

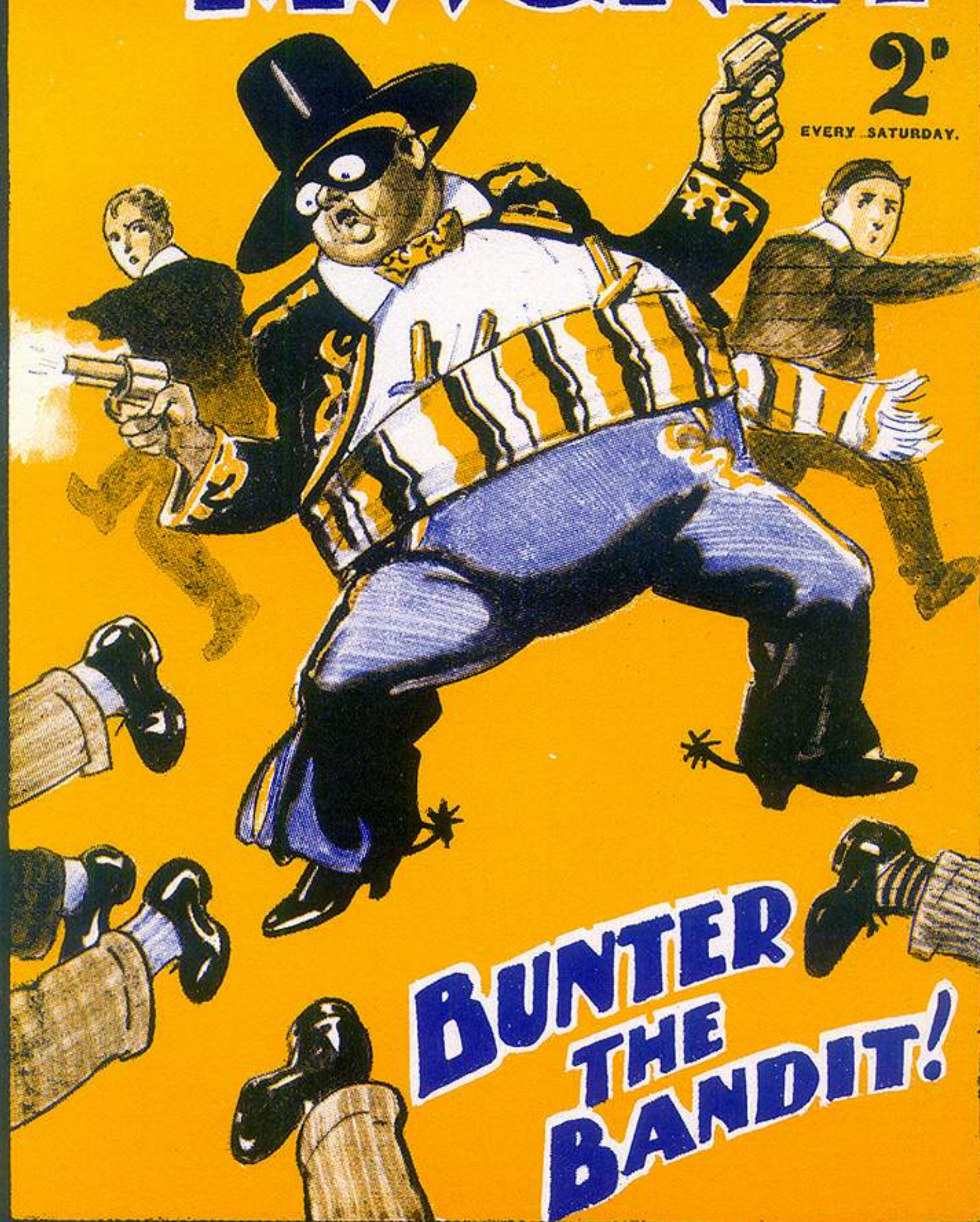
DON'T DELAY—ORDER YOUR "HOLIDAY ANNUAL" TO-DAY!

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The **MAGNET**

2'

EVERY SATURDAY.



BUNTER THE BANDIT!

THE GREYFRIARS TERROR!

(Read all about the weird and wonderful adventures of this amazing Greyfriars schoolboy—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.).

EVERY now and again I receive letters from readers who would like to become writers of boys' stories, and who ask what training is necessary to achieve their ambition. Frequently I am asked to recommend some school of story-writing, where, my readers seem to think, they can be taught to write yarns that will be "winners." Now these fellows seem to think that writing is something that anyone can do, and I am sorry to have to disillusion them. Story writing is an art, and if you haven't it in you to write interestingly, no school on earth can tell you how to do it. The best "training" is to write as much as you can, and to go on writing until you feel satisfied that you have really accomplished something which is worthy of being compared with the work of professional writers.

The majority of writers—especially of boys' stories—took years to discover their particular talent.

THEY DIDN'T KNOW THEY COULD WRITE

stories until they suddenly discovered the fact. Jules Verne, for instance, tried all sorts of jobs, and didn't make headway. Then he tried writing for the theatres, but his plays were never a success. After that he started writing scientific articles—and suddenly discovered that he could make a success by writing stories with a scientific interest for boys! It is very interesting to note that a number of his stories have been dramatised and produced in Paris with great success—in the very city where his own plays proved to be a failure!

ANOTHER WELL-KNOWN BOYS' AUTHOR,

G. A. Henty, first served in the Crimea, and afterwards became a newspaper correspondent. Later in life, however, he decided to make use of his own experiences by writing boys' stories around them, and he wrote over eighty very popular yarns for boys. Ballantyne was another boys' author who had "roughed it," for he served for six years in the service of the Hudson Bay Company, and when he came back to England went into a publisher's office. Several years afterwards, however, he also broke into print with boys' stories, and soon made a name for himself.

Nearly every writer of boys' stories has knocked around the world before settling down to write, and this is equally true of the authors who write for the MAGNET and the companion papers. Quite a number of the yarns you read are based upon the personal experiences of our authors, and that is why the yarns "ring true," and hold the interest of the reader so well. That's one of the reasons why the MAGNET tops the ladder of popularity for boys' papers!

There's a question this week which comes from R. Tarrell, of Torquay, which is rather interesting.

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"CAN A WHALE SWALLOW A MAN?"

he asks. Somebody told him that it was possible, but someone else contradicted that and said that whales have very small throats. It all depends on the species of the whale. Some have very small throats indeed, but it is possible for certain whales to swallow a man—the sperm whale, for example. Some time ago a sperm whale was captured, and inside it a shark, fifteen feet in length, was discovered!

I EXPECT most of you have heard the saying:

"A RED SKY AT NIGHT

is a sailor's delight!" Does a red sky at night really foretell the weather? asks Arthur Telford, of Sydenham. If so, how? The reason is that if the red rays of the sun are very clear it indicates that there is not much moisture in the air. Therefore there is not likely to be any rain, and the following day will be fine. Check it for yourself; Arthur, next time you see a red sky at night. I think you will find that the rhyme is fairly reliable.

Now pull up your socks and sit tight! Here are some

"RAPID FIRE" REPLIES

to readers' queries:

What is the longest period anyone has fasted? Sixty-five days. A man completed a fast of that length recently at Liverpool.

Are there such things as "jumping mice"? Yes. They have exceedingly long hind legs and tail, and are found in deserts in Europe, Asia, Africa, and America. Their proper name is Jerboas.

Is Mars inhabited? Scientists are divided on this question. If the canals which can be seen on Mars are of artificial construction, it would prove that there has been, and perhaps still is, life of some description on the planet—but it is bound to be a vastly different type of life from which we are accustomed.

Is there such a thing as a "Blue Moon"? Yes. One night last year the moon was vivid blue when it arose over Suva, one of the Fiji islands. The phenomena is very rare; hence the saying: "Once in a blue moon."

What is a Rukh? This is another way of spelling "Roc"—the mythical bird mentioned in "The Arabian Nights."

Now we will have a yarn. This one wins a penknife for J. Bartlett, of 123, Hesse Road, Hull.



Rastus: "Here am a telegram from de massa in Africa, stating dat he am sending us some lions' tails."

Circus Owner's Wife: "Lions' tails, Rastus. What-ever do you mean?"

Rastus: "Read it yo-self, mam. It says: 'Just captured two lions, sending de-tails by mail.'"



I WONDER how many of my readers have been worried by

THE SNOWBALL POSTCARD

which one of my readers tells me he has received. I know the thing well, and I advise any of you who receives one of them to have nothing to do with it. During the War an American officer—who should have had more sense—started the "snowball postcard" by sending a postcard to a friend and asking him to copy it out nine times and send on to nine other people. The idea was that each one of them would send similar postcards to nine other people and so the "snowball" would go on growing.

Since then these postcards have multiplied at an astonishing rate because it is said that whoever "breaks the chain"—that is, he who does not send on nine more postcards—will have bad luck, and many people are too superstitious to break the chain. My chum wants to know what he should do. Should he pass on the postcard? Yes—he should pass it on to the fire, or the waste-paper basket, which is where all such postcards addressed to me go! Do you know it has been reckoned that the Post Office profits to the extent of about £2,000 per week out of foolish people who keep this crazy "snowball" business going?

There is just space for another answer to a question which comes from Herbert Wilson, of Backworth. Herbert wants to know

SOMETHING ABOUT CORAL ISLANDS.

He knows that these are formed by coral insects, but would like to know how long it takes them to make an island. Under favourable conditions a coral reef can grow at the rate of nine inches per year, which is remarkably quick.

Now, just before I finish up this chat, let us have a limerick. R. G. Mortimer of 25, Catherine Street, Swansea, Glam., wins a pocket-wallet for this attempt:

There is a sly fellow named Snoop,
Who to all sorts of meanness will stoop;
He gambles and smokes,
Backs several wrong "mokes,"
And oft lands himself in the soup!

Let's open the black book now, chums, for I've got another good programme for you next week. You'll regret it very much if you miss reading the grand Greyfriars yarn which shows our old friend Horace Coker, the Fool of the Fifth, in a prominent light. It's called:

"COKER'S CRACKSMAN!"

By Frank Richards.

and is a tip-top, bang-up-to-the-mark yarn which will make you want to read every line before putting your MAGNET down. And when you've finished it there's plenty more good things in store for you—notably the opening story in a grand new series of St. Sam's yarns. The first of these smile-raisers written in Dicky Nugent's most humorous style is entitled:

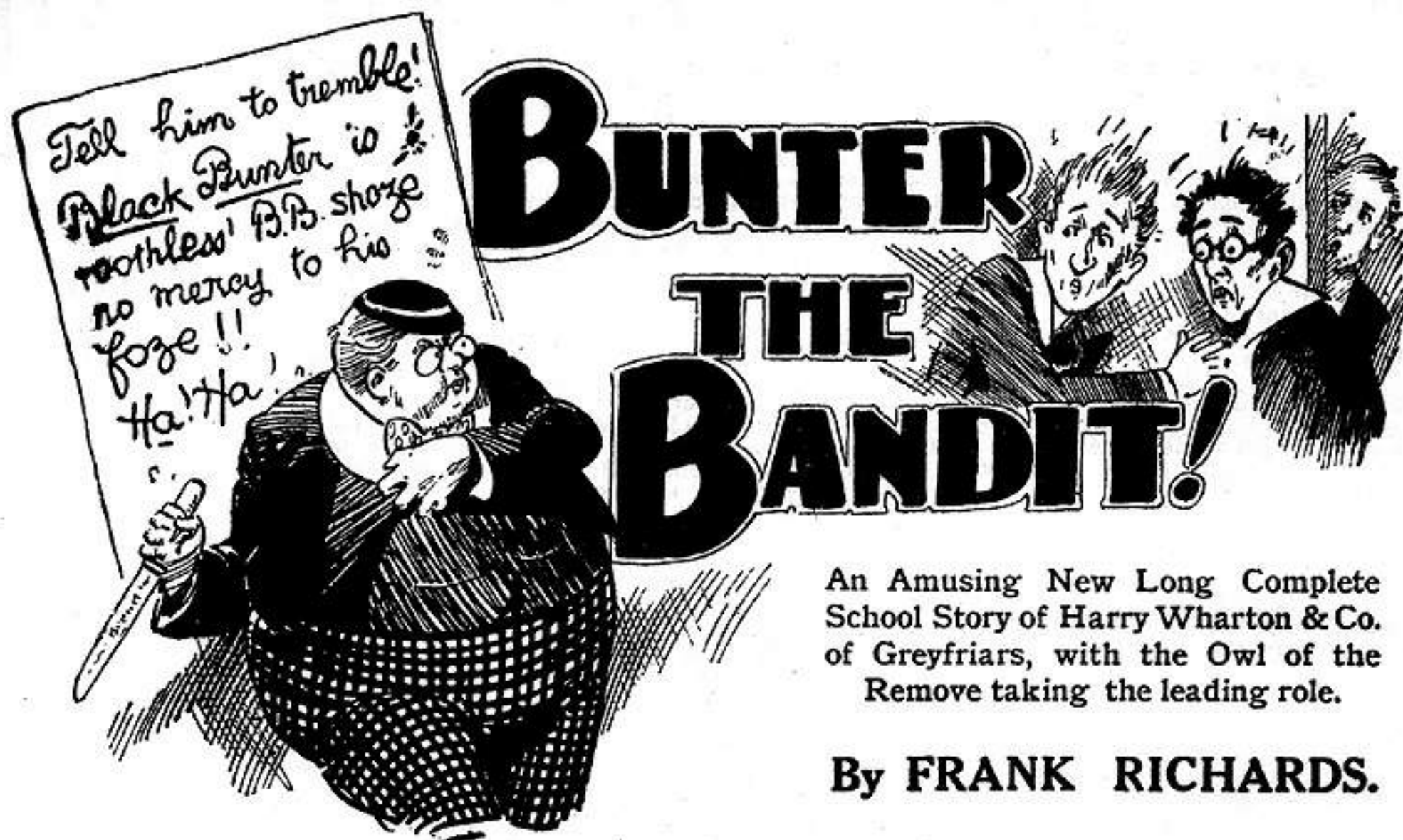
"THE MISSING MUNNY-BOX!"

and will be voted by one and all as being one of Dicky's greatest masterpieces. In addition to these fine features there will be another stirring instalment of

"PETER FRAZER—IRONMASTER!"

our grand new sporting and industrial serial, together with another interesting "footer" talk under the heading of "Inside Information" and, of course, my usual weekly chat. Look out, then, for this bumper number next week.

YOUR EDITOR.



BUNTER THE BANDIT!

An Amusing New Long Complete School Story of Harry Wharton & Co. of Greyfriars, with the Owl of the Remove taking the leading role.

By FRANK RICHARDS.

THE FIRST CHAPTER.

Bunter to the Rescue!

"YOU fellows coming?"

Billy Bunter asked that question, and paused for a reply.

There was no reply.

Probably Harry Wharton & Co. heard him; but if they did, they heeded him not.

The Famous Five were standing at the window on the Remove landing, looking out into a weeping quadrangle.

It was raining hard.

It had rained all day. From early morn it had rained, and it looked like going on till dewy eve.

In the morning it did not matter very much. When fellows were in class, raindrops might splash unheeded on the window-panes, and drip from the branches of the ancient elms. In fact, on a rainy day the Form-room was more grateful and comforting than on a fine, sunny day, when the fellows longed to be out of doors. That morning nobody had longed to be out of doors. The rain rained hard but unheeded while the fellows were in class. But in the afternoon it was a different matter, for it happened to be a half-holiday.

When a half-holiday and heavy rain came together, fellows groused.

The Famous Five were not given to grousing, as a rule; but they groused now as they stared from a wet window into a wetter quad.

Football was off. Even Bob Cherry was disinclined for football. A walk in that downpour was not inviting. It was coming down, as Johnny Bull remarked, in buckets, and Hurree Jamset Ram Singh observed dismally that the bucketfulness was terrific. Frank Nugent had rather dubiously suggested the pictures at Courtfield. But nobody wanted to walk a couple of miles in the rain. Still, something had to be done with the afternoon. A half-holiday was a

half-holiday, and had to be made the most of.

Billy Bunter came up to the Remove landing, blinked at the chums through his big spectacles, and asked them if they were coming; and they did not heed.

"What about a rag?" asked Bob Cherry. "Let's go and rag Coker of the Fifth."

"Oh, bother Coker!" said Nugent.

"Well, what about Temple? We haven't ragged the Fourth for a long time."

"I say, you fellows—"

"What about lines?" asked Harry Wharton. "We've all got some lines on hand for Quelch, and this is a chance of getting them done!"

You've heard of . . . { Fat Bunter!
Deaf Bunter!!
Lame Bunter!!!
Blind Bunter!!!!

But you'll agree that
BLACK BUNTER
takes the whole giddy biscuit factory!

There was a general groan.

Nobody, it seemed, was in a mood to sit down and write lines. The weather was bad enough without that.

"I say, you fellows—" roared Bunter.

"Hallo, hallo, hallo! Hero's Bunter, turned up just in time!" said Bob, looking round at last. "Let's roll Bunter down the stairs and see whether he bursts!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Ready, Bunter?"

The fat junior jumped back.

"I say, you fellows, no larks! I say, I came up to ask you whether you were coming."

"Where?" inquired Harry Wharton, without much interest. It was unlikely that the Owl of the Remove would be able to suggest a resource for that dismal rainy half-holiday.

"I'm going to the films," explained Bunter. "They've got a new American crook film at the Marble Hall in Courtfield. I'd like you fellows to come."

"Blow American crook films!" said Johnny Bull. "Who wants to see such tripe?"

"This is something rather special," urged Bunter. "Blood-curdling, I can tell you! Makes you sit up and shudder!"

"Anybody want his blood curdled?" asked Bob Cherry. "Anybody keen on sitting up and shuddering?"

"Rats!"

"I say, you fellows, I wish you'd come," said Bunter. "I really shan't enjoy the picture without my old pals."

The Famous Five grinned.

"Which means that you want somebody to pay for your ticket," remarked Johnny Bull.

"Oh, really, Bull—"

"Seat!"

"Look here!" Bunter dived a fat hand into his pocket and produced a shilling. "Look at that! That's for a bob seat!"

"Wonders will never cease!" remarked Bob Cherry.

"If you don't want us to buy your ticket, what the merry thump do you want us for?"

"Your company, old chap," said Bunter affably. "You see, you're such a nice set of chaps, and I've always liked you."

"Oh, crumbs!"

The Famous Five regarded Bunter with renewed interest. Why the fat junior was thus buttering them, if he did not need their services in buying a ticket at the Marble Hall, was rather a mystery.

"The flatterfulness is great," said Hurree Jamset Ram Singh. "But the rainfulness is terrific. The walkfulness in the esteemed and disgusting rain is not the proper caper."

"I'm taking a taxi."

"Eh?"

"That's what I was going to tell you, THE MAGNET LIBRARY.—No. 1,137,

if you'd let a fellow speak," said Bunter. "I've got a taxi, and it's a sheer waste to take it alone. All you fellows can pack into it, and it will cost you nothing."

"Great pip!"

"Gammon!"

"Oh, really, you fellows! Look here, are you coming?" demanded Bunter. "I can jolly well tell you that there's plenty of fellows will come if I ask them. In fact, Skinner's hinted already that he'd like a lift in the taxi, and Snoop says he'd like to come. But I'm sticking to my old pals."

"If it's honest Injun—" said Johnny Bull doubtfully.

"The taxi's at the gate now," said Bunter, with dignity. "I phoned for it. Luckily, Prout was jawing in Common-room, and I got at his phone."

"You've actually got a taxi?" exclaimed Harry Wharton.

"Yes; it's waiting."

"My hat!"

The chums of the Remove exchanged glances. The pictures were a resource on a rainy day, but they did not want to walk through the rain to Courtfield. But a run in a taxi was quite another matter.

As for getting back, the rain might have stopped by the time they had seen the pictures. Anyhow, they were willing to chance that.

"What about it?" asked Bunter. "I'm paying for a taxi to Courtfield, and it's waiting. I can give you a lift if you'll come. I could find plenty of fellows to fill up the taxi if I liked, I can tell you."

Harry Wharton laughed.

"I've no doubt about that," he said. "What about it, you men? We might as well go."

"What about the money market?" asked Bob Cherry. "Funds are rather low in my study."

There was a hasty searching of pockets. Funds, as it happened, were low among the chums of the Remove. But five shillings were found.

"That will see us through in the bob seats," said Harry. "Let's!"

"Let's!" agreed Nugent.

"Much obliged to you, Bunter!" added Bob Cherry. "It's jolly decent of you to give us the lift!"

"The obligefulness is preposterous, my esteemed fat Bunter."

"Thanks, Bunter! We'll come!"

Bunter waved a fat hand airily.

"That's all right," he said. "You fellows have stood things for me at times, and I'm glad to oblige you. Get your coats, and come on."

And the Famous Five, considerably cheered by the prospect of doing something with that rainy half-holiday after all, got their coats and came on.

THE SECOND CHAPTER.

Shell Out!

BILLY BUNTER settled himself comfortably in the taxi. He took up a considerable amount of space, partly owing to his circumference, partly to his desire to make himself quite comfortable. The comfort of others was a less important matter; indeed, of no importance at all so far as William George Bunter could see. But it was Bunter's taxi; and the Famous Five were getting the lift for nothing, so they made the best they could of the available space, and refrained from telling Bunter what they thought of him.

Certainly the shelter of the taxi was very welcome. Outside, the rain came down almost in sheets, and it dashed

noisily on the roof. Mud splashed right and left as the wheels revolved. A walk to Courtfield would not have been enjoyable to the hardest member of the Co.

"Glad we're not hoofing it," remarked Bob Cherry, with a glance at the streaming window.

"The gladfulness is terrific," said the Nabob of Bhanipur, with a shiver. "On the present esteemed occasion the absurd Bunter is the stitch in time that saves the cracked pitcher from going longest to the well."

"I say, you fellows—"

Nobody said "Shut up, Bunter," as usual. It was Bunter's taxi, and his guests played up politely.

"Go it, old fat bean!" said Bob.

"It's a ripping picture we're going to see," said Bunter. "It's called 'The Black-Masked Bandit'—"

"Some picture!" grinned Bob.

"It's frightfully thrilling," said Bunter. "I've seen the advertisement pictures on the hoardings. There's a close-up of Black Benito, the Bandit, with his eyes glittering through his mask, and a revolver in each hand."

"What rot!" said Johnny Bull. "Look here, let's go to the Palace instead; you can see a decent English picture there."

"Oh, really, Bull—"

"Much better than that American crook muck," urged Johnny.

Bunter sniffed.

"I'm jolly well-going to see the Black-Masked Bandit!" he said. "You can jump out of the taxi if you like."

Johnny Bull did not like!

"Oh, all right; let's see the jolly old bandit," he said. "It will be funny, anyhow."

"You silly ass, it isn't funny! It's sensational and tragic," said Bunter. "Thrills you to the marrow of your bones! Pawker Chew, the great American film actor, plays the bandit, so you can guess what it's like. You should see his eyes roll!"

"Is it a talkie?" asked Nugent.

"Yes."

"Chance to study the American language, anyhow," said Frank. "May pick up enough to talk to Fisher T. Fish in his native tongue."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The taxi rolled on swiftly through the rain. Bunter continued to expatiate upon the wonderful and thrilling attractions of the great film, which had evidently made a deep impression on his fat brain. The other fellows, as a matter of fact, would have preferred something a little more wholesome, but it was Bunter's taxi, so Bunter was given his head.

The streets of Courtfield, swept by rain, were almost bare of passengers. But a goodly number of umbrellas were converging upon the Marble Hall when the Greyfriars party arrived in sight of that building. The thrilling film, featuring Pawker Chew, seemed to attract the good folks of Courtfield. The taxi drew up before the entrance.

Bunter threw open the door, and rain-drops splattered in. The fat junior pushed out his umbrella, opened it, and extricated himself from the doorway under its shelter.

He turned back to the doorway, blinking at the chums of the Remove from beneath the umbrella.

"I say, you fellows—"

"Let's get out," said Bob.

"Hold on a minute," said Bunter, blocking the doorway with his fat person and his umbrella.

"What on earth for?"

"The fact is—"

"Buck up!"

"The—the fact is—" stammered Bunter.

"What are you burbling about?" asked Johnny Bull. "For goodness' sake, let's get out of this taxi!"

"Oh, really, Bull—"

"Look here, Bunter, what—"

"The—the fact is, I'm sure you fellows won't mind—"

"What?"

"I've been disappointed about a postal-order," explained Bunter. "I was expecting a postal-order to-day—"

"Chuck it!"

"It hasn't come," said Bunter.

"Let's get out!"

"And—as my postal-order hasn't come—I'm rather short of ready cash," Bunter further explained. "I've got just the bob to pay for admission—"

"Eh?"

"I suppose one of you fellows could lend me five bob to settle with the driver—"

"What?" roared the Famous Five, with one voice.

"You needn't shout," said Bunter. "I'm not deaf. Will one of you fellows lend me five bob to settle for this taxi?"

"You—you—you phoned for a taxi to the school without having the money to pay for it!" gasped Wharton.

"Well, I couldn't walk in the rain," said Bunter. "Talk sense! It's all right if you lend me the five bob."

"Why, you fat villain—"

"I don't care which it is, but one of you," said Bunter. "Don't all speak at once."

The Famous Five did not speak at all. They glared at Bunter as if they could have bitten him.

They understood now why Bunter had been so keen to give them a lift in the taxi. It was necessary for somebody to pay for the taxi!

"I say, you fellows, it's jolly damp standing here," said Bunter. "Look here, I'll go in and you can settle with the driver."

"Let's get out and slaughter him!" breathed Johnny Bull.

"Look here, Bull—"

"You fat rotter!" roared Bob.

"Oh, really, Cherry—"

"Sold!" said Nugent. "Taken in and done for! Well, we jolly well wont pay for the taxi!"

"No fear!"

Bunter blinked at the exasperated five through his big spectacles.

"I say, you fellows—"

"Not a red cent!" hissed Bob. "And we'll jolly well scrag you into the bargain, you fat footling freak!"

Slam!

Bunter suddenly shut the door of the taxi.

The next moment he executed a strategic retreat and disappeared into the crowd going in at the entrance of the Marble Hall.

Bob Cherry tore open the door and jumped out.

"After him!" he shouted.

"Ero, 'old on!" exclaimed the taxi-driver, who had got down from his seat. "What about my fare?"

"The chap who engaged you has gone in," said Harry Wharton.

"That's all very well," said the driver.

"Four bob is the fare, and a shilling for extra passengers. Five bob, some of you."

The juniors looked at one another.

Bunter had vanished in the stream of people going in, and it would evidently not be easy to recapture him. Not that his recapture would have been useful, so far as settling with the taximan was concerned.

That gentleman was beginning to look unpleasant. He had the impression that he was dealing with a party of "bilks."

"Sold!" said Bob. "The man's got to be paid."

"I fancy so!" remarked the taxi-driver, with emphasis.

"That villain Bunter——"

"That rotter Bunter——"

"That fat scoundrel Bunter——"

"I'm waiting!" said the taximan.

There was no help for it. The juniors had used the taxi, and it had to be paid for. Five shillings were sorted out and handed over to the taximan, who grunted, remounted, and drove away. Five juniors stared at one another in the rain. The taximan had driven away with the exact sum that was to have paid for admission to the Marble Hall. There was no admission for the Famous Five now.

"I—I—I'll slaughter him!" gasped Bob Cherry.

"We can't go in now," said Nugent.

"And we've got to walk back——"

"In the rain——"

"Oh crumbs!"

"That fat villain——"

"That spoofing porpoise——"

"Oh dear!"

The feelings of the Famous Five, as they walked back to Greyfriars in the rain, could not have been expressed in words. There was only one comfort—the prospect of dealing with Bunter when he came in. To that moment the five juniors looked forward with a feeling akin to ferocity.

THE THIRD CHAPTER.

A Dreamer of Dreams!

BILLY BUNTER was enjoying himself.

His little round eyes, through his big round spectacles, were glued on the screen.

He was breathless with attention.

The Black-Masked Bandit was going strong.

The nasal squeaks that passed for talking in that great American talkie film did not worry Bunter. He had not a musical ear.

But he had a feast for his eyes—all four of them, as it were. His very spectacles gleamed with appreciation.

Gazing at the screen, Bunter was lost to time and space. Naturally, he had no thought to waste on the fellows who had paid for the taxi, and were walking home in the rain. To Bunter that was a trifle light as air. He was not even thinking of what might happen to him when he got back to Greyfriars, and was interviewed by an infuriated quintette. He was thinking of nothing but the exploits, which certainly were thrilling, of Black Benito, the Bandit in the Mask.

Bunter was an imaginative fellow. Like most imaginative fellows, he lived in a little world of his own, that only approximated roughly to the real world. Ordinary life was not interesting enough for Bunter. Things that really happened interested him little. This gift of imagination might have made him, with a little more brains, a poet, an author, a journalist, or a politician—in fact, any kind of dealer in fiction. Unfortunately, Bunter lacked brains. His powerful imagination had made him into nothing but a reckless fibber, whose fibs never carried conviction.

It was this curious trait in Bunter's character that caused the suburban villa where the Bunters lived to blossom forth, in Bunter's fertile fancy, into Bunter Court, and his father's old Ford into a Rolls-Royce, and his relatives into members of the peerage.

Like many fellows who tell fibs over and over again, Bunter came to believe in them more or less himself—much more, at least, than anyone else believed in them.

Sometimes, going home for the holidays, he had quite a shock at seeing Bunter Court dwindle into a suburban villa and the Rolls-Royce into a dusty, creaky Ford.

Greatly Bunter preferred his imaginary world to the real one.

The films, therefore, hit Bunter just where he lived, as Fisher T. Fish would have expressed it in the American language.

At the films he could let his soaring imagination take its wildest flights unchecked.

Bunter lived the film while he watched it.

Every time the Black-Masked Bandit dashed away at top speed on his coal-black horse, Bunter, in his happy

went up, hardly realising where he was. Tie-up seats and hurrying people, umbrellas and bowler-hats seemed not only horribly commonplace, but almost incredible after the wild and thrilling career of his fat imagination as a black bandit.

The Black Bandit was still running in Bunter's obtuse brain as he made his way out of the Marble Hall.

Films always impressed Bunter deeply, but never had any film impressed him so deeply as this.

Bunter would have given all Greyfriars just then for a coal-black steed and a long-barrelled revolver and a black mask. He was in a mood to hold up the bank at Courtfield, as Black Benito had held up a bank in the wild



"Hold on a minute," said Bunter, blocking the doorway of the taxi with his umbrella, "I've been disappointed about a postal-order, and all I've got is a bob to pay for admission to the pictures. I suppose one of you fellows could lend me five bob to settle with the driver." "What?" roared the Famous Five, with one voice. (See Chapter 2.)

thoughts, was dashing away at top speed on a coal-black horse, quite forgetful of the fact that he had never even been able to keep on the back of a donkey at Margate.

When the bandit, surrounded by foes, fired right and left with flashing revolvers, the breathless Bunter was firing right and left with flashing revolvers in his happy thoughts, never remembering that he had a deep apprehension of loaded firearms.

The bandit, cornered at the top of a high building, flung himself across space to an adjoining roof, and Bunter followed him in spirit, regardless of the fact that he would have disliked to jump across a three-foot ditch.

There was no doubt that Billy Bunter had his shilling's worth at the Marble Hall that rainy afternoon.

When it was over Bunter woke as from a dream.

He had been living in the film, and coming back to reality was a disagreeable shock to him.

He blinked round him when the lights

and woolly West. He would have liked to stop the motor-bus that ran from Courtfield to Redclyffe, as Black Benito had stopped the stage-coach that ran from Panhandle to Pie-Crust Gulch, and yell "Hands up!" to the driver, which certainly would have astonished the driver very much had Bunter done so.

But these things could not be in the commonplace world to which Bunter had returned after his excursion on the screen.

Bunter grunted discontentedly.

With a burning desire to be a bandit—a black-masked bandit—he had to walk back to school and be a schoolboy. He was getting hungry, too.

He would have liked to walk into the Courtfield Hotel, lay a revolver on the table, and order the best to be brought, and then ride away after vollying bullets through the windows in lieu of payment. Black Benito had done that on the screen.

But it was obvious, even to Bunter, that it couldn't be done in Courtfield, in the county of Kent.

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He had no coal-black horse, no long-barrelled revolver, and no black mask. He lacked perhaps some other qualifications for banditry. And there was the policeman to be considered. Bunter, though he revelled in thoughts of banditry, could not quite see himself shooting the Courtfield constable dead in his tracks, even if he had possessed the requisite revolver. Indeed, the fact was that had Bunter been anywhere near a revolver his chief concern would have been to get as far away from it as possible.

Fortunately, the rain had stopped while Bunter was in the cinema. There was no one in Courtfield whom he could diddle for a taxi home. He had to walk. Black Benito thought nothing of dashing through the wildest storm and the most torrential rain, but in that Bunter did not yearn to imitate him. On the screen you did not catch cold; in real life you did. Bunter was glad that the rain had stopped when he set out for Greyfriars.

He walked along, heedless of muddy roads and lowering skies. There was a rapt expression in the little round eyes behind the big, round spectacles. Bunter was still following the wild career of a bandit—in his thoughts.

He arrived at the school just in time. Gosling was about to close the gates when the fat junior rolled up.

Bunter did not hurry, but Gosling did. Gosling was a crusty gentleman, and he took what fellows considered a fiendish delight in shutting a fellow out if he had a chance. It was Gosling's duty to shut the gates on the stroke of time, and, though not an over-dutiful man in other respects, Gosling never failed in that duty. If a fellow was outside when the gates were closed he was late, and had to be reported as late. It was rumoured that for financial considerations Gosling would keep the gate open a minute or two. But there was no tip to be expected from Bunter, so Gosling accelerated a little to shut him out.

Bunter, who was in another world just then, did not heed Gosling, and he rolled up in quite a leisurely manner.

Clang!
The gate closed.
That brought Bunter to himself. Gosling, grinning through the bars, fumbled with the key.

"Here, I say, I'm not late!" exclaimed Bunter, and he ran up to the gate.

He shoved, and Gosling grinned. Bunter's eyes flashed.

Gosling, totally ignorant of the film at the Marble Hall, and its vivid effect on the Owl of the Remove, supposed that he merely had to deal with a fat schoolboy. But he was, for the moment, dealing with a black bandit in the shape of a fat schoolboy, which was quite a different thing.

Bunter's eyes flashed, almost as Black Benito's eyes flashed on the screen, though the spectacles marred the effect a little. He grasped a bronze bar of the gate with a fat hand and hurled it open, just as Black Benito might have done.

This was unexpected on Gosling's part.

The gate was not yet locked; and Bunter's sudden fierce shove sent it crashing back on Gosling.

Crash!
Bump!
"Ow!"
Gosling sat down.
Splash!

"There was a puddle at hand. Gosling sat in it."

Muddy water splashed all over Gosling as he sat suddenly.

"My eye!" gasped Gosling. "Ow! I'm wet! Wow! You young rip! Wot I says is this 'ere—Ow, ow!"

Bunter strode in.

He gave the seated porter a stare of lofty scorn as he passed him. What was a crusty old school porter to a Black Bandit?

"Ha!" exclaimed Bunter.

"Wot?" ejaculated Gosling.

"Take your life, you dog!" said Bunter.

"Eh?"

Bunter strode on.

Gosling slowly extricated himself from the puddle and almost forgot that he was wet as he gazed after the fat figure disappearing across the quad. Bunter's mode of address had quite surprised Gosling.

"Mad!" murmured Gosling. "Mad as a 'atter! Mad as a blinking March 'are! Wot I says is this 'ere—that young rip ought to be took to a lunatic asylum! Mad as a 'atter!"

And Gosling locked the gates and stumped back to his lodge to dry himself before he reported Bunter to Mr. Quelch.

THE FOURTH CHAPTER.

Alarming!

"HALLO, hallo, hallo!"

"Here he is!"

"Collar him!"

"Scrag him!"

"Scrag the esteemed rotter!"

Five voices in chorus greeted Billy Bunter as he reached the Remove landing.

Harry Wharton & Co. were waiting there for him.

The Famous Five were glad to see Bunter. It was unusual for any fellow to be glad to see Bunter, but on this occasion they were very glad. The juniors had walked home in the rain, they had arrived drenched, they had changed their clothes, and they had waited for Bunter—and the sun had gone down on their wrath. The passage of time did not diminish that wrath—rather, it improved, like wine, with keeping. Five pairs of eyes gleamed, and five voices greeted the Owl of the Remove as he arrived.

"You fat villain!" roared Bob Cherry. "Now you're going to have what you've asked for!"

"The askfulness was terrific, and the whatfulness will be preposterous, you esteemed spoofer."

"Collar him!"

Bunter blinked at the wrathful five.

He had quite forgotten that incident of the taxi. He remembered it now.

"I say, you fellows!" he gasped.

"Bag him!"

"Bump him!"

"Mop up the passage with him."

"Burst him!"

Bunter jumped back.

Vengeance awaited him, and in ordinary circumstances Billy Bunter would have fled from the wrath to come. But the Bunter who had returned to school after seeing the bandit film was a different Bunter from the one who had gone in the taxi with the Famous Five. Bunter's fat brain was still fevered with the vivid influence of the film.

"Back!" he shouted.

"What?"

"Ha! Stand back! Hands up!"

"Wha-a-a-t?"

The Famous Five halted in sheer astonishment. Something seemed to be the matter with Billy Bunter.

The fat junior gave them a scornful stare.

"Back!" he snapped. "On your lives!"

"On our whatter?" gasped Bob Cherry.

"My only hat!"

"Is the fat ass potty?"

"The pottiffulness is terrific."

"Look here, Bunter—"

Bunter laughed contemptuously—the scornful, ringing "Ha, ha!" appropriate to a Black Bandit.

The chums of the Remove gazed at him in amazement and some alarm. They feared that Bunter was off his rocker, as they would have expressed it. They had never supposed that he was quite on it, as a matter of fact. Now he seemed to them to be quite off.

Had they seen the bandit film, and noted its effect on the fat junior, they might have guessed how the matter stood. But they had not seen that thrilling film, and did not know that it had caused Bunter's fat imagination to run riot.

"Ha, ha!" laughed Bunter.

"Look here you fat idiot—"

"Bah!"

"You jolly well spoofed us over that taxi, and we're jolly well going to snatch you bald-headed!" roared Johnny Bull.

"Lucky for you I didn't blow your brains out!" sneered Bunter, contemptuously.

"Bub-bub-blow our bib-bib-brains out!" stuttered Bob.

"You little know!" said Bunter mysteriously.

"Eh?"

"What?"

"Bah! I waste time on you!" said Bunter. "You're beneath my notice! But beware!"

"Great Scott! What are we to be ware of?" gasped Nugent.

"Vengeance!" said Bunter, in a thrilling voice.

"Wha-a-a-t?"

"Blood-red vengeance! Ha!"

Bunter rolled on up the Remove passage. Not a hand was raised to stop him. The Famous Five gazed at him as if they were mesmerised.

He rolled into Study No. 7 and disappeared from sight. Then the chums of the Remove looked at one another.

"What's the matter with him?" asked Bob, in a hushed voice.

"Goodness knows!"

"Gone off his rocker," said Johnny Bull, shaking his head. "He hadn't far to go."

"Poor old Bunter."

"Well, we won't scrag him if he's gone potty," said Harry Wharton soberly. "I—I suppose it must be that."

"Can't be anything else. After all, he never had any brain to speak of," said Johnny Bull. "What he had has failed him."

"He certainly seemed to be wandering in his mind," said the captain of the Remove. "Blessed if I can make it out."

The juniors went along to Study No. 7 and looked in. Peter Todd was there with Bunter. Toddy was regarding his fat study mate with a very curious look.

Bunter was worthy of curious looks at that moment. He was standing before the study fire, with his arms crossed on his podgy chest, a frown on his fat brow, and a baleful gleam in his eyes, looking contemptuously round the study. His fat lip was curled in a sneer.

"Precious hole!" Bunter was saying, as the Famous Five looked in. "Ha! A schoolboy's study—for me! Ha!"

"What's the matter with you, Bunter?" asked Toddy.

"A schoolboy's study, and prep, and

classes!" said Bunter, with intensifying scorn. Ha! They little know!"

"Look here——"

"Silence!" snapped Bunter.

"Silence?" repeated Toddy.

"Yes." Bunter's eyes rolled behind his big spectacles in quite an alarming way. "Rouse my anger and you are lost!"

"Oh, my hat!"

"Silence on your life!" snapped Bunter.

Peter Todd gazed at him. From the doorway the Famous Five gazed. They were really concerned now.

"I—I say, have you had your tea, Bunter?" asked Peter at last.

If anything could have brought Bunter back to common earth again that question should have done it. In his most inflated moods, Bunter never was indifferent to the claims of the inner Bunter. The most unpunctual of fellows in other respects, Bunter was never late for a meal. The mere mention of a meal was sufficient to make his eyes brighten.

But something evidently had come over Bunter now. Even the mention of tea left him cold.

"Tea!" he repeated.

"Yes; you're late."

"Tea!" Bunter's voice rose in a crescendo of scorn. "Tea! Who's thinking of tea?"

"Aren't you?" ejaculated Toddy, in astonishment.

"No!" roared Bunter.

"My only Aunt Sompronia!" said Peter blankly. "You—you—you're not thinking of—of tea?"

"No!" hooted Bunter.

"But—but ain't you hungry?" babbled Toddy. This was an entirely new Bunter, if he was not thinking of tea when it was past tea-time.

"Hungry! Who cares for hunger?" sneered Bunter. "What are hardships and privations to me? Nothing!"

"Nothing?" murmured Peter. "Oh crumbs! I—I say, has—has anything happened while you've been out, Bunter? Had a—a—a knock on the head or anything?"

"Enough! What I want, I can take with my own right hand," said Bunter. "You shut up, Toddy! What are you? A schoolboy—a commonplace, silly ass! Saying 'Yes, sir!' and 'No, sir!' and 'Please, sir!' and 'Oh, sir!' to a Form master! Bah! I'll show them!"

"Wha-a-at will you show them?" gasped Toddy. "And—and whom are you going to show?"

Bunter's eyes rolled at him, with so alarming a roll, that Peter Todd backed towards the door, glad that the Famous Five were there. He had an idea that Bunter might need holding down.

"Halt!" rapped out Bunter.

"Oh dear!" gasped Peter.

"Stand!"

"I—I'm standing already, old chap——"

"Fool! I mean, stop where you are! I need a comrade!" said Bunter.

"A—a—a—kik-kik-comrade?" babbled Peter.

"A trusty comrade. Will you join me?"

"Jig-jig-join you?" stuttered Peter.

"Have you the courage? Dare you shed blood?"

Peter jumped almost clear of the floor.

"Shed what?" he gurgled.

"Blood!" said Bunter in a thrilling voice. "Red blood—ha! Dare you stain your hands with gore?"

"Great pip!"

"Bah! You fear!" hissed Bunter. "You are useless to me! In my wild career I must ride alone! Begone!"

"Mad as a hatter!" whispered Bob Cherry, as Peter Todd, quite alarmed now, almost tottered from the study.

Peter drew the door shut.

In the Remove passage the six juniors looked at one another with startled, alarmed faces.

"Poor old Bunter!" breathed Toddy.

"I've thought, at times, that I've seen signs of this coming. Now it's come."

"What can have happened to him?" asked Bob, in a hushed voice. "Something's sent him completely balmy."

"The balminess is terrific!"

"Think we'd better tell Quelch?" asked Nugent.

"Blessed if I know!"

"He may get dangerous," said Frank anxiously. "Are—are there any knives in the study?"

"Hark!"

From within the closed door of Study No. 7 came a laugh—a low, blood-curdling laugh. Bunter's voice followed.

"Ha! They little know! Ha!"

"He can't have been drinking!" whispered Bob.

Peter shook his head.

"Then it's insanity!" said Bob.

"The poor chap wants looking after. I wonder if over-feeding did it?"

There was a sound of regular footsteps, in Study No. 7. Bunter was pacing the study.

OTHERS CAN DO IT, SO CAN YOU!

The following amusing joke has been sent in by: Henry Hardman, of Heys Farm, Heapey, Chorley, Lancs. Henry is now the happy recipient of a MAGNET pocket knife.

Sea Cook (sarcastically to new helper): "Ever been on a ship before?"

Helper: "Sure, I've been a gunner in the Royal Navy."

Sea Cook: "Oh! Well start right in, mate, and shell the peas!"

When you've got a moment to spare, chums, have a shot at winning one of these useful prizes!

Peter Todd opened the door a few inches and peeped in. Bunter's eyes rolled round at him at once.

"Away!" he snapped.

"I—I say, old chap——" faltered Peter.

"Leave me! Would you provoke my vengeance?" roared Bunter. "Would you see this study streaming with blood? Ha!"

Peter closed the door hurriedly.

"Quite potty!" he said. "Goodness knows what's done it; but he's a balmy lunatic now. If he doesn't get better, we shall have to tell Quelch. Poor old Bunter! I've often wondered why they sent him here, instead of a home for idiots. He will have to go now."

The juniors moved away from Study No. 7 in a disturbed frame of mind. In a very short time the news flew up and down the Remove passage that Billy Bunter had gone off his rocker. Fellows came and listened at the door of Study No. 7 to the strange mutterings that were going on within. Nobody ventured to open the door. The weird mutterings within were enough for them.

Bunter remained quite unconscious of the impression he was making on the Remove. He would have been quite surprised to learn that the fellows considered him "balmy." He was simply

living over again the life of a bandit on the films; imagining himself in the place of that wonderful film star Pawker Chew, letting his fat imagination run away with him and enjoying the result. It was, in fact, a talkie film that was going on in Study No. 7, had the Removites only known it. But they did not know that; and so far from comprehending that Billy Bunter was, for the time being, a Black Bandit, they only wondered how long it would be before he was taken away to a lunatic asylum.

THE FIFTH CHAPTER.

Bunter Is Wanted!

MR. QUELCH, the master of the Remove, was taking the roll in Big Hall. When he came to the name of Bunter he was not gratified by hearing the usual fat squeak in reply. There was no "Adsum!" from Bunter.

"Bunter!" repeated Henry Samuel Quelch, in a deep voice, that might have caused some uneasiness to a Black Bandit, and certainly would have made Bunter uneasy had he heard it.

But Bunter did not hear it. Bunter was not there. In the ranks of the Remove the fat Owl was conspicuous only by his absence.

Having repeated the name of Bunter in vain, Mr. Quelch glanced at the Remove with a glint in his eyes, and went on with the roll. Bunter was marked absent from calling-over.

When the roll was finished, and the school dismissed, Mr. Quelch beckoned to Wharton to remain behind.

The captain of the Remove remained, rather uneasily. If his Form master was going to ask him about Bunter he did not quite know what to answer.

Bunter, in the opinion of the Removites, had passed the border-line that divides ordinary fatheadedness from sheer balminess. But Wharton did not want to mention that to the Remove master.

"Ah, Wharton!" said Mr. Quelch. "Bunter was absent from calling-over, as no doubt you observed."

"Yes, sir," said Harry.

"He is, however, within gates," said the Form master. "It is very unusual for a boy actually in the House to absent himself from calling-over."

"Quite, sir," agreed Wharton.

"Gosling has reported to me that Bunter acted very strangely when he came in," said Mr. Quelch.

Wharton was not surprised to hear it. Certainly, Bunter had acted strangely enough in the Remove passage. No doubt he had given Gosling a sample when he came back to the school.

"Gosling," continued Mr. Quelch, "has expressed himself as entertaining an actual doubt of the boy's sanity."

"Oh!" said Harry.

"This is, of course, absurd," said the Form master. "But Bunter must have acted in a very strange manner to cause Gosling to receive such an impression. Have you seen Bunter since he came in, Wharton?"

"Yes, sir."

"Have you observed anything unusual in him?"

Wharton hesitated.

Mr. Quelch's keen eyes fixed on him like gimlets.

"I see that you have Wharton," he said quietly. "Kindly speak out and tell me exactly how the matter stands. The boy may need care."

"Well, I—I thought he seemed a—a little queer, sir," said Wharton reluctantly.

"Queer? In what way?"

"Well, not quite the same as usual, sir. He seemed to be talking rather out of his hat—"

"What?"

"I—I mean, talking rather at random, sir!" amended Wharton.

"Has anyone else noticed this, Wharton?"

"I—I think so, sir."

Mr. Quelch pursed his lips.

"I must look into the matter," he said. "Kindly find Bunter and send him to my study immediately, Wharton."

"Very well, sir."

Mr. Quelch took his way to his study, with a very thoughtful expression wrinkling his scholastic brow. He had not attached very much importance to Gosling's statements; but Bunter, though within the House, had missed call-over, and now Mr. Quelch learned that a number of his Form fellows had noticed something "queer" about him. The matter began to look serious.

It was not pleasant. The Remove had been distinguished hitherto by having for a member the most hopelessly obtuse fellow at Greyfriars. That was bad enough, for the Form master who had to deal with him. Mr. Quelch did not want his Form to be distinguished by having a lunatic in it. Really that would be the limit.

But to do Henry Samuel Quelch justice, he was thinking more of the unhappy junior than of himself. It would be disagreeable for him, but really awful for Bunter, if Bunter had gone mad. Yet Mr. Quelch would hardly have thought that W. G. Bunter had sufficient brains to go mad with.

Harry Wharton hurried up to the Remove passage. He looked into Study No. 7 and found Bunter there.

Bunter was no longer pacing the study.

He was seated, or rather sprawled, in the armchair, with his fat little legs stretched out, his hands in his pockets and a wrinkle in his podgy brow. He was thinking.

There was a bitter, sardonic expression on his fat face.

Bunter was thinking of the difference between life as it was, and life as he wanted it to be.

With all the makings of a bandit in him, with boundless courage, desperate hardihood, devil-may-care recklessness, he reflected, he was still doomed to the humdrum, sedate life of a schoolboy—swotting at prep in a study, grinding in the Form-room; subject even to the cane!

Bunter laughed mockingly at that thought!

Yes, Quelch had the cheek to cane him and jaw him, never even suspecting that within that podgy breast beat the reckless heart of a bandit!

Bunter pictured to himself the surprise and horror of Quelch, the amazement of the Remove, if, when he was told some day to hand over, he should suddenly draw a revolver from his pocket, level it at Quelch, and thunder out:

"Hands up!"

It was never likely to come to pass. That was certain. But Bunter's fat imagination revelled in the fancied scene.

Shakespeare has told us how the poet, with his eye in a fine frenzy rolling, gives to airy nothing a local habitation and a name. When Bunter let his vivid imagination go, he was in the same mood as that poet. Fancies became realities to him; he forgot facts, and lived the role that he had adopted in his mind.

So it was with him now. Picturing that amazing scene in the Form-room,

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Bunter forgot that he was a fat school-boy, that he would tremble at Quelch's frown. His brow darkened, his eyes flashed behind his spectacles, and he raised his right hand as if levelling an imaginary revolver. He was thus occupied when Wharton looked in.

"Die!" hissed Bunter.

Wharton started.

Bunter did not observe him. He was wrapped up in the scene he was mentally enacting.

"Die!" he repeated. "Cane me, will you? Ha, ha! You know me not! Ha! My trusty gun covers your heart! Die!"

Bunter was glaring at the study table as he made these extraordinary remarks. So far as Wharton could see, he was addressing the table, or the inkstand that stood on it. There was no one in the study with Bunter; and for a fellow to talk to an inkstand was, if anything could be, a proof of pottiness.

"I—I say, Bunter—" gasped Wharton.

Bunter's extended hand dropped, and he started from his day-dream and blinked round at the captain of the Remove.

"Don't butt in here!" he snapped.

"What the thump do you want?"

This sounded rather more normal, and Wharton was glad to hear it.

"Quelch wants you," said Harry.

"Hang Quelch!"

"You've missed call-over, old bean," said Harry soothingly.

"Call-over?" Bunter laughed sardonically. Call-over—for a fellow who was dreaming of the wild and woolly career of a bandit! Call-over! Black Benito had never answered to his name at call-over, Bunter was sure of that. "Call-over! Ha, ha!"

"Well, fellows have to turn up for call-over, old fat bean," said Wharton. "Why didn't you, Bunter?"

"I forgot!" said Bunter carelessly. "Not that it matters! I've no time for trifles."

"Quelch doesn't think it a trifle," said Harry, with a smile. "He gets wrathful if a man cuts call-over."

"Let him! Do you think I fear his wrath?" asked Bunter scornfully. "You fellows may! To me, fear is unknown."

"My hat! You've changed a lot, then, since the time when you let Tubb of the Third chase you along the Remove passage."

"Bah! Let Tubb beware how he crosses my path," said Bunter darkly. "Let him beware the vengeance of one who never spared a foe."

"Great pip!"

"Begone!" said Bunter impatiently. "You don't understand me. Nobody at this school understands me. I may surprise them some day. It may be soon! Terror may stalk abroad. They little know."

"Oh dear! Terror will stalk into this study if you don't go down and see Quelch," said Harry.

"Bah! Trouble me not!"

"But Quelch wants you—"

"Has the man dared to send for me to go to his study?" asked Bunter contemptuously.

"He jolly well has."

"Then take my answer back! Tell him I defy him."

"My only hat! I'm likely to tell Quelch that—I don't think."

"Tell him," said Bunter, rolling his eyes with a genuine cinema roll, "that I fear him not! Tell him to beware of vengeance—the vengeance of one to whom blood is as water! Go!"

"Oh crikey!"

Wharton went.

He did not go back to Mr. Quelch. He was not likely to convey those melodramatic messages. He went to his own study, where he confided to Frank

Nugent that what Bunter seemed to want was a strait-jacket.

A few minutes later, however, Bunter's footsteps passed the doorway of Study No. 1, on the way to the stairs. It had been borne in upon Bunter's fat mind, on reflection, that he was a bandit only in imagination, and that in actual fact he was a Remove junior, and had to obey his Form master's behest lest worse should befall him. So he went!

Several fellows were on the Remove landing; and they were discussing Bunter and his supposed insanity as the fat junior came by. There was a rush to get out of his way.

Bunter blinked round in surprise.

He was not accustomed to fellows getting out of his way like this. Even Bolsover major, the burly bully of the Remove, had jumped aside with an alarmed look, and was staring back at Bunter quite nervously.

"I say, you fellows—"

"Keep calm!" said Bolsover major. "For goodness' sake, keep calm, Bunter, if you can!"

"Oh, really, Bolsover—"

"Don't come near me!" said Skinner, backing away as Bunter made a movement.

"Oh, really, Skinner—"

"He's got a jolly wild look in his eye!" muttered Snoop. "I—I say, something ought to be done about it."

"I say, you fellows, what's up?" demanded Bunter. "Blessed if you don't all look as if you were afraid of me!"

The juniors made no answer to that, but they backed farther away. Bunter blinked at them in amazement, but with a feeling of satisfaction. They were afraid of him; he could not be mistaken on that point. He made a step towards Bolsover major, and Bolsover jumped back about three feet. There could be no mistake about it.

Bunter grinned.

He had never inspired terror before. Many a time he would have liked to do so, but it had never happened.

Now—he did not know why—he was inspiring it.

The thought was like wine to the weak head of William George Bunter. Half-unconsciously, he drew himself more erect, feeling more than ever like Black Benito. These fellows realised, at last, what a devil of a fellow he was, it seemed to Bunter. He was getting the awed respect that had so long been his due, but which had never been accorded him before.

Casting a look of scorn at the ring of nervous faces, Bunter rolled on, and went down the stairs.

Fisher T. Fish was coming up the stair. At the sight of Bunter coming down, Fishy halted suddenly.

"I—Wow!" he ejaculated.

"I say, Fishy—"

"Keep off!" yelled Fishy.

"Look here—"

"Oh, Jerusalem crickets!" exclaimed Fishy, as Bunter came down. He turned, went down the stairs three at a time, and vanished into space.

Bunter blinked after him in amazement.

Bunter had long flattered himself that he had, like Hamlet's father, an eye like Mars, to threaten and command. Never yet had it produced its proper effect. But now it was producing it. Fishy, fear-stricken, had fled at his approach. It was rather perplexing to Bunter, but it was very gratifying. He remembered that Black Benito had said that if he could not be loved, he would be feared. Nobody, certainly, was likely to love Bunter very much. But it was evident that they feared him.

Bunter rolled on his way, feeling several inches taller. But he was reduced to his former height, as it were,

as he entered his Form master's study and came under the steely stare of Mr. Quelch's gimlet-eyes.

THE SIXTH CHAPTER.

Dark Doubts!

BILLY BUNTER rolled into his Form master's study in a truculent mood. He was in a sort of inflated frame of mind—above himself, so to speak; ready to indulge in any kind of recklessness. But somehow or other the sight of Mr. Quelch's severe features, the cold glitter in Quelch's eyes, had a deflating effect on him. Under Mr. Quelch's grim gaze he felt like a punctured tyre. What Black Benito would have done in the presence of the Remove master at Greyfriars Bunter did not know; but what Bunter did was to drop all of a sudden into the Owl of old. One glance from those gimlet eyes turned Bunter from a lion into a lamb. Instead, therefore, of cheeking Mr. Quelch, as he had fully intended, Bunter almost crawled towards the Form master's table, and squeaked with his old accustomed humility:

"You sent for me, sir?"

"I sent for you, Bunter," said Mr. Quelch, scanning him.

Quelch's look was always penetrating, for which reason his pupils compared his eyes to gimlets. But it was more than usually penetrating now.

Bunter observed it, though he was not aware that doubts of his sanity were entertained.

"I have received a report from Gosling, Bunter. It appears that you were rather late—"

"Oh, no, sir!" said Bunter. "The beast tried to shut me out—"

"Bunter!"

"I mean, the rotter—that is, I mean, the porter—"

"Gosling states that you were late, and that you pushed open the gate with violence, causing him to fall," said Mr. Quelch severely.

"I think perhaps he had been drinking, sir," said Bunter.

"What?"

"He was jolly unsteady on his pins, sir."

"Really, Bunter—"

"Anyhow, I couldn't help him falling over, sir," said Bunter. "He was clumsy. He's getting old and decrepit, sir. Must be fifty."

Mr. Quelch glared, seemingly not pleased by this observation—perhaps because he was fifty himself.

"Bunter! Do not talk nonsense!" he snapped. "Perhaps Gosling's fall was an accident. But I am informed that you used most extraordinary language."

"D-d-d-did I, sir?"

"Gosling states that you called him a dog."

"D-d-does he, sir?"

"He does, Bunter."

"He's rather deaf, sir," said Bunter.

"Deaf?" repeated Mr. Quelch.

"Yes, sir," said Bunter. "You see, as he's getting frightfully old—"

"Kindly keep to the point, Bunter."

"Oh, yes, sir! I mean, Gosling being so awfully old—fifty, at least—he's getting deaf, and doesn't hear what a fellow says. I—I—I really said there was a fog, sir."

"A fog!" repeated Mr. Quelch.

"Fog, sir! Not dog! Fog!"

Mr. Quelch gave Bunter another penetrating look. This explanation was

"The—the fact is, sir—" he stammered.

"Well?"

"I—I was rather wet, sir. I'd been out in the rain. I—I was drying myself, sir. I was afraid of catching cold—"

"Oh! If that is the truth, Bunter—"

"You see, sir—"

"In that case, I will excuse you, Bunter."

"Thank you, sir!"

There was a pause. Again the Form master's eyes searched the fat and fatuous countenance before him. But it was exactly the fat and fatuous countenance to which he was accustomed.



Billy Bunter grasped the big bronze gate with his fat hands, and sent it crashing back on Gosling. Crash! Bump! Splash! There was a puddle at the back of Gosling, and he sat in it.

"My eye!" he gasped. "Ow! I'm wet! Wow! You young rip!" (See Chapter 3.)

plausible enough, and certainly Mr. Quelch was unable to detect any sign of insanity in the fat junior; nothing but the obtuse studidity to which he was so well accustomed.

"Very well, Bunter, we will pass over that matter," said the Remove master, much to the fat junior's relief. "But you did not attend at calling-over, to answer to your name. Why was this?"

"I—I—I—"

"Explain yourself at once."

"I—I—I—"

It was not easy for Bunter to explain himself. He could not explain, to a grim and gimlet-eyed Form master that he had been happily occupied in a sort of day-dream in his study, imagining himself in the part of Pawker Chow, the great Hollywood film actor, and completely wrapped up in it. Mr. Quelch was the last man in the world to understand such erratic flights of fancy. A more prosaic explanation had to be found. Fortunately, William George Bunter was quite free from the trammels of truth.

He made a gesture of dismissal at last.

"You may go, Bunter."

Bunter went.

He closed the study door after him on a perplexed and thoughtful Form master.

Outside the study, Bunter's manner changed.

"Beast!" he murmured.

Once safe away from the daunting stare of those gimlet eyes, Bunter felt his courage revive. With a thick oak door between him and Mr. Quelch, he felt that he could give expression to his feelings.

He clenched a fat fist and shook it at the closed door.

It was unfortunate that Mr. Quelch, who intended to go along to Masters' Common-room, opened the door at that moment.

Bunter, with his fat fist shaking in the air, stood revealed under the astonished stare of his Form master.

"Bunter!" ejaculated Mr. Quelch.

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"Oh!" gasped Bunter.

So taken by surprise was the Owl of the Remove, that he stood rooted to the floor in the same attitude, with his fat fist in the air.

"Bunter! What—"

"Oh dear!"

Bunter let his arm fall.

"What are you doing, Bunter?"

"N-n-nothing, sir."

"Why are you not gone?"

"I—I—I—"

"For what reason, Bunter, were you standing outside my study door, gesticulating in that extraordinary manner?"

"I—I—" stuttered Bunter.

"Are you not well, Bunter?"

"Yes! No! I—I mean, yes, sir!" gasped Bunter.

He was relieved, though surprised, to observe that Mr. Quelch's look was more anxious than angry.

"You may go, Bunter," said Mr. Quelch, after a long, long look at the Owl of the Remove.

"Yes, sir!" gasped Bunter.

He hurried away along Masters' passage. Mr. Quelch's glance followed him, doubtfully and anxiously.

His suspicions as to Bunter's sanity had revived, on finding the fat junior outside his door, engaged in making extraordinary gesticulations.

Mr. Quelch watched the fat junior out of sight, and then went on his way to the Common-room, in a very thoughtful and preoccupied frame of mind. It looked—Mr. Quelch could not help feeling that it looked—as if this member of his Form was going out of his mind. That was enough to make any Form master thoughtful and preoccupied.

THE SEVENTH CHAPTER.

Supper for One!

"I SAY, you fellows!"

"Get out!" yelled Skinner, Snoop, and Stott, in an alarmed chorus.

"Eh?"

"Get out!"

Bunter did not get out.

He stood in the doorway of Study No. 11, blinking at Skinner & Co. through his big spectacles, in amazement.

Prep was over in the Remove studies. Bunter had not done any prep; his fat mind was still running on bandit films.

But Bunter had missed his tea that afternoon, and he was hungry—frightfully hungry. Even bandit films, and the imaginary vision of himself as a bandit, could not satisfy the cravings of the inner Bunter. And it was a scent of cooking that had drawn him to Study No. 11.

Skinner & Co. were having a sausage supper in the study. The enticing odour of frying sausages spread into the passage, and Bunter had scented it. Naturally, it drew him there.

Bunter had butted in, in the hope of joining in that supper. The hope had been faint, for Study No. 11 was anything but a hospitable study. But Bunter was hungry, and the scent of the sausages was attractive, and he was trying it on.

He was quite surprised by his reception.

It was not unusual, of course, for Bunter to be told to get out when he butted into a study, especially at a meal-time. What was unusual was the obvious terror of Skinner & Co.

They had been about to sit down to supper when Bunter opened the door. Instead of sitting down they backed across the study, eyeing Bunter in alarm.

He stared at them, amazed.

"Look here, you fellows—" he began.

"Get out!" said Snoop faintly.

"I—I say, old chap, go to your own study!" gasped Skinner. "I—I think Toddy wants you."

"Go away!" articulated Stott.

"But I say—"

"You can't come in here," said Skinner. "Go away!"

Bunter stood his ground.

For some reason, inexplicable to Bunter, these fellows were afraid of him. Why, was a mystery—but there was no doubt about the fact.

Had Skinner & Co. kicked Bunter out he would have been hurt, but not surprised. He was surprised now, but he was pleased. If fellows were afraid of Bunter there was no need for Bunter to be afraid. That was merely logic. And Bunter was the fellow to take advantage of such a situation. His fat face assumed a bullying expression.

"Don't you fellows be cheeky," he said. "I've come in to supper! If you don't want me, say so."

Bolsover major, the bully of the Remove, sometimes invited himself to tea or supper in a study in that way. Generally, he got away with it, as it were. Bunter had never been able to understudy Bolsover major before. He quite enjoyed doing it now. A fellow who was feared by timid fellows could do as he jolly well liked. Bunter, evidently, was feared, so he was going to do as he jolly well liked! That was all there was about it.

"Now then!" he rapped out. "Do you want me or not?"

"Oh, yes! Of—of course!" gasped Skinner, with a terrified eye on a knife on the table, which was quite near Bunter. What would happen if a lunatic got hold of a knife, Harold Skinner did not dare to think. But he knew that lunatics had to be humoured. "Oh! Yes, rather!"

"That's better," said Bunter, quite in the manner of Bolsover major in his most bullying mood. "I don't want to have to mop up this study. I've dropped in to supper—see?"

"Oh, yes!" gasped Snoop.

"I—I say, put that knife down, Bunter!" ejaculated Stott, as Bunter picked up the knife on the table.

"Eh, why?"

"Oh, dear!"

"I say, these are prime sosses!" said Bunter. "I see, you've got six. That will be three for me and one each for you fellows—what?"

"Yes—oh, yes!"

Bunter grinned. Why these fellows were letting him bully them was really mysterious; but there it was, and Bunter was going to make the most of it.

"You can sit down if you like," he said as he sat at the table, knife and fork in hand.

"We—we'd rather stand, if you don't mind," stammered Skinner, keeping on the farther side of the study.

"Oh, rot—sit down!" said Bunter.

"We—we'd really rather stand," groaned Snoop.

It was only a table knife that was in Bunter's fat hand. But there was no telling what a lunatic might do, even with a table-knife.

"Please yourselves," said Bunter. "Blessed if I can make you out. You needn't be in such a funk—I'm not going to lick you if you behave yourselves. Don't you want any supper?"

"You—you can have the lot, if you like."

"All right! Pass the salt, Skinner."

"C-c-c-an't you reach it, old chap?"

"I've told you to pass the salt!" roared Bunter.

"Oh dear!"

"If I have to come over to you, Skinner—"

"All—all right! D-d-d-don't get up, old chap."

Skinner approached the table in a very gingerly way. He picked up the salt-cellar and slid it across towards Bunter.

Bunter reached for it with the hand that held the knife. Skinner gave a yelp of terror and jumped back.

Bunter blinked at him.

"What's the matter with you?" he demanded.

"N-n-nothing!" gasped Skinner.

"I'm not going to hurt you, you silly ass!" said Bunter contemptuously.

"I—I know. It's all right, old chap!"

Bunter proceeded with his supper. It had been intended as a supper for three, but it was not too much for one—when that one was William George Bunter.

The Owl of the Remove was enjoying himself. The supper was good, and Bunter was hungry. But that was not all—what he was enjoying mostly was the unusual and gratifying situation. It was the first time that Billy Bunter had been able to bully a study into submission like Bolsover major. He resolved that it should not be the last.

Obviously, to Bunter, the fellows were realising, at long last, that he was not a fellow to be trifled with. His very glance seemed to inspire terror. Even Bolsover major, in his most truculent mood, had not been regarded with so much dread—he could see that. Certainly he was not aware of the cause. But the fact was enough for Bunter.

While the Owl of the Remove was busy with sausages and chips, Snoop sidled with an air of assumed carelessness along the wall, to get to the door. Once at the door Sidney James Snoop intended to bolt.

Bunter blinked round at him.

"Where are you going, Snoopey?" he asked.

Snoop halted suddenly.

"I—I wasn't going—" he stammered.

"Tired of my company?" asked Bunter ferociously.

"Oh, no—no! Not at all!"

"Stay where you are, then!"

"Oh! Yes, rather, old chap!"

Snoop slunk back to the window.

Billy Bunter finished his supper, with a good appetite and keen enjoyment. Skinner & Co., in an unhappy group by the window, watched him, only longing to see the supposed lunatic lay down the knife.

"Is that the lot?" asked Bunter at last.

"Yes, old fellow! I—I hope you liked it," said Skinner meekly.

"Anything in the cupboard?"

"N-n-no!"

Bunter grunted.

"Call that a supper?" he snapped. "Measly, I call it!"

"I—I say, I—I'll get you a cake to wind up with, old chap," said Skinner. "I—I've got a cake in the—the box-room."

Billy Bunter brightened up.

"Cut off," he said; "and be quick back!"

"I—I won't be a jiffy!" gasped Skinner. And he fairly bolted from the study.

Skinner did not return with the cake. He did not return at all.

Bunter sat and waited, with growing impatience.

"That silly ass is a jolly long time!" he growled.

"Shall—shall I go and look for him?" stammered Snoop.

(Continued on page 12.)

INSIDE INFORMATION!



By "The OLD REF."

Our special contributor is here to answer any of your perplexing "Soccer" questions, so fire in your queries, chums; and see if you can score a "goal" against him!

THIS week I have to announce, by way of a start, a discovery which has pleased me. It is that the readers of the MAGNET do as they are told. I asked you to write to me about little football problems: told you to do so, in fact, and the questions are beginning to come in. That's good. The more the merrier.

A query comes from Glasgow concerning an incident in a recent Glasgow Cup Final between Rangers and the Celtic. What fights of the past are conjured up by the mention of those two clubs being in opposition.

However, to the point of my correspondent's letter. He was watching this Glasgow Cup tie and noticed that in the course of the game a shot from a Rangers' forward which would undoubtedly have gone into the net was knocked out by the outstretched hand of a full-back. There was no other way in which the full-back could have prevented a goal, and he realised that his own goalkeeper was in a hopeless position so far as stopping the shot was concerned.

The referee gave a penalty kick. Meiklejohn, of the Rangers, failed to score with it, and the match ended in a goal-less draw.

Why didn't the referee give a goal, my reader friend asks, seeing that it is laid down as a principle that offenders on the football field should not profit by their offences.

There is one good and satisfactory reason why the referee did not give a goal on that occasion—he had no power to do so under the rules of football. There are a lot of people who think that when the referee is absolutely satisfied that a goal would have been scored if it had not been for a breach of the rules by a defender the official should be able to award a goal without any penalty kick being taken. I am inclined to agree with this view. But rules are rules, and the referee of a football match is not put on the field to make the rules: he is sent there to carry out the rules as made by the authorities.

ANOTHER little question arises out of the same incident. What do you think of the sportsmanship ideas of a full-back who fists the ball out when there is no other way of stopping a goal? On the face of it, and at first blush, my reply would be "Not much."

However, let us be fair about this matter and try to look at it from the full-back's point of view without excusing in any way the breach of rules or a breach of the highest standard of sportsmanship. The full-back is all strung up for a big effort to prevent a goal from being scored against his side. He is excited. Suddenly he sees the ball going for goal. He can't stop it with his head, his body, or his feet. So up goes his hand. I can quite see that the full-back may do this instinctively in the stress and struggle of the moment. He has no time to think. So don't let us condemn him quite so much as we might be tempted to do when thinking over the matter hurriedly.

Football is like bicycle tyres, and motor-car tyres—they burst sometimes—get punctured in some mysterious way. A game can't go on with a ball out of which the wind has gone, but occasionally a burst ball may lead to an awkward complication. A season or two back Everton were playing Hull City in a Cup match at Villa Park. They had met twice previously, and each game had ended in a draw. Hence the affair on neutral ground.

Extra time had to be played in this third meeting, and in the course of that extra time a Hull forward hit a beauty. Straight to the net it went—a good goal which made everybody very excited. The ball was kicked up the field to Dixie Dean, the Everton centre who had to restart the game from the middle. No sooner did Dean get to the ball, however, than he noticed the wind had gone out of it. The ball had burst!

The referee's attention was called to it, and the Everton players immediately asked the question as to whether the goal against the side should be allowed to count, in view of the burst ball.

When did the ball burst—prior to its entering the net or afterwards? That was the question the referee had to decide, and this, as he told me afterwards, was the way his thoughts ran. When the Everton goalkeeper picked the ball out of the net after Hull had scored, the ball must have been all right, otherwise the goalkeeper would have drawn attention to it. Therefore the assumption was that the ball was quite O.K. when the Hull forward shot the goal. That was the referee's decision, and the goal stood.

But if the referee had decided that the ball had burst prior to going between the posts he could not have allowed a goal.

You can't score a proper point with a burst ball. So if you are going to score a goal, don't kick the ball so hard that you burst it. I often conclude, when watching football, that fellows try to burst the ball every time they shoot. Sometimes it isn't at all necessary.

But there, I am in danger of wandering off into a lecture on how to play the game: in danger of telling you that a soft shot which is well placed out of the goalkeeper's reach is just as effective as a wild bang at the ball which may send it over the bar. But I mustn't give lectures on tactics just now.

QUITE frequently, when I attend football matches, I notice that the linesmen get into a row because they give a throw-in when, so far as the spectators can see, the ball has not been over the line. In these cases I am always on the side of the linesman, because surely he, right on the spot, should be able to tell whether the ball has or has not been over much better than the spectators, viewing from all sorts of angles can tell.

Sometimes, however, the spectators are annoyed owing to a misapprehension. They see the ball kicked into the air, and see it drop on the line. The linesman signals a throw-in because the ball has been over the line as it travelled through the air. And according to the laws the ball is out of play when it crosses the line, whether in the air or not.

Perhaps you may think this is wrong: that a ball which swerves outwards beyond the line and then swerves in again before it drops should not be considered out of play. I agree with this view. It puts up a bit of a bar against skill.

Suppose a player is taking a corner kick on a windy day—when the wind is blowing down the field. A skilful player could use that wind, sending the ball into the air out of play in such a way that it would drop in play in front of goal owing to the action of the wind. Don't you think that such a player ought to get the benefit of his skill? I do.

BUNTER THE BAN DIT!

(Continued from page 10.)

"Yes. Tell him to buck up, or it will be the worse for him!"

"C-c-certainly, old chap!"

Snoop cut across to the door. Stott rushed after him.

"You needn't both go!" snapped Bunter.

But both went; Stott had no idea of being left alone in the study with a maniac. They rushed into the Remove passage together.

Bunter waited.

He waited in vain. Skinner was still absent, and neither Snoop nor Stott returned. Bunter had taken up a knife to cut that cake when it came. But the cake did not come. He stepped to the door of the study at last, and looked out, the knife still in his hand.

Fisher T. Fish was coming along the passage, and Bunter called to him:

"I say, Fishy, seen Skinner?"

Fisher T. Fish gave one look at Bunter and the knife in the fat hand. Then, with a howl of terror, he rushed back along the passage, bolted into Study No. 14, and slammed the door and turned the key in the lock.

Bunter blinked after him.

"What the thump—" he ejaculated.

He stepped out into the passage. There was no sign of Skinner & Co. returning. Little Wun Lung, the Chinese, came out of Study No. 13, and Bunter rolled towards him, quite forgetful of the knife in his hand.

"Here, you!" he said. "Seen Skinner—"

"Keepee away!" yelled Wun Lung, his almond eyes dilated with terror.

"No killy pool lill' Chinese!"

"What?" gasped Bunter.

"Pool lill' Chinese he velly good feller; he likee ole fat Bunter!" howled Wun Lung. "No killy! No killy!"

"You silly idiot—"

Wun Lung jumped back into Study No. 13. The door slammed, and the key turned.

"My hat!" gasped Bunter.

It was all very well to inspire fear and respect; but, really, this was too much of a good thing. Billy Bunter rolled along to his own study. He found Peter Todd there.

Peter seemed to give a sort of convulsive start at the sight of Bunter with a knife in his hand.

"I say, Peter—"

"Yes, old fellow," said Toddy, in a soothing voice. "I say, put that knife down, old chap."

"Eh, why?"

"I—I'd rather you did, if you don't mind, old fellow."

"What rot! I say, Peter, it seems to me that all the fellows are going mad," said Bunter.

"M-m-mad?" stammered Peter.

"Mad as hatters!" said Bunter crossly.

Peter gazed at him. He knew that it was a foible of lunatics to suppose that other people were mad.

"They rush away at the sight of me," said Bunter. "Fishy's locked himself in his study. So has that potty little Chinese. I—I say, Peter, where are you going—sneaking off while a fellow's talking to you?"

"I—I—"

"Skinner said he was going to fetch a cake," said Bunter. "He never came back."

Peter was not surprised to hear it.

"Snoop and Stott went to fetch him, and they haven't turned up, either," went on Bunter.

Again Peter was not surprised to hear it.

"Blessed if I can make the fellows

out!" said Bunter. "What are you staring at me for in that queer way, Peter."

"W-w-was I?" stammered Peter.

"Yes, you were. Are you as potty as the rest?" demanded Bunter irritably.

"Oh dear! What have you got that knife for, Bunter?"

"Eh? I picked it up to cut the cake—"

"Oh, is that all?"

"What the thump did you think I'd got it for?" demanded Bunter.

Peter did not answer that question. He appeared to listen.

"Is that Skinner in the passage?" he exclaimed.

Bunter stepped into the doorway to look.

Peter made a jump at the door, and slammed it.

"Yarooooh!"

The door caught Bunter on the back and hurled him headlong into the passage. There was a bump and a fearful yell.

The key turned in the lock, and Peter breathed more freely.

Bunter scrambled to his feet.

"You silly ass!" he roared. "What did you do that for?"

"Oh dear!" gasped Peter.

"Let me in, Peter, you silly idiot!"

"No jolly fear!"

Toddy felt better with the door locked. Billy Bunter rolled away in a state of enraged astonishment. Two or three fellows who sighted him bolted on the spot. They stood not on the order of their going, but went at once. Billy Bunter was left in sole possession of the passage. What was the matter with the fellows? Unless they had all gone mad, Bunter did not know. But there was no doubt that he was inspiring as much terror as Black Benito in his blackest moments.

THE EIGHTH CHAPTER.

Black Bunter I

"HALLO, hallo, hallo!"

"Look out!"

The Famous Five were in Study No. 1.

They had gathered there, to discuss the strange case of William George Bunter and to consider what was to be done.

If Bunter was "potty," as seemed to be the case, it was evident that something had to be done; and the famous Five, as the leaders of the Form, were the fellows to do it.

The discussion was going on, when a fat face and a pair of large spectacles glimmered into the doorway.

"I say, you fellows!" squeaked the subject of the discussion.

The chums of the Remove looked at him, and involuntarily backed away a little. Harry Wharton & Co. had plenty of pluck; but they were not used to dealing with lunatics, and did not quite know how to handle such a case.

"Keep calm, old chap!" ventured Bob Cherry.

"Eh?"

"The calmfulness is the proper caper, my esteemed Potty Bunter," murmured Hurree Jamsot Ram Singh soothingly.

"Look here—"

"Don't get excited," said Frank Nugent. "Whatever you do, Bunter, don't get excited!"

"Who's excited?" yelled Bunter.

"Hush! When you feel it coming on make an effort and calm yourself. That's the best way."

"You silly chump!"

"Watch him!" whispered Johnny Bull. "If he springs on us, collar him all at once, and hold him jolly tight."

"I say, you fellows, what's up?"

"Up?" repeated Harry Wharton.

"Yes. Have all the fellows gone mad or what?"

"Oh dear!"

"Blessed if I can make it out!" said Bunter. "You fellows are looking at me jolly queerly yourselves!"

"Are—are we?"

"You are!" snapped Bunter. "Look here, if it's a lark, you can chuck it. I'm not a fellow to be japed, I can tell you!"

The Famous Five regarded him in silence. All the evidence was, that Billy Bunter had taken leave of his senses. Every fellow in the Remove was convinced of it.

Skinner had declared his intention of going to Mr. Quelch about it; Snoop declared almost tearfully that nothing would induce him to sleep in the Remove dormitory with Bunter there.

The Famous Five really hardly knew what to think. But they watched Bunter very carefully—and still more carefully when, after coming into the study, he turned and closed the door behind him, and then turned round to them with a mysterious air.

If he was going to spring they were ready for him. But Bunter did not spring. He blinked at the five silent juniors through his big spectacles.

"I say, you fellows—" he began.

"Yes, old chap," murmured Frank Nugent, in his most soothing tones.

"I've got something to tell you."

"Go ahead," said Bob. "Keep on that side of the table, Bunter."

"Eh, why?"

"I—I'd rather you did!" stammered Bob.

"Blessed if I can make you out, Cherry! The whole Form seems to me to have gone potty this evening," said Bunter crossly.

"Do—do they?"

"Or else it's a jape. I suppose it's a jape of some sort," said Bunter. "But I'm not the fellow to stand it, I can tell you."

"N-n-no, old fellow."

"Keep cool!" said Nugent.

"Who's not keeping cool, you fat-head?"

"All right—all right!" said Frank hastily. "Right as rain! You—you said you had something to tell us, Bunter. Do you feel ill?"

"No, I don't!"

"Or—or queer, in any way?"

"No, you ass!"

"Not—not any giddiness in the head, or—or anything of that kind?"

"No, you chump!"

"Oh, all right! Don't get excited!"

"Who's getting excited?"

"Nobody, old chap! Nobody at all! It's all right!"

Bunter blinked round at the five grave faces through his big glasses, puzzled and perplexed. The chums of the Remove were soothing him like a baby, and Bunter could not make it out.

"Look here, you fellows, don't play the goat!" he said peevishly. "I've got an important communication to make."

"Oh!"

"Before I breathe a word—"

"Before you whatter?"

"Breathe a word," said Bunter.

"Before I breathe a word, you've got to swear—"

"We never swear in the Remove," said Bob Cherry, shaking his head.

"Don't be a silly ass! You've got to swear to keep the dread secret."

"The—the which?"

"The dread secret!" said Bunter.

"Oh dear!"

The Famous Five exchanged glances. There could be no doubt about it now.



"I say, you fellows," said Bunter, as Skinner & Co. backed away from him. "Blessed if you don't all look as if you were afraid of me." The juniors made no answer to that, but backed farther away. The Owl of the Remove grinned. If he had never inspired terror before, he was inspiring it now. (See Chapter 5.)

Dread secrets existed in yellow-jacketed novels, and on talkie films. But in the Lower Fourth at Greyfriars, a fellow who talked about dread secrets could only be in need of medical attention.

"What are you blinking at one another like that for?" asked Bunter suspiciously.

"Oh, nothing!"

"Go on, old chap."

"Cough up the dread secret," said Bob.

"Swear first!" said Bunter. "Dire danger may dog our steps, unless the whole thing is wrapped in the darkest mystery."

"Oh crumbs!"

"Poor old chap!"

"Eh? What are you calling me a poor old chap for?" ejaculated Bunter.

"N-n-nothing!" said Harry Wharton.

"Get it off your chest, old fellow."

Bunter blinked mysteriously at the juniors, and then turned to the door, stooped, and listened. The juniors watched him as if fascinated. Bunter seemed satisfied, and turned back.

"We must be careful of cave-droppers," he said.

"Oh!"

"Our lives may depend on it."

"Phew!"

"Now to come down to business," said Bunter, more mysteriously than ever. "I've been doing a lot of thinking—"

"You have?" ejaculated Bob, in involuntary astonishment.

"Yes. I'm going to form a band."

"A—a—a band?"

"Yes," said Bunter impressively. "I shall be the leader of the band.

You fellows will be the band. I've picked you out."

"But—but I can't play anything," said Bob.

"What?"

"Wharton can play the flute a bit, and Johnny has a mouth-organ. But I can't play on any instrument—except a football."

"You silly ass! I don't mean that kind of a band!" said Bunter impatiently. "Not a musical band, you dummy. A band of bandits!"

"A what of which?" gasped Bob.

"Bandits!"

"Oh, my hat!"

"Surprised you, what?" smiled Bunter, as the five juniors gazed at him almost open-mouthed.

"Yes, a—a little!" gasped Wharton.

"Well, that's the idea," said Bunter.

"That—that's the idea, is it?"

"Yes. It came into my head while I was watching the film this afternoon at the Marble Hall, in Courtfield."

"The—the film?" Light began to dawn at last on the perplexed juniors.

"The film! Oh!"

"Oh!" gasped Johnny Bull. "The film!"

"It was a ripping film," said Bunter. "Pity you fellows didn't see it! It might have put ideas into your heads."

The juniors gazed at him. They were beginning to understand. They had read in the newspapers of hare-brained fellows who fell into all sorts of delinquencies after seeing American films. Certainly they had never expected to find one at Greyfriars. How any fellow could be weak-minded enough to be led into folly by a

foolish film they could hardly comprehend. But that there were such fellows they knew; and apparently William George Bunter was one of them.

"I thought it out while I was watching Black Benito on the film," said Bunter. "It flashed into my brain."

"There was room for it," remarked Johnny Bull.

"Oh, really, Bull—"

"And what exactly flashed into your brain—what you call a brain?" asked the captain of the Remove, eyeing Bunter very curiously.

"The idea of being a bandit."

"Oh crumbs!"

"Of course, there's a lot of limitations here," said Bunter. "Mounting coal-black horses, and holding up banks, and all that. We couldn't go in for that."

"You—you think we couldn't?" gasped Bob.

"Well, not at the start, at any rate. It may come later. But everything has to have a beginning," said Bunter. "First of all we form the band. I'm leader. That's understood. My orders are carried out unquestioningly. Disobedience is death!"

"Oh crikey!"

"I shall be known as Black Bunter, and—"

"Bub-bub-Black Bunter?"

"Yes. Black Bunter, chief of the Black-Masked Band!" said the Owl of the Remove impressively. "I've thought it all out, you know."

The Famous Five gazed at him. They seemed to be able to do nothing

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(Continued from page 13.)

but gaze at him. He had taken their breath away.

"You fellows will swear obedience, same as—the members of Black Benito's band," said Bunter. "We shall go on the trail—"

"The trail?"

"In black masks—"

"Oh dear!"

"And spread terror wherever we go," said Bunter. "If we shed blood, the—"

"If!" gasped Bob.

"The if-fulness is terrific!"

"The dread secret will be kept locked in our own breasts," said Bunter. "This school will be our headquarters. We can make a secret lurking-place in the old priory. There we can store our booty."

"Our boots, do you mean?"

"No, I don't, you ass! Booty—our booty! There will be stacks of booty after our raids—"

"Our—our raids?" said Nugent faintly. "Who—who—whom are we going to raid?"

"Oh, anybody! All the wealthy are victims of the Black Mask Band," explained Bunter. "Same as on the film, you know."

"Oh, scissors!"

"Well, what do you think of the idea?" asked Bunter.

The juniors did not tell Bunter what they thought of the idea. They were relieved to find that Bunter was not, after all, insane; only a born idiot. Their feelings overcame them all of a sudden, and there was a roar of laughter in Study No. 1.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Bunter blinked at them in surprise.

"I say, you fellows—"

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

"This isn't a laughing matter!" roared Bunter wrathfully.

"Isn't it?" gasped Bob Cherry, wiping his eyes. "Oh, my hat! Your mistake, old fat bean—it is! Black Bunter! Oh, my hat! Ha, ha, ha!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Look here, you silly asses—"

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

The door opened, and Peter Todd looked in.

"What's the jolly old joke?" he asked. "Oh, here's Bunter! I say, a fellow being mad isn't a laughing matter, you men!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" yelled the Famous Five.

"It's all right, Toddy!" gasped Bob Cherry. "He isn't mad! Only films on the brain! Ha, ha, ha!"

"Only the jolly old films!" stuttered Johnny Bull. "He saw Black Benito on the pictures this afternoon, and he wants to be Black Bunter the Bandit."

"Wh-a-at?" gasped Toddy.

"Black Bunter!" yelled Bob Cherry. "Oh, hold me, somebody! Black Bunter! Fan me! Ha, ha, ha!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" yelled Peter Todd.

Billy Bunter blinked wrathfully and indignantly round the study. There was, so far as Bunter could see, nothing to laugh at. Becoming a bandit—a black bandit—was surely a serious

matter for any fellow. But these fellows evidently were not taking it seriously. They were shrieking with merriment.

"Black Bunter!" gurgled Johnny Bull. "Ha, ha, ha!"

"I say, you fellows—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Shut up!" roared Bunter. "I tell you—"

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

"Yah!"

Bunter, with a scornful sniff, rolled out of the study. He left the Removites shrieking. And it was clear that, if Black Bunter ever succeeded in forming a band, he would not enlist the members thereof in Study No. 1 in the Remove.

THE NINTH CHAPTER.

To Be or not to Be—a Bandit!

BILLY BUNTER was in a morose humour the next day.

His fat brow wore a perpetual frown.

Although an unprejudiced observer would have supposed that Nature had specially designed him for the part, Bunter did not like being an object of merriment.

Neither could he see anything comic in Black Bunter. Banditry was not, so far as Bunter could see, comic.

To the other fellows, it seemed not merely comic, but a real shriek.

The whole Remove, when they heard of it, yelled.

They were relieved of their misgivings on the score of Bunter's sanity. He was not mad—at all events, no madder than usual. He was only film-mad—cinema-silly! His brain—such as it was—was fevered by the absurdities of American films.

There had been such cases before—and would doubtless be many such cases again. Indeed, Skinner remarked that there were fellows who had been sent to "chokey" for trying to enact, in real life, what they had seen on the screen. Foolish fellows, with their foolish minds stuffed with cinema stunts, had transgressed the law, and had been brought to their senses by a policeman's hand on their shoulders. Bunter was only one more on the list.

The more the Removites chortled, the more Billy Bunter frowned. The hilarity of his Form-fellows did not have the effect of clearing his fat mind of its peculiar obsession. It annoyed him and exasperated him, and fired him with a desire to "show" them.

"A time will come!" he said dramatically to Peter Todd, in Study No. 7.

Peter only chortled.

When Black Benito, on the screen, said, in a nasal accent, that a time would come, it was intensely dramatic—to Bunter's mind, at least. But the same phrase produced no dramatic effect in Study No. 7 in the Remove. It only made Peter chortle.

"You know me little!" said Bunter, glaring at him wrathfully. "Ha, ha! Time will show!"

"Don't!" gasped Peter, almost weeping. "Don't! You give me a pain in my ribs, Bunter! Don't!"

"Wait!" said Bunter mysteriously. "Wait! You will see what you will see!"

"Well, I shan't see anything else, that's a cert," agreed Peter; "and what am I going to see, you fat fooling fat-head?"

Bunter did not answer that question. Perhaps his fat mind was not quite clear on that point.

That day was not Bunter's happy day.

"Bunter the Bandit" was a standing joke in the Remove that day—and

Bunter was the only Remove man who did not cackle over it.

Moreover, Skinner & Co. had not forgotten the happenings in Study No. 11. Bunter had lost his terrors for them, all of a sudden. It was not because he was a devil of a fellow, a reckless bandit in the shape of a schoolboy, that they had let him bully them and bag their supper. It was because they had supposed him to be a lunatic! That was an irritating and humiliating discovery for Bunter. Still worse, Skinner & Co. indemnified themselves by kicking Bunter whenever they saw him that day.

They kicked him often, and they kicked him hard.

It was humiliating for a fellow who felt the lawless heart of a bandit beating in his podgy breast, to be kicked by fellows like Skinner and Stott and Snoop. It was also painful.

But it was useless to tell Skinner & Co. that a time would come! Even a statement that the hour of vengeance would dawn, only made them chortle, and they kicked Bunter the more.

Neither was the fat Owl happy in the Form-room.

Dreams of the wild life of a bandit had occupied the time that should have been devoted to prep. The result was that Quelch ragged him in class.

Fierce thoughts passed through Bunter's fat mind while he received the acid edge of Quelch's tongue.

He saw himself—in his mind's eye—whipping out a trusty revolver, levelling it at Quelch, and ordering him in a voice of thunder to put his hands up. It was a delightful mental picture.

But Bunter saw this only with his mind's eye. With his other two eyes, and his spectacles, he saw Mr. Quelch take his cane from his desk. And he roared much more like a schoolboy than a bandit, when he experienced the weight of that cane.

After class Bunter was the richer by a caning, two hundred lines, and the kickings he had received from Skinner & Co., not to mention any amount of chipping from the Removites.

Under such discouragements it might have been supposed that thoughts of banditry would leave him. Instead of which, they haunted Bunter's fat brain more persistently than ever.

It was written of old, that though you bray a fool in a mortar, yet will not his folly depart from him.

So it was with W. G. Bunter.

In Study No. 7 that evening, Bunter sat in the armchair and gloomed at Peter Todd and Tom Dutton, as they did their prep.

Bunter did no prep. He seemed quite reckless about that—at all events when he was at a safe distance from Quelch's gimlet-eye.

Peter glanced at him several times, and grinned. He could guess the thoughts that were passing behind the corrugated fat brow.

"What about prep, fatty?" Peter asked, at last.

"Blow prep!" snapped Bunter.

"Quelch ragged you to-day!"

"Blow Quelch!"

"He will rag you to-morrow!"

Bunter sniffed.

"Bah! Who cares for Quelch?" he sneered.

"Well, you seemed to, rather, when he was jawing you in class!" grinned Toddy. "You seemed to care quite a lot."

"He will go too far some day!" said Bunter darkly. "I came jolly near felling him to the earth this morning!"

"So near and yet so far!" sang Peter.

"Beast!"

"Fathead! Get on with your prep, and don't play the giddy ox!" advised

Peter. "And don't go to the films any more. They're not good for a weak brain like yours, old fat bean."

"Prep! As if I could bring my mind down to prep!" said Bunter scornfully.

And Bunter did not bring his powerful mind down to prep.

He was still glooming in the armchair, and thinking dark-some thoughts, when Peter finished and went down to the Rag.

In the Remove dormitory that night, smiling faces greeted Bunter when he rolled in.

"Hallo, hallo, hallo! Here comes the jolly old bandit!" said Bob Cherry.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Hands up!" chortled Skinner.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Bunter frowned round at a crowd of grinning faces.

There was not, so far as Bunter could see, anything funny in his remarkable new stunt. But all the Remove fellows persisted somehow in regarding it as funny.

Bunter's fat lip curled in scorn.

"You can cackle!" he said.

"Thanks, we will!" said Squiff. "Ha, ha, ha!"

"You can snigger—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"But you'll see what you'll see," said Bunter. "This is no place for me."

"Eh?" ejaculated Bob.

"What do you mean, fatty?" asked Peter.

"You will know when the time comes," said Bunter mysteriously. "Perhaps I shan't be here much longer. Perhaps you're going to have a surprise. I'm not telling you anything."

"You're not leaving?" exclaimed Skinner.

"Who knows?" said Bunter, still more mysteriously.

"Are your people sending you to a home for idiots?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Beast!"

"Now, then, turn in, you kids!" said Wingate of the Sixth, coming into the dormitory. "Time's up. Buck up, Bunter!"

"Shan't!"

"What!" ejaculated the prefect.

"Oh, my hat!" murmured Peter.

All eyes turned on Bunter. The fat junior was giving Wingate a glare of defiance. Wingate stared at him blankly.

"What—what did you say, Bunter?" he ejaculated.

He made a stride towards Bunter, letting his ashplant slip down into his hand. Bunter blinked at the ashplant, and his defiance melted away like snow in the summer sunshine.

"I—I—I mean— All right, Wingate!" he gasped.

And he bolted into bed like a fat rabbit.

Whack!

The ashplant caught Bunter as he plunged into bed.

"Yaroooh!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Wingate smiled, extinguished the lights, and left the dormitory. There was a howl from Bunter's bed and a chuckle from the rest.

"Ow, ow, ow!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Why didn't you fell him to the earth, Bunter?" chortled Peter Todd.

"Or make him put his hands up?" howled Bob Cherry.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Billy Bunter did not reply. That one lick from the cane had, for the moment, taken the banditry out of Bunter.

Sleep fell on the Remove dormitory. But had any fellow remained awake he would have noted a remarkable circumstance. Generally, Bunter was the first to fall asleep, and his deep, unmusical snore announced the fact. But now there was no sound in the Remove dormitory, save the steady breathing of the sleepers. Bunter was not snoring.

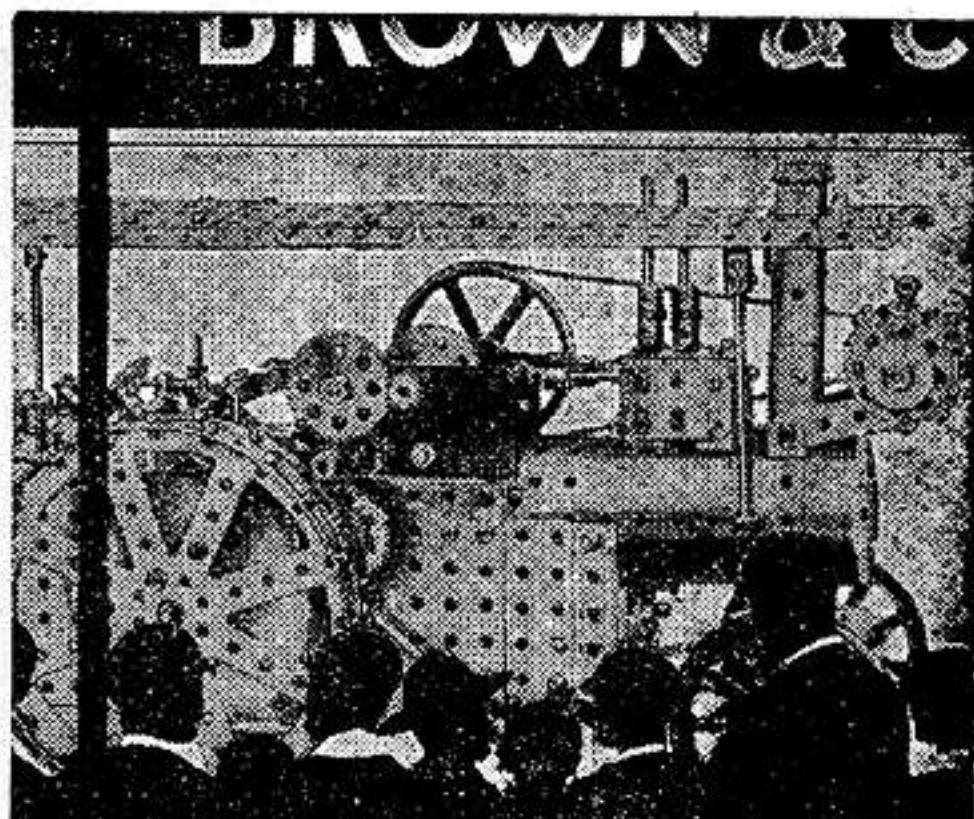
He was not asleep.

While the other fellows slept Billy Bunter remained awake, with dark and direful thoughts passing through his podgy brain.

It was nearly midnight before Bunter's snore began to awaken the echoes. He slept at last.

But even in slumber those direful thoughts did not leave him. He did not, as usual, dream of tuck, of boundless spreads and unlimited feasts. He dreamed that he was mounted on a coal-black broncho, with a black mask on his plump countenance, and that trembling foes fled wildly before the glittering eyes of Black Bunter. He smiled in his slumber. In real life, unhappily, he was only a fat schoolboy, but in the mists and shadows of sleep, at least, he was Black Bunter the Bandit.

(Continued on the next page.)



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THE TENTH CHAPTER.

Where is Bunter?

HARRY WHARTON & Co., the following day, did not bestow on Billy Bunter the attention so important a personage merited. Having chortled over the jest, they let the matter slip from their minds, having plenty of things to occupy their thoughts which seemed, to them, at least, more important than Bunter and his weird stunts. Bunter the Bandit, no doubt, was a good joke, but the best joke could not last for ever, and William George Bunter fell back into the obscurity which was his natural element. He was destined to emerge from it in quite a surprising way, but of that the chums of the Remove were as yet happily ignorant.

Bunter was caned in class that morning, and given more lines. That drew momentary attention to him. After class he was not seen.

But as nobody wanted to see him he was not specially missed.

Peter Todd certainly missed him at tea, but he was only too happy to miss him. When Bunter was missed at a meal there was enough for the other fellows, which there seldom was when Bunter was present.

So, though Peter wondered for a moment where Bunter was, and what he was up to, he did not bother his head about it.

After tea, however, Wibley of the Remove dropped into Study No. 7. He looked round as if in search of someone, and then stared at Peter.

"Where's that idiot?" he asked.

Peter did not need to ask who he meant.

"Not here," he answered.

"Well, where is he?"

"Haven't seen him since class."

Wibley grunted.

"Somebody's been rooting about in my study!" he growled. "I suppose it was that frabious ass."

"Tuck missing?" grinned Peter.

"No, some of the stage props," said Wibley. Wibley was manager of the Remove Dramatic Society, and the theatrical properties belonging to that society were kept in a box in Wibley's study.

"Eh? That wouldn't be Bunter," said Toddy, in surprise. "If you'd missed a cake, of course—"

"I fancy it was Bunter," grunted Wibley. "Somebody's taken a mask out of the property box, and a false beard."

Peter jumped.

"Oh, my hat! But—but what would Bunter want with a mask and a false beard?" he ejaculated.

"Well, somebody's bagged them!" growled Wibley. "And if Bunter's doing bandit stunts to the extent of bagging things out of my study, Bunter is going to hear something drop, I can tell you. Don't you know where he is?"

"Haven't any idea."

Wibley grunted again, and left the study, apparently in search of Bunter. Peter was left with a very thoughtful expression on his face—a rather startled look.

But he shook his head in answer to his own thoughts.

"Even Bunter couldn't be such an idiot!" he murmured.

But Peter was worried a little. He knew his Bunter, and from long experience he could not help being aware that Bunter was idiot enough for anything.

Ten minutes later there was another caller at Study No. 7. This time it was Herbert Vernon-Smith, and he

looked round, just as Wibley had done, as if in search of someone.

"Where's that fat freak?" he asked.

"Oh, my hat! Anything gone from your study, Smithy?"

"Yes," growled the Bounder. "Somebody's cleared out my study cupboard. I had a lot of stuff. I was going to stand a study supper. It's all gone, the whole blessed lot."

"That sounds more like Bunter," agreed Peter.

"Well, where is the fat villain?" demanded the Bounder. "I'm going to find him before he stacks it all away."

"Haven't seen him."

"Br-r-r-r!"

Vernon-Smith tramped out of the study, with an expression on his face that boded ill for the Owl of the Remove when he was found.

Peter Todd, looking still more thoughtful, went along to Study No. 1, and looked in on Wharton and Nugent. Wharton was rooting about the study, evidently looking for something, and Peter wondered if anything was missing from No. 1.

"Lost anything?" he asked.

Wharton glanced round.

"Not exactly lost it," he said. "But I'm blest if I know where it can be! It's my old rucksack. It was hanging on that nail. If some ass has borrowed it he might have asked first."

"A rucksack!" repeated Peter thoughtfully. "A chap might borrow it to carry a stack of grub in."

"But why—"

"Smithy's missed a cargo of tuck from his study."

"Where's Bunter?" grinned Nugent.

"Smithy's looking for him. I sympathise with him when Smithy finds him," answered Peter.

"But Bunter wouldn't want to bag my rucksack to carry away Smithy's tuck in," said Wharton, with a stare. "He would carry it away inside his waistcoat."

"There's something else missing," said Peter soberly. "Wibley's missed a mask and a false beard from the property box in his study."

"Great pip!"

"But—but you don't think—" ejaculated Nugent, staring at Toddy.

"Blessed if I know what to think!" said Toddy.

"That ass Bunter—"

"That idiot Bunter—"

"Goodness knows," said Peter. "I've read in the newspapers of fellows going potty over films, and playing the giddy ox; but—"

"Oh crumbs! But—"

"I'm going to look for Bunter anyhow, and see what he's up to," said Peter. "He belongs to my study, and I'm his keeper."

Peter Todd departed, and Wharton and Nugent looked at one another. They had almost forgotten Bunter the Bandit; now they were reminded of him.

"Even that idiot wouldn't—" murmured Nugent.

"Goodness knows."

"Anyhow, he will have to turn up at calling-over, and we shall see."

"I think we'd better help Toddy look for him. Goodness knows what the potty porpoise may be up to!"

"Let's!" agreed Frank.

The chums of Study No. 1 joined Peter, and looked for Bunter. But they did not find him.

They looked in the tuckshop first; the most natural place to look for Bunter. But he was not there; and Mrs. Mumble had not seen him. They looked up and down and round about. They looked in the Form-room; it was barely

possible that Bunter had gone there to write his lines. But the Owl of the Remove was not in the Form-room.

Other fellows, questioned on the subject, could give little information. Snoop had seen him in the Remove passage after class; and Fisher T. Fish remembered that he had noticed him carrying something—it might have been a rucksack—in the direction of the Cloisters. That was all. Wherever Bunter was, he was not to be found.

"Bound to turn up for call-over, anyhow," said Toddy.

But Toddy did not prove a true prophet. When the Remove assembled in Hall, with the rest of the school, for the roll to be called, there was one member missing from the ranks of the Lower Fourth. Prout, the master of the Fifth, called the roll; and he marked Bunter absent.

That, in itself, was not alarming; Bunter had missed call-over the previous evening, and had been in the House all the time. But it had a disturbing effect on the juniors. Bunter, apparently, had been rather busy after class, collecting goods in the studies, packing them into Wharton's old rucksack, and then—then he had disappeared.

"He's gone out," said Peter, to a group of Removites on the Lower Fourth landing. "He's out of the school."

"Must have gone out by the Cloisters when Fishy saw him," said Nugent.

"And—and he hasn't come back!" said Bob.

"Does he mean to come back?" muttered Peter.

"Great Scott!"

"You—you don't think he's run away from school, Toddy?" ejaculated Johnny Bull.

Peter gave a hopeless shrug of the shoulders.

"Goodness knows what he's done! I give it up!"

"The howling ass!" said Harry.

"The potty chump!"

"The burbling duffer!"

"Well, we can't do anything," said the captain of the Remove at last. "If he's not back by bed-time, there'll be a row. Better get to prep."

And the fellows went to prep.

In every Remove study, now, Bunter was once more the topic of conversation—rather to the detriment of prep.

Bunter was gone! He had taken a bag of provisions, a mask, and a false beard! The facts seemed to speak for themselves. Some of the fellows chuckled over it. But some of them looked very serious. If the hapless Owl of the Remove was playing the goat to that extent it might be comic, but the consequences to William George Bunter were likely to be anything but comic.

Peter Todd was quite worried, as he went to Study No. 7 for prep. Bunter was rather trying as a study mate. He did not, perhaps, inspire deep affection. There was no doubt that Study No. 7 was a happier place of abode when Bunter was not there. Nevertheless, Peter was worried.

Still, worried or not, prep had to be done. Peter sorted out his books, and sat down at the study table.

As he opened his Virgil a folded paper dropped out.

Peter glanced at it.

Then he jumped.

"Oh, holy smoke!" he ejaculated.

For a full minute Peter stared blankly at the written sheet that had been placed in his Virgil, evidently to meet his eye when he opened the book at prep.

"Now then, turn in, you kids!" said Wingate, entering the Remove dormitory. "Time's up! Buck up, Bunter!" "Shan't!" "What?" ejaculated the prefect. All eyes turned on Bunter as the Owl of the Remove gave Wingate a glare of defiance. (See Chapter 9.)



Then, taking it in his hand, he rose from the table and left the study, and went quickly along to Study No. 1.

THE ELEVENTH CHAPTER!

Black Bunter's Farewell!

WHAT the thump—"What's happened?" Wharton and Nugent were at prep in Study No. 1 when the door opened, and Peter Todd came hurriedly in.

They looked up, and the expression on Peter's face was more than enough to banish prep from their minds.

The two juniors jumped up from the table.

Peter shut the door and turned to them.

"He's done it!" he gasped.

"He—who—Bunter?"

"That fat idiot!" groaned Peter.

"But what—"

"He's been and done it!" groaned Toddy. "The howling idiot! The benighted chump! Oh dear!"

"But what has he done?" gasped Wharton.

"Bolted!"

"Bolted!" yelled the two juniors.

"Bunked!" said Peter.

"But what—"

"Why—"

"The burbling jabberwock!" said Peter. "The unmitigated, fozzling fat-head! The frightful ass! Oh crumbs!"

"But what has he done?" yelled Wharton.

The chums of Study No. 1 were getting alarmed.

"He's gone!"

"But what—why—"

"To be a bandit!" gurgled Peter.

"What?"

"He left this letter for me in my Virgil!" moaned Peter. "I've just found it! Oh dear!"

He threw the missive on the table. Wharton and Nugent stared at it together.

It was written in Bunter's hand. At quite a distance that missive could have been recognised as Bunter's work. The blots announced as much; the smears were characteristic. And the spelling was Bunter's—quite his own. The remarkable epistle ran:

"Dear Peter,—

"When this meets your eye I shall be gone—for ever!

"Search for me not! You will never find me! From this moment the fate of Black Bunter will be rapt in mystery.

"Tell Quelch I am gone. Tell him I defy him, and her! defiance in his teeth.

"Tell the Head! Tell him I regard him with scorn as a fatheaded old schoolmaster.

"Tell him that he will never see me moar; unless, perchance, the skool is raded some dark and stormy nite by Black Bunter and his band.

"Tell him to tremble! Black Bunter is ruthless. Black Bunter shoze no mercy to his foze.

"Ha, ha! You have larked at me, knowing me little! Wait! Watch! Tremble with dredd!

"Seek me not! Deth awates 'hose who phollow the trail of Black Bunter. Vencher not into the bandit's laze. In the depo phorest Black Bunter bids defiance to his enemeze. Blud—krimson blud—marks the trail to the bandit's kave.

"Fairwell for evver,

"W. G. BUNTER."

"P.S.—Tremble!"

"My only hat!" said Frank in a hushed voice; as he perused and reperused that remarkable letter of farewell.

"Great Christopher Columbus!" murmured Wharton.

"Ain't he a bute?" said Peter. "Ain't he a prize-packet? Ain't he the fattest and frabjousest idiot that ever was?"

The juniors gazed at the epistle and gazed at one another. The mystery of Bunter's absence was solved! With his fat brain filled and fevered with the films, Bunter had gone forth to be a bandit!

"The frightful idiot!" gasped Wharton.

"The awful ass!" said Nugent.

"It's no good slanging him," said Peter in despair. "What's going to be done? That's the question."

"Blessed if I know! We don't know where the fat idiot is, or we might hook him back. But where is he?"

"Ask me another!" groaned Peter. "Somewhere outside Greyfriars—stuffing Smithy's grub, most likely."

Wharton and Nugent grinned. "It's funny," said Peter. "But it won't be funny for Bunter. If he's missed at bed-time there'll be a fearful row."

"He will be missed all right," said Frank. "That letter shows that he means business; and it will last as long as Smithy's grub lasts."

"He may be sacked for this," said Peter. "Of course, that would be no loss—"

"Rather the reverse."

"Yes, but we don't want the fat idiot sacked!"

"If we knew where he'd gone—"

"But we don't!"

"Something will have to be done," said Harry. "Let's call in the other fellows and have a pow-wow."

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Frank went along the passage to call the other members of the Co. to council. Bob Cherry and Johnny Bull and Hurree Jamset Ram Singh arrived in Study No. 1 in a state of considerable surprise. Nugent shut the door carefully after they were in the study.

"What's up?" asked Bob. "Franky told us to come here—"

"We've left prep!" grunted Johnny Bull.

"There is some esteemed matterfulness?" inquired Hurree Singh.

"Bunter—" began Toddy.

Snort, from Johnny Bull.

"You've called us away from prep on account of Bunter?" he demanded.

"Yes," said Harry. "You see—"

"I don't see, and I don't want to. Prep's got to be done. Blow Bunter! Bother Bunter!"

"Shut up a minute, old chap," said the captain of the Remove, "and look at that letter."

"What the dickens is it?" grunted Johnny Bull.

"The last farewell of Black Bunter, the Bandit."

"Wha-a-a-at?"

The three juniors read the letter. They gazed at it with almost unbelieving eyes.

"Oh crikey!" chuckled Bob Cherry.

"That tears it! That puts the jolly old lid on! Ha, ha, ha!"

"The tearfulness is terrific!"

"We've got to stop the silly idiot somehow," said Peter.

"You can't stop a silly idiot from being a silly idiot," said Johnny Bull.

"Let him rip! He will get a flogging for this! It will do him good."

"He may get sacked."

"Well, let him! There will be a lot of dry eyes at Greyfriars if we don't see Bunter any more. Do you want me to take out my hanky and weep into it?" inquired Johnny Bull sarcastically.

"Oh, don't be an ass!" said Peter peevishly. "That fat idiot's in my study, and I'm not going to see him sacked!"

"Might be sent to a lunatic asylum on that letter," said Johnny Bull. "It's evidence enough! Well, that's the proper place for him."

"Look here—"

"Well, what the thump do you want us to do, Toddy? We can't get the fat idiot back when we don't know where he is! Think we can break bounds and walk all over Kent in the dark looking for him?"

"Something's got to be done—"

"He will be missed at bed-time," said Bob Cherry, "and they'll know he's out of bounds. Every fellow will be asked if he knows where the fat dummy's gone, and you'll have to produce that letter, Toddy."

"Impossible!"

"You'll have to, fathead, when they begin inquiring after Bunter," said Johnny Bull.

"That will mean the sack for him. He mentions the Head as a fatheaded old schoolmaster. How will the Beak like that?"

"That letter can't be shown to the masters," said Harry Wharton decidedly.

"No fear!" said Nugent.

"If we only knew where the howling ass was," said Peter despairingly, "we could bag him and thrash him and bring him in—"

"My esteemed ohums"—Hurree Jamset Ram Singh was looking again at the farewell letter of the Greyfriars bandit—"the excellent and idiotic Bunter speaks of a lair in a deep forest, which is probably Friardale Wood—"

"That's the nearest forest," grinned

Bob Cherry; "and it's quite as far as Bunter's likely to walk."

"It's jolly cold for a night in the wood," said Frank. "The fat ass must be right off his rocker to think of camping out in this weather!"

"Well, he is off his rocker!" grunted Johnny Bull.

"The esteemed idiot speaks of a cave—"

"There isn't any cave in Friardale Wood, that I know of," said Bob. "The nearest caves are on the beach. Bunter hasn't the nerve to go over the cliffs in the dark."

"But there is the old priory in the wood," suggested Hurree Jamset Ram Singh.

"That's it!" exclaimed Harry Wharton, with a nod. "Ten to one that's where the fat chump has gone!"

"That's it," agreed Bob Cherry. "He can't be thinking of a lodging on the cold, hard ground."

"Leave him to it," suggested Johnny Bull. "He will jolly soon get fed-up with camping out there in this weather."

"Fathead!" said Peter. "If he's not back by bed-time there will be a row and an inquiry, and we shall be bound to tell what we know. And if this letter's seen by the beaks, it's all up with Bunter."

Johnny Bull gave a snort.

"What about prep?" he asked.

"Oh, blow prep, and blow you!"

"We're all in this," said Harry.

"We've got to save that born idiot from what he's asked for, if we can. Look here, it's two hours or more to dorm. We can cut prep, and chance it with Quelch in the morning—"

"Can we?" snorted Johnny.

"Yes, old chap! And the sooner we get going, the better."

"And suppose we're spotted sneaking out of the school after dark?" demanded Johnny Bull.

"We'll take care not to be spotted."

"It will mean a licking all round."

"Let it!" said Peter.

"That's all very well—"

"Of course it is, old bean," said Bob Cherry cheerily. "Now let's scrounge our coats and get going."

"Well, I think it's rot!" growled Johnny Bull.

And having delivered that opinion, Johnny Bull proceeded to prepare for the expedition with the rest.

THE TWELFTH CHAPTER.

The Bandit's Lair!

"PRIME!"

Billy Bunter made that remark.

It was not, perhaps, the remark that a film bandit would have made on a talkie film. But Bunter, after all, was only a beginner.

There was quite a lot of the Owl of the Remove left in Black Bunter, so far.

As Hurree Jamset Ram Singh had sagely guessed, it was for the old priory in the wood that Bunter had headed.

Now he was camped there.

Bunter, of course, would have preferred a cave in a forest. A darksome cave in a gloomy forest would have been more suitable for a bandit's lair.

But beggars cannot be choosers. There were no deep and tangled forests anywhere near Greyfriars, with caves in them. There was a wood and an old ruin, and Bunter had to make the best of them.

Under the old stone archway, the most solid remaining portion of the ancient ruins, Bunter had fixed his camp. The archway was deep and dark; but it was impervious to the weather, and that was an important consideration in the winter.

The front of the archway was partly open, partly screened by thickets and draggled bushes. The place was, at least, a very good imitation of a robber's cave, as near as Bunter could expect, having taken up the business so suddenly.

Bunter was quite satisfied with it. He was still more satisfied with his supper. It was a good supper. It had been intended for the supper of quite a large party in Smithy's study in the Remove at Greyfriars. The Bunter never stinted himself or his friends in these matters. Wharton's old rucksack had been packed full when Bunter made his mysterious exodus from Greyfriars. Grub, perhaps, was not a romantic item in the programme. But even the blackest bandit must eat—and there was no doubt that Bunter the Bandit had to eat, at least twice as much as any other bandit in the business. So Bunter had not forgotten that unromantic but important item.

He had reached his lair in the winter dusk. Had he reached it later Bunter might have been scared by the darkness of the woods, the howl of the wind from the sea among the creaking old branches, the rustling of the twigs, and the recollection that rough tramps sometimes camped in the priory ruins. Even in his present exalted mood Bunter might have been pensive to such impressions. But it was not yet dark when he arrived at the old priory, and he found it silent and deserted—as it generally was. It was easy to gather any amount of firewood for a camp-fire; and under the old stone archway he built his fire, and the warm and cheery blaze was grateful and comforting.

From the opening of the archway strange lights and shadows danced out over the ruins and over the dark surrounding woods.

Anyone coming anywhere near the place would certainly have known at once that somebody was in camp there. But Bunter was not thinking of that. He was not aware that he had left any clue to his destination in his farewell letter. That his disappearance would cause a sensation in the school he was sure; the name of Bunter would be on every lip. That thought was deeply gratifying.

Night fell darker and darker; but within the stone archway Bunter piled fuel on the fire, and there was plenty of light and warmth. Smithy's good things were unpacked round him. A kettle sang cheerily on the glowing embers. Bunter had thoughtfully packed Wharton's camping things in Wharton's rucksack. He made himself coffee, to wash down the various viands that belonged to Herbert Vernon-Smith, but that Herbert Vernon-Smith was destined never to see again.

"Prime!" said Bunter.

He grinned gleefully.

He could not help thinking how prime it was. Ample as his supper was, he had plenty left for breakfast in the morning; and beyond the next meal Bunter's thoughts seldom wandered.

Having finished a Gargantuan repast, the world's fattest bandit leaned back luxuriously on a bundle, with his feet to the fire. That bundle contained ground-sheet and blankets for Bunter's camp. Somebody at Greyfriars was possibly wondering what had become of them, and never guessing that they had been raided by a black bandit.

It was true that Black Benito would stretch himself on the cold, hard ground and sleep, rolled in his bandit's cloak. But that part of the bandit business did not appeal to Bunter. He preferred blankets.

Leaning back, Bunter sorted out of his pocket the mask he had abstracted

from the property-box in Study No. 6. That mask he proceeded to put on. He had tried it on before, but it had been rather in the way of his gastronomic performances. Gastronomy being over, Bunter the bandit donned the black mask. The false beard he left in his pocket. He had tried it on and found that it tickled his fat chin; so for the present he left it where it was.

With the black mask on his face, and his glasses reflecting the fire-light through the eye-holes, Bunter presented a remarkable aspect. Probably no one, seeing him, would have taken him for a bandit, or even a footpad. But the fat junior was satisfied that he looked the part. Certainly he felt the part.

Leaning on the bundle, gazing at the fire, breathing a little hard after his exertions at supper, Bunter gave himself up to pleasant contemplation.

He was done with Greyfriars now—done with school life! That was quite settled.

He had never been appreciated there. Fellows, quite ignorant of the dark and direful depths of his character, had regarded him merely as a fat freak—merely that and nothing more.

They had never dreamed what there was in Bunter. There was a lot in him—not to mention Smithy's supper. A wild and lawless heart, a desperate and reckless courage, lurked in that fat breast—at least, Bunter was persuaded that they did.

Pleasant visions of the future filled Bunter's fat mind as he reclined and grunted and gazed at the fire.

He saw himself, in his mind's eye, no longer a schoolboy—chipped by unthinking juniors, kicked out of studies at tea-time, trembling at the frown of a Form master. He saw himself masked and armed, stopping cars on shadowy roads, holding up banks, banging right and left with an automatic at terrified foes. He saw himself charging through stormy midnights on a coal-black horse.

He saw all these things with his mind's eye. No other eye was ever likely to behold them.

Darkness lay like a cloak on Friar-dale Wood. The wind whistled among the trees, and swung the creaking branches. The ruins lay black round Bunter.

But for the camp-fire, blazing merrily, Bunter might have felt uneasy. He was in an exalted mood—not by any means his usual self. But the place certainly was lonely, and Bunter was still only a bandit in embryo; he did not possess a deadly automatic, neither indeed would he have known how to use it had he possessed one.

Once or twice a slight misgiving seemed to trouble Bunter; for he raised his head and peered round through the eye-holes of the mask, as the wind howled. But he settled down again contentedly. The fire made the old archway light and warm, and it was

(Continued on next page.)

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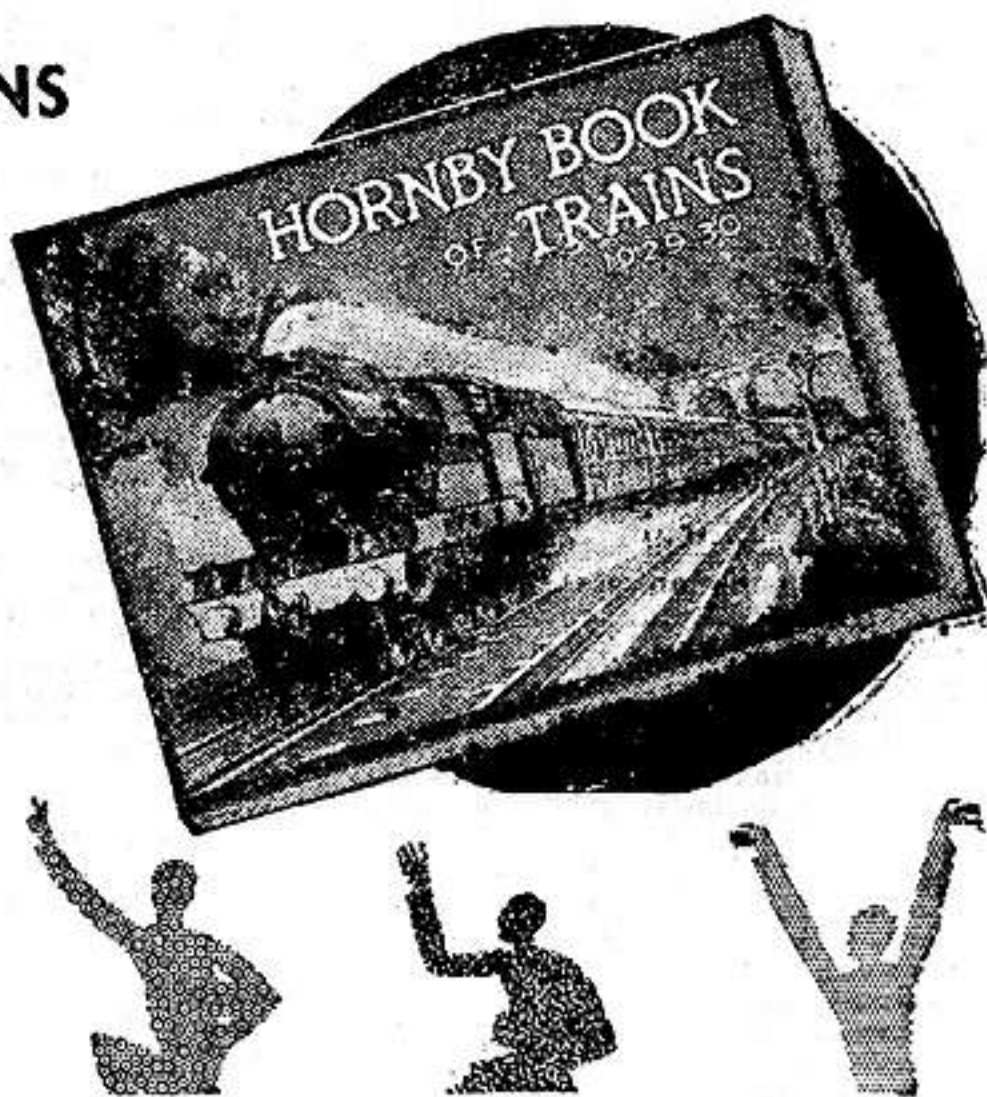
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cheerful company. So long as the fire was bright Bunter could dismiss the outer darkness from his podgy mind.

It was going to be a glorious life!

No more classes, no more lessons, no more Quelch! With a strong hand Bunter the Bandit would take what he needed. If Black Benito could do it, Black Bunter could do it.

Difficulties might crop up, but he would overcome them—as yet he did not know how; but that was in the future, anyway, and the future could take care of itself.

An ordinary fellow would not have found it easy to follow the processes of Bunter's fat intellect. With a fervid imagination unchecked by sense, there really was no telling what Bunter might or might not do.

There was no doubt that he was taking himself seriously now as he sprawled by the fire and dreamed of a wild bandit's life. That Nature had not fitted him for such a part did not occur to him for the moment.

But he was going to learn that shortly.

"Die!" murmured Bunter, raising his right hand and pointing at the fire. "Dog! Die! Perish under the vengeance of Black Bunter!"

Bunter was rehearsing.

Scenes like this were going to be quite common in his career when he was once fairly in the bandit line.

All of a sudden he started.

From the darkness without the archway, which Bunter's imagination had transformed into a bandit's cave, came a sound.

It was a footstep!

Bunter sat up abruptly.

Black Benito, on hearing a footstep in the silence and darkness of the night, would have smiled sardonically and reached for a gun. Bunter had no gun to reach for, so that was out of the question. Certainly he could have smiled sardonically. But he didn't! He gasped, and his little round eyes bulged behind the eye-holes in the mask.

His fat heart palpitated.

Somebody was coming!

The hour was not yet late, but the early winter darkness made it seem later than it was. As a matter of fact, it was not yet eight o'clock, but it seemed like black midnight to Bunter. Anyhow, it was intensely dark, and the bandit's lair was at least two miles from any habitation.

And somebody was coming—in that dark and lonely spot!

Bunter's fat heart beat quite unpleasantly.

Footsteps approached.

Bunter sat quite still, his fat ears strained to listen.

He could not suppose that it was another bandit—obviously, Bunter was the only bandit in the neighbourhood. But it might be a tramp—some rough and hairy tramp—possibly under the influence of drink.

Bunter shivered.

He palpitated.

It was not the bold lawless heart of Black Bunter that was palpitating, it was the fat, funky heart of the Owl of the Remove.

His eyes were glued on the opening of the archway.

The footsteps arrived there.

A figure tramped through the draggled bushes. A face looked on Bunter from the darkness.

It was not a nice face.

It was a hard, stubbly face, with a broken nose and a cast in one eye. It surmounted a form clad in dirty tattered garments, such as a respectable scarecrow would have disdained. A battered bowler hat, of which part of the

rim was missing, was jammed on a tousled head. Two little piggy eyes stared at Bunter. And although this horrid visitant was not yet near, a powerful aroma of spirits preceded him and reached Bunter.

Billy Bunter gazed at this hideous apparition in horror. Fear rooted him where he sat.

Where was the bold, rockless courage of Black Bunter? Where was the ruthless ferocity of Bunter the Bandit?

Gone!

It was not Bunter the Bandit, it was Billy Bunter, shaking like a jelly with apprehension, who blinked in horror at the horrible tramp.

At that dreadful moment it was borne in on Billy Bunter's fat mind that a bandit's life was not for him. He woke up, as it were!

From the bottom of his podgy heart he wished himself safe back at Greyfriars—even doing lines for Quelch, even being kicked out of a study—anything rather than this!

But this was what the fat and fatuous Owl had brought on himself, and there was no help for it now.

He gazed at the tramp, and the tramp stared back at him, in wonder. No doubt the mask on Bunter's face puzzled him. The rest of Bunter was plainly a fat schoolboy, but the mask did not

ANOTHER POCKET WALLET WON!

This clever Greyfriars Limerick has been sent in by Jack Cornwall, of 35, Balmer Grove, St. John's Estate, Blackpool, who carries off one of this week's useful pocket wallets.

Fat Bunter, once scrounging
his tea,
Set off with his face full of
glee.
But instead of some loot
He got Bob Cherry's boot
And a "boko" the size of
three!

There's a chance for all of you to
win one of these useful prizes!

seem to belong to the picture. The new arrival spoke at last.

"My heye! Nice and comfy 'ere, ain't you? Camping hout—what? All alone 'ere, young covey?"

"Oh!" gasped Bunter. "Yes."

"Like a little company?" grinned the ruffian.

"Ow! No!"

"Wot?"

"I—I mean yes!" gasped Bunter.

"Yes, yes, yes!"

"That's better!" said the newcomer.

"When a covey don't like my company I generally dot him one on the beezer!"

"Oh dear! I—I— Oh dear! Ow!"

"Supper going, hey?" said the stranger, stepping into the archway.

"My heye! Wot you got that rag on your dial for?"

"I—I—"

"Take it orf and let a bloke look at yer!"

"Ow!"

"You 'ear me! When Bill Harker tells you to 'op, you'd better 'op!" said the tramp. "Got that?"

Bunter jerked the mask off. It's removal disclosed a fat face that was pale with terror. Bill Harker stared at him.

"Fat Jack of the Bone-'Ouse—what?" he asked. "Well, you asking a bloke to supper, young covey?"

"Eh? No—I—"

"Wot?"

"I—I mean, yes," spluttered Bunter.

"I'm glad you mean yes," said Mr. Harker. "'cause if you didn't I'd jest take you by your blooming fat neck and wring your silly 'cad orf, like I would a chicken. See?"

"Ow!"

"Now git up."

"I—I— Yaroooh!" roared Bunter, as a heavy unwashed hand smote him, and he rolled over.

He sat up and blinked dazedly at his unwelcome visitor.

"Want another?" asked Mr. Harker.

"Ow! No!"

"Then 'op it, and 'and out some grub."

"Oh, crikey!"

Mr. Harker sat down, and Bunter hurriedly handed out the grub. He was not feeling anything like a bandit now.

THE THIRTEENTH CHAPTER.

The Last of the Greyfriars Bandit!

"JOLLY cold!" grunted Johnny Bull.

"It's never really warm in November!" remarked Peter Todd.

"Look here—"

"Quiet!" whispered Harry Wharton. Caution was necessary.

Harry Wharton & Co. were getting out of bounds for a good object—quite a good object. They were going to round up a young ass and save him from a flogging, perhaps from the sack, if they could. Nevertheless, they were breaking bounds after dark, which was a serious matter, and so they had to imitate the gentleman who did good by stealth and blushed to find it fame.

Had a master or a prefect discovered the six juniors stealing out of the House in the dim November gloom, trouble certainly would have accrued.

It would have been a case of "bend over" and "six" for each member of the party who were doing good by stealth.

So they were very cautious. From the box-room window they gained the leads, from the leads the ground, and then they stole away like spectres in the gloom, for the old Cloisters.

There was a certain spot in the Cloister wall that they knew, and Bunter knew. They had no doubt that the fat Owl had gone out that way, and by that way went the half-dozen pursuers.

They dropped into the lane and listened. All was quiet—save an expressive grunt from Johnny Bull.

"All serene," said Wharton. "Come on!"

"If we're missed—" grunted Johnny.

"Oh, we shan't be missed if we're back in time for dorm. Anyhow, we're for it now—trot!"

Johnny Bull expressed his feelings with another grunt, and the party trotted.

It was dark, and it was a little misty, and there was a sharp wind from the sea. The wood, when the juniors entered it, was damp and dismal. Moisture dripped from the leafless boughs, and when it dripped down the back of a fellow's neck it did not add to his comfort.

Fortunately, the juniors knew every path in the wood, or assuredly they never would have found their way in the clinging darkness. Friardale Wood was almost as black as the inside of a hat. But as it was, they followed the damp, misty footpath without a fault, and turned into the track that led to the old priory.

"Blessed if I can understand Bunter

being here, after dark," growled Johnny Bull. "He's too jolly funky."

"The funkfulness is great, but the fat-headedness is terrific," remarked Hurree Jamset Ram Singh. "The esteemed Bunter is not in his usual, or common and garden frame of mind."

"Sort of bee in his bonnet," said Bob Cherry. "The jolly old films have sort of mesmerised him. Bunter's under the 'fluence."

"Mad as a hatter, you mean," grunted Johnny Bull. "Ow! I didn't see that beastly branch." Johnny Bull rubbed his nose, which had established sudden contact with a drooping bough across the path. "Ow! Look here, I'm going to kick Bunter as soon as we find him."

"Same here," said Peter. "Mine's the first kick, mind. You fellows can take your turns after me."

"The kickfulness is the proper caper," assented Hurree Singh, "and perhaps it may result in the curefulness of the esteemed and idiotic Bunter."

"We'll keep it up till it does," said Toddy. "We'll jolly well cure Bunter of being a bandit, if there's anything in bootleather."

"If we find him," grunted Johnny Bull. "If he isn't at that beastly old priory after all—"

"Blessed if I know where else he could be," said Peter. "Anyhow, we'll soon see. And when we get him—"

Peter did not finish, but he breathed hard. Apparently there was a warm time in store for the Greyfriars bandit when his pursuers ran him down.

It was not an enjoyable walk. It was damp and dismal and dripping, and there was a possibility of being missed at the school and called to account. There was a possibility, too, that the fatuous Owl was not at the old priory after all. Altogether the chums of the Remove were not having a happy evening, and it was no wonder that their thoughts dwelt on what they were going to do to Bunter when they found him. If they did all they thought of doing, there was not likely to be much bandit left, and really not much Bunter.

"Hallo, hallo, hallo!" exclaimed Bob Cherry suddenly.

"What—"

"Somebody's there! There's a light!"

The juniors had emerged from the dripping wood into the open space round the ruins of the ancient priory. They groped into the blackness of an old, dismantled gateway, and the shattered ruins, chiefly masses of masonry overgrown with creepers, ferns, and grasses, lay before them.

From across a blackness of space a light gleamed. Bob was the first to spot it, and the party halted and fixed their eyes on it.



"My heye!" said the tramp. "Nice and comfy here, ain't you. Supper going, hey? Wot you got that rag on your dial for? Take it off and let a bloke look at yer." Bunter's fat face was pale with terror. "Fat Jack of the Bone-'Ouse, what?" asked Bill Harker. "Well, you asking a bloke to supper, young covey?" (See Chapter 12.)

It was not a steady light. It was a ruddy glare that danced and shifted, sank, and rose again.

"A camp-fire!" said Harry Wharton.

"That's it!" said Peter. "The howling ass has lighted a camp-fire. It's in the old archway over the vaults. That's his jolly old lair!"

"The bandit's cave!" chuckled Bob.

"Quiet!" said Wharton. "We don't want the howling idiot to hear us coming, and dodge away. I've had enough of trekking through the woods."

"Yes, rather! Take him by surprise," said Nugent. "If we corner him in that archway he can't dodge out!"

"Come on, then!"

The juniors moved forward again, slowly and cautiously. The ruins were littered with blocks of broken masonry and dragged bushes, and the darkness was thick—made all the thicker by the glare of the fire ahead. With all their caution they stumbled occasionally, and shins were barked, and there were suppressed ejaculations.

But the prospect of bagging Bunter and kicking him, comforted the pursuers. They drew nearer and nearer to the opening of the old stone arch.

"Hold on!" breathed Bob Cherry suddenly. "Look!"

"That's not Bunter!" breathed Nugent.

"Oh, my hat!"

At a little distance from the arch the juniors halted again. They were near enough now to see through the openings of the bedraggled bushes at the mouth of the archway. A figure could be seen seated on a bundle close by the fire—and it was not the figure of Billy Bunter.

It was the figure of a burly, rough-looking, ragged tramp, with a stubbly face, beady eyes, and a drink-inflamed

complexion. The juniors stared at that unpleasant figure. Bill Harker was not the man that anyone would have chosen to meet in a lonely place on a dark night.

"My only hat!" whispered Peter Todd. "That's some beastly tramp camping in the ruins. Bunter can't be there—"

"Hark!"

A gruff, surly voice came from the archway. The burly tattered man by the fire was speaking. Evidently he was not alone.

"Ere, you! Where's that corfee?" A terrified squeak responded.

"It—it's nearly ready. Oh dear!"

"Urry up with it!" growled Harker. "Look 'ere, you fat freak, I've 'it you twice already, ain't I? Well, if I 'ave to 'it you agin, you'll know it. You 'ear me?"

"Oh dear! Yes."

"And out some of that 'am. I'm 'ungry, I am," said Harker. "Ain't tasted bite or sup for hours, I ain't! This 'ere is a stroke of luck, this 'ere is! You 'ear me telling you to 'and out that 'am?"

"Oh dear! There isn't any more, please!"

"Then wot 'ave you got?" growled Harker. "If I don't 'ave enough supper, my pippin, you'll know it. You will that!"

"There's only a cake left—"

"And out the cake."

Harry Wharton & Co., watching in silence, saw a fat form emerge into the light of the fire. Billy Bunter, shaking from head to foot, brought the cake to the lounging tramp.

Harker took it from him, with a growl.

"Now, 'urry up with that corfee!" he snarled.

"Yes—yes—please— Yarooooogh!"

"That'll 'elp you 'urry!" said Harker, as he let out a tattered boot, catching Bunter on his tight trousers as he turned away.

The Owl of the Remove yelled and sprawled. Harker chuckled huskily, and began to devour the cake.

"Oh crumbs!" breathed Bob Cherry. "Bunter's there, and he seems to have hit trouble."

"Who wouldn't be a bandit?" murmured Nugent.

The juniors suppressed a chuckle. The Greyfriars bandit had evidently landed in trouble. It was probable that the promised kickings would not be required. It was quite likely that, in these distressing circumstances, Billy Bunter was already getting fed-up with the career of a bandit.

Harry Wharton & Co. crept a little nearer, still without revealing their presence. They were quite interested in the strange proceedings that were going on in the bandit's lair.

With great entertainment they watched Bunter make the coffee and present it to Mr. Harker. With still greater entertainment they watched him rewarded with another lunge of Mr. Harker's tattered boot, which sent him sprawling again on the old stone flags.

"Yow-ow-ow!" howled Bunter. "Old your row!" growled Mr. Harker. "You ain't 'urt—not like you're going to be if you don't 'old your row!"

Bunter suppressed the sounds of woe, and stood blinking in fear and apprehension at his taskmaster. The remnants of the cake disappeared down Bill Harker's capacious throat. He had disposed of all that remained of Bunter's provisions, but he did not seem satisfied. He drank his coffee, and when he had finished it, threw the tin cup at Bunter's head and the fat junior dodged too late. There was a clang and a howl.

"Wow!"

Six faces grinned in the darkness outside. Evidently the Greyfriars bandit was having the time of his life.

"Nar then," growled the tramp, "ain't there any more grub?"

"Ow! No!"

"Ain't there any more corfee?"

"Wow! No!"

"Well, it was a little bit of luck finding you 'ere, anyway," said Harker. "I've 'ad some supper, and I've got some blankets to sleep on. What the thunder was you doing 'ere, anyhow, you fat fool?"

"Oh dear!"

"P'r'aps," went on Mr. Harker, eyeing the fat junior—"p'r'aps you've got some money about you. I see you've got a ticker. Come 'ere!"

"I—I—I—" stammered the terrified Owl.

"Come 'ere!" roared Harker.

Bunter's fat knees knocked together. The ruffian was going to rob him—not that he had much to lose.

Bunter's wealth was limited to a rolled gold watch and a bad penny. His career as a bandit had been nipped in the bud, and he was never likely to add to his wealth by stopping cars on shadowy roads and holding up banks. But such as his possessions were, he did not want to part with them. Moreover, it was quite probable that the ruffian would indemnify himself by knocking him about when he found how little there was to be gained.

Bunter backed away towards the opening of the vault.

"You 'ear me?" growled Harker. "Come 'ere! If I 'ave to fetch you,

you'll know it, and you can lay to that!"

He half rose from the bundle. That was enough for Bunter. With a gasp of terror the fat junior fled into the night.

Harker plunged angrily after him. "Yow-ow-ow!" roared Bunter, as he caught his foot in a trailing root and went headlong to the ground, with a concussion that knocked all the breath out of his fat person. "Groooooogh! Ooooooh!"

Here's Another AMUSING YARN which wins one of this week's useful pocket knives. It has been sent in by: H. McMillan, 31, Elgin Road, Sea View, via Durban, Natal, S. Africa.

CLOSE RELATIONS!

Two chance acquaintances from Ireland were talking together. "An' so yer name is Riley?" said one. "Are yez any relation to Tim Riley?" "Very distant—ly," said the other. "O! was me mither's first child an' Tim was the tenth!"

Who's next for one of these useful prizes?

"Gotcher!" gasped Harker, as he reached the Owl of the Remove and bent over him.

What happened next was a surprise to Mr. Harker. Six unseen shadowy figures closed round him, and six pairs of hands closed on him.

Mr. Harker was jerked away from Bunter, upended, and brought down on the stone flags with a terrific crash.

A gasp like escaping steam came from Bill Harker, as he landed. It was followed by a stream of vivid, picturesque language.

"Collar the brute!" said Bob Cherry. "What-ho!"

"Ere, let a bloke go!" roared Mr. Harker, as his head was banged forcibly on the stone flags. "Wot's this game? Ow, ow! Ow, my 'ead! Leggo! Yooop!"

Bang, bang, bang!

Bill Harker was a burly man, but he was not much use in six pairs of hands. He struggled frantically; but he had simply no chance. A series of fearful yells woke the echoes of the woods as his bullet head was banged—a frantic yell at every bang.

He wrestled himself free at last, and fled. Who his assailants were, and what brought them there at that hour of the night Bill Harker did not know, and did not stay to inquire. All he wanted was to get away—and he got away as fast as his legs could carry him. There was a crashing in the dark thickets in the distance, and Bill Harker was gone.

Harry Wharton & Co. turned to Bunter. The fat junior, sprawling outside the archway, was panting and palpitating, gasping and spluttering. Bob Cherry grasped him by the collar, and there was a yell of terror from Bunter.

"Yaroooh! Keep off!"

"You fat idiot—"

"Yow-ow-ow! Help! Fire!" yelled Bunter. "Keep off! Yooop!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Bunter, you fat chump—"

"Bunter, you benighted owl—"

"Bunter, you fat bandit—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Bunter squirmed into a sitting posture. He set his glasses straight on

his fat little nose, and blinked at the juniors.

"You fellows!" he stuttered. "Little us!" grinned Bob Cherry.

"Oh dear! Is—is—is he gone?" gasped Bunter, blinking round him into the shadows. "That—that awful beast, is he—he—he gone?"

"The gonefulness is terrific, my esteemed idiotic Bunter."

"Oh dear!"

Bob Cherry jerked the fat junior to his feet. Bunter stood unsteadily on his fat little legs, blinking apprehensively round him. Harker was gone, but every shadow was full of terror for Bunter now. Never in the history of banditry had there been a bandit so unfitted for the business.

"I—I say, you fellows—" gasped Bunter. "I—I say—"

"Let's get back!" growled Johnny Bull.

There was a howl from Bunter.

"Ow! Don't leave me here! Ow! I say, you fellows, stick to me! Oh dear!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Bob Cherry. "Are you fed-up with banditing in a bandit's lair already?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I—I say, you fellows, I—I—I'll come back!" groaned Bunter. "I—I ain't going to be a bandit—"

"Not really?" chuckled Bob.

"Nunno! Oh dear! I—I want to go back to Greyfriars! Oh crikey! I—I—I've had an awful time! D-d-don't leave me! Oh dear! Ow! I say, Toddy, old chap, stick to me! D-d-don't leave me alone! Ow!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Come on!" said Harry Wharton, laughing. "Let's get the fat idiot home—we can kick him to-morrow. Let's get back before we're missed. Get a move on, you frabjous chump! I'll carry your bundle."

"I—I say, lemme held your arm. Toddy. I—I might miss you in the dark; d-d-don't leave me alone!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

It was a very subdued bandit that trod the dark paths homeward with the chums of the Remove. The unhappy bandit gasped and shivered at every sound and every shifting shadow. Evidently Bunter was fed-up with banditry. All he wanted was to get safe back to Greyfriars and to bid a long farewell to the career of a bandit. He gasped with relief when he rolled in at the box-room window.

Outside the Remove Bunter's remarkable adventure was kept a secret. But the Remove howled over it. Bunter had recovered from his overdose of films: he no longer wanted to be a bandit—indeed, he shuddered at the thought. He would have been glad to forget all about the whole thing. But it was a long time before the Remove ceased to chortle over Bunter the Bandit.

THE END.

Extra-Special Story of Harry Wharton & Co., for Next Week!

"COKER'S CRACKSMAN!"

By FRANK RICHARDS.

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PETER FRAZER—IRONMASTER!

By JOHN BREARLEY.

They didn't want Peter Frazer as their "boss" at the iron works at first. But now they're glad they've got him, 'cause Peter is a 100 per cent he-man!

INTRODUCTION.

Head and sole owner of Frazer's Iron Foundry! It is a strange prospect that lies before Peter Frazer, a cheery strapping youngster of eighteen, when he arrives in the squalid industrial city of Maxport to take over the great business left to him by his dead uncle. Peter soon realises that his legacy has brought danger with it, for he is kidnapped on his way to his new home. Luckily, he escapes, but with only one clue to the identity of his unknown enemy: the man is completely bald, with a terrible jagged scar running across the top of his head. At the works Peter learns from his manager, Mr. Dimmock, that Frazer's Foundry is on the brink of ruin owing to the activities of a man named Granger and his gang. Peter is determined to fight his enemies tooth and nail, and he starts by knocking out the scoundrelly Granger in a fight, and then sacking him. Gradually the young ironmaster overcomes the animosity of most of the foundrymen, and he makes a great step forward in this direction when he restarts the foundry football team and enters it for the Works Cup. Before long Peter succeeds in getting together a really useful side, his only worry being the filling of the centre-forward position. When Saturday morning arrives he is still in a quandary, for the opening match is only a week away.

(Now read on.)

A Born Centre!

IT was a worrying morning. Mr. Dimmock sent word down to the foundry asking Peter to come up, and in grimy dungarees he had to listen to a mournful tale for nearly an hour.

Business was no brighter—only small orders barely kept the furnaces going. If only they could land a big order—and be sure of keeping the men—

Mr. Dimmock's voice trailed away, and he shook his grey head dolefully.

Peter forced a cheerful laugh, and laid a firm hand on his manager's shoulder.

"Buck up, Mr. Dimmock! Things are going all right—jolly sight better than I expected! We'll get that big order soon—and we'll see to the men, too! Come on, now, don't look so worried!"

Dimmock smiled gratefully.

"You're a great help, Peter," he said. "It's for your sake I worry! Are you really making progress? Surely there was a free fight again last Saturday!"

Peter chuckled.

"And there was some football, too," he grinned. "That's why there was a fight!"

Back to the foundry he went, and then, having something to talk to Sparrow about, went over to the loading trucks. There was always some skylarking going on over there, for Sparrow's set were a mischievous crowd, so that when he turned the corner and a yell of laughter greeted him he felt no surprise.

It was apparent, however, that something extra rich and rare was toward, for prostrate across a truck lay Master Sparrow, and his wiry young body writhed with mirth. Great tears ran down his grimy face.

Around him most of his pals were in a similar state, all save one, a scared, weedy-looking lad, who stared at them dumbly with puzzled eyes.

As Peter strode up Sparrow lurched towards him, gurgling.

"Aw, boss!" he sobbed. "Just at t' ret time!" He pointed shakily at the weedy youth. "He, he! Oh! Ha, ha, ha!"

"Haw, haw, haw!" echoed the others. "He, he! Ho, ho, ho! Ha, ha, har!" shrieked Sparrow, and clutched at the truck for support.

Seeing that for a second or two he could get no sense from the yelling crew, Peter, smiling, turned towards the object of the mirth.

"What's it all about, son?" he asked kindly.

The lad looked up at him nervously. He was a tall, bony lad, in shabby clothes far too small for him, with untidy black hair, pale face, and big, intelligent eyes.

"I—I asked Sparrow if—if—"

"Well?"

"If I could play for the Works!" The words came in a hurried gabble and were drowned in a fresh roar from Sparrow and his friends.

Peter raised his eyebrows.

"Nothing funny in that," he smiled. "But you're rather on the light side, aren't you? Played before?"

"Oh, yes, sir!"

"Where?"

"C-centre-forward, sir!"

This was obviously the cream of the joke, for at the last words Sparrow & Co. became hysterical. Even Peter could scarcely repress a smile, for the idea of the frail figure before him thrusting his way through his burly halves and backs did seem rather comic.

However, that was no reason why the boy should be discouraged. Peter cuffed Sparrow's shock head.

"Shut up that row! What's your name, lad?"

"Osborne, sir!"

"New hand?"

"Yes, sir! Mr. Moller, the chief engineer, took me on last week!"

"I remember! And, I say, aren't you the lad who watched us last Saturday?"

Osborne nodded.

"All right, my son! You deserve something for being our only

supporter. Turn out with the others this afternoon."

And he went off, leaving an astonished, gasping crowd of loaders and one delighted youngster.

That afternoon he discovered his centre-forward!

He put Osborne down as centre for the Whites, meaning to let the lad down lightly. Clad in football kit, the new man looked even thinner, but there was an air about him as he trapped a practice kick and shot for goal that told Peter he had played before. Also, if he was thin, he was wiry!

The game started, and Whites forced a goal kick. Low and hard came Phairson McDonald's kick, and Osborne, rising in the air, nodded it accurately to Hammond. The inside-right went off, was challenged, and put it back to the new centre.

Without a second's hesitation the lad swished it out to the left wing, a second before Peter got to him, and, taking the perfect pass, Baker ran round Elspeth Macdonald and centred. For once in a way the centre was accurate.

Peter had got back to cover the gap in the middle, but again Osborne just beat him by a second.

Once more his thin figure bobbed into the air, he met the ball slantwise with his head, and Sparrow was beaten hopelessly. Whites were one up!

Before the game had gone another ten minutes it was obvious to everyone that Osborne was a born centre.

Weight he had none, but he was the most elusive man Peter had ever marked. Twice his willowy, swaying run left the ex-Clayton centre-half standing, and fed by long, perfect passes, Baker, the fast left wing, a stocky and heavy runner, snorting fire and enthusiasm, was giving Elspeth the time of his life! Only his wild centres saved the Colours goal time and again.

Osborne's swerving shooting and accurate headwork, too, soon wiped the grin off Sparrow's face, and the little loader surpassed himself in goal, while as for Peter, it was the happiest afternoon he had spent! Together with the herculean McDonalds he at last organised the defence to cope with Osborne's attacks, but the lad trickled through twice at the finish, and scored both times.

After the game, walking back across the field, Peter came across Mr. Moller, smoking a reflective pipe and, in the joy of his heart, smote the engineer on the back.

But when he explained the cause of this Moller only grunted.

Trapped in a Cellar!

THAT evening, after dinner with Mr. Dimmock in their long, comfortable room, Peter announced his intention of going for a stroll, and leaving his manager comfortably ensconced before the fire, sauntered off out.

The moon had not yet risen, so it was fairly dark as he turned his back on the foundry and walked slowly down the lane that led to Maxport's poor quarter.

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GRANGER, the former ruler of Frazer's Iron Foundry and Peter's implacable enemy.

Soon he found himself among the narrow streets and dark, crooked turnings of the poorer district. Why he had taken this direction for a stroll when the wide, windy marshes lay just as close to hand he was not sure. Certainly he had not confided his intentions to Mr. Dimmock. He chuckled quietly as he thought of how that kindly but nervous gentleman would behave if he knew!

However, it was the thought of the Scarred Man that had tempted him out—the thought that was always at the back of his mind, shelved sometimes by other problems, but always recurring as soon as they were passed.

There was to-night a vague idea that if he could only find the archway where the Scarred Man's thugs had waylaid him, and retrace his journey, some clue or idea might come of it.

The weak and annoying part of the programme was that he had not the slightest idea where the arch was, nor had he paid the least attention to the route taken by the ancient hansom cab on the night of his arrival.

Still, the adventure had a spice of thrill about it, and so he carried on, lounging aimlessly along, and taking care not to expose his features to the guttering street lights.

Soon he rambled into an area where the lights were very few and scattered indeed—a place of cobbled alleys and

IN A FORTNIGHT'S TIME

twisted ways. Once through a low archway he caught the glimpse of a ship's riding-light, and a whiff of cold air told him he was near the river. It was not long before he had completely lost himself, which didn't trouble him much; but the aimless ramble was becoming a bore.

He had reached the point of definitely making up his mind to return and find his way back, when a man popped out of the mouth of a pitch-black alley and, without paying any heed to him, hurried quickly down the narrow road to where the dim lights of a little beer-shop shone dingily. The man carried a small leather bag and walked with jerky, nervous steps.

Before he had gone two yards he passed under a lamp, and Peter knitted his brows.

"I've seen you before, Sunny Jim!" he muttered. "And somewhere jolly important, too! Now, who the dickens can you be?"

Hunching his shoulders and hugging the wall, he sidled quietly after the retreating figure before him, trying desperately to remember where he had seen the man last.

The lights of the beerhouse—the only light in the lane—came nearer, and suddenly the man before him whistled.

The sound petrified Peter, freezing him instantly into a part of the wall's black shadow. For the whistle that floated down the dark lane was the same long, sweet call that had summoned the ancient cab on a certain memorable evening! And the whistler—the man hurrying along in front—was the little perky, bird-like man of the booking office!

The whistle was a signal, for down the road the beerhouse door opened and a head looked out and was withdrawn immediately. But not before Peter had recognised it.

"Spider Higgins!" he breathed. "Oh, my aunt!"

He stood absolutely still, scarcely

daring to breathe as the little man crossed the road. The beerhouse door opened, and he popped into it like a rabbit into a warren.

There was a gleam in Peter's eyes and a pumping in his heart as he left the shadow of the wall.

The boy slipped through the darkness across the road and past the tiny inn, shooting a lightning glance through the dirty windows.

The little man was inside, standing against the bar with Spider Higgins. In the corner round a table, watching them, were the other members of Granger's Gang. As far as Peter had been able to see, they had the place entirely to themselves.

Turning, he stole past the place again. They were all bent over the table, on which the little man had set his bag.

For a brief moment Peter had an idea of trying to steal into the bar itself; but that was impossible.

Coolly, he flattened himself against the wall and commenced to work alongside the window.

When next the gang came into view the little man was talking eagerly, his thin, nervous fingers playing about the bag, and the tough faces around him were tense and hard.

Peter turned and crouched against the door, straining his ears to catch the muttered whispers; and so intent did he become that he failed to notice the black figure that rose with deadly

BUMPER CHRISTMAS NUMBER

quietness out of the shadows in the street behind him.

For just a second the figure froze in crouching menace; then, with a hoarse cry of rage, it hurtled forward on to the unwary Peter, and the pair crashed through the door into the centre of the bar.

Instantly pandemonium reigned. The tackler from behind had passed his arm in a suffocating grip round Peter's neck, and even as the young ironmaster fought madly to escape, the others hurled themselves on him like tigers.

He went to the dirty floor under a solid mass of humanity, and lay pinned. One man darted to the door and barred it, another brought the smoky lamp and held it above the captive.

There came a gasp and a crackling, breathless oath:

"It's Frazer himself, boys!"

The little man, who had retreated fearfully to a corner, clutching his bag, set it down gently at these words, and rushed forward.

"Peter Frazer!" gloated the little man, peering down. Then, snarling: "Ropes, you fools! Bind and gag him! Stand by the window, you! Tightly there, curse you all! Now his feet!"

Granger's Gang, with vengeance in their every movement, worked with lightning deftness. In five minutes Peter lay beneath the table, trussed like a chicken and brutally gagged.

The light above him snapped out. Rough hands gripped him and raised him, and he was carried swiftly out through a door at the back.

The men marched forward unhesitatingly. Stone flags echoed beneath their feet, and presently the air blew cold with a disgusting dankness. But onward the party went, their footsteps

echoing all the time, telling of underground passages.

How far he was carried Peter had no means of guessing. Suddenly they stopped. He could hear one of the men working bolts that screamed with rust, and then the air blew in even colder and fresher. Above the smack of footsteps came the low gurgle of moving water.

Now Peter's captors descended some steps, old and slimy, on which they trod with care. They stopped and, for the first time, dumped their prisoner on the floor. It was wet and covered with mud.

Not a light was used as the gang bent over the young ironmaster, unseen hands fiercely yanking the binding ropes from his arms. Then his wrists were siezed and jerked apart, rammed into iron floor-rings, and lashed there. When the men rose in the blackness Peter was spreadeagled!

He became aware of a malignant, freezing whisper in his ear.

"And that's for you, Mr. Frazer!" it gloated. "This is an old dock, but the water rises. And now in half an hour, Peter Frazer, we shall be in your foundry, and my little bag will do so much damage you'd be bankrupt to repair it! Do you hear that, you schoolboy scum? Men are going to suffer because they've worked for you! But you won't be there, Peter! You'll be here, with the water lapping, lapping—Ah! And no bungling sailor-man to trick, either! Good-bye, my young friend—you dog!"

One of the men growled. The voice ceased, and its owner rose. He bestowed a venomous kick at Peter's

BE SURE YOU GET IT!

prostrate body; there was a scraping and hasty shuffling of feet. A clang. Then silence.

Silence!

A black, damp, all-enclosing darkness descended like an actual weight on Peter when the echoes of the closing gate ceased to ring in the underground cellar. And for a long minute he remained stiff and still under the horror of it.

Presently came the low murmur of water, leaking slowly into his prison. It grew deeper and deeper, until it gurgled and swayed around the boy, and already his body was half submerged, the cold gripping him like an icy band.

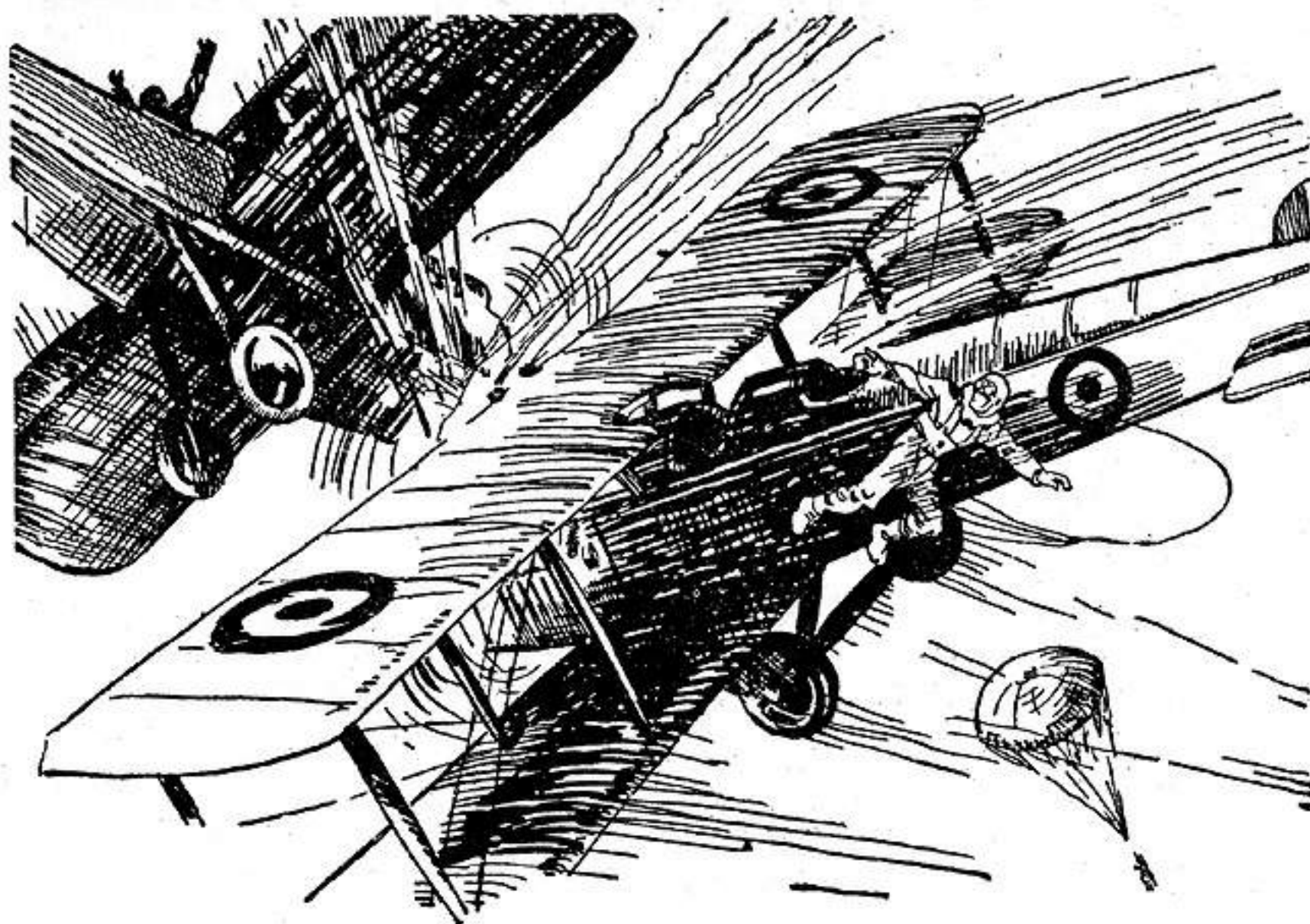
Granger's Gang had bound him with diabolical cleverness, for they had left him stretched out to his fullest extent between the iron rings, so that he could exert nothing like his fullest strength with either arms or legs.

With teeth clenched on his gag and face whitening under the effort, Peter strained fiercely at his bonds. Water began to splash across his face. The flood was increasing every minute with awful speed, and at last, utterly spent, he ceased pulling, and lay inert. A second later, however, despair laid hands on him, and he threshed and writhed in a last terrific effort.

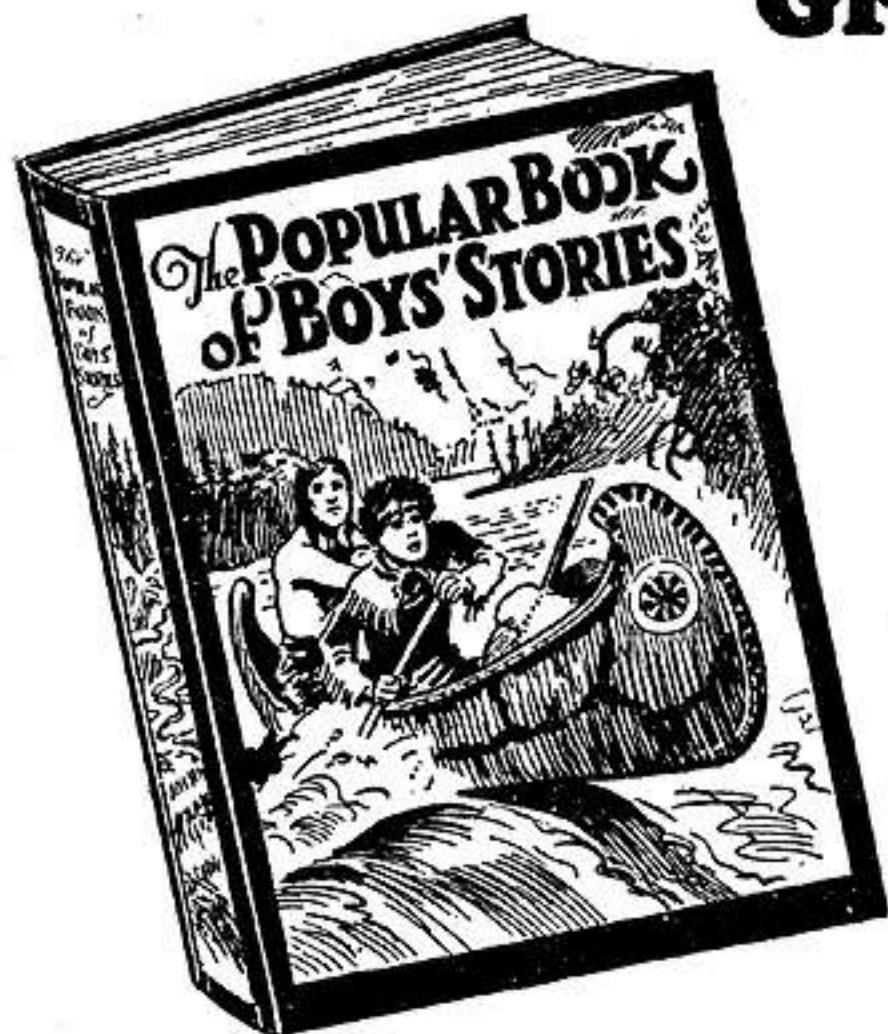
The effort failed. Completely done, Peter lay still once more, gasping and choking.

(Young Peter Frazer is in about the tightest corner it's possible to be in. But he's not the one to quit without a fight! Whatever you do, chums, don't miss next week's thrilling instalment of this powerful serial!)

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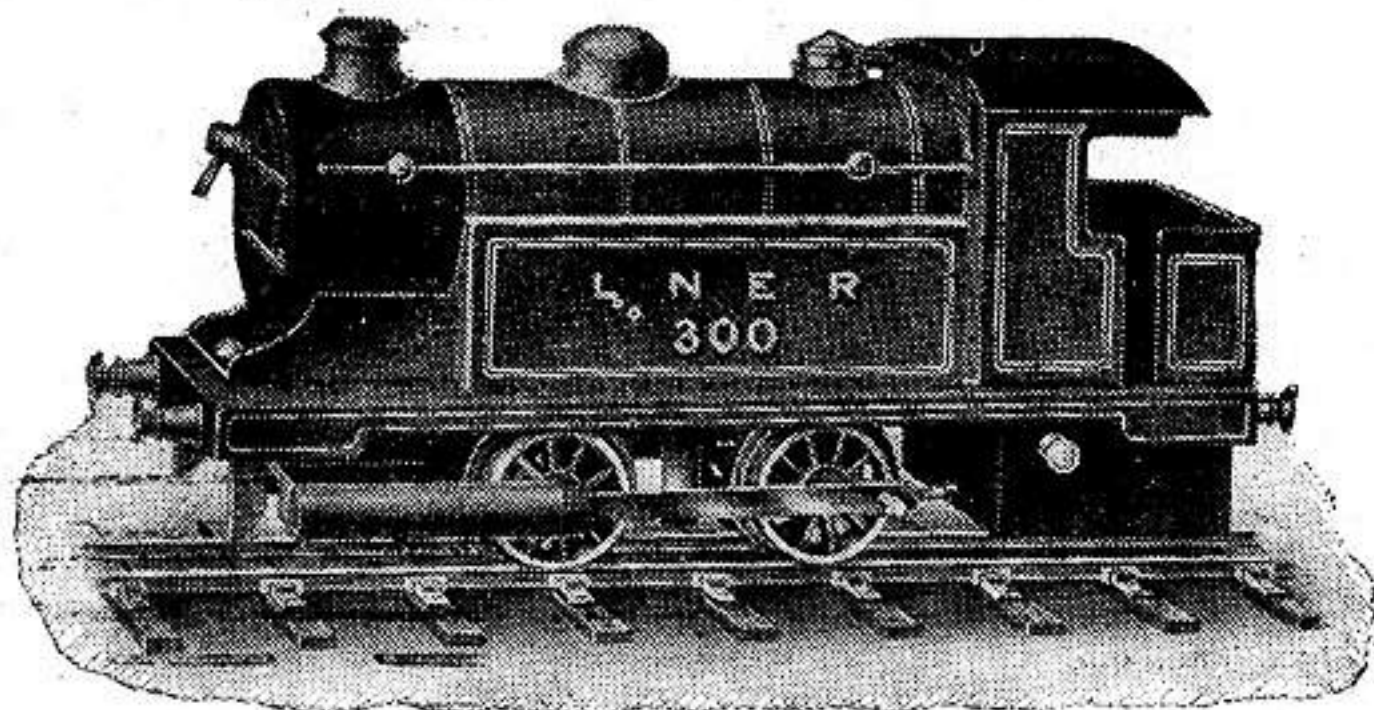
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BOWMAN MODELS

BOWMAN MODELS (DEPT. 464), DEREHAM, NORFOLK

"LETTER for you, sir!"
Blinding, the school page,
troited into the tuckshop and
handed over a letter as he
spoke.

Dr. Birchmell, the revered and majes-
tick headmaster of St. Sam's, snatched
it eagerly from the page's grasp.

It was rather extraordinary to see
the Head serving behind the tuckshop
counter. But St. Sam's had grown used
to the extraordinary site during the
previous month.

Dame Grubbe, who
usually manned the shop, had left
it in charge of the Head while she went
on the Reverend. Needless to say, the
Head had made the most of his oppor-
tunity. School meals had been cut down
to a minimum and tuckshop prices had
been sent up to a maximum. St. Sam's
had fairly groaned under the tyranny of
the Proprietor Head. And meanwhile
Dr. Birchmell and his assistant, Mr.
Lickham, had been living in a land flowing
with milk and honey—or, at least, doc-
nuts and jam-puffs!

"Eggspeaking a postal-order, sir?"
grinned Mr. Lickham, as the Head in-
serted his thumb in the envelope and ripped
it open.

"I am always eggspeaking something,"
Lickham answered the Head. "I
dreamed last night that I received a lawyer's
letter informing me that a wealthy
admirer had died and left me his vast
fortune. I wonder if this letter will
make my dream come true!"

"I sincerely hope so, sir!" said the
master of the Fourth, fervently. "Possi-
bly you will then be able to repay me the
ten bob I lent you a couple of terms
back!"

Dr. Birchmell loftily ignored his
assistant's broad hint and glared over
the letter.

As he did so his jaw dropped.

"Oh, crickey!" he murmured, half to
himself.

"How much is it, sir?" asked Mr.
Lickham curiously.

"How much is what?" asked Dr.
Birchemall, peering over the top of the
letter with an eggspeaking on his dle
that seemed almost tragic.

Mr. Lickham laughed.

"I'm referring to the jiggery you
spoke about. That's what the letter's
about, isn't it?"

"No, Lickham, it is not!" grunted
the Head. "As a matter of fact this
letter is from Dame Grubbe!"

"Oh, my giddy aunt!" eggspeaking the
master of the Fourth, looking awfully
serious. "What does the old bean say,
sir?"

"I will read the letter out to you,
Lickham."

Dr. Birchmell blew his nose violently
to hide the emotion he felt, then read
the following aloud:

Dear Sir,
I am taking the liberty of writing
to inform you that I shall arrive
back at St. Sam's on Tuesday
afternoon. I trusted that you have
been doing excellent business
during my absence. I notice you
haven't sent me any of the instal-
ments of 10s. per week which you
arranged to pay me, so kindly have
the full amount ready for me when
I return.

Grat to say I am in good health,
eggspeaking for hooping-coff, mumps,
scarlet fever and measles.

Hoping this finds you as it leaves
me
Yours respectfully,
Cetta Grubbe.

"Pew!" whistled Mr. Lickham, as
Dr. Birchmell concluded his recital.

"And to-day is Tuesday. Then the
game is up?"

"It certainly looks like it," admitted
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Dr. Birchmell
gloomily. "Bies-
sed if I know
what to do now.
There's hardly
any cash left, and
we've eaten half
the stock. What
Dame Grubbe
will say when
she finds out I
hardly dare to
contemplate."

"Well, it's
nothing to do
with me, any-
way," said Mr.
Lickham, with a
shrug. "I have
merely been your
assistant—some
people might say
your dupe!—and
I shall refuse
to make myself
responsible for
the shortage."

"You will,
will you?"
snorted Dr.
Birchemall. "So
that's the gratitude I get for allowing
you to skoff enuff grub to feed a reg-
iment! But you don't get out of it so
easily as that! If I go to chocky, my
dear Lickham, you'll come with me!"

"Oh-chocky?" stammered Mr. Lick-
ham, a cold sweat breaking out on his
brow.

"Chocky!" said the Head, with a
grim lart. "Handcuffs and manacles!
Working the jolly old treadmill! Years
and years of solitary confinement in a
damp, dark dungeon overrun by rats."

"Oh, rats!" interrupted Mr. Lickham.
"You can't really mean that it is possible
we shall go to prison over this affair?"

"That's what I'm afraid of, anyway,"
said the Head, tugging his beard thought-
fully. "Women are such mercenary
creatures. I have no hope whatever that
Dame Grubbe will view things in a reason-
able light, and if she dunnets we shall
undoubtedly go to quod. That is,
unless—"

"Unless what, sir?" asked Mr. Lick-
ham, who had gone pale and haggard at
the mere thought of going to durance vile.

"Unless I can think out a brany
wheez to get us out of our fix—and I
believe I can!" replied the Head, knitting
his brows in thought.

"Thank hevvam!" muttered Mr.
Lickham.

Dr. Birchmell remained worried in
thought for about five minutes. At the
end of that time he suddenly smiled.
The smile changed to a grin, the grin to
a chuckle, the chuckle to a lart, and the
lart to a roar.

"Ha, ha, ha! Ho, ho, ho! Oh, my
giddy aunt! What a skeem!" gasped
the Head. "Lickham, my dear Lickham,
you should thank your lucky stars you've
got a jeonius like myself to look after
you!"

"I'll hear the wheeze before I do that,
sir!" said Mr. Lickham. "Trot it out
and I'll see what I think of it."

Dr. Birchmell wiped the tears of merr-
iment from his eyes and condescended to
eggsplain.

Broofly," he said, "the wheeze is
this: to arrange for a burglary to take
place in the tuckshop somewhere about
dinner-time to-day."

"A—burglary?" gasped Mr. Lick-
ham, in utter astonishment. "But—
but don't you think, sir, that quite enuff
of the stock has vanished already?"

The Head larted.

"You are very dussie, Lickham. When
I said a burglary I didn't mean a real
burglary, but a bogus burglary. Savvy?"

"No, I don't quite savvy yet," con-
fessed Mr. Lickham, scowling as his napper



It was said of what the best laid
schemes of mice and men gang aft
agley, and in no case is this more
apparent than that of Dr. Birchmell-
all's brief prebship of the St.
Sam's tuckshop!

in bewil-
derment.
"Prey eggs-
plain a
little fur-
ther, sir."
pleasure!
grinned Dr.
Birchemall.
My idea
is to load up my motor-
car with what appears
to be a terrific pile
of empty wooden cases and biscuit tins.
for in reality it will be merely a collection
of empty wooden cases and biscuit tins.
See?"

"Well?"

"Just after dinner-time, when the
shop is crowded with boys making up for
what they didn't get in the regulation
school meal, I shall suddenly go into the
back parter and yell out: 'Help, help!
I have been robbed!'"

"And what then?" asked the mystified
master of the Fourth.

The Head chuckled.

"Then you take a hand in the game, my
dear Lickham!"

"I?"

"Eggspectly! Just as I yell out, you will
dash out of the back door, wearing a
mask. There the loaded car will be waiting
for you. Jumping into it, you will start
up the engine and drive recklessly away
to the gates."

"M-m-my hat!" stammered Mr. Lickham.
"The crowd will chase you, but match-
lessly will be unable to catch you up. You
will drive to a lonely part of the country
and dump the cases in a field. Then you
will drive back, and announce that you
found the car abandoned in a country
lane."

"G-g-grate pip!"

"This little skeem will shift the re-
sponsibility for the shortage of stock
completely off our shoulders, eggsplain-
the Head. "We shall have dozens of
witnesses to prove that a large quantity
of stock was pinched, purloined and
appropriated. And Dame Grubbe will
be forced to acknowledge that we are
entirely blameless. There! Don't you
think it's a stunning wheeze?"

"I'm! I don't know so much about
that!" said Mr. Lickham dewily.

"Don't you think it would be a better
idea if you took the part of the burglar
instead of me?"

"Not at all. You are far better suited
to such a part than I am. Come, Lickham!
We will close the shop and fetch the car
round to the back entrance."

So saying, the Head linked arms with
his reluctant assistant and waltzed him
round the counter out of the tuckshop
taking care to lock the door after them.

No sooner had they vanished than a
fat finger emerged from his hiding-place
at the back of the shop.

Tubby Barrall, the fat boy of the Fourth
—for it was he—looked through the window
after the retreating figures of the two
masters, and gave vent to his feelings in a
fat chuckle.

"My hat! The deep boundaries!" he
muttered aloud. "Dashed I don't go and



He had
turned round to
the shop, then
sank back into
his seat with a
groan of despair
as he saw a crowd
of yelling juniors
rushing towards
him.

An instant
later Jack Jolly
and his followers,
all of them larting
fit to bust, sur-
rounded the car.

"Got you,
you villain!"
cried Jack Jolly,
triumphantly.
"Now send for
the police, some-
body!"

"Oh, grate
pip! You
mustn't—you
simply mustn't
do that! I
groaned the
bandit."

"If
you imagine I am a burglar you are
making a big mistake. As a matter of fact,
I am Mr. Lickham!"

With those words he wrenched off his
mask, to reveal the well-known fiz-
z of Mr. Lickham, the master of the Fourth.

Needless to say, the crowd fairly roared
with lartier as they saw Mr. Lickham's
pall, terrified face. And they yelled
louder still as the Head came upon the
scene, his classic dle the picture of dismay.

"Bless my sole! Then you—you have
captured the despite criminal!" he
gasped.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Criminal, be blowed!" spoke up
Mr. Lickham. "I mito have known some-
thing would have gone wrong with your
huro-brained blessed skeem! Look at the
mugs you've landed me in now!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I don't know what you're talking
about, Lickham!" cried Dr. Birchmell,
trying to bluff it out. "By the look of
things, it seems that you were making a
despite effort to purloin half the tuck-
shop!"

"Mr. Lickham glared.

"Trying to make me responsible now,
are you? He hooded. "Well, it's not jolly
well coming off! Now you've let me down,
I intend to make a clean breast of it to
Dame Grubbe when she returns!"

"Did someone mention my name?"

Everybody swung round at the sound
of the feminine voice, and there was a
buzz from the crowd as Dame Grubbe
herself was seen to stalk upon the scene.

"Dame Grubbe!" gasped the Head.

"At your service, sir!" said Dame
Grubbe, with a courtesy. "Mite a lady in-
quire what all this hoo is about?"

"Oh, n-n-nothing!" stammered Dr.
Birchemall. "I assure you, ma'am, that
Lickham and myself are quite innocent
of any wrong-doing. If you think for one
single moment that we ever dreamed of
arranging a bogus burglary, you're quite
mistaken! I can't state, Lickham?"

"Ha, ha, ha!" sneezed the juniors.
Mr. Lickham snorted.

"Don't appeal to me for support, sir!"
he cried. "I've had enuff of your brany
wheezes for one day. I'm going to tell
Dame Grubbe everything and face the
giddy music, whether you like it or not!"
Dr. Birchmell's face turned a sickly
green.

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(There will be another amusing yarn of
Jack Jolly & Co. at St. Sam's in next
week's MAGNET, entitled "THE MISSING
MUNNY-BOX!") IFU raise the loudest
laugh ever, change.)