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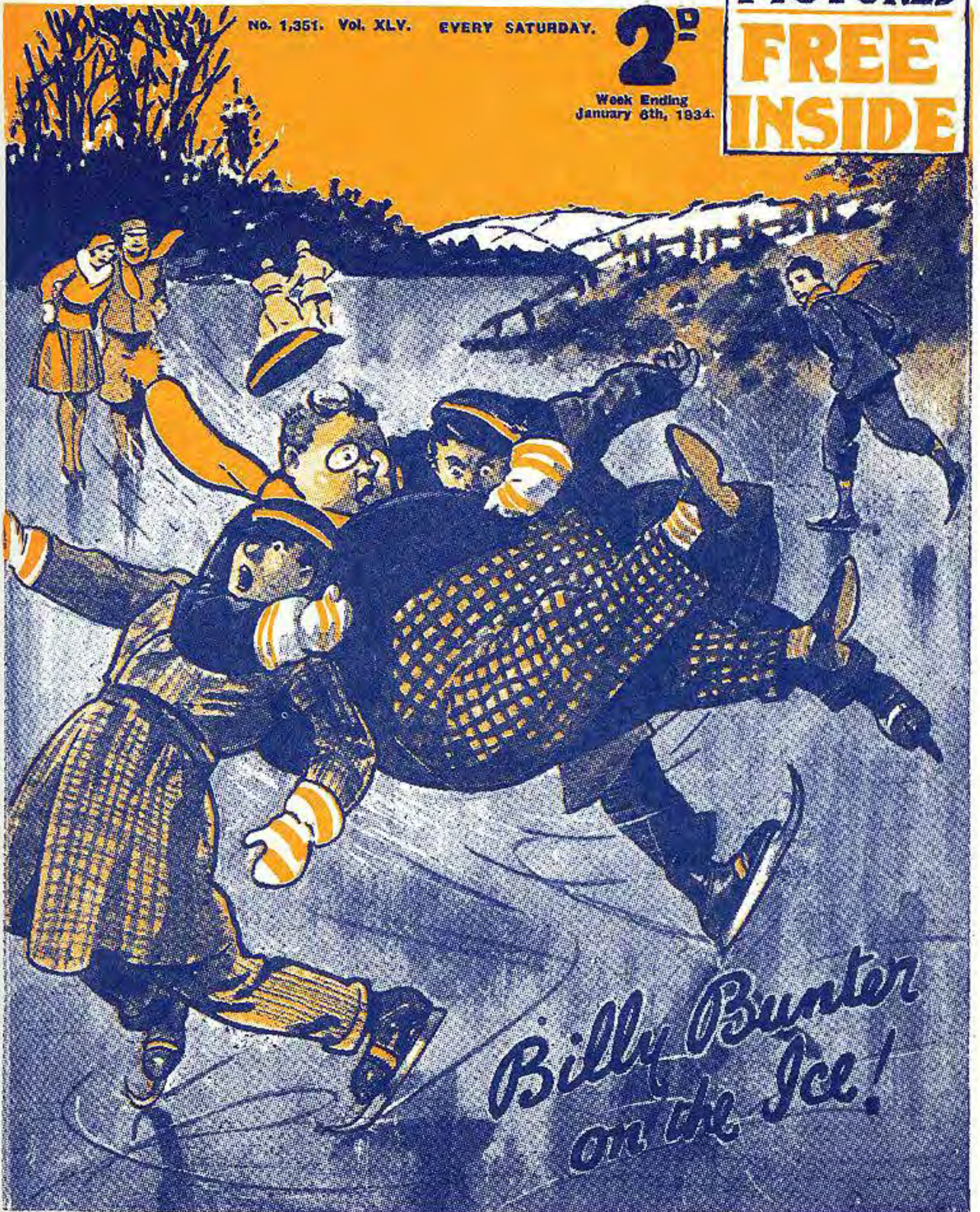
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FREE
INSIDE



*Billy Bunter
on the Ice!*

BUNTER, THE CRASHER!



BY FRANK RICHARDS.

THE FIRST CHAPTER.

Unexpected I

"INKY!"

Hurree Jamsset Ram Singh fairly jumped.

The dusky junior of Greyfriars was startled.

It was a fat whisper that fell suddenly on his dusky ears—the fat whisper of Billy Bunter of the Greyfriars Remove.

And as Hurree Jamsset Ram Singh had no idea that Billy Bunter was within a dozen miles, he was naturally startled.

It was a sharp winter's morning. The new year was beginning bright and cold and clear. It was freezing hard, and the lake in the grounds of Wharton Lodge was a sheet of glistening ice. Four Remove fellows were skating—Harry Wharton and Frank Nugent, Bob Cherry and Johnny Bull. With cheery, ruddy faces, and scarves flying in the wind, they whizzed over the ice, evidently enjoying life.

Hurree Jamsset Ram Singh had walked down from the house with his friends. But the freezefulness, as he would have expressed it in his wonderful English, was rather too terrific! The dusky nabob preferred the shelter of the hut on the bank, from the keen and searching wind, which seemed to the junior from the warm and sunny East to penetrate through his overcoat to the marrow of his bones.

From the shelter of the hut he watched his comrades disporting themselves on the ice, with a cheery smile on his dusky face. And then, from behind him, came that fat whisper which made him jump almost clear of the floor in his surprise, and spin round in amazement.

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He had supposed that nobody was in the hut when he entered it. Least of all had he supposed that Billy Bunter was there! Now that he looked round, however, there was Bunter! In the farthest corner of the hut a fat figure was visible, and a big pair of spectacles glimmered.

"The esteemed and idiotic Bunter!" ejaculated Hurree Jamsset Ram Singh.

"Don't yell!" gasped Bunter.

"What the preposterous thump—"

"Don't shout! Can't you see that the old hunks is coming? And if he spots me here—"

The Nabob of Bhanipur stared blankly at Billy Bunter, and then glanced out of the hut. Harry Wharton's uncle, the colonel, was coming along the bank. Apparently Colonel Wharton, like Inky, preferred the shelter of the hut to the bitter winter wind, for he was heading for it, though he paused every now and then to glance at the skaters, with an amiable smile on his bronzed face.

"I say, Inky, bar that old donkey off!" whispered Billy Bunter, in deep anxiety. "He's got his back up with me, you know! If he spots me here, what do you think he will do?"

Hurree Singh grinned. "The kickfulness will probably be terrific!" he answered. "What are you doing here at all-fully, my esteemed fat-headed Bunter?"

"Well, I dodged in here out of sight when I saw the fellows coming," said Bunter. "I was just taking a—a—a walk, you know. I—I happened to—to come this way just by—by chance. I say, keep that old beast away, Inky! He smacked my head when he saw me in Wimford the other day, just because he heard me call him an old fool—"

"Probably there will be some more

smackfulness," chuckled Hurree Jamsset Ram Singh. "When you call an esteemed old Johnny an old fool, my idiotic Bunter, it would be safer to keep clear of his ridiculous residence."

"Well, I didn't know he could hear me, you ass! Besides, he is an old fool!" argued Bunter. "They talk about it being up to a fellow to tell the truth, and all that—but when an old donkey hears you telling the truth, he just gets his back up—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Oh, don't cackle!" exclaimed Bunter irritably. "Just keep that old fossil away before he spots me! He's coming here! Stand by a pal, Inky, old chap, after all I've done for you! Cut off and tell him—"

"What shall I tell him, my esteemed Bunter?"

"Tell him the house is on fire—"

"Wha-a-at?"

"Or that old Miss Wharton has fallen downstairs—"

"Eh?"

"Anything you like, so long as you bar him off!" whispered Bunter hurriedly. "I don't mind what you tell him, old chap, so long as you keep him away!"

Hurree Singh chuckled.

"But I mind what I tell him, my idiotic Bunter," he answered. "I have some regard for absurd veracity."

"Beast!"

Billy Bunter blinked anxiously out of the hut through his big spectacles. Colonel Wharton was coming along slowly—but he was coming! Hurree Singh had not observed the fat junior crouching in the shadowy corner, when he stepped into the hut. But it was probable the colonel would do so. Bunter, at all events, did not want to

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—TELLING OF BILLY BUNTER'S EXTRAORDINARY ANTICS AT WHARTON LODGE!

run the risk. He was uneasy—and he had cause for uneasiness.

Whether it was the truth or not, there was no doubt that Colonel Wharton had been fearfully wrathful when he heard Billy Bunter's genuine opinion of him!

He had smacked Bunter's head, and would have gone on smacking it had not the fat Owl of the Remove got away.

Now, if he spotted Bunter, it was fairly certain that the smacking would restart after the interval, so to speak.

It was an alarming and distressing position for the Owl of Greyfriars.

Hurree Singh, on the other hand, seemed to find it amusing. A cheery grin wreathed his dusky features.

"Oh lor'!" gasped Bunter. "He—he's coming, Inky! I say, old chap, stand just in front of me, will you, and—
—and hide me!"

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

The idea of the slim Indian junior hiding the fat Owl of the Remove by standing in front of him, was enough to make a fellow yell. Bunter's ample form would have been visible on both sides of Hurree Jamsot Ram Singh.

"Blessed if I see anything to cackle at!" hissed Bunter. "I say, Inky, old chap, stand here and screen me—"

"But you forget that you are double-width, my esteemed Bunter!" chuckled the nabob.

"Beast!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Colonel Wharton was quite near the hut now. The sound of the Indian junior's merriment reached his ears, and he glanced at Hurree Singh, and came on, with a smile.

"You seem very merry, my boy," he remarked. "What—why—who—By Jove!"

Billy Bunter backed into the farthest corner. But it was in vain! The old colonel, as he looked in, spotted him, and stared at him in surprise and gathering wrath. He was as surprised as Hurree Jamsot Ram Singh had been to see the fat Owl there. But he was not amused, like the nabob! He looked anything but amused.

"By Jove! Is that that impertinent young jackanapes?" hooted the old military gentleman. "What?"

"Ow! No!" gasped Bunter. "I—I'm not here! I—I mean—"

"Bunter, hay?" roared Colonel Wharton. "What are you doing here, what? Cheeky young rascal! What?"

"Oh lor'! I—I say, sir, I—I—I wasn't speaking of you, sir, when I called you an old fool!" gasped Bunter. "I—I was speaking of another old fool, sir—"

"What?" roared Colonel Wharton.

"I—I assure you, sir—I—I—you're not the only old fool in the world, sir, and I—I assure you—"

If Bunter hoped that that explanation would placate Colonel Wharton, his hope was unfounded. Rather it seemed to add to the old military gentleman's wrath. He strode past Hurree Jamsot Ram Singh into the hut, and made a grab at Bunter's collar.

Only too clearly the smacking was about to recommence.

Colonel Wharton had a heavy hand! Bunter had had some, and he did not want any more! Very much indeed he did not want any more! Escape was cut off—the colonel was between him and the doorway. Bunter was desperate. As the colonel's hand was outstretched to grasp him by the collar, the fat Owl lowered his bullet head, and butted.

Possibly, had he stopped to think, Bunter would not have done it. But

there was no time to think. And thinking was not much in Billy Bunter's line, anyway.

Crash!

Bump!

"Oh gad! Oooooogh!" spluttered Colonel Wharton, as Bunter's bullet head landed where he had packed his breakfast. "Urrrrgh!"

The colonel sat down, quite suddenly, with a bump that shook the hut.

"Oh, my esteemed hat!" gasped Hurree Jamsot Ram Singh.

"Urrgh! Seize that young scoundrel! Hold him! Urrrrgh!" gurgled Colonel Wharton.

Bunter made a bound for the doorway. Hurree Singh's foot shot out as he bounded. It landed on the tightest trousers in the United Kingdom, and Bunter roared and rolled. Colonel Wharton scrambled up, red with wrath, gurgling for breath.

"By gad! I—I—I will— Urrgh! Bunter, you young rascal— Urrgh!"

Bunter bounded up and fled. Behind him came the heavy footsteps of the

**Who wants Bunter? Nobody!
At least, nobody from
Greyfriars, for the juniors
see enough of him at school
without being burdened with
him over the holidays! But
somebody's got to have Bunter.
Read how he "crashes" in on
Harry Wharton & Co.!**

enraged colonel, and Bunter, in sheer desperation, shot out on the ice and slid for his fat life!

THE SECOND CHAPTER.

Slippery!

"HALLO, hallo, hallo!" yelled Bob Cherry.

"Bunter!" exclaimed Harry Wharton, in amazement.

"That fat owl!" exclaimed Johnny Bull.

"Yarooooop!" roared Frank Nugent, who did not see Bunter so soon as the other fellows.

But though he did not, for the moment, see Bunter, he became aware of his presence. For Bunter, as he shot on the ice, slipped and slid, and travelled a good deal like a bullet from a rifle—straight at Frank Nugent and Harry Wharton! He collided with the two Removites, clutching them round the neck and sending them spinning.

Nugent spun, and his skates flew in the air. Wharton crashed the next moment. Bunter swerved from the shock, but, wonderful to relate, did not roll over. He shot away at a tangent, and before Johnny Bull knew that he was coming in his direction, Bunter had come!

Crash!

"Yawp!" gurgled Johnny, as he sat.

"Oh crikey!" gasped Bunter.

He sprawled over Johnny Bull. He clutched at Johnny to save himself, and got Johnny's nose with one hand, his ear with the other. The yells that emanated from Johnny Bull, as he was dragged over on the ice by his nose and his ear, were absolutely fearful.

"What's that blithering idiot doing here!" gasped Bob Cherry. "He keeps on turning up like a bad penny!"

"Seize him!" roared Colonel Wharton. "Stop that boy! Seize him! I am going to thrash him! Seize him!"

"Oh, my hat!" gasped Harry Wharton.

"Yooooop!" roared Bunter, as Johnny Bull succeeded in getting in a punch. Bunter released a nose and an ear, and rolled over on the ice. "I say, you fellows— Yaroooo! I say— Help! Whoooooop!"

Colonel Wharton had halted for a moment on the margin of the lake. But the desire to get within smacking distance of Bunter was too strong for him. He had an ache where Bunter's bullet head had butted. His breakfast had been seriously disturbed. He stepped out on the smooth ice, and headed for the sprawling Owl of the Remove.

Bunter saw him coming and scrambled up. He scrambled frantically. As fast as he landed one foot, it slipped away before he could land the other. He looked as if he was going through an extraordinary series of physical jerks. The ice was as smooth as glass, or smoother. Colonel Wharton strode at him grimly. But that military stride, suitable to the parade ground, was disastrous on slippery ice. The old colonel's feet suddenly flew, and he sat down, and shot towards Bunter in a sitting position.

"Oh, my esteemed hat!" gasped Hurree Jamsot Ram Singh, from the bank.

"Oh jiminy!" ejaculated Bob Cherry.

"Great gad!" gasped the colonel.

"What—what—what—"

He crashed into Bunter, and the fat junior rolled.

"Yarooooop!" spluttered Billy Bunter.

The old colonel was sprawling on the ice. Bunter grabbed at him, to get righted. He simply could not get up on the slippery ice—his feet played him false. But, with a hold on the colonel, he managed it. Grabbing a collar and a white moustache in his fat hands, Bunter planted a knee on a heaving chest, and heaved himself up from the ice.

"What—what—" gurgled Colonel Wharton, hardly knowing what was happening. "Great gad what—"

The skaters closed in to the rescue. With the unintentional assistance of the colonel, Bunter was up. He slid away across the lake, leaving Colonel Wharton sprawling on his back, gasping for breath, and dizzily wondering whether he was on his head or his heels.

"Uncle!" exclaimed Harry. "Here, lend a hand, you men!"

The juniors grasped the gasping old military gentleman, and got him on his feet. Colonel Wharton spluttered for breath.

"Where is he?" he gasped.

"Bunter? Oh, he—he's gone!"

"The young scoundrel!" Colonel Wharton glared round, evidently unappeased. "I will thrash him! I—I— There he is!"

He spotted Bunter. The fat junior had slid across the lake, and bumped over in the frozen rushes on the opposite side. Picking himself up there, the Owl of the Remove staggered onward, heading into the snowy, leafless park.

Colonel Wharton started after him. This time he did not proceed with a swinging military stride. He walked very carefully. Smooth ice was not to be trifled with.

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Bunter blinked back from his side of the lane, his little round eyes popping behind his big, round spectacles.

"Oh lor'!" he gasped, as he saw the tall form of the master of Wharton Lodge in pursuit astern.

He bolted among the trees.

"Stop!" roared the colonel, as he reached the edge of the ice and tramped through the rushes. "Stop! I am going to thrash you! By gad, I'm going to thrash you within an inch of your life! Stop!"

If Colonel Wharton supposed that such an inducement would make Bunter stop, he was mistaken. Bunter did not stop. He flew!

After him went the colonel, his long legs whisking almost as rapidly as Bunter's short, fat ones. Harry Wharton & Co. stared after them blankly till they vanished among the frosty trunks of the park.

"Oh crikey!" spluttered Bunter.

He blinked back over a fat shoulder. At a distance behind, but coming on fast, was the exasperated colonel.

Bunter panted onward, running his hardest. How and why he was within the walls of Wharton Lodge, only Bunter knew; but there was no doubt that at this moment he was extremely anxious to get outside those walls. A path, carpeted with snow, led through the park towards a fence at a distance, and Bunter went along that path at top speed, only hoping that he would reach the fence before the colonel reached him!

Naturally, Billy Bunter did not expect to meet anyone on a snowy path among the frosty trunks in the wind-swept park. But it was the unexpected that happened. As he came round a curve of the path like a runaway steamroller, he crashed into a man who was coming towards him with a terrific crash.

"Ooooooh!" gasped Bunter, reeling from the shock, and sitting down with a bump in the snow.

"Oh!" spluttered the man he had run into, staggering back against a tree.

The shock fairly winded Bunter. He could only sit and gurgle and blink at the gasping man in front of him. He was a rather powerful man, in soft hat and shabby clothes, with a clean-shaven face and hard features. He did not look a good-tempered or amiable man, and at the present moment he seemed frightfully bad-tempered. He glared at Bunter almost like a tiger. He had narrow, steely eyes, and they glittered savagely at the fat junior.

"You young fool!" he snarled. "What— By James, I'll kick your fat carcass across the park!"

He made an angry stride at Bunter.

"Owl! Keep off!" yelled the alarmed Owl. This was worse than Colonel Wharton. "I say, I didn't see you! Yaroooh! Keep off! Beast! Whoop!"

Tramp, tramp, tramp! came Colonel Wharton's footsteps on the path behind Bunter. And Bunter was actually glad to hear him coming. The steely eyed man was kicking him in sheer savage temper, and it was painful—worse than a box on his fat ears from the colonel. But the sound of the new arrival caused the man to turn his attention from Bunter. He stared along the winding path.

"Yaroooh! Help!" roared Bunter.

Colonel Wharton came tramping round the curve in the path. The steely eyed man gave a start at the sight of him, and his teeth came together with a sharp click. Bunter, blinking at him, could see that the stranger knew Colonel Wharton, and his look indicated clearly enough that he knew him as an enemy.

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Billy Bunter, unheeded by the man who had been kicking him only a minute before, squirmed away.

"By James! It's the colonel!"

Bunter heard the exclamation, or rather the snarl, from the steely eyed man.

"Great gad! Corkran, you scoundrel! What are you doing here?" roared Colonel Wharton, as he came face to face with the man. "You— Why— Hands off, you scoundrel!"

"Oh crikey!" gasped Bunter, his eyes almost bulging through his spectacles at the startling sight as the man leaped on the colonel with the spring of a tiger, and bore him backwards to the earth.

Colonel Wharton went down with a crash, the man he had called Corkran upon him. Billy Bunter gave them one astonished blink, and scuttled on. If there was going to be a scrap between the colonel and the stranger in the park, Bunter did not want to linger to watch it. It gave him the chance he needed of making his escape.

He heard sounds of a struggle behind him as he scuttled on. But he did not pause or look back. Gasping for breath, he reached the park palings and clambered over, and dropped into the lane on the other side.

"Oh lor'!" gurgled Bunter.

He was safe now.

A JOLLY NEW YEAR to ALL MY CHUMS The Editor.

That was all that mattered. What might be happening to the old colonel was a matter of very small moment in comparison.

THE THIRD CHAPTER.

The Man from India!

"THAT ass!"

"That fat chump!"

"That blithering fathead!"

"That footling frump!"

"That preposterous porpoise!"

The Famous Five of the Greyfriars Remove were, of course, referring to Billy Bunter. They stood staring in the direction in which Bunter had vanished among the trees, and the colonel had vanished after him.

The apparition of Billy Bunter, within the walls of Wharton Lodge, was surprising. Several times during the Christmas holidays they had seen Billy Bunter, but generally at a distance from the Lodge.

Bunter, so far as they could make out, was staying somewhere in the neighbourhood, though exactly where they had no idea.

Certainly it never crossed their minds to imagine how near—how very near—the Owl of the Remove had been during the hols.

Now he had turned up again. How and why they did not know. They were aware that he was at a loose end for the holidays. His people were away; Bunter Villa was shut up, and his Uncle George, upon whom Bunter had been

landed, had cut up rusty, which was not astonishing, with so very peculiar a guest as Billy Bunter.

After a row with his Uncle George, Bunter had decided to favour Harry Wharton with his company for Christmas. And no doubt Wharton would have suffered the infliction, as he had suffered it before, but for the fact that the fatuous Owl had put the colonel's back up.

That, so to speak, tore it!

Where the fat Owl was hanging up, and what he was up to, the chums of the Remove did not know, or care very much. In fact, they rather forgot Billy Bunter's fat existence, except when he turned up like a bad penny.

"The fat, fozzling, footling frowster!" said Harry Wharton, kicking off his skates. "What the thump is he doing here? He ought to be jolly well kicked!"

"The kickfulness is the proper caper," agreed Hurree Janset Ram Singh. "Probably the esteemed and absurd colonel will bestow the necessary and ridiculous kickfulness."

Harry Wharton laughed.

"I—I think I'd better get after them," he said. "Uncle's got his rag out with the fat duffer, and no wonder, but—"

"But he may lay it on a little too thick," chuckled Bob Cherry. "Let's go and pick up what he's left of Bunter—if he's left anything."

"Let's!" agreed Nugent.

And, leaving their skates on the bank, the chums of the Remove followed the path into the trees. Billy Bunter was undoubtedly a most exasperating ass, and deserved to be kicked; but in his present mood it was quite probable that the colonel might lay it on too hard. And Wharton hoped that his arrival might have a pacifying effect on the old military gentleman.

As they hurried up the path, winding through the frosty wood, the juniors fully expected to hear sounds of loud howls from the Owl of the Remove.

But they heard nothing from Bunter.

A voice came suddenly to their ears through the frosty thickets, but it was the voice of Colonel Wharton, in panting tones:

"You scoundrel! Release me! By gad! You villain!"

"What the thump—" gasped Bob Cherry.

It sounded as if Bunter had turned on his pursuer, and got the better of him, which was wildly impossible.

But another voice followed—a sharp, sneering, disagreeable voice—a man's voice, strange to their ears.

"Likely! You hound! I've been looking for this chance! I told you I'd remember, Colonel Wharton, and, by James I haven't forgotten! As soon as I came back from India—"

"Corkran, you scoundrel—"

"You laid a stick about me—years ago! You remember?"

"By gad, I'll lay a stick about you again for your impudence in coming on my land, you rascal! Release me, or—"

"I'm handling the stick this time!" came the sneering, snarling voice. "You won't be in a state to lay a finger on me when I've done with you! You thrashed me like a dog once—now it's my turn! I've got you where I want you! And, by James, you're going through it!"

Harry Wharton heard the words as he raced up the path, his comrades at his heels. For a second or two the captain of the Greyfriars Remove had been utterly amazed. But he realised

very quickly that, startling as it was, his uncle was in the grasp of an enemy, out of sight beyond the trees, in his own park. And the colonel's nephew ran as he had never run on the football field as he realized that.

He came speeding round the curve in the path.

His eyes blazed at what he saw. Colonel Wharton was on his back in the snow, and a powerfully built man was kneeling on him. The old colonel was savagely but vainly struggling to rise. He was pinned down, and his assailant, in his uplifted right hand, held a short, thick stick. That weapon would have crashed down on the colonel's defenceless head, but for the arrival of Harry Wharton. He put on

him, running hard, when he reached the park palings, leaped up and caught the top, and swung himself over. A sound of running feet died away outside as the juniors came panting up to the fence.

The rascal was gone. "Rotten luck!" grunted Johnny Bull. And the juniors, panting for breath after the rapid run, walked to where they had left Harry Wharton and his uncle.

The old colonel was leaning on a frosty trunk, gasping.

"Has he got away?" he panted. "Sorry, sir; but he was too quick for us," said Bob. "He ran like a jolly old hare."

"The rascal! He will not get away

What had happened had quite driven the fat Owl of Greyfriars from his mind.

But Harry Wharton & Co. did not go back to the skating.

"I'm going to look for that scoundrel Corkran," said Harry. "You fellows coming?"

"Yes, rather!"

"The rascalfulness is terrific."

And the Famous Five followed the way the man from India had gone, clambered over the palings, and dropped into the road. For a long time they hunted up and down the lanes and field-paths, very keen to get hold of the rascal and march him off to Wimford police station. But they saw nothing of him; it was clear that he had lost no time in getting away from the vicinity.



"Look here, don't you start a shindy here!" said the waiter warmly. "You'll pay your bill at the desk——" "Shan't I!" came a deep growl very like Johnny Bull's. "The cakes were rotten!" "Johnny——" gasped Wharton. "Eh,——what!" stuttered Johnny Bull. "I never spoke. Who the dickens said that?" Billy Bunter, the ventriloquist, looked quite unconcerned.

a desperate spurt, and reached the steely eyed man, even as the blow was descending.

Wharton crashed into the man, hurling him backwards with his weight, and sending him rolling off the colonel. He rolled over himself from the shock.

Corkran spat out an oath, and he rolled in the snow. His hard-featured face was convulsed with rage. He scrambled up swiftly, glaring round. And then as he saw the crowd of juniors coming charging up the path he jumped back.

For an instant he stood glaring at them; and then, suddenly turning, took to his heels.

"After him!" roared Bob Cherry. Harry Wharton staggered up and ran to his uncle to help him to rise. The other four fellows rushed on in pursuit of Corkran.

But the steely eyed man ran like a deer. They were still panting behind

from the police; and they will soon be looking for him!" gasped the colonel. "I'll charge him with assault, by Jove, and he will be taken care of for six months. Lurking in my own park, watching for me, by Jove!"

The colonel calmed down. The juniors were exchanging wondering looks. The incident was surprising enough to them.

"A man I knew in India!" grunted the colonel, as if feeling that some explanation was needed. "A swindling rascal in Calcutta! I thrashed him, by Jove, and I'm glad to remember that I laid it on hard! I'm not too old to thrash him again, by Jove, only he took me by surprise! Get back to your skating, my boys! I will walk back to the house."

Still breathing hard, obviously much disturbed by the startling episode, Colonel Wharton walked back through the trees, forgetful of Billy Bunter.

Neither did they see anything of Billy Bunter. But that fat and fatuous youth was not, if they had only known it, very far away.

THE FOURTH CHAPTER.

Mysterious!

"WELLS!" "Sir!" said the butler of Wharton Lodge.

"It's getting too jolly thick!" exclaimed Harry Wharton warmly.

"The thickfulness," remarked Hurree Jamset Ram Singh, "is truly a little terrific."

"But what, sir——" asked Wells. "That dashed pincher has been at it again!" exclaimed Wharton.

"Oh, sir!" said Wells. It was afternoon. The winter dusk THE MAGNET LIBRARY.—No. 1,351.

was falling. Harry Wharton was in his "den"—a very pleasant room, with a balcony outside the french windows, and old stone steps leading down to the garden at the side of the house. The Nabob of Bhanipur was with him; the other fellows in their rooms, getting ready for a walk.

The Famous Five were going down to the pictures at Wimford, and they were going to "tea" in the tea lounge attached to the picture-house. But the captain of the Greyfriars Remove was not, for the moment, thinking of the intended excursion. He had rung for Wells, and now he was pointing to the bookshelf beside the fireplace. A number of handsome gilt volumes had been placed there—Christmas gifts from various relatives to Harry—and he had just noticed that they were no longer in their place. And he was wrathful.

"Half a dozen books," said Harry. "I've looked round the room; they're not here anywhere. Look here, Wells, it's up to you!"

Wells stood distressed.

All through the Christmas holidays it had gone on. There was some unknown pilferer lurking within the walls somewhere. Certainly it was up to Wells, as chief of the household staff, to put a stop to it. But Wells seemed quite helpless in the matter.

"Thomas!" he called out.

Thomas, the page, came in from the passage. He had heard Wharton's words, and his chubby face was as distressed as Wells'.

"Thomas," said Wells, "a number of books are missing. Do you know anything about it?"

"No, Mr. Wells!" said Thomas. "I noticed they were gone when I dusted the room this morning, sir. I thought p'r'aps some of the young gents had

them to read. They was there last night, sir."

"They have been taken during the night, then," said Wells, with a very doubtful look at Thomas. Suspicion, as far as suspicion existed, rested on that unfortunate youth.

"It's too jolly thick!" said Harry. "It's been going on almost ever since I came back from school. All sorts of things—bedclothes and rugs and socks and shirts—and now books!"

"It has been going on still more below stairs, sir," said Wells. "Food from the larder, sir, has continually disappeared. Everything is now kept locked up at night, since the Christmas pudding and the cold turkey went. It is a very strange mystery, sir."

Bob Cherry came in. "One of you borrowed my 'Holiday Annual'?" he asked.

"Oh, my hat!" exclaimed Wharton, in great exasperation. "Is that gone, too?"

"Well, it isn't in my room," said Bob. "I thought one of you fellows—"

"That dashed pilferer has been at it again, Bob! I'm awfully sorry!" said Wharton, colouring with vexation. The loss of his own property was irritating enough, but pilfering from a guest under his roof was much more mortifying.

"Oh, it's all right, old bean!" said Bob.

"It isn't all right!" growled the captain of the Remove. "There's some rotter in the house pinching things! It's never happened before! It's got to be stopped, Wells!"

"Certainly, sir, but—"

Johnny Bull stepped in at the door. "If one of you chaps has borrowed my 'Modern Boy's Annual'—"

"Oh crumbs! Is that gone?"

"I thought I'd mention it, as it's not in my room—"

"The jolly old pincher seems to have made rather a clearance," said Bob, with a faint grin. "Must be a cove with literary tastes, to borrow so many books all at once."

"They've been taken to be sold, of course," said Harry. "The brute can't want them! It's too awfully thick!"

Nugent came in. All eyes turned on him at once.

"You missed anything?" asked Harry.

"Eh? No! Anything up?"

"More pinching!" said Harry. His face was crimson. "It's fearfully rotten for it to happen while you fellows are here! Look here, Wells, something will have to be done about it! It can't go on!"

"Certainly, sir," said the worried Wells. "But—" Wells was evidently at a loss.

Wharton's face was clouded when he went down with his friends and they started to walk to Wimford. The peculiar depredations that were going on at Wharton Lodge worried him deeply.

Nothing of any great value had been taken: that was the most curious circumstance. Schoolboys are careless; and plenty of times one or another member of the Co. had left money in his room, in pockets of clothes, or even on a dressing-table. It had never been touched. Such things as watches and pins might have been snaffled by the mysterious snaffer—but they never had been.

Food seemed to be his chief object—though that had been stopped since Wells had taken to locking up everything very carefully before going to bed. Next he seemed keen on articles of clothing, as if he was a fellow in need of a change—as perhaps he was! Now he seemed to have concentrated on books: it was hardly likely he wanted so many at once to read, so no doubt he had taken them to sell for what they would fetch second hand.

It was odd enough that a fellow who would not touch money would bag property—but that, after all, was not uncommon. The stupidest fellow, if he took money or valuables, could not delude himself into the belief that he was not a thief. So long as he only "snaffled" trifles of little value, perhaps he succeeded in persuading himself that he was not exactly dishonest. Certainly there existed plenty of fellows with obtuse intellects like that. Billy Bunter of the Greyfriars Remove was one of them!

No fellow's cakes or tarts at Greyfriars were safe from Bunter. He would "borrow" a fellow's socks or shirts surreptitiously and unscrupulously. He had even been known to "borrow" a fellow's school books and sell them to Fisher T. Fish, the business man of the Remove! But Bunter would have been very shocked and indignant had anybody accused him of dishonesty. He had wonderful ways of working out that whatever he did was somehow right—or right if fellows would only look at it properly.

But nobody, of course, thought of Billy Bunter in connection with the mysterious happenings at Wharton Lodge. So far as anyone knew, Bunter was some distance away.

Wharton's face cleared, however, under the influence of a walk in the keen, fresh air, and by the time the chums of the Remove arrived at Wimford he had dismissed the disagreeable incidents from his mind.

Quite a good picture was on show at the cinema—one of the good British

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films which are slowly but surely ousting American crook stuff from the screen. The Famous Five saw it through, and then adjourned to the tea lounge for tea. There were several people at the little tables in the tea lounge, and among them was a fat youth in spectacles, who caught the eyes of the juniors at once.

"Hallo, hallo, hallo!" ejaculated Bob Cherry, with a grin. "Is that a porpoise escaped from the Zoo, or jolly old Bunter?"

"Bunter again!" grinned Nugent. "The fat fozler must be staying in Wimford, as he told us he was. I thought he wasn't, as he said he was."

"Bother him!" grunted Harry Wharton. He was not pleased by the sight of William George Bunter. Fascinating fellow as Bunter was, it often happened that people were not pleased to see him.

"Somebody's been handing him a Christmas tip!" grinned Bob, with a glance at Bunter's table.

The fat Owl was certainly "doing himself" very well! He was happy and shiny and sticky and jammy—his usual state when he was in funds. He blinked across at the Famous Five and grinned a fat and sticky grin.

"I say, you fellows," he squeaked, "come over here—lots of room for you. My treat, old chaps."

The Famous Five did not accept that kind invitation. They sat down at another table to tea. A treat from Bunter generally meant that the fellow he treated would be landed with the bill, at the end of the treat. They knew their Bunter!

Giving the fat Owl the "marble" eye, they proceeded with tea. Billy Bunter sniffed, and devoted his fat attention to the foodstuffs. He had been at it some time, to judge by his sticky aspect; but he was not the fellow to leave off so long as there remained anything to eat. Several times it might have been observed that Billy Bunter paused and made a little mental calculation, as if he realised that he was in danger of going beyond the limit of his financial resources—a danger that Bunter constantly incurred. Apparently Bunter reached the limit of his cash before he reached the limit of his uncarthy appetite—for he rose from his table, casting a longing, lingering look at a pile of cakes that remained there. Having blinked at the cakes, he blinked across at the Famous Five.

"I say, you fellows—"

No reply.

"I say—"

Same result!

"Deaf?" hooted Bunter.

Stony silence.

"I say, can you lend me a few bob?"

Ten deaf ears were turned to that request! Billy Bunter snorted, sniffed, sorted out his cash, and paid his bill. His calculations, evidently, had been correct; for the bill amounted to exactly the amount of his cash. There was nothing left over for the waiter, who had been kept rather busy for some time and who gave the fat junior a rather expressive look. But expressive looks had no effect on the Owl of the Remove.

He rolled across to the juniors' table.

"I say, you fellows—"

"Hook it!" said Harry Wharton briefly.

"I've had my tea!" said Bunter, with dignity. "I'm not going to stick you for a tea, Wharton."

"You're not!" agreed Wharton.

"Take your face away, old fat bean! We have to stand it in the term at Greyfriars; but it's not fair to spoil the landscape with it in the hols."

"Beast!"

Billy Bunter blinked round for a chair. Spotting one, he drew it up to the table. Freezing stares from the Famous Five had no more effect on Billy Bunter than the expressive look of the waiter.

"Make room for a chap, Franky—is that your foot I trod on, Bob?—you shouldn't have such big feet. He, he, he!" And Billy Bunter sat down and grinned agreeably at the chums of the Remove.

THE FIFTH CHAPTER.

A Little Ventriloquism!

BILLY BUNTER blinked over the tea-table. The chums of the Remove had nearly finished tea, and little remained. On the cake-dish was one sticky cake, to which the Owl of the Remove helped himself. It did not last long.

"Shall I call the waiter, old beans?" he asked.

"Certainly—if you want him!" answered Harry. "We don't!"

"You haven't had much of a tea—"

"Enough's as good as a feast!"

"Well, look here, I haven't seen much of you these hols—have some more at my expense," said Bunter.

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"Can't afford having anything at your expense, old fat bean," said Bob Cherry, shaking his head. "Comes too expensive."

"Oh, really, Cherry—"

"Time we were getting a move on," remarked Harry Wharton.

"Don't walk away while a fellow's talking to you, Wharton! Dash it all, there's such a thing as manners!" said Bunter warmly. "Not that I expect much from you in that line. He, he, he! I say, has the old hunks got over it yet?"

"The who?"

"Your duffy old uncle—he seemed excited this morning," grinned Bunter. "Did that chap in the park damage him? I'd have stopped and lent him a hand, but he really couldn't expect it, in the circumstances, what? Barging after a chap like a wild Indian! I hope that fellow gave him a jolly good hiding. He, he, he!"

Harry Wharton looked fixedly at the Owl of the Remove. In the tea lounge of Wimford Picture Palace he could not very well take Bunter by the scruff of his fat neck and bang his head on the table. So he had to be contented with looking at him—expressively. Which did not bother William George Bunter in the very least.

"What the thump were you doing there at all, you fat ass?" asked Bob Cherry. "If you wanted a walk you

needn't have walked on Colonel Wharton's estate? Plenty of other places to walk in."

"Ho, ho, he!"

"What are you cackling at, fathhead?"

"Your face!" answered Bunter agreeably. "Your features rather have that effect on a fellow, you know."

Bob Cherry breathed hard. Like Wharton, he regretted that it was out of the question to bang Bunter's head in the tea lounge of the Wimford Picture Palace.

"The fact is, I've been looking for a chance to speak to you, Harry, old chap," said Bunter, blinking at the captain of the Remove. "As you know, I kept the hols open for you—it was understood that I was staying with you—"

"Not by me!"

"Beast! I mean, oh, really, old fellow! Having turned down a crowd of invitations on your account, I was rather stranded when you turned me down," said Bunter. "I admit it's not wholly your fault—that stuffy old ass of an uncle of yours got his back up—"

"Do you want me to pull your nose Bunter?"

"Eh? No!"

"Then you'd better speak of my uncle a bit more respectfully."

"Oh, really, Wharton! You know as well as I do that he's a stuffy old ass! But never mind that. Look here—don't get up, old chap, I haven't finished yet! What I meant to say is, can you fix it with him? I'm willing to apologise, if that will be any use. I don't mind pulling an old goat's leg. He, he, he! If you can fix it, I can give you a week! Not more—as I've so many friends anxious to see me these hols. What about it?"

Harry Wharton rose from the table.

"Let's get going, you men," he said.

"I say, Harry, old chap—"

"Go and eat coke!"

"I was going to say that I decline to stay with you, Wharton, if you ask me on your bended knees—"

"The bendfulness will probably not be terrific!" grinned the Nabob of Bhanipur.

"But look here!" said Bunter. "Hold on a minute—I'm in rather a scrape. I'm short of money."

"Not really?" asked Johnny Bull, with deep sarcasm.

"Yes, really, old chap, and it's rather rotten! You see, I'm not used to it, like you fellows."

"Oh, my only hat!"

"To tell you the truth—"

Bunter.

"You couldn't!" said Bob, shaking his head.

"Beast! Look here, to tell you the truth, I've just blown my last bobs on tea here," said Bunter. "I got only seven-and-six for the lot—"

"Eh?"

"I mean, I had seven-and-six, and lunch was five bob," said Bunter. "That left only half-a-crown! That's all I've had for tea."

"We've managed on a bob apiece," remarked Nugent.

"Well, that's all right for you fellows," said Bunter. "You're poor! But I'm rather accustomed to the decencies of life, and all that. I suppose you can lend me a quid. It's only four bob each, if you whack it out."

"The whackfulness will not be posterous!"

"Well, look here, make it ten bob if you're hard up," said Bunter. "I can tell you I've been going jolly short lately. The fact is, I'm getting fed-up with the whole thing, and I've a jolly

good mind to go back to my Uncle George! Still, he's rather a beast—mean with the food, too! Your place is better than that, on the whole, Wharton."

"Better or worse, you'll get the boot if you get within kicking distance there!" growled Wharton.

"He, ho, ho!"

"What is the fat blitherer cackling at?" asked Bob. "Is there some joke on, Bunter?"

"He, he, ho! Oh, no! Not at all! He, he, ho! Look here, what about that ten bob? To tell you the truth—"

"Great pip! Is he going to tell the truth twice in one day?" ejaculated Bob Cherry.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"To tell you the truth," hooted Bunter, "I'm stony! I've been disappointed about a postal order!"

"Good-bye, Bunter!"

Five juniors turned away from the table.

"I say, you fellows—"

No answer.

Billy Bunter's eyes gleamed behind his spectacles. He gave a fat little cough—the usual preliminary of the Greyfriars ventriloquist when he was about to begin operations.

"Waiter!" came a voice, which Bob Cherry's nearest and dearest relative might have taken for Bob's. "Here, waiter—"

"Yessir?"

"What do you mean by bringing us those rotten cakes? We're jolly well not going to pay for them!"

The waiter, coming up probably in expectation of a tip, stared blankly at Bob Cherry. So did his comrades.

"The cakes were all right," said Harry.

"Who said they weren't?"

"Eh? You did!"

"I did?" gasped Bob.

"What was the matter with the cakes, sir?" demanded the waiter, rather aggressively. "You've eaten them all, at any rate, and they're on your bill!"

"Nothing the matter with the cakes that I know of!" gasped Bob in bewilderment. "What—"

"You silly idiot, shut up!" came a voice that was either Johnny Bull's, or a twin to it.

Bob stared round at him.

"What? Who's a silly idiot?" he demanded. "Look here, Johnny Bull, if you can't be civil, keep your head shut, see?"

"What the dickens do you mean? I—"

"For goodness' sake don't rag, you men!" exclaimed Harry Wharton. "Everybody's staring already! Let's get out—"

"You preposterous ass, stop your idiotic jawfulness and give us a rest!" came from the Greyfriars ventriloquist; and Harry Wharton spun round at Hurree Jamset Ram Singh, crimson with anger.

"Inky, you cheeky ass—"

"My esteemed chum, I did not speak!" gasped the Nabob of Bhanipur. "I assure you terrifically—"

"Look here, young gentlemen, don't start a shindy here," said the waiter warmly. "You'll pay your bill at the desk—"

"Shan't!" came a deep growl, very much like Johnny Bull's. "You're a rotten swindler. The cakes were rotten!"

"Johnny—" gasped Wharton.

"Eh? What? I never spoke! Who the dickens said that?" gasped Johnny Bull.

"You did—"

"I didn't—"

"Look here—"

"Oh, shut up, Wharton! You talk too much! You're too jolly conceited," came the twin to Bob Cherry's voice.

"My hat! You cheeky, silly ass—"

"Pay your bill at the desk and leave the place, please!" barked the waiter. "You can't kick up a row here!"

Harry Wharton, with a set face, went to the desk and paid the bill. Then he walked down the stairs and out, followed by his friends—all of them frowning. Billy Bunter, left on his own, grinned a fat grin. The Greyfriars ventriloquist considered that he had got his own back, and a little over!

THE SIXTH CHAPTER.

Giving Bunter Beans!

FIVE fellows, with frowning faces, walked down the old High Street of Wimford. Dusk was falling, and with dusk came a fall of snow, and the street was glistening white. They tramped in silence under the falling flakes.

It had been quite a happy party till the Greyfriars ventriloquist weighed in! Now it was far from a happy one!

But suddenly, from Hurree Jamset Ram Singh, there came an exclamation. He halted.

"My esteemed chums!" he exclaimed.

"Well, what?" asked Frank Nugent.

"We have been diddled! My esteemed and absurd Wharton, pray lend me your ridiculous ears—"

Wharton had not stopped. Bob Cherry caught him by the arm.

"Hold on, old bean!" he said.

Wharton shook his hand off. Bob stared at him.

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

"Oh, nothing!" said Wharton sarcastically. "Only I talk too much, and I'm too jolly conceited! Frightfully polite to tell me so!"

"I never said anything of the kind!"

"What's the good of rotting? You know you did!"

"I did not!" bawled Bob Cherry.

"Oh, rats!"

"My esteemed and ridiculous chums, please lend me your absurd ears," urged the Nabob of Bhanipur. "We have been donefully diddled by the absurd and execrable Bunter—"

"Bunter?" repeated Wharton.

"You have forgotten that the esteemed and execrable Bunter is a ridiculous ventriloquist—and he has been pulling our absurd legs, as he has done at Greyfriars—"

"Oh!" exclaimed Bob Cherry.

"Bunter!" gasped Wharton. "That fat villain! We might have known—he's always playing some fool game like that at Greyfriars—we've kicked him up and down the Remove passage for it—"

All was clear at once! Frowning faces divested themselves of their frowns! As soon as the keen-witted nabob tumbled to the trick that had been played, the chums of the Remove knew that the ventriloquist of Greyfriars had been at work.

"The podgy villain!" breathed Bob Cherry. "Here, let's go back and wait for the fat scoundrel to come out! He's spent all his money, so he won't be long!"

"Yes, rather!"

The Famous Five walked back towards the picture-house. A fat figure was rolling out as they reached the entrance. Billy Bunter was grinning. Evidently he was enjoying the discomfiture of the chums of the Remove. But the fat grin vanished from his podgy features at the sight of five wrathful faces. He blinked at them in alarm.

"I—I—I say, you fellows—" stammered Bunter.

"You fat scoundrel—"

"Oh, really, Cherry—"

"It was you!" roared Johnny Bull.

"Not at all, old chap! If you mean that little bit of ventriloquism, it was only a lark, and I never did it, neither! The fact is, I can't ventriloquise at all! As for imitating a fellow's voice, I couldn't do it to save my life! I say—Yaroooooop! Groooooogh! Oooooogh!" spluttered Bunter, as a snowball, plopping on his capacious mouth, cut short his remarks.

"Urrrrrrgggh!"

"Give him beans!"

"Give him jip!"

"Give him terrific and preposterous jip!"

Whiz, whiz, whiz! Crash! Smash, smash! There was plenty of snow, and Billy Bunter had the benefit of it. Five fellows pelted him with snowballs with accuracy and wonderful rapidity. It seemed to Billy Bunter that the air was full of snowballs. They landed on him right and left.

"Yooogh! Urrgh! I say, you fellows—wurrgh—it wasn't me—urrgh—and it jolly well served you right—gurrgh—oh crikey! Oh lor!"

Billy Bunter fled for his fat life. Through the falling flakes, the Famous Five followed him, gathering up snow as they went, and hurling snowballs. Bunter felt as if he had collected tons of snow by the time he dodged round a corner and escaped.

After which, the Famous Five, chuckling, took their way back to Wharton Lodge, tramping cheerily through the snow, with harmony once more restored in their happy circle.

Billy Bunter was not feeling happy!

It was a breathless and winded and gasping Bunter that tramped out of Wimford some time after the chums of the Remove.

He tramped in the same direction, gurgling as he went.

The winter darkness was falling thickly, and had Harry Wharton & Co. looked back, they would not have perceived the fat figure that was rolling on behind them.

By the time they arrived at Wharton Lodge they had almost forgotten Bunter.

Certainly they never suspected that Billy Bunter was still tramping in the same direction, with the same destination!

But he was!

Bunter's proceedings, those holidays, had puzzled them a good deal, especially his extraordinary way of popping up like a jack-in-the-box on unexpected occasions. They had concluded that he must be passing the holidays at some place not far away. They little dreamed how near that place was!

The fat junior reached Wharton Lodge an hour after the chums of the Remove had gone in. He did not approach the gates. He clambered over a fence into the park, and—blinking cautiously round him through his big spectacles—crept stealthily through

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the shadows till he passed through the shrubbery at the side of the house. There he blinked up at the french windows of Wharton's "den."

There was no light in the room. Reassured on that point, Bunter crept up the stone stairs to the balcony. He tried the french window! Once he had found that window locked on the inside. Luckily, it was not locked now! The Owl of the Remove opened it, stepped in, and closed it again. He stole on tiptoe across the room to the door on the corridor. There he blinked cautiously out, before he emerged. The coast was clear! Bunter whipped out and down the passage to the little steep stair that led to the attic over Harry Wharton's rooms. He gasped with relief when he had negotiated that stair and was safe in the attic.

Billy Bunter was home again!

THE SEVENTH CHAPTER.

Cornered!

COLONEL WHARTON started. It was past midnight. At that hour all should have been silent and still at Wharton Lodge. All was, in fact, silent and still; but through the silence and the stillness there came the sound of a thud, as if someone, moving in the dark, had bumped into some article of furniture. The colonel's eyes gleamed under his grey, knitted brows.

The old military gentleman was in his study, a room that opened off the hall next to the dining-room. It was far from his habit to keep late hours. But he had been rather disturbed that day by the unexpected meeting with the man from India, and his nervous system was still rather feeling the effects of the struggle with Corkran.

He had gone to bed at the usual time; but found himself unable to sleep, and at last he had turned out, donned dressing-gown and slippers, and descended to his study, with the intention of reading himself to a sleepy state. He threw a few logs on the embers of the fire, and settled down in an arm-chair with a volume of Darwin's "Origin of Species" in his hand—a volume specially selected for its soporific effects. And he had not been perusing that great work for more than a quarter of an hour when the faint thud from the direction of the adjoining room came to his ears through the silence and stillness.

He laid Darwin in the arm-chair and stepped quietly to the door. Someone was astir in the sleeping house—moving about in the dark! It could scarcely be anyone but the secret pilferer whose mysterious purloinings had caused so much perturbation during the Christmas holidays. The old colonel picked up a golf club from a bag in the corner, opened the door, and looked into the dark hall grimly.

The door of the dining-room was close at hand, and it was open!

Someone was there!

Darker and grimmer grew the brow of the old colonel. His grip closed hard on the golf club.

He stepped out into the hall and switched on the light there. Then he stepped towards the open doorway of the dining-room.

The secret snaffler was fairly cornered in that room. When the colonel got to close quarters with the golf club there was no doubt that that mysterious individual would wish that he had made a New Year's resolution to give up snaffling!

Why he was there the colonel had no

doubt. In the provender department everything was now safely locked up at night, and Wells inspected the process. There was no chance of the secret snaffler getting at the pantry or the larder again. And it was food that he chiefly snaffled! But in the dining-room there was a sideboard, and in the sideboard there were biscuits. That, the colonel did not doubt, was what the pilferer was after. Once before the biscuits had vanished from the box in the sideboard. Now they were going to vanish again—or, rather, they would have vanished, if the colonel had not happened to be wakeful that night! Grimly gripping the golf club, Colonel Wharton stepped towards the dining-room.

There was a startled gasp in the darkness of that room.

The sudden flashing on of the light in the hall had, of course, alarmed the unseen person there.

A fat figure that was groping at the

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Patient: "Oh, yes, doctor: I'm rolling my own cigarettes now!"

sideboard—and had already knocked over a chair in the dark—leaped up!

"Oh lor'!" gasped Billy Bunter.

Terror rooted him, for a moment, to the floor.

But only for a moment! It was necessary to act swiftly! Bunter had a glimpse of a tall figure in sweeping dressing-gown, then he leaped to the dining-room door and slammed it.

Swiftly he turned the key in the lock.

The next moment Colonel Wharton's hand was on the door-handle.

"Good gad!" hooted the colonel. "Locked! By Jove! Open this door at once, you scoundrel!"

"Oh orrikey!" breathed Bunter.

He was not likely to open the door! He was only too glad that he had succeeded in locking it before the colonel spotted him.

What Colonel Wharton would have done, had he discovered that the Owl of Greyfriars was a secret and unsuspected resident in his house, Bunter did not quite know! But he had no doubt that it would have been something drastic—very drastic indeed!

The door-handle rattled.

"Is that you, Thomas?" hooted the colonel. Many circumstances had fixed suspicion on poor Thomas.

Bunter grinned breathlessly.

He did not care whom the colonel supposed that it was so long as he did not guess that it was William George Bunter.

"Open this door at once."

"Boast!" murmured Bunter.

Thump! Bang! Rattle! The colonel was angry and impatient. He did not know who the secret snaffler was, but he knew that he had cornered him. And he was very anxious to put in some work with the golf club.

Bunter, on the other hand, had no desire whatever to establish contact with that golf club! Nothing would have induced him to unlock the door.

But what was he going to do? Too late, he repented that he had stolen out of his lair to snaffle the biscuits in the dining-room. But he had been hungry—too hungry to sleep. The sale of certain books at a second-hand shop in Wimford had provided him with funds for lunch and tea. But he had had no supper! It was the biscuits or nothing—and Bunter naturally preferred biscuits to nothing! Now, however, he would have given the whole output of Huntley & Palmer to be safe back in his attic!

"Beast!" breathed Bunter.

He was fairly cornered! For the moment he was safe! But there was no escape for him, except by the window. That meant a night out.

Since the fat and fatuous Owl had ensconced himself, secretly, in the house, he had been accustomed to use the french windows of Wharton's "den" as a mode of egress and ingress. But at night those windows were locked. If he got out, there was no getting in again—till the following day! On a winter's night that was not an attractive prospect.

Bang! Thump!

"Open this door, you rascal!" came the colonel's voice in tones like those of a Royal Bengal tiger in a particularly ferocious frame of mind.

"Oh lor'!" groaned Bunter.

He heard another voice from the hall, the portly, fruity voice of Wells, the butler. The thumping on the door had awakened Wells and brought him forth.

"Is anything amiss, sir?" asked Wells, with a cough.

"Amis!" hooted the colonel. "Yes, by gad! That rascally pilferer is in the dining-room, Wells, and has looked the door."

"Dear me!" said Wells.

"We shall now ascertain who the scoundrel is," said the colonel. "I will thrash him, by Jove, thrash him soundly, and then kick him out."

"Beast!" hissed Bunter, under his breath.

"I will call Thomas, sir—"

"Huh! Probably it is Thomas in the dining-room at this moment. I do not see who else it can be—"

"Oh, sir," said another voice, "I ain't in the dining-room, sir—I'm 'ere, sir!"

"Good gad!"

"I think, sir, that it cannot be Thomas," said Wells respectfully. "As Thomas is here, sir, I think—"

"Huh!"

"I was about to suggest, sir, that I should call Thomas, because he would be able, being a small person, to get into the dining-room by the serving-hatch," said Wells. "As he is here—"

"Good! At once!" barked the colonel.

"Oh crumbs!" breathed Bunter.

He scudded across to the dining-room window. There was no help for it now.

and no time to lose! Bunter had that window open in a few seconds. Heedless of cold wind and falling flakes he rolled out. He bumped into snow, picked himself up, and fled.

A minute later the active Thomas was in the dining-room, and he had the door open for the colonel and Wells.

Colonel Wharton strode in and switched on the light, and fixed his eyes on the open window, through which the snowflakes were blowing in on the January night-wind.

"By gad! He is gone—by the window!" roared the colonel.

"Dear me!" said Wells.

"'Ooked it!" said Thomas.

Colonel Wharton glared at the open window. He strode across to it, glared out into the snow and darkness, and then closed and fastened it. Then he turned to Wells.

"Wells, the scoundrel is out of the house now! Ascertain at once if any of the servants are out of their rooms!"

"Very good, sir!"

Wells glided away. He came back in ten minutes—which the colonel spent in snorting and fuming.

"None of the servants, sir, is out of the house," said Wells.

"Good gad! Are you sure?"

"I have ascertained the fact, sir!" said Wells, with dignity.

Colonel Wharton stood silent. It had been taken for granted that the secret snaffler was a member of the household staff. This discovery, however, obviously cleared them—much to the satisfaction of Wells, but to the great puzzlement and perplexity of the colonel. Thomas brightly weighed in with a suggestion:

"P'raps it was one of the young gents, sir, a-jarking."

"Don't talk nonsense, Thomas!" barked the colonel testily.

"Oh! Yes, sir!" said Thomas.

But he looked at Wells, and Wells looked at him. Colonel Wharton refused to entertain for a moment the idea that his nephew, or his nephew's school friends, might have been "larking" at that hour of the night, and in such a way! But to the butler and the page it seemed rather probable. Indeed, they did not see what else there was to believe!

"Some intruder must have obtained admission to the house," said the colonel, at last. "We must examine doors and windows—"

Quite a considerable time was spent in examining doors and windows. But they were found safely secured on the inside. The matter had to be given up at last, and it remained a mystery—one more of the mysteries of Wharton Lodge!

THE EIGHTH CHAPTER.

The Man at the Window!

"Oh lor'!" murmured Billy Bunter.

It was wild and windy that night in early January. Snow fell lightly, but persistently. Billy Bunter stood under a tree; but that afforded little shelter and no warmth at all! Bunter was cold. His teeth chattered! He had not even got away with the biscuits; but he was so cold that he almost forgot that he was hungry.

"Beasts!" groaned Bunter.

Had it been practicable, the fat Owl of the Remove would have "chucked" his secret sojourn at Wharton Lodge, and returned at once to the inhospitable roof of his Uncle George.

But it was not practicable!

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Even had Bunter possessed a railway-fare, there were no trains at that time of night!

Bunter was fairly "for" it!

On the whole, he had not done so badly during his secret and surreptitious stay at Harry Wharton's home. He had snaffled sufficient bedclothes and rugs to keep himself warm and comfortable in his attic. Supplies had been rather irregular, but he had done fairly well.

His comings and goings had had to be very cautious and stealthy, but he had escaped discovery. All the time, he had hoped that a propitious moment might arrive when it would be safe to reveal himself; but in that he had been disappointed. Still, on the whole, he had found it rather better than Uncle George!

But now—

Now it was awful!

It was windy! It was cold! He was shut out! It was long hours before morning! It was awful!

"Oh lor'!" groaned Bunter.

If that brute of an old colonel had only got over his temper it would have been all right! He could have managed Harry Wharton somehow! But all Bunter's proceedings seemed to have made the old colonel's temper worse, instead of better!

One thing was certain. He had to get in somehow! A night out in the wind and the snow was out of the question.

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And at last the fat Owl made up his mind to it.

He left his shelter under the tree and tramped away through the falling snow and frosty shrubberies, to the old stone steps that led up to the balcony of Harry Wharton's den.

To break a pane and put a fat paw through and unlock the door was the only resource!

It was a desperate resource, for it could scarcely fail to warn the occupants of the house that someone had entered from the outside during the night.

But it was a case of "needs must." The Owl of the Remove had to get out of the cold and the snow. Risk or no risk, discovery or no discovery, that was essential.

He reached the stone steps at the side of the building, thickly carpeted with snow. He trod up them in the deep darkness.

Click!

Bunter jumped.

It was the click of a lock that he heard. Someone was opening the french window of Wharton's den.

It was past one o'clock in the morning! It seemed impossible that anyone could be up, opening the window from the inside.

Bunter's fat heart jumped.

If the window was not being opened from the inside, it was being opened from the outside!

That meant that Billy Bunter was not the only surreptitious intruder seeking an entrance into Wharton Lodge in the small hours.

He hardly breathed for a moment or two!

If it was a burglar—

He blinked with terrified eyes through his big spectacles, across the dark balcony, not daring to move.

Dark as it was, he made out a dark figure close to the french window! It was the figure of a man in an overcoat, muffled up against the wind.

One wing of the french window had been pushed open. Evidently the man had picked the lock from the outside, and opened it.

Now he was standing with his head bent, listening cautiously before he entered. Billy Bunter gave him one scared blink, and turned to grope his way down again. The snowy ivy rustled as he moved; and the figure at the french window spun round instantly towards him at the sound.

Bunter had a glimpse of gleaming, steely eyes—of a hard mouth and a hawkish nose; and, even in the gloom, he knew that it was the man who had attacked Colonel Wharton in the park that morning.

He had only time for that one glimpse. The man had heard him, and instantly taken the alarm.

He came across the balcony towards Bunter at a bound.

There was no time for the fat Owl to retreat. That rapid bound brought Corkran fairly upon him.

Scarcely knowing what he did in his terror, the Owl of the Remove lashed out with both fists, his only idea—so far as he had any idea in his frightened, fat mind at all—being to keep the rascal off.

There was a sudden, startled gasp, as his lashing fists hit the man in the shabby clothes. The figure disappeared.

Bunter blinked in wonder.

Bump, bump, bump!

As he heard that bumping sound from the darkness he understood. The sudden punch in the darkness had caused the man from India to slip on the edge of the balcony steps, and he had gone down the stone steps headlong.

Bump, bump, bump!

There was a crash in the snow at the foot of the stone stair, and a sound of gasping and groaning. Apparently the man was damaged by his fall.

"Oh orrikey!" panted Bunter.

Like a hunted hare, the fat junior darted across the balcony, and into the open french window. In a twinkling he had shut the window and turned the key in the lock. The man from India had evidently turned that key back from the outside with some burglarious implement, and so unlocked the window. Now it was locked again.

Bunter stood panting within. But only for a moment or two! Whether the man from India was too damaged to renew his attempt, whether he had taken the alarm and fled as was very probable, Bunter did not know—and did not even think! Bunter's fat thoughts, as usual, were concentrated wholly on his fat self.

Having recovered his breath, he scudded across the room, got out of it, and groped up to his attic!

Bunter was safe. Bunter was all right! That was all that mattered! When Bunter was all right, everything was all right!

THE NINTH CHAPTER.

Something Like Strategy!

HURREE JAMSET RAM SINGH came out of his room, in coat and muffler clad as if for an Arctic expedition.

There had been no snow since dawn, but the day was bitterly cold—indeed,

the Nabob of Bhanipur declared that the coldfulness was terrific. Harry Wharton & Co. were in the passage, waiting for him—also warmly clad, though not to the same extent as the Indian junior. They grinned cheerfully as he joined them.

"Got 'em all on?" asked Bob Cherry.

"The coldfulness is—"

"Terrific and preposterous!" agreed Bob, with a chuckle. "Well, if you've stacked on all your coats and mufflers and things, we may as well get going. The jolly old colonel is ready, I believe. Jolly decent of him to run us across to see the 'Spurs play.'"

And the Famous Five went down the staircase in great spirits.

The cold weather did not worry four of them, at all events; and the fifth had wrapped himself up remarkably well.

There was a League match that afternoon, ten miles away, and Colonel Wharton was taking the schoolboys over in the car to see it, so it was going to be an agreeable afternoon.

Five cheery juniors packed themselves in the car and glided away, little dreaming that their cheery talk before they started, had been overheard by a fat youth in spectacles, lurking at the half-open door of the little attic over Wharton's rooms.

Five minutes after they had gone Billy Bunter crept out, blinked down the attic stair, and descended on tip-toe.

Reaching the passage on which the juniors' rooms opened, Bunter, like Moses of old, looked this way and that way; and, like Moses again, saw no man!

And he rolled across into Wharton's den. In that apartment, on several occasions, the hidden guest at Wharton Lodge had been able to "snoop" such articles as chocolates, or toffee, or candied fruits. And as Bunter had had no breakfast or lunch that day, so far, he was desperately anxious to get hold of something to eat.

His experience the previous night had rather fed Bunter up with his peculiar visit to Wharton Lodge! He had almost made up his fat mind to quit.

But, on reflection he decided to stick it out.

His parents were staying with relatives, who not only did not want Billy in addition, but had made that fact abundantly clear. His sister Bessie was staying with an aunt, who had received her for the holiday on the express condition that she came without her brothers. His brother Sammy was staying with Uncle George—and Bunter had "rowed" with Uncle George, which made it exceedingly difficult and unpleasant to return to that avuncular abode. On the whole, Billy Bunter decided that he would try it on a little longer at Wharton Lodge.

His present idea was to snaffle any eatables that might be in Wharton's den, and then borrow a few more books, for disposal at the second-hand shop in Wimford!

Later on, when he received several postal orders that he had been expecting for quite a considerable time, he would redeem those books! Bunter hoped that he was honest! In the meantime, however there seemed to be no other resource.

"Beast!" murmured Bunter, as he blinked round the "den."

There was nothing of an edible nature to be seen! So much pilfering had perhaps caused unusual care to be taken.

Not even a packet of toffee rewarded

Bunter's quest. There was not so much as an apple or an orange.

Bunter could not venture downstairs in quest of supplies in the daytime. Colonel Wharton and the juniors had gone out, but the servants were about! Indeed, he was not safe where he was, for Wharton's fire was kept in during his absence, and somebody had to come up to see to it.

Billy Bunter was about to make a selection of books from the bookshelf, when he heard footsteps—and, guessing at once that it was Thomas coming to see to the fire, he darted across to the communicating door of Wharton's bedroom, and promptly closed that door after him.

It was not the first time, my many a one, that Bunter had had such narrow escapes. Indeed, ever since he had taken up his extraordinary residence at the Lodge, his life had been a succession of hairsbreadth escapes!

Quietly he locked the communicating door. On the other side, he could hear Thomas poking at the log fire. The bed-room had a door on the passage also, and Bunter stepped to that and locked it, too. An idea was working in Billy Bunter's fat brain!

Ideas did not, as a rule, evolve very easily in the depths of that podgy intellect! But, if anything could make Bunter think, and think hard, it was the need of "grub."

Spurred on by that dire need, Bunter was capable of really brilliant strategy. There was going to be a little ventriloquism.

Now that both doors of Wharton's bed-room were locked, the fat Owl of Greyfriars was safe from observation. That was an essential preliminary, before he got to work with his ventriloquism.

He gave his fat little cough and approached the communicating door again. He could hear someone putting logs on the fire in the den.

"Thomas!" It was Harry Wharton's voice, tone for tone, that proceeded from the fat ventriloquist of Greyfriars.

"Is that you, Thomas?"

"Yessir! Is that Master Harry?" exclaimed Thomas, turning from the fire in astonishment.

He had seen Master Harry start in the car with his uncle and his friends, so it was naturally astonishing to hear his voice proceeding from his bed-room.

"Yes. Who did you think it was, you young ass?"

"I thought you'd gone out, sir!" said the amazed Thomas.

"I came back, Thomas."

"Yessir, I suppose you did," said Thomas. "Ain't you going, sir?"

"No—my uncle thinks I'm catching a cold, and I'd better stay in," said the voice through the door.

"Oh, sir! I'm sorry, sir!" said Thomas.

"I shall have tea in my room, Thomas—tell Wells."

"Yessir," said Thomas, staring blankly at the bed-room door.

It was no business of his, of course; but it really was odd that Master Harry should speak to him through a closed door, instead of opening it.

"Tell Wells at once, Thomas."

"Oh, yessir! Tea at the usual time, sir?"

"No. I'm going to feed my cold, Thomas—you have to feed a cold and starve a fever, you know. I'll have tea at once."

"Oh!" gasped Thomas.

As it was only about an hour since lunch, this was very surprising indeed.

"I want a really good tea," went on

the voice. "Tell Wells! Plenty of everything—ham and eggs and scones, and cake and jam and scones."

"Oh, yes, sir!" gasped Thomas.

"Tell Wells to send it up to my den at once! I'll stay here till it's ready—I'm putting on some warmer things."

"Yessir."

Thomas, in a very surprised state, departed. Billy Bunter grinned; but it was a rather uneasy grin. Thomas, evidently, was completely taken in; but the thing was risky. Bunter realised that. Still, there are times when a fellow has to take risks; and this was one of them. Even discovery, and the order of the boot, was better than going without grub!

Bunter waited. In a few minutes there were footsteps in the den. A tap came at the communicating door.

"Are you there, Master Harry?"

It was Wells' fruity voice.

"Eh! Yes!"

"I was not aware that you had returned, sir—"

"Well, you're aware now!" snapped Bunter, still in the voice of Colonel Wharton's nephew. "Hasn't Thomas told you—"

"Oh, yes, sir, but it is so very unusual, sir, I thought I would ask you and make sure, sir—"

"Don't be an ass, Wells!"

"Wha-a-at, Master Harry?" ejaculated Wells.

"I'm catching a cold! My uncle has advised me to eat! I—I haven't much of an appetite, but I shall do exactly as he says!"

"Oh, yes, sir, certainly!"

"Mind you send up a good tea, and plenty of it! A dozen sausages—"

"A—a—a dozen, sir?" gasped Wells.

"Yes—and a dozen poached eggs—"

"A—a—a dozen poached eggs—"

"And plenty of buttered toast, and a pot of jam, and a cake—mind, a big cake—and some scones—say a dozen—and a couple of pounds of ham—"

"Dear me!"

"And buck up, Wells! You're wasting time!"

"Oh! Yes, Master Harry!" gasped Wells dazedly.

"Call me when it's ready!"

"Certainly, Master Harry!"

Wells almost tottered away. If Master Harry was catching a cold, and was going to feed it, it was clear that he was going to feed it on a very generous scale! Still, it was not for Wells to argue! He went down to give the necessary directions in the kitchen—where those directions caused much surprise and great activity.

Bunter waited anxiously.

Before long, there was a sound of footsteps, and of trays being laid on a table! Thomas, as a rule, brought up anything that was required in the den. But unusual quantities were now required, and Wells was lending his own assistance. There was a tap at the communicating door at last.

"Master Harry!" Wells called through the door. "Your tea is ready, sir!"

"Thank you, Wells! You can go down!"

"Very good, sir!"

"Thomas can go down, too! I—I don't want to risk giving anybody my—my cold! Both of you go."

"Very good, sir! Come, Thomas!" said Wells.

Billy Bunter waited, and listened, anxiously, till he heard the door of the den close. Then he opened the communicating door, and blinked in. An ample—not to say gargantuan—tea was laid, and Wells and Thomas were gone!

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Bunter cut across to the door by which they had left, and turned the key in the lock! He whipped across to the french windows, locked them, and drew the curtains across, to guard against the bare possibility of somebody coming up the steps to the balcony. He was safe on all sides now!

Then he stepped to the well-spread table.

For one ecstatic moment he gazed at it, at the magnificent supply of good things that he owed to his weird gift of ventriloquism!

Then he sat down and started.

His fat face beamed, as his active jaws worked. This was happiness! This was life! This was something like! Glad now was the Owl of the Remove, from the bottom of his fat heart, that he had not shaken the dust of Wharton Lodge from his feet, as he had thought of doing! Wharton Lodge was all right. It was as right as rain!

Gobble, gobble, gobble!

Billy Bunter's fat face grew red and shiny! His breath came short and spasmodic! But he kept on manfully!

Gobble, gobble, gobble!

Harry Wharton & Co. were enjoying their afternoon. But Billy Bunter was more than enjoying his! Billy Bunter was in the seventh heaven!

THE TENTH CHAPTER.

A Fat Young Gent of the Name of Bunter!

COLONEL WHARTON drove up to the garage, handed the car over to Brown, and walked to the house.

He had landed the juniors at their destination in good time for the League match, and left them to enjoy themselves watching the exploits of the famous 'Spurs. Wells came to take his hat and coat, and the old, military gentleman rubbed his hands before the fire in the hall.

"My nephew and his friends will be back rather late for tea, Wells," he said. "You had better have tea laid for them in Master Harry's own quarters."

Wells jumped.

It was quite unlike Wells to jump. He was the most sedate of butlers. But he could not help it! He jumped, and almost dropped the colonel's hat!

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

Colonel Wharton glanced round at him. He was astonished by the butler's astonishment.

"I said that my nephew——"

"Master Harry, sir?" gasped Wells.

"What do you mean, Wells?" snapped the old colonel. "I have no other nephew! Of course I mean Master Harry!"

"But—but I don't understand, sir!" stammered Wells. "Master Harry is back already——"

"What?"

"He came back soon after you started in the car, sir——"

"Have you been drinking, Wells?"

"Sir!"

"If you have not been drinking, what do you mean?" snorted Colonel Wharton. "My nephew is ten miles away, with his friends, watching a football match. What do you mean by saying that he came back?"

Wells almost staggered.

"Sir! Colonel Wharton! Master Harry with his friends!" he stammered.

"Certainly he is!"

"Tut-tut-ten miles away!" gurgled Wells. "You—you—you left him there, sir?"

"Of course I did! What do you mean?"

"But—but—but he came back, sir—he's in his room now!" gasped Wells: "I—I assure you, sir, that he came b-b-back, and—and ordered tea in his room, and—and is having his tea there now, sir!"

Colonel Wharton gazed severely at his butler.

"Wells, I am surprised at you! I am astonished and shocked! This is the first time you have shown signs of intoxication——"

"Thomas!" howled Wells.

"Yes, Mr. Wells, sir!" Thomas appeared from the service stairs.

"Is Master Harry in his room, or is he not?"

"Yes, sir!" answered Thomas. "Having his tea, sir!"

Colonel Wharton transferred his gaze to Thomas.

"Is the boy mad?" he snorted. "Are you mad, Wells? I tell you that my nephew is at this very moment watching a football match with his friends. He is ten miles from this house!"

"Then who," gasped Wells, "is in his room, sir?"

"Is anyone in his room?"

"Master Harry, sir—at least, it was Master Harry's voice spoke through the bed-room door, sir—I did not see him!" gasped Wells. "Did you see him, Thomas?"

"No, Mr. Wells; he spoke to me through the door, sir——"

"Do you mean to say," roared the colonel, "that someone is in my nephew's room, and that you supposed it to be my nephew?"

"Yes, sir, certainly sir, it was certainly Master Harry's voice, and he said he was catching a cold, and you had sent him back——"

"Great gad!"

Colonel Wharton strode to the stairs, with a brow of thunder. Wells and Thomas, in a dazed condition of amazement, followed him up. The colonel reached the door of his nephew's den, and turned the handle. The door did not open. A heavy fist banged on it.

"Who is there?" roared Colonel Wharton. "Who is in this room? I can hear someone! Who is it?"

"Oh lor!" came a startled ejaculation from within. The formidable roar of the angry colonel startled Billy Bunter so much that he quite forgot his ventriloquism.

"That is not my nephew's voice!" snorted the colonel. "It seems familiar, but it is nothing like Master Harry's voice. How you could possibly have been deceived, Wells, I cannot imagine. Open this door! Do you hear? Whoever you are, open this door at once!"

Billy Bunter jumped up from the table. He blinked in alarm at the door, deeply thankful that he had taken the precaution of locking it.

"Who is there?" roared the colonel. "It is not my nephew. I have just left my nephew ten miles away! Who is it?"

"Oh crikey!" breathed Bunter.

He shook a fat fist at the door.

Bunter had not foreseen this. Colonel Wharton having driven off in the car with the juniors, Bunter had taken it for granted that he was safe off the scene, as well as Harry Wharton & Co. Really, he might have foreseen that the colonel would probably drive home after taking the schoolboys to their destination. But Bunter never foresaw anything.

Ventriloquism was of no use now. Colonel Wharton was not likely to believe that his nephew was there when he knew that he was elsewhere.

Bang! came at the door.

"Who are you? What are you doing there? Who is it?" shouted the colonel. "Wells, go through the bed-room! There is another door——"

"The bed-room door is locked, sir!" said Wells, a moment later.

"Good gad! The rascal has locked himself in, then! But who can he be? Some pilfering thief——"

"Oh crikey!"

"He deluded me, sir, into supposing that he was Master Harry, and he ordered tea—a very substantial tea——"

"Extraordinary! Some unscrupulous rascal! But how did he gain admittance to the house?"

"No doubt by Master Harry's door on the balcony, sir."

"Yes; no doubt—no doubt! Then it must be someone who knows the place! But I will soon discover! Will you open this door, you rascal, whoever you are?"

Bang! Thump!

The door did not open. Bunter was not very bright, but he was far too bright to open that door!

Colonel Wharton stepped back, fuming. This was his experience of the night over again, and he suspected that it was the same rascal concerned.

Thomas stooped and applied an eye to the keyhole.

"I see him!" gasped Thomas.

"You see him?" exclaimed the colonel.

"Yes, sir; a fat cove——"

"A what?"

"A fat feller, sir, in specs. I've seen him before, sir," said Thomas, in great excitement. "A fat young gent of the name of Bunter, sir!"

"WHAT!" roared Colonel Wharton.

"Oh jiminy!" gasped Bunter. "I—I say, sir, I'm not here! It—it isn't me, sir! It—it's quite another party, sir!"

"Good gad! I know his voice now! That impertinent and disrespectful young rascal, Bunter! Thomas, fetch my riding-whip!"

"Oh crikey!"

"Wells, remain here to see that he does not escape through the house! I will go round to the door on the balcony! Be quick with that riding-whip, Thomas!"

The colonel's heavy tread rang down the staircase.

Billy Bunter stood transfixed with terror.

Once more he was cornered.

The door on the balcony was locked, certainly; but it was not likely to stop the angry old military gentleman long. It was fairly certain that he would knock in a pane of the french window with the butt of the riding-whip and open the door. And then——

Bunter had not yet finished with that substantial tea. But he was not thinking of finishing it now. He was not thinking of it at all. He was thinking only of his fat skin!

For a moment he stood transfixed. Then he bounded to the french window, dragged aside the curtain, unlocked it, and tore it open.

His first thought was to bolt before the colonel got round the house, but he stopped. Bunter's fat brain was working at double pressure now.

Leaving the door wide open, to give an impression that he had bolted that way, he tiptoed across to the communicating door of the bed-room, passed through, and silently shut it after him.

Then he crept under Harry Wharton's bed.

When the colonel arrived and found the french window open, surely he would suppose that the fat Owl had



Billy Bunter's fat form established sudden contact with Wells' equator, and the butler went backwards as if he had been shot. "Why—what— Oh gad!" roared Colonel Wharton, as Wells hurtled down the balcony steps and crashed into him, sending him spinning.

bolted! If he did, Bunter was safe. If he didn't— But Bunter preferred not to think of that. It was really too awful to contemplate!

THE ELEVENTH CHAPTER.

Hunted Bunter!

TRAMP, tramp! came heavy footsteps up the balcony steps.

Colonel Wharton had lost no time.

He had waited only for Thomas to get him his riding-whip. With that article in his hand, he strode round the house, and ascended the balcony steps to his nephew's window.

He was prepared to knock in a pane if he found the french window locked. But he found it standing wide open.

He strode in, with a brow of thunder, swishing the riding-whip. He glared round.

"Good gad! Gone!" roared the colonel.

"I heard him unlock the window, sir!" came Wells' voice, from outside the passage door. "I was afraid he would be gone, sir."

"The young rascal! He knew what to expect!" fumed the colonel. "By gad, I would have given him the thrashing of his life! I would have taken the skin off his back, by Jove! Thomas!"

"Yessir!"

"Go at once and look for that young rascal! If you find him in my grounds, kick him—kick him out! Do you hear, Thomas? Kick him as hard as you can!"

"Certainly, sir!"

Thomas cut away to hunt for the fat young gent of the name of Bunter, gleefully ready to carry out the colonel's

instructions if he found him in the grounds.

The colonel strode across the room and unlocked the door where Wells stood. Wells glanced at the tea-table. Bunter had not had time to finish, but he had made remarkable progress. Where he had packed it all was a mystery. Two-thirds of that ample supply of provender had vanished.

"It is extraordinary, Wells, that you should have been deceived by that young scoundrel!" snorted the colonel.

"The voice was so like Master Harry's, sir—"

"Nonsense!"

"H'm! I assure you, sir—"

"That balcony door had better be kept locked! You may tell my nephew so. The young scoundrel may venture to repeat his impudent trick. By Jove, I have no doubt that it was he in the dining-room last night! Let me catch him! Let me catch him playing tricks here, by Jove! Huh!"

The colonel strode away, fuming. He was deeply disappointed that the riding-whip had not established contact with the fat young gent of the name of Bunter. But he still hoped that Thomas had run him down in the grounds and carried out his instructions.

Thomas did his best. But as the fat young gent was still within the house, Thomas really hadn't even a sporting chance of finding him outside. After a long hunt, Thomas could only report failure.

Meanwhile, Billy Bunter remained palpitating under the bed.

Luck had befriended him again. The open french window had given the desired impression, and it was taken for granted that he had bolted. That was

all right, so far as it went. But the fat Owl was very anxious to be safe back in his attic.

There was no chance of that at present, however. He dared not venture out till he was sure that the coast was clear.

When at last he put his head out from under the bed, like a fat tortoise from its shell, it was to hear sounds in the adjoining room. No doubt Thomas was there, clearing away the wreck of Bunter's feast, and making preparations for the return of Master Harry and his friends. Bunter suppressed a groan and popped back.

He palpitated, and listened.

When all at last was silent, the fat junior crawled out from under the bed. He crawled out in fear and trembling. The bare thought of the old colonel and his riding-whip made Bunter shudder. He had kept on hoping that, sooner or later, the old gentleman would get over his "tantrums," but it was clear that the tantrums were getting worse instead of better. Discovery at an earlier date meant the order of the boot; now it meant a thrashing before the boot was applied. It was borne in on Billy Bunter's fat mind at long last that his extraordinary sojourn at Wharton Lodge had better come to an end, and that it could not come to an end too quickly.

The game was, in fact, up!

With the balcony door kept locked, as the colonel had instructed Wells, there would be no more surreptitious comings and goings. With all the food carefully locked up at night, there could be no more secret grub raids in

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(Continued from page 13.)

the small hours. The game, evidently, was up!

Bunter could get out—as soon as the coast was clear—but he would not be able to get in again! But the angry roar of the colonel, and the sound of the riding-whip swishing, made Bunter feel more anxious to get out than to get in!

He had thought it out while he lay palpitating under the bed.

Once safe back in his attic, he would wait for the fall of the winter dusk. His hat and coat were in the attic, and he could scarcely go without them. And it was impossible to go empty-handed. The difficulty of a railway fare stood like a lion in the path. Borrowing a few more of Wharton's books would see him through.

Then he would shake the dust of Wharton Lodge from his feet, with the scorn that such an inhospitable place deserved.

Later, when he was in funds—Bunter always hoped and expected to be in funds at some undefined future date—he would redeem all those books, and send them back to their owner with a curt note expressive of the scorn and contempt he felt.

That, he hoped, would make that beast Wharton jolly well ashamed of himself.

His plans were now settled, cut and dried. But he was not back in his attic yet. He crept to the bed-room door on the passage, silently unlocked it, and opened it half an inch to listen. A fruity voice came to his ears.

"I am sorry, Thomas, that I distrusted you. I have little doubt—I may say that I have no doubt—that that very unpleasant and disagreeable young person Bunter was at the bottom of it all the time."

"Thank you, Mr. Wells!"

Bunter's eyes glittered behind his spectacles. Wells and Thomas were in the passage, talking. Of course, the beasts had to talk there—just when Bunter wanted to dodge across that passage.

"That unpleasant boy," resumed Wells, little dreaming that his remarks fell on the fat ears of the unpleasant boy himself, "has stayed with Master Harry on previous occasions, Thomas, and, of course, knew his way about the house. That accounts for it."

"It do, Mr. Wells," assented Thomas. "Obviously," said Wells, "knowing about Master Harry's balcony door, and knowing the interior of the mansion, Thomas, that unscrupulous boy Bunter has continually let himself into the 'ouse."

"It looks like it, sir."

"Why he has pilfered such things as clothes and rugs and candles I cannot imagine, unless he is a kleptomaniac, Thomas."

"Wot's a kleptomaniac, Mr. Wells?"

"A kleptomaniac, Thomas," said Wells, "is a person who steals from

some natural kink in the character, and cannot help it."

"Good lor', Mr. Wells!"

"I am very sorry," said Wells, "that the master did not catch him, and thrash him with the riding-whip."

"Same 'ere, sir!"

"I have seldom seen the master so angry. I could almost pity the young rascal if the master did catch him," said Wells. "It is a most extraordinary affair altogether, Thomas. But I cannot doubt that that unpleasant boy of the name of Bunter has been at the bottom of the pilferings. However, we shall, I think, see no more of him."

"If Master Harry's door is kept locked, sir—"

"Exactly!"

"And if I should see him about, sir, I s'pose it 'olds good what the master said about kicking him, sir?"

"Certainly!" said Wells. "Most decidedly! If you see him, Thomas, carry out the master's instructions to the very letter, and kick him as hard as you can. I shall do the same. I shall also mention to Robert that the boy is to be kicked, if seen. I hope, Thomas, that it may do him good. And, indeed, I should be so glad to kick him, Thomas, that I am sorry he is gone."

Behind a door a fat fist was shaken, and Billy Bunter's eyes glared with wrath through his spectacles. This was the way these dashed menials talked of Bunter. Actually thinking of kicking him if they saw him! The cheek of it. And the worst of it was that they meant it. It was very clear that they meant it. More than ever the fat Owl of Greyfriars realised that it behoved him to keep carefully out of sight till he could make his escape from that inhospitable abode.

There was one consolation, however. Evidently it was not suspected that he was still in the house, or had been staying secretly in the house. That suspicion had occurred to nobody as yet.

It was not, in fact, a thing that anyone was likely to suspect. Only Billy Bunter was capable of such weird proceedings, which were quite outside the experience of ordinary mortals.

Voices and footsteps receded at last. There was silence, and Bunter ventured to blink out.

The passage was deserted.

In deep relief the Owl of the Remove tiptoed out, and crossed to the little steep stair that led up to the attic.

He fairly flew up that stair when he reached it.

At the top was a narrow landing on which the attic door opened. As the attic had long been disused and kept locked up that spot was seldom or never visited save by an occasional maid with a broom.

It was Bunter's custom when he left his lair to lock the door after him, and put the key in his pocket.

Breathing hard and deep on the little landing, Bunter felt in his pocket for the attic key. So long as it was daylight he was visible there if anyone passed along the passage below, and happened to glance up. He was in a hurry to get out of sight.

But his fat hand came out of his pocket with nothing in it! The key was not there!

Hastily the fat junior ran his hands through his other pockets.

The key was not there, either.

"Oh, lor'!" breathed Bunter.

The attic door was locked! And he had lost the key!

THE TWELFTH CHAPTER.

No Exit!

BILLY BUNTER groaned. He could not help it. At the risk of being overheard he groaned aloud.

It was a crushing blow.

Once more in feverish haste he ran his fat hands through his pockets. He knew that he had put the key in one of them.

But it was in vain that he searched for it. It was not there. Evidently he had dropped it somewhere—either in Wharton's den, where he had feasted, or in Wharton's bed-room, where he had hidden from the angry colonel. Most likely it had dropped from his pocket when he dodged under the bed—that was most probable.

He could not get into his hiding-place without it. He could not remain where he was. He could not even take his chance of dodging out while it was still daylight, for his hat and coat were in the locked attic. To start on his travels on a bitter January day, hatless and without a coat, was hardly to be thought of. He had to go back and hunt for that key.

He groaned.

But groaning did not improve matters. He listened intently, and heard no sound from the passage, and at last tiptoed down again. The passage was still deserted, and he cut across into Wharton's bed-room once more.

He closed the door and stood panting.

The winter dusk was beginning to fall. There was plenty of light still out of doors, but indoors it was growing very dusky.

Bunter stooped and peered under the bed in the hope of spotting the lost key. Under the bed was very dark indeed, and a keen eye might have failed to spot a small key lying there. Bunter's eyes were far from keen. Indeed, even with the aid of his big spectacles, his vision was limited. He blinked in vain.

He had to grope for it. And perhaps all the time he had dropped it somewhere else. And any minute—

Once more Billy Bunter's fat brain worked at double pressure.

He might be a long time finding that key. He might not find it at all. And those beasts would be back from the football match before long. And a servant might come up any minute.

After all, if he was going, it was certain that he could not go without a coat and a hat. But there was no need to go in his own coat and hat. Such things were available nearer at hand. In the circumstances, Bunter felt that he would be justified in borrowing them. He did not, as a matter of fact, worry a whole lot about the justification. At a pinch, indeed, he could have done without it.

As soon as the idea came into his fat mind he abandoned on the spot the thought of hunting for the lost attic key, and turned to Harry Wharton's wardrobe.

Wharton, of course, had a coat on that afternoon. Fortunately he had several coats. Bunter had only to make his choice. In the big wardrobe there were coats hanging up, and several caps.

He selected a handsome, natty, grey coat. It was a new coat, and Wharton had worn it only once or twice over Christmas. It was, in fact, going to be his best coat, for the new term at Greyfriars. Being the best coat in the collection, it was naturally selected by Billy Bunter, Bunter did not believe

in helping himself to the second best in anything.

He found a grey tweed cap to match. He had seen Wharton in that grey coat and cap, in which the captain of the Remove looked very well-dressed and good-looking. Bunter had no doubt that he did the clothes more credit. Having put them on, he surveyed the result in the glass of the wardrobe door, and gave a smirk of satisfaction. This was all right! No need to get his own rather shabby and rumpled coat from the attic now! So long as he could keep out of sight till dark it was all right! All he had to do now was to make a further selection from Wharton's bookshelf, for the purpose of raising the wind at the

second-hand shop in Wimford! Bunter was feeling quite relieved.

He opened the communicating door into Wharton's den and went in. The glowing log-fire on the hearth dispelled the gathering winter gloom there.

"Boasts!" murmured Bunter, as he saw that the table was laid for tea for five.

Apparently the chums of the Remove were going to have tea in Harry Wharton's den, as they sometimes did. The foodstuffs were not yet on the table, however, as Bunter ascertained with a very rapid glance. Had they been there, they would not have remained to greet the Famous Five. Billy Bunter had taken on board a

generous cargo that afternoon. But he always had room for a little more.

But the fact that the tea-table was laid in the den warned him that he had no time to waste. The beasts, evidently, would come up there when they came back from the football match. Thomas might come up any minute with something for tea.

Bunter hurriedly scanned the bookshelf. Even Bunter felt a slight inward doubt as to whether he was quite, quite justified in taking these measures to raise the wind! Still, as he was going to set the matter right later, when he received some postal orders that he had long been expecting, surely only a very captious critic could find fault
(Continued on next page.)



If you're in doubt over any Soccer query, "Linesman" will be only too pleased to help you out. Write to him, c/o The MAGNET, The Fleetway House, Farringdon Street, London, E.C.4.

THE BEST SIDE OF THE SEASON!

KING SOLOMON was supposed to be very wise. He gave such finely balanced judgments that everybody was satisfied, apparently. I sometimes wonder if that old-time king would have gained the same sort of reputation if he had been called upon to give judgment on football topics. I can tell you this: that I oft-times sigh for the wisdom of Solomon to enable me to settle football arguments to the satisfaction of everybody.

Take a question which is raised by a MAGNET reader this week. While the members of his team were dressing after a recent match an argument arose. It centred round the question of whether the football team which won the F.A. Cup or the team which won the First Division championship could lay claim to being the best side of the season.

Some thought that the Cup winners took the primary honours of the season, while others held that the First Division champions earned the title of the best side. Finally it was agreed to send the question along to me for settlement. Thanks very much.

I am prepared to give my judgment, however, and hope that my argumentative friends will agree.

My view, definitely, is that the team which wins the First Division championship has the right to the title of the best side of that season.

The team thus successful must have staying power over a long period: they must pick up points consistently on all the varying types of pitches which are met with during the course of the season. The reserves of the side must be good, too. Indeed, I would say that the side which wins the championship plays more Cup-ties, really, than the team which wins the Cup.

Every match in which the top team of a League is concerned has something of the Cup-tie spirit about it. Every set of opponents put forth special efforts to bring the top-notchers down a peg. The team which pulls through must go on picking up points, roughly, at the average

rate of three points from each couple of games. It often requires sixty points to win the championship.

Having given the judgment that the best team of the season is the one which wins the First Division championship, I must now add that there is much merit in Cup-winning. Different clubs have to be met—clubs that is, from different sections of the League, and consequently with different styles. The Cup winners must be able to play their own game against those various types of opponents.

There is this to be said about Cup-winning, however. The element of luck enters into it to greater extent than in a League tournament. There is the luck of the draw, for instance. Teams have been known to win the Cup without playing a match on their opponents' ground. Everton only played one Cup-tie away from home prior to the semi-final last season.

A team which runs into form in the second half of the season can win the Cup, too, concentrating on that competition, and keeping their very best for the knock-out games. So, on the whole, don't you agree that the team which wins the First Division championship can be labelled the best of the season?

THE INDIVIDUAL SIDE OF FOOTBALL!

ASCHOOLMASTER friend who is very anxious that the boys under his care should develop as all-round footballers asks me if I can give him a hint on how to frame what he calls an individual championship. He wants to award a prize to the best all-round footballer.

By way of reply I cannot do better than refer this schoolmaster to a system in vogue in France which has for its object the cultivation of players of all-round merit. I once had the pleasure of being present at a French boys' Soccer competition. Seventy-eight lads took part in it. Each of the boys occupied the field for a few minutes, and points were awarded for dribbling, passing, shooting, heading, kicking with a dead ball, and volleying. The boy who got the biggest

total of points from his prowess at these various phases of the game was awarded the championship prize.

While I must say that I am not very keen on stressing the individual side of football, remembering that it is essentially a team game, I think it is wise to spur young footballers on in the all-round sense, and a little healthy competition on these lines can do no harm. It certainly encourages the young players to practise.

JUST BAD LUCK!

NOW for another argument to be settled by me. A Ryde reader was playing in a boys' match on the ground of a man's club. The original goal-posts had been left in place, and the original crossbar as well. But for this particular match a new crossbar had been placed about a foot below the other one to constitute the "goal" for that particular game.

During the match a shot was sent in which struck the top crossbar. The ball came back into play, and the inside-left, gaining possession, took another shot, and this time sent the ball below the lower crossbar. The referee awarded a goal and my friend was surprised. I don't blame him. I should have been surprised, too.

It seems to me that when the ball struck the top bar the referee should have given a goal-kick.

This, of course, is one of those cases which are not provided for in the rules, but I give it as my view that common sense dictated the award of a goal-kick immediately the ball struck the top bar. For the purposes of that game the height of the crossbar was not eight feet, but seven, and a shot which would have gone over the lower bar should have been treated as if it had gone over. Doubtless the referee concerned would be able to give what, from his point of view, were good reasons for the other decision.

While dealing with this question another can be answered in which a referee was concerned. He happened to be standing near the goal during a scrimmage following a corner-kick. A shot was sent in. The ball struck the referee, and then went into the net. Should it have been a goal?

The answer is yes, even though the ball might not have gone into the net if it had not struck the referee.

There was a similar instance in a Stoke v. Everton match a few weeks back. A shot which was going into the net struck the referee, and was deflected outside the post. But the man with the whistle could not award a goal. It was just bad luck.

"LINESMAN."

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with his proceedings! And Bunter had never been a captious critic of his own actions!

He selected the volumes with care. He had received only seven-and-six for the last lot, and he hoped to do better this time. People gave hardly anything for second-hand books, even when they were nearly new! Volume after volume was selected, and Bunter was making a little pile of them on the shelf when there was a footstep in the passage.

Bunter's fat ears were on the strain. He detected that footstep before it was near the door. He stepped quickly away from the bookshelf, and behind a screen that stood across a corner. He had spotted that convenient hiding-place, and kept it in mind.

The door opened, and Thomas entered with a basket of logs. He switched on the light when he came in, and crossed to the fireplace.

Behind the screen Bunter made no sound.

Thomas stirred the fire, placed logs on it, and disposed the other logs in their place. He was quite leisurely in his movements, being, of course, totally unaware that a fat Owl behind the screen was feverishly impatient for him to be gone.

When he went at last, he left the door open, and the light on. Apparently he was coming back again.

"Beast!" hissed Bunter, under his breath.

Thomas came back with a kettle, which he placed in the fender. When Harry Wharton & Co. "tea-ed" in the den they liked to make the tea and look after themselves generally, as in the study at Greyfriars. So the kettle was needed.

Again Thomas departed, but again he left the light on and the door open. It was some time before he reappeared, and this time he brought a tray, which he laid on the table. Then he proceeded to set out the contents of the tray.

There was a rent in the screen—in fact, there were several small rents. Through one of them Billy Bunter watched Thomas with a malevolent eye.

He was getting tea ready for Master Harry and his friends, who were expected back very soon now, Brown having gone to fetch them in the car. Outside, the January dusk was thickening to darkness. If that unutterable boast Thomas would only have cleared, Billy Bunter had only to grab his pile of books and let himself out by the french window. Thomas, however, did not seem to be clearing!

Having finished, at last, with the tea-table, Thomas went across to the french window. He felt the window to ascertain that it was locked, and then drew the curtains across, with a swish of rings. Then, to Billy Bunter's intense exasperation, he sat down in an armchair before the fire! That, of course, Thomas had no right to do, and certainly would not have done had Mr. Wells' eye been upon him. But the only eye upon him was the hidden eye of William George Bunter, so Thomas allowed himself the luxury of taking it easy for a while.

Could looks have slain, Thomas might have reached a sudden termination of his career in that comfortable armchair. For the look that Billy Bunter gave him, through the rent in the screen, was absolutely homicidal.

But that look, deadly as it was, produced no effect whatever on Thomas! Perhaps Thomas was tired. He had many little duties to perform, and, as he sometimes confided to the cook, he was up and down stairs all day. Safe from the butler's severe eye, and unlikely to be disturbed till Master Harry came back to tea, Thomas stretched himself luxuriously in Master Harry's armchair, toasted his toes, and grinned with satisfaction.

Bunter waited! Minute after minute passed—and minutes were precious now! It really seemed as if the surreptitious guest at Wharton Lodge was going to have more difficulty in getting out than in getting in! Any minute now those beasts might come crowding in—

In that desperate extremity the Owl of the Remove bethought himself once more of his ventriloquism. It was that or nothing. Suddenly, and apparently

from the passage, came a barking voice, marvellously like that of the old colonel in a cross mood.

"Thomas! Where is that boy, Thomas?"

"Oh, my eye!" gasped Thomas in alarm. He bounded up from Master Harry's armchair as if the seat of that armchair had become suddenly red-hot!

"Ere, sir! Coming, sir!"

Thomas fairly scudded to the door. "Ere, sir! You called me, sir!" He stared into the passage. Colonel Wharton was not to be seen there. Thomas hurried out of the room in the direction of the stairs.

Billy Bunter gasped with relief. He had got rid of the brute at last! He whipped out from behind the screen! As he did so he heard the sound of many footsteps, and a cheery voice that roared:

"Hallo, hallo, hallo! Tea ready, what? We're all as hungry as jolly old hunters!"

"Yes, Master Cherry, sir, tea's roady, sir—"

"Oh lor'!" groaned Billy Bunter. He popped back behind the screen. He was only just in time, as Harry Wharton & Co., cheery and ruddy from the frosty air, tramped into the room.

THE THIRTEENTH CHAPTER.

Exciting!

COLONEL WHARTON glanced into his nephew's den, and his grim, bronzed face relaxed into a smile.

It was a very cheery scene that met his eyes. Five ruddy faces were gathered round the tea-table, five fellows were doing ample justice to an excellent spread, and five voices were talking all at once. The juniors jumped up, however, as the colonel looked in, rather as if they had been in the study at Greyfriars and Mr. Quelch had dropped in.

"Don't mind me, my boys," said the old colonel genially as he came in. "I dare say you are hungry. Did you see a good game?"

"Topping, sir—'Spurs in great form!" said Bob Cherry. The juniors resumed tea.

"You have seen nothing of that extraordinary and disagreeable boy Bunter, I suppose?"

"Bunter!" repeated Harry. "We saw him yesterday in Wimford."

"He has been here!" grunted the colonel, and his brow resumed its frown. "The boy's impudence and audacity seem unbounded. He actually came into the house, by this window apparently, and somehow deceived Wells into believing that it was you who had returned, Harry—apparently he has some rascally trick of imitating voices—"

"Oh, my hat!"

"He carried his impudence to the length of ordering a meal here, and, unluckily, escaped before I could get at him with my riding-whip," said Colonel Wharton. "On reflection I have no doubt that he has played such tricks here before, many times, in fact. I find that Wells thinks so, also—and indeed there can be little doubt of it. He has, I believe, used this french window for getting in and out of the house."

"Phow!" murmured Nugent.

"That would account for many strange occurrences that have puzzled us during the holidays," said the colonel.

"By Jove! It would!" exclaimed Harry Wharton. "But—but would even that fat fooler have the nerve—"

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"Hold him fast, my boys—I will deal with him!" said Colonel Wharton. The Greyfriars Juniors dragged the man's hands together and tied them. Then, for security, the end of the rope was knotted to the end of the banisters.

"The esteemed Bunter's nervefulness is terrific!" remarked Hurree Jamset Ram Singh.

"This french window had better be kept locked," said the colonel. "But that is not all. I should like you boys to keep a very sharp eye open for this young rascal Bunter, and if you discover him within the grounds, bring him to me. I desire very much to see him!"

"Certainly," said Harry; and the other fellows nodded assent.

Colonel Wharton left the Famous Five to themselves. They had been discussing the League match before—now they discussed Bunter! Certainly it did not occur to them that a pair of fat ears behind the screen in the corner were drinking in every word.

"If your uncle's right, that accounts for a lot of things," remarked Frank Nugent. "But if Bunter has been doing all the pilfering, he must have been hanging about a jolly long time."

"Well, we've spotted him again and again," said Harry thoughtfully. "But it certainly never occurred to me that he had been dodging into the house. Still, it was easy enough for him, knowing his way about here as he does. It was that frabjous ass that snaffled the books, of course—he's played that game at Greyfriars, you know. 'Member how he sold your 'Holiday Annual' to Fishy once, Bob?"

"Yes, rather!"

Bob Cherry chuckled. "Fancy the fat villain having the nerve to barge in here and pull Wells' leg with his blessed ventriloquism. Well, if we catch him and take him to the jolly old colonel, I fancy he will wish he had steered clear."

"I suppose he dodges in after dark—easy enough, as it gets dark so early now," said Harry. "And it's all been put down to poor old Thomas! By

Jove, he ought to be jolly well thrashed, and—"

"The thrashfulness will be terrific, if the esteemed and absurd colonel catches him hopfully!" grinned Hurree Jamset Ram Singh.

"Not much doubt about that, judging by the look in the colonel's eye," chuckled Johnny Bull. He glanced towards the curtained window. "If that's the fat villain's way in and out, he may be there now, watching for a chance to barge in—"

"Oh, my hat!"

Harry Wharton stepped to the french window and pulled the curtains back. Only the ivy could be seen in the darkness of the balcony outside.

"Look here, if he's playing that game, the sooner he's snaffled the better," said the captain of the Remove. "We'll go out and scout for him after tea. Ten to one we shall bag him if he's around!"

"Good egg!"

Behind the screen, Billy Bunter grinned. In the circumstances, he was not likely to be caught. Once the juniors were gone, and the way of escape was open, it was Billy Bunter's intention to go also! Things were getting much too hot for the secret guest at Wharton Lodge!

While they finished their tea, the Famous Five discussed that little scheme for bagging Bunter. Then they left the den, to go along to their rooms for their coats.

Bunter blinked out from behind the screen.

Now was his chance! The coast was clear! The door had been left wide open, so the interior of the room was visible from the passage. The communicating door with Wharton's bedroom was half open, and he could hear Wharton moving there. But he had to take the risk!

He tiptoed from his hiding-place to

the bookshelf. He was not going without his plunder if he could help it! He had at least a few minutes!

He had—so far as the juniors were concerned! But there was a tread in the passage, and Wells looked in.

"If you have finished tea, Master Harry, I will tell Thomas to clear away!" said Wells, glancing across at the figure in the grey overcoat and cap that stood at the bookshelf, its back to Wells.

Bunter's fat heart missed a beat! He stood petrified!

For an awful instant he saw himself discovered!

Then he realised—indeed, Wells' words left no room for a mistake in the matter—that the butler, seeing him from the back in Wharton's coat and cap, had taken him for Master Harry! Wells knew that handsome grey coat—he had held it more than once for Master Harry to get into!

Bunter did not stop for the books now! He did not stop for anything! Keeping his back carefully to Wells, he moved to the french window and opened it! If only he could get away before Wells discovered that he was not Master Harry—

Wells gazed at his back. He concluded that Master Harry had not heard him speak.

Bunter had the window open in a twinkling!

He stepped out on the dark balcony. Wells came into the room.

Bunter crossed the balcony with a bound!

He had only to scuttle down the stone steps and vanish into the winter darkness!

But at the top of the steps he stopped suddenly.

In the darkness below there was a

stirring shadow, and the red glow of a cigar-end!

"Oh lor'!" breathed Bunter.

He knew that it was Colonel Wharton, walking on the shrubby path there—perhaps keeping an eye open for Bunter!

Bunter stood quite still.

Escape was cut off!

A lion in his path would hardly have terrified him so much as the irascible colonel.

To his horror, the glowing cigar-end came to a halt at the foot of the stone steps! The colonel was looking up. He had seen the window open! Bunter shrank back into the frosty ivy.

"Is that you, Harry?" called up the colonel. "Who is there?"

Bunter, crouching in the ivy, made no sound—though he almost expected the colonel to hear the thumping of his fat heart!

He was between the devil and the deep sea! Wells was in the room; and the colonel at the foot of the steps! Only the darkness and the ivy saved Bunter for the moment!

"Who is that?" rapped the colonel, irritated at receiving no answer. "I've said that that window is to be kept closed!"

Wells looked out of the french window.

"Is that the master? Did you call, sir?" asked Wells, blinking out into the darkness.

"Wells, I have given instructions for that french window to be kept secured in case that young scoundrel Bunter tries—"

THE FOURTEENTH CHAPTER.

Who Did It?

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

Bob was the first to come back to the den with his coat and cap on, ready for the excursion. Bunter, again in his hiding-place behind the screen in the corner, strove to suppress his breathing. What was going to happen now Bunter did not know, and could not guess. But he knew that he was going to remain out of sight till the latest possible moment, at all events!

Bob was staring at the open french window. From outside, strange sounds reached him.

"Urrrrrghh!"

"Oh gad! What— Wurrghh!"

"Oh, sir! Gurrghh!"

Bob ran across the room, and ran out on the balcony. It sounded as if something had happened!

Below was darkness, and a garden carpeted with snow. Two dim figures were staggering up from the snow. One was the colonel; the other was Wells.

Both were breathless.

"Hallo, hallo hallo!" gasped Bob, staring over the balustrade. "Has—has anything happened?"

"Urrrrghh! Oh gad! Urrrrghh!"

"Wurrghh!"

"Wells, are you mad? What do you mean by falling down the steps on me?" spluttered the colonel.

"It was not my—gurrgh—fault, sir!"

to get a little excited, after being hurled headlong down a flight of steps! Wells forgot, for the moment that he was a butler at all, and only remembered that he was a man—a damaged man, and a very angry one!

"Are you calling my nephew a rascal?" roared the colonel.

"I am, sir!" bawled Wells. "A ruffianly young rascal, sir! A most inconsiderate and rascally young ruffian, sir!"

"You dare—" gasped the colonel.

"I tell you, sir, that your nephew hurled me headlong down those steps, sir, and I demand that his punishment—"

"It is impossible!" gasped Colonel Wharton. "Harry—where is Harry?"

"Wells must be dreaming!" exclaimed Bob Cherry. "Wharton couldn't have done such a potty thing! Wharton, come here, old bean: Where are you?"

"Here," answered Harry Wharton, coming across the den to the french window. "Keeping you waiting—"

"Wells is saying—"

"Harry!" roared the colonel.

"Yes, uncle! Here!" Wharton joined the astonished juniors on the balcony. "What's the trouble?"

"Wells says that you pushed him down the steps off the balcony—"

"What?" howled Wharton.

"If you did—"

"I did not! Is Wells mad or what?" gasped the captain of the Remove. "I've been in my room, getting a coat—"

"You hear that Wells—"

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"It is all right, sir! Master Harry is here," answered Wells. "He opened the window a moment ago and came out. Did he not come down, sir?"

"Eh? What? No! I've not seen him!"

Wells stepped across the balcony to the steps and peered down. Dimly he made out the figure of the old military gentleman staring up.

"But Master Harry came out a moment ago, sir!" said the bewildered Wells. "I saw him go out of the room, sir!"

Wells turned round. The junior in the grey overcoat and cap had certainly gone out on the balcony under Wells' eyes. Wells looked round for him.

"Master Harry—" He glimpsed a grey overcoat in the shadows and stepped towards it. Why Master Harry was crouching back in the frosty ivy was a mystery to Wells.

Another moment and Bunter would have been discovered! Wells did not see his face. He saw the top of the grey tweed cap! And he saw that only for a fleeting second—a split second! It established sudden contact with Wells' equator! Wells went backwards as if he had been shot.

"Why—what— Oh gad!" roared Colonel Wharton as something heavy came hurtling down the balcony steps and crashed into him.

The colonel went spinning. Wells dropped at his feet! The colonel roared! Wells gurgled! And Billy Bunter, gasping with terror, darted in at the french window again, and bolted behind the screen in the corner. Just then, that seemed the safest place for Bunter!

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gurgled Wells "I have been assaulted, sir, by your—gurrghh!"

"What?"

"I was knocked over, sir, by—wurrghh!" Wells struggled madly for breath. "I was struck, sir, by—gurrghh!"

"What's the row, Bob?"

Frank Nugent joined Bob on the balcony.

"The rowfulness seems to be terrific!" remarked Hurree Jemset Ram Singh, coming out after Frank.

"What do you mean, Wells?" roared the exasperated colonel. "You fell on me, sir, and knocked me over—urrgh! My cigar, sir, went into my—urrgh—mouth! I am burnt, sir! What do you mean by it? What?"

"Master Harry sir pushed me off the balcony!" spluttered Wells. "I was taken quite by surprise, sir—gurrgh! I am considerably upset. I am breathless—wurrgh! Such an assault—"

"Are you mad, Wells? My nephew did nothing of the sort! He is incapable of such a foolish trick!"

"Sir, I have been assaulted—I am hurt—I am bruised and breathless! Sir, this is not the treatment that a butler has a right to expect in a gentleman's house! I have a right, sir, to demand that the young rascal—"

"Who?" roared the colonel.

"Your nephew, sir!" roared back Wells.

The impassive expressionlessness of Wells was quite gone now. Even the most excellently trained butler is liable

"I am not surprised, sir, that a young ruffian who committed such an assault should deny it afterwards, sir!" bawled Wells. "I have always, sir, had a very great respect for Master Harry, and I have, I trust, treated him with the respect due to my master's nephew, sir. But now, sir, I tell you he is a young ruffian, and—"

"Wells!" gasped Wharton.

"And unless that boy, sir, is adequately punished for this act of ruffianly brutality, sir, I resign my position in your household, sir!" hooted Wells. "I leave in the morning, sir!"

"You may leave in the morning, or you may leave in the middle of the night, if you choose!" roared Colonel Wharton. "How dare you cast doubt on my nephew's word!"

"I saw him, sir—and I can believe my eyes!" roared Wells. "I will not remain under your roof, sir, to be treated with ruffianly brutality, sir! I am no longer your butler, sir!"

"Certainly you are not! You are discharged! Pack your things and leave as early as possible in the morning! By gad! My belief is that you have been drinking!"

"I repudiate the suggestion, sir—I repudiate it with scorn!" gasped Wells. "I am a strict teetotaler, sir, as you are well aware. For twenty years, sir, I have been entrusted with the key of the wine-cellar, and I defy you, sir—I defy you to assert that a single bottle—"

"Enough! If you are not drunk, you are mad! Go!"

"Wells!" howled Harry Wharton from the balcony. "You're mistaken,

Wells! I never touched you—I wasn't here—I give you my word—"

"Pah!"

"You must have slipped and fancied—"

"Pah!"

Having "pahed" twice, to express his utter scorn, Wells limped away, still gurgling painfully for breath. The colonel glared after him as he disappeared, as angry as Wells, or angrier.

"Harry, there is no one word of truth in Wells' statement—"

"Not a word, uncle! He must have slipped—there's some ice here, and—"

"No doubt, no doubt! It is extraordinary, amazing that he should fancy that you pushed him over—unless he has been drinking! By gad! In that case, the sooner he goes, the better! I have been deceived in him!"

"I can't understand—"

"Drink!" snorted the colonel. "It must be drink—that is the only explanation!" Colonel Wharton calmed down a little. "If you are going out, Harry, lock that french window, and take the key in your pocket. It must be kept locked!"

"Very well, uncle."

Colonel Wharton strode away in the gloom, still fuming. When, a little later, the Famous Five went out to scout for a possible Bunter, the french window was locked and the key reposed in Wharton's pocket. And a fat junior in a grey overcoat, behind the screen in the corner of the den groaned! There was no escape for Bunter now!

THE FIFTEENTH CHAPTER.

In the Dead of Night!

CLICK!

Billy Bunter started. He thrilled!

It was past midnight; but Billy Bunter was not asleep. That, in itself, was rather a record.

Sleep was impossible!

The fat junior was sprawling in Harry Wharton's armchair, before the almost dead embers of the fire. He was huddled in the grey overcoat. But he was cold! He was hungry! He was fed-up to his fat chin! He was longing to be away from Wharton Lodge, even if he had no alternative but the inhospitable roof of Uncle George.

But he was still there. The french window had been locked, to keep Bunter out if he essayed to get in! Nobody dreamed that it would keep Bunter in when he wanted to get out!

When the juniors came back from their ramble they came in downstairs. The key of the french window was still in Wharton's pocket. As only he and his friends used that french window, there was no need to replace the key till he came upstairs.

Bunter heard the wireless on below without deriving any entertainment whatsoever from it. Then he heard the gramophone, which lasted till supper. It was not till after supper that Harry Wharton & Co came up, to chat in the den before going to bed.

Bunter, squatted behind the screen in the corner, was still as a fat mouse. Through the rent in the screen he saw Harry Wharton replace the key in the french window. That was that!

A little later the chums of the Remove bade one another good-night, and went to their rooms. Lights were turned off. All was quiet in that part of the house. And now that the key was on the inside of the french window again, Billy Bunter was free to go if he liked!

But he did not like—at that hour! It

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was past ten o'clock. Snow was coming down, and a bitter wind howled round the old roofs and chimneys. Bunter did not want a night out. There was no shelter for his weary head. He could not raise the wind for a railway fare—by the sale of a selection of Wharton's books—now that all the shops had long been closed. Walking about all night was a prospect that did not appeal to him in the least.

There was only one thing for Bunter to do—remain where he was, and escape early in the morning. As he really had no choice in the matter, it was easy to decide.

But it was rotten! He was safe from discovery, so far as that went! But there was no supper—nothing to eat! It was cold—and he dared not even build up the fire, lest it should lead to discovery.

Wharton was in the next room. The communicating door was closed; but he was not a heavy sleeper. When Bunter moved, he moved on tiptoe. The crackling of logs might have caught his ear—the gleam of firelight under the door might have caught his eye! Bunter dared not risk it!

He settled down in the armchair

before the fire, and tried to sleep. But sleep would not come!

He dozed a little every now and then, but only to start into wakefulness and remember that he was cold and hungry. When he heard twelve strike he wondered if that endless night would ever end. He thought of his attic with longing. But the attic was locked—the key probably somewhere under the bed in which Wharton had turned in. Bunter had to make the best of it. And then—

Suddenly through the silence came that click from the window, and the fat junior sat bolt upright in the chair, thrilling with alarm.

He blinked round in the gloom with terrified eyes behind his big spectacles. Back into his fat mind came the incident of the previous night!

Bunter had quite forgotten that incident. In the stress and distress of his own peculiar circumstances he had had no time to think about that, or any other trifling matter.

But he remembered it now, as he heard the lock of the french window click—as it was opened from the outside.

He could see nothing!

But he knew, just as plainly as if he could have seen, that the man he had surprised on that balcony the previous night had come back to make another attempt. The opening of the lock could mean nothing else.

Bunter hardly breathed.

He felt a cold draught of bitter wind across the room. The french window was open.

Then his straining fat ears caught a sound—a soft sound of the window closing. Blinking through the gloom, he made out a dim figure against the glass panes.

His fat heart almost died within him.

It was the man from India—the man Corkran, who had attacked Colonel Wharton in the park! Bunter could make out only dim outlines, but he knew it. What did the man want?

He was no ordinary housebreaker or burglar, that was certain. His attack on the old colonel had been inspired by revenge. Had he "got away" with that attack he would have gone. It was clear enough that he was in the house not for such a purpose as robbery—Bunter could not doubt what his purpose was! He was seeking the man he regarded as his enemy—for revenge! Bunter remembered the hard, cold face, the cruel, steely eyes, and repressed a shudder of fear. What would happen to him if the ruffian found him there?

There was a tiny gleam in the darkness.

It was the glimmer of a torch. Bunter crouched deep in the roomy chair. The tiny beam of light glittered round the room, but evidently the man from India had no suspicion that there was anyone in the apartment—he had only turned on the light to ascertain his bearing. It was shut off again, and Bunter heard him cross stealthily to the door on the passage.

That door opened quietly. It was left open—no doubt as a ready retreat for the rascal in case of alarm.

Faint stealthy footsteps died away.

Bunter dragged himself out of the chair and blinked through the open doorway. A faint twinkle of light caught his eyes for a moment. There was no sound—and the light twinkled only for a second. The man was "after" the old colonel, that was certain; but it dawned on Bunter that he could not know which was Colonel Wharton's room. Possibly, watching the house, he might have seen the old soldier at his window, but finding the room from the inside was not an easy task. Billy Bunter knew that the man from India was searching for that room now.

"Oh crikey!" breathed Bunter.

The fat Owl of the Remove was scared to the marrow of his bones! He dared not make a sound or a movement that would have drawn the revengeful rascal's attention to himself. But he had to do something! The old colonel was a "beast"—he was going to thrash Bunter if he saw him—it was only because of his tantrums that Bunter had had such an extraordinary and exciting sojourn under his roof! Still, Bunter evidently could not leave him to it. The man from India meant mischief—a cruel and brutal attack upon an unwary man! Bunter had to do something!

He crept to the communicating door of Harry Wharton's bed-room and opened it with almost agonised caution. He rolled into the bed-room.

Dimly he made out the bed and groped to it. There was a startled gasp from Harry Wharton, as he awoke

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suddenly with a fat paw groping over his face.

"Who—what——" gasped Harry.

"Quiet!" hissed Bunter.

"What——"

"Do be quiet! He'll hear you—Oh lor'!"

"Bunter!" gasped Wharton in utter amazement.

"Quiet! He's in the house——"

"Eh? Who is?"

"That man!" gasped Bunter. "I saw him! The man who tackled your uncle in the park! Corkran! He—ho's going to his room——"

"Wha-a-at?"

Harry Wharton switched on his bed light. He sat up, staring blankly at the fat, terrified face of the Owl of the Remove.

Bunter's presence was utterly amazing to him. But for the moment he gave that no thought. One look at Bunter's fat face, white as chalk, quivering with terror, showed that he was in earnest.

Wharton leaped from the bed.

"That man—Corkran—is in the house?" he breathed.

"He got in at the french window."

"You saw him?"

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"Oh lor'! Yes! Oh crikey! Oh dear!" gasped Bunter. "I—I say——"

But Harry Wharton did not wait to hear what Bunter had to say. If the man who had attacked his uncle was in the house, after midnight, there was no doubting what he intended, and there was not a moment to lose. Wharton leaped across to the door, tore it open, and ran out. He ran down the passage to the landing, and along it to the passage that led to his uncle's room. There was a sudden crash in the dark, a muttered gasping oath, and then hands in the darkness grasped Harry Wharton, and he found himself fighting fiercely with an enemy he could not see.

THE SIXTEENTH CHAPTER.

Because of Bunter!

"I SAY, you fellows!" yelled Billy Bunter.

From the darkness of the long landing above the hall Billy Bunter could hear the sounds of a struggle, of scuffling and panting breath. He knew that Wharton, hurrying to his uncle's room, must have run into the man from India in the dark, and he yelled!

"I say, you fellows! Help! Murder!

Fire! Help! Whoop! I say, you fellows! Oh crikey! Help!" yelled Bunter in a voice that not only awakened the juniors in the rooms along the passage, but might have awakened Rip Van Winkle and the Seven Sleepers of Ephesus.

"Hallo, hallo, hallo!"

"What the thump——"

"That's Bunter!"

"The esteemed and idiotic Bunter!"

Doors opened and lights flashed on. Bob Cherry and Johnny Bull, Frank Nugent and Hurreo Jamsot Ram Singh ran out in their pyjamas. They stared blankly at the fat figure in Wharton's doorway, in Wharton's grey overcoat and cap! Bunter, blinking in the electric light as it flashed on, roared and yelled.

"I say, you fellows! After him! Oh crikey!"

"What's the matter?" roared Bob Cherry.

"Help!" came a shout from the landing—a gasping, breathless shout in the voice of Harry Wharton. "Oh, help!"

"Come on!" roared Bob Cherry.

He ran up the passage, switched on the landing light as he turned the corner. His comrades were at his heels, alarmed and amazed. Bunter, behind them, still yelled and roared.

"Harry!" shouted Nugent, as the light flashed on.

Harry Wharton was struggling desperately in the grasp of the man from India. He had no chance against such an adversary, and it would have gone hard with him had not help been at hand.

The juniors fairly raced to the spot.

Four pairs of hands clutched at the midnight intruder at the same moment and dragged him down.

"Back up!" roared Bob Cherry.

Wharton panted.

"Hold him! It's the man Corkran! He's after my uncle——"

"We've got the brute!"

The man from India was still struggling, though it was only of escape that he was thinking now. But there was no escape for him. In five pairs of hands he had not the ghost of a chance.

And plenty of help was coming! Lights flashed on in the hall and the passages. From one direction came Wells and Thomas and Robert. From another came Colonel Wharton, whisking in a voluminous dressing-gown, in a towering state of irritation at the midnight disturbance.

"Harry! What——" roared the colonel.

"We've got him, sir!" panted Bob Cherry.

"Who—what——"

"The gotfulness is preposterous!" gasped the Nabob of Bhanipur. "Sit on his esteemed head, my absurd Bob!"

"Oooooogh!" came in a gurgling gasp from the man underneath.

"Great gad! Corkran!" roared the colonel. "You rascal! You scoundrel! In my house at midnight! By Jove! Hold him securely! Wells!" In the excitement of the moment the colonel forgot that Wells was sacked. "Get a rope, tie his hands, secure him. No, you get a rope, Thomas. Wells, go and telephone this instant to the police station!"

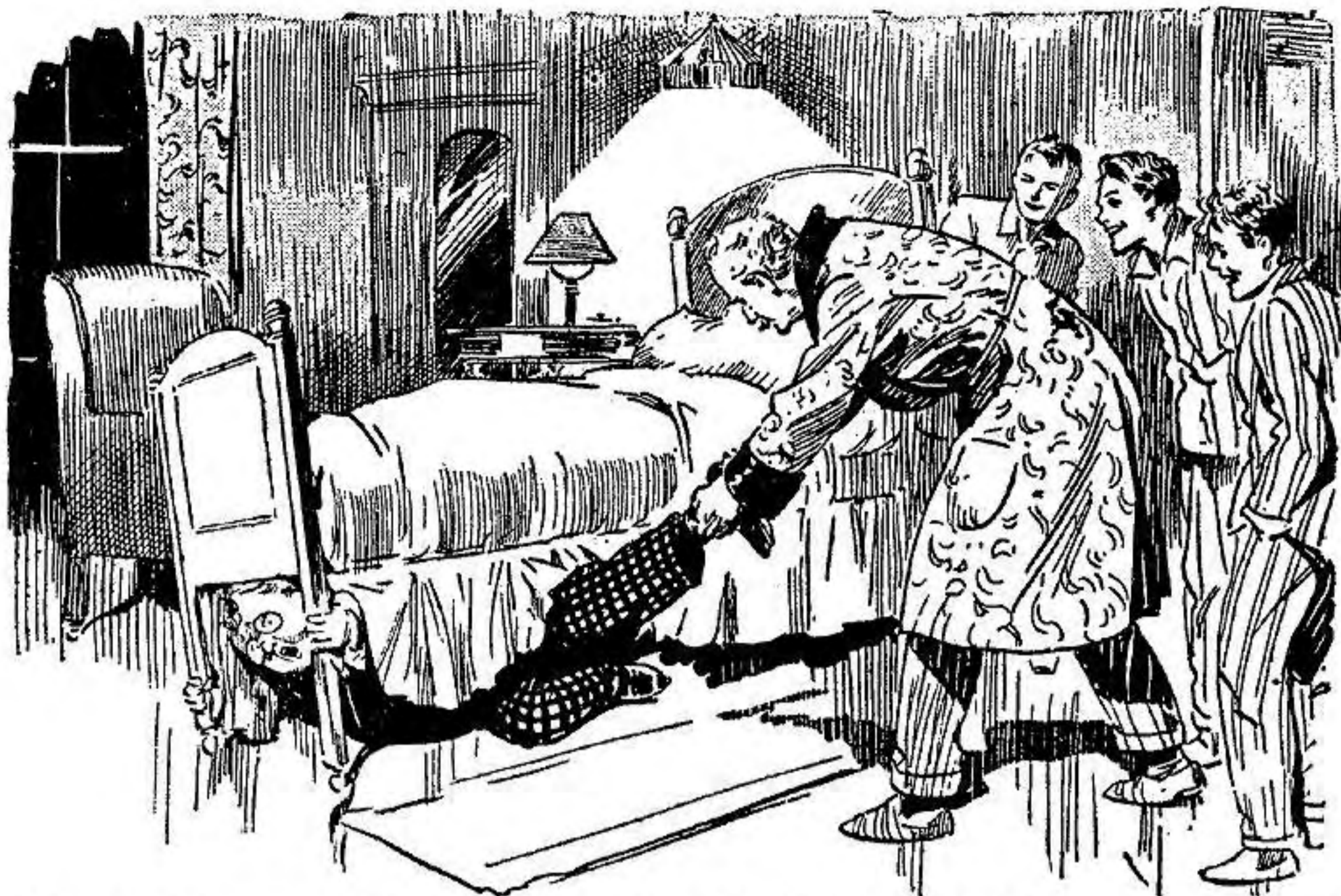
"Yes, sir!" gasped Wells.

"Yes, sir!" gasped Thomas.

"Hold him fast, my boys—I will help you!"

The colonel took a grip on the wriggling man's collar.

Thomas was not long getting a box-rope. Wharton and Bob dragged the man's hands together, and Thomas tied them. Then, for additional security, the



"Bunter! Where are you?" roared Colonel Wharton, entering the room and switching on the light. "Why—what—!" A fat foot was sticking out from underneath the bed, and the colonel grasped at it and pulled. "Yaroooh!" yelled Bunter, from his hiding-place. "I'm not here!"

end of the rope was knotted to the banisters.

Then Corkran was allowed to rise. He leaned on the banisters, gasping for breath. On the floor lay a short, thick stick, which the ruffian had dropped when Wharton ran into him in the dark. It was, perhaps, fortunate for Wharton that he had dropped it. Thomas picked it up.

"Keep that!" rapped the colonel. "The police will want that! By Jove! You rascal! What have you to say—hay?"

The man from India had nothing to say! He had no breath to say anything with. He gasped and gurgled. Wells came up the stairs.

"A constable is coming from Wimford, sir—"

"Very good! I am thankful, my boys, that you discovered this scoundrel, and seized him!" said Colonel Wharton. "There is no doubt what he intended to do with that stick, in revenge for a well-deserved thrashing I gave him in India years ago—a swindling rascal, by Jove! But how—"

"It was Wharton spotted him, sir," said Bob. "We came along to help—"

"Harry, my boy! But how—"

"Bunter woke me up—"

"Bunter!"

"Yes." Wharton gave a breathless laugh. "Bunter—he's here—goodness knows how! He woke me up and told me the man was in the house, and I came to wake you, and ran into him in the dark, and then—"

"Bunter woke us all up!" grinned Nugent. "He was yelling fit to raise the roof! Lucky he did!"

"The luckfulness was terrific!"

"Bunter!" repeated the colonel dazedly. "That young rascal here! How came he to be here? Where is he?"

"I left him in my room."

"Take care of that scoundrel, Thomas! Watch him! Bunter here—great gad!"

Colonel Wharton strode away along the landing and headed for his nephew's room, the juniors following him, and Wells following the juniors. Now that they had time to think about it, all were utterly astonished by the amazing presence of the Owl of the Remove.

A fat figure in a grey overcoat was gasping in Wharton's doorway. At the sight of the colonel it squeaked and vanished into the room. There was a bump, and a sound of scuffling, which indicated that somebody was hurriedly taking cover under a bed.

"Bunter! Where are you?" roared the colonel, striding in and switching on the light.

"Bunter, you ass!" gasped Harry. A grey cap lay beside the bed, and a foot was sticking out from underneath. "You blithering idiot, come out from under the bed!"

"Yaroooh! I'm not here! Keep that old brute off!" roared Bunter. "I say, you fellows—Whoooop!"

Colonel Wharton stooped, grasped a fat ankle, and tugged. There was a howl, and Billy Bunter came out from under the bed, like a winkle from a shell.

"Yaroooh!" roared Bunter.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Bunter!" roared Colonel Wharton.

THE SEVENTEENTH CHAPTER.

All Right for Bunter!

BILLY BUNTER had the spotlight!

Bunter was the cynosure of all eyes.

Billy Bunter filled the scene!

He was the goods!

Colonel Wharton stared at him blankly. The Famous Five stared at him and grinned. Wells stared at him from the doorway and frowned. Everybody stared at Bunter, frowning or smiling!

"How did you get here?" gasped the colonel, at last.

"I—I'm not here! I mean I didn't get here—that is I haven't been here! I mean—"

"It was he, sir!" gasped Wells.

"What? What do you mean, Wells?"

"That coat, sir!" gasped Wells.

"Coat! What coat? Bunter's coat?"

"Master Harry's coat, sir!" gasped Wells. "He is wearing Master Harry's grey overcoat!"

"My hat! So he is!" ejaculated Wharton. "I thought I knew that coat!"

"You young rascal!" growled the colonel. "Pilfering a coat—"

"Oh, really, sir! I suppose I can borrow a coat when my own coat's locked up in the attic!" exclaimed Bunter warmly. "I suppose you don't think I was going to keep this coat! I don't suppose I should even have sold it!"

"Sold it! Good gad!"

"Not if I could have raised enough on the books—I mean—"

"The books—"

"I mean, I haven't touched any books—"

"The—the coat, sir!" stammered Wells. "It was the coat I saw, sir, on the balcony this evening—Master Harry's grey overcoat, sir, which I knew very well, and that led me to believe—"

"Oh!" exclaimed Harry. "That fat

(Continued on page 28.)

WHEN the GREAT APES CAME!

By STUART MARTIN.



HOW THE STORY STARTED.

GERRY LAMBERT and **BILLY MURCHIE** are flying over the African jungle when they are brought down by an army of apes—led by Big Ling, a giant ape-man—reared to crush civilization by a renegade called Stein. Gerry escapes, but Billy is taken prisoner with a white girl named Lola. Billy and Lola are forced to accompany Big Ling's army, which, after laying waste villages and towns, makes for London, headed by a stolen Zeppelin. Flying back to London, Gerry, assisted by Lieut. Huskin, succeeds in bringing down the Zep in Hyde Park. As a counter-attack, Big Ling makes for the Zoo and lets loose the animals on London. Gerry, Billy, and the girl are eventually reunited, and, in company with a police-inspector, make all speed in a car for the War Office.

(Now read on.)

A Plan that Failed!

THROUGH Trafalgar Square the car swung, and then into Whitehall, to eventually draw up in front of the War Office, where policemen were grouped. The inspector and Billy dismounted, Gerry and the girl at their heels.

In the hall were officers and officials. A strange silence pervaded the place.

The inspector stated his business, and explained the presence of Billy, Gerry, and the girl.

An officer looked curiously at the party.

"Come upstairs," he said. "I want a word with you, please."

The trio mounted the stairs. On the landing Billy spoke.

"If I could see the Chief of the War Office—" he began.

The officer shook his head.

"You may see him, but you can't

explain anything to him. Look here!" He opened a door, and pointed.

On the carpet of the big room lay several bodies, one of which Gerry quickly recognised.

"Lieutenant Huskin!" he exclaimed. "Dead!"

"Strangled," said the officer quietly. "Every man in the building was strangled by gorillas, who overran the place. It all happened quickly, before we could get here. Every telephone line was broken, every room wrecked. For ten minutes, I'm told, it was pandemonium. And then they cleared off."

"But where have they gone?"

"We don't know. Many of them were killed. The troops got lots of them during the raid on Covent Garden; but the main body scattered. Most of them went into Pall Mall and the Green Park, and then down to Westminster that way. It wasn't a fight, it was a raid."

"And where did they go after leaving Westminster?"

"We don't know. The barges in which they came have disappeared. We are waiting for news. We have scouts all along the Thames. There isn't a live gorilla in Whitehall or in the West End now. As for Scotland Yard—"

"Well?" cried the inspector.

"It was raided, too. They've captured some of the animals and put them in the cells. We don't know where the remainder will break out next."

"I can tell you!" cried Billy.

"Where, youngster? You are the person we want most in this affair."

"There will be nothing doing during the day," said Billy. "Ling's plan is to attack during the night. It was Stein's

idea to wreck the electricity works, and then to tear up the railway lines around London, so as to isolate the city. While parties are doing this, Big Ling will be leading shock troops to-night to collect stores and ammunition."

He drew from his pocket a chart, and spread it before his listeners.

Where were the gorillas and their leaders? That was the question that puzzled Whitehall.

That an army of beasts could raid London, keep their plan of campaign a secret, and hide themselves without leaving a trace, was the puzzling situation that faced the authorities.

Yet there was Billy Murchie's chart which he had shown to the officers in the War Office, marked with strategic points which the invaders intended to attack.

All that day there was no sign of Big Ling, the monster ape-man, and his forces. London life went on as usual, following the scare of the previous night. Billy and Gerry had earned a sleep which they were enjoying in a hotel close to Whitehall. The girl Lola had been taken in charge by officials who were getting into touch with her family in Belgium to whom they intended to send her.

Every precaution had been taken to guard the electrical works, and the various other sources and channels of the city's life; but, in spite of the seeming calm, there was an undercurrent of foreboding.

Army planes swept the sky, droning like bees as they kept up their vigil, and messages were flashed out at regular intervals.

"No news of enemy. No sight of enemy."

A slight mist began to descend over London in the early evening when Billy and Gerry awoke after their rest. They were due at the War Office where Billy had left the chart he had marked of Big Ling's intentions. And, having dressed and had a meal, they emerged from the hotel into the Strand.

It seemed strange to think that the hurrying crowds did not dream of the danger that was overshadowing the city; but the authorities had determined not to cause undue alarm by issuing bulletins. Everybody thought that Ling's attack had been a raid, not an advance thrust of war.

Half a dozen paces from the hotel door, Gerry seized Billy's arm and suddenly dragged him aside. At the same moment a pedestrian who was about to pass them staggered and fell. A second man dropped beside the first. Then a third went down. The boys were standing in a shop door, sheltered by the jutting wall.

"Stein!"

Gerry whispered the name excitedly. He pointed to a hurrying figure that was racing across the Strand, dodging the traffic as he went.

In a moment the crowds began to gather round the fallen men. A cry went up. The men had been shot; two were dead, the third was wounded by a shot that had caught him full in the chest.

"Those shots were meant for us," exclaimed Gerry. "I saw Stein coming

towards us, his hand in his pocket. He must have used a gun with a silencer."

They followed the dodging figure across the street. But the traffic gave Stein cover, and by the time the boys reached the other side there was no sign of him. Whether he had gone down a side turning towards the Embankment, or dashed to right or left, could not be ascertained. As they stood for a second looking up and down the street, however, a bullet hit the pavement by their feet, ricocheted through a shop window, and left a starred, broken mark that startled everybody in the neighbourhood.

Smash-and-grab raiders was the thought in everyone's mind. By this time Billy had caught a glimpse of a car that had glided past them in the stream of traffic. And at the wheel was Stein! Another face peered through the window of the car—the Mongolian face of one of Ling's lieutenants!

In a flying leap Billy was on the running board of the car, clinging to the door handle. Gerry, too, had followed Billy's lead, and was at his chum's elbow.

The window of the car dropped, and a hairy hand made a grab at Billy, who dodged. Stein lifted his right hand, still holding the wheel with his left, and fired at the boys. But a bus touched his rear mudguard at the moment, and the shot went wide. There was no report—just a faint plop!

Then the car swung jerkily into the thick traffic.

Stein jerked his head round and shouted an order, and the door of the car to which Billy and Gerry clung, swung open.

They hung to the handle desperately, but the open door was in the path of an oncoming vehicle. It was Stein's plan to "rub them off" the running-board, and he was prepared to sacrifice the door in the crash that seemed inevitable. His front wheel just missed the vehicle—a bus—by inches; but Billy and Gerry leaped clear just in time.

They landed safely in the road together, and there was a screech of brakes, followed by yells from drivers. The boys paid no attention to the noise and the shouting. An empty taxicab was moving slowly in the thick of the stream. The boys hailed it, and ordered the driver to follow Stein's car, which could be seen threading its way ahead, and forcing other vehicles to draw up and swerve dangerously.

Widespread Destruction!

THE driver of the taxi did his best. Through the window the boys saw Stein's car dash up past Charing Cross Hospital. There was no obeying the road rules or signals. Policemen on point duty at St. Martin-in-the-Fields raised their hands, but Stein heeded them not. A sharp turn and the car was going down towards Trafalgar Square.

Through the square they flashed, pursuer and pursued. In Northumberland Avenue, however, the taxi driver's nerve gave way, and he drew up in obedience to a policeman who came rushing out of a side street.

Stein's car was then barely twenty yards ahead, held up by some oncoming traffic. But the policeman never reached either vehicle.

Out of Stein's car there tumbled the most strange cargo—first Stein, then a monster ape-man, fifteen feet high, squeezing himself out of the doorway, and after him three gorillas. Then something flew from Stein's hand, and

a blinding flash tore the street into red flame just as Billy and Gerry jumped from their taxi. They were thrown to the ground, blinded by smoke and debris, deafened by the roar of the bomb.

Scrambling to their feet the boys saw the wreckage the explosion had caused. Their taxi was but a heap of smoking ruins. Of the policeman and the taxi-driver there was no sign. They had been blown to pieces.

Gerry saw Stein and his apes dash along the pavement. Pedestrians fled at their approach. Howling and snarling the three gorillas raced on all fours beside Stein and the huge ape-man. Once more Stein turned and threw a bomb.

The boys dropped in their tracks, burying their faces in their arms to protect themselves from the explosion.

By the time the boys rose to their feet again Stein and his apes had disappeared, and the crowds were surging from the Embankment towards the Underground Station. Voices were shouting on every side. It was with difficulty that Gerry and Billy managed to force their way through the press of people that had gathered. There was only one way that Stein could have gone, apparently, and that was into the Underground Station. People were crowding round the entrance, pointing to the hall, where the apes had caused consternation by their appearance.

CAN YOU RHYME?

For submitting the following Greyfriars limerick Leonard Bates, of The Cottage, Thornhill, Bamford, Derbyshire, has been awarded a **USEFUL LEATHER POCKET WALLET**:

Said Bunter to Bull, with a blink,
"Will you please lend me your
red nk?
For I, ie Mathe to-day,
And to Lasselles I'll say:
'My hand's fearfully injured, I
think!'"

Now You Have a Try, Chum!

A ticket-collector at the barrier was explaining, in bewilderment, how he had been thrown aside by a gorilla, and as Gerry and Billy reached the barrier there came from below a muffled roar that made the ground heave under their feet.

The thunder of that subterranean explosion was followed by another, and then a third. Smoke came drifting up the staircase.

From outside the station there came other sounds—a strange echo of hissing water, an occasional splashing, and then a riot of sound burst out. The Embankment had been heaved up by the explosion below the ground. Tramcars swayed and fell on their sides, a part of the Embankment wall fell into the Thames, and the water flooded over and swept across the roadway, several inches deep.

Billy and Gerry forced their way out of the station, and saw a figure clawing its way through the panic-stricken crowd.

It was Stein, making his way towards the river wall.

After him went the boys, knowing that in the state of affairs around them it was impossible to raise a shout, useless to try to explain who Stein was, or why he should be caught. They kept to their objective, and that was the cap-

ture of this arch-criminal, who was spreading death and disaster wherever he went.

"There he goes!" cried Gerry, pointing to a small, dark motor-boat that shot out from the steps of the Needle.

Stein was seated at the rudder, as he swung his craft downstream.

The only other craft on the river was a tug in midstream labouring against the down-flowing tide with a string of barges behind her. The river was still pouring through the gap in the wall.

"Westminster Pier!" cried Billy. "The police boat!"

The boys turned and ran towards Westminster. They had not gone half the distance, however, when suddenly the street lights were extinguished. Darkness fell on the Embankment like a pall that had been dropped suddenly from above. Darkness also fell on the lighted buildings on both sides of the river—the Houses of Parliament, Scotland Yard—on every hand darkness. The tug's lights were tiny specks moving on the river. That was all, save for an occasional light on the other side of the river.

"That puts the kybosh on our pursuit of Stein for the time being," remarked Gerry. "We'd better see what the Yard has to say."

"We'll need the Yard's sanction for a boat, anyway," said Billy.

The boys eventually found their way to Scotland Yard, where here and there policemen were flashing lamps. Giving their names they were shown into the office of the chiefs, who, in the light of flickering candles, were discussing the terrible situation.

Telephone messages were coming through from various quarters. There had been explosions at intervals along the various Underground electric lines. In every case the officials were able to give similar information. A small band of apes had burst through the barriers and had descended to the tunnels. Bombs had burst, and the roofs of the tunnels had collapsed. The rails were buried in debris.

Trains were caught between the explosions. The heavy loads of passengers were buried underground, with no hope of escape.

And the lights, how had they been extinguished? It was impossible to say. There had been explosions in the electrical works—fuses had been blown out, had been repaired at once, and had blown out again and again. Dynamos had been wrecked. Yet there had not been any sign of Big Ling or his gorillas. The works had been under the guard of soldiers.

London streets were crammed with people groping in various directions. Shops were being closed hurriedly, and fears of gangsters were abroad.

Then, while Billy and Gerry were listening to the information that was pouring into the Yard, there came other news that added to the crisis.

A shipload of gorillas had descended on Southampton, and were spreading devastation in the town. From Liverpool it was reported that the authorities were battling with apes who had descended from the sky. The animals at the Edinburgh Zoo had broken loose, and were clambering over Calton Hill and destroying Prince's Street, the fashionable thoroughfare. And from Reading: an army of apes was marching up the Great West road on the way to London!

The Chief dropped the telephone receiver with trembling hands.

"If only I could lay my hands on this Stein!" he cried, in despair.

"Chief," said Gerry, "my pal and I

came to ask for the use of a boat—a police boat—to track him. Ho is down the river somewhere, he and Big Ling. Give us passes, with full authority, and we will go where an ordinary policeman could not."

Tracked Down!

THE Chief gave the necessary permission, and ten minutes later the boys emerged into the dark street with firm determination to find Ling, and every authority to back them in their search.

"Who's that?" came a voice; and a boat rubbed the side of the boys' fast craft some distance below Tower Bridge.

A police boat had crept up to them in the darkness, and a light was flashed into their faces. One look at the boys' passes, however, changed the challenge into a greeting.

"We were told you might be about," said the inspector, who was muffled in a greatcoat, and had two assistants beside him. "Any news of anything?"

"Not yet, inspector," answered Billy. "They've found out what put the lights of London out," went on the inspector. "Somebody has been interfering with the electric cables in various parts of London, which resulted in the blowing of main fuses at the stations. They're getting light now, though."

He waved his hand towards the upper reaches of the river, where lights were beginning to show again.

"And, another thing," he went on, "the cars this madman Stein used were all stolen. He must have selected his cars from the various parking places."

"Inspector," said Billy, "have you any report of abandoned barges on the river within the last twenty-four hours?"

"Abandoned barges? Well, there were some that broke from their moorings, but they were found below the Pool yesterday—"

"Below the Pool?"

"Yes. And there was another thing. A shipkeeper of one of these cargo steamers has disappeared—"

"Which cargo steamers?"

"There are several about here, lying in the stream waiting for discharge."

The inspector pointed upward towards the dark hulls of ships at anchor.

"What kind of cargo did they hold?" asked Gerry.

"Produce and fruit mostly, and one had a cargo of frozen meat. They can't be handled now, as they can't get out below the Tower, since we have troops on the bridge, and orders are that the bridge is not to be raised—"

"Not to be raised!" said Billy, aghast.

"But look!"

He pointed to the gaunt framework in the distance. From the bridge came sounds of commotion. Against the sky it could be seen opening its gigantic leaves.

The inspector made a grab at the tiller of his boat, and was off up-stream at once, while Billy and Gerry remained where they were, sheltered beside a large ship moored in midstream.

Up went the big leaves gradually. The figures of the troops on the roadway could be seen hurrying towards the ends of the moving platforms; and then the crack of rifles broke out.

At first the reports came singly, then they were as one volley. A few splashes came to the boys' ears. They started their engine and moved upward.

"Look, Gerry!" cried Billy.

Across the water under the bridge a

small boat shot out and disappeared in the shadow of the shipping. The commotion on the bridge increased, and the firing continued. The two sections of the roadway across the bridge were nearly half-way raised, and hanging to the edges strange figures could be seen. They were the figures of apes.

From the ends of the bridge the troops were firing rapidly. One figure after another dropped. The bridge began to close again, trembled, and rose once more. More firing, and more apes appeared. Some were running along the top, some were swinging on the trellised ironwork of the bridge. A large steamship moved through the opened bridge, going seaward, followed by a second ship.

As their boat swept under the tall structure the boys saw the gorillas running hither and thither. One dropped, shot through the chest, into the water close to them. A large paw made a grab at the gunwale of their boat, and next moment a hideous face of an ape-man appeared.

His weight bore the boat down until the gunwale touched the water. He was clambering in, when Gerry pulled out a Service gun with which they had been supplied and aimed at the terrible face. "Don't shoot!"

It was the ape-man who spoke breathlessly, in agitation, and with intense earnestness.

Blood was streaming from his wound. He made no attempt to board the craft, for he was terribly wounded and almost exhausted. His face, ghastly in the faint light, seemed to become more human than usual.

"I am no friend of Big Ling," he breathed. "I hate him. The master sent me to death!"

"Who is the master?" asked Billy, watching the ape-man closely, as he hung there, while the boat drifted with the tide.

"Him you call Stein. My name is Tree Climber."

"Why do you hate Ling?"

"He promised us to be rulers. But I die!"

"Where is Ling?" cried Billy.

"Where is the master?"

"Over there."

The ape-man stabbed his finger across the river. His strength was ebbing fast, but he still clung to the boat.

"Save me!" he said in a rumbling tone. "I am afraid of your people. The master tied explosives to our shoulders. We did not know that the bombs would kill us in the tunnels!"

His huge head sank, his hand lost its grip on the boat, and, with a terrible sigh, he dropped into the water and slid out of sight.

"What do you make of that, Billy?" asked Gerry.

"I understand now how the underground explosions took place, Gerry. Stein sacrificed his men and apes to make the explosions. I'll bet that was Stein's boat we saw shoot across the river. Where could it have gone?"

They scanned the opposite bank, heedless of the fight that was still taking place on Tower Bridge.

Up against the sky rose the mass of the Tower of London, its turrets silhouetted against the heavens and the racing clouds.

Billy and Gerry steered the boat over to the wall that rose as a buttress against the river, but there was no sign of Stein's boat.

"What was that?" cried Billy suddenly, as a flickering light appeared ahead.

It was extinguished at once, but it had shown for an instant.

Then the truth burst on the two boys at the same moment.

They were opposite the Traitors' Gate, that passage leading to the Tower which in the past has seen so many tragic passengers.

The portcullis was up; the water flowed into the passage without hindrance.

Billy steered the boat straight for the dark opening, and then shut the engine off. They passed the entrance, and as they did so the ancient portcullis dropped into place.

Were they trapped?

The boat rubbed against the dripping walls. They drew their revolvers and waited. Not a sound.

Feeling their way against the wet stones, they pushed the boat forward until its prow touched an obstacle. It was the ancient steps into which they had bumped, and beside their boat they discovered another craft—Stein's boat.

Still not a sound; but from somewhere came the odour they had learned to detest—the odour of gorilla.

A grunt made them start. A pair of eyes gleamed in the darkness, rising from Stein's boat.

Crash!

Gerry's gun descended on the ape's head, and it slumped to the bottom of the boat without a cry. Then from above came a voice shouting in a strange tongue. It was the voice of Stein.

The boys crouched low, waiting for the attack they believed would follow. It did not come, however; but again that flicker of light appeared above. It wavered at the top of the flight of old steps, then disappeared.

In the darkness Billy leaned over and whispered into Gerry's ear.

"We've got to go up," he said. "Are you ready?"

"Yes."

They stepped out of the boat into water, found a foothold, and climbed up the steps. A small door stood open. They edged through and found themselves in a wide cellar, one of the dungeons. Another passage of stairs, and they were faced with another door, which also was open. Beyond it another dungeon; and then the light appeared again. A footstep sounded on the flagstones.

The light threw a sudden flicker into the apartment. There were several deep recesses in the stone walls, and into one of these the boys dodged.

Hardly had they done so when Stein appeared.

He was holding a candle above his head. He did not look round, but continued on his way. Clearly he was wondering why his ape had not followed him.

The moment he had passed, the boys slipped into the passage through which Stein had come. More stairs, winding and narrow. The smell of gorilla grew stronger. They reached another room, and in here they saw a group of animals, crouched on the floor beside wooden cases which had been broken open, jabbering and growling as they fed. A candle stuck on a stone ledge was the only illumination.

"The produce stolen from the ships," whispered Billy, pointing to the contents of the cases.

The floor was a litter of the remains of fruit and cold storage provisions.

The gorillas took no notice of the boys beyond a swift glance.

At the sound of approaching footsteps, however, Billy and Gerry dashed into the gloom of a passage and round a corner, where they pressed their forms into what had in the old days been a cell. Peering out, they saw Stein enter the chamber where the apes were feeding, and then pass through another doorway, holding his candle high above his head.

Billy and Gerry tiptoed in his wake. They dared not get too close to him lest he heard them. Suddenly Stein's candlelight ceased to glimmer as he

entered a doorway on the right of the passage.

Reaching the spot, the two investigators found themselves faced with a heavy curtain. Pulling it aside cautiously, they saw a strange sight.

They were looking into the ancient chapel. There sat the enormous figure of Big Ling; but not the Big Ling they had expected to see. Around the huge ape-man lay the Tower jewels, while on his head he wore, balanced in an odd fashion, the crown.

Big Ling was garbed in a bright-coloured robe. In his right hand he held a spear, its gleaming sharp point towering above him.

At Big Ling's side was a machine-gun, its belt of cartridges hanging loose

ready for its deadly work, while astride the gun itself sat Stein, an eyeglass in his eye, dressed in a light grey suit which looked new.

Ranged along each side of the chamber were other ape-men, and behind them gorillas only slightly less in stature, but each armed with a weapon.

It was like a court of ancient days, savage and frightful. The armoury of the Tower had been stripped of its weapons to provide these monsters with death-dealing implements.

(Look out for further thrilling chapters of this popular adventure story in next week's FREE GIFT NUMBER of the MAGNET.)

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., The Fleetway House, Farringdon Street, London, E.C.4. A stamped, addressed envelope will ensure a reply.

WELL, chums, 1933 has come and gone and still the MAGNET reigns supreme as the best boys' paper on the market. Well done, everybody! Last year, if you remember, I said that the Old Paper was out to break all records—and it certainly has done so! Cheers! Frank Richards has triumphed all along the line with his magnificent Greyfriars yarns, our serials have all been top-notchers, and our shorter features have gained full marks! Isn't the MAGNET the ideal boys' paper? I'll tell the world it is! And I'll say this, that 1934 is going to see the MAGNET rise to even more dizzy heights! For days now I have been working at tip-top pressure on

ANOTHER GREAT FREE GIFT OFFER

which will follow immediately after our present series of free gifts come to a close. But more about these coming Free Gifts next week; I'm only just whetting your appetites now!

TEN more stunning coloured pictures for your album this week, chums. Your collection must be looking well worth while now! You should have 76 pictures all told, and there are still two more marvellous sheets of pictures to come, bringing the total up to 100 coloured pictures all told. Whatever you do, don't miss any of these grand free pictures, or your album will be spoiled!

Having told you fellows to fire away as much as you like at me, I suppose I've got myself to blame when you put up a real poser to me. Jimmy Cameron, of Belfast, Ulster, gave me a task this week. Jimmy has been having an argument with a friend named "Stewart," who said that his name was originally French. Jimmy argued that it was Scottish, so now I've got to settle the business.

FRENCH OR SCOTTISH?

is the question—and here is the answer: The ancestor of the Stewarts was a Breton noble named Alan, a cadet of the ancient Counts of Dol and Oman, in Brittany. He crossed to England, was appointed Sheriff of Shropshire, and, through his third son, Walter Fitz-Allen, became the founder of the House of

Stewart. Walter crossed the border, and was made Great Steward of Scotland by King David I.

I dare say I have a number of readers who bear the same name, so they will be interested in the above reply. And having settled that argument, here is where the name "Cameron" came from. Jimmy wants to know that, too.

The Camerons got their name from the Cam-shron, or "wry nose" of some early chief. The first assured Chief of the Clan was Donald Dhu, who flourished in the year 1411. Make a note of it, you Cameron lads.

MOST of my letters this week can be dealt with by means of my RAPID-FIRE REPLIES.

The first comes from "A Glasgow Reader," who asks:

How Did Scotland Yard Receive Its Name? Quite simple! What we generally term "Scotland Yard" is the headquarters of the Criminal Investigation Department of the Metropolitan Police, and it gets its name because it is built in New Scotland Yard—just in the same manner as we sometimes talk about "Whitehall," when we mean certain Government departments. The police station attached to "Scotland Yard" is officially known as Canning Street, W., Police Station. But the public prefer to dub the C.I.D. "Scotland Yard," after the name of the site on which it is built.

How to Kill and Mount Butterflies. ("Scientist," of Birmingham.) Butterflies and moths are killed by being put into a "killing bottle"—an ordinary well-stoppered bottle which contains ammonia, or some other powerful "killing" liquid. The ammonia is protected, of course, to prevent the insects dropping into it. The fumes kill them, or—in other words—they are "gassed."

The best way to mount them is to pin them upon tiny circles of cork, which are, in turn, glued down to strong cardboard in whatever design the collector prefers.

If this reader applies to his local library, he will most certainly be able to obtain a book on the subject which will give him much more information than I have space to print.

Incidentally, I am bearing in mind the interesting suggestion he makes, and will see what I can do in a future issue of the MAGNET.

From Which Country do we Obtain Radium? (Robert Niblock of Mile End, London.) Small deposits of radium are found in various parts of the world. By far the greatest amount, however, comes from the Belgian Congo, and a Belgian company owns the radium mines. Radium is very scarce, which accounts for its terrifically high price.

Getting Rid of Freckles. ("Constant Reader," of Port Elizabeth, South Africa.) Don't worry about them. A weak solution of diluted peroxide of hydrogen will help you to get rid of them, and will not harm you.

HERE comes a query from Tom Mathers, of Croydon. He asks: **ARE THERE SEALS ROUND THE ENGLISH COAST?**

Yes! Any amount of them! Seals breed extensively on certain islands round our coasts, notably the Farn Islands, off Northumberland. In the season the rocks are sometimes swarming with young seals, and they are so tame that they pay practically no attention to visitors or the fishermen who work just off the islands. But that is because visitors are scarce in the breeding season, and no one lives on the islands except three lighthouse-keepers. Needless to say, you won't find many seals in the more crowded holiday resorts round our coasts, although an isolated one is sometimes seen.

Many thanks to all the readers who have sent me so many congratulatory letters on the subject of our stories. You may be sure that I will always see to it that the standard of MAGNET stories remains as it is at present—and that means the finest schoolboy fiction published.

You'll find evidence of this when you read:

"BILLY BUNTER'S DIAMOND!"

By Frank Richards,

which appears in our next issue. As usual, Mr. Frank Richards gives you a yarn that starts off "bang" with a real interest-holding opening—and the interest is held continuously until the very last line. This yarn will make you wish it were twice as long, so the best thing I can do is to repeat my oft-given advice—"order your copy in advance, and don't run the risk of the MAGNET being sold out!"

There are thrills in store for you in next week's chapters of our thrilling "ape" story, and two pages full of chuckles and laughs in the "Greyfriars Herald" supplement, not to mention "Lincsman's" interesting Soccer talk.

And fire in your queries, chums! The more there are, the better I like it!

YOUR EDITOR.

THE MAGNET LIBRARY.—No. 1,351.

BUNTER, THE CRASHER!
(Continued from page 23.)

villain was there in my coat, and you saw him, and thought—"
"I did not see his face in the dark, sir!" gasped Wells.

"Oh gad!" exclaimed the colonel. "I understand now! Then you really were pushed off the balcony, Wells?"

"Yes, sir; though I am now aware that it was not Master Harry who pushed me off, but that unscrupulous boy who has pilfered his overcoat—"

"That's all right, Wells," said Harry. "You could hardly think anything else when a fellow in my overcoat pushed you over in the dark."

"And it was that young rascal!" boomed the colonel. "Wells, your mistake was a natural one. I shall forget what you said, and you will remain. The whole thing was a mistake, due to that pernicious young rascal!"

"Thank you, sir! I shall be very happy—"

"As for Bunter—"

"It wasn't me!" roared Bunter, watching the colonel warily across Wharton's bed. "I never pushed the old ass over! Never touched him! Besides, what was a fellow to do? I only wanted to get away, and he would have collared me in another tick!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Blessed if I see anything to cackle at! You're practically doubting my word! Pretty thick, I call it!"

"Why did you put on my nephew's coat?" roared the colonel.

"What was a fellow to do when his coat was locked up in the attic? It would have been all right if I hadn't lost the attic key! It was your fault, making a fellow hide under a bed—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Not that I've been in the attic!" added Bunter. "You needn't fancy that I've been here for days and days sleeping in the attic! As for getting in and out of the house by Wharton's french window, I never did—in fact, I didn't know there was a french window. If there is, I don't know anything about it! I never camped in the attic, and never went round at night looking for grub; and if anybody's missed Christmas puddings, and turkeys, and such things, it's no good asking me! I don't know anything at all about them! You'll be making out next that it was me played ghost at Christmas!"

"Oh, my hat!" exclaimed Wharton. "Bunter all the time!" gasped Bob Cherry.

The Famous Five were beginning to understand now quite a lot of things that had puzzled and mystified them.

"Upon my word!" gasped Colonel Wharton.

"You keep off!" said Bunter. "I haven't been here through the holidays, and I haven't touched a thing all the while I've been here. And—" The colonel made a movement, and Bunter broke off, with a yell of alarm. "I say, you fellows, keep him off!"

"You ridiculous boy!" exclaimed the colonel. "You have acted like an impudent and unscrupulous young rascal, but—"

"I haven't! Perhaps you're thinking of Wharton, sir, or Bob Cherry—"

"Oh crumbs!"

"But," hooted the colonel, "it seems that you awakened my nephew to-night, when that rascal Corkran got into the house, and gave the alarm. But for that, I might have received injury at the rascal's hands. In view of this, cannot you understand, you absurd boy, that your ridiculous and rascally proceedings will be forgiven—"

"Oh!" gasped Bunter.

"It was fortunate, as it turns out, that you were here, and I shall certainly not give you the thrashing you deserve—"

"Oh!" repeated Bunter.

"Wells, if you will oblige me by overlooking the act of this absurd and hare-brained boy—"

"Certainly, sir!" said Wells.

"Oh!" said Bunter again.

It dawned on his fat mind that he had, in fact, made his peace quite unexpectedly. All the while he had been a hidden guest at Wharton Lodge he had hoped that something might turn up to placate the old colonel and get him over his tantrums. He realised now that something had.

In fact, all was calm and bright.

As Bunter realised that, a fat grin overspread his face. He was not to be kicked; he was not to be thrashed. The riding-whip was a thing of the past.

"Wells, will you see that a bed is prepared for this boy?" said the colonel.

"Very good, sir!"

"Oh!" gasped Bunter. "Good! What about supper?"

"Eh?"

"I'm hungry—"

"Perhaps, Wells, you may be able to—" gasped the colonel.

"Oh, certainly, sir!" said Wells.

"Nothing much, you know," said Bunter. "A cold chicken—say, a couple—a pudding or so—and a pie or two—anything you've got handy—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Bunter was led away to supper.

Harry Wharton looked into Bunter's room at eleven o'clock the next morning. Bunter was snoring. Wharton shook him.

"Urrgh!" grunted Bunter. "Beast! Wharrer you waking me up for?"

"I thought you might be catching a train—"

"Well, I'm not!"

Bunter blinked at him.

"If that's what you call gratitude, Wharton, after I came here specially, at the risk of my life, to save your uncle from being knocked on the head—"

"Oh crikey!"

"Has the old brute—"

"What?"

"I mean, the dear old gentleman—has the dear old gentleman got over his tantrums? I suppose he has, after my risking my life for him—what? Well, I've not been treated well here; but I never was the fellow to bear grudges. I forgive you all round."

"Oh, my hat!"

"I mean it," said Bunter. "I always was a forgiving chap—kindest friend and noblest foe, and all that! It's all right, old fellow! I'm not going! I'm staying with you till the end of the hols."

"Oh!"

"Tell them to send up my brekker at twelve; then I'll turn out for lunch! Don't disturb me again till then! I'm sleepy!"

"I say—"

Snore!

Harry Wharton gazed for a long moment at the snoring Owl. Then he left him to it, and Billy Bunter snored on!

THE END.

(Next week's grand long yarn of the chums of Greyfriars is entitled: "BILLY BUNTER'S DIAMOND!" and it's full of amusing and amazing situations. You'll vote it great, chums, same as you will the sheet of topping coloured pictures which will be given FREE with our next issue.)

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POCKET STAMP WALLET FREE, Gauge, Mounts, and 25 Soviet Russia. Many Fine Sets. Enclose 2d., request Approvals. (Without Approvals 1/6.)—**North Wales Stamp Co.,** 25, Lawson Rd., Colwyn Bay.

All applications for Advertisement Space in this publication should be addressed to the Advertisement Manager, The MAGNET, The Fleetway House, Farringdon Street, London, E.C.4.

PUT ON A BOLD FACE
If you've got a face like a frost-bitten lamb, no wonder bigger fellows bully you! Change your fizz and give the bullies a fright! The Bruiser's Beauty Course, administered by Geo. Bulstrode, will do the trick. Thick lips, swollen nose, and cankered ears guaranteed in one session! **AND I CHARGE YOU NOTHING—IT'S A PLEASURE TO DO IT!—G. BULSTRODE, c/o GREYFRIARS HERALD.**

THE NEW Greyfriars Herald

GRAND PIANO RECITAL
First Day of New Term in the Rag at 8 p.m. pronto. By the Celebrated Ivory Crasher, **CLAUDE HOSKINS**. Whatever you do, boys, don't miss this Bashing, Crashing, Ear-drum Smashing Niagara of Noise! Admission Free—you pay to get out.



"MUSIC HATH CHARMS—"
Bolsy's Uke's So Soothing
"Tiger" Lyons and Kong King had never been brought to his notice!
Bolsy had a dreamy look in his eye, too. And when he intended asked what train he intended catching to get to the boxing match Bolsy shook his head.
"Sorry, old chap," he said.
"Fraid I shan't be able to come along after all!"
"You won't be able to come along, eh?" remarked Bulstrode, in measured tones. "May I ask why?"
Bolsy struck a chord on his musical instrument and smiled.
"Yes; I'll tell you," he said. "Somebody gave me this ukulele for Christmas and I've been practising on it. The result is that I've discovered I'm a born musician and I've decided to go into it seriously for crooning!"

MY WORST AND BEST EXPERIENCE
By Hurree Singh
that I was paralysed with horror for a few moments. I could only eye-fully stare at the monster, hoping that it would turn away; but instead of doing that, it attacked me with forceful ferociousness! When I at last found my voice, it seemed too late, for the python was already curling round my body, preparatory to setting ready to crush me deathfully!
You may guessfully imagine my joy when, in the time nick-fully, a shot rang out and the bullet, after whistling past my ear, buried itself in the snake's head! By sheer good luck, however, one of my party, who fortunately happened to be an excellent and ludicrous shot, had seen my dilemma and fired!
Nevertheless, it remains the worst experience I can mindfully remember!

Big Bungle at Blundell's Beano
Coker Brings the House Down
If you've never seen Horace Coker play Blind Man's Buff, you've never lived! In the words of Mabel, one of the waitresses at Blundell's New Year party: "Of all the so-called funny that gives you only a faint idea of how funny Coker can be!"
It was obvious when Coker suggested Blind Man's Buff that he had something up his sleeve. It was taken for granted, when he wanted to be the first Blind Man, that shrieks of merriment would soon make the welkin ring. One look at the merry twinkling in his eye gave the game away!
And Coker didn't disappoint the party. He certainly WAS funny. Funnier than he had expected to be, as a matter of fact!
His idea, you see, was to stagger round the room laying hands on all kinds of impossible objects and pretending they were people we all knew. "This is Mr. Blundell; I can tell him by his whiskers!" Then he crossed a coconut and said: "Own up, Potter, old man; I'd know you anywhere by your head!" And so on.

MYSTERY OF MASKED MARAUDER
Armed Man at Bedside
There's a mystery about the armed burglar who appeared at the bedside of a guest in the Bounder's house one night last week.
The guest in question was a fearful old bore called Sir Frederick Frump. Mr. Vernon-Smith, who knew him in the City, had invited him down for Christmas; but he decided to stay much longer and did his utmost to spoil everybody's holiday by monopolising the conversation with stories of his amazing bravery in the face of danger in many parts of the world.
As yarns, they wouldn't have been bad, had they been true. But it was so obvious that Sir Frederick was drawing largely on his imagination that nobody derived the slightest pleasure from them.
On the night of the burglary, by a strange coincidence, Sir Frederick had been talking of burglars. Apparently, he had encountered any number of armed burglars and treated them all in the same way—with a smashing left that had knocked them into the middle of the following week!
Well, on this particular night, he met one more.
He awoke to find a masked man standing at his bedside, too pleased to shake the dust of the Bounder's home from his feet.
The rest of the guests were glad, too.
Sir Frederick didn't breathe a word about the burglar.
How do we know about him, then? Why, the Bounder told us!
How the Bounder came to know everything is nobody's business!

'LONZY'S LITTLE LETTERS
Dear Editor,—My behaviour is ordinarily, I apprehend, exempt from any suspicion of intractability; but I find it difficult, nay, well-nigh impossible, to preserve my characteristic restraint in referring to the hostility which I have unwittingly aroused by the execution of an act of altruism, conducive, I maintain, to nothing but social amelioration.
You are cognizant, dear Editor, of the fact that the purity of the atmosphere has been recently vitiated through its suffusion by illumination and plunged the neighbourhood into Stygian obscurity. With the intention of assisting in the dissipation of this insalubrious and fuliginous atmospheric adumbration, I have been visiting junior studies during the absence of the occupants and effecting the extinction of such coal fires as I discovered therein. To my inexpressible dismay, this supererogatory performance has resulted not in congratulation, but in vociferous abuse. I conceive that such obscurantism among my juvenile acquaintances is to me incomprehensible.
Yours for atmospheric lucidity,
ALONZO TODD.

This Week's Bright Remark
Dicky Nugent and young Paget both want to be wireless operators aboard ship when they grow up and their conversation is full of unintentional wireless allusions as per example herewith, collected one day last week:
"I don't care a DASH for you, young Nugent!"
"If you say that you a DOT on the eye!"
Note that their mutual interest in radio topics doesn't make them any more peaceable—
MORSE the pity!

GREYFRIARS FACTS WHILE YOU WAIT!
Tom Rodman is familiar with the old smugglers' caves in Pegg Bay, and once guided the famous five tars on a treasure hunting expedition. They found nothing but rusty iron bands which might at one time have bound a treasure chest!

WOULD YOU BELIEVE IT?
Geoff Beagnald Tompkins, the Upper Fourth captain, had his photograph taken prior to a match with the Remove. Temple looked very "atty" before the game started—but when it ended he looked a freak! Remove won.

DICKY NUGENT'S WEEKLY WISDOM
They say Horace Coker's unpopular because he's too fond of interfering; but I don't believe myself that he's disliked simply because he has a finger in everybody's pie. The real trouble is that he usually manages to put his foot in it, too!

Most Suitable!
After inspecting a bottle of ink over himself, Snopoc can find nothing that will remove the traces from his beard.
May we suggest sand-paper!

GREYFRIARS HERALD
January 6th, 1934.

See the Point, Fishy?
Fisherman T. Fish has lost his horn-rimmed specs.
But you're quite mistaken, dear reader, if you imagine that this is the first time he's been looking in vision!

WOULD YOU BELIEVE IT?
It is rumoured among the "Gosling" school porters, that Gosling has obtained his hundredth room on a special Havana brand. He was not pleased when he tried to claim this room, as he found a chocolate one substituted in its place. He left a note claiming 60 odd years' experience in the business, but with certificates to prove it.

WOULD YOU BELIEVE IT?
Sammy Sutor has a great weakness for mince-meat and was raided the Remove studies in search of it! Bolsy's heavy hand speedily dispatched Sammy back to the fog quarters—minus the mince-meat!

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