in before he could put in his punch."

Polk gasped.

"Wharton—then Wharton—"

"I guess the kid's O.K.," said Mr. Carter. "Gomez is in the stone jug. Mr. Schootz is sure rejoicing over that shot. It came off first-rate."

Myron Polk staggered to his feet. The mists of terror were clearing from his mind now.

The "accident" had not happened—Wharton had not been killed—Gomez had not confessed! He was in no danger.

His eyes gleamed with evil as he looked at the detective. He understood now that the astute sleuth had been drawing him on to betray himself.

"I've got Gomez," said Mr. Carter pleasantly. "I guess I'm nailing him on the kidnapping charge; and I sure hope to get the rum-running fixed on him. But I guess a charge of attempted murder won't wash—I know what his game is; and you know, Mr. Polk. But that ain't evidence. He's the guy to keep mum—especially with a rich man behind him to pay lawyers to get him through. And what that fat gink heard you spilling to him won't go much in a court of law. No, sir!"

"So—so you've been fooling me?" said Polk, in a hissing voice. "You came here to pump me?"

"I guess you can call it that," assented Mr. Carter coolly. "I sure wanted to know. Now I know! You put up that guy to make the kid break his neck on the Hair-Trigger; but I can't get it home to you, and I can't get it home to him!" Mr. Carter shook his head. "You'll pay the lawyers to help Gomez, to keep him mum; but the cutest lawyer in Los won't get him off under a year in the pen! No, sir! I can't touch you. I'd sure like to cinch you on it, Mr. Polk; but there's nothing doing."

The film star forced a laugh.

He was in no danger—and he knew it now. The crime that had haunted

him with terror had not taken place. His fears had been unfounded. Polk pulled himself together.

"You fancy you've played a cute game here, Carter," he said. He was once more the cool, disdainful star, cool and supercilious. "I don't see that it will buy you anything. I know nothing of Gomez—not even his name! If you repeat before witnesses what you've been saying to me here, I'll see that you're got for libel—and your professional position won't save you!"

"I guess I ain't spilling anything outside this room," said Mr. Carter. "No, sir! I jest wanted to know—and now I know! If you'll take a word of advice, you'll let them schoolboys alone—after this! I can't get you this time, Mr. Polk. But"—Mr. Carter's eyes glinted—"you try again, and you pull it off, Mr. Polk, and I'll get you—I'll sure get you! Chew on that!"

And Mr. Carter, replacing the Derby hat on his head, walked out of the room and left the bungalow.

THE FIFTEENTH CHAPTER.

Bunter's Reward!

"BUNTER, old bean!"

"Yah!"

"Eh?"

"Yah!" repeated Bunter, with lofty scorn.

"My dear old porpoise—"

"Yah!" said Bunter for the third time.

It was the following day, and work on the films was over. Harry Wharton & Co. had been down to Santa Monica; and they had returned in time for tea. And Wharton had looked for Bunter—and found him in a lofty, contemptuous, and uncompromising mood.

Bunter was indignant.

The testimonial had given him no satisfaction whatever. His wrath was deep, his indignation deeper. The sun had gone down on his wrath, and had risen again on his indignation.

That day he had declined to speak to the juniors. He cut them ruthlessly.

No doubt Bunter considered that a rather severe punishment. The chums of the Remove bore it, however, with considerable fortitude.

Now that Wharton had sought him out, with a cheery smile on his face, Bunter was apt to be placated.

"Yah!" he said, for the fourth time. "I prefer you not to speak to me, Wharton! I despise you, if you don't mind my mentioning it. Keep your distance! I'm done with you!"

"But—" urged Harry.

"Yah!" Bunter's vocabulary seemed limited, but it did not lack emphasis. "Yah!"

"Look here, fathead—"

"I saved your life," said Bunter witheringly. "You played a rotten trick on me in return—your idea of a joke, I suppose. Yah! Some fellows would have been grateful! Yah! Next time you're in fearful danger, don't expect me to chip in and save you at frightful risk to myself. I wash my hands of you!"

"Well, they could do with a wash," remarked Bob Cherry.

"Yah!"

"But—" argued Wharton.

"Away!" Bunter waved a fat hand, registering scorn and contempt. "Away!"

"We've been down to Santa Monica and—"

"Yah!"

"And done some shopping—"

"Yah!"

"And we've got the biggest feed ever known—"



The table, which had looked like a pastry-cook's counter, was almost bare when Bunter suddenly flopped back in his chair and gasped. "Hallo, hallo, hallo!" cried Bob Cherry. "What's the matter, Bunter?" "Mooooooooo—oooooooo!" gasped the Owl of the Remove. "I haven't eaten too much, you fellows! Hardly enough, in fact! But—but—oooooooo!"

(See Chapter 15.)

"Eh?"
"For you——"
"What?"

"Come and see the tuck!"

Scorn and indignation faded from Billy Bunter's face. His fat features registered the keenest interest.

"No larks?" he asked.

"Ha, ha! No! A feast of the gods—cakes and pies, jam-tarts, and cream-puffs, iced pudding and chocolate roll, all sorts of things——"

Bunter beamed.

"Now you're talking!" he said.

"It's a feast of honour," said Bob Cherry gravely.

Bunter smiled.

"Well, of course, I don't care much for tuck, as you fellows know."

"Oh, my hat!"

"But it's the spirit of the thing," said Bunter. "As Shakespeare says, a serpent's tooth is more ungrateful than a thankless winter wind. I'll come."

And Bunter came.

It was, as the captain of the Remove had declared, a feast of the gods. As Bunter sat down to the table, piled and stacked with all sorts and varieties of tuck, his fat countenance beamed like the sun at noonday.

Harry Wharton & Co. had agreed, nem con, that William George Bunter deserved a reward. Certainly, it was by sheer chance that he had come in useful. Still, there could be no doubt that for once he had come in very useful indeed. Bunter's reward took a shape that was peculiarly acceptable to Bunter. Quite a considerable sum had been expended on all sorts of squashy and sticky things. And there they were spread out in enticing array before Bunter's gloating eyes.

"Go it, old bean!" said Bob.

Bunter went it.

Huge as the pile of tuck was it diminished rapidly under Bunter's frontal attack.

His fat jaws worked swiftly. The juniors watched him in admiration, which deepened to wonder, and then became tinged with alarm.

They wanted Bunter to enjoy the feed of his life. But they did not want him to burst.

Half-way through that feast William George paused a moment to unfasten a few waistcoat buttons. Then he resumed the attack with renewed vigour.

"I say, you fellows," he gasped, at last, "this is good! This is prime! This is tip-top! Pass those cakes!"

Even Bunter slackened down at last.

But much remained, and his eyes lingered on it. It was against all Bunter's principles to leave anything on the table undevoured. He paused a few moments, rallied, and returned to the attack.

His fat jaws worked more slowly now. But they worked. Item after item disappeared.

The table, which had looked like a pastrycook's counter, was now almost bare. Only a bag of tarts and a few ices remained. Bunter stretched out a fat hand to the tarts.

One by one they vanished. Bunter had to make efforts now. But he made them manfully. The tarts went. More slowly the remaining ices followed. Bunter sat quite still when he had cleared the table, breathing stertorously, with a fat and shiny face.

"Had enough, old chap?" asked Bob Cherry, gazing at him and wondering where he had put it all. Even Bunter's ample circumference seemed hardly to

account for the disappearance of that mountain of tuck.

"Yes!" gasped Bunter.

"The enoughfulness is terrific," murmured Hurree Jamsset Ram Singh, "Perhaps there is a little too-muchfulness."

"Grooogh!"

"Hallo! Hallo! Hallo! What's the matter?"

"Mooooooooh!"

"What——"

"Oooooooooh!"

After uttering those peculiar sounds Bunter sat very still. He realised that he dared not move. A strange feeling was upon him, which he remembered having experienced on the steamer on the Atlantic.

"I—I—I think I—I'll lie down a bit," gasped Bunter, at last. "I haven't eaten too much, you fellows. Hardly enough, in fact. But—but—Oooooooooh!"

The juniors helped Bunter to his room. They laid him on his bed.

"I say, you fellows——" moaned Bunter.

"Yes, old bean!"

"Oooooooooh!"

"Over-done it a bit, old chap?"

"No; nothing of the kind! But——"

"But what?"

"Oooooooooh!"

"Better leave him to it," said Bob. And Bunter was left to it.

THE END.

(Whatever you do, chums, don't miss the next yarn in this magnificent "Hollywood" series, entitled: "A FILM STAR'S VENGEANCE!" It is undoubtedly one of the finest stories Frank Richards has written. Order it to-day!)

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OPENING CHAPTERS OF A BRILLIANT NEW SERIAL OF RACING ADVENTURES!



THE FIRST CHAPTER.

Champion of the Track!

"TORNADO" ROSSITER slung his twin-cylinder Volson racer into the second bend of the Elsenham Park Speedway, and hazed the safety-fence with the cinder-spray of a long, raking slide.

Close behind him came a challenger in a white slip. He was known to the "fans" as Syd Mollison, and he was making a desperate bid to snatch the victory from Rossiter on the sweep of track that curved into the front straight. Incidentally, he was making a bid to supplant Rossiter as proven champion—Rossiter, the unbeaten, Rossiter the hitherto unbeatable.

But was he unbeatable? Close on forty thousand spectators believed otherwise as they stood on their feet and lifted their voices in a storm of applause. And the name that they yelled was "Syd Mollison."

Forty thousand pairs of eyes watched Rossiter and Mollison swing out of the bend, with the sun on the gleaming bikes, and the sparks flying from the steel toe-plates on the riders' boots.

The exhaust-spouts blurted venomously at full throttle as both men took their fingers off the "cut-out" buttons on the handlebars. Mollison was still a shade to the rear, but he was lunging forward with his body to urge the best out of his machine, and it looked as if Rossiter had met his match at last.

Rossiter's back wheel took a sudden switch to the right. It may have been an accident, and again it may have been a vicious and intentional side-slip by a man notoriously jealous of his reputation. Whatever the cause, the result was disastrous, for Mollison was forced to wrench away.

Down came the challenger's bike in a smother of cinders. Mollison flung himself clear of the saddle at the critical moment, while his machine went tearing and grinding across the track on its side, spiral-fashion, to finish up by the fence.

Rossiter rode on comfortably, with nothing to fear from the two other competitors who were still on the back-

SPEEDWAY PALS!

A. CARNEY ALLAN

straight. The checked flag sliced down to signal him the winner, and the finishing-gun banged deafeningly.

Less than a minute afterwards, Tornado Rossiter was riding round the track with the Silver Armlet, trophy of the race, clasped about his sleeve. He looked almost ghoulish in his leather suit, crash-helmet, and aviation mask—a champion of the dirt track, but an unpopular one, for behind the mask and goggles of Rossiter's kit was a face that had never been revealed to the followers of the great game.

Rumour had it that he was averse to

Elsenham Speedway, two youngsters, unknown, and scarcely noticed by those around them, but destined to play their parts in a grim drama which would link them closely with the man who called himself Tornado Rossiter.

One of these youngsters was Jimmy Beresford, notable for a cheerful, smiling countenance, and a strong, athletic figure; notable also for his passionate interest in all things relating to speed and motor-cycling.

The other was Ron Connolly, his chum, a dark-haired fellow, of a more serious disposition than Jimmy, but likewise interested in speed and motor-cycling. His interest, however, ran in a different groove, for Ron Connolly was of an inventive turn of mind. He worked as a mechanic at Glendale Richards & Co., a firm noted for the tuning, maintenance, and repairing of dirt-track machines, and his pet ambition was to launch a new engine on the motor-cycle market.

These two, fast chums since school-days, rose immediately after the race for the Silver Armlet and made their way from the stands. A few minutes later they found themselves in a "park" specially reserved to accommodate cars and bikes.

Jimmy located a twin-cylinder machine here and, taking it from its stand, he settled himself in the saddle. The bike was a magnificent-looking job, with plated fittings, and the very latest of "gadgets." On the tank was a trade-mark, on which was inscribed the

Here you will meet Jimmy Beresford, whose heart and soul is in all things relating to high speeds and dirt-track thrills.

publicity. The few who blindly favoured him called it modesty. But the swagger of his bearing gave the lie to these opinions, and the fact remained that he had never been a popular winner.

There was little cheering now, and there were two possible reasons for the lack of enthusiasm. One was the mystery that surrounded his personality, keeping him at a distance from the fans, as it were.

The other was the wreckage of Mollison's bike on the edge of the track.

Let us now turn to two youngsters among the almost-silent crowd at the

name "Beresford," and it must here be explained that Jimmy was the son of Gordon Beresford, of Beresford Motors.

Jimmy kicked the starter and, as the exhausted chuckled with rhythmic, deep-throated note, he prepared to say good-bye to Ron.

"By the way," said Ron, as Jimmy was on the point of dropping the clutch, "I had a word or two with your dad the other day. About my invention, you know."

"You did?" Jimmy exclaimed. "What was the verdict?"

"Well, your father couldn't tell me anything definite, of course," Ron answered. "But I let him have a plan of the engine, and he said that the principle of the thing looked good. He was glad I came straight to him with the idea, in preference to the Volson people—particularly as I haven't taken out a patent yet. He told me that the Volson Company had an ugly reputation."

"Yes, dad's always had that opinion," Jimmy mused, "and I don't think it's simply prejudice against a rival firm. Well, Ron, here's hoping your engine turns out a success. In the meantime, so-long!"

With a genial wave of the hand, Jimmy departed, skilfully driving his bike between two cars that partially blocked the entrance of the park. One of these cars Jimmy casually noticed. It was a big open four-seater, with a cream body, and pale green wings. He was to remember it.

Jimmy lived with his father in a large house some distance out of town, and a little while later he might have been seen riding along a quiet country lane between tall hedges.

For once, Jimmy was not "speeding," and the engine note of his bike was subdued and low-toned. Jimmy, in fact, was thinking—thinking of Ron's invention. He knew that his chum had worked hard on it for the last year, devoting every spare minute to it.

The youngster's thoughts were suddenly interrupted by an imperious hooting behind him and, turning his head, he saw a car racing along the lane. The driver's face was scarcely visible above the big steering-wheel, and clouds of dust were swirling in the auto's track. Jimmy, in his backward glance, had a vivid impression of a "road-hog" who had not the slightest consideration for others.

Moreover, the youngster recognised the car as the one he had seen at the Elsenham Speedway.

Jimmy's blood was roused, and he twisted the throttle-grip impulsively. There was an instantaneous response, the engine ripping out its challenge to the on-coming car with a fierce staccato tune, and the bike jerking forward at increased speed.

The car was within fifty yards before Jimmy's machine could set the pace; but with the "twin" roaring stridently the pursuing vehicle ceased to gain ground. It was then apparent that the driver had realised the youngster's intention to make it a race, for he had pulled a pair of goggles over his eyes, and was crouched still lower behind the steering-wheel.

There was a speedometer on Jimmy's bike, and the needle flickered past the fifty-five mark and on to the sixty, then crept forward towards the sixty-five. Gradually the distance between motor-cycle and car began to increase, and Jimmy, flattened along the tank, looked back again with a defiant gesture.

Ahead of him the lane took a sharp left-hand turn, and it was as he hurtled round the bend that the youngster came

face to face with imminent disaster. For right in front of him a huge farm-cart was drawn across the road, having emerged from a branch track.

Jimmy's presence of mind saved him, for in a split second he saw that there was still a narrow gap left for him between the heads of a pair of massive horses and the hedge on the right-hand side. He wrenched on the steering and dashed through, his wheels on the very brink of a shallow ditch.

The horses reared and plunged, and they were still plunging when the car with the green wings thundered round the bend.

Where there had been room for the bike there was no room for the automobile, and there came a shrieking of brakes, followed by an ugly shock.

Jimmy looked back again. The car was resting at an acute angle with her off-side wheels in the ditch, her front axle bent by the jar, and her wind-screen splintered. The driver, clad in a white dust-coat, was scrambling out in a vile rage that had yet to find expression in words.

Jimmy rode on contentedly, assured that the "road-hog" had met with no serious hurt, and half a mile farther on turned into the drive of his father's house.

He found his father in the library, looking over some papers. He was a tall, aristocratic man, Gordon Beresford, with grey hair and a pair of kindly



JIMMY BERESFORD.

eyes. On occasion, however, those same eyes could look grimly-forbidding and that same aristocratic countenance assume an apoplectic hue. He was popular among his employees at Beresford Motors, but when circumstances warranted it he could reveal a temper that was little short of cyclonic.

"Hallo, dad!" Jimmy greeted him cheerfully.

Gordon Beresford grunted—always a danger signal.

"Suppose you've just got back from that confounded Elsenham Park Speedway," he said.

"Right first time!" was the unabashed answer. "I say, dad, the Beresford bikes weren't much in evidence on the track to-day. Most of the winners were riding Volson machines—"

The youngster was interrupted by a resounding thump as Beresford senior brought down his hand on the polished surface of a table.

"Will you hold your tongue about the

dirt-tracks?" he snapped, his face assuming apoplectic tendencies. "I've told you before that I'm not interested in them! And now listen to me, young man. For the hundredth time, when are you going to settle down and earn your own living? There's a job waiting for you in the works of Beresford Motors. Make good there, and in a year's time I'll take you into the office, where your Cousin Otto will coach you in the business side. There's an example for you—your Cousin Otto! He's done so well that he's managed to buy himself a car, I hear. He doesn't waste his time at the dirt-tracks!"

"I'll tell you what, dad," Jimmy countered. "I'm no mechanic, so I'm not keen on the works. But I'll let you take me on as sales' manager—at five hundred a year to begin with."

Gordon Beresford's features became increasingly apoplectic, but before he could find his voice a manservant appeared in the doorway.

"Young Mr. Otto to see you, sir!" he announced, and next moment a figure appeared on the threshold.

It was the figure of a man in the early twenties—tall, sallow, and dark-haired. He seemed in a vile rage, which was just beginning to find expression in low-toned mutterings. There were several small cuts on his hands and face, and he was wearing goggles and a white dustcoat.

The Thief in the Night!

JIMMY tried hard to stifle his mirth, but scarcely succeeded, and, in consequence, drew upon himself an irate glance from his Cousin Otto.

"Good heavens!" Gordon Beresford exclaimed. "What have you been doing to yourself?"

"You can thank Jimmy for this, uncle!" Otto told him angrily. "I was on my way here in my car when I saw a motor-cyclist in front of me. He was driving like a madman, and on the sharp bend half a mile from this house he succeeded in frightening a pair of farm horses. When I came round they were plunging all over the road, and I was forced into a ditch. It wasn't till then that I recognised the motor-cyclist as your precious son!"

Jimmy's face flushed.

"Let me tell you the story—" began Jimmy.

But Gordon Beresford cut in on him. "Silence!" he ground out. "Knowing your recklessness, I don't find it difficult to believe Otto. Now listen to me! I'm tired of these scrapes in which you are constantly landing yourself, and I'm tired of seeing you idling around here. You will remember that we were discussing a job for you just before Otto came in, and a job is what you need to keep you out of mischief. Either you will take the position I offered you in the works, or you will clear out of here and fend for yourself!"

Jimmy was a little staggered, to say the least, by the unexpectedness of this decree, and for a moment he could give no answer.

"Well?" his father growled, and with that Jimmy's face regained its habitual cheerfulness.

"If you'll let me sleep here to-night, dad," he answered, "I'll be off the first thing to-morrow morning. Meanwhile, I'll do some packing."

It was Gordon Beresford's turn to be taken aback, and when he spoke again the harshness was quite gone from his voice.

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"What do you think you're going to do for a living?" he asked.

"Oh, I'll find something!" Jimmy told him genially. "Of course, if you change your mind about that job as sales' manager—starting at five hundred a year—"

Once more Gordon Beresford lost his temper.

"You have big notions!" he snapped. "Very well, then, get out of here to-morrow and come back in a year's time! If you can prove that you've earned five hundred pounds, then I'll start you as sales' manager at seven hundred and fifty!"

"Right you are, dad," said Jimmy; and, turning on his heel, he went out of the room and made his way upstairs.

When he had gone both his father and his cousin Otto were silent for a while.

It was old Gordon Beresford who broke the silence, and as he spoke there was a wistful look in his eye.

"I wonder," he mused—"I wonder if that boy can do it?"

The dark and sullen Otto said nothing; but he frowned as he looked up at the ceiling, which shook slightly under Jimmy's tread in a room above.

The room was Jimmy's bed-room, and the youngster was busy packing into a small case the things which he considered most essential. When he had finished his task he sat down to think.

Long into the evening Jimmy planned his future, and he was still planning when he undressed for bed. Cousin Otto had taken his departure by then, Jimmy having watched him stride down the drive some time before.

The shadows deepened, and the night grew still, but Jimmy Beresford did not sleep. He could not sleep, for his mind was too full of the adventure on which he was presently to embark. Lying on his back with his hands cupped behind his head, he stared into the darkness and reflected.

At a late hour he heard his father come upstairs, and then the silence was absolute, except when a solitary clock chimed the hour of midnight.

The last stroke had scarcely died away when Jimmy heard the sound of

a motor-bike engine, and from its characteristic note he recognised it as a Volson. A motor-bike engine was in complete accord with his mood at that moment, and he found himself listening to it. In fancy he let himself imagine that the sound was magnified by a hundred-fold to the roar of the "speed-irons" on the Elsenham track, that deafening roar which drowned even the plaudits of the crowd.

Then he realised that the engine had stopped, presumably close to the gates of the house. The next thing that Jimmy heard was a stealthy movement immediately under his bed-room window!

Jimmy slipped out of bed almost involuntarily. He always slept with the sash raised, and as he peered over the sill he saw a figure entering the library by way of a pair of french windows that had obviously been forced.

Flinging on a dressing-gown, the youngster stole to the door of his room and tiptoed downstairs. It took him some time to reach the library, for he moved slowly and cautiously, fearing that the intruder might take the alarm and make his get-away.

It was dark, but not so dark that it was impossible to see, and from the doorway of the library Jimmy discerned a figure crouching at his father's safe. The man had already opened the safe, and was examining its contents by the light of an electric torch. The reflected glow of the torch threw into half-relief the man's gloved hand and a black leather suit that he was wearing.

This much Jimmy saw the instant before he sprang across the room.

The man at the safe heard him and leapt up. But Jimmy was hurtling forward with his fist bunched for action, and the fist took the thief flush in the face, staggering him.

The man was quick to recover, and he made a rush for the french windows; but he did not know the room as Jimmy did, and he blundered into a chair.

Next instant Jimmy was upon him once more.

The two of them grappled, and they reeled and lurched across the room,

colliding with the furniture in their mad scuffle.

The man knew a trick or two in the ju-jitsu line, and he brought the edge of his hand sharp against the tender division of bone between Jimmy's nostrils, using the pressure that can lay a man on his back. But he failed to reckon with Jimmy's right, which came with shattering impact against his jaw.

The man tumbled sideways, and as he sprawled on the floor Jimmy dropped atop of him. To and fro they rolled, till the man in black managed to scramble clear and reach his feet again.

Jimmy tried to rise as well, but before he could straighten up the thief lashed at him viciously with his boot.

It was a cowardly blow, and it took the youngster with smashing force on the temple, pitching him backward.

Jimmy lay for a while half-stunned, and when at length he pulled round he was alone in the room. Through the open french windows there came to him the sound of a motor-bike engine, a sound that grew fainter as he listened to it dazedly.

A movement in the doorway arrested Jimmy's attention, and he saw a figure standing on the threshold. A hand fumbled along the wall and a switch clicked, and as the lights flooded the room the youngster recognised his father.

"Your safe, dad," said Jimmy. "A thief was trying to rifle it!"

"Never mind the safe," old Gordon Beresford growled. "Are you all right, son?"

"Sure, dad," Jimmy told him. "But look through your papers. There may be something missing."

A number of documents littered the floor beside the open safe, and Gordon Beresford examined them hastily.

"Everything's here," he declared; and then he pointed to a drawer that had been wrenched wide, a drawer that was packed with wads of Treasury notes. "It wasn't money he was after," he observed.

"What else could he have wanted?" Jimmy wanted to know; and at his words a light dawned in the old man's eyes.

"Nothing that I can think of, unless—young Connolly's blue-print!" he ground out. "And, fortunately, I took that upstairs with me to study it before I slept. Listen, Jimmy! The Volson people approached Connolly. He tells me they seemed anxious to negotiate with him, and I fancy they must have found out somehow or other that there were possibilities in his invention. And"—he indicated the litter of papers—"I wouldn't put this past the Volson people."

Jimmy was scarcely listening. He had seen a document on the floor which his father had overlooked, and, picking it up, the youngster noticed that it bore the finger-marks of a greasy gauntlet.

Old Gordon Beresford seemed to have forgotten his strained relationship with his son, but at sight of that document his lips tightened slightly.

"You'd better read that," he said, "for it concerns you. I wrote it this evening."

Jimmy unfolded the document wondering.

"The previous will which I have made is hereby cancelled," it ran. "I leave my entire estate to—"

The space was left blank, but Jimmy understood clearly enough.

Boys,
you'll be
missing
a treat
if you
fail to
read—



—this
Bumper
Story of
Tom
Merry
& Co. of
St. Jim's



Although there was only a narrow gap left for him between the heads of the massive horses and the hedge, Jimmy Beresford wrenched on the steering and dashed through! (See Page 25.)

"It depends on you," said Gordon Beresford, "whether I write Otto's name or your own. Now, there's a job waiting for you—"

"As sales' manager in a year's time," put in Jimmy, with a grin.

"Oh, confound you, boy!" old Gordon Beresford rapped out. "Have it your own way, but if you fail to prove yourself within twelve months the name of Otto Beresford is going down on that will!"

Jimmy grinned, and turned on his heel.

"Good-night, dad!" he said. "And good-bye, for I'll probably be gone by the time you're called to-morrow morning."

And gone Jimmy was, for at an early hour he strapped his suitcase to the back of his bike and launched forth on the road of adventure.

It was a road that led him to town, and the premises of Glendale Richards, where he sought out Ron Connolly.

"Ron," he said, "I want you to strip my bike, for I'm going on the tracks with her. And I'd be glad if you can help me any, since you know the ropes. There's another thing. Do you think they've got room for me at your digs?"

The New Recruit!

THERE was a crowd of forty thousand at the Elsenham Park Speedway, and a single member of that crowd had come specially to see Jimmy Beresford in his first public appearance on the track.

The isolated supporter of the great game's new recruit was none other than Ron Connolly, to whom Jimmy owed much. For it was Ron who had tuned his bike for him, and it was Ron who had paved the way for him as a novice of the high-speed sport.

The first event of the meeting was about to be run, and there was a casual fluttering of programmes. The event was not important, being Heat 1 of the Elsenham Park Speedway Club Handicap, for which only novices were entered. The crowd took little interest in the names of the half-dozen competitors. Least of all did they note the name of Beresford.

The official starter was quick to note a strange face, and he took it upon himself to explain to Jimmy the system of flags employed, and the method of "taking off." Jimmy hardly listened, for he knew all this already, and he was eager for the race—tremendously eager. He was not entirely out of element, for he had had several "try-outs" on the track. But, nevertheless, his heart was thumping sickeningly.

His position was on the outer edge, as the rider with the longest handicap. He felt hot and uncomfortable in his unaccustomed track togs—crash helmet, goggles, leather suit, and steel-plated boots. His hands were clammy in their gauntlets, though for the time of year it was not unduly hot. He remembered that green, the colour of the slip he was wearing, was reckoned to be unlucky.

Jimmy tried to turn his mind from all anxieties, and, thinking of his father, he smiled as he visualised the old man's ire on learning that he had taken to the dirt track.

He smiled, too, as he reflected that Cousin Otto was probably among the spectators again—the much-lauded Cousin Otto, who ingratiated himself by pretending to scorn the new sport.

Then he glanced down at his bike, stripped of its "gadgets" and all unessential equipment. The machine was tuned to perfection, and if he—Jimmy

Beresford—could likewise tune himself to a great effort—

The starting-flag fell, and the attendants in white pushed Jimmy away. His engine blazed forth stridently, and he felt the engine vibrate beneath him.

Again the flag fell—again, again, each precise drop of the hand that held it signalling a competitor off the mark. The united racket of the bikes seemed to fill the air with thunder.

Jimmy switched the throttle-grip full open and dashed along the front straight. This was plain sailing. It was on the bends that he would be tested—the bends!—and as the first loomed near he felt his nerves leap to the ordeal. Everything seemed at stake, and for an ugly moment his imagination conjured up the bitterness of failure.

He shut off at the curve and coursed round precariously, his front wheel wobbling, his back wheel threatening to skid among the cinders. It was the most desperate experience he had ever known. The loose grit of the track seemed to conspire malevolently for his downfall.

A rider in a white slip shot past him, followed by another in blue. A third in red, who had started at scratch, pulled level. These were men more accustomed to the game than Jimmy, and ready to take a chance.

Jimmy clenched his teeth as he came out of the bend fourth in the "procession." Beyond the safety fence he saw a sea of hazy faces—disinterested, unimpressed faces. But he knew that among the crowd was one who was not disinterested, and because he knew that Ron Connolly was watching him Jimmy somehow gained encouragement.

SPEEDWAY PALS!



(Continued from previous page.)

There were three men in front of him. He must fight for the lead that he had lost and beat those three to the checked flag that would signal the winner.

On the back straight he gave his bike full-throttle again, and as the machine stormed forward in response he realised how much was due to Ron. The expert tuning of the engine made the recovery of lost ground possible.

The rider in red was forging ahead to take the lead, but Jimmy caught the man in the white slip and passed him. The thrill of that redeeming triumph kindled his blood and steadied his nerve. He chased the other two, racing after them towards the second bend.

"Red Slip" hit the curve with the man in blue a close second. Then came Jimmy—and Jimmy did not shut off so early this time.

He raked round in pursuit of the others, his bike leaning far over towards the turf on the inner edge. Once he was almost down, but scrambling desperately with his toe, he averted a crash and swung into the front straight.

His heart was palpitating, but no longer with anxiety. He had weathered his way through a threatening spill, and he grinned as he thought of the frantic concern that the watching Ron must have felt.

"Red Slip," "Blue Slip," and Jimmy Beresford dashed along the front

straight with the "spouts" of their bikes roaring clamorously. The former two were still fighting for the lead when they gained the first bend of the second lap, but Jimmy was storming up to challenge the pair of them.

He launched his machine at the curve only two lengths behind the second rider. The man in blue answered the challenge with a "broadside" effort that might have carried him round the bend to recover first place. But he was no champion, and he over-reached himself. With his back wheel sliding through the cinders, and his front wheel wrenching to right and left, he lost control.

Down went his twin-cylinder "speed-iron," and machine and rider were lost in a cloud of dust and grit.

Next instant Jimmy Beresford was almost a-top of the wreck. A double crash seemed inevitable, but as he saw the bike spinning in front of him, the youngster jerked madly at his handle-bars, and swung clear to plough on round the curve.

For a breathless moment the spectators were gripped by something very much like suspense, and when Jimmy came safely out of the bend, more than one programme was consulted for his name.

There was now only Red Slip in front of him, and Jimmy tore in pursuit with his blood at fever-heat. Yet the "scratch" man was riding well, and the second and third lap brought little change in their positions.

The green flag dropped to signal the fourth and last lap, and Jimmy knew that he must go "all out" on the corners to win.

On the first he gained ground by a long-controlled skid, and from the spurt over the back-straight he slashed into the last curve two lengths behind the leader, at a speed reckless and foolhardy for one so new to the game.

His back wheel whipped aside crazily in a fearsome skid, and the front wheel bucked like a wild thing. Jimmy's gauntleted hands juggled and battled for control, and Jimmy won, raking out of the bend dead-level with his rival.

The exhaust-ports blurted in unison as both riders opened the throttle. For a moment the two bikes raced side by side, and then one was seen to thrust ahead. It was the Beresford "twin," and the checked flag fell to signal Jimmy the winner as he flashed across the line!

A few minutes afterwards the jubilant Ron Connolly joined the victor in the pits.

"Did you hear the announcer, Jimmy?" Ron cried, wringing him by the hand. "He said your time was an achievement for a novice making his first appearance, and the crowd let out quite a yell for you."

"I've got you to thank, Ron," Jimmy told him. "No matter how far I get in the dirt-track game, I'll always remember it's you I'll have to thank."

Ron indicated a figure standing just out of earshot.

"Wait till you're riding against him before you start thanking me," he rejoined. "'Tornado' Rossiter."

Jimmy looked at the champion, and then all at once his interest quickened. He had noticed something that robbed his face of its genial smile—something that had never struck him until this very moment.

With his hands encased in greasy gauntlets, Rossiter was adjusting the gauze shield round the engine of his bike—a Volson twin-cylinder. And Rossiter was wearing a black leather suit!

(Like a flash Jimmy Beresford remembered the man in black he had seen crouching before his father's safe. Could it possibly have been "Tornado" Rossiter, the champion? Be sure you read next week's instalment of this great new serial, chums, by ordering your copy well in advance. Meanwhile, introduce Jimmy Beresford to your chums.)

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