

"SPEEDWAY PALS!" THRILLING DIRT-TRACK
SERIAL JUST STARTING.

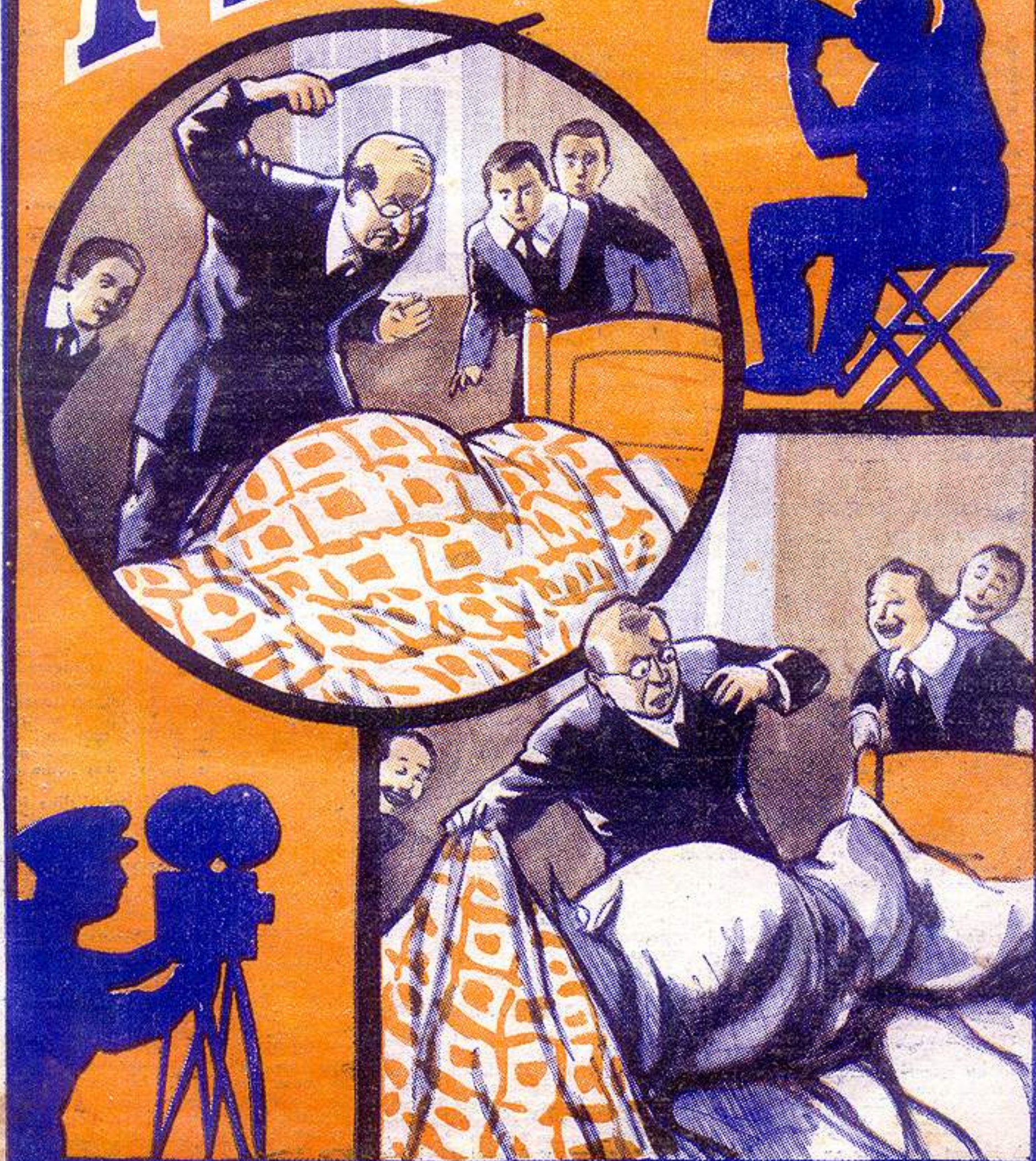
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The Magnet

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EVERY SATURDAY.



—AND BUNTER WASN'T THERE!

(Read the splendid schoolboy adventure story dealing with Harry Wharton & Co.'s trip to Hollywood—inside.)



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.).

WHAT is a Paravane? That is the question which Tom Arnold, of Norwich, asks me this week. The Paravane, which came into being during the War, is a device which cuts submarine mines adrift, and allows them to rise to the surface, where they can be sunk by gun-fire. It is estimated that this device saved at least two thousand million pounds during the War. In shape, the Paravane is something like a shortened torpedo, with a small plane on each side, and fixed rudders. Two Paravanes are towed along by a ship, and they dive down into the water, acting there in a similar manner to that in which a kite acts in the sky. There is a stout wire stretched between them and the bows of the ship, and this catches the mooring chains of the mines, and diverts them to a special steel cutter. The mooring chain is cut by this, and the mine rises to the surface, well clear of the ship. All merchant vessels sailing in British waters during the War rigged their Paravanes in mined areas, and this saved a tremendous number of ships which would otherwise have gone to the bottom.

ANOTHER REVOLUTION

is proceeding gaily in Mexico at the time of writing. Earthquakes and revolutions seem to be the staple "industries" of Mexico. I was talking to a fellow the other day who has lived in Mexico a great deal, and he told me of rather an amusing incident which occurred to him during one of the periodical revolutions. He paid for an article with a silver coin, and received, in change, what he took to be a handful of tram-tickets. As his protests met with no result, and no real money seemed to be coming along, he began to "raise Cain"—only to discover that the supposed tram-tickets were paper money!

What had happened was that the particular town in which he was, had been captured by the rebels a little while previously, and they had immediately taken possession of all the money in the place, and had issued printed "notes" in return! Even coppers had been replaced by notes of the same size and style as English tram-tickets! That is how the rebels finance their revolutions. If they are successful in getting into power they might honour their printed notes; if not—well, the notes are not worth the paper they are printed on. Apparently, a printing-press is an essential part of a Mexican revolutionist's outfit!

HERE'S A TIP

which is sent along by an Accrington reader. "There's so much information in your chat," he says, "that I am keeping it all for future reference. I cut the paragraphs out, and paste them in alphabetical order in a large notebook. The result is that before long I shall have a veritable encyclopædia of just the kind of information which a boy wants to know." Thanks for the bouquet! I try to make this chat as interesting as I can, and as amusing, too, so now

LET'S HAVE A LAUGH with Ernest Edwards, of 6, Cromwell Road, Maidstone, who gets a MAGNET pocket-knife for the following yarn:

Butcher (to small boy who is whistling shrilly outside his shop): "What are you making that noise for, sonny?"

Boy: "I've lost my dog."

Butcher: "Well, I haven't got it."

Boy: "I know you ain't, but it's funny every time I whistle those sausages over there begin to wriggle!"

TURNING FROM GAY TO GRAVE

I find that my diary tells me that this Tuesday is the anniversary of the sinking of the Titanic in 1912. I don't suppose many of you fellows remember anything about it, because it would be before your time. But the whole world was horrified when it happened, for it was the greatest shipping disaster known at that period. The Titanic was a magnificent passenger liner, on her way to New York on her maiden voyage. She ran into a fog, and shortly afterwards hit an iceberg, being smashed up almost immediately, and taking most of her passengers and crew with her to the bottom. It was this disaster which first demonstrated the value of wireless—which was then in its infancy. It was thanks to the heroic wireless operator, who went down with the ship after remaining at his post until the last minute, that the boats containing the survivors were picked up.

Incidentally, the distress signal at that time was "C.Q.D.", and it was not until after this that it was changed to "S.O.S.", which, as those of you who are conversant with the Morse code will know, is infinitely more suitable for an urgent call.

SOMETHING NEW IN FREE GIFTS!

How many fellows haven't, at some time or other, given their imagination free rein and tried to picture to themselves the amazing changes that invention will bring in years to come? Not many, I'll warrant, for what more fascinating "game" than to hazard guesses at the wonderful mechanical marvels of the future; guesses that—who knows?—may not be so far wrong, after all!

And now there comes a chance for all my readers to get a real peep into the future—to compare their pet ideas and theories with those of skilled artists and inventors! How's this? I can hear you ask. By obtaining, by hook or crook, a copy of this week's record-breaking issue of our grand companion paper, the "Gem," on sale Wednesday. It contains the first of a series of wonderful FREE GIFTS—coloured picture cards depicting marvels of the future on land, sea, and in the air, in a way never before surpassed!

Of course, all "Magnetites" will want the complete collection of these ripping cards. Very well, then! A standing order for the GEM is the only way of avoiding disappointment. Do it NOW!

Here's another funny yarn for which Edward Rutherford, of 64, Mayflower Street, Bloomfield, Belfast, has been awarded a useful MAGNET pocket-knife.

A GENERAL ANTIQUE

"This inn must be very old," said a visitor who had not as yet been made acquainted with its history. "Very old, sir," said the proprietor, with the utmost solemnity. "Would you like to hear some of the stories connected with the place?" "I should, indeed," replied the tourist. "Tell me the legend of that curious old apple-tart the waiter just brought in!"

GREAT SNAKES!

No, I'm not giving vent to my feelings—I'm simply dealing with a question which Arthur Gaunt, of Norwich, asks me. What is the largest snake in the world? he wants to know. The largest yet known was killed just a little while ago by a settler in one of the wildest parts of Africa. This particular specimen was a water-snake, and measured forty feet in length, while it was three yards in circumference. Native legends say that much larger snakes than this exist, but up to the present this one is a record. I admire the man who killed this monster! I can't say that I would like to run across a reptile-like that on my way home at night!

I've always had a violent dislike for snakes, although a keeper at the Zoo told me the other day that

SNAKES MAKE FINE PETS!

We were round at the back of the cages at the time. "Look at this one, for instance," he said, suddenly diving a long iron rod into one of the cages and fishing out a constrictor. "He's perfectly harmless, and likes being handled." And, before I could protest, he had taken the snake and put it on my shoulders, where it calmly proceeded to coil itself round me! Lucky for me, the keeper's words were true, and I began to get quite pally with that snake by the time the keeper put him back. "Snakes are all right if you know how to handle them," the keeper reassured me. I agreed with him! But then, you see, I don't know how to handle them, so I prefer to leave them alone!

(Continued on page 28.)



THE FIRST CHAPTER.

Fed-Up!

"I 'M fed-up!" Billy Bunter made that announcement.

He made it with due emphasis. Standing in the doorway of Harry Wharton & Co.'s dressing-room, on the Perfection location, with his fat thumbs in the armholes of his extensive waist-coat, and a deep frown on his fat brow, William George Bunter announced, emphatically, that he was fed-up.

If Bunter expected that announcement to cause dismay, or consternation, he was disappointed.

It caused neither. In fact, it did not even seem to be heard. If it was heard, it was not heeded.

The Greyfriars film actors were busy.

A "shot" of the great school film was to be taken that morning on the location in Jack-Rabbit Canyon. Mr. Schootz, the director, had told the juniors to be ready at ten o'clock. If they were not ready at ten o'clock, Mr. Van Duck, the assistant director, was likely to look in for them and inquire what in thunder they guessed they were at Los Angeles for, and whether they figured that he was going to loaf around waiting for a bunch of pesky ginks.

So they had no time for Bunter. The Owl of the Remove blinked into the room through his big spectacles, and, like Brutus, paused for a reply. Like Brutus, he paused in vain.

There was no reply.

"I say, you fellows—"

"Where's my hat?" inquired Lord Mauleverer. "Anybody seen my hat?"

"I say, you fellows—"

"Is my tie straight, you men?" asked Bob Cherry.

"As straight as it ever is, or will be, old bean," said Johnny Bull. "Don't stop to get your tie straight. Mr. Schootz said ten o'clock this morning, not ten o'clock to-night."

"Fathead!"

"I say, you fellows!" roared Billy Bunter.

"Eh? Is that you, Bunter?" asked Harry Wharton. "Find my stud, will you?"

"What?"

"I've dropped a stud."

"Blow your stud," hooted Bunter, "and blow you! I say, you fellows, I said that I'm fed-up! I'm going back to Hollywood!"

"Good!" said Frank Nugent. "Start now!"

"Oh, really, Nugent—"

"Good-bye, Bunter!" said the Bounder. "Don't wait!"

"Beast!"

Bunter did not start. He stood in the doorway, his back to the bright sunshine in the patio of the old ranch-house at Jack-Rabbit, and glared.

Myron Polk, the Perfection star, has sworn to get even with his schoolboy rival, Harry Wharton. But Polk reckons without Billy Bunter, who, for once in a way, is the means of averting a tragedy!

"I'm fed-up with this!" announced Bunter. "I'm left out of the film! No good-me staying on at the location, that I can see."

"None at all," said Bob Cherry. "Bad, in fact."

"The badfulness is terrific," remarked Hurree Jamset Ram Singh. "The immediate departfulness of the absurd Bunter will be a boonful blessing."

"We're simply wasting time here," went on Bunter. "The film will be a dud—absolutely rotten—with you fellows acting in it and me left out! I've offered my services to Mr. Schootz. I've been refused."

"I wonder—" began Wharton.

"You wonder why?" asked Bunter.

"No. I wonder where that stud is."

"You silly ass! I'm fed-up with watching you duffers do your second-rate stunts, and that ass Polk doing his sheikh stuff! I could play his head off,

and yours, too! As I'm not wanted, I'm retiring from the scene!" said Bunter, with dignity.

"Hear, hear!"

"The retirefulness is the proper caper."

"I guess the sooner you vamoose, you fat clam, the sooner you'll improve the landscape around here," said Fisher T. Fish.

"But there's a difficulty," said Bunter.

"Where on earth's that stud?"

"It's all right," said Lord Mauleverer.

"I've found—"

"My stud?"

"No, dear man. My hat."

"Ass!"

"I tell you there's a difficulty!" hooted Bunter. "I've spoken to old Fish. I've told him I'm going back to Long Beach Boarding-House at Hollywood. He says I can go if I like—"

"And so say all of us!" said Vernon-Smith.

"But he says he's not going to pay my beard there—"

"I guess not!" chuckled Fisher T. Fish. "You won't put it over on the popper so easy as all that."

"He says I can go and live at Hollywood, or go to Jericho, at my own expense," said Bunter.

"Well, so you can," said Bob. "It's a free country. Bother this tie!"

"He refused to give me a lift in his car to Hollywood this morning," went on Bunter.

"Afraid of a breakdown, perhaps," suggested Johnny Bull. "What you want is a lorry."

"Beast!"

"Time's up!" said Frank Nugent. "You fellows ready?"

"I say, you fellows!" hooted Bunter. "Owing to the rotten postal arrangements in this rotten country, I haven't had any of the postal-orders I told them to forward from England. Of course, I declined to argue the matter with Mr. Fish. It's beneath me to haggle about money. But—"

"Can't you help me look for that stud?"

"No!" roared Bunter.

"Then shut up!"

"Shan't! I'm fed-up with this show! The grub here isn't really good. I never had enough at the boarding-house in Hollywood. I get less here. There isn't a teashop within ten miles. I ain't allowed to use the cars to run down to Santa Monica. I'm going back to Hollywood, and you fellows can play the goat here as long as you like! When you come back, I've no doubt you'll find me acting for some really good company in Hollywood. There are directors there who know talent when they see it. But the question is—"

"Where's that stud?"

"The question is, money!" said Bunter. "Which of you fellows is going to lend me a couple of hundred dollars till I get a remittance from home?"

"It may be for years, and it may be for ever!" sang Bob Cherry.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Now, Mauly," said Bunter. "You're not such a mean beast as those other beasts—"

"I am!" said Lord Mauleverer hurriedly. "Quit!"

"Oh, really, Mauly—"

"I've got it!" said Harry Wharton.

"Oh, good, old chap! You've got a couple of hundred dollars—"

"No! I've got my stud!"

"Beast!" roared Bunter.

"Ready?" asked Harry. "It's turned ten, and Van Duck will be after our scalps—"

There was a step on the wooden stair that led up to the gallery round the patio of the ranch-house. Mr. Van Duck was already after the scalps of the fellows who were a minute late.

He came along the gallery to the doorway of the dressing-room. At the same moment, the juniors made a general move.

"Look here—" hooted Bunter.

"Get out of the way, fathead! We shall be late."

"That doesn't matter. Now, I want to—"

Bob Cherry stretched out a finger and thumb towards Bunter's fat little nose.

Bunter made a hasty backward step out of the doorway.

He made it just as Mr. Van Duck arrived.

The consequence was that Bunter's heel was planted on Mr. Van Duck's toe.

How much Billy Bunter weighed had never been precisely ascertained. It was said at Greyfriars that no weighing-machine would have stood the strain, had he put the matter to the test. Estimates varied from fifteen stone to a ton and a half. To Mr. Van Duck, at that moment, the most exaggerated estimate seemed to under-state the case.

From Mr. Van Duck came a gasp of agony.

Bunter had come down on his toe with all his weight, and whether that weight was fifteen stone, or a ton and a half, or whatever it was, there was no doubt that the assistant director was hurt. It happened, unfortunately, that Mr. Van Duck had a corn on that toe. A flail could not have crushed the corn so effectually.

"Yoooooh!" came from Mr. Van Duck.

Bunter spun round.

"Oh!" he gasped.

"Oh, my hat!" ejaculated Bob Cherry.

Mr. Van Duck was dancing on one leg. The other foot he clasped in both

hands. His face was distorted with agony and rage.

"Ow!" he yelled. "Oooo! Whoop! You pie-faced gink! Yow!" He danced, and howled, and raved. Had Mr. Schootz seen him at that moment, probably he would have figured that in his assistant director he had got the goods for a comedy film—a real shriek. "Yaroooh! Great snakes! My foot! My toe! My corn! Thunder! Yarooop!"

"Hook it, Bunter!" breathed Bob Cherry.

The expression on Mr. Van Duck's face indicated, only too plainly, that something was likely to happen to Bunter when the first agony had abated.

The advice was too good not to be taken.

Bunter turned to depart.

He was quick—but he was not quick enough. Mr. Van Duck, raving, dropped his injured foot to the floor and raised his uninjured one.

Crash!

"Whoop!"

It was Bunter's turn to roar.

"Yow! You dog-goned geek!" raved Mr. Van Duck. "Take that—and that—and that—and that—"

"Yaroooh!"

Bunter took them. He did not want to, but it was a case of Hobson's choice. He fled along the gallery, with Mr. Duck in close pursuit, hopping in anguish on his injured foot, and letting out the uninjured one in a rapid succession of ferocious kicks.

"Ow! Help! Fire! Murder!" yell the Owl of the Remove.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Bunter reached the steps that led down into the patio. He made a wild jump down the steps just as Mr. Van Duck's last kick landed on his tight trousers. Bunter flew.

"Oh, crikey!" gasped Bob Cherry.

"Yaroooh!" yelled Bunter, as he landed in a flower-bed at the foot of the steps. "Yow-ow-ow! Help! Fire!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Mr. Van Duck hopped down the steps. Bunter rolled in the flower-bed and spluttered.

"Yow-ow-ow! Keep him off! Yooop! It wasn't me! Help!"

"You pesky gink!" roared Mr. Van Duck. "You gol-darned mugwump! You slab-sided clam! Come out of that! I guess I'm going to kick you all round the location!"

"Yooop! Help!"

Bunter scrambled away through the flower-beds, reckless of the damage he did. The assistant director shook a furious fist after him and turned to glare at Harry Wharton & Co.

"You ginks! You—"

"Ready, Mr. Van Duck!" said Harry Wharton meekly.

Mr. Van Duck limped away, and the juniors followed him, smiling. Billy Bunter was left sitting in a bed of magnolias, spluttering, and more fed-up than ever.

— —

THE SECOND CHAPTER.

Bunter Butts In!

THE door of Mr. Rigg Schootz's office in the old rancho burst open with a crash. Mr. Schootz projected himself through the doorway, like a pip from an orange. Mr. Schootz, who was always a hustler, was hustling at an unusual rate now. Mr. Schootz's fat face glowed with excitement and irritation. Something, apparently, had occurred to ruffle the equanimity of the Perfection director.

"Here, you Bunter!" he barked.

Billy Bunter blinked at him morosely.

Bunter was loafing about the patio in a wrathful and disgruntled mood. The rancho was almost deserted. The "shot" was being taken a good distance up Jack-Rabbit Canyon, and nearly everybody had gathered there. He did not want to look on at rotten acting while his own splendid acting was left out, disregarded and contemned.

It was very pleasant in the patio, amid gorgeous flower-beds, shaded by old trees that had stood there since first the Spanish settlers came up from Mexico. But Bunter did not find it pleasant. He was annoyed and wrathful. Now that it was quite, quite clear that his valuable services were not going to be requisitioned for the big school film, Bunter was, as he had said, fed-up with the location. Back in Hollywood there were teashops, cafes—all sorts of refreshment places and foodstuff emporia, where a fellow could have a good time, if supplied with that necessary article, cash—more necessary in the United States than in any other country.

Bunter, as usual, was cashless. He still had the supply of English money that he had brought to the United States with him. But a threepenny-piece was not much use for shopping in Hollywood.

Mr. Fish had even refused to pay his board at Long Beach House if he returned there. Mr. Fish's view was that Bunter had hooked on to the party, and that he was a lucky guy to get quarters at the location, with the rest. Hiram K. Fish had no hunch to go to any extra expense for Bunter.

So Bunter, fed-up as he was, had no choice but to hang on at the location, unless he could find some solution of the problem of cash.

In that disconsolate mood Bunter eyed Mr. Schootz morosely as he barked at him. He was feeling sore, not only in mind, but in body. Mr. Van Duck had kicked the Owl of the Remove not wisely, but too well. Bunter had been kicked before, many a time and oft. But he did not like it. And Mr. Van Duck's kicking had been unusually vigorous.

"You, Bunter!" repeated Mr. Schootz. If he noted Bunter's moroseness he did not heed it. The great Hollywood producer was too great a man to heed so insignificant a person as Bunter. "You beat it up the canyon and tell Mr. Van Duck I've got a phone call from Mr. Fish, and I'm hitting Hollywood pronto. Tell him I shan't be back to-day."

Without waiting for an answer Mr. Schootz rolled away through the arched entrance of the rancho and bundled into his car.

The car sped away down the canyon, turned into the road above the terraced shore of the bay of Santa Monica, and disappeared.

Bunter did not stir.

Mr. Schootz was accustomed to having his orders obeyed promptly and unquestioningly. When Mr. Schootz spoke, to hear was to obey in the Perfection Company. So it naturally never even crossed his mind that his message would not be taken up the canyon to the assistant director at once.

But William George Bunter was not in an obliging mood. He blinked after the vanishing director and grunted.

"Beast!"

It was nearly half a mile up the canyon to the spot where the "shot" was being taken. It was a warm morning. April in Southern California was warm. Bunter had no desire whatever to plug half a mile under a hot sun. It was, he considered, like the old blighter's cheek to ask him—or rather, tell him—to undertake that exertion.



"Get out of the way, fathead. We shall be late!" Bob Cherry stretched out a finger and thumb towards Bunter's fat little nose. The Owl of the Remove stepped back hastily and planted his heel on Mr. Van Duck's toe. "Yaroooooh!" yelled the assistant director, dancing about on one leg, his face distorted with agony and rage. (See Chapter 1.)

Billy Bunter remained where he was, leaning against one of the old adobe buttresses, in pessimistic reflection.

The door of Mr. Schootz's office opened again, and a spare young man in horn-rimmed glasses came out. This was Mr. Schootz's stenographer. Mr. Schootz being absent for the day, there was no reason why Mr. Schootz's stenographer should not take things easy.

"Say, bo," said the young man, addressing Bunter, "you put me wise if the telephone-bell rings. See?"

Taking it for granted that Bunter was prepared to make himself useful in that way—which was really taking a lot for granted—the spare young man walked away into the patio, disposed himself in a comfortable attitude on a bench under a tree, and devoted his attention to a recent work of fiction from the Hollywood library.

"Cheek!" murmured Bunter.

He blinked after the young man. If that young man thought that Bunter was going to do his work for him, that young man was labouring under a misapprehension.

Bunter was thinking—but not of doing that young man's work. He was thinking that the office was now unoccupied, and that it was Mr. Schootz's custom to keep a dish of luscious Californian fruits on his desk. The stenographer was deep in American fiction—following the adventures of a he-man. Bunter slipped quietly into the office, closed the door, and locked it.

He blinked round the room. There was another door that led into Mr. Van Duck's office. Bunter locked that, too. A fellow couldn't be too careful. Then he bore down on Mr. Schootz's desk. There was a big glass dish, and there was a stack of grape-fruit, pears, peaches, and other attractive things.

Bunter grinned.

That morning he had been feeling like the ancient monarch who never smiled again. But he smiled now.

Seating himself in Mr. Schootz's well-padded revolving chair, Bunter proceeded to deal with the luscious fruits that the busy director had left unregarded.

For a quarter of an hour Bunter was happy.

By that time the dish was entirely cleared, and William George Bunter was feeling much better.

Buzzzzzzzz!

The sudden raucous hoot of the telephone-bell startled Bunter. He spun round in the revolving chair.

Buzzzzzzzz!

Bunter had no intention of calling the young man in from the patio. For one thing, it was too much trouble; for another, nobody was allowed in the office except on business—and Bunter had had enough kicking that morning to last him for the day. When he left those forbidden precincts, Bunter intended to leave cautiously and carefully, after watching to see that the coast was clear. But he had to stop the telephone, or it might have been heard by somebody else. So he jerked off the receiver and put it to his ear. It was easy enough to take the call and shut up the worrying person, whoever he was. Possibly that proceeding might disconcert some of Mr. Schootz's business arrangements. But Mr. Schootz's business arrangements, of course, were nothing to William George Bunter.

"Hallo! Is that you, Schootz?"

Bunter grinned as he recognised the voice on the phone. It was that of Myron Polk, the Perfection star, evidently calling from Hollywood.

"Schootz! Is that Schootz?" came

Polk's voice in angry, impatient tones, as he received no answer. "Tell Mr. Schootz to come to the phone, will you? It's important! Can't wait!"

Bunter gave a little cough.

That was a sign that the Greyfriars ventriloquist was just going to begin.

Bunter's besetting sin was inquisitiveness. He was curious to know what it was that Mr. Polk had to say that was so important and couldn't wait. And the imitation of Mr. Schootz's wheezy voice was as easy as pie to the ventriloquist of Greyfriars.

"Hallo! That you, Polk?" he asked in a voice that any member of the Perfection company would have sworn was Mr. Schootz's.

"Polk speaking!" came the voice of the Perfection star. "I've seen Fish. Has he phoned you about it?"

Bunter guessed that it was a phone call from Hiram K. Fish that had called Mr. Schootz so suddenly away to Hollywood.

"Say, what's the trouble?" he asked. "I ain't heard from Fish."

"He said he would put you wise at once," hooted Polk. "But never mind; it's you I'm talking to. You've seen the papers this morning?"

"Nope!" said Bunter.

"Then you don't know what's happened?"

"I guess I ain't wise to it, Polk!" answered Bunter, with a grin of pure enjoyment. Evidently he was going to hear something important.

"It's got to be stopped!" hissed Polk. "You hear me, Schootz? You've got to beat it at once to the 'Film Ledger' office and make them put in a contradiction. You get me?"

"Oh, my hat!" murmured Bunter.

"What?"

THE MAGNET LIBRARY.—No. 1,105.

"I mean—get on with it, Polk! What's the pesky trouble?"

"That young hound Wharton has given the whole show away!"

"Eh?"

"It's in the papers—the whole thing!" Bunter could hear the film star panting with rage. "I'm given away—double-crossed! I tell you, Schootz, I'll horse-whip that young scoundrel!"

"Oh crikey!" gasped Bunter. He blinked at the telephone.

THE THIRD CHAPTER.

Plain English for Mr. Polk!

"YOU hear me, Schootz?" came the Perfection star's voice impatiently.

"Oh! Yep!" gasped Bunter, in his excitement almost forgetting to imitate Mr. Schootz's voice. "Sure! Get on with it!"

"I tell you I won't stand for it!" hissed Myron Polk. "When that school-boy took my place in riding the Hair-Trigger path for the scene in the 'Lord of the Desert,' it was agreed that nothing should be said—especially to the newspaper men. You allowed that the kid could be trusted. You know you did!"

"Sure!" gasped Bunter.

"Now he's given it away!" Polk's voice was a snarl. "I'm telling you it's in the papers this morning! They're making out that I got a guy to ride in my place because I funk'd it! The story's all over Hollywood. What's that going to do for me? You reckon that I'm going to stand it?"

Bunter grinned.

How Mr. Schootz would have answered had he been there Bunter did not know. Not as Bunter answered, however—that was certain!

"So it's come out, has it, Polk?" said Bunter into the transmitter. "You're given away! He, ho, ho!"

"What?" hooted Polk.

"Well, what did you expect?" went on Bunter. "You were afraid to ride in that scene——"

"What?"

"Afraid! You needn't give me any guff on the subject, Polk; you had cold feet! You wanted the scene cut because you funk'd riding down the Hair-Trigger path! You let a school-boy take your place got up as you! Well, if you're such a rotten funk——"

"Schootz!"

"The kid got away with it, and it was a good scene. It's the big punch of the film! You stood for roping in the credit, after leaving the danger to a kid! Well, if it's got out, serve you right!"

"What?" panted Myron Polk.

"Ain't I speaking plain?" went on the excellent imitation of Mr. Schootz's voice. "You got a reputation all over the United States for dare-devil stunts on that horse. It's all gas! When there's risk you back out! Now you're screeching because the newspaper guys have got wise to it! Serve you right!"

It was sheer enjoyment to Billy Bunter. He was repaying the Perfection star for supercilious contempt and scornful disregard. Never had Billy Bunter had an opportunity to tell Myron Polk what he really thought of him. He was not likely to lose this opportunity.

He heard a gasp of rage at the other end of the wire.

"You promised that nothing should be said, Schootz!" came Myron Polk's voice, hoarse with fury.

"Well, I ain't let on a word to any guy. Things got out, you know! You can't keep up a daredevil reputation for ever, when you're a pesky coward."

"You dare!" hissed Polk.

"Aw, can it! If you don't like it, lump it! You ain't the only pebble on the beach, Myron Polk, though you figure that you are! Who are you, anyhow?"

"Are you mad, Schootz?"

"Not any! I'll say you've got what

you asked for, Polk! You funk'd that ride. You're a pesky coward, that's what's the matter with you. As for horsewhipping that kid, you'd no more dare touch him than you'd dare ride down the Hair-Trigger!"

"You—you—you——" articulated Polk.

"I'm telling you, Polk, you put on too much swank. You ain't the big noise you fancy you are!"

"I'm done with you, Schootz! I'll break my contract—I'll never act for Perfection again."

"Aw, who wants you to? You can't act, if you come to that! You cavort around calling yourself the handsomest man in Hollywood! A stuck-up, namby-pamby dude! Go and shake yourself."

"You're mad, Schootz! You've been drinking!" came the star's voice husky with rage. "I ask you again, will you go down at once to the Ledger office and put a stop to it? They'll put a contradiction in the next edition if you fix it."

"I guess not! Go along and see them yourself. Tell them you want to keep it dark that you let a schoolboy take your place because you had cold feet!"

There was a sudden whirr on the telephone, indicating that the enraged star had jammed his receiver back.

Bunter hung up, and grinned.

He had enjoyed that conversation with Myron Polk.

He could imagine Polk's feelings! His fat thoughts dwelt on that mental picture with satisfaction.

But the grin died off his face, as he remembered that Mr. Schootz had gone down to Hollywood in hot haste, no doubt to do the very thing that Myron Polk demanded. No doubt he would see Polk that day! If it came out that Bunter had played that trick——

Bunter realised that the sooner he got out of Mr. Schootz's office, unseen, the better. It was necessary to establish a very strong alibi. Once before Bunter had imitated Mr. Schootz's voice on the telephone, and had been discovered. So this time, it was certain that suspicion would turn on him. He needed a very strong alibi indeed.

He crept softly to the door, and listened. He unlocked the door, opened it an inch, and peered out.

In the distance, he could see the back of the stenographer's head. The young man was still deep in he-man fiction.

Bunter crept softly out, and closed the door behind him without a sound. With a beating heart, he crept away.

"Say, bo!"

Bunter jumped.

It was Leonora, the movie girl. She looked at Bunter in amazement.

"Sure, I ain't a ghost, bo!" she said.

"Nunno!" gasped Bunter. "I—I—you see, I—I——" he spluttered. He knew that Miss La Riviere must have seen him emerging from Mr. Schootz's office.

"What's the trouble?" asked Leonora.

"N-n-nothing! I—I haven't been in Mr. Schootz's office, you know," gasped Bunter.

"Why, you've jest come out of it!" ejaculated Leonora.

"I—I mean——"

"I guess I'm going to see Schootz," said Miss La Riviere, and she moved on towards the office.

"I—I say," gasped Bunter. "I—I wouldn't go in just now. Mr. Schootz is—is awfully busy."

"I guess he can sure tell me so himself, bo," answered Leonora, dryly.

"I—I mean, he isn't there?"

Leonora stared, as well she might.

"He's awfully busy, and he isn't there!" she ejaculated.

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"Exactly," gasped Bunter. "I—I mean—"

Leonora did not stay to inquire what Bunter did mean. She went on to the office, tapped at the door, and opened it.

"Sure, he's not here," she said.

"I—I say," stuttered Bunter. "D-d-don't mention that I was in the office, will you, Miss La Riviere? I mean I wasn't there, you know."

"You been up to some stunt?" asked the mystified movie girl.

"Oh! No! I haven't spoken on the phone," said Bunter. "Nobody's phoned, and I haven't answered."

"Search me!" said Leonora.

"But—but you know that Schootz is a suspicious old beast," said Bunter. "That cad, Polk, might make out that he phoned, and that somebody answered him. He's capable of it! You know what a rank outsider he is. As a matter of fact, the telephone bell never rang at all, and I never took the receiver off to stop it."

"Carry me home to die!" said Leonora.

"In fact, I haven't been in the office at all. I was only—only passing the door when you saw me come out—"

"Ha, ha, ha!" shrieked Leonora.

"You—you see how it is?" gasped Bunter.

"Sure!"

"That's all right, then."

And Bunter rolled out of the rancho, leaving Leonora still laughing, and wondering why.

THE FOURTH CHAPTER.

A Warning for Wharton!

"MR. VAN DUCK—"

"Git!"

"Oh, really, you know!"

"Git!" roared Mr. Van

Duck.

He lifted his boot, and Bunter 'got.' Mr. Van Duck was busy taking the shot, and he had no time for Bunter. Besides, he was already annoyed with Bunter. There was still a twinge in his favourite corn.

Billy Bunter backed away, grunting. Having decided that it was necessary to prove an 'alibi,' Bunter had rolled up the canyon to the spot where the filming was going on. Being on the spot, he was ready to deliver Mr. Schootz's message to the assistant director. This, Bunter considered, was a stroke of genius. It would be supposed that he had come right up with that message—as indeed he ought to have done. That supposition would clear him of any suspicion of having been in Mr. Schootz's private office. It would establish his alibi. It would prove beyond doubt that Bunter hadn't been where he had been.

But Mr. Van Duck declined to listen to a word from the Owl of the Remove. Still, he had seen Bunter—and seeing was believing. He would have to bear witness that Bunter had been there, right on the spot, if Mr. Schootz asked suspicious questions, and refused to take a fellow's word.

So Bunter—bent on establishing his alibi beyond the possibility of cavil—remained looking on at the set. He looked on with a fat sneer on his podgy face. He did not think much of the acting of the schoolboy cinema stars. Compared with his own performances, it was very inferior stuff. Fortunately, it did not last very long. Bunter had been some time reaching the spot—half a mile in a hot sun was a considerable matter to the Owl of the Remove. The shooting was over soon after he arrived, and the set broke up.

Then the Owl of the Remove approached the assistant director again, to deliver the message. Mr. Van Duck regarded him with a malevolent eye. He was one of the many persons who failed to realise what a really charming fellow Bunter was, and his corn still twinged. He made a motion with his foot, and Bunter spoke from a respectful distance, ready to dodge if the beast became violent.

"I say, I've got a message from Mr. Schootz!" he hooted.

"Oh!" said Mr. Van Duck. "And why didn't you spill it before, you goob?"

"You wouldn't listen—"

"Oh, don't chew the rag! Spill the message and quit!"

"Mr. Schootz has gone down to Hollywood," said Bunter. "He says he won't be back to-day. I came up immediately to tell you—without losing a single instant. If Mr. Schootz asks you, I want you to remember that. I came right up."

Mr. Van Duck glared at him.

"But you didn't!" he grunted. "Anyhow, shut up and git!"

Another reader wins handy pocket-knife for the following amusing joke!

ONLY A GUESS!

At a country fair, five pounds was offered to the person who could guess the right weight of a certain cow. Many people tried their skill, and various weights were given. Finally, 'Old Garge,' a none too bright farm-hand, came forward. To everybody's amazement, he named the correct weight of the beast. "How did you do it?" asked the judge, after awarding the prize. "I warn't nothin'," replied the man, "I'd a done better'n that if I'd been tryin'!"

A pocket-knife has been awarded to Hubert Larkin, 68a, Beacon Street, Lichfield, Staffordshire.

Now, chum, get busy on your effort and send it along!

"I want you to remember—"

"Quit!"

"In case Mr. Schootz asks—"

"Git!" roared Mr. Van Duck.

And again Bunter got. He joined the Greyfriars fellows, who were moving off towards the rancho, now that their morning's work was over.

"I say, you fellows—"

"Hallo, hallo, hallo! Haven't you gone to Hollywood, after all?" exclaimed Bob Cherry.

"Oh, really, Cherry—"

"It's a bit unfeeling, Bunter," said the Bounder.

"Eh! What is, you ass?"

"Raising our hopes like this, and then giving us this disappointment."

"Boast!"

"The disappointfulness is terrific!" said Hurree Jamset Ram Singh sadly. "The dashfulness of our esteemed hopes is preposterously painful, my worthy fat Bunter!"

"I say, you fellows, don't talk rot!" said Bunter peevishly. "Look here, I want to go down to Hollywood. Lend me—"

"Good-bye, Bunter!"

The juniors accelerated. Billy Bunter put on speed also, his fat little legs going like clockwork.

"I say, you fellows, don't buzz off when a fellow's talking to you. It's rather important for me to go down to Hollywood. I want to get there before old Schootz comes back. I don't want any more trouble with him."

"What have you been up to now?"

"Nothing. I haven't been in his office."

"Oh, my hat!"

"You fellows can take my word," said Bunter. "You know me. But old Schootz mightn't. He might think—"

"What have you been doing in old Schootz's office, you fat fraud?" demanded the captain of the Remove.

"Nothing at all. As for the oranges and things, my belief is that the stenographer scooped them. He would you know! Americans are awfully unscrupulous."

"Oh crumbs!"

"As for telephoning to Polk, naturally I never thought of such a thing," said Bunter. "He never rang up, in fact."

"Go it!" said Bob Cherry admiringly. "Keep it up!" If you put it to Schootz like that, he's sure to believe every word you say!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Well, I don't know," said Bunter. "He's suspicious. It's low to doubt a fellow's word; but these Americans are low, you know. A low lot, in my opinion."

"You dog-goned, slab-sided mug-wump!" said Fisher T. Fish.

"Considering everything, I'd better get down to Hollywood before old Schootz comes back," said Bunter. "You fellows can tell him, if he asks, that I never went near his office. Tell him I told you so, and that you can answer for me. You may as well mention that it's bad form to doubt a public school man's word."

"Ye gods!" murmured Nugent.

"The doubtfulness of the esteemed Bunter's word will probably be terrific," remarked Hurree Jamset Ram Singh.

"You can tell him, Wharton, that you know me to be the soul of honour, and incapable of a lie," said Bunter.

"Oh, great pip!"

"Still, I'd rather be away when he butts in again," said Bunter. "It's rather beneath my dignity to enter into any vulgar argument with the man. He's coarse. He called me a liar once."

"Only once?" asked Harry. "How was that?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Beast! Look here, Wharton, one good turn deserves another," said Bunter. "You stand by me, and I'll stand by you. I can't say fairer than that. I suppose you don't want a horse-whipping?"

Harry Wharton jumped.

"A what?" he ejaculated.

"Horse-whipping," said Bunter. "Polk's coming up here to horse-whip you. I'm putting you on your guard. See?"

Wharton stared blankly at the Owl of the Remove. All the juniors stared at him.

"What is the fat idiot talking about?" asked Nugent.

Wharton's brows knitted.

"Has Polk said—" he began.

"He jolly well has," said Bunter, grinning. "You see, he thought it was Schootz speaking on the phone to him, and he said—"

"You fat villain!" roared Johnny Bull. "You've been playing tricks on the telephone again."

"Oh, really, Bull! I've told you I never touched the telephone—"

"Then how do you know what Polk said on it?"

"Oh!" gasped Bunter. "I—I mean—that is to say—I—I don't, you know! I—I haven't an idea!"

"You fat chump!" said Harry. "If you've been playing tricks and stirring up trouble, Schootz will boot you, and serve you jolly well right! You ought to be kicked!"

"Well, I like that—from you!" sneered Bunter. "Talk about playing tricks! Who gave Polk away to the newspaper man? Made him look a fool to all Hollywood! You know jolly well that it was to be kept dark about you taking his place in that scene in the sheikh film. Polk made a point of that—so did Schootz! Then you go and give him away—"

Wharton flushed with anger.

"You fat idiot! I haven't said a word about it."

Bunter chuckled.

"Better tell Polk that when he comes along with the horsewhip!" he jeered. "They've got it in the papers at Los Angeles, and he's as mad as a hatter about it!"

"Oh, my hat!" said Bob Cherry blankly.

The Bounder whistled.

"Phew! That will make Polk feel awfully sick," he said. "Somebody's given the show away."

"Of course, Wharton naturally wouldn't keep it dark," remarked Bunter. "He did the stunt, and he wanted the credit of it." Bunter made a backward jump. "Here, I say—keep off! What's the matter now?"

"You fat rotter!" roared the captain of the Remove.

"Oh, really, Wharton—"

Harry Wharton glanced at his chums, with a flushed face.

"You fellows know that I haven't said a word about it!" he exclaimed. "It was understood that nothing was to be said, and that Polk was to be supposed to have appeared in that scene."

"Of course," said Bob. "But everybody in the Perfection company knew, and somebody has given it away."

"That's odd, too," said Johnny Bull. "Old Schootz has got his men under pretty good control; and it's the sack for whoever jawed about it off the location. Still, things do get out."

Harry Wharton frowned with intense annoyance. He had been glad to oblige Mr. Schootz, by taking on the dangerous riding stunt that the film star refused to touch. He had seen no harm in acting as Polk's understudy, made up as the sheikh in the Lord of the Desert film. That Polk would get the credit of having performed the stunt mattered nothing to him. The film fans, when they saw the picture on the screen, would believe that the daring rider was Myron Polk, and would admire their bright particular star more than ever. If Polk chose to take the credit of an act he dared not perform, that was his own business.

But it was necessary for the incident to be kept dark; and Mr. Schootz had appeared to place full confidence in the discretion of the members of his company. If the secret was out, and the newspaper men of Los Angeles had got hold of it, Wharton could understand how savagely enraged the film star would be. He had already hinted that the schoolboy would be likely to "swank" about what he had done. Now there was no doubt that he would

believe that Wharton had given him away.

"It's Polk's own fault," said Johnny Bull. "He shouldn't have funk'd the act—and if he funk'd it, he shouldn't have let another chap do it for him, and taken the credit. He's only got himself to blame!"

"It's rotten!" growled the captain of the Remove. "I wish it had never happened now. But—"

"Can't be helped!" said Bob.

"I say, you fellows—"

"Oh, shut up, Bunter!"

"Oh, really, Wharton—"

"Hallo, hallo, hallo!" ejaculated Bob Cherry.

"What—"

"There he comes!"

THE FIFTH CHAPTER.

Myron Polk on the Warpath!

MYRON POLK sat at the wheel of his purple auto, whizzing up the road that ran above the terraced shore of the Bay of Santa Monica. The Perfection star was driving with even more than his usual recklessness. The purple car fairly flew. His face, as he drove, was white and set, his eyes gleaming under bent brows.

Often enough the Perfection star allowed his passionate, ungoverned temper to carry him away. The spoiled darling of the film fans was not accustomed to self-control. But never had he been in so bitter and deadly a rage as now.

What had happened was not only a personal humiliation; but it touched him professionally. Much of his popularity was founded on his reputation for reckless daring. No film fan would ever have believed that Myron Polk would have funk'd the most daring act ever devised by the most enterprising movie director. Until he joined the Perfection company, Polk had contrived to live up to that reputation. He was a splendid rider, and he had performed many stunts that looked breathlessly perilous on the screen. Every trick known to the picture studios had been employed to enhance the reputation of the dashing sheikh of the films. It was Mr. Schootz's passion for realism that had brought him to grief. Studio trickery was not good enough for Mr. Rigg Schootz. He wanted the genuine article. When he planned a big punch, he wanted a real big punch, and not a trick. And the Perfection sheikh had failed to meet the test.

Twice he had balked at the perilous stunts devised by Mr. Schootz; and each time his place had been taken by the schoolboy whom he already bitterly disliked.

Each of those stunts had been quite practicable, to a fellow of boundless pluck. But it was precisely that quality that was lacking in the Perfection star.

But while he hated the schoolboy for doing what he dared not do himself, he was not unwilling to take the credit of what was done. There was a strain of meanness in the haughty, supercilious star. He was well aware that, so long as the secret was kept, it was to his benefit for those daredevil feats to be performed in his name and under his guise.

And now the secret was out!

The schoolboy who had out-done him, and humiliated him, had given him away—as he might have expected. Mr. Schootz had answered for it that not a word would be said off the location. He had his company well in hand; and could trust them. But somebody had talked—and Polk had no doubt that it

was Wharton. He knew how little consideration he deserved at the schoolboy's hands. All the Greyfriars fellows knew, though it could not be proved, that the film star had plotted to make that ride down the Hair-Trigger path end in a fatality. This was Wharton's revenge. Polk had no doubt of it, not a shadow of doubt. Unless the story was quashed immediately, his name would become a mockery all through the movie world. It would make an immense difference to his professional standing. He knew that that paragraph in the Los Angeles Film Ledger would be the talk of every studio in Hollywood that day. The thought of it enraged him to fury.

He dashed recklessly into the canyon, and drove up to the rancho. The car crashed to a halt, and Polk flung himself out. From the seat of the auto he picked a horsewhip.

He stared about him for the hated face he sought. Three fellows were lounging outside the rancho—Coker, and Potter and Greene, of the Greyfriars Fifth. They stared at the Perfection star, surprised to see the white fury in his face.

Polk strode up to them.

Potter and Greene stared; Coker doubled his big fists. Coker had had trouble with Polk before; and if that horsewhip was intended for him, Horace Coker was prepared to take it away from the star, and lay it about him with vigour. The star's furious looks had no terrors for Coker of the Fifth.

"Where is Wharton?" panted Polk.

"Looking for Wharton?" drawled Coker. "Sure you're not looking for me, Mr. Polk?" Coker was the fellow to meet trouble half-way.

"I want Wharton!"

"Sorry," said Coker. "I'd rather you wanted me! But if you've got that whip for a Greyfriars kid, Mr. Polk, you can depend on it that I shan't let you handle it. Got that?"

Polk turned his back savagely on Coker, and stared up the canyon. He sighted a group of Greyfriars juniors at a little distance.

With the horsewhip gripped in his hand, he strode towards them.

Harry Wharton & Co. faced him as he came up.

"What on earth's the matter with the fellow?" asked Potter of the Fifth, staring after him. "He looks as mad as a hatter!"

"Mad as a jolly old hornet!" agreed Greene.

Coker snorted.

"I dare say those fags have been cheeky," he said. "They're generally cheeky! I've had to lick them myself for cheek! But that popinjay ain't going to handle that whip on a Greyfriars kid! Come on!"

And Coker of the Fifth followed the Perfection star, ready to chip in if required—or even if not required. Coker of the Fifth was the fellow for chipping in.

Polk, striding along almost at a run, reached the group of juniors. They waited for him with rather grim looks. The horsewhip gripped in his hand betrayed his intention.

"Wharton!" panted Polk.

"Well?" said Harry quietly.

The Perfection star tore a folded newspaper from his pocket. He held it out to the captain of the Remove.

"Look at that!" he said, in a choking voice.

"What—"

"Look at it!"

Wharton took the paper. It was the "Los Angeles Film Ledger," and it was



As Harry Wharton sat on the edge of his bed to take off his boots, he gave a sudden jump. "I say, old chap!" "Wha-a-a-at—" gasped Wharton, jumping up. From beneath the bed a fat face and a pair of big spectacles blinked out at him. "I say, old chap!" gasped Bunter. "It's only me!" (See Chapter 10.)

folded open at a marked paragraph. Wharton read the paragraph:

"We hear that great stunts are being performed by a well-known movie company now on location in the Santa Monica Mountains. A celebrated star is handing out riding acts that will get the film fans gasping. But why did he ride the Hair-Trigger with a bandaged face? Whose face was under the bandage? Quicken pace? We can tell our readers that a new star is about to burst on the film firmament."

Myron Polk, trembling from head to foot with fury, watched the Greyfriars junior as he read. Wharton read with a grave, frowning face. That paragraph had evidently been dictated by someone who bore the Perfection star no good will. That was not surprising; for Myron Polk's ways made him more enemies than friends. There were plenty of movie men in Hollywood, who would have been glad of the chance of taking down a peg or two, the supercilious, conceited star. Whoever had written that paragraph, knew what had happened at Jack-Rabbit Canyon, and was disposed to "tell the world" about it.

"Well?" said Polk hoarsely.

"I'm sorry it's out, as you wanted to keep it dark," said Harry. "No fault of mine!"

"How much did they give you for the news at the 'Ledger' office?" asked Polk savagely.

Wharton crimsoned.

"I haven't been near the 'Ledger' office—and I don't know anything about it. If you knew a decent fellow when you saw one, you'd know that I haven't said a word."

"Liar!"

Wharton's eyes blazed.

"I've come here to thrash you, as you deserve!" hissed Polk. "I will thrash you within an inch of your life! I will—"

His hand was up with the whip in it. Before the blow could fall his arm was grasped from behind and dragged back.

"No, you don't!" said Coker of the Fifth.

"Let go!" screamed Polk, struggling furiously.

Coker grinned. By sheer strength he wrenched the horsewhip away from the Perfection star, and then pitched Myron Polk from him.

"If this whip's going to be handled, I'll handle it," he said, "and I'll lay it about your hide, Mr. Polk!"

"Bravo, Coker!" gasped Bob Cherry.

Polk, his hands clenched, his eyes flaming, glared at Coker as if about to spring on him like a tiger.

"Come on!" said Coker invitingly. "I've handled you once, you popinjay, and I'm ready to handle you again! They won't call you the handsomest man in Hollywood when I'm done with you!"

Polk turned from him.

The next moment Harry Wharton was staggering back under his furious attack.

THE SIXTH CHAPTER.

Blow for Blow!

"HOLD on!" "Hold the rotter!" "Stop him!"

Wharton was staggering under a rain of furious blows. The juniors rushed on Polk, grasped him, and bore him backward. He struggled like a tiger in their grasp.

"Oh!" gasped Wharton.

He passed his hand over his face. Three or four savage blows had landed there before he could guard.

"Let me go!" Polk was almost screaming with passionate rage. "Let me go! I—I—I—"

"Oh, cheeso it!" said the Bounder. "Hold the blessed wildcat, you fellows!"

Polk struggled in vain in the grasp of the Greyfriars juniors. His eyes blazed at the captain of the Remove. Wharton with a great effort, controlled his temper.

"Look here, Mr. Polk," he said, speaking as steadily as he could, "you're making a mistake in this. I haven't said a word on the subject. Somebody else must have told the story—"

"You lie!" yelled Polk.

"Can't you take my word?" demanded Wharton. "I tell you—"

"You lie!"

Wharton's teeth set.

"That's enough!" he said. "Let him go, you fellows! Let him do as he likes! I can take care of myself!"

"Leave him to me!" said Coker of the Fifth.

"You needn't butt in, Coker," said Wharton. "I tell you I can take care of myself! Let him go, you men!"

Myron Polk was released. He flew almost like a wildcat at the captain of the Remove.

But this time Harry Wharton was not taken off his guard.

He stood his ground firmly, and faced the enraged Perfection star, with his hands up and his eyes gleaming over them.

The juniors and the Fifth-Formers made a circle round them. From all sides members of the Perfection company came hurrying up.

Mr. Van Duck's astonished eyes almost started from his head at the scene. More than once had Polk's passionate temper led him to act father like a spoiled boy than a grown man. But never had he made so complete an exhibition of himself as now. He was plunging into a fight from which he certainly could gain no credit if victorious; and which would cover him with humiliation if he was defeated. But he was thinking of nothing but passionate hatred and vengeance as he attacked the captain of the Greyfriars Remove.

He was ten years older than Wharton—bigger and heavier in every way. At first sight it seemed that the school-boy must be overwhelmed.

But the captain of the Remove was strong and sturdy, in the pink of condition, and as good a boxer as Greyfriars had ever turned out. In spite of the fury of the star's attack, Wharton held his own.

He stood up to Myron Polk, cool and steady and determined, and gave blow for blow, with plenty of beef in every blow.

It was to have been a thrashing. It was a fight, instead. And it was a fight in which the man by no means carried all before him against the boy.

Wharton was hard as nails, and knew how to take punishment without flinching. He had the advantage there. Polk flinched at every blow that landed with any force.

And he was not in good condition. Late hours and innumerable cigarettes and boot-leg liquor did not conduce to good condition. In a few minutes Polk was panting desperately.

"Go it, old bean!" roared Bob Cherry.

"Bellows to mend!" grinned the Bounder. "Pile in, Wharton!"

"My only hat!" said Coker of the Fifth, in loud tones of contempt. "That popinjay is going to let a Lower Fourth fag lick him! My only hat!"

The fury of Polk's attack petered out as the junior did not give ground before it. He backed a little, panting and gasping, and Wharton, with steady eyes, followed him up, attacking in his turn.

Mr. Van Duck pushed forward.

"Stop this!" he rapped out.

"Here, keep off the grass!" exclaimed the Bounder indignantly. "Let them finish! Wharton's got him beat!"

"The beatfulness is terrific!"

"Keep off!" roared Coker of the Fifth. "Let 'em fight it out! What are you butting in for?"

The assistant director did not heed. He pushed between the two adversaries, and Harry Wharton dropped his hands.

Mr. Van Duck was quite well aware that, at that stage of the proceedings, Myron Polk was glad of his intervention. No doubt the man could have gained the upper hand had he fought

with determination. But determination to take punishment was not in the film star's character.

"Stop this!" said Van Duck curtly. "I'm sure surprised at you, Mr. Polk. Stop it!"

Polk drew back, panting.

His nose was streaming red—the handsome Greek nose that was admired by countless flappers in Hollywood. It did not look quite Greek now, and anything but handsome.

"I'm going to thrash that young hound!" said Polk, breathlessly.

"You're welcome to try!" said Wharton contemptuously.

But Polk made no attempt to push past Mr. Van Duck. His words were uttered only to save his face.

"Forget it!" said the assistant director. "You've sure been hoisting hooch, Mr. Polk, to mosey along here and kick up such a rookus!"

Polk gave an evil look round at the staring faces, many of which wore a grin. He set his lips, and turned away, and strode back to his car.

There was nothing else left for him to do. He had bitten off more than he could chew, and only retreat was left to him.

He threw himself into the purple auto, and the car roared away to the

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.

ROOKKRAOECE

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

Last week's solution was—

Frank Nugent.

road, turned in the direction of Hollywood, and disappeared.

"My hat!" said Bob Cherry. "What a jolly old circus!"

"Funk!" grunted Coker of the Fifth.

"What was the rookus about?" demanded Mr. Van Duck angrily. "What did Polk wade in for, Wharton?"

Wharton picked up the Los Angeles newspaper, which had fallen to the ground, and handed it to the assistant director.

Van Duck whistled as he looked at the marked paragraph.

"Great gophers!" he ejaculated.

"That sure was enough to get Polk's goat! I'll say it was low-down of you to give the show away like this!"

"What the thump do you mean?" exclaimed Wharton angrily. "I know nothing about it! I've said nothing."

"Who has, then?"

"How the dickens should I know?" snapped the captain of the Remove.

"You'd know that I haven't if you had the sense of a bunny rabbit!"

"You don't want to shoot off your mouth at me, kid!" grunted the assistant director.

"Don't talk rot, then!" snapped Wharton. And he walked away, leaving the assistant director of Perfection Pictures staring at him.

THE SEVENTH CHAPTER.

Awkward for Mauly!

"MAULY old man!"

No reply.

I say, Mauly!"

Silence.

"Deaf?" hooted Bunter.

Apparently Lord Mauleverer was deaf. At all events, he turned a deaf ear to William George Bunter.

It was afternoon. Harry Wharton & Co. were in the patio, discussing the scene of the morning, and wondering what would come of it. Lord Mauleverer was outside the rancho, seated on the wooden parapet of the little bridge that spanned the torrent.

There was a dreamy expression in Mauly's amiable face as he gazed at the orange grove by the frame house. The frame house was the residence of the movie girls on the location. Anybody but Bunter would have guessed that his lordship was thinking of Leonora, his lordship's admiration for that young lady being a standing joke in the Greyfriars party. But Bunter did not guess; he was too busy thinking about himself and his more important affairs to bother about what Lord Mauleverer might be thinking of.

"I say, Mauly!"

Still Lord Mauleverer turned a deaf ear.

Bunter poked him in the ribs with a fat knuckle. Lord Mauleverer gave a gasp.

"Ow! Begad!"

"I'm speaking to you, Mauly——"

"Well, don't."

"I say, old chap——"

"Can't you shut up, Bunter?" asked Lord Mauleverer plaintively. "Can't you ever shut up, old bean?"

"Look here, Mauly——"

Mauleverer did not look. A graceful figure came through the orange trees, and Mauleverer immediately forgot the fat existence of William George Bunter. His glance was fixed on Leonora.

Bunter followed his glance, and understood at last. He gave a contemptuous snort.

"You silly ass!" he said.

Mauleverer did not heed. He slipped from the parapet and gave a touch to his necktie.

"You chump!" said Bunter. "Making sheep's eyes at a red-haired girl—— Yaroooooop!"

Billy Bunter suddenly found himself in a horizontal attitude, without quite knowing how he got there.

He sat up and blinked.

"Ow! Beast! Wow!"

But Lord Mauleverer was already out of hearing. He had out across to intercept Miss La Riviere, who was walking down the canyon towards the road.

"Ow!" gasped Bunter. "Beast! I say, Mauly, old chap—— You rotter! Look here old fellow—— Beast!"

Billy Bunter picked himself up dismally and drifted back to the rancho. Bunter was still at Jack-Rabbit, urgent as it was for him to go down to Hollywood before Mr. Schootz came back. Nobody seemed to understand how urgent it was excepting Bunter. Lord Mauleverer—always Bunter's last resource in times of financial stringency—had failed him. Instead of listening to Bunter's troubles, and helping him out, he seemed to have no eyes for anybody but a red-haired movie girl! Even an ass like Mauly ought to have understood that Billy Bunter was more important than a whole bevy of movie girls. But he didn't. Bunter rolled back to the rancho to try his luck once more with the Famous Five.

Lord Mauleverer, as completely forgetful of Bunter's existence as if the fat junior had never honoured the universe with his presence, joined Leonora on the path and raised his hat gracefully.

Leonora gave him a smile.

She liked Mauleverer; moreover, she was not likely to forget that Mauly had

saved her from the fire at the Perfection studio in Hollywood.

"Goin' for a walk, Miss La Riviere?" asked Mauly shyly.

"Sure!" said Leonora.

"Mmmmm—" stammered Mauleverer.

"Eh?"

"Mmm-mum-may I come a little way?" stammered Mauly.

"Oh, sure! If you like."

"Thanks!" gasped Mauleverer.

They walked down the canyon to the road. Leonora was in a thoughtful mood, and Mauleverer had nothing to say.

Since he had learned that Miss La Riviere was engaged to Peter Carter, the Los Angeles detective, his susceptible lordship had had to give up the day-dreams, in which the movie girl figured as chatelaine of Mauleverer Towers.

What Leonora could see in Mr. Carter was a mystery to Mauly.

Mauly could see nothing in Mr. Carter but a very commonplace young man, with a square, aggressive chin, a keen eye, and an unpleasantly positive manner.

Some of the juniors were rather interested in Mr. Carter, because he was a detective. Mauleverer didn't think much of detectives—since he had met Mr. Carter, anyhow.

Besides, Carter wasn't much of a detective, to judge by results. He had failed to run down the gang of bootleggers in the Santa Monica Hills, and they had cleared off and snapped their fingers at him. Certainly, he had captured Gomez, their leader; but he owed that to Billy Bunter, of all people. Bunter had "put him wise" on that occasion. Mauleverer didn't think much of Mr. Carter as a detective. He did not think much of him in any way whatever.

But Leonora did. He could see that Leonora did, and it remained a mystery to him.

Leonora being booked, as it were, Mauly was reduced to the last romantic resource of worshipping from afar. Sometimes he sighed. Sometimes he thought of verses in which "Leonora" rhymed with "adorer," and "part" with "heart," and "eyes" with "sighs." His appetite remained good, however, and his health was unimpaired, and he continued quite keen on the movie work. So probably his young life was not quite so blighted as he supposed. He was quite sure that when he went back to Greyfriars he would leave his heart in Los Angeles. But possibly he was mistaken on that point.

Anyhow, when the commonplace and utterly uninteresting Mr. Carter was not around there was no reason why Mauly should not bask in the smiles of Leonora. There was no reason why he should not nourish a tender and respectful admiration. Leonora, of course, was not allowed to suspect his sentimental attachment. Probably, had she suspected it, she would have regarded his lordship as the world's prize boob.

The movie girl's face was very thoughtful as she walked up the road. She stopped under a tall tree that grew by the roadside.

Lord Mauleverer stopped, too.

"Rippin' here, isn't it?" he said, breaking a long silence. His lordship was not much of a conversationalist.

Leonora started. Had Mauly been a suspicious fellow he might have suspected that she had forgotten that he was there.

"Oh, sure!" said Leonora.

But she did not glance at the terraced shore, and the waves of the Pacific rolling in to the beach, and the white town of Santa Monica in the distance, and the sails that dotted the sea. She was looking up the dusty road that led to Hollywood.

"Like to rest here a bit?" asked Lord Mauleverer.

"Eh?"

Leonora remembered him again and looked round.

"Restin' here?" asked Mauleverer.

"Oh, sure!"

They sat on a mossy rock that cropped out of the hillside by the road. Leonora still watched the dusty distance.

"He's late!" she said suddenly.

Mauleverer started.

"Eh?"

"He's late!" said Leonora.

"He? Who?"

"Peter."

"Peter?" repeated Lord Mauleverer blankly.

"Sure!"

"Oh! Begad!"

A little car, enveloped in a cloud of dust, came whizzing up the road from Hollywood. Mauly knew that car, and

knew the utterly commonplace and uninteresting young man who sat at the wheel. That young man did not seem uninteresting or commonplace to Leonora. Her face brightened as she spotted the car.

"It's Peter!" she said.

She jumped up.

Lord Mauleverer rose, too. It dawned upon his noble mind that Miss La Riviere's object in walking from the location was to wait for Peter at this spot. If ever a fellow felt inclined to kick himself, Lord Mauleverer did at that moment.

"I—I—I—" he stammered.

Leonora's eyes were fixed on the approaching car.

"I—I'll be gettin' back, if you'll excuse me," stuttered Mauleverer.

Miss La Riviere seemed as deaf to Mauly as Mauly had been to Billy Bunter. He made his excuses to deaf ears, raised his hat to unseeing eyes, and retreated. Leonora stepped into the road as the car whirled to a halt, and the commonplace and uninteresting young man stepped down.

(Continued on next page.)

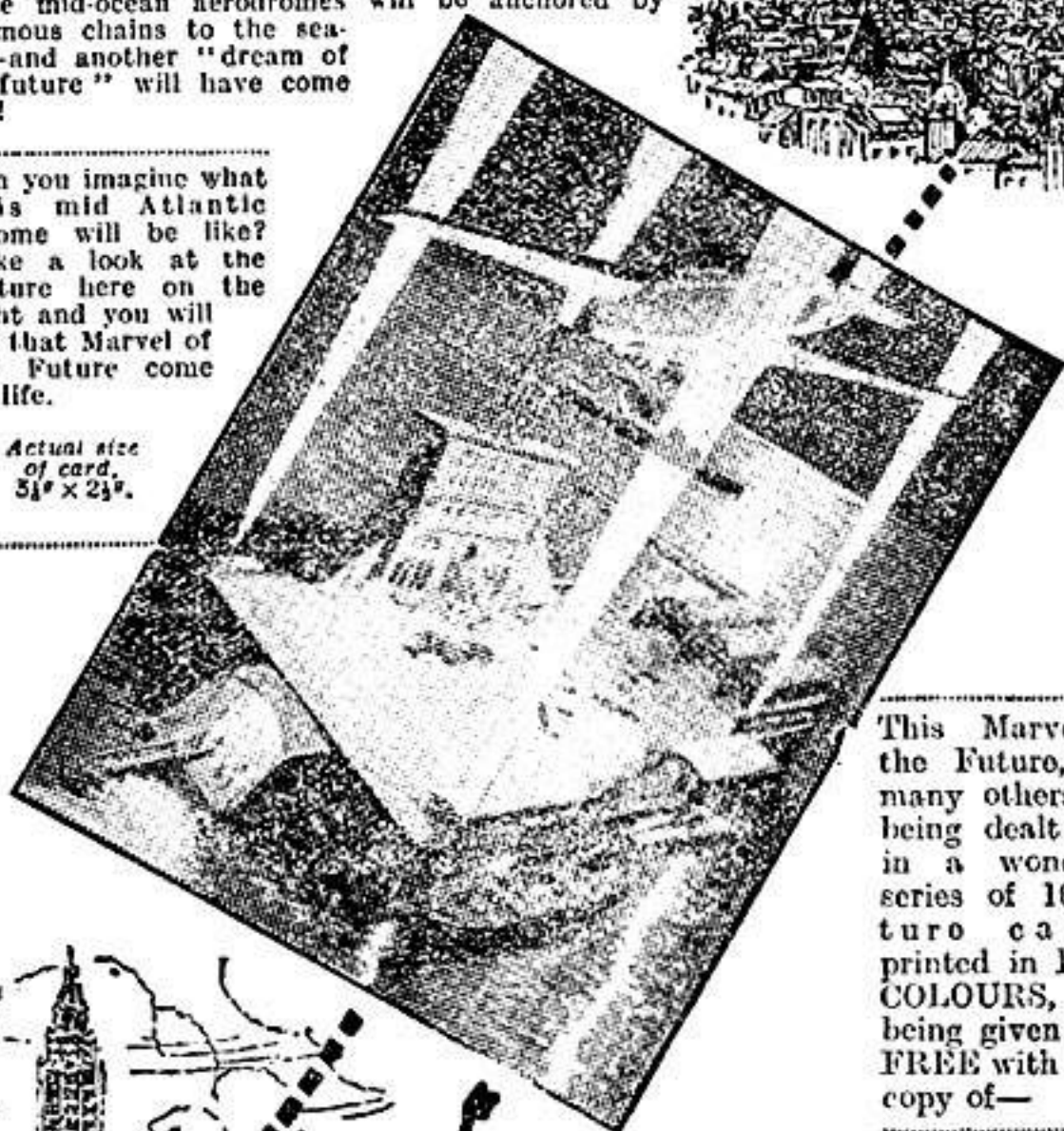
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"You're late, Peter!" she said.
 "Pesky tyre, Jane," answered Mr. Carter. "Say, who was the guy who absquatulated so lively?"
 "Mauleverer." Leonora looked round.
 "Is he gone?"
 Lord Mauleverer was gone.

THE EIGHTH CHAPTER.

The Nigger in the Woodpile!

MR. PETER CARTER sat down in the place that Lord Mauleverer had vacated.

There was a frown on Mr. Carter's face, and his square jaw looked more aggressive than usual.

Leonora eyed him rather anxiously.

"Spill it, Peter," she said.

"I been through a course of sprouts, Jane, like I told you on the phone," said Mr. Carter gloomily. "When I got on to this rum-running business, I figured that it was going to get me promotion. I never figured on hitting up against graft."

Mr. Carter snorted.

"That durned guy, Polk!" he said.

"Myron Polk?" said Leonora.

"I got that galoot, Gomez," went on Mr. Carter. "I got him cinched. But the gang's vamoosed out of the hills, though I reckon they're still running hooch not very far off. The Volstead Act and the pesky Eighteenth Amendment ain't caused any shortage of drink in Los, Jane. But—you see, them rum-runners was mixed up with Polk. Polk set them on to work out his grudge against them schoolboys. That's where I get handed the rough stuff."

"How?"

"I've got nothing on Polk," said Mr. Carter. "I know that he put up the bootleggers to what they did. There's no proving it. He's too cute for that. He's got a pull in Los, Jane. He's been making things hum for me at headquarters."

"The scallywag!" said Leonora indignantly.

Mr. Carter grinned.

"Well, he sure would," he said.

"I've got the office from a man higher up to mind my step. Any more trouble I make for Mr. Poninjay Polk, and my services ain't likely to be required any more. Graft!" said Mr. Carter discontentedly.

Leonora nodded.

"I put it to the boss," grunted Mr. Carter. "He jest snickered. Told me to guess again. He ain't believing a word. It sounds tall, Jane. A guy who's featured in the pictures at fifty thousand dollars a time—working in cahoots with a bunch of boot-leggers! It don't sound likely. If I could get the goods on Polk, it would be O.K. As the matter stands, he's more likely to get the goods on me. He's a big man in Los, Jane, and who am I? Jest nobody! A word from him in the right quarter, and my goose is cooked. He's put in the word. I got to mind my step, or—"

"Or?" asked Leonora.

"Or I get fired," said Mr. Carter glumly.

"It's sure mean!" said Leonora.

And the movie girl sighed.

Had Mr. Carter's case been worked up successfully, he had hoped for promotion; and there would have been a wedding, and Miss Jane Snookson would no longer have been Leonora la Riviera on the films, but Mrs. Peter Carter.

That happy prospect was dashed now. Mr. Carter knew perfectly well that the Perfection star had set on the Santa

Monica bootleggers to kidnapping, and even a darker crime. But "getting the goods" on Myron Polk was another matter.

All that Mr. Carter had succeeded in, so far, was in making a bitter enemy of Myron Polk.

The Perfection star had not been long in making his enmity felt. It was, as Mr. Carter said, "graft" that he was up against. "Money talks" all over the world, but nowhere so loudly and emphatically as in the United States.

Polk was in touch with men much higher up in the police, than Mr. Carter could ever hope to be. A police-detective who made himself obnoxious to a man in Myron Polk's position, was likely to "feel a draught" from somewhere higher up.

Mr. Carter had felt that draught, and it had had a very chilling effect on him.

So far, it was only a draught. Mr. Carter had been warned to "mind his step." If he did not mind his step, the draught was likely to become a hurricane, which would blow Mr. Carter right out of the police.

"I got to quit it!" said Mr. Carter.

"It's mean!" said Leonora.

"But I guess," continued Mr. Carter, his obstinate chin jutting out like a promontory—"I guess I ain't quitting, all the same! I got to lie low and say nothing. But I'll get the goods on that guy Polk, Jane! I sure will! Next time he breaks out—"

Mr. Carter's steely eyes glinted.

"You see, Jane, if I got the goods on him, with plenty of proof, that would fix it. Graft wouldn't stand against that. I allow it won't be easy, and I got to mind my step. But I'll sure get him! He's a bad egg—bad all through. He fixed it up with Gomez to make that kid, Wharton, break his neck riding the Hair-Trigger in Jack-Rabbit Canyon. He's sure a pizen scallywag! And if he was mad with that kid before, I guess he's madder now—if he's seen the papers this morning."

And Mr. Carter grinned.

"Say, there's Schootz!" said Leonora.

A big car came grinding up the road from Hollywood. Mr. Rigg Schootz sat in it.

Evidently the Perfection director was returning to the location at Jack-Rabbit.

Mr. Schootz's fat face wore a deep frown. His morning in Hollywood did not seem to have pleased the director of the Perfection Picture Syndicate.

The car whirled by in a cloud of dust.

"Something's got Schootz's goat," remarked Leonora.

"I guess I can tell you what," said Mr. Carter, with a rather malevolent grin. "Some guy has given Polk away to the newspaper reporters. They're chewing the rag all over Hollywood about Polk faking the riding act and letting a kid take his place."

Leonora caught her breath.

"Peter! Polk's been up to Jack-Rabbit this morning, kicking up a shindy—he was mad as a hornet about it."

"I reckoned he would be," agreed Mr. Carter.

"And—and it was you, Peter?"

"It was a galoot about my size," admitted Mr. Carter, "that put the 'Ledger' reporter wise. He won't let on where he got the news. Jane—Polk won't ever guess it came from me."

"He thinks it was Wharton gave him away."

"So I figured," said Mr. Carter complacently.

"He's mad with him, Peter."

"Madder than ever, I guess," assented Mr. Carter. "He was riled enough before, to try to get the kid's

neck broke. Now he's more riled than ever."

"Peter!" murmured Leonora.

"I've got to mind my step," said Mr. Carter. "But if that guy don't mind his step, too, Jane, I'll sure get the goods on him!"

Leonora looked troubled.

"But the boy will be in danger, Peter."

"Not while I'm watching out," answered Mr. Carter reassuringly. "The trouble ain't coming to the kid. It's coming to Polk."

But Leonora still looked troubled. Perhaps she felt that there was an element of unscrupulousness in the Machiavellian planning of her Peter.

"I been told to take a holiday," said Mr. Carter grimly. "I been told to take a holiday and think a piece, Jane. Well, I'm going to take that holiday with my eyes wide open, and thinking a whole lot—all about Polk! Don't you be scared for the kid, Jane. It's about time for somebody to be scared for Polk." Mr. Carter's chin jugged again. "If there's any galoot don't want to see Polk in the stone jug, it's time for him to be getting scared."

When Mr. Carter's little car bore him away, Leonora walked back to the location with a thoughtful and troubled brow. Mr. Carter had his own methods, and was satisfied with them; in an atmosphere of "graft" he had not learned to be over-scrupulous. Leonora could not help wishing that her Peter's methods had been different. But she did not think of arguing with Peter. Argument was useless with a guy whose chin was so well developed as Peter's.

THE NINTH CHAPTER.

Not Bunter!

"**I** SAY, you fellows!"
 "Shut up, Bunter!"
 "Old Schootz—"

"Dry up!"

"Is coming—"

"Cheese it!"

"Back—" gasped Bunter.

Harry Wharton & Co. did not seem impressed. Billy Bunter blinked at them, with his little round eyes almost bulging through his big spectacles. Bunter's fat face registered alarm and terror, indeed consternation.

The sight of Mr. Schootz, in his car, still in the distance, had been enough for Bunter. He bolted into the rancho like a rabbit into a burrow. Of all the guys in California, Mr. Schootz was the guy whom Billy Bunter least desired to meet.

"I say, you fellows, he's coming back. He looks awfully ratty. I say, he said he would be away all day—told me to tell that other beast so! Now he's coming back—Oh dear!"

"Well, let him come," said Harry. "If you get a kicking, it will very likely do you good!"

"The kickfulness is the proper caper," said Hurreo Jamset Ram Singh. "The esteemed idiotic Bunter has askfully requested it."

"I say, you fellows, I'm not going to be kicked!" roared Bunter. "I never touched old Schootz's phone! I couldn't imitate his voice to shave my wife—I mean, to save my life. I wanted to clear off before he came back. Now it's too late. All you fellows' fault! You needn't deny it—you refused to lend me a hundred dollars—"

"The refusefulness is still terrific!" grinned the Nabob of Bhanipur.

"Beast! I say, you fellows, I know



As Slick Wilson bent over the swathed figure on the sand and jerked the blankets loose from the hidden face, there was a wild howl. "Yaroooh! Help! I say, you fellows! Yow-ow-ow-ow! Wharton-Inky-help!" Myron Polk gave a convulsive start. "That—that is not Wharton!" he gasped. "I know that voice—it's that fool Bunter!"
(See Chapter 13.)

Schootz will suspect me! He did before, you know. He's a suspicious beast!" groaned Bunter.

"You fat idiot!" said Harry, frowning. "It was very likely your trickery that made Polk make such a fool of himself this morning."

"And the harder you're kicked, the better!" said Johnny Bull.

"I say, you fellows, if you all swear that I was a mile away when I was in Schootz's office—"

"Fathead!"

"I mean, when I wasn't in Schootz's office—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

There was a honk of a motor-horn outside the rancho. Mr. Rigg Schootz was at hand.

Bunter gasped.

"I say, you fellows, you stand by me, you know! You tell Schootz that if he makes a fuss, you'll turn him down and refuse to finish the school film. See? That will bring him round! He only thinks of making money, like all—"

"Ass!"

"I guess," said Fisher T. Fish, rising. "I'll go and see Schootz and put him wise. You can get ready for the licking of your life, you fat jay!"

"Oh, really, Fishy—"

"Scat!"

Fisher T. Fish walked away.

"I—I say, you fellows, what do you think Schootz will do?" groaned Bunter.

"Kick you all round the location, most likely," answered Bob. "If he wants any help, we'll help him."

"Oh, really, Cherry—"

"And serve you jolly well right!" said Frank Nugent. "There was trouble enough, without you playing tricks on the telephone and making matters worse."

To which all the Greyfriars juniors nodded assent. They had no doubt that Bunter's trickery had added fuel to the fire of the Perfection star's rage, and caused him to come up to Jack-Rabbit on the warpath. Bunter was partly, at least, the cause of the unfortunate scene on the location that morning.

"I say, you fellows, I—I'm going to my room!" gasped Bunter. "If old Schootz wants me, tell him I'm ill, will you? Tell him I've got something infectious—influenza and complicated double pneumonia. That will keep him off. Tell him I'm dying, and unable to move!"

And Bunter cut away to the stairs, and scudded up to the wooden gallery that surrounded the patio, on which the rooms opened.

About a minute after he had disappeared, Mr. Rigg Schootz came striding into the patio.

He stared round, evidently in search of the Owl of the Remove.

"Where's that fat gink?" he demanded.

"Echo answers where!" murmured Bob Cherry.

"That pie-faced jay!" roared Mr. Schootz. "I'm going to kick him off this location! You kids know what he's done? Playing tricks on my telephone again. Polk rang me up, and that fat scallywag answered him and insulted him, making Polk figure it was

me! See? I seen Polk in Hollywood, and he started slanging me—me! I couldn't make out what was biting him at first. What you snickering at?" demanded Mr. Schootz.

The juniors tried not to smile.

"This here ain't a snickering matter, I'm telling you!" hooted Mr. Schootz. "I was half an hour getting at what was the matter with Polk—and when I told him I never phoned him he only half believed it. I guess I know who did it. It was that fat gink! I'm going to burst him all over the canyon! I want him! I want him bad! Where is he?"

"He's ill with influenza and complicated double pneumonia, dying, and unable to move," answered Bob.

"What?" gasped Mr. Schootz.

"So he said—and I suppose he knows."

"You young jay!" snorted Mr. Schootz. "Here you, Fish! You bring me that big stick out of my office."

"Sure!" said Fisher T. Fish.

With a big stick in his grasp, Mr. Schootz went up the steps to the gallery.

"Oh, my hat!" said Nugent. "Looks as if Bunter's going to get what he asked for!"

"Serve him jolly well right!" grunted Johnny Bull.

"Let's go after Schootz," said Harry. "He mustn't kill Bunter."

The juniors followed Mr. Schootz, up to the gallery. The Perfection

(Continued on page 16.)

THE MAGNET LIBRARY.—No. 1,105.

The Head's Booby-Trap!

by DICKY NUGENT

Many a time and oft have Jack Jolly & Co. prepared fearsome booby traps. But this is the first occasion in the history of their life at St. Sam's that they have prepared a booby-trap at the bidding of the Head.

"SILENCE viz you! Or, in othaire words, shut-uppez voo!" yelled Monsure Froggay, the French master, in the Fourth Form room one fine day.

The Fourth looked slitley surprised. Froggay was usually a very easy-going gentleman, and they played all sorts of trix on him, as a rule. But this morning his usually plassid face was screwed up into an eggsspression of rage that the Head himself mite have envied.

"Wonder what's the matter with Monsure?" mermered Jack Jolly, the kaptin of the Fourth. "Looks as if something has upset his apple-cart!"

"So it ap-pears!" grinned Punster, the tame humerist of the Fourth.

And there was a chuckle from the juniors who herd.

Monsure Froggay bestowed a savvidge glare on the grinning juniors.

"Mong dew!" he eggssclaimed (this is French for "Grate pip!") "You make a larf of me, is it not? Ze whole class vill be punish for ze insult viz vun hundred lines!"

"Few!"

Jack Jolly jumped to his feet, an eggsspression of concern on his handsom young dial.

"Please, sir—"

"Vat is it, mon ongfong?"

"Is there anything the matter with you this morning?" asked Jack Jolly boldly.

"Mong dew!" said Monsure Froggay, startled by such ordassity.

"As a rule, you're such an easy-going little idiot that we can do as we like with you," eggssplained the kaptin of the Fourth. "But this morning you look a regular boolying tirant, like the Head. What's come over you, sir?"

For a moment Froggay seemed to hezzitate, as if dewbious whether to trust the Fourth with his trubbles. Then he seemed to come to a decision.

"I vill tell you vat is ze mattaire, mays ongfongs," he said. "Just before I come into ze class I make a discovery. I find zat I 'ave been, as you say, dished, diddled, and done!"

"Hard cheddar, sir!" mermered the Fourth simperthetically.

"Vun day last year, ze Guvvernairs ordaired ze 'Ead to give me a rise of salairy of vun shilling a veek," eggssplained Monsure, with a drammatick jesture. "Vat do you sink ze 'Ead 'as been doing all zis time?"

"Sticking to it, sir!" shouted the Fourth.

"Mong dew! Zat is right!" said the French master. "Zat villan zat scoundrell—zat cheeky blighter—'e 'as been pinching my rise all zis long time, and for zat reason I lose my tempaire and get ze mad up!"

"My hat! I don't wonder at it, then!" eggssclaimed Jack Jolly. "But, of corse, sir, you must make allowances for the Head. Everybody knows what

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a cunning old fox he is—"

"Jolly! How dare you!" roared a majestick voice from the doorway at that moment, and Dr. Birchmall himself stalked in.

He glared savvidgely at the kaptin of the Fourth.

"That's a nice respective way to speak of your headmaster—I don't think!" he snorted. "Seems to me you're asking for a thick ear, Jolly!"

"Nunno, not at all, sir!" said Jack Jolly hastily.

"Well, you're going on the right way to get one, anyway! Hallo! What the thump— Yarooooo!"

The Head broke off with a feendish yell as the French master suddenly tugged at his venerable beard, causing him to swing round to Froggy's desk.

"Villan!" cried Monsure Froggay, shaking his fist in the face of the astonished Head. "Swindler! At last I 'ave found out ze trooth! Give me ze rise you 'ave pinched from me, or I vill give you ze punch on ze boko!"

Dr. Birchmall's dile went suddenly white.

"Not so loud, Froggay, for goodness' sake!" he said horsely. "Look here, I'm sorry about that rise—"

"And ovaire ze arrears, or I give you vun mitey swipe on ze jaw!" hissed Monsure Froggay.

"Oh, crikey! All in good time, Froggay!" gasped Dr. Birchmall, placing a restraining hand on the eggssited forriner. "To tell you the trooth, I've had to borrow the munny for the time being, but if you'll only allow me time, I'm eggsspecting a postal-order—"

"Ze arrears, or a punch on ze boko—vich?" asked Monsure Froggay.

The Head groaned. Parting with munny was like having a tooth out to

Dr. Birchmall. But he could see it was no good argewing the toss any further. The French master was evvidently determined to have his pound of flesh, so there was nothing else to do but to pay up and look plezzant.

With a hevvy sigh Dr. Birchmall plunged his hand into his trowsis pocket and droo out a handful of silver coins, all mixed up with a weerd collection of peg-tops, marbles, peeces of string, and chunks of toffy.

Slowly and reluctantly he counted out fifteen shillings, and handed that sum to Monsure Froggay, who axcepted it, with a beaming dile.

"Here you are, then, lust you!" growled the Head.

"Zank you, sir!" mermered the French master. "Zis munny vill be ver' useful in buying snails and frogs for my suppaire!"

Dr. Birchmall shuddered.

"Don't tell me what you're going to buy with it, for Hevvan's sake!" he snapped. "It's quite bad enuff to have to pay you, without learning that munny which could be well spent on doennuts and jam-puffs is going to be wasted on a lot of horrible snails and frogs!"

"Zo lovely suppaire!" mermered Monsure Froggy, rolling his eyes.

"Oh, ratts!" growled Dr. Birchmall. "Look here, Froggay, I'm displeased with you."

"Mong dew!" grinned the French master. "Zat does not mattaire!"

"Duzzent it? We'll see about that!" snorted the Head. "Owing to your mean and mercenary natcher, Froggay,

I've had to part with cash which would have been useful to me."

"Cool!" eggclaimed Monsure Froggay. "But ze munny was mine!"

"Yes; and it would have been mine if you hadn't nabbed it!" grunted the Head. "As I say, Froggay, I'm displeased with you; and when I'm displeased, it's time for mean, grasping, frog-eating men like you to sit up and take notice!"

"Mong dew!"

"If something sudden and painful duzzent happen to you during the next few hours I shall be very much surprised," continued the Head, with a scowl. "For the prezent I will leave it at that, and bid you a very good day!"

With a sinner, mocking smile on his dille, Dr. Birchmall quitted the Form-room, leaving the Fourth buzzing with eggitement, and Monsure Froggay wondering, with a feeling of vague alarm, what form the Head's threatened revenge was likely to take.

II.

LATER on in the day Jack Jolly & Co. were having tea in their study, when there was a sound of the tread of heavy hob-nailed boots coming down the Fourth passidge. A moment later Dr. Birchmall entered.

He nodded jenially to our heroes.

"Good-afternoon, my boys!" he said. "Pray reseom your seats. Thanks; I will!"

In response to an invitation which nobody else herd, Dr. Birchmall helped himself to a jam-tart. Jack Jolly & Co. sat down again, and proceeded to wade into the remainder of the feast before the greedy old buffer devoured the lot.

"May I inkwire the reason for this uneggspected honner, sir?" asked Merry respectively.

The Head smiled—a slitley sinner smile.

"I will tell you," he replied, wiping a smear of jam from his face. "As a matter of fact, I want you juniors to help me prepare a booby-trap."

"A—a booby-trap?" stuttered Jack Jolly & Co.

Dr. Birchmall nodded.

"You are more eggperienced in these matters than I am, and I rely on you to give me the bennefit of your eggperience. Savvy?"

"My hat! Rather unusual for a headmaster to indulge in such practisses, isn't it?" asked Jack Jolly.

The Head grinned.

"Perhaps it is, Jolly. But this is not the first time I have behaved in an unusual manner. You see, I want to make that rotter Froggay sit up, and a booby-trap strikes me as an eggcellent way of achieving my object."

"Oh crikey!"

"You need have no fear of Monsure reeking his venjenz on you afterwards, boys," went on the Head. "I—your headmaster—will take the full responsibility for the deed. Now, can I rely on your assistance?"

Jack Jolly & Co. grinned. As a matter of fact, their simperthies were more with the French master than with Dr. Birchmall. But the opportunity of fixing a booby-trap for a master, with no unhappy consekwences to follow, did not occur every day, and they didn't feel like letting it pass.

"Rely on us. We'll see you through, sir," said Jack Jolly.

"Good egg! Let's get bizzy, then!" said the Head briskly. "Pass the jam-tarts, Jolly; they're simply prime!"

Jack Jolly passed over the last two jam-tarts, and hurriedly covered up the

rest of the grub. After that the chums of the Fourth cheerfully fell to preparing a booby-trap for Monsure Froggay.

Dr. Birchmall's cunning little eyes twinkled merrily as Jack Jolly & Co. ladled out soot from the chimney, dust from the coal-skuttle, tea-leaves from the tea-pot, et settera, et settera.

"Go it, my boys!" he encourridged gleefully. "What about this jar of treacle—won't that give it a finishing touch?"

"But we've only just bought it from the tuckshop, sir!" eggclaimed Jack Jolly indignantly.

"Never mind; it wasn't bought with my munny!" retorted the Head, and he calmly added the treacle to the evil mixture.

By the time Jack Jolly & Co. had added a libberal quantity of water and red-ink, and mixed the whole lot up in a pail, they had prepared a trooly fearsome concoction.

"That will do, I think," said the Head, rubbing his hands with satisfaction. "Now I want you boys to fix it up for me in Monsure Froggay's study. I have just sent him down to the school shop for two pennyworth of mixed fruit drops, so I know he's out."

Jack Jolly & Co. nodded, and followed Dr. Birchmall out of the study.

Within five minnits they had succeeded in ballancing the well-filled pail above the door of the unsuspecting French master's room.

Scarcely had they finished their handywork when the delicate footprints of Monsure Froggay became ordible in the distance.

"Quick! Let's conseal ourselves round the corner of the passidge!" whispered the Head, and they all scrambled out of the way, and took up positions at the end of the passidge.

A few seconds later Monsure Froggay, his mouth full of the Head's mixed fruit drops, trotted on the scene. Blissfully unaware of what was waiting for him, he stepped into the study. And immediately after there was a crash and a wild howl.

Swoooooosh!

"Yarooooo! Ooooooo! Groooooo!"

Jack Jolly & Co. couldn't help larfing at the commical spectacle. In one second Monsure Froggay had been converted into a howling nigger minstrel.

As for Dr. Birchmall, he was farley dumbled up with mirth.

"Ha, ha, ha! That'll teach the rotter to demand arrears of pay!" he chortled. "Just look at his fizzog, boys! Ho, ho, ho!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" yelled Jack Jolly & Co., wiping the tears of merriment from their eyes.

"Grooooo! Mong dew! Helas! Ooooooch!" gurgled Monsure Froggay. "Vat fearful rottaire 'as committed zis outrage?"

Dr. Birchmall, grinning all over his dille, came out of his place of consealment.

"Here I am, Froggay!" he chuckled. "Oh, my giddy aunt! You ought to see your fizz!"

Monsure Froggay gowged the mixture out of his eyes and fixed a terrific glare on his sooperior.

"Mong dew!" he shrieked. "You!"

"Little me!" grinned Dr. Birchmall.

"You feexed zis trap for me?" howled the French master furiously.

The Head nodded calmly.

"I acknollidge it, old bean! Jevver get left? Ha, ha, ha!"

For a moment Monsure Froggay looked as if he was about to herl himself on the grinning headmaster. But with an effort he restrained himself.

"Say bien!" he said. "In zat case,

doctaire, zere is but vun answer 'to you!"

"What's that?" chortled the Head.

"I challenge you to a duel to ze deth!" replied Monsure Froggay.

The Head's larfter came to a sudden stop.

"What?" he yelled.

"You 'ave insplt me. I am insult!" said the French master. "And so, Doctaire Birchmall, I challenge you to a duel to ze deth!"

The Head's face went garstly white, and his bony neeze knocked together.

"You silly ass! We can't fight a duel in a sivivilised country!" he eggclaimed.

"Ha! You are afraid! You tremble!" sneered Monsure Froggay.

"Nevertheless, I insist on a duel. You vill 'ear from my second in ze morning. Bong nuit?"

And with that the furious French master stamped into his study, and slammed the door after him.

Dr. Birchmall jumped back only just in time to avoid his nazal organ being jammed in the door.

"Narrow squeak that," said Jack Jolly, forgetting himself for the moment, and thumping the Head heartily on the back. "As I've always said, sir, you will persist in poking your nose into trouble."

"Jolly!" thundered Dr. Birchmall, wheeling round sharply on the kaptin of the Fourth. "What do you mean eggactly by that insinuation? Take one thousand lines for disportinece, and bring them to me in a hour's time. Do you here, boy?"

"Y-y-yes, sir!" stuttered Jack Jolly.

The crowd of Fourth-Formers was about to disperse when Mr. Lickham, the master of the Fourth, came whisking along the corridor.

"Ah, Lickham," said Dr. Birchmall, stepping in the path of the Fourth Form master. "I want you for a second—"

"But I am in a terribul hurry, sir," ventured Mr. Lickham.

"Hurry or no," roared Dr. Birchmall, "I want you for a second, Lickham. Monsure Froggay has challenged me to a duel, a duel to the deth. As you are a bosum pal of mine, Licky, I choose you as my second."

Mr. Lickham's eyes opened wide.

"Oh, yes!" he answered. "But—but you must eggscuse me for a moment, sir, I've had an urjent phone call."

And Mr. Lickham rustled by.

Dr. Birchmall was left staring at Jack Jolly & Co. with a face from which all traces of larfter had now vanished.

"Oh, grate pip! I seem to have put my foot in it now, boys, and no mistake!" he remarked dolefully.

"But surely you're not afraid of a meer Frenchman?" asked Jack Jolly skornfully.

"Nunno! N-n-not at all!" gasped Dr. Birchmall. "I'm as b-b-brave as a lion, I assure you! Oh crikey! I must go and apply my powerful branebox to this problem at once!"

So saying, the Head, feeling very sorry now that he had conceived the brilliant notion of japing Monsure Froggay, rushed off to his study.

And Jack Jolly & Co. were left to spread the news throughout the length and bredth of St. Sam's that Monsure Froggay had challenged Dr. Birchmall to a duel—a duel to the deth!

THE END.

(There will be another long laugh in next week's amusing yarn of St. Sam's, entitled: "DR. BIRCHMALL'S DILEMMA!" If you miss it, chums, you'll regret it!)

THE MAGNET LIBRARY.—No. 1,105.



(Continued from page 13)

director stopped at the door of Bunter's room, and kicked it open with a crash. "Come out here, you fat guy!" he roared.

No answer.

"I'm going to break you up into little pieces!" roared Mr. Schootz. "I'll give you ventriloquial stunts! I sure will."

As Bunter did not emerge, Mr. Schootz strode into the room.

In the bed was a recumbent figure, completely concealed by the bedclothes. Mr. Schootz halted at the bedside, and flourished the stick.

"Get up!" he roared.

The figure in the bed did not stir.

"I'm telling you to hop out!" roared Mr. Schootz. "You hear me gaup? Get up and take what's coming to you!"

There was no movement from the recumbent figure in the bed. Harry Wharton & Co. gathered round the doorway, looking in anxiously. Mr. Schootz was in a towering rage, and he looked as if he might do some serious damage with that big stick.

"You hopping out?" bawled Mr. Schootz.

No reply.

Mr. Schootz lifted the stick, and took aim at the figure in the bed.

"I give you one second to hop out, you Bunter!"

But there was no answer, and no movement, and Mr. Schootz brought down the stick with a terrific swipe.

Whack!

The juniors expected to hear a yell that would almost lift the roof of the old Mexican rancho.

But there was no sound.

"My hat!" gasped Bob Cherry.

Mr. Schootz swiped again.

Whack!

Still no sound! The juniors stared on in wonder. Bunter was given to making a great deal of noise over a little damage. It was amazing to see him lying soundless after those two terrific swipes.

"Carry me home to die!" gasped Mr. Schootz.

He grasped the bedclothes, and dragged them off.

"Oh, crikey!" gasped Bob.

Mr. Schootz stared blankly at the bed. Bunter was not there! The recumbent figure that had looked like somebody in the bed, was composed of pillows, cushions, and a folded overcoat.

"Search me!" gasped Mr. Schootz.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"He—he—he ain't here!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" yelled the juniors. There was something entertaining—to the spectators, at least—in Mr. Schootz's expenditure of energy on that dummy figure in Bunter's bed.

"Where's that gink?" roared Mr. Schootz.

He strode out of the room, fuming. He stared into every room that opened on the gallery. But Bunter was not to be seen. Billy Bunter had disappeared.

And so long as Mr. Schootz remained in his present mood, it behoved Billy Bunter to remain disappeared! And he did!

THE MAGNET LIBRARY.—No. 1,105.

THE TENTH CHAPTER.

In Hiding!

"YOU, Wharton."
"Yes, Mr. Van Duck."
"You're wanted—Mr. Schootz's office."

"Right."

Harry Wharton's face was rather grim, as he made his way to the Perfection director's office, after tea. He was expecting a far from pleasant interview with Mr. Schootz.

The director looked far from pleasant, as the junior entered.

"You been chewing the rag?" he demanded accusingly.

"If you mean that stuff in the paper this morning—" said Harry, setting his lips.

"I mean jest that!"

"You've no right to ask such a question, then."

"What?" boomed Mr. Schootz.

"I've said nothing—it was understood that I should say nothing. If you think I'm a fellow that can't keep faith, the sooner I get away from this show the better," said Harry.

"Oh, don't go off on your ear," snapped Mr. Schootz. "There's a nigger in the woodpile somewhere. You can see that! Polk allows that you've been bragging around of what you've done."

"Polk's a fool and a blackguard," answered Wharton.

"Wha-a-at?"

"A fool and a blackguard!"

Mr. Schootz stared at the Greyfriars junior thunderously. Then his plump face broke into a grin.

"I guess you ain't a long way off the mark, kid," he said. "But that's neither here nor there. The show was given away—and Polk figures that it was you swanking about taking on his stunts. He's as mad as a hornet about it. On top of that, that fat gink pulled his leg on the telephone. That's how he came to break out like I hear he did to-day. I reckon he made a big boob of himself."

"No doubt about that," said Harry dryly.

"If you say you ain't chewed the rag, I believe you," said Mr. Schootz, more amiably. "There's a nigger in the woodpile, but I allow you ain't that nigger. Polk won't believe you—"

"I don't care two straws what Mr. Polk believes or doesn't believe," answered Harry.

"But it's a gol-darned mush-up," growled Mr. Schootz. "Polk's sure gone off at the deep end. I been to the Ledger office, but they ain't letting on where they got the noos. I guess some jay has been talking! Them newspaper guys are like tigers after a story to shove in their papers. Still, I've fixed it. It's contradicted all right."

Wharton looked at him.

"I've fixed it with the paper," said Mr. Schootz. "The later editions will contain an explanation and an apology. It's run me into a pretty figure, too."

Wharton had nothing to say to that.

"Money talks!" explained Mr. Schootz.

"I've no doubt it does," said Wharton, without adding what he thought of the transaction. It was not his business to criticize the director.

"There's a lot of guys in Hollywood, glad of a chance to dig at Polk," grunted Mr. Schootz. "He's got a way of putting a guy's back up, he sure has. But I've fixed it, and if you hold your tongue, there won't be any more of it. I reckon Polk will come round. He generally climbs down after blowing off his mouth a piece. I suppose you're feeling rather mad with him?" The director eyed Wharton suspiciously.

"I dislike him," answered Harry. "But I don't want any more trouble with him, if that's what you mean, Mr. Schootz."

"That's jest what I mean."

Mr. Schootz paused.

"Look here, kid, I'll put it plain. Some jay has talked too much, and a newspaper guy has got hold of it. That's washed out now. But it's in your hands to blow the whole thing. Polk figures that you're set on doing it, to spite him. He figures that you want to make a big noise by telling the world that you've played his part, when he funk'd it. That's what gets his goat so sure."

"I've said nothing, and I shall say nothing," exclaimed Wharton, impatiently. "If you can't trust me, I'd rather clear off and have nothing more to do with this show."

"You ain't clearing off, till we've finished the big film, bo," answered Mr. Schootz. "But there won't be any more 'Lord of the Desert' stunts for you. Polk's made a point of that, and I've had to agree."

Wharton's lip curled.

"Mr. Polk needn't have troubled himself about that," he said. "Nothing would induce me to play his part for him again. I'm quite as fed up with Mr. Polk as he can be with me."

"Let it drop, then," said Mr. Schootz. "Polk will come round, when he finds that there's nothing more said. He'll be all right in a few days. I guess I've had to humour him before. You can beat it."

Wharton went to the door.

"That gink Bunter turned up yet?" asked Mr. Schootz.

"I haven't seen him!"

"I guess he'll turn up at bed-time," said Mr. Schootz darkly. "I'm sure going to beat him up to the queen's taste! I sure am! Tell him so if you see him!"

Wharton left the director's office. Evidently Mr. Schootz's wrath had not cooled, so far as Billy Bunter was concerned.

But Bunter was not seen again that evening.

He even missed a meal.

That he was hidden somewhere about the rancho was certain, so the juniors were not anxious on his account. In the rambling old building there were a score of places where the fat junior might have kept out of sight.

At bed-time, nothing had been seen of Bunter.

It was not till the juniors went to bed, and Harry Wharton went to his room, that anything was seen of him.

Wharton turned on the electric light in his room, and shut the door on the gallery.

Then, as he sat on the edge of the bed to take off his boots, he gave a jump.

"I say, old chap!"

"Wha-a-at—" gasped Wharton.

He jumped up.

From underneath the bed, a fat face and a pair of big spectacles blinked out at him.

"I say, old chap!" gasped Bunter. "It's only me!"

THE ELEVENTH CHAPTER.

Taking Wharton's Place!

HARRY WHARTON stared blankly at the fat face.

Bunter blinked back at him anxiously.

"You fat idiot!" gasped Wharton.

Bunter grinned.

"Did I scare you?" he asked cheerfully.

"You startled me, you fat ass!"
"He, he, he!"
"Have you been hiding there all the time?" demanded the captain of the Remove, staring at the fat junior.
"Well, not all the time," said Bunter. "I got under the bed every time I heard anybody coming along. See? I've been in the room all the time. Lucky I found a box of chocolates—"

"You've scoffed my chocolates?"
"Oh, really, Wharton! I suppose you didn't want me to starve? I say, what about scrounging some supper for me?"
"Nothing about it," answered Harry.
"Get out and roll away to your own room, you fat fraud."
Bunter shook his head.
"No fear! I'm staying here. You can go to my room, and I'll have yours, old chap!"

Bunter crawled out from under the bed and sat on it.
"Is Schootz still waxy?" he asked.
"Yes, ass!"
"Think he's going to be a beast if he finds me?"

"Quite sure!" answered Wharton, laughing. "I believe he's going to look for you at bed-time, from what he says."
"Well, he jolly well won't find me," said Bunter. "I'm staying here. You can have my room. It's a much nicer room than this. That's really why I'm offering it to you."

"Fathead!"
"You see, Schootz will never suspect we've changed rooms," explained Bunter. "If he comes to my room, he'll find you there. But he won't! You needn't be afraid of that."

"Then why can't you go to your own room?"
"Well, he might, you know," said Bunter cautiously. "I'm not taking any risks. I'd rather stay here."

"You silly owl!" growled Wharton.
"Oh, really, you know—"
"Get out!"
"Shan't!"

"Look here, you silly chump—"
"Oh, don't jaw!" said Bunter peevishly. "I'm staying here. I'm not going to be woke up by old Schootz's stick."

"And suppose I'm woke up by old Schootz's stick?" demanded Wharton.
"He, he, he!"

Apparently Bunter had already envisaged that possibility, and found it amusing.

Wharton glared at him.
"You fat villain—"

"Oh, really, Wharton! If you were what I call a pal, you'd be scrounging me some supper, instead of jawing there. I can tell you I'm jolly hungry. Look here, if you don't want my room, go and turn in with one of the other fellows. You can't turn in here with me. I want all the bedclothes. Don't be selfish!"

Wharton gave the Owl of the Remove a long, long look. He was debating in his mind whether to let Bunter have his room, or to collar the fat Owl and pitch him out neck and crop.

He decided on the former alternative, and went along to the next room, which was tenanted by Bob Cherry. Even had not Bunter wanted all the bedclothes, he would not have been inclined to turn in with Bunter. The beds in the juniors' rooms were large enough to accommodate any two fellows of ordinary dimensions; but Bunter's dimensions were far from ordinary. And Bunter's snore was no small matter, at close quarters.

So Bunter was left in possession.
"Beast!" he remarked, no doubt by way of thanks.

The Owl of the Remove turned out

the light and stretched himself on the bed. He did not undress; he was keeping ready to dodge in case the incensed Mr. Schootz searched for him again.

About ten minutes later he heard a heavy step on the gallery outside, and the sound of a door opening.

Bunter grinned.
Mr. Schootz apparently had gone to his room, expecting to find him there, no doubt taking the big stick with him.

A few minutes later voices came to Bunter's ears.

"That fat gink ain't gone to bed!" It was Mr. Schootz's voice. "You seen him anywhere, Van Duck?"

"Nope."
"Dog-gone him!"

Heavy footsteps again.
Mr. Schootz was gone.

Whether the angry director was likely to pay another visit later to his room, Bunter did not know. But he knew that he was not taking the risk.

He laid his head again on Wharton's pillow and closed his eyes. In a few minutes more, Bunter was fast asleep, and a sound like the rumble of distant thunder echoed through the room.

The last light was extinguished in the rancho; the last door had closed for the night.

Midnight came and went, and all the building was wrapped in slumber.

There was no waking eye to see two shadowy figures that lurked among the trees in the patio. The big iron gate at the arched entrance of the rancho was closed and locked for the night. But the old-fashioned lock on the gate offered slight difficulties to the light fingers that touched it in the darkness; and the two shadowy intruders had found no difficulty in penetrating into the patio, the central courtyard.

There was no waking ear to hear the stealthy footsteps that passed along the wooden gallery.

The two dark figures stopped outside the door of the room that belonged—or had belonged—to Harry Wharton.

There they stood and listened. From within came the sound of a resonant snore.

"I guess he's fast asleep, Diego!" murmured Slick Wilson, with a grin.

"Si, si!" grinned Diego.

"Hold on a spell! I reckon we want to make sure. Polk said the seventh door from the steps."

"Si, si!"

The Mexican waited while Slick Wilson counted the doors once more from the wooden steps. He rejoined the Mexican.

"O.K.!" he said. "This here is the room. Quiet!"

He groped over the door, and it opened to his touch.

Slick stepped in softly. But he need not have been so cautious. The sleeper was not likely to awake.

Within the room the darkness was intense. But the steady sound of snoring guided the two bootleggers.

Two dark shadows loomed in the darkness over Bunter.

He was dreaming that he was back in the Remove dormitory at Greyfriars, and that a dormitory spread was on. He smiled in his sleep.

He awakened suddenly.

"Owl!"

A blanket was over his face, wrapped round his head. Billy Bunter wriggled.
"I say, you fellows! No larks! I know it's you, Bob Cherry, you beast! Yow-ow-ow! Chuck it!"

But Bunter's splutter did not come audibly from the folds of the blanket. It was wound tighter round his head, and then another was wound outside it to make sure of his silence. Then the amazed Owl of the Remove felt a rope passed round him and knotted, fastening him inside the roll of blankets, rather like a mummy in its swathings.

Bunter gasped.
He was still under the impression that this was some practical joke of the juniors.

"Owl! Beasts! Lemme go! Oooch!" The folds of the blankets drowned his splutterings. Bunter felt himself lifted from the bed.

"Gosh! He sure weighs a whole heap for a kid!" muttered Slick Wilson.

"Si, si!"
"We got him!"

Bunter, wondering whether he was still dreaming, felt himself carried away. But he no longer supposed that he was the victim of a practical joke. He remembered the kidnappers!

Gomez, the leader of the gang, was in the prison hospital, but the rest of the rum-runners were at large; and it was borne in upon the fat mind of Billy Bunter that he was in their hands again. The Owl of the Remove did not struggle. Terror held him spellbound as he was carried away into the night.

THE TWELFTH CHAPTER.

The Dead of Night!

MYRON POLK stood in the darkness beside a car that showed no lights by the side of the road under shadowy trees. Any late motorist who had passed the spot on the coast road would have seen nothing of the Perfection star, or his auto. Both were hidden from sight under the trees well off the road. But at that late hour no car was likely to pass; none had passed since Myron Polk had stood there watching, waiting for the return of his confederates from Jack-Rabbit Canyon.

Polk's face was white, his eyes burning. He was calm with a forced calmness; but inwardly he was seething with excitement—passionate rage and hatred mingled with half-suppressed fear. Waiting in the darkness, he listened for the footsteps of the returning ruffians.

Hitherto, in wreaking his bitter grudge against the Greyfriars party the star had never ventured to step outside the law, excepting by the hands of his

(Continued on next page.)



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paid agents. He had made that step at last.

Gomez and his gang had been willing enough to serve him—as willing as they were to supply him with smuggled bootleg liquor. It was only a matter of money to the lawless rascals. But they had failed again and again. And now Gomez was a disabled prisoner, and the rest of the gang had scuttled out of the Santa Monica hills to find a new hiding-place.

Polk had realized at last that if he was to carry out his purpose he had to carry it out himself, and he had made up his mind to it. But it was not only a reckless hatred that inspired him now. His professional position was in jeopardy if the truth came out regarding the "sheikh" stunts that Harry Wharton had performed in his place. The matter was already rumoured in the Hollywood studios. The film star, in his bitter jealousy and hatred, had no doubt that the schoolboy fully intended to claim the credit of what he had done—to "tell the world" all about it. Only too many people in Hollywood would be glad to hear such a story and make the most of it.

In his black and bitter suspicion, it seemed to the star that the whole thing had been prearranged; that the schoolboy, with a cunning beyond his years, had made a gull of him.

He had been, as he expressed it, "played for a sucker." He had allowed the boy to take his place, believing that he could never get away with the dangerous stunts. Wharton had got away with them—intending all along to shout out from the housetops what he had done. He had been making use of Polk; using him as a cunning schemer might use any mug! Schootz, in his keenness for "realism" in the pictures, had been a party to it.

That was the belief fixed in the bitter mind of the star; and the paragraph in the Los Angeles "Film Ledger" had banished all doubt on the subject.

Like a simple "jasper," he had allowed the boy to cut the ground from under his feet.

The Los Angeles reporter had told his readers that a "new star" was about to burst on the film firmament.

Polk ground his teeth over that phrase. He had been made use of as a stepping-stone for an ambitious aspirant to film fame. There was no doubt in

his jealous, suspicious mind. If he had hated the boy before for outdoing him, humiliating him, and wounding his vanity, his hatred had now become an ungovernable passion when he looked on the schoolboy as a rival in his own profession—and a rival who had cunningly made use of him.

There were footsteps in the shadows on the road.

Polk caught his breath.

Two shadowy figures loomed under the trees, carrying between them a silent form rolled and roped in blankets.

"You've got him?"

"Sure!"

Polk peered at the silent, wrapped figure.

"You've made no mistake? You're sure?" he muttered.

Slick Wilson grunted.

"If there's any mistake, it's yours!" he answered. "You told us the seventh door from the steps on the gallery—"

"That's right! That is Wharton's room," muttered Polk. "I made sure of it; there's no mistake about that."

"Well, we've got him!"

Polk's eyes gleamed. His look was gloating as it dwelt on the swathed figure.

"There was no alarm?" he asked.

Another grunt from the bootleggers.

"Sure not! I guess any kid could have got that lock open on the rancho; and the rest was pie! We only had to walk to the room. If you was sure of the room—"

"Yes, yes! And no one woke—"

"Course not!" growled Slick. "Think we called out that we was visiting? He won't be missed till morning."

Polk laughed savagely.

"They can miss him then! They can find him then! Take him down to the beach."

"Get an eye on the road fust. We don't want to be seen," grunted Slick.

"This here is a bit more dangerous than bootlegging whisky."

"No business of yours!" snarled Polk.

"You'll be paid!"

"Kerrect!" said Slick. "But I ain't looking for ten years in the pen. Keep an eye on the road afore we cross."

Polk stepped out of the trees and scanned the road—to the west towards Jack-Rabbit Canyon, to the east towards Santa Monica and Hollywood. There was a faint glimmer of starlight on the road, the terraced shore below, and the Pacific rolling in the distance. Not a sound, or sign of life; no gleam of a car's headlights either way.

"O.K.!" he breathed. "Quick!"

The two ruffians tramped across the road bearing their heavy burden.

From the road there was a series of terraces down to the sea. The bootleggers tramped down by a rugged, winding path.

Polk followed them.

In a few minutes darkness swallowed them.

They were heading for the gully that split the range of cliffs and gave access to the beach. There lay the little cove, where the rum-runners had been wont to land their cargo of smuggled spirits. Since the discovery of the smuggling the cove had no longer been used by the bootlegging gang. The nefarious business was being carried on in another quarter.

Dark, silent, utterly deserted, lay the gully in the cliffs as the ruffians tramped down the rugged path, the Perfection star following.

It was not till they were out of sight of the road that a shadow stirred under the trees and a figure emerged into the faint starlight.

The pale gleam of the stars glimmered on a sharp nose, a pair of keen eyes, and a square, aggressive chin.

But only for a moment. Then Mr. Carter vanished into the shadows, noiselessly following the three rascals who tramped down the gully to the shore.

Mr. Carter's superintendent had scornfully told him to take a holiday. Mr. Carter was putting his holiday to good use.

THE THIRTEENTH CHAPTER.

The Wrong Man!

"HERE!" whispered Polk.

The bootleggers stopped.

There was little need to whisper; the beach was utterly deserted. No sound broke the stillness of the night, save the murmur of the Pacific on the shore. It was the stealthy instinct of fear and crime that made Myron Polk sink his voice.

The swathed figure was laid on the sand.

Polk glanced furtively round.

A lonelier spot could hardly have been chosen on all the coast of Southern California.

The cliffs shut in the beach from the land; tall, towering cliffs; only here and there accessible to a climber.

At low tide there was a wide strip of beach under the cliffs. At high tide the water washed the cliffs and surged into the lower end of the gully. At the present moment about a dozen yards of the sandy beach remained uncovered. The tide was coming in.

Only a fitful gleam of starlight broke the darkness. All was shadow and gloom.

Polk stood for some moments, looking round him, as if fearful of what the shadows might hide.

Here and there, jutting out of the sand, were great rocks, strewn with seaweed. There was cover for a hundred watchers, had any been at hand. But all was silent and still.

Slick Wilson grunted impatiently, and the Mexican gave a sardonic grin. The half-suppressed fear of the film actor amused the two hardened ruffians. They had only contempt for a man who had the wickedness but lacked the nerve to deal in crime.

"Waal?" grunted Slick at last.

Polk breathed hard.

His eyes were fixed gloatingly on the still figure on the sand, silent in the roped blankets.

There was no mercy in his heart. But his fear of what he was about to do made his hands tremble.

"You know what to do!" he muttered thickly. "In ten minutes the tide will cover him! But—"

"But I guess he ain't going to be found like that when the sea washes him up!" grinned Slick. "We ain't going to tell the world about this here stunt, Mr. Polk."

"Si, si!" grinned the Mexican.

"He won't be the first guy who's been held with his head under the sea, and found arterwards without a mark on him—found drowned!" said the bootlegger, with a hideous grin. "There was a police guy once who got too close—"

"Silence!" hissed Polk.

He did not want to listen to a tale of crime, when the crime that he now contemplated filled him with fear.

Slick Wilson grinned contemptuously.

"Lend a hand, Diego!"

"Si, si!"

Slick Wilson bent over the swathed

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"Will you let me have that bed, you beasts?" roared Bunter. "No, but I'll let you have the pillow!" said Bob Cherry, swiping out at the Owl of the Remove. "Yaroooh!" Bunter got the full force of the pillow and sat down quite suddenly on the floor with a bump. (See Chapter 15.)

figure on the sand, and jerked the blankets loose from the hidden face.

There was a wild howl.

"Yaroooh!"

"Shut up, you!" growled the bootlegger savagely.

"Yaroooh! Help! I say, you fellows! Yow-ow-ow-ow!" yelled Billy Bunter. "Yooop! Help! Bob Cherry—Wharton—Inky—help!"

A rough hand over Bunter's mouth silenced him.

Polk gave a convulsive start.

"That—that—" His voice was gasping, husky. "That is not Wharton!"

Slick Wilson stared at the fat face glimmering in the shadows, at the little round eyes dilated with terror.

"Thunder, it sure ain't!" he stuttered.

The bootlegger savagely dragged the blanket over the fat face again. Bunter's yell died away in a gasping mumble.

Polk trembled with rage.

"You fool—fool—fool!" he hissed. "That is not Wharton! I know that voice—that is the fat fool Bunter!"

"Sure!" said Slick. "We had that fat gink once, and he got away! Search me!"

Bunter mumbled helplessly in the swathing blankets.

"You fool!" Myron Polk choked with rage. "You made a mistake after all! Fool—fool!"

"I guess I ain't the fool here!" snarled Slick. "I counted the doors twice. The greaser knows—"

"Si, si!" said the Mexican. "It was the right room—the seventh from the stair—"

Polk spat out a curse.

"Then they must have changed rooms

—Satan knows why! That is not Wharton!"

Slick Wilson shrugged his shoulders.

"He's took the other guy's place, and I reckon he's got to go the way the other guy was going!"

"Si, si!" grinned Diego.

"Hold your tongue, you fool—dog—villain!" hissed Polk. "Do you think— You hound, silence!"

Slick scowled savagely.

"You reckon you're going to let the fat gink mosey back to the location and spill all he knows!" he snarled.

Polk panted.

He pressed his hand to his brow. His hatred of Wharton had become almost an insane passion to the film star. But he was utterly incapable of adopting Slick Wilson's suggestion in regard to Bunter. Bunter was nothing to him. He included Bunter in his dislike of the whole Greyfriars party—but that was all. He looked on him with contemptuous disregard. Nothing would have induced him to share in, or permit, the cold-blooded villainy of which the hardened bootlegger was capable.

But he was at a loss. Never had a wretched dabbler in crime been so nonplussed.

"It is but a life, senor!" murmured the Mexican.

"Hold your tongue, you greaser!"

Diego's black eyes glinted, but he held his tongue, and shrugged his shoulders contemptuously.

"After all, he has seen nothing—knows nothing!" muttered Polk. "He knows nothing of my being here—"

"I guess—"

"Silence! Let me think! I tell you he shall not be hurt!" snarled Polk.

"Do you think I will stain my hands

with blood for that worthless fat fool? Hold your tongue!"

The bootlegger snarled, and was silent.

A faint mumble came from the folds of the blankets. Bunter was wriggling and squirming. Slick Wilson kicked at the bundle of blankets, and there was a suppressed yelp, and the Owl of the Remove lay still.

Polk stood in hurried, troubled, enraged thought—nonplussed. It was not Wharton who had fallen into his hands. Some maddening freak of chance had defeated him. Wharton, his hated enemy, was still safe at the rancho—Bunter, insignificant, a despised nobody, lay there—useless to him, a danger to him. What was to be done? Had the rum-runners still been haunting their hidden den in the Santa Monica hills, the fat junior might have been taken there a prisoner. But that den of rascality was deserted now, with the police combing the mountains for bootleggers and bootleg liquor. There was only one safe way of disposing of the fat fool who had so unexpectedly fallen into his hands—and that was the way suggested by Slick—that made Polk shudder with repulsion. That way was impossible; but what other way?

"Waal?" growled Slick. "Give it a name, boss! I guess we got to be the other side of Santa Monica afore dawn."

"Si, si!" murmured Diego.

"Let him go!" muttered Polk at last. "I will get out of sight—he will not know you in the dark—anyhow, he has seen you before, when you seized him in the hills. Let him go—start him running—I know the fat fool: he will not stop even to look round."

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Slick gave a surly grunt.

"Safer to—"

"Confound you, hold your tongue!" hissed Polk. "Do you think I will let you put my neck in the rope because you have bungled! That fat fool can do us no harm—I tell you, let him go!"

"It's your say-so—you're paying!" growled Slick, and he turned to the bundle of blankets on the sand.

Myron Polk hurried up the beach and backed into an embayment of the cliff. Bunter was not to see him—was to have no suspicion that he had had any hand in what had happened. Once the fat junior had run, the coast would be clear. It was a mile to Jack-Rabbit Canyon from that spot, even if Bunter could find his way at night: he would have ample time to return to his car and drive away to Hollywood before there could be any alarm. Bunter, certainly, was not likely to make any investigations before he fled. Once he was free, the fat junior could be depended upon to depart as fast as his fat legs could carry him.

It was the easiest way out of the unexpected difficulty—the only way, in fact, except by a useless crime. Polk drew back in the hollow of the tall cliff, drew a silver flask from his pocket and drank a deep draught of bootleg liquor.

Slick Wilson, bending over the Owl of the Remove, loosened the ropes and jerked the blankets aside, grasped Bunter by the shoulders, and swung him to his feet, his face towards the gully.

"Beat it!" he snarled.

THE FOURTEENTH CHAPTER.

A Surprise for Mr. Carter!

BILLY BUNTER gasped.

He stood unsteadily on his fat little legs, terrified almost out of his podgy wits, and would have fallen again but for the grasp of the brawny bootlegger on his shoulders from behind.

Polk had disappeared; and Bunter did not even know that the Perfection star had been there. Diego had drawn back into the shadows. Slick Wilson stood behind Bunter as he held him.

"You hear me, you fat gink?" He shook the Owl of the Remove. "You want to beat it out of this, and you want to beat it quick. You look round afore you quit, and you'll hear my gun. Got that?"

"Ow! Yes!" gasped Bunter.

He blinked round him dizzily.

"I—I say—"



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"Beat it, you dog-goned geck!"

"I—I can't see—"

"What?"

"Without my specs!" gasped Bunter. "Lemme get my specs!" He fumbled in his pocket for his spectacle-case, in which he had placed his glasses before going to sleep on Wharton's bed at the rancho.

"Search me!" ejaculated Slick Wilson.

"Yaroo!"

A powerful kick on his tight trousers started Bunter—without his specs. He staggered forward.

"You in sight when I count three and my gun talk!" growled Slick savagely.

"Ow! I'm going! Yow!"

Bunter tore away.

Without his spectacles, the Owl of the Remove was in a difficulty. But he dared not stop a second, or a fraction of a second.

He blinked round him as he ran.

Black against the night rose the tall range of cliffs, split in one spot by the deep gully that led up to the terraced shore. Bunter could see that, at least; and he knew where he was now; he had been down that gully before. That was the way up to the road that ran along the foot of the Santa Monica hills—the way to safety. Bunter tore over the sand that flew in showers from his pounding feet and dashed into the gully.

It was a steep path up; and Billy Bunter was no sprinter. But he charged up the rugged path breathlessly. His only thought was to get away from the unknown ruffians on the beach. Why they had let him go—why they had taken him at all—he could not imagine—neither did he stop to think it out. All he thought of was getting away.

He left the beach behind and charged up the rocky gully. From the shadows ahead a dark figure appeared.

"Stop—"

There was a screech of terror from Bunter.

Terror lent him a desperate courage. Instead of stopping, he charged right on at the man in his path.

Crash!

"Yarooogh!"

"Oh, gee-whiz!"

Mr. Peter Carter went sprawling over the rocks, spluttering. Bunter reeled and fell, yelling.

"Yow-ow-ow! Help! I say, you fellows— Yarooogh! Help! Fire! Murder! Yooop!"

Mr. Carter sat up dizzily.

"Carry me home to die!" he stuttered.

"Yarooogh! Help!"

The Los Angeles detective staggered to his feet.

"Keep off!" shrieked Bunter, as the shadowy figure approached him in the gully. "Keep off! Mercy! Yarooogh! Help!"

"Dog-gone my cats, if it ain't that fat gink Bunter!" exclaimed Mr. Carter in blank amazement.

He flashed the light of a pocket torch in Bunter's fat, terrified face. The Owl of the Remove yelled.

"Keep off! It wasn't me! Yarooogh!"

"You dog-goned fat geck!" growled Mr. Carter. "Don't you know me? I'm Carter—"

"Eh?"

"Stow that rumpus, you ornery gink!" snapped Mr. Carter. "Say, this sure gets my goat! I'm sure beat to a frazzle!"

"Oh dear! Help! Ow!"

"Shut up, you geck!" hissed Mr. Carter, so ferociously that Bunter gave a gasp of terror, and was silent.

The Los Angeles detective stood staring at him, perplexed, and listening.

He was utterly taken aback by discovering Bunter there. A minute more, and the detective would have been on the beach, closing in on the three rascals who held—as he firmly believed—Harry Wharton a prisoner. He had lost sight of them while picking his way cautiously down the rocky gully. Mr. Carter had never been so surprised in his life as he was when Billy Bunter charged up from the beach and bowled him over.

From the beach came a sound of footsteps grinding on the sand. Bunter's yells had been heard far and wide.

Slick Wilson and Diego, realising that someone was at hand, and having the best of reasons for desiring to keep out of sight, were scuttling away along the shore to seek another path up to the road.

Mr. Carter stooped and shook Bunter by the shoulder.

"Say, you geek——"

"Yarooogh!"

"Where's Wharton?" hissed Mr. Carter.

"Eh?" Bunter blinked at the detective. It had dawned upon his fat brain by this time that this was not a foe, but a friend. "I—I suppose he's in bed."

"In bed?" yapped Mr. Carter.

"I—I suppose so. Oh, dear! Ow!"

"Wasn't he in the hands of those guys?" snapped Mr. Carter.

"Ow! No. I was. Oh, crikey!"

"Dog-gone it, if this ain't got me beat! Mean to say it was you them two guys brought along from the rancho?" hissed Mr. Carter.

"Oh, dear! Yes. Ow!"

"Search me! Then how did you get away?"

"They let me go. Ow!"

"Let you go?" said Mr. Carter dazedly. "They brought you here and let you go? Carry me home to die, if this ain't the elephant's hind leg! I'm sure beat to a frazzle!"

"Oh, dear! Oh, crikey! Ow!"

Mr. Carter hurried on down the gully. He had counted on "cinching" Myron Polk, and "getting the goods" on him, as he expressed it—catching the film star fairly in the act. He had not doubted for a moment that it was Harry Wharton who was swathed in that bundle of blankets, that he had glimpsed under the trees by the road. Whether the junior was being taken down to the beach to be placed on board a kidnapping vessel, or for a darker purpose, Mr. Carter did not know. In either case, he was ready to intervene, gun in hand. But this strange turn of events utterly perplexed him.

He reached the beach.

Slick Wilson and Diego had vanished in the dim distance already. Myron Polk, his heart throbbing with fear, was crouched in the hollow of the cliff, a score of yards away. In the dim starlight nothing met Mr. Carter's eyes save the dim sands, and rocks, and the washing sea, creeping closer and closer to the cliffs. On the sea there was no sign of a craft of any kind.

Mr. Carter fumed under his breath.

He was hopelessly perplexed and irritated. He returned to the gully at last, where he found Billy Bunter gasping, where he had left him.

"Say, you gink, you want to beat it for home," he growled.

"I don't know the way——"

"Oh, shucks! Come with me, you jay!"

Bunter trailed wearily after Mr. Carter up the gully. On the road above, the detective left him, and Bunter plodded away for Jack-Rabbit. Mr. Carter stalked away in the opposite

direction, the most puzzled and perplexed man in California at that moment.

It was not till the sea was washing up to the cliffs that Myron Polk left his hiding-place and splashed through shallow water back to the gully and clambered up to the road. Who it was that had met Bunter in the gully he did not know, but he had a haunting terror of watching eyes. Someone had been on the spot, by chance or design, he knew that. He started at every shadow as he picked his way back to the road and returned to the car hidden under the trees there. He did not breathe freely till he was in the car, racing down the dark road to Hollywood.

From the roadside Mr. Carter watched the car flash past and vanish in the distance towards the film town.

He scowled savagely after it.

THE FIFTEENTH CHAPTER.

A Tale of Woe!

"I SAY, you fellows——"

"Hallo, hallo, hallo!"

"What the thump——"

Dawn was breaking over Jack-Rabbit Canyon and glimmering on the patio of the old ranch-house.

Well done, Frederick Allan, of 308, Gt. Northern Road, Woodside, Aberdeen, for sending in the following Limerick:

On the films Bunter wanted to be.
But it wasn't so easy, you see.

The Producer cried: "Say!

You fat, silly jay,

You look a born idiot to me!"

Fred's effort wins a useful leather pocket wallet. What about you having a shot at winning one, chum?

Harry Wharton and Bob Cherry awakened simultaneously.

The door of the room opened from the gallery and a fat figure stumbled in and sat down on the bed.

Bunter was tired. His long tramp back to the location had tired him. Naturally, he sat down. His fatigue and his avoirdupois united to make him sit down heavily. That was quite natural. Nevertheless, it was startling, and rather painful, for the fellow on whose unfortunate feet Bunter plumped down.

"I say——" gasped Bunter.

"What the thumping thump?" exclaimed Harry Wharton. "Gerroff! Roll off! Oh, crumbs!"

"Oh, really, Wharton——"

"Gerroff!" shrieked Wharton. "You're squashing me!—You're laming me! Gerroff!"

Bunter, however, was too tired to move. If his weight was squashing the extremities of the captain of the Remove, so much the worse for those extremities. Bunter was there to stop.

But he did not stop long. Bob Cherry, on the farther side of the bed, planted a pyjamaed knee in the middle of Bunter's podgy back, and shoved. Bunter gave a yelp, a gasp, and rolled off the bed and landed on the floor.

"Ow! Beast! Wow!"

He sat up on the floor and remained there. Harry Wharton glared at him, while Bob Cherry grinned.

"You fat idiot!"

"I say, you fellows!" groaned Bunter. "I'm worn out. I've been murdered and——"

"Wha-a-at?"

"I mean nearly murdered," groaned Bunter.

"Not quite?" asked Bob, sarcastically.

"Nunno. Oh, dear! I say, you fellows, I'm jolly well going back to Hollywood. It's not safe here. Oh, jiminy!"

"Schootz has been after you?" asked Bob.

"Blow Schootz! No. Who cares for Schootz! Ow! I've been kidnapped, and dragged away by the hair of my head, and murdered—that is, practically murdered! Oh dear——"

"You look jolly lively for a chap that's been recently killed," remarked Bob Cherry. "Are you you, or your ghost? If you're you, shut up! If you're your ghost, avaunt!"

"Beast! I say, you fellows, get out of that bed, will you?"

"Eh?"

"I want to turn in. I'm not going back to Wharton's room. Those villains might come there again. I'll take that bed, if you fellows don't mind."

"And suppose we do mind?" grinned Bob.

"I hope you're not going to be selfish. In fact, I'd like you two fellows to stay awake and guard the door while I go to sleep."

"Great pip!"

"Otherwise, I shan't feel safe, after what's happened," argued Bunter. "I've had a fearful time. Kidnapped, drowned—I mean nearly drowned!—lost, and assassinated. Oh, dear!"

"Anything else?" asked Bob.

"If you don't believe me——"

"Believe you! My hat! Go back to bed and dream again," suggested Bob Cherry.

"I wasn't dreaming, you chump!" hooted Bunter. "I was lying in Wharton's room——"

"And now you're lying in my room," said Bob. "Why can't you chuck lying for a bit and tell the jolly old truth?"

"You silly fathead! I mean I was lying, not lying!" hooted Bunter. "I was lying on the bed, when they collared me and bore me away—a whole gang of them. They bore me——"

"And now you're boring me," said Bob. "You bet they didn't bore you so much as you bore me."

"I tell you they bore me away, wrapped in blankets. My head was wrapped——"

"Your head will be rapped again—hard—if you don't let a fellow go to sleep!" hooted Bob. "Buzz off!"

"They got me down to the beach," gasped Bunter. "I tell you it happened—it really did! Of course, I wasn't frightened. You fellows would have been. I said: 'I defy you villains!—just like that. And then——'"

"Then you woke up?"

"No," yelled Bunter. "Then they—they let me go, and I—I came back."

"What awful rotters!" exclaimed Bob indignantly. "They might have kept you when they'd got you!"

"Why, you awful beast!" gasped Bunter. "I had a frightful narrow escape! You might have lost me!"

"No such luck! Is that all?" asked Bob. "If you've done, for goodness' sake dry up and let a fellow go to sleep!"

"Suppose they come back?" howled Bunter.

"Oh, they won't! You won't have

the same nightmare twice over," said Bob comfortingly.

"It wasn't a nightmare, you silly owl!" shrieked Bunter. "I say, Wharton, old chap, you believe me, don't you?"

"Hardly," said Harry, laughing. "Go back to bed, ass!"

"It's all true!" wailed Bunter.

"Bow-wow!"

"They got in, in the middle of the night, and carried me off!" gasped Bunter. "I believe they were going to chuck me in the sea, but they changed their minds for some reason."

"Afraid of making the Pacific overflow, perhaps," suggested Bob Cherry.

"Beast!"

Bunter picked himself up from the floor.

"I say, you fellows, I think you might turn out and let me have that bed. There's a sofa here you can sit on till morning. I'd like you to stay awake and keep watch."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Blessed if I see anything to cackle at. Will you let me have that bed, you beasts?" roared Bunter.

"I'll let you have the pillow," said Bob.

And he did, with unerring aim.

"Yarooogh!"

Bunter got the pillow, and did not seem at all pleased therewith. He sat down quite suddenly on the floor.

"Ow! Beast!"

The Owl of the Remove struggled up, seized the pillow, and returned it—hard. There was a roar from Bob Cherry as he caught it with his face.

"Why, I—I'll—I'll—you wait a minute till I get out—"

Bunter did not wait.

He departed hurriedly from the room, slammed the door, and rolled along the gallery. The patio glistened in the

light of early dawn, but no one was stirring yet. Bunter blinked round him uneasily, and scuttled into Johnny Bull's room. Johnny was sleeping the sleep of the just, but he was suddenly awakened by a shake. He opened his eyes and blinked in the dusk of the room.

"Groogh! Wharrer marrer? What—what—"

"I say, Johnny, old chap—"

"You fat villain, wharrer you waking me for?"

"I've been kidnapped—Yarooogh!" roared Bunter, as Johnny Bull smote. He staggered away from the bedside.

"Now come back and have another!" said Johnny Bull ferociously.

"Beast!"

Again Bunter made a hurried departure. Johnny Bull settled down to sleep once more.

"Of all the unsympathetic beasts—" gasped Bunter, as he rolled out into the gallery.

He did not seek any more of the juniors. It was only too clear that there was no sympathy going. A fear that the kidnappers might return kept him from going back to Wharton's room. A lingering dread of Mr. Schootz kept him from going to his own. He trailed dismally up and down the gallery for some time, and at last sat down on a bench to rest, and in a few minutes nodded off to sleep there. Once asleep, the Owl of the Remove was not likely to wake.

He was fast asleep and snoring when Mr. Rigg Schootz turned out and took a walk in the patio before breakfast. The sound of a deep and resonant snore from the wooden gallery caught his ears.

Mr. Schootz stared up and sighted Bunter. He glared. Then he went to fetch a big stick.

Billy Bunter awakened suddenly. He awakened with a grasp on his collar.

"Oh! Ow! Help! Murder!" roared Bunter. "Keep off! I say, you fellows, they've got me again! Help!"

Whack! Whack! Whack!

"I guess this is where you get what's coming to you, you fat gink!" roared Mr. Schootz.

"Yarooogh! Help! Fire! Kidnappers!" bawled Bunter.

Whack! Whack! Whack!

"Yow-ow-ow! Why, it's the old beast Schootz!" gasped Bunter. "I say—Yow-ow! Leggo! Yooop! I've been kidnapped! Yaroooh! Help!"

Whack! Whack! Whack! Whack!

"Yow-ow-ow-ow!"

"There!" gasped Mr. Schootz. "I guess that will put you wise about playing tricks on my telephone! What?"

"Yow-ow-ow-wooooo!"

Mr. Schootz tucked his stick under his arm, and descended the steps into the patio, feeling better. He was satisfied now.

Bunter was not feeling better. He was not feeling satisfied. But in an imperfect world it is impossible for everybody to be pleased.

THE SIXTEENTH CHAPTER.

The Peril of the Night!

HARRY WHARTON & CO. smiled.

Billy Bunter scowled.

The morning's work on the location was over, and the Famous Five, being at leisure, had given a hearing to Bunter's story. They had listened to his tale of woe.

Unfortunately, Billy Bunter told the tale with his usual exaggerations and disregard for veracity. Billy Bunter could stick to anything but the truth.

That Bunter had had a severe attack of nightmare, and imagined the whole thing, the juniors took as a matter of course. In fact, the proceedings of the kidnappers, as Bunter described them, seemed rather inexplicable, if true. They had taken the trouble to root Bunter out from the rancho, carried him stealthily down to the beach, and let him go again. The whole proceeding seemed rather to resemble that of the Duke of York who, with ten thousand men, marched up a hill and then marched down again. According to Bunter, Mr. Carter had been on the spot and could bear out his story. But Mr. Carter was not at the location, and could not be called as a witness. So the Greyfriars fellows took the liberty of regarding William George Bunter's story as simply one more of Bunter's yarns—merely that, and nothing more.

It was in vain that Bunter added more and more details to the story, with a view to convincing the doubting Thomases. Every added detail only made the story seem more unlikely than ever.

Only Hurree Jamset Ram Singh's dusky face had a very thoughtful expression, and he did not smile.

"I say, you fellows, you ought to take a fellow's word, you know," said Bunter. "You know me!"

"We know you too jolly well!" grinned Bob Cherry.

"Oh, really, Cherry—"

"My esteemed chums," murmured Hurree Jamset Ram Singh, "the esteemed narrative of the idiotic Bunter is terrifically improbable. But—"

"But rats!" said Johnny Bull. "You don't mean to say that you believe a word of it."

"It was a nightmare, of course," said Nugent. "Why the thump should they bag Bunter and let him go again?"

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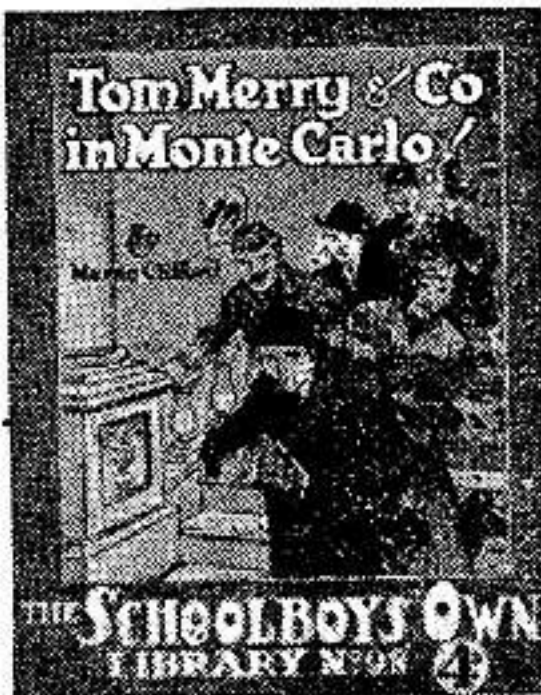
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"They did!" howled Bunter.

"And who were 'they,' anyhow?" demanded the Bounder.

"I don't know! I'm not a cat, to see in the dark!" snapped Bunter. "I hadn't my specs on, either. But I knew the voice of one of the beasts. It was one of that bootlegging gang."

"Bow-wow!"

"They got me down on the beach!" nipped Bunter. "I tell you, they did. I was wrapped in the blankets. One of them began pulling the blankets off, and as soon as he saw my face he—"

"Fainted?" asked Bob Cherry.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Beast!"

"My esteemed and ridiculous chums," said Hurree Jamset Ram Singh, "the gate of this absurd rancho was found unlocked this morning. I have inquiringly asked the question."

"There you are!" exclaimed Bunter triumphantly. "The beasts left it unlocked; and it was unlocked when I got back."

"Left unlocked over-night, of course," said Johnny Bull.

"Yah!"

"My ridiculous friends," murmured the Nabob of Bhanipur, "I have been thoughtfully reflecting on this absurd matter, and it occurs to my esteemed brain that there is one point you have preposterously overlooked!"

"Go ahead, Inky!" said Harry.

"The excellent and execrable Bunter was not in his own room," said the nabob. "But for the terrific wrath of the honourable Schootz and his absurd stick, the fat and frabjous Bunter would have been in his own room, and then—"

"Well, what then?" granted Johnny Bull.

"Then the esteemed and absurd Wharton would have been in the room which he ridiculously gave up to Bunter."

"Oh!" exclaimed Harry.

"What difference does that make?" asked Johnny.

Hurree Jamset Ram Singh smiled.

"The execrable kidnappers bagged the esteemed Bunter in the dark; but they came to Wharton's room. It appears to my preposterous mind that they came there for the estimable Wharton."

"Oh!" repeated Wharton.

"My hat!" ejaculated Bob. "Of course, Wharton would have been in that room, but for Bunter's idiotic games—"

"Oh, really, Cherry—"

"But how the thump would they know it was Wharton's room?" demanded Johnny Bull.

"The honourable and disgusting Polk may have told them, my ridiculous Johnny!" said the nabob gently.

"Oh!"

The Greyfriars fellows looked at one another.

"The estimable Bunter was collared in the dark and rolled in the ridiculous blankets," said Hurree Jamset Ram



Mr. Schootz was about to take a walk in the patio before breakfast when the sound of a deep and resonant snore from the gallery caught his ears. The film-director stared round and sighted Bunter. Then he glared, and went and fetched a big stick.
(See Chapter 15.)

Singh. "It was not till they had him on the absurd beach that they uncovered his preposterous and ludicrous physiognomy."

Wharton's face paled a little.

"If I had been in the room—" he muttered.

"In that esteemed case you would not be here now, my excellent chum. They let the absurd Bunter go, because they had got the wrong pig by the ear. I thoughtfully opine that that accounts for the esteemed milk in the ridiculous coconut!"

Wharton set his lips. He understood now.

"That villain Polk! They came for me—and they got that fat idiot by mistake because he'd bagged my room—"

"Exactly."

Bob Cherry whistled. None of the juniors had any doubt now. The whole thing was clear.

Wharton breathed hard. What would have happened had he been in his room that night; had he been taken down to the tide-swept beach? Was it kidnapping that the stealthy scoundrels had intended, or— Or had the wings of

the Angel of Death passed him by that night, while he slept, unknowing?

There was a long silence.

It was broken by Billy Bunter.

"I say, you fellows! Perhaps you believe me now—"

"You ass! Dry up!"

"I like that!" said Bunter scornfully. "I'd like to know which of you fellows would have done what I did? Taking a fellow's place and running his risks for him! Something like a pal, if you ask me! Not that I expect any gratitude! I take a fellow's place, and save him from fearful danger, at the risk of my life, and all you fellows can say is—"

"Rats!"

And the fellows said it all together!

THE END.

(Whatever you do, chums, don't miss the next magnificent yarn dealing with the adventures of Harry Wharton & Co. in Los Angeles, entitled: "ALL THROUGH BUNTER!" which will appear in next week's bumper issue of the MAGNET. It's the treat of the week, chums!)

THE MAGNET LIBRARY.—No. 1,105.

START READING THIS BRILLIANT NEW DIRT-TRACK SERIAL TO-DAY, BOYS!



Suspicion!

THE proverbial sixth sense will sometimes tell a man that he is under scrutiny, and so it was with "Tornado" Rossiter. For all at once, without warning, he turned his head.

Jimmy Beresford encountered the dull glint of Rossiter's tinted goggles. They concealed the man's eyes, even as the aviation mask concealed his face. Whatever expression his countenance registered, it was not betrayed by this enigma of the dirt tracks, this champion around whom so much mystery was woven.

Yet Jimmy could have sworn that Rossiter started at sight of him and, ceasing to tamper with the gauze shield around his engine, the man wheeled his bike on to the track somewhat abruptly.

"Rossiter's riding against Ben Stevenson in a match-race," Ron Connolly observed. "It's to be the best out of three rounds. But I expect Rossiter will win the first two straight off and make the third unnecessary. Stevenson isn't in the same class."

Jimmy Beresford was scarcely listening. He was thinking of the suspicions that had flashed upon him. He was trying to gauge the strength of that suspicion, dwelling on the facts that had prompted it.

A black leather suit and a Volson bike.

"Ron," said Jimmy, "there's something I want to tell you. It's about what happened the other night at dad's place. As you know, dad reckoned the thief was after the blue-print of your invention, and I think—I think I've got an idea who the thief was. It may have been—Rossiter!"

"Rossiter!" Ron echoed the name in blank astonishment, and then gaped at his chum.

"There isn't much to go on," Jimmy continued. "Only his track togs, and the speed-iron he's riding. But just now, when he looked round, it struck me he seemed uneasy. Of course, it would be mad to make any accusation. The

SPEEDWAY PALS!

A. CARNEY ALLAN

connection's so slight. And maybe I'm doing the fellow an injustice."

Ron suddenly fluttered the pages of a booklet that he was carrying. It was a copy of the "Dirt Track News," on sale at Elsenham Park.

"Look at this," he said, holding out the paper. "It's an advertisement that appears every week, and you can bet that Rossiter gets a fat fee for putting his name to it."

Jimmy saw an action-photograph of a

to evade him until the seventh event of the programme came round.

This was Round 2 of the match-race between Rossiter and Stevenson, and again Rossiter won.

Jimmy could have wished it otherwise, for he had thought of turning amateur sleuth and following Rossiter after the meeting. This was not to be, however, unless Rossiter waited till the end, but it was not likely, as he was not entered for any other race.

Jimmy now wheeled his bike on to the track and took up his position on the outer edge. The competitors for the Club Final were limited to four—the riders who had won first and second places in the two heats—and Jimmy had changed into a red slip.

The others who were ranged up in line with him were three youngsters whose names were a little more familiar to the "fans" than Jimmy's. Their names were Summerton, Bellamy, and Perkins, and the former, winner of the second heat, had covered the track in a time equal to that made by Jimmy.

Jimmy forgot Rossiter in the tense expectancy of the moment before the "push-off."

The starter's flag signalled him away. Two seconds later Perkins and Bellamy were shoved forward, and Summerton, at scratch, was the last off the mark.

The exhaust-ports of the four bikes blazed away their raucous challenge, and under the roar of his own machine, Jimmy heard the thunderous engine-notes of the pursuing speed-irons. But Jimmy was no longer the tentative, hesitant

If fortune does favour the brave there's a packet of good luck coming to our young speed merchant, Jimmy Beresford. Meet him on the dirt-track, boys!

rider on a speed-iron, and over it, in black type, was the announcement:

"'Tornado' Rossiter, the Mystery Man of the Speedways, Recommends the Volson 'Twin.'"

Jimmy said nothing, but he watched Rossiter thoughtfully as the champion circled the track with Stevenson, coming into the front straight for a flying start. Both men opened up as they approached the line, but from the fall of the starter's arm it was Rossiter's race, and he won comfortably by forty yards.

Jimmy himself was due to appear on the track again for Event No. 8, the final of the Club Handicap, but in the meantime his interest was centred on Rossiter. It may have been the youngster's fancy, but the latter seemed

rider who had taken the first bend so cautiously during his heat. He was "warmed up" to the game, and he dashed for the corner at speed.

He shut off, and raked round the curve, slamming in again at wide angle as he swung on to the back straight. Not one of his rivals had overtaken him at the bend, but Bellamy gained the straight half a length behind him, with a precarious skid.

They stormed towards the second curve, Jimmy holding his narrow lead, Bellamy fighting in vain to pull level with him. But behind the two of them was the threat of a challenger from another quarter. Summerton, the scratch man, had thrust past Perkins to take third place, and was going "all out" to catch up with the leaders.

Close to the inner edge, Jimmy, Bellamy, and Summerton wavered round the second bend. Then came Perkins, who, in a reckless attempt to recover lost ground, launched his speed-iron into the turn at a speed too great for him.

Perkins' bike slashed across the curve with the dirt spraying from its back wheel in a neck-or-nothing skid. High up on the bend he came out of the saddle as if catapulted, the machine somersaulting amidst a cloud of dust.

Perkins was lucky to escape unhurt, and, rising, he stumbled on to the turf, while the wreck of his speed-iron was dragged off the track by two attendants.

Meanwhile, the other three were crossing the line for the second lap. When once more they hit the bend that curved into the back-straight, Bellamy was still short of Jimmy by half a length. But Summerton was making the pair of them sensible of his challenge, for he had drawn to within a yard of Bellamy.

Jimmy switched into the curve. The cinders spurted from his rear wheel, and he heard them rattle against the gauze shield round Bellamy's engine. He heard, too, the vicious blurring of Summerton's exhaust-spouts as the scratch man juggled with a "cut-out" button on his handlebars.

Summerton was still in the novice class, but he had ambitions to imitate the big men of the game, and the effect of his experiment with the cut-out was to sling his back wheel round in a fearsome broadside.

When the trio came out of the bend the cinder spray from Jimmy's bike was still rattling on Bellamy's gauze shield—and Summerton was scrabbling into the straight dead level with the last named. The scratch man's handlebars were twisted hard round against the tearing skid into which he had thrown himself, and his foot was digging at the track in the approved style. But it was more by luck than skill that he mastered his machine.

Jimmy realised that in Summerton he had a dangerous rival for the honours of the race—one even more dangerous than Bellamy—and on the second bend of the second lap the youngster extended himself to the utmost.

The tail of his machine whipped to the side through the loose dirt, and the handle-bars seemed to wrench against his gauntleted fists. He fought for control, with the muscles of his forearms taking the strain. He knew that he had rushed the curve at too great a speed, but to keep his lead against the reckless and the more experienced Summerton he had to take a chance.

Summerton came round in the same wild way as before, and he swept past Bellamy with front wheel twisted hard round again to control an ugly broadside. But he did not sweep past Jimmy, for the youngster managed to

retain first place by his own desperate effort.

Both Jimmy and Summerton swung on to the front straight in safety, and it was now clear that the race was to be settled between these two, for Bellamy was several lengths in arrears when he pushed out of the bend.

Throughout the third lap Summerton pressed Jimmy for the lead, forcing the youngster to take chance after chance on the curves. The two of them were riding wildly, taking the corners at a speed which was foolhardy for novices, but for the two of them the luck held good.

On the last bend of the last lap the luck changed. Jimmy dashed into the turn and instantly fell into a slashing skid. Summerton, tearing after him, attempted a broadside once more.

Summerton's back wheel was slung towards the right as he lifted his finger off the "cut-out" for an instant. The speed-iron heeled over, and Summerton could not control it. Half-way round the bend he came down.

He was flung clear, sliding through the dirt on the point of his shoulder, while his bike went forward on its side, grinding, spiral fashion, along the track.

The rear wheel of the wreck swung round and struck the tail of Jimmy's machine. The Beresford "twin" took a savage switch to the inner edge of the speedway, and for an instant it seemed as if Jimmy must crash as well. But he jerked at the steering, and simultaneously he brought the steel toe-plate of his field boot into play.

The sparks leapt from under his foot as the toe-plate scored through the cinders. His bike was swaying crazily, but he managed to keep it upright, and as he scrabbled into the home stretch he gave it the throttle, in a final endeavour to straighten the machine by sheer motive-power.

The bike did not straighten, however, for, with the exhaust stabbing flames, the Beresford "twin" zig-zagged from side to side.

The finishing line was in front of Jimmy, and the victory within his grasp if he could only fight on until he had crossed.

The youngster fought on, his hands striving against the steering, and Jimmy won. But the back wheel was slashing round breadthwise as the checked flag dropped for him, and next moment he came down in a helter-skelter crash.

INTRODUCTION.

Jimmy Beresford, a cheerful, athletic youngster, whose heart and soul are in all things relating to speed and motor-cycling, is the son of Gordon Beresford, the Head of Beresford Motors. Mr. Beresford is considering the plans of a new motor-cycle engine invented by Ron Connolly, Jimmy's pal, who, though of a more serious disposition, is equally absorbed in motor-cycling. At the Elsenham Park Speedway, the two chums witness the victory of "Tornado" Rossiter, the unbeaten champion of the track, in the race for the Silver Armlet. That evening, mainly owing to an encounter with his cousin Otto, Jimmy is told by his irate father that he will either have to take a position in the works or fend for himself. To Gordon Beresford's amazement, Jimmy decides to do the latter, with the guarantee from his father that if he earns five hundred pounds in twelve months, he wins a position in the works at seven hundred and fifty pounds a year. During the night the house is burgled, and the safe rifled by a man in a black leather suit, who is undoubtedly after the plans of Ron's invention. Jimmy does his best to overcome the intruder, but the man gets away on his motor-cycle, a Volson machine. Faced by the prospect of earning his own living, Jimmy's first thoughts are of dirt-track racing, and, helped by Ron's expert mechanical knowledge, he wins a thrilling novices' race at the Elsenham Speedway. Soon after the finish Jimmy catches sight of "Tornado" Rossiter with his Volson racer, and notices with a start that the man is wearing a black leather suit!

(Now read on.)

Jimmy picked himself up dazedly, and marvelled to find that he was unharmed except for a bruise or two. A couple of attendants ran to his aid, but he waved them away, and picked up his bike to wheel it towards the pits. He was dimly conscious of a certain amount of cheering, and felt his blood glow in his veins.

In the pits he found Ron awaiting him.

"A close call, Jimmy!" Ron said excitedly. "There were times when I thought Summerton had licked you! But you pulled it off. Oh, boy, you certainly did pull it off!"

Jimmy was grinning happily, but all at once his grin faded, for he saw something that brought back to mind the subject that had concerned him before the race.

"Rossiter hasn't gone, then," he said. "That is his bike over there, isn't it?"

And he pointed to a Volson speed-iron.

"That's his bike all right," Ron told him. "But Rossiter's gone, nevertheless. He has a special mechanic to take care of his machine after every meeting. And here's something that might interest you, Jimmy. I happen to know that Rossiter's mechanic is a man from the Volson Company's London depot."

Jimmy's eyes narrowed thoughtfully, and he was still in a pensive mood



JIMMY BERESFORD.

when he left the speedway with Ron. But outside the gates of the big stadium the two had an encounter that interrupted the trend of Jimmy's reflections.

A car nosed its way out of a "park," and pulled up across the pavement in front of the two youngsters, to allow a string of traffic to pass before swinging out into the road.

It was a cream car with pale green wings, and behind the steering-wheel Jimmy recognised his cousin.

"Hallo, Otto!" he said cheerfully. "Wonder what dad would think if he saw you at Elsenham Park?"

The driver of the car started at the sound of Jimmy's voice, and then his sallow face became clouded with an unpleasant expression.

"I only came here to make sure that you had taken to the dirt-track," he answered. "Your father heard a rumour to that effect. He will be none too pleased when I confirm the rumour."

"Go ahead and confirm it," Jimmy retorted. "He wouldn't be any too

pleased to hear that I saw this car of yours at Elsenham Park before ever I took up dirt-track riding. You know dad's opinion of speedways."

Otto made no reply to this, but jammed the gear-lever of his car savagely into "first" and swung out into the road.

"I fancy Cousin Otto isn't fond of me," Jimmy observed to Ron, as he watched the big automobile.

The youngster's tone was light-hearted and care-free, but it might not have been could he have foreseen the trend of future events.

"Mr. Brown!"

It was dusk when Jimmy and Ron reached the "digs" which they now shared, and there Jimmy found a letter from his father. He read it over a late tea in the dining-room.

The letter was couched in ominous terms, and ran thus:

"I am informed that you intend to take up dirt-track racing. If so, be good enough to call here at once. At the same time you might tell Connolly I wish to see him concerning his invention. While the blue-print is in my possession I must hold myself responsible for it, but in view of what happened the other night I cannot accept the responsibility unless he applies for a patent immediately. You can tell him that, at present, I am keeping it concealed in my bed-room, in preference to the safe . . ."

Jimmy handed the letter across to Ron.

"It's from dad," he explained. "He wants to see the two of us—you about your invention, me about the career I've chosen. I guess I'd rather be in your shoes than my own, for he's bound to cut up rough. Still, I suppose I'd better go and have a word with him."

Ron scanned the letter, taking particular note of that portion which concerned himself.

"I'm only a mechanic, not a business man," he mused ruefully, "otherwise I'd have had the sense to take out a patent right at the start. But I'll come along with you—now, if you like—and tell your dad that I'll see about it."

The two chums were not destined to leave at once, however, for just then their landlady appeared and announced that a visitor had called to see "Mr. Connolly."

The visitor was shown in, and proved to be a lean, spare man, with a dark and glittering eye.

He looked at Jimmy Beresford questioningly, but Ron hastily assured him that, if the matter was nothing very private, he would prefer Jimmy to stay.

The lean man shrugged, and then began. Jimmy decided that he liked neither the visitor's dark and glittering eye nor his manner of speech, which was too smooth and suave.

"My name is Brown," the man said, "and I am confidential secretary to Mr. Bernard Volson, of Volson Motors."

Ron and Jimmy looked at each other quickly.

"Mr. Volson is now at his home outside Stepford, in the North," the lean man went on. "Our works are there, you know. And Mr. Volson has authorised me to make you an offer for your invention. We feel it has big possibilities."

"I'm afraid I can't enter into any

negotiations, Mr. Brown," Ron answered. "The invention is being considered in another quarter, you see."

"By Gordon Beresford, I believe," said Mr. Brown. "But, of course, you could cut short those negotiations. Gordon Beresford has not had time to go into the matter yet."

"You seem to know a great deal—about my affairs," Ron told him, whereupon Mr. Brown spread out his hands expressively.

"When we tried to get in touch with you before," he observed, "you told us enough to interest us. And as for my information regarding Gordon Beresford—well, we make it our business to know the movements of our rivals."

Jimmy touched Ron on the arm.

"You leave the blue-print in dad's hands," he advised. "You'll get a better deal with him."

Mr. Brown turned on Jimmy. In a moment his smoothness and his suaveness were quite gone from him.

"What has this to do with you?" he demanded angrily.

"Lots," said Jimmy, in the coolest tone imaginable. "Ron Connolly is my chum. And Gordon Beresford is—my father. And I repeat that Ron Connolly will get better treatment if he leaves the blue-print where it is."

The eyes of Mr. Brown seemed to smoulder.

"Are you trying to make slanderous reflections against the company I represent, you young whelp?" he ground out savagely.

"Not me!" said Jimmy. "But if you start calling me names there's liable to be trouble. In fact, the 'young whelp' is liable to throw the Volson 'representative' out of that door!"

Mr. Brown controlled himself, and turned to Ron.

"My business was with you," he resumed, in a voice that trembled with rage. "Are you prepared to negotiate with us if I make a generous offer immediately?"

"No," said Ron quietly. "The blue-print remains with Mr. Beresford."

The man from the Volson Company turned abruptly on his heel, and went to the door.

"You will regret it," he said, pausing on the threshold, and next moment he was gone.

His departure was followed by a brief silence, and then Jimmy laid his hand on Ron's shoulder.

"Come on!" he said cheerfully. "We'll go and see dad!"

The two chums went out into the hall and slipped on their hats and coats. There was a station not more than a hundred yards away, used both for local and main-line traffic, and they made their way towards this.

As they turned a corner a few yards from the diggings the two youngsters saw a car move away from the kerb, and suddenly Jimmy gave an exclamation.

"Otto's car!" he said, in surprise. "What the dickens is he doing round here?"

It was a question that neither could answer, but Jimmy was still speculating over it when they caught their train.

Half an hour later they alighted at the outlying station that served the district in which Gordon Beresford's home was situated.

When they reached the house Otto's car was drawn up in the drive, and Jimmy gave a short laugh at sight of it.

"That blessed auto is haunting us, Ron!" he declared.

Jimmy rang the front-door bell, and it was answered in person by his father. Only an elderly manservant "lived in," and it appeared that this old fellow had been called away earlier in the day by the illness of a near relative.

Jimmy's father led the way to a small study, and here the two youngsters found Otto. He nodded to them briefly, and then turned his back, with an air of disinterest.

Gordon Beresford was the first to speak.

"Otto is going up to Stepford," he said to Jimmy. "He is going to negotiate for the purchase of a 'plant' for me up there, a 'plant' that belonged to a firm which the Volson people crushed. But he can stay to hear what I have to say, and, young Connolly being your friend, I think I can talk without restraint. Is it true you have taken to the dirt-tracks? If so, I disown you here and now!"

"Look here, dad," Jimmy put in, standing ground, "when we talked about my earning that five-hundred in a twelve-month, no conditions were laid down. And why this insane prejudice against the speedways, anyhow? Am I right when I suggest that Beresford Motors aren't doing so well as they might?"

Gordon Beresford's face purpled vividly at the coolness of Jimmy's tone, but he managed to contain himself.

"Well, supposing we aren't doing so well as we ought to," he growled. "What of it?"

"Listen," said Jimmy. "Dirt-tracks have been opened all over the country. Twenty, thirty, and forty thousand people attend each of them regularly, a big percentage of them being motor-cyclists. 'Tornado' Rossiter has been winning all along the line on a Volson, and I'm willing to bet that the Volson sales have gone up on the strength of that. Stepford seems to be in vogue just now, for on Saturday Rossiter is riding there for the Silver Pennant, and it will be one more triumph for the Volson machine. But to-day I did a little in the way of boosting the Beresford 'Twin'—"

Gordon Beresford cut in on his son, but his tone was no longer angry. It was merely petulant.

"Very well," he said, "go ahead and make your five-hundred any way you like—I'll stick to the bargain. But you'll break your neck before you can ever earn that amount. What's more, you'll never convince me that the dirt-tracks—"

It was Gordon Beresford's turn to be interrupted, but this time it was by a sound in the room above, his own bedroom—a sound that a man might have made in stumbling.

Gordon Beresford raised his head with a start.

"What was that?" he demanded.

"Jennings, your manservant, I expect, uncle," said Otto quietly.

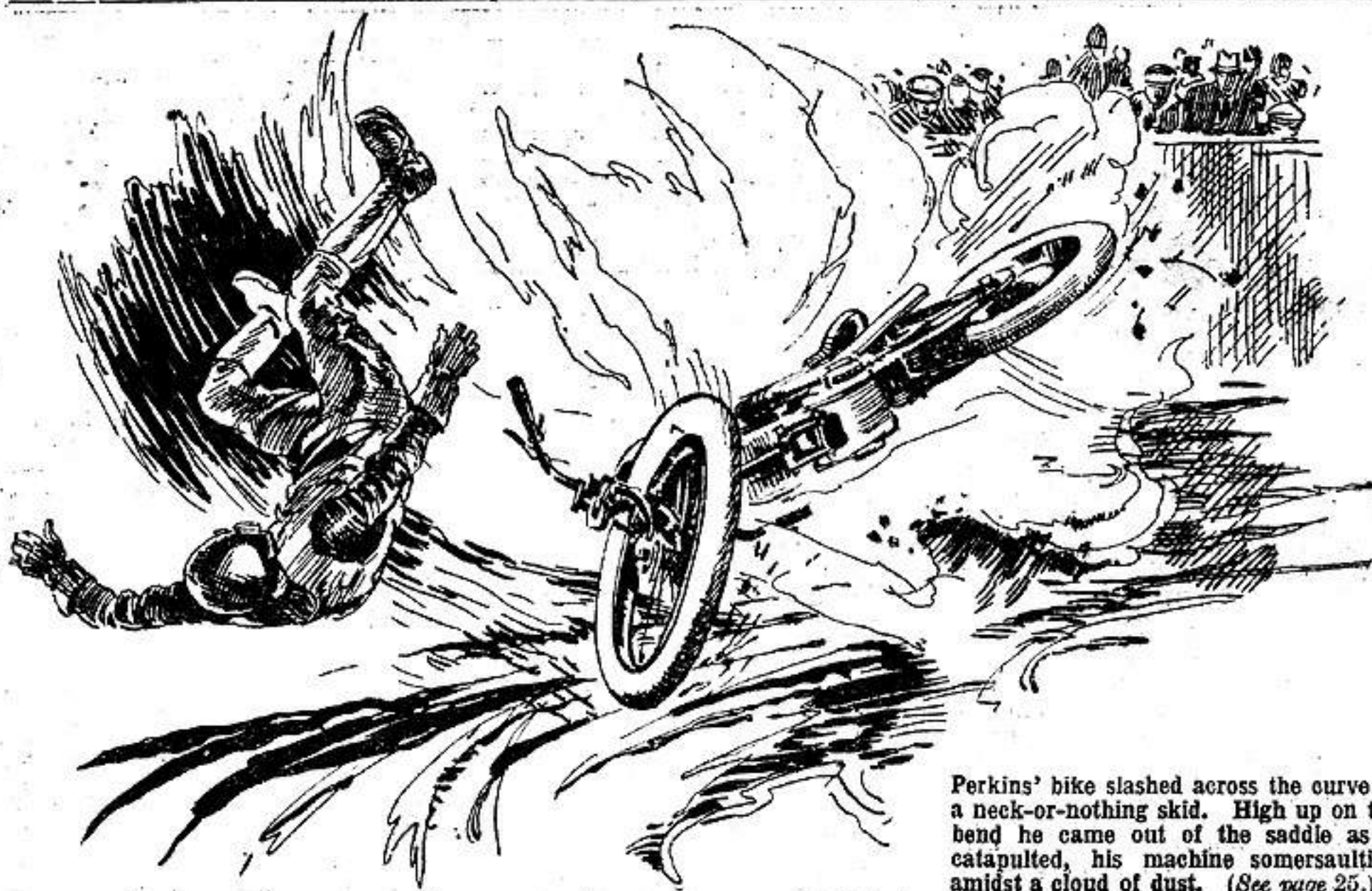
"Jennings isn't here," said the old man, and then all at once he wheeled round. "The blue-print!" he stammered. "And someone's in my room!"

There was a stampede. Otto was the first to reach the door, and the handle rattled in his grasp.

"It's locked!" he announced, facing the others.

Jimmy pushed past his father and thrust Otto aside.

"Stand clear!" he ordered. "We'll soon have the thing opened."



Perkins' bike slashed across the curve in a neck-or-nothing skid. High up on the bend he came out of the saddle as if catapulted, his machine somersaulting amidst a cloud of dust. (See page 25.)

Bracing himself up, Jimmy hurled himself shoulder-foremost at the door.

There was a shock that seemed to echo all over the house, and it was followed by hurried movements in the room above.

The door had not given way, however, though one of the stout panels bore a long crack, testifying to the impact of Jimmy's twelve stone.

The youngster drew back, and this time he used his foot, jamming his heel with smashing force against the woodwork near the lock.

There was a splintering, and the door burst open.

Followed by his father, and Ron, and with less alacrity by Otto, Jimmy ran out into the hall and faced towards the stairs. As he looked up, he saw a dim figure on the landing.

Old Gordon Beresford saw the figure, too, and with an exclamation, he started up the staircase, Ron and Jimmy hard on his heels.

The man above was ready for them. A heavy oak chest stood on the landing, and grasping this he lifted it on its end and shoved it toppling forward. The chest hit the stairs with a terrific crash, and then hurtled on to sweep Gordon Beresford and Ron Connolly off their feet. Jimmy was knocked backward as Ron thudded against him, but he saved himself from falling by clutching at the banisters.

Next moment the thief rushed past him, cleared the sprawled forms of Gordon Beresford and Ron, and dashed on to the front door.

"Stop him!" Jimmy yelled to Otto.

But Otto seemed incapable of movement, and a chill draught scurried through the hall as the door was wrenched open.

Jimmy gave chase alone, calling on Otto to look to Ron and his father. For Ron was sprawling dazedly on the floor, and Gordon Beresford was lying with the oak chest half a-top of him.

From the porch Jimmy saw his man scuttling through the gateway at the end of the drive, whence he darted

across the road and plunged through a hedge at the other side.

Jimmy pelted after him, not only for the mere satisfaction of capturing him, but because he had seen a familiar-looking envelope clutched in the fellow's hand.

Beyond the hedge was a field, and as Jimmy crashed through the twigs and foliage, he picked out the figure of his quarry in the gloom. The man was footing it across the meadow, and Jimmy realised that he was making for the railway station.

From the meadow a long stretch of rail was visible, and there was a growing thunder in the air. To the right Jimmy saw the flushed, spark-dappled smoke of an engine, and the straight frieze of light from the carriage windows of a passenger train.

He did his utmost to overtake the fugitive before he could reach the station and the approaching train. But the man could run, and with a fair lead he broke through a hedge at the other side of the meadow, and dashed into the station entrance, even as the train panted to a standstill alongside the platform.

Jimmy reached the station only a few seconds after him, and he pulled up at the pigeon-hole of the booking-office.

"I'm after a man who came through here just now," the youngster gasped to the clerk. "Did he take a ticket?"

"For Stepford," was the answer. "You'll have to hurry. The eight-thirty don't stop more than a minute here."

Jimmy flung down some money, grabbed a ticket, and dashed through the barrier. The fugitive was no longer in sight, and the train was actually on the move before Jimmy boarded it.

It was a corridor train, and, pausing only a moment to recover his breath, Jimmy started to make his way along the swaying coach, peering into each compartment as he did so. Then all at once he stopped, for he suddenly realised the impulsiveness of the thing he

had done, and the senselessness of the thing he was doing now.

He had caught only the merest glimpse of the thief. How was he going to pick him out of a train-load of people? That man sitting there in the corner—Jimmy regarded one of the occupants of a first-class compartment—that man might be the fugitive, for instance, but how was he going to tell?

It was at this juncture that Jimmy received a shock. For the man in the corner happened to lower a coat-collar which partially concealed his features, and to Jimmy was revealed the lean, gaunt face of the man called Brown.

Jimmy's first thought was to blunder into the compartment and confront him; but impulsive as he was he had a shrewd side to his nature. There were people in that compartment who might take the part of Mr. Brown, if the latter assumed an outraged and indignant manner. The train officials, too—they might take his part in the event of a "scene." At best they would refer Jimmy to the police at the next stop, by which time Mr. Brown might be cunning enough to rid himself of the blue print.

Then, again, it was possible—barely possible—that Mr. Brown's presence on the train was a mere coincidence. Foolish and discomfited would Jimmy look if it were another Volson agent who had played the part of thief, or if it were not a Volson agent at all.

But in Jimmy's own mind, as he drew back out of sight, there was very little doubt.

Mr. Brown, Bernard Volson's confidential secretary—Bernard Volson's private residence, outside Stepford—and the man who had stolen the blue print had bought a ticket for Stepford!

Mr. Brown and the thief were one and the same.

Jimmy took a seat in the compartment next door. As the train thundered on through the night he had ample time to reflect on his course of action. A strange young fellow he must have seemed to the others who shared

that compartment, hatless, coatless, a tribe of dishevelled and miserably pre-occupied.

The train steamed into Stepford Station at last and Jimmy, sitting by the door, waited till he saw Brown alight. Then, mingling with the crowds that thronged it, he endeavoured to keep his man in sight, without approaching unduly close to him.

Stepford proved to be a grim, unenchanting town and its streets were wet with drizzle as Jimmy followed Mr. Brown from the clamorous station. The Volson agent engaged a taxi at a cab-rank. Jimmy did the same, and ordered his driver to follow the other vehicle.

Twenty minutes later they were out of the town, and in a flat, drab stretch of country that lay soggy under the cloak of the night, holding nothing of the North's usual beauty.

Brown's cab drew up outside the gates of a big house that lay well back from the road. Jimmy commanded his driver to proceed past the other vehicle, but he called on him to stop when he saw Brown hasten through the gates.

Paying off his driver Jimmy ran back to the drive of the house. He was just in time to see the front door close behind Brown, who must have doubled hurriedly towards the porch on account of the drizzle.

Jimmy hesitated. He had wanted to encounter Brown on the drive and search him for the blue print. He had felt that if it came to a struggle he could more than hold his own against that lean, spare figure. But this course was no longer possible.

The youngster's attention was drawn to a row of long windows in which a fire's light rose and fell. He saw that one of the windows was open, and he tiptoed towards it.

There was a pair of heavy curtains beyond the row of windows, and these were half-drawn, but in the aperture between them Jimmy observed two men standing by the fireplace. One was Brown; the other, he surmised, was Bernard Volson, a gross, heavily-built individual, with a brutal countenance.

Brown was in the act of handing Volson a sealed envelope.

Jimmy turned up his collar and climbed stealthily over the sill. He had felt, a moment ago, much as a detective might have done. But now as he

slung one leg through the open window, a change came over him, and it was the fierce emotions of the hunted that he experienced, not the hunter.

He was still poised on the sill when he heard the note of a car's engine, and in the instant of quickly turning his head he was dazzled by a pair of headlights that swung through the gates. He slipped through the window, noisily but speedily, wondering if the driver of that car had seen him.

He heard the car come to a standstill, and decided that he must act quickly, for presently there might be three instead of two men to deal with. Glancing towards the fireplace, he saw that Volson was taking the sealed envelope from Brown's hand.

Jimmy braced himself for a desperate rush across the room. It would be the work of a few seconds to snatch that precious document, the plan of Ron's invention.

He grasped the edge of one of the curtains, and was preparing to wrench it aside, when something hard and blunt was jabbed into the small of his back.

"Keep still!" said a voice from the open window behind him.

(Young Jimmy Beresford has landed himself in a mighty unpleasant situation, hasn't he, chums? Make sure you read next week's gripping instalment of this powerful serial of amazing adventures on the dirt-track.)

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(Continued from page 2.)

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Your Editor.

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