

Grand Christmas Week Number!

The **MAGNET**

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The **MIDNIGHT PROWLER!**

(Read the Amazing Yuletide Adventures of Harry Wharton & Co.—inside.)



HUNTED DOWN!

THE FIRST CHAPTER.

A Change in the Dark!

"BOB!"
 "Mmmmm!"
 "Wake up, you ass!"
 "Eh!"

"Wake up, you dummy!" grunted Billy Bunter.

Bob Cherry woke up. Bob was a fairly sound sleeper. But he could not help waking up when a fat hand was clawing over his face in the dark.

He woke up in great astonishment. He turned his face up from the pillow and blinked in the darkness. A chilly draught told him that the door of his room was open. A whispering voice and a fat clawing hand told that Billy Bunter was at his bedside. But he could see nothing.

The hour was late. But the Greyfriars party at Hilton Hall had not been long in bed. An alarm of an escaped convict from Blackmoor Prison, a mile away across the moor, had kept the household astir to a very late hour. Bob's eyes had closed almost the moment his head was on the pillow. Now they were open again. A fat thumb had poked into one of them!

"What the thump—" gasped Bob Cherry.

"Don't make a row, you fathead!" "Is that you, Bunter, you blithering idiot? What the dickens are you doing out of bed, you benighted burler?"

The fat paw was withdrawn from Bob's startled face. There was a faint glimmer of a big pair of spectacles in the gloom. Billy Bunter bent over the awakened junior.

"I say—" he whispered. "You howling ass!" hissed Bob.

"What have you woken me up for?" "Don't yell!" whispered Bunter.

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BY

FRANK RICHARDS.

Bob Cherry sat up. Bang!

"Yaroooh!" roared Billy Bunter. Bob, naturally, could not see a fat face bending over him in the darkness. As he sat up his head established sudden contact with a fat little nose. He jumped.

"Oh!" gasped Bob. "I've knocked my head on something!"

"Ow! Wow! It was my nose, you beast!" howled Bunter. "Wow! You've smashed it! Yow-wow! You've banged it right through my napper! Wow!"

Bob Cherry chuckled. Sitting up in bed he pulled the blankets round him. The December night was bitterly cold. Now that he was wide awake he had a faint glimpse of the fat figure at his bedside. Billy Bunter was clasping both hands to his injured nose and spluttering with anguish.

"Ow! Wow! Beast! Wow!" "Hurt?" asked Bob cheerfully.

"Ow! Yes! Wow! Fearfully! Ow!" "Good!"

"Beast! Wow! Ow!" "I'll hurt you some more, if you don't clear off and let a fellow go to sleep!"

said Bob, groping for his pillow. "It's past midnight, you blithering bandersnatch! What's this game, you shrieking ass?"

After a tiring day and bed at a late hour, it was not pleasant to be jerked suddenly out of balmy slumber. Bob Cherry was wrathful. But he was more surprised than wrathful.

In the adjoining rooms the other Greyfriars fellows—Harry Wharton and Frank Nugent, Johnny Bull and Hurree

Singh—were fast asleep. Bob had been fast asleep. As a rule, Billy Bunter would have been fastest asleep of all. Instead of which, the fat Owl of Greyfriars was awake—and stirring, probably the only fellow who was stirring in all the great establishment of Hilton Hall.

Outside the wild December wind whirled snowflakes on the moor and whistled round roofs and chimney-pots. It moaned and echoed in nooks and crannies of the ancient building.

Certainly it was not a night to tempt any fellow out of a warm bed. Least of all Billy Bunter! Yet here was Bunter, awake and up!

"What is it—nightmare?" asked Bob. "Too many mince pies? I warned you to stop at three dozen."

"Beast! Look here, Bob—" "Wait a minute till I get my pillow."

"You don't want your pillow—" "I do!"

"What for, you fathead?" "To bash you on your silly napper!"

Billy Bunter jumped back from the bedside.

"I say, Bob, old chap—" "Get out and let a fellow go to sleep!"

"But I want—" "You want this pillow?"

"No, you idiot!" hissed Bunter. "I want you to change rooms with me."

"Wha-a-a-t?" ejaculated Bob. He stared at Bunter in the thick gloom. He could see little of him but a glimmer of spectacles. But he could make out that the fat Owl of the Remove was dressed. Apparently Bunter had not been to bed yet.

"Change rooms?" repeated Bob in sheer amazement.

"Yes, old fellow!" "Why?" hooted Bob.

"Well, mine's a better one than this!" said Bunter. "There's a fire in

it, too! I've kept up the fire. You'll be more comfortable there."

"My only hat!" said Bob Cherry.

Whatever might be Billy Bunter's mysterious reason for awakening him, that reason was not a regard for his comfort. Bunter, as usual, was prevaricating!

"You'll do it, won't you, old chap?" whispered Bunter.

"No, you ass! No, you fathead! Leave off trying to pull my leg and go back to bed!" growled Bob.

"Oh, really, Cherry—"

"Bunk!"

"What I mean is, I'd rather have this room. You see, Hilton fixed up the rooms for us, and Price knows which is which, of course."

"Price?" repeated Bob in wonder.

"That cad Price of the Fifth, you know—"

"Are you off your rocker?" demanded Bob.

He really began to wonder whether the fat Owl of the Remove was wandering in his podgy mind.

Harry Wharton & Co. were at Hilton Hall as the guests of Cedric Hilton of the Fifth Form at Greyfriars. Price of the Fifth was Hilton's chum at school, and he also was a guest at the Hall.

Hilton, it was to be supposed, wanted the Famous Five as he had asked them for Christmas. Price, they knew, did not. But what Price wanted was a matter of very little moment to the cheery chums of the Remove.

But both Hilton and Price, doubtless, were fast asleep in bed. What was worrying Bunter was a deep mystery; unless he was going off his rocker.

"You utter ass!" said Bob. "What do you mean? Price doesn't want us here, I know that; but do you think a Fifth Form man would come ragging a fellow in the middle of the night? Is that it?"

"Yes—I mean, no—"

"You fancy that Price is up to some lark, and you want me to get it instead of you?" demanded Bob.

"Oh! No! Nothing of the sort! I mean—"

"Well, what do you mean, you howling ass? If you're afraid of Price, why can't you lock your door?"

"The key's gone."

"Oh!" said Bob.

"And—and it's not Price!" mumbled Bunter. "I—I'm not afraid of Price. I—I mean—I—I want you to change because—because—"

"Afraid of that escaped convict?" grinned Bob.

"Yes, that's it! I—I'm rather nervous of that—that convict! You know, he was seen near the house—we saw him looking in at the window at supper, and you remember Walsingham, the butler, fainted he was so funky. I wasn't funky, of course—"

"You crawled under the table because you weren't funky?" asked Bob.

"Beast! I—I mean, I—I want you to change rooms, old chap! You see, as there's no key in my lock—"

"Oh, rot!" growled Bob. "As if the convict could get into the house, you ass! If he did, he would make for the grub—he wouldn't want to come to your room! Go back and go to sleep!"

"Beast!"

"Clear off and don't be an ass!"

"Shan't! Look here, let me have the bedclothes, and I'll turn in in the armchair here. You can keep one blanket."

Bob Cherry drew a deep breath. He wanted to go to sleep, and he did not want to turn out of bed on a bitter winter night. But it was clear that Billy Bunter was afraid to sleep

in his own room, whether he feared a jape from Price of the Fifth, or a visit from Convict No. 33—or both! Bob was always good-natured, and though changing rooms in the middle of the night was not a comfortable proceeding, it was undoubtedly more comfortable than having Bunter in the same room.

"Fathead! Ass! Fat fooling frump!" growled Bob. "You can have my bed. Turn on the light."

"I—I say, he might see the light and—and guess—"

"Who might?"

"That cad Price—I mean, the convict—that is, nobody!" gasped Bunter. "I say, you don't want a light! The room's next to this! You're not afraid of the dark, are you?"

"Idiot!"

Bob Cherry turned out of bed. He groped for a dressing-gown and slippers, and put them on in the dark. Then, with an expressive grunt, he groped out of the room.

Click!

The key turned in the door behind him. Billy Bunter gave a gasp of relief. He was cold and sleepy, and he wanted to slumber, but he wanted to slumber behind a locked door. Once the door was locked the fat Owl of the Remove lost no time. His fat head

Somewhere on the snow-covered waste of Blackmoor lurks an escaped convict. Though he is hunted relentlessly, the neighbourhood of Hilton Hall, where Harry Wharton & Co. are staying for Christmas, seems to have a special attraction for him. What is the mystery of Convict No. 33?

was on the pillow, and he was beginning to snore almost before Bob had reached the other room.

THE SECOND CHAPTER.

Stephen Price Means Business!

"NO!" said Hilton of the Fifth. "Yes!" said Price coolly. Cedric Hilton gave a grunt of annoyance. At home, under his father's roof, Hilton was not, perhaps, so much under Price's influence as at school. But his easy nature generally followed the line of least resistance.

Late as the hour was, the dandy of the Fifth and his friend had not yet gone to bed. They were sitting up late in Hilton's den—a very handsomely appointed room.

Hilton, leaning back in the easiest of easy-chairs, with one elegantly trousered leg crossed over the other, held a smoking cigarette between finger and thumb. He was in evening clothes, and the electric light gleamed on his spotless shirtfront and diamond stud. Very handsome and elegant he looked—and was no doubt conscious of the same.

Stephen Price also was in evening clothes; but he looked neither handsome nor elegant in them. In any clothes, Price always looked a bit of a "bounder," and when a fellow looks a

bounder, evening clothes generally make him look more so. So Price looked more so than usual.

There was a determined expression on his thin, rather foxy face. Quite different from the easy-going dandy of the Fifth, Price always knew exactly what he wanted, and meant to get it. At the bottom of his heart he knew that Hilton did not care much for him, and would not have missed him if he had not been there. The friendship existed because it suited Price, and Hilton was too lazy and indolent to think for himself.

Price had laid his cigarette down on an ashtray, and was sorting over a pile of fancy costumes.

There was going to be a fancy-dress dance at Hilton Hall on Boxing Night, and Hilton had a rather large and varied assortment of costumes in his den, which he had not yet troubled to look at.

Price was looking at them. He grinned as he picked out a suit with broad-arrows marked on it and a convict cap.

"Look at that, Cedric!" said Price, holding it up. "I told them specially to put that in when we went down to Okeham about the things."

"Rotten idea!" drawled Hilton.

"Jolly good idea, I think. As there's an escaped convict waudering about the moors, a fellow got up as a convict will make rather a sensation, I think."

"Shouldn't wonder! But—"

"I fancy it will be the only one!" said Price.

"Bet on that!" said Hilton. "Shouldn't care for it myself. Please yourself, though."

He sat up, blew out a little cloud of smoke, and stared at Price. That youth was putting on the convict garb over his own clothes.

"What's the game?" asked Hilton, puzzled. "You're not gettin' dressed up ready for Boxing Night, I suppose?"

"I'm getting dressed up for to-night," answered Price coolly.

"What the dooce—"

"I'm dropping in on Bunter, as I've told you."

"I've said no to that!" said Hilton, frowning a little.

"And I've said yes!" answered Price. "What the thump did you have that fat freak here for, except to get that letter off him?"

"Oh, bother the letter!" said Hilton irritably. "I dare say the fat brute will give it back to me if I give him a good time here."

Price sneered. He sat down on the arm of an armchair, and looked at his friend, and lighted a fresh cigarette.

"Have a little sense, Cedric!" he said quietly. "You're in a hole, though in your usual way you'd like to shove it out of your mind, and not think about it. That fat brute pinched a letter you dropped at school—a letter from the butler here, Walsingham. You've asked Walsingham to lend you money, as he's done before: That was in the letter—and mention of debts that you'd find it hard to explain, either to your father or to the Head!"

"I know all that!" granted Hilton, his handsome face clouding. "But what's the good of meetin' troubles half-way?"

"This one has got to be met! Bunter traded on having that letter to make you ask him here for Christmas. He knows that that letter would get you the sack from Greyfriars—and land you in a fearful row with your

father. He's got you right under his thumb so long as he keeps it; and he's not likely to part with it. It's going to be taken from him."

Hilton made an uncomfortable movement.

"I don't like the idea! After all, he's a guest here, of sorts."

"That's rot! Would you have asked that grubby fag here if he hadn't got you under his thumb?" snapped Price.

"Of course not. But—"

"I'm in this as well as you!" said Price. "If that letter comes to light, your game is up at the school—and very likely mine, too. If things come out, I'm done for as well as you. If you don't want to save your skin, I want to save mine!"

Hilton grunted.

"I've pinched the key from his room," went on Price. "He won't be able to lock his door. He's got the letter with him—in his pockets or in his bag. I'm gettin' after it. What's the objection? It's not his, is it? He would have given it back to you if he hadn't been a dishonourable young scoundrel!"

"He's more fool than rogue."

"Very likely; but, fool or rogue, he's got us both under his thumb, because he's pinched that letter Walsingham wrote you at the school. You'll be glad enough when I come back with that letter, and you can chuck it in the fire here."

"That's true enough—jolly glad!" admitted Hilton. "But, look here, Price, it won't do! I tell you no! Suppose the fat idiot wakes up while you're in his room and raises the alarm? How's it to be explained to my father, and the mater—yes, and to the servants, too? It can't be done!"

"That's why I'm putting on this jolly old fancy dress," Price grinned. "Bunter knows there's an escaped convict hanging about—he was scared out of his wits when the man's face was seen at the window at supper. If he wakes up, he's not going to see Price of the Fifth—he's going to see a giddy convict. And you can bet he'll be too scared to raise any alarm."

"Oh gad!" ejaculated Hilton. "Is that the game?"

"That's the game," said Price coolly. "Everybody's fast asleep now, and nobody will see me in this rig—only Bunter, if he wakes up. If he spins a yarn of seeing a convict in his room, it will be set down to nightmare and funk. Anyhow nobody will know that I had a hand in it."

"Somebody may be up yet. Walsingham was fearfully alarmed about that johnny from Blackmoor staring in at the window, and he may—"

"No good makin' difficulties. I'm goin'."

Hilton grunted again and resumed smoking. Price, standing before a tall glass, proceeded to don the costume. Over his own clothes it made him look larger, and certainly no one would have recognised his rather thin and meagre figure in the loose garments.

He sorted out a make-up box and opened it. Hilton's clouded face broke into a grin as he watched him dabbing at his face before the glass.

Price was rather skilful in private theatricals. His own features and appearance vanished under a few dabs of make-up.

In a few minutes he turned a face on Hilton that looked ten years older than his own. His light eyebrows were hidden under thick dark bushy ones; his chin looked unshaven and stubbly; the

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convict cap completely concealed his hair.

"How's that?" grinned Price.

"Good gad!" Hilton stared at him. "Your twin brother wouldn't know you, Priccy! If I met you like that I'd swear you were the man who got away from Blackmoor Prison."

Price chuckled.

"I fancy Bunter will think so!" he remarked.

"You may frighten the fat duffer out of his wits!" said Hilton uneasily.

"A fellow who pinches a letter and holds it over a fellow's head can take his chance of that!" said Price coolly.

"I don't like the idea!"

"Bow-wow!"

Price took a last look in the glass, crossed to the door, and quietly left the "den." He closed the door after him, leaving Cedric Hilton to rather unpleasant thoughts.

It was true that he was eager, anxiously eager, to recover possession of that letter from his father's butler, which Bunter had "snaffled" in the Greyfriars quad. It was true that he did not want Billy Bunter at Hilton Hall and would have been glad to boot him out. But he "jibbed" at this kind of thing under his father's roof.

As usual, however, he gave in to Price, and he remained in his den, smoking cigarettes, while that youth crept away by dark passages through a silent, sleeping house.

Stephen Price had no scruples and no hesitation. Certainly he did not want Bunter to spot him in his room in his own person.

But in this disguise there was no danger of that. His nearest relative could not have recognised Price now.

The fact that an escaped convict from Blackmoor was known to be lurking near Hilton Hall was a stroke of luck, from Price's point of view. It made his disguise plausible.

Price crept quietly to the oaken gallery above the hall, along which he had to pass to reach the juniors' quarters. The hall below was a well of darkness. Not a light was burning in the great building at that hour, nearly two o'clock in the morning. He knew Bunter's room; he had made a special note of it and had, indeed, removed the key from the door so that the fat Owl could not lock himself in. All was plain sailing, so far as Price of the Fifth could see.

Suddenly he stopped, his heart beating. Ahead of him in the dark gallery there was a sound.

Price felt an uneasy thrill.

Someone was moving—moving in the dark! Who could be up at that hour, and without a light?

He stopped dead. The thought of the escaped convict, No. 33, of Blackmoor Prison, flashed uncomfortably into his mind. The man had been seen lurking about the house that evening, and it had been supposed that he was there to watch for some chance of getting food or clothes. Suppose he had found a way into the house in the small hours?

Price hardly breathed. Who could it be moving in the darkness, unless—

A light, the sudden beam of an electric torch, flashed out into his face, startling and dazzling him. A hand dropped on his shoulder, and he gave a suppressed, startled gasp.

"Richard! It is you, Richard—you here!"

Price gave a panting cry of mingled relief and amazement. The voice was the voice of Francis Walsingham, the butler of Hilton Hall.

THE THIRD CHAPTER.

In the Dead of Night!

"WALSINGHAM!" panted Price. He knew the rich, fruity voice of the butler; but he could hardly make out the portly figure behind the glare of the light.

Holding the electric torch in one hand, Walsingham grasped Price's shoulder with the other.

He was staring hard at the made-up face of the Greyfriars senior. It seemed to Price at the moment that Walsingham was staring at his face in the expectation of recognising it. If so, he certainly did not recognise it.

"It's all right, Walsingham!" gasped Price. "Don't be alarmed—it's me—Price! Don't you know my voice?"

"Price! What—"

"It's a fancy costume—make-up! You know my voice! For goodness' sake don't give an alarm—there's nothing to be alarmed about! It's me—Price—Hilton's pal—"

Price panted out the words hurriedly. He was in dread of the alarmed butler awakening the house. He could only suppose that Walsingham had taken him for the Blackmoor convict; though why the butler had addressed him as "Richard" was beyond his understanding.

The grasp fell from his shoulder. Walsingham, no doubt, recognised his voice. But he kept the light on Price's face.

"Mr. Price!" he stammered.

"Yes!" Price forced a laugh. "It's a joke, Walsingham—I've made myself up in the costume I'm going to wear on Boxing Night, that's all."

"Oh!" gasped Walsingham. "You—you gave me a—a dreadful start, Mr. Price! I could never have known you—indeed, I do not know you now, only your voice. You startled me terribly, sir."

"Well, you startled me!" answered Price. "I hadn't the faintest idea that anybody was up! What the thump were you rooting about here in the dark for, Walsingham, at two in the morning?"

The butler did not reply immediately. He kept the light so that Price could not see his face. But the Fifth Former of Greyfriars knew that he was pale, and he could hear him breathing hard as if with difficulty. It was evident that Walsingham had had a severe shock.

Price grinned.

"You took me for the Blackmoor man?" he asked.

"Who else could I take you for, sir, in that outfit?" said Walsingham. "The fact is, I feared that the man might still be lingering about the house, and I have remained up to keep watch in case he should make some attempt to break in."

"I don't see why you should keep watch in the dark," grunted Price. "I shouldn't care to. The fact is, I thought you were the convict when I heard you. Look here, you'd better go to bed, Walsingham, and don't say anything about this in the morning."

"I was about to make the same suggestion to you, sir!" said the butler. "I cannot imagine why you are playing this extraordinary prank in fancy costume; but I am sure that Sir Gilbert Hilton would not approve—"

"That's my business, Walsingham."

"Oh, certainly, sir, but—"

"It's a jape!" said Price. "Just a joke on the Lower School fellows who are staying here. No harm in it."

"Really, sir—"

"Cut it out!" said Price. "It's no business of yours, Walsingham, and I'm

going to carry on. You'd better go to bed."

Price of the Fifth moved on. Walsingham stood watching him as he went, his light following the Fifth Form man.

It was clear that the stately butler of Hilton Hall disapproved strongly of Stephen Price's proceedings. But great man as Walsingham was in the servants' hall, revered by the whole household staff, he had no authority above stairs. And Master Cedric's guest could carry on exactly as he liked, regardless of the stately Walsingham.

And he did!

Walsingham shut off the light as Price turned a corner and disappeared.

He stepped into the room and closed the door noiselessly behind him.

There was a dim red glow of firelight in the room.

Logs had been thrown on the fire at a very late hour, and were still smouldering red, shedding a dim illumination.

Price had an electric flashlamp in his pocket, but he did not need it.

The red glow from the wood fire gave him light enough.

He stepped towards the bed soundlessly, and stared at it. The bed was in deep shadow, and he could only dimly make out the outlines of a figure there. But he could hear the steady breathing

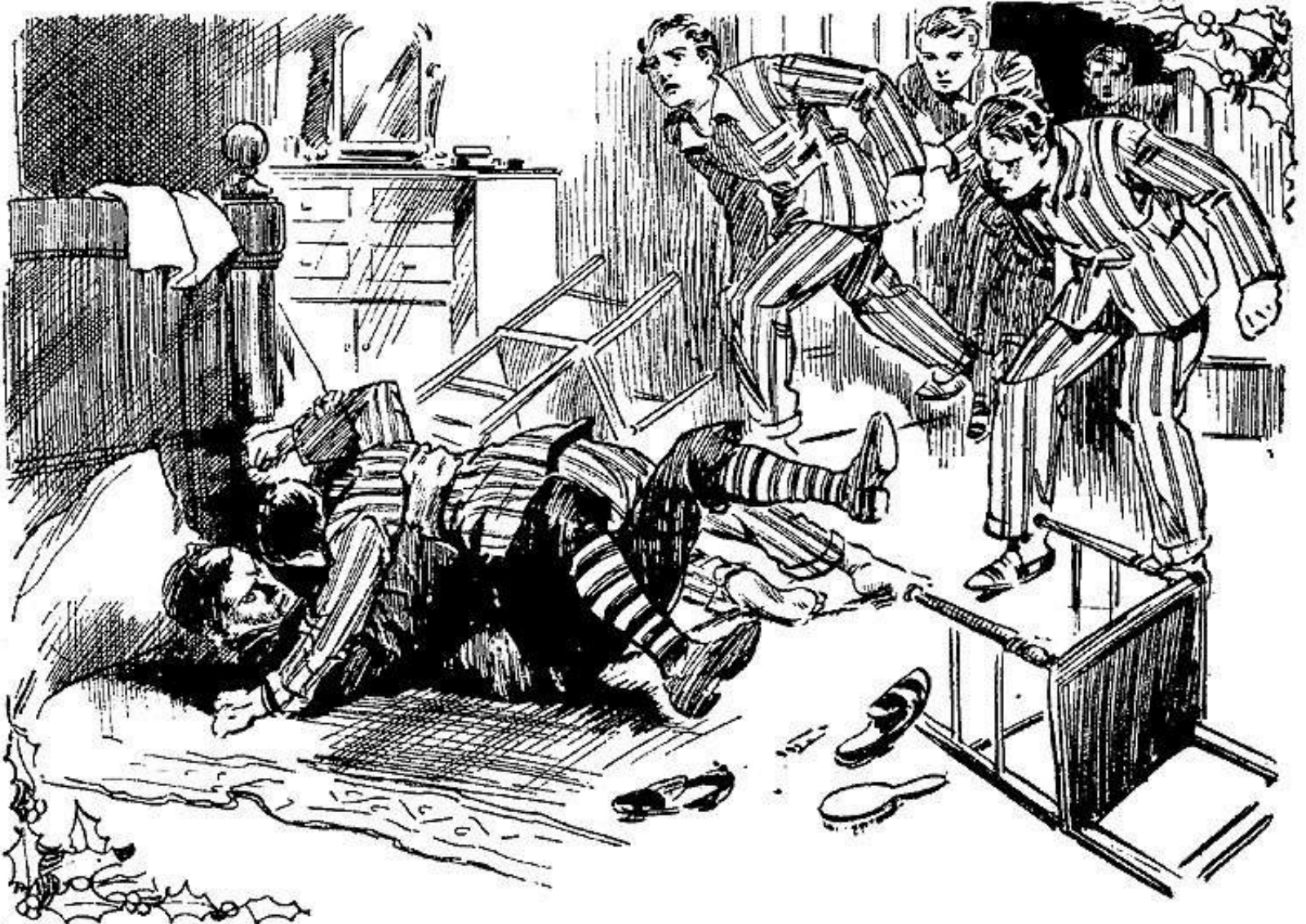
under the clothes, so that nobody could go through the pockets while he slept. He would hardly have suspected the proud and haughty Hilton of such a proceeding; but it was very probable indeed that he suspected Price.

The end of the Fifth began a search of the room for the clothes.

He looked into a wardrobe, where he found a coat—and ran his fingers through the pockets. He examined a chest of drawers, and its sparse contents. Billy Bunter, as usual, was travelling light; depending, as usual, on borrowing from the other fellows anything he might happen to want.

Price breathed hard.

He approached the bed at last. It



As Harry Wharton & Co. rushed into the room, a startling scene met their gaze. Two figures were rolling and struggling in desperate combat on the floor. One of them—Bob Cherry was in pyjamas, but the other—it was a black-browed, stubbly-faced figure in convict garb! "The convict!" yelled Wharton. "Come on!"

Whether the butler went to his room or not Price did not know, and cared little.

He was annoyed by the chance meeting, which gave his game away if Bunter woke up and found the "convict" in his room. Still, he had told the butler to hold his tongue about it, and a word from Cedric Hilton would probably be sufficient to ensure Walsingham's silence.

Quietly Price of the Fifth stepped along the corridor, on which opened the rooms tenanted by the Greyfriars juniors.

He reached the door of Bunter's room.

Softly he turned the handle and opened it. He grinned as he did so. No doubt the fat Owl would have locked his door had there been a key to it; but Price had taken care that there was no key.

of a sleeper. The occupant of the bed was fast asleep.

Satisfied of that, Price looked round for Bunter's clothes. Utterly ignorant of the fact that Billy Bunter had changed rooms with Bob Cherry, and gone to Bob's room fully dressed, he naturally expected to find the clothes at hand. Most likely the letter was in one of the pockets, and, if so, his task was easy enough.

But there were no clothes to be seen. Bunter had gone dressed to Bob's room, and Bob had come to Bunter's room with a dressing-gown over his pyjamas. That, of course, could not possibly occur to Price, who had not the remotest idea that it was not Bunter in the bed at all.

He gritted his teeth with anger. Likely enough, Bunter had feared a surreptitious nocturnal visit to his room. Likely enough, in that case, he had

looked to him as if Bunter must have taken the clothes to bed with him, to keep them safe from searching hands. Really, it was difficult to imagine what else could have become of them.

He stood for some moments, hesitating.

The steady breathing showed that the occupant of the bed was sleeping soundly. Had Price been in the Remove at Greyfriars instead of the Fifth, he would have been surprised not to hear a deep, rumbling snore as he stood by Bunter's bedside. But a Fifth Form man was unaware that every night in the term the Remove dormitory echoed to Billy Bunter's heavy snore. Not for a second did it cross his mind that it was not Bunter in Bunter's bed in Bunter's room.

Still, he hesitated. The soundest

sleeper was bound to awaken if a fellow started searching the bed in which he slumbered.

He had to chance it! After all, he had taken his precautions. The fat junior's awakening eyes would see only a convict, bearing no resemblance whatever to Price of the Fifth! And it was certain that the sight of the convict in the glimmering firelight would strike the fat Owl dumb with terror. There was nothing to be feared.

He made up his mind at last, bent over the sleeper hidden in shadow, and grasped his shoulder. And as the sleeper stirred into wakefulness he snapped, in a gruff voice quite unlike his own:

"Silence! Silence! I am desperate! Silence!"

Which, from a scowling convict, would have been enough, more than enough, for Billy Bunter; but was not quite enough for Bob Cherry!

THE FOURTH CHAPTER.

A Sudden Alarm!

HARRY WHARTON started suddenly out of slumber.

He sat up in bed.

He had been dreaming, and the alarm-bell which had rung out that night across the lonely wastes of Blackmoor had mingled with his dreams. As he sat up, half-awake, he seemed to hear it now; but as his mind swiftly cleared he realised that it was some other sound that had awakened him. Sounds of scuffling and bumping echoed in the night, and a shouting, panting voice:

"Help!"

It was Bob Cherry's voice.

"Rescue, Greyfriars!" came Bob's roar.

Harry Wharton bounded out of bed. Another bound carried him to his door, and he tore it open.

"Help!" came the roar. "Rescue!"

Other doors opened as Wharton flashed on the corridor light. Frank Nugent, Johnny Bull, and Hurree Jamset Ram Singh came running out of their rooms in their pyjamas, their faces startled and excited.

"What's the row?" gasped Nugent.

"That's Bob!" exclaimed Johnny Bull.

"This way!" panted Harry.

"Hold on—it's from Bunter's room!" exclaimed Nugent. "Bob's there!"

"Help! Back up!" came Bob's panting roar.

Amazing as it was to his friends, it came, plainly enough, from Bunter's room, not from Bob's. And they dashed down the passage to Bunter's door.

Wharton reached it first, and hurled it open.

A startling scene met his gaze in the red glow of the wood fire. Two figures were rolling and struggling in desperate combat on the floor.

One of them was in pyjamas—that was Bob Cherry. But the other—

The juniors could hardly believe their eyes as they saw the other. It was a black-browed, stubbly faced figure in convict garb!

Wharton gave a yell:

"The convict!"

"What!"

"Come on!"

Wharton bounded into the room.

The struggle was fierce. But the convict, apparently, was trying only to tear himself loose.

He succeeded, as Wharton arrived, wrenching himself from Bob's grasp, and bounding to the door.

He crashed into Wharton, as the captain of the Remove rushed in. Wharton staggered back, grasping at him.

But the fugitive dodged his grasp and dashed out into the passage.

There was a yell from the three juniors there.

"The convict!"

Johnny Bull, the nearest, grabbed at him, and barely missed. Panting, the figure in convict garb raced away down the passage towards the oak gallery over the hall.

"It's the convict—the man from Blackmoor!" panted Nugent.

Bob Cherry staggered up.

"After him!" he gasped. "After him! It's the escaped convict!" He leaned on the wall gulping for breath. Wharton stared round.

"Where's Bunter?" he exclaimed.

"He's not here—we changed rooms—he was funky of the convict!" gasped Bob. "Of course, I never fancied there was anything in it. I went to sleep here—oh, my hat!" He gurgled for breath. "And—and I was woke up! He grabbed me by the shoulder and woke me up! He yapped at me to be silent, and I landed out and got him on the nose. Goodness knows what he wanted; but it's the convict—the Blackmoor man! I knocked him over, and—and—"

"Come on!" yelled Johnny Bull, from the passage.

Without waiting to hear more from Bob, Harry Wharton dashed out of the room. Bob, still gasping from the struggle, hurried after him as fast as he could.

"This way!" roared Johnny Bull. He was already in pursuit, and he shouted back from the corner of the passage where it opened on the oak gallery over the hall.

Wharton raced after him. Nugent had switched on the light in the gallery.

"Where?" panted Wharton.

"He cut across—"

"Downstairs—"

"No! Up that passage—it leads to Hilton's room, I think—"

"Come on!" panted Wharton.

"We'll wake Hilton and Price—"

The light in the hall below flashed on as they ran along the gallery. From below, Walsingham stared up with an amazed face.

"Young gentlemen—" he called out.

"That the butler? Call the servants!" shouted Wharton. "It's the convict! He's in the house!"

"What is this?" A stout, white-whiskered gentleman, with a red face, clad in a voluminous dressing-gown, emerged from one of the corridors that opened on the oak gallery. He had a golf club in his hand. "What—"

Evidently the uproar had startled Sir Gilbert Hilton out of the land of dreams. He stared almost in stupefaction at the juniors.

"It's the convict, sir!" gasped Nugent.

"The esteemed and ridiculous desperado who has escaped from Blackmoor Prison, venerable sir!" panted Hurree Jamset Ram Singh.

Sir Gilbert jumped.

"Good gad! In the house?"

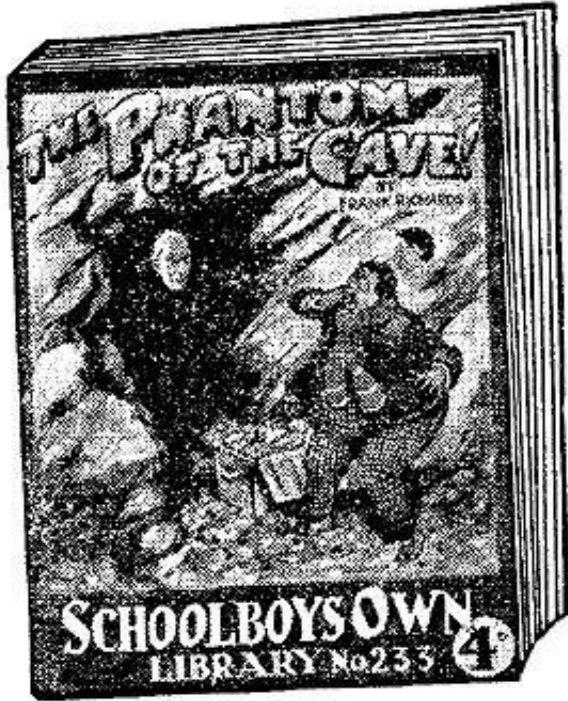
"Yes!"

"You've seen him?" gasped Sir Gilbert.

"Yes, yes! He's dodged up that passage—towards your son's room!"

"Good heavens! He may—" Sir Gil-

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bert Hilton rushed along the gallery, golf club in hand, his plump red face full of alarm. Evidently he was deeply alarmed by the possibility that his son might be in danger.

He whisked along at great speed, his dressing-gown flying about him like stagsails in a wind!

Walsingham was coming up the stairs. But nobody heeded Walsingham.

Sir Gilbert and the Famous Five rushed up the corridor that led to Cedric Hilton's rooms.

Far up the corridor, a door had opened and light streamed out into the dark passage.

Into that lighted doorway a running, panting figure was seen to whisk. It was a figure in convict garb!

The door shut.
"That is Cedric's den!" gasped Sir Gilbert. "He is not gone to bed yet, it seems! And the convict—follow me! For Heaven's sake, hurry!"

He fairly raced up the corridor, gripping his golf club. At his heels raced the chums of the Remove; unarmed, but prepared to handle the desperado with their bare hands if they got at him. Far in the rear, the portly Walsingham panted after them.

THE FIFTH CHAPTER.

Only Price!

CEDRIC HILTON bounded from his chair.

Ash from his cigarette dropped unheeded on his white shirt-front. He spun round towards his door as it was hurled open and Price of the Fifth, in his convict outfit rushed breathlessly in, and slammed the door after him.

"What the dooce!" roared Hilton, startled almost out of his wits.

Price panted for breath, but did not answer. He was fumbling with the key in the door. There was a click as he turned it with an unsteady hand.

Then he leaned on the door almost sobbing for breath.

Hilton stared at him, dumbfounded.

Already an echo of footsteps reached him from the passage without.

"What—" he shouted.

"Oh, shut up!" panted Price. "Shut up! Oh crumbs!" He gasped and panted.

The make-up on his face was badly smudged. Crimson that was not part of it, mingled with it now. It proceeded from Price's nose, which seemed to have got damaged.

It was plain that Price had been engaged in a struggle. His convict cap was on one side of his ruffled, tousled head—his nose oozed crimson; he was rumpled and dishevelled from head to foot.

"You ass!" said Hilton. "You utter ass! Have you roused up the whole house with your foolery? Have you let Bunter knock you about like that?"

"It wasn't Bunter—it was that hefty brute, Cherry!" panted Price.

"You got into the wrong room?" snapped Hilton contemptuously. "Pretty asinine sort of thing to do."

"No! I can't understand it—but it wasn't Bunter there—it was Bunter's room, but not Bunter—it was that hefty young ruffian—"

Hurrying footsteps stopped at the door of Hilton's den. The door-handle turned, and there was a crashing knock on the panels.

"Cedric! Cedric!"

Hilton gritted his teeth as his father's voice called. He gave Price a black and bitter look. Evidently the house was alarmed.

"Cedric!" shouted the old baronet, hammering.

"Yes, father?"

"Cedric! You're safe?"

"Yes! Quite! What's the matter?" called back Hilton to gain time.

Price staggered away from the door.

"Is he in there?"

"He! Who?"

"The convict!"

Hilton forced a laugh.

"No convicts here, father! I'm all right!"

"Why do you not open the door, Cedric? I saw him run into the room—you must have seen him—"

"Oh, you fool! You fool!" breathed Hilton, glaring at Price. "How are we going to explain this? You fool!"

"He's in there!" It was Bob Cherry's

TOLD ROUND THE YULE LOG!

TOUGH
LUCK!



Tommy (to butcher): "Mother sent this steak back. She said it's so tough she could sole our boots with it!"

Butcher: "Then why didn't she?"

Tommy: "The nails wouldn't go through it!"

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voice outside. "I saw him run into that room—"

"I saw him!" came Wharton's voice.

"The secfulness was terrific."

"The whole crew up!" breathed Hilton. "What are we to do?"

"Open the door, Cedric!" shouted Sir Gilbert Hilton. "Were you asleep, or what? The man is in your room—open the door instantly!"

"Coming!" called back Hilton.

He crossed slowly to the door.

Price stood panting.

Had he escaped to Hilton's room unseen, his trickery might have been kept secret. But the chase had been too hot at his heels for that.

Now that he knew that he had been seen to enter that room, it was obvious that there could be no further concealment. He could have dodged away by another door into Hilton's bed-room; but Hilton would have had to explain.

Hilton's eyes were on him savagely as he went to the door.

"What am I to say?" he breathed. "You fool! You've alarmed the house—we've got to explain. You can think of lies easily enough at Greyfriars; think of one now, sharp."

"Call it a jape on the fags!" muttered Price. "Leave it to me! Let him in—open the door, you ass, before he gets suspicious!"

Hilton unlocked the door and threw it open.

His father strode in with rustling dressing-gown, golf club in hand. Behind him were the Famous Five.

"Hallo, hallo, hallo!" yelled Bob Cherry. "There he is!"

"Good gad! There stands the villain!" gasped Sir Gilbert, and he rushed at Price with golf club uplifted. "Surrender, you scoundrel—lift a finger, and I will strike you to the floor—"

Price jumped back in great alarm.

"Hold on, father!" gasped Hilton.

"It's only Price—"

"What?" gasped Sir Gilbert.

"Only Price—it's a joke—"

"Price!" roared Bob Cherry. "Price of the Fifth! Oh, my hat!"

Sir Gilbert glared at the skulking convict and then stared at his son. He was astonished and angry.

"What do you mean, Cedric?" he snapped. "Are you in your senses? That is the man who escaped from Blackmoor Prison—"

"No, no!"

"He attacked one of these boys in his room!"

"No, no! Only a lark—"

"A lark!" roared Sir Hilton, his face purple. "Cedric! What?"

"Please forgive me, sir!" panted Price. "I'm Price—really I am—Cedric knows, sir! I—I was trying on a costume I've got for the fancy-dress dance on Boxing Day, sir—"

Snort from Sir Gilbert! He was realising now that this skulking convict was Stephen Price of the Fifth Form at Greyfriars; his son's friend. But that did not lessen his anger. Rather it added thereunto.

Harry Wharton & Co. exchanged glances in the doorway. They knew Price's voice and recognised it, though they could not recognise Price himself in his make-up.

"I—I was trying on this—this convict costume, sir," stammered Price, "and—and I thought I—I'd test it, sir. It was rather silly, perhaps, but—but I thought I'd look in on the boys, sir, and—and see if they took me for a real convict—"

"Are you a fool?" roared Sir Gilbert.

"Are you an utter fool?"

"I—I'm awfully sorry—I—I realise now that—that it was a bit thoughtless, sir—"

stammered Price.

"Thoughtless!" roared Sir Gilbert.

"That is not the word, sir, that I should use to describe your conduct in dressing yourself up as a convict when it is known that an escaped convict is in the neighbourhood, and trying to frighten schoolboys in the middle of the night."

"I—I didn't mean to—to—"

"Is this friend of yours in his right senses, Cedric?"

"I—I think so, father!" gasped Hilton.

"I have never heard of such a thing!" snorted Sir Gilbert. "Never! The whole house has been alarmed—the servants are up—Lady Hilton is alarmed—everybody has turned out—and it proves to be a silly practical joke—upon my word! Pah!"

Sir Gilbert seemed to be rather over-looking the fact that the silly practical joker was a guest in the mansion. Courteous old gentleman as he was, his courtesy seemed quite forgotten now.

The juniors stepped quietly away. Now that they knew that the "convict" was only Price of the Fifth playing the fool, they were not wanted there. It was a satisfaction to Bob to remember that he had given the practical joker a hefty one on the nose!

They returned to their rooms.

Sir Gilbert was not in such a hurry to go. He was intensely angry and exasperated. Price's stuttered apologies and regrets were ruthlessly interrupted. Sir Hilton turned to the door where Walsingham was looking in.

"Walsingham! Send the servants back to bed! Go back to bed yourself! Nothing is the matter—only an insensate practical joke played by a boy old enough to know better! There is no occasion for alarm."

"Very good, sir!" murmured Walsingham.

"I—I—I'm really awfully sorry, sir!" stammered the wretched Price.

"I should imagine so!" snapped Sir Gilbert. "Such an absurd prank—such an insensate trick—is beyond my comprehension. Cedric, why are you up at this hour? Why have you not gone to bed long ago?"

Sir Gilbert sniffed. The odour of cigarette smoke in the room was plain enough. Sir Gilbert sniffed, and then snorted.

"You have been sitting up to this hour smoking! Really, Cedric, I have a right to expect you to act more sensibly! Go to bed!"

Sir Gilbert marched off at last.

Hilton did not even say good-night to Price before he went to his room to bed. He only gave him a black look. Price went off to bed scowling savagely. He was not thinking of any further attempt to get that dangerous letter away from Billy Bunter. The fat and fatuous Owl of Greyfriars had beaten him, and for the present Price of the Fifth had to give it up.

THE SIXTH CHAPTER. A Strange Discovery!

"**H**OLD on!"
"What?"
"Footprints!" said Bob Cherry.

It was the morning of Christmas Eve, and Harry Wharton & Co. had been rambling in the keen, frosty air of Blackmoor.

Snow covered the wide, wild moor like a carpet. Far in the distance the high roofs of Blackmoor Prison could be seen against a steely grey sky. On the sky-line, several times, the juniors had spotted a horseman riding, or a warder tramping with a rifle under his arm. The hunt for the escaped convict was still going on. Nothing had yet been seen of Convict No. 33 from Blackmoor since he had so strangely looked in at the window at Hilton Hall.

Snow had fallen again while the juniors were on their ramble, but it had stopped. They were coming up the oak avenue towards the mansion, when Bob Cherry halted and pointed to the tracks in the snow.

The track led away from the avenue through the trees, in the direction of a larch plantation that bordered the open moor.

The sight of the footprints in that spot, a quarter of a mile from the house, rather interested the Greyfriars fellows.

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"The jolly old convict again, what?" asked Johnny Bull.

"Just what I was thinking!" said Bob.

"Most likely he's far enough off by this time!" remarked Frank Nugent. "He would find it fearfully parky, hanging about on the moor."

"The parkiness is rather terrific!" observed Hurree Jamset Ram Singh, stamping his feet in the snow as the other fellows stood looking at the footprints. The dusky Nabob of Bhanipur felt the cold of Blackmoor very keenly.

"Well, they're watching for him," said Bob. "He won't find it easy to get off the moor. They're still hunting for him, which shows that they think he's still around."

"That's so!" agreed Harry Wharton.

"If he's hanging about this show, he ought to be rooted out," said Bob. "He must be pretty desperate by this time, and he might knock anybody on the head to get a change of clothes. Let's trot along this trail and see where it leads."

"Won't do any harm," assented Harry.

The Famous Five turned from the avenue into the trees. The earlier trail had been covered by the snowfall, so where it had started they could not tell. But from the avenue it had evidently been made since the snow ceased to fall, for it ran clearly marked towards the larch plantation.

It was possible, of course, that the tracks had been left by someone belonging to Hilton Hall who had gone for a walk that frosty morning. On the other hand, it was equally possible that they had been left by the desperate man who was known to have been lurking about the place since his escape from prison. In either case, it could do no harm to ascertain where they led. The juniors strolled on, following the trail, which led into a path through the larches.

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

A figure appeared on the path ahead coming towards them.

The juniors burst into a laugh.

It was not a convict figure! It was the portly, stately form of Walsingham, the butler, muffled up in a thick great-coat.

"Oh, my hat!" ejaculated Nugent. "It's the jolly old butler we've been tracking."

The chums of the Remove could not help laughing. It was evident that the footprints they had picked up had been left by the butler of Hilton Hall, who was now coming back from his walk.

Walsingham saluted them respectfully and politely as he came up. He seemed a little surprised by their smiling faces, and Harry Wharton explained.

"We found your footmarks, Mr. Walsingham, and followed them," he said. "We thought Convict No. 33 might have left them."

Walsingham smiled, too.

"What a rotten sell!" said Bob.

"The rottenfulness of the sell is preposterous."

"Perhaps it is just as well, young gentlemen," said Walsingham. "The man who escaped from Blackmoor the other night would probably be very dangerous for schoolboys to meet."

"Oh, we shouldn't mind that!" said Bob. "I fancy the five of us would handle him all right."

Walsingham's portly face became very grave.

"Surely, young gentlemen, you would not seriously think of trying to deal with that dangerous man?" he said.

"Wouldn't we just, if we spotted him!" answered Bob. "I thought I'd

got him in hand the other night, but it turned out to be only that ass Price playing a joke."

"Have you any reason to suppose that the man is still in the vicinity?" asked Walsingham.

"Oh, no, only he turned up here once!" said Bob. "I've wondered a lot why he peeped in at the window that time; I should have thought his game would be to keep out of sight. But we all saw him, at supper, the night we got here."

"No doubt he is gone long ago, sir."

"He's not caught yet."
The butler had come to a halt. There was a trace of uneasiness in his manner that the juniors did not quite understand.

If he was alarmed for their safety, they were not disposed to share that alarm in the least. Five sturdy Greyfriars fellows felt themselves a match for any convict in Blackmoor.

"Well, come on, you men!" said Bob.

"One moment, sir!" said Walsingham. "Please excuse the liberty, but it would be as well for you boys to avoid lonely places on the estate while there is a possibility that the convict is still about."

"Oh, that's all right!" said Bob carelessly.

"I should certainly advise you, sir, not to go on by such a very solitary path as this!" said Walsingham.

"You think the jolly old convict may be skulking in the plantation?" grinned Bob Cherry.

"There is a possibility, sir."

"All the better! It's the very spot he would choose to hide, and if he's there, we'll root him out."

"Please be advised by me!" said Walsingham urgently. "I am sure that Sir Gilbert would be far from pleased at the idea of his son's guests going into any danger."

"Danger be blowed!" said Bob. "In fact, I am sure that Sir Gilbert would be displeased!"

"We shall judge for ourselves about that, Walsingham!" said Harry Wharton coolly. "Come on, you fellows!"

He spoke civilly, but he intended to give Mr. Walsingham a hint to mind his own business! The five juniors walked on by the path through the frozen larches, leaving the butler standing where he was. He did not go on his way, but stood looking after them until they disappeared among the frosty trees.

"Hallo, hallo, hallo!" exclaimed Bob suddenly. "What's this?"

The footprints in the snow ended at the entrance of a little summer-house standing by the path through the plantation.

Apparently Walsingham's walk had extended as far as that spot, and he had then turned back.

In the summer, no doubt, it was a very pleasant spot, but in the depth of winter it was cold and dark, dank and cheerless. The interior of the summer-house was shadowy and bitterly cold, and a good deal of snow had drifted in on the wind.

"A lodging for the night, if the convict knew where to find this place!" remarked Harry Wharton. "Perhaps that's why Walsingham came—to see whether he had been camping here."

"Shouldn't wonder! Let's look!"

Whether Walsingham had entered the summer-house or not, they did not know. But the Famous Five entered it. Having discovered it, they naturally intended to examine the spot. It was quite possible that it had sheltered the hunted man from Blackmoor.

Inside the little building was a



"Stop!" roared Inspector Trevelly, while one of the warders levelled his rifle. Crack! The bullet whizzed barely two inches over the convict's cap. But the warning was unheeded. The fleeing man reached the gap; then he rose in a wild and desperate bound!

wooden seat against the back wall. On the seat lay a bundle.

Bob Cherry fairly jumped at it.

"Look!" he roared.

"My hat!"

The juniors gathered round the bundle in great surprise and interest. How it had come there was a mystery. It could scarcely belong to the convict, if he had even been there. It was wrapped in plain brown paper, and tied with string.

Bob held it up.

"Something soft inside!" he said. "Feels like folded clothes."

"Clothes!" repeated Wharton, with a start.

His eyes gleamed.

"I say, this is jolly queer!" he said. "Is it possible——" He paused.

"Is what possible?" asked Nugent, with a startled glance at the captain of the Remove. The same thought had occurred to his mind.

"That man from Blackmoor needs more than anything else a change of clothes," said Harry quietly. "If there's clothes in that bundle, left here like this——"

Bob Cherry whistled.

"Somebody lending him a hand!" he exclaimed.

"Well, it looks like it."

"By gum! It does!" Bob whistled again. "My hat! Is that why he turned up here after making his escape—does he know somebody in this quarter who might help him out?"

"Looks as if he does!" said Johnny Bull.

"Anyhow, this has got to be jolly well explained!" said Harry Wharton. "I don't think we'd better open the bundle—but Sir Gilbert Hilton has a right to

examine it, and pass it on to the police if he thinks fit. We'd better take it to him."

"That's right!" agreed Bob.

He put the bundle under his arm, and the Famous Five left the summer-house. Greatly excited by that strange discovery, they started for the distant mansion at a run.

Rather to their surprise they passed Walsingham on the path. He was still there, and his eyes went to the bundle under Bob's arm at once. He called to them; but they trotted on without stopping. They were anxious to get that mysterious bundle into the hands of the master of Hilton Hall, and had no time to waste on Walsingham. The portly butler was a good distance behind them when they arrived at the mansion.

THE SEVENTH CHAPTER.

Mysterious!

SIR GILBERT HILTON was standing with his back to the log fire in the hall.

His ruddy face glowed cheerfully. His son lounged by one of the windows, looking out into the snowy grounds. Price was talking to Sir Gilbert—or, rather, listening to him. The red berries of holly branches gleamed on the old oak walls, in the flicker of the firelight. There was a hospitable, cheerful atmosphere of Christmas about Hilton Hall.

The old baronet had been particularly courteous to Price of the Fifth since the night of the convict-costume incident. No doubt he realised that he had expressed himself rather frankly on that

occasion. He was telling Price now about a "kill" with the hounds, and Price manfully suppressed his desire to yawn.

He would have preferred to be in the billiards-room with his pal, but he felt that he could not get away till the end of the story. The end seemed a long way off, for the old gentleman had a way of going back to some forgotten incident in telling a story, and then telling all over again what he had already told. Price did not like seeing Harry Wharton & Co. about the place; but he was rather glad when they came in and the lord of Hilton Hall was interrupted.

Bob Cherry laid the bundle on a table, and Sir Gilbert blinked at it. He opened his eyes wide when he was told where the juniors had found it, and why they had brought it in.

"Gad!" said Sir Gilbert. "Good gad! Cut that string for me, Cedric."

Hilton of the Fifth, rather interested, came over from the window. He took out a little pearl-handled penknife, and cut the string.

The bundle was opened.

All eyes turned very keenly on the contents, as they were unrolled. A suit of clothes came to light; a new, ready-made suit, that evidently had not been worn before. There was a soft hat, and a cap; a pair of boots, and a pair of socks, a couple of collars, and a necktie, and several more such articles. It was, in fact, a complete new outfit of clothes, obviously recently purchased at a shop, or various shops—for everything was quite new.

"Well, my hat!" said Hilton.

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"Not much doubt about it now," said Harry.

"The doubtfulness is not terrific."

"By gad!" said Sir Gilbert, staring at the articles turned out of the bundle. "It's clear enough! That outfit was put in the summer-house to be picked up by the man from Blackmoor. He has a friend in this quarter—that's why he came in this direction when he got away."

"Looks like it, by Jove!" said Price.

"No doubt about it!" said Hilton. "It can't be anybody connected with the household, father."

"Eh! What? No! Of course not," said Sir Gilbert. "Somebody in the vicinity. Impudence to use a place in my grounds for a rendezvous! The police must know of this, and at once. I'll get Inspector Trevelly on the phone." He crossed to the telephone cabinet in the hall.

Walsingham entered by the service doorway. Plump and portly man as he was, he had a soft and almost silent tread.

Bob Cherry called to him.

"Look at this little lot, Walsingham!"

Walsingham was already taking in the articles that lay on the table with the tail of his eye. He faced round as Bob called, and looked at them.

"You'd have found these, if you'd gone into the summer-house!" said Bob, with a laugh.

"In the summer-house, sir!" said Walsingham.

"Yes, where you had your walk. We found them in a bundle on the seat."

"Dear me! Did you really, sir?" asked Walsingham. "What a very extraordinary thing! To whom can they belong?"

"I dare say the police would like to know that!" chuckled Bob. "But there's no doubt to whom they were going to belong! They must have been left there for the jolly old convict to pick up."

Walsingham started.

"Impossible, sir!"

"Rot!" said Hilton. "It's as clear as daylight, Walsingham! What else can an outfit of clothes have been put in that lonely place for?"

"But nothing has been seen of the man, Master Cedric—"

"Something will be seen of him, I fancy!" remarked Price. "The police are sure to watch the place, and nab him when he comes to pick up that bundle."

"Yes, rather!" agreed Bob.

"And they'll get the fellow who brought those clothes for him, too," said Price.

Walsingham looked at him.

"Do you really think so, sir?" he asked.

YOUR ATTENTION, PLEASE!

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"Ten to one!" said Price. "You can see that they're all new—they must have been bought lately, specially to be left for the convict. Ten to one the police will be able to trace the shop where they were bought."

"Let's see if the name's on them!" said Bob.

The juniors examined the clothes. But the tabs bearing the name of the makers had been cut off, and even on the collars the inscription had been rendered indecipherable by blotches of marking-ink. Evidently the unknown friend of the convict had done his best to destroy all traces.

"Dished!" said Nugent.

"Oh, the police will nose it out," said Price. "Most likely the things were bought in Okeham; it's the only town near here, and if they take them round to all the shops, they'll soon find out where they came from, and get a description of the man who bought them."

"Yes—I should say it was all U.P. with that sportsman!" remarked Hilton.

Sir Gilbert came back from the telephone.

"Oh, you're here, Walsingham!" he said. "Take away that bundle, will you, and lock it up in a safe place. Inspector Trevelly will be here very shortly, and the things are to be kept safely till he comes."

"Very good, sir!" said Walsingham.

He rolled up the articles in the brown-paper, and disappeared with the bundle through the service door.

The gong sounded for lunch a few minutes later.

At lunch Walsingham did not, as usual, wait at table, his place being taken by a footman. The strange discovery in the summer-house was the chief topic over lunch.

By the time the meal was over Walsingham appeared, to announce that Inspector Trevelly from Okeham, was waiting in the hall to speak to Sir Gilbert.

"You boys had better come with me, as you found the bundle!" said the baronet, and the Remove fellows followed him.

Billy Bunter blinked after them, but did not follow. Bunter had had only one lunch so far, so he was not finished yet. Hilton and Price, however, followed on, curious to hear more of the strange affair.

Inspector Trevelly, a stocky, thick-set man, with very keen eyes in a dark face, was evidently keen on the discovery that had been made. He listened to what Sir Gilbert had to say, and turned to the juniors. He snapped questions at them, in a few minutes drawing from them all they knew.

"How did you chance to visit the summer-house?" he said. "I understand that the spot is very lonely and uninviting, at this time of the year."

Bob Cherry chuckled.

"We picked up some footprints," he said. "But it turned out that they were only Walsingham's."

"I had gone for a walk in that direction, sir," said the butler. "I met these young gentlemen on the path."

"Oh!" said Mr. Trevelly, disappointed. "No other footprints?"

"None that we saw," answered Bob.

"I saw none, sir," said Walsingham.

"Only those made by the young gentlemen and myself."

"Someone must have been to the summer-house, to leave the bundle there," jerked Mr. Trevelly.

"The snow had only ceased to fall a very short time before, sir," said Walsingham. "No doubt it covered up the footprints."

"No doubt," grunted the inspector.

"Let me see the things that were found. Where are they?"

"I placed them in Walsingham's charge," said Sir Gilbert. "Bring them at once, Walsingham."

"Very good, sir!"

The butler went out by the service door. Sir Gilbert looked at the stocky inspector, who stood with a grimly thoughtful expression on his face.

"There can be no doubt, inspector, that the articles were placed there for the convict to find?" he asked.

"Scarcely, Sir Gilbert. Someone has already been in touch with the man, and made this arrangement with him. We knew that he must have been supplied with food or he must have given himself up before this. He has a friend in the locality, and I have no doubt that I shall now be able to trace that friend, and, through him, Richard Pike."

"Richard Pike?" repeated Price of the Fifth. He gave a start as he heard the name. "Is that the name of the convict?"

Inspector Trevelly turned on him sharply.

"That is his name—No. 33 at Blackmoor!" he rapped. "Is the name familiar to you, sir?"

"Oh, no; I've never heard of him," answered Price. He turned away as he spoke, his eyes on the doorway by which Walsingham was to return.

There was a peculiar glimmer in his eyes. He had not forgotten that strange episode when the butler had caught him in the oak gallery in convict garb, and addressed him by name. Price had puzzled over that a good many times. The name the butler had uttered was "Richard." Now Price learned that the name of Convict No. 33 was Richard Pike!

The coincidence was, at least, a very strange one. There were very strange thoughts in Price's mind now. He drew Cedric Hilton to a window.

"Walsingham's gone for that bundle of clobber, Cedric," he murmured.

Hilton stared at him.

"Eh? Yes. What about it?" he asked.

"I wonder if he'll turn up with it?"

"Why shouldn't he?"

Price smiled.

"Might have lost it, or somethin'," he drawled.

"What utter rot!" said Hilton.

"Well, here he comes—and he doesn't seem to have a bundle with him," said Price, with a grin.

Walsingham came back by the service doorway. His face was very grave, and had a disturbed look. And he came empty-handed.

"I am sorry—" he faltered.

"What do you mean?" rapped Inspector Trevelly. "Where are the clothes?"

"They are gone, sir!"

"Gone?" repeated the Okeham inspector blankly.

"Walsingham!" exclaimed Sir Gilbert, in amazement.

"I am very sorry, sir! I had, of course, not the remotest idea that they would not be safe in my room," said Walsingham. "I laid the bundle on the table, by my window—"

"I directed you to lock them up safely, Walsingham," said Sir Gilbert, sharply.

"I regret very much, sir, that I neglected to do so," said Walsingham humbly. "But I presumed, of course, that the bundle would be perfectly safe in my room. I found the window open, sir, and the bundle had disappeared. Some tramp—"

"Take me to your room, at once!" rapped Inspector Trevelly.

"This way, sir!"
The Okeham inspector followed Walsingham. Sir Gilbert followed on, frowning.

Bob Cherry gave a whistle.
"What a sell!" he remarked.
Price smiled. Hilton looked at him very curiously. How Stephen Price had guessed that the butler would return without the bundle was a mystery to him. But Price did not explain. He avoided the subject that afternoon, and Hilton soon dismissed it carelessly from his mind. But Price of the Fifth did not.

THE EIGHTH CHAPTER.

The Rocket!

"I SAY, you fellows!"
"Shut up, old fat man, and listen!"
"Oh, really, Cherry—"
"Shut up!"
Billy Bunter snorted.
Shutting up was not in his line.
The winter darkness lay thick on Blackmoor. Light flakes of snow whirled on the wind. There was a warm glimmer of light from the window that looked on the terrace. But the terrace itself was dusky, and beyond it the night was black.

Bitter as the weather was, there were quite a number of persons outside the house that evening. All of them turned their glances continually in the direction of the distant summer-house in the larch plantation.

Sir Gilbert, a massive figure in a fur coat, paced to and fro, the red end of his cigar gleaming through the gloom. Hilton and Price walked together. The Famous Five were in a group.

They were rather surprised when Billy Bunter rolled out and joined them.

It was not like the fat Owl to face the bitter wind and the frosty air when there was a fire available to frowst over.

But here he was, with Wharton's warmest overcoat on, and Bob Cherry's thickest scarf wound round his fat neck, and Nugent's woolly gloves on his podgy hands, and Johnny Bull's woollen pullover keeping him nice and warm under Wharton's overcoat. Billy Bunter had been very keen on the Famous Five spending Christmas at Hilton Hall with him. He had many reasons. Now he was wearing some of the reasons.

The juniors watched and listened.
Everybody knew that the police and warders were watching in the larch plantation.

That the bundle of clothing had been placed there for the hunted convict hardly admitted of doubt. It seemed fairly certain that he would come there for it under cover of darkness.

There were more than a dozen men on the watch in the darkness among the frozen trees. If Convict No. 33 came he could hardly get away again.

That he would come nobody doubted, but whether he would come early or late it was impossible to guess. Armed men were watching and waiting, and at any moment a shot might be heard to ring out.

"They'll get him!" Bob Cherry declared. "He can't have had a tip to keep clear from the pal who left the clobber for him, for that Johnny can't know that the clobber's gone. He hasn't been back to the summer-house, or the bobbies would have nailed him."

"Unless it's somebody in this household!" murmured Johnny Bull.

"My dear chap, that's impossible!"
"Well, there are no end of people about the place," said Johnny, "and most of the servants must know about

the clobber being found, and the bundle being pinched from Walsingham's room."

"Oh, rot!" said Bob uneasily.
"The fact is, it looks a little bit like it," said Johnny, in his slow, argumentative way. "What did the convict show up here at all for, unless there's somebody about the place he wanted to get in touch with?"

"Bow-wow!" said Bob.
"Fathead!" said Johnny.
And the chums of the Remove stood silent again, listening for a sound through the wintry night, and peering into the dense December darkness.

"I say, you fellows!" Billy Bunter restarted. "I say, do listen to a chap! It's rather important! Fifty pounds is a lot of money!"

That remark drew the attention of the Famous Five. They stared at the fat Owl of the Remove.

"Fifty pounds?" repeated Wharton.
"Yes, old chap. It's a lot of money!"

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(The next issue of the GEM will be on sale Monday, December 24th—Price 2d.)

said Bunter. "Not so much to me as to you fellows, perhaps—"

"You silly ass!"
"Beast! We can do with it!" said Bunter. "My idea is that I ought to take half. You fellows can whack out the other half. That will be a fiver each. After all, you'd never have been here but for me."

"What is the blithering ass blethering about?" asked Bob Cherry, in wonder. "Anybody know?"

"Oh, really, Cherry—"
"The blithering bletherfulness is terrific!"

"Oh, really, Inky—"
"Well, what do you mean, you fat duffer—if you mean anything?" demanded Harry Wharton.

"I mean the reward—"
"What reward?"

"Oh, you fellows never hear of anything!" said Bunter peevishly. "There's bills stuck up outside the police station at Okeham, and in a dozen places, about the reward offered for the convict. There's a reward of fifty pounds for anybody giving information leading to his arrest."

"Well, what about it?"

Bunter jerked a fat hand towards the distant dark wood.

"They're watching for him there," he said. "If they get him, it will be through you fellows. You gave the information, so you will be able to claim the reward."

"Oh, my hat!" ejaculated Bob Cherry.

"Mean to say you hadn't thought of that?" demanded Bunter.

"Not a syllable!"

"Well, you always were a silly ass, old chap! Think of it now—I've pointed it out to you!" said the fat junior. "What I want to know is, where do I come in?"

"You don't come in at all!"
"Oh, really, you beast—"

"I don't think we should be entitled to the reward, Bunter," said Harry quietly, "and I'm quite certain that we shouldn't claim it. Now shut up!"

"You silly ass!" hooted Bunter. "If they get him through you fellows giving them the tip, of course you're entitled to the reward. And I want to know where I come in. As I got you asked here for Christmas, I think I ought to have half—"

"Cheese it!"
"Well, look here, if you're going to be mean—"

"Ring off!"

"If you're going to be mean we'll whack it out even," said Bunter. "I can do with six or seven pounds. I happen to be short of money."

"What an unusual happening!"
"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Blessed if I see anything to cackle at! The fact is, coming on here straight from school, I've missed some postal orders I was expecting! You fellows have hardly lent me anything since we've been here, and I can jolly well tell you that I expected to be treated a bit more decently when I got you asked to a magnificent place like this for the hols!"

"You howling ass! You had nothing to do with Hilton asking us here!" said Harry. "He wrote to me, asking the lot of us—"

"He, he, he!"
"What are you cackling at, you image?"

"Well, I can jolly well tell you that it was out of friendship for me that Hilton asked you!" said Bunter. "I told him I'd like you to come—that was how it was!"

"What utter rot!"
"The rotfulness is terrific!"

"Shut up, you gassing fathead!"

"Look here, I don't want any cheek from you fellows!" hooted Bunter. "I can jolly well tell you that you'd get the cold shoulder here if I chose! I can tell you it all depends on me! And I can jolly well say— Yaroooooh! Beast! Leggo my neck!"

Bump!

Bunter sat down on the frosty terrace.
"Now shut up!" said Bob.

"Ow! Beast! Wow!"

The Famous Five moved farther off, leaving Billy Bunter sitting and gasping for breath. More than once already Bunter had given mysterious hints that he had had a hand in Hilton sending them that invitation for Christmas. They did not believe a word of it, but it gave them an uncomfortable feeling.

Certainly, had they known how Bunter had "wangled" that visit to Hilton Hall for the festive season they would never have been found within a good many miles of Blackmoor.

The Owl of the Remove picked himself up and rolled after them. His fat face was red with wrath.

"Look here, you beasts!" he gasped.

"Go and eat coke!"

"I can jolly well tell you this—I'm coming in on that reward!" hissed Bunter. "If they get him to-night you'll get the reward, and I'm going to have my whack—"

"You are!" said Bob Cherry, and he handed one out on the spot—though it was not the sort of "whack" that Bunter meant.

"Whoop!"

Bunter sat down again.

"Hallo, hallo, hallo! What——" shouted Bob suddenly.

His eyes caught sparks glittering in the darkness.

"What the thump——"

Bang! Whizz! Squissssssh!

A trail of brilliant sparks shot in an arc through the blackness of the sky.

"A rocket!" exclaimed Wharton.

"What the dickens——"

"A rocket!" came Sir Gilbert Hilton's deep boom. "A rocket—from somewhere in the grounds! Who can have fired it?"

"I wonder!" murmured Price, with a grin.

"What silly ass is letting off fireworks here?" exclaimed Hilton. "One of the fags——"

"Not guilty, my lord!" chuckled Bob Cherry.

"Then who—— What——"

"It's a signal!" said Price of the Fifth coolly. "And the sportsmen who are watching that summer-house can go on watching, but they won't catch anybody now."

The sparks died away, leaving the sky blacker than before.

Was it a signal from the convict's unknown friend warning him of danger? Price of the Fifth was sure of it, though he did not tell the other fellows his reasons. Some unseen, unknown hand had sent that rocket soaring skyward, from some dark spot in the extensive grounds of Hilton Hall.

Whether it was, or was not, a signal to the hunted man lurking in the darkness of the moor, the warders who were watching the summer-house under the larches watched in vain.

There was no news by the time the Greyfriars fellows went to bed. Through the dark, bitter night the watch went on; but it was in vain; and nothing was seen of Convict No. 33 when the grey dawn of Christmas glimmered in the sky.

THE NINTH CHAPTER.

The Man Hunt on the Moor!

A DEEP, musical note came faintly across the moor. It echoed eerily among the leafless trees.

At the bright and cheery breakfast table at Hilton Hall there was a general start. The sound floated faintly in, and faint as it was from the distance, all knew it.

"Bloodhounds!" breathed Bob Cherry.

Out on the wild moor, in the falling flakes, the hunt for the man from Blackmoor was going on on Christmas morning. And that ringing note from the frosty spaces told that a bloodhound was on the trail.

Sir Gilbert Hilton rose and stepped to a window. Everyone listened—except Billy Bunter. Bunter was devoting himself to kidneys and bacon—a matter that required and received his whole attention.

"By gad! They're after him with bloodhounds!" murmured Cedric Hilton.

"Poor beggar!"

Price of the Fifth glanced at Wal-

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singham. The butler was standing quite still, a dish in his plump hands. He seemed to be petrified by that sound from the moor.

"They'll get him now, if they've a scent to follow!" said Bob Cherry.

"I don't know; it won't be easy to pick up scent in the snow!" said Harry Wharton.

"They never got him last night!" remarked Nugent. "He couldn't have gone to the summer-house for that bundle of clothes, after all."

"I suppose that rocket was a warning to him."

"But who the dickens——"

"Goodness knows!"

The Greyfriars fellows did not linger over breakfast. They were keen to see something of the man-hunt that was going on on the wilds of Blackmoor. Billy Bunter preferred the warm indoors, and Hilton and Price strolled away to the billiards-room; but Sir Gilbert tramped out in the snow, and the Famous Five went with him.

As they went down the oak avenue the bay of the bloodhound was heard again from the distance.

Glancing back, Harry Wharton noticed the portly form of Walsingham on the terrace, following them with his eyes. But the butler's duties kept him to the house.

Far away on the moor was a bunch of dark figures against the white of the snow. Sir Gilbert and the juniors tramped over and joined them.

The bloodhound, a huge animal, was held in leash by Inspector Trevelly. A constable was with him, and two warders from the prison, and a keeper in Sir Gilbert's service.

The warders had rifles under their arms. The hound was snuffing at a track in the snow. Slowly, as if in doubt, it pulled on the leash, leading the way, and the party followed.

"On the track, do you think, Trevelly?" asked Sir Gilbert.

"I hope so, sir!" answered the Okeham inspector briefly.

"You saw nothing of him last night?"

"Nothing."

"You noticed the rocket?"

"I did," said Mr. Trevelly grimly. "It came from a spot very near your house, Sir Gilbert."

"You think it was a signal?"

"I am sure of it!"

The hound gave a sudden pull, and started at a greater speed. Inspector Trevelly said no more, but followed the hound, gripping the leash. Behind him followed the others.

The way led across Blackmoor, and the high roofs of Hilton Hall dipped and disappeared in the wintry mists. Snowflakes were falling lightly, whirling on the bitter wind.

The juniors turned up their coat collars, and drew their scarves close. The cold on Blackmoor was almost Arctic.

"By gum!" murmured Bob Cherry. "The man must be potty to keep to the open in this weather. Blackmoor Prison must be better than this."

"The betterfulness must be terrific!" said Hurree Janset Ram Singh, with a shiver.

"He hopes to get away, of course," said Harry. "And he may, if his pal can get him a change of clothes, so that he can run for it. But he's risking his life in the cold and snow. And for his own sake, I hope they'll get him."

"Yes, rather!"

The dog was loping on steadily. It was clear that, in spite of the snow on the ground, it had picked up a good scent.

Whether the convict had left foot-prints there could not be told, as the fresh-fallen flakes carpeted the ground. But unless the hound was mistaken, it was clear that he had passed that way.

The juniors could picture him, in the darkness of the night, stealing towards Hilton Hall, to pick up the bundle that had been left for him at the summer-house; and then, warned by the rocket, fleeing away into the December night again.

Somewhere on the wild, snowy moor he was lurking, waiting for another chance of help from his mysterious confederate. But if the hound was on the right track, it did not seem likely that that confederate, whoever he was, would ever be of help to him again.

"Poor beggar!" muttered Bob. "He must be starving!"

"Hardly," said Johnny Bull.

"Why not?" asked Bob.

"There were clothes in that bundle—no food," said Johnny, shaking his head. "His pal must have supplied him with food already, or there'd have been some put in the bundle for him."

"Oh!" said Bob. "I suppose that's so."

"Yes, that's likely enough," assented Harry. "It looks as if the convict got in touch with the man, whoever he is, and they arranged for the clothes to be bought and placed in the summer-house. When they met he would supply him with food."

"He would have given himself up before now if he'd had nothing to eat," remarked Nugent.

"Hallo, hallo, hallo! They've found something!"

The hound had come to a stop in a hollow under the shelter of a high tor. He was snuffing and scratching at the snow.

At a sign from the inspector his followers cleared the snow away. Signs of a camp were soon revealed.

An empty beef tin lay there, and several other traces of a meal. It looked as if the hunted man had camped there for a time, the high tor sheltering him from the wind.

Inspector Trevelly examined the spot with keen eyes. The man had been there—that was certain.

The hound was evidently on the right track. The party started once more, the bloodhound straining at the leash.

The juniors scanned the moor with eager eyes. The winter mist was thick at a little distance, cutting off the view. The man might have been within a hundred yards, and yet unseen. They wondered whether he had sighted the hunters, and fled from them; but if so the falling flakes had already hidden his tracks.

The hound pulled and pulled, and its deep bay rang through the frosty silence. With a thrill at their hearts the juniors followed on.

The way now led up the side of a steep tor, that rose to a height of three or four hundred feet, rugged, and banked with snow. The hound loped on steadily, but several times the men following it slipped in the snow, and stumbled over. It was hard going. The schoolboys were panting for breath by the time the summit was reached.

In clear weather there would have been a view of Blackmoor for miles on every side. Now the winter mist hung like a blanket, shutting it off.

"Visibility not good," murmured Bob Cherry.

"The scent's holding," said Harry.

Across the rugged summit of the tor the hound loped on. The juniors were panting. Sir Gilbert Hilton puffed and



Bunter disentangled his fat limbs from the bedclothes, then grabbed up the Christmas pudding from the dish at the bed-head. Plop! "Urrrghh!" Price gave a muffled gurgle, and staggered back, with the pudding squashing over his face.

blew. All the man-hunters showed signs of fatigue. But they kept grimly on. They had little doubt that they were close behind the hunted man now. So far, he had baffled pursuit; but now that the bloodhound had been put on the track, it looked as if his game was up. Unerring, unswerving, the hound loped on. Bob Cherry uttered a sudden exclamation.

"Look!"

It was a footprint in the snow. Evidently it was very recent, for the flakes were falling fast, but had not yet hidden it.

Inspector Trevelly's eyes gleamed. He rapped out a word, and the constable loosened his truncheon, and the warders slipped the rifles from under their arms into their hands. It was clear to all that they were close now on Richard Pike, Convict No. 33. Trevelly glanced round at the juniors.

"You boys had better keep back!" he jerked.

"Yes—yes; keep back out of danger, my lads!" said Sir Gilbert.

It was not for the juniors to argue, so they dropped to the rear. But they followed on, with keen eyes and beating hearts.

Half-way down the slope from the summit of the tor to the level of the snow-covered moor below, a deep chasm split the earth. It cut across the hill-side, barring the way. Its depth could not be seen, but it was wide, the edges crumbling with snow. If the hunted man was still on the near side of it, he was cornered. And there was little doubt that he was.

"They've got him," murmured Nugent.

There came a sharp, yelling bay from the hound, and it leaped at the leash, almost dragging itself loose. From a hollow of the snow a figure leaped up, and ran. There was a shout from the whole party. It was a wild figure in convict garb, with a blanket wrapped round it.

"The convict!" panted Wharton.

"Stop!" roared Inspector Trevelly.

The man did not stop, and did not look round. He bounded away down the steep slope, directly towards the chasm that barred the way. The blanket dropped from him as he ran.

Crack!

One of the warders fired over his head.

The report of the rifle awoke a thousand echoes, rolling through the mists. The convict ran on.

"The madman!" panted Sir Gilbert. "He will be killed! Stop!" he roared to the fleeing man. "Stop!"

The convict raced on.

Crack! rang a rifle again, the bullet whizzing barely two inches over the convict cap. But the warning was unheeded.

The fleeing man had almost reached the gap. The man-hunters came to a breathless stop. Surely he must have seen that deadly obstacle in his path; surely he would halt in time. The juniors felt their hearts leap to their mouths as they watched him, spell-bound.

He did not stop. But he had seen the rift in the rugged side of the tor,

As he reached it he rose in a wild and desperate bound.

"Oh!" gasped Bob.

They watched, fascinated. For a second that seemed an age the leaping figure of the convict was in the air, over the yawning gulf below. Then he crashed on the farther side.

But he had not quite made the jump. It was his chest that crashed on the snowy edge of the chasm, and he was seen to clutch and grasp at the crumbling snow with frantic hands.

Long, long seconds passed as they watched, unable to help, unable to approach the desperate man, whose life hung in the balance. They panted with relief as they saw him drag himself to safety. He plunged headlong into the snow on the farther side of the rift, and lay there, gasping and panting.

But only for a few moments; then he scrambled up again, and looked back. On the edge of the chasm the bloodhound halted, baying fiercely. But the hound could not leap the space, much less the men. Only utter desperation had enabled the hunted man to make the jump, and he had barely escaped with his life.

He glared back across the chasm, shook his clenched fist, and darted away through the falling flakes.

"Shoot!" roared Inspector Trevelly. "Shoot!"

Crack, crack! the rifles roared.

But in a few moments the snow and the mists had swallowed the hunted man from sight. The rift had to be followed

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HUNTED DOWN!

(Continued from page 13.)

a quarter of a mile before a crossing was practicable. By that time there was little hope of getting the hunted man. Once more Convict No. 33, of Blackmoor, had escaped.

THE TENTH CHAPTER.

Pudding for Price!

BILLY BUNTER awoke.

It was Christmas night. Billy Bunter had had a merry Christmas. He had expected the good cheer at Hilton Hall to be very good. It had surpassed his expectations. He had dreamed of the turkey. Mince pies and Christmas pudding had mingled in his dreams—happy dreams! Bunter, fortunately, had the digestion of an ostrich. Otherwise, the good cheer of Hilton Hall might have caused trouble, considering the vast quantities of the same that Bunter had parked within his capacious circumference.

Perhaps he was not sleeping so soundly as usual that night. Possibly the turkey and the Christmas pudding were not on the best of terms with the army of mince pies that had followed them on the downward path.

He sat up in bed.

There was a red glow from the fire, which Bunter had banked up with logs before turning in.

Once awake, Bunter's fat mind naturally turned to food.

No one who did not know Bunter, would have guessed that he had any available space left. But Billy Bunter knew that he might get hungry in the night, and he had taken precautions. He had annexed a Christmas pudding to carry up to his room. Now it lay on a dish on the table beside his bed. If Bunter woke up hungry, there it was, ready for him.

He had woken up! Even Bunter was not exactly hungry. Still, the thought of the pudding was attractive. He felt that he could dispose of a pound or two before snuggling down to sleep again.

He was about to stretch out a fat hand towards the pudding when he stopped, and stared.

A dark shadow passed between him and the firelight.

Bunter felt a thrill of startled alarm. He was not alone in the room.

He blinked.

The door was locked. With Price of the Fifth in the House, Bunter was not likely to neglect to lock his door before turning in. Price had not ventured to make any attempt to annex his bedroom key again.

With the door safely locked on the inside, Bunter had felt quite secure. Yet there, standing between him and the firelight, was the figure of Stephen Price, of the Greyfriars Fifth.

Bunter hardly breathed.

This time Price was not got up in fancy costume. His previous exploit, no doubt, had fed him up with that device.

With the firelight gleaming on his hard, set face, he was recognisable at a glance. Bunter knew him at once.

How Price had got there was a mystery. But Bunter, as he blinked from the dark shadows of the bed, discerned that a wardrobe door was wide open. And he remembered that Price had gone up to bed before the rest.

He understood! Price, when he went up, had not gone to his own room. He had gone to Bunter's room and hidden himself in that big wardrobe.

There he had remained concealed, while Bunter locked his door and went to bed!

It was quite a simple device—really, Bunter might have looked for something of the kind, had he ever foreseen anything. He was well aware how keen Price was to get hold of that dangerous letter. But it was not the fat Owl's way to foresee anything.

"Oh lor'!" breathed Bunter.

He groped silently under the pillow for his spectacle-case, and jammed his big spectacles on his fat little nose, and blinked at Price. It was an old-fashioned bed with curtains, and Bunter was quite hidden from view. Neither was Price looking towards him.

He was stepping to the chair on which Bunter had laid his clothes. Stooping over the folded clothes, Price went through the pockets.

Bunter watched him.

He was not uneasy about Price finding the letter in his pockets. The letter was not there. That letter was, in point of fact, hidden inside the lining of Bunter's cap. And his cap was under his pillow.

There was a faint rustling as Price searched the pockets, in vain.

Billy Bunter watched him with growing uneasiness. Price had remained in his place of concealment till he was certain Bunter was asleep. Now he was searching for the letter. What was he going to do when he failed to find it?

His stealthy caution showed that he did not want another alarm in the night. Bunter thought of giving a yell to awaken the juniors in the adjoining rooms. That, no doubt, would send Price on the run! But was he likely to punch Bunter before he ran? It was only too likely! Bunter remained silent, blinking at the stealthy cad of the Fifth in anxious uneasiness.

Price finished with the clothes at last.

He stood for some moments in thought, and in the glow of the firelight Bunter could see the savage and bitter expression of disappointment on his hard face.

Price stepped towards the bed. As on the previous occasion, he concluded that Bunter had taken the letter to bed with him for safety.

He drew the bed-curtains further open and his eyes gleamed at Bunter. He gave a sudden start as he discerned that the fat junior was sitting up wide awake, with his little round eyes almost bulging through his big round spectacles.

"Ow!" squeaked Bunter. "Here, you keep off, you beast! I—I'll yell and wake the house!"

Price gritted his teeth.

"Do," he said, "and I'll smash you, you fat rotter! Give just one howl, and I'll knock your nose through the back of your head."

"Beast!" gasped Bunter.

Price's narrow eyes glittered at him. "Where's that letter?" he snapped.

"Wha-a-at letter?" stuttered Bunter.

"You know what I mean! The letter Walsingham wrote to Hilton at Greyfriars, and that you pinched, you young scoundrel. You know that that's what

I'm here for, and I'm not going without it!"

"I—I say——"

"Where is it?"

"I—I left it at Greyfriars!" gasped Bunter. "I mean, I left it at home! That is, I asked Wharton to mind it for me! You—you'd better go to Wharton's room, and—and ask him——"

"Where's that letter?"

"Bob Cherry's got it! I—I asked him to—to take care of it for me. If—if you go and see Bob—— Ow!" gasped Bunter, as Price made a grab at him. "I—I say, you beast, I'll wake the house——"

"Give me that letter, or I'll thrash you till you can't squeak!" said Price, in low, concentrated tones, that left no doubt that he meant every word that he said.

"Oh crikey! I—I—— Leggo! I—I—I'll get it!" gasped Bunter.

Price let go and stood watching him and waiting. Billy Bunter gasped with dismay. Price was in deadly earnest; and the fat Owl of the Remove did not want to be thrashed till he could not squeak. Very much indeed he didn't! His eyes fell on the Christmas pudding on the dish at the bed-head.

His eyes gleamed behind his spectacles.

"I—I—I'll get it!" he gasped.

"Sharp!" snapped Price.

Billy Bunter shifted nearer to the bedside table. His fat brain did not usually work swiftly. But it was working at double pressure now. Bunter had an idea.

He disentangled his fat limbs from the bedclothes, ready to jump. Then he reached out to the pudding.

He grabbed up the pudding, whole, in both fat hands.

"What——" began Price.

He did not finish the question.

Plop!

Price gave a muffled gurgle, and staggered back with the Christmas pudding squashing over his face. He sat down on the floor with a bump.

Bunter made a frantic bound from the bed. The bedside table went over, and the dish cracked on the floor. With a bound Bunter reached the door, turned back the key, tore the door open, and bounded out.

"I say, you fellows!" he yelled.

"Urrrgh!" came in a gurgle from Price of the Fifth, as he grabbed at squashed pudding on his face.

Billy Bunter rushed into the nearest room. Harry Wharton was suddenly awakened by a fat hand clawing at his features.

"Ow! Help!" gasped Bunter. "That beast Price——"

Wharton blinked at him.

"That silly owl larking again——"

"Ow! Yes! He's in my room—I say——"

Wharton did not wait for Bunter to say any more. If Price of the Fifth was practical-joking in the middle of the night again, Price wanted a lesson on the subject of nocturnal practical joking! And Harry Wharton, jumping out of bed, grasped his pillow and rushed along to Bunter's room, to give Price of the Fifth the lesson he needed.

THE ELEVENTH CHAPTER.

A Mistake in the Dark!

PPRICE of the Fifth clawed wildly at his sticky face.

Christmas pudding taken internally, was very agreeable—in fact, grateful and comforting. Taken externally, it was horrid.

The pudding had jammed hard on Price's sharp features. Most of it had

fallen to the floor; but quite a lot was sticking to his eyes, his nose and the rest of his face. He was masked with pudding!

He gurgled and gasped and clawed. But busy as he was with the pudding, he realised that it was time to go. He heard Bunter yelling in the next room; and he did not want the Famous Five swarming over him. He staggered to the door, and, still clawing pudding from his face, ran out.

Crash!

Bump!

It was dark in the passage, and he did not even see a running figure in pyjamas.

Wharton crashed into him, and sent him spinning.

He bumped heavily on the floor.

"Ow!" he spluttered. "Wow! Ooogh!"

Harry Wharton staggered back from the shock. He had hardly a glimpse of Price in the darkness, but he knew whom it must be. And in a moment his pillow was rising and falling.

Swipe, swipe, swipe!

"Urrghh!" gurgled Price, wildly, as the pillow smote. He caught it with his head, then with his nose, then with his neck.

Swipe, swipe!

"Take that, you silly ass!" panted Wharton. "And that! And that! And

that! You howling fathcad, what do you want to come skylarking in the middle of the night for? Take that!"

Swipe, swipe!

Price took them all—he could not help it. Twice he almost got on his feet, and the swiping pillow knocked him down again.

He roared and yelled.

Swipe, swipe!

"Hallo, hallo, hallo!" A shout came from Bob Cherry's room. "What the thump—"

"I say, you fellows, it's Price!" squeaked Billy Bunter.

"That ass Price!"

It was Nugent's voice.

(Continued on next page.)



Post your Soccer queries to: "Linesman," c/o The MAGNET, The Fleetway House, Farringdon Street, London, E.C.4. It's his job and pleasure to answer knotty problems from readers.

FOUR MATCHES IN EIGHT DAYS!

"SOME of my friends tell me that a professional footballer need not play for his club on Christmas Day if he doesn't wish to do so. Is that true?" That is the gist of a question I have received from a Middlesbrough reader, and I can't do better than answer it at this time of the year. It is a fact that in the agreement of every professional footballer there is a clause which permits him to cry off from two footballing days in every season if he feels so disposed. The games he can miss, without penalty, are those on Christmas Day and Good Friday.

There are plenty of footballers who would, of course, like to have Christmas Day off. But I don't know of one modern footballer who takes advantage of this clause in his agreement. There is no doubt that even with the professional footballer his club comes first.

I confess that I don't know what would happen if the whole of the players of a team decided that they would not play on Christmas Day. I take it that the match which had been arranged for them would be off automatically, because there is another rule which states that in every League match each club must play its strongest available side.

The fact that Christmas Day comes on a Tuesday this year makes this just a little bit better for the footballer. He has two days in which to throw off any ill-effects of the Saturday game, and then, when he has played on Christmas Day and Boxing Day, he has two more days in which to recover for those games before being called out again.

All the same, four games in eight days—and that is the ordinary programme of the League clubs—is pretty strenuous, and many a manager will be scratching his head, before the end of the year, as to how to make up his side with fit footballers.

The Christmas games are unusual in one respect: practically all the big clubs play home and away engagements with the same opponents. Some of them will have to do a lot of travelling this week-end. Arsenal, for instance, play Preston North End at Preston on Christmas Day, and

the return game between these clubs takes place in London on Boxing Day. It is an even longer journey from Portsmouth to Blackburn, but the "Pompey" players are there on Christmas Day, and they play the return match against Blackburn at Portsmouth on Boxing Day.

It can be taken for granted that the players of these teams—and others as well—will do the journey together after the match. Let us hope that the weather will be nice; that the Christmas spirit will prevail among the footballers, even though they won't be able to indulge in the good things of the table as the majority of us will do. Christmas pudding and mince pies are a long way from being the ideal food for footballers.

CIRCUMSTANCES ARE DIFFERENT!

CHRISTMAS-TIME also marks the half-way house of the football season: when the teams switch over to the second half of their programmes. Those which have done well up to now will expect to finish in the same vein, and the failures of the first half of the season will make up their minds to turn over a new leaf. These good resolutions sometimes have their effect, too.

Before the start of the Christmas games last season, Chelsea were five points worse off than any of their rivals in the First Division, and it seemed inevitable that they would eventually descend into the Second Division. But they made a remarkable recovery in the second half of the season—played more like champions than relegation candidates, and managed to escape the "drop."

Mention of the long journeys which the footballers have to do this Christmas-time reminds me to reply to a London reader on a point which he cannot understand. He says he has noticed that the authorities refused permission to the Plymouth Argyle club to allow their players to travel to matches by aeroplane, but that no objection to flying was made when Arsenal travelled to Paris to play a match there quite recently. My good

friend seems to sense that there is a difference in treatment here.

There is, on the face of it, but in reply to my correspondent I also have to point out that the circumstances are different. If the Arsenal officials decide to play a match in Paris that is their affair, absolutely, so far as English clubs are concerned. But if Plymouth Argyle chartered aeroplanes for their League matches, and the aeroplane did not arrive at the right time, another League club would suffer.

You see the difference, don't you? I have no doubt that one of these days flying by football teams will be the general thing, but that time is not yet.

The players of the various clubs will be anxious to get through the Christmas games without serious hurt, because the big Cup-ties will be coming along soon. Indeed, the various clubs already know who their opponents will be in the Third Round, which is the first round so far as the First and Second Division clubs are concerned.

BARTERING OF GROUND RIGHTS!

TALKING about Cup-ties reminds me that I have an East London reader—H. Biggs—who cannot understand why Ashford were refused permission to play Clapton Orient on the Orient ground in the first round of the Cup this season, seeing that Ashford and Orient both wanted the game to be played on the ground of the latter club.

As a matter of fact, the F.A. never agree to a change of venue for a Cup-tie unless they are absolutely convinced of the necessity for the change being made. And they did not think it necessary in the instance I have mentioned. In the old days it was quite the popular thing for a big club, drawn to play away to a smaller club, to pay a sum of money to the smaller club to change the venue, but this bartering of ground rights, as it was called, was stopped.

I remember once Blackpool taking a goodly sum of money to play a Cup-tie at Sheffield after the draw had given the seasciders the right to play at home. The whole world laughed when Blackpool went to the Sheffield United ground and won there.

Another London reader sends me an International match query which can be answered briefly. When an English player connected with an English club is chosen to play for England he cannot refuse, providing he is fit. A player with an English club can refuse to play for Scotland, Ireland, or Wales, if chosen to represent the country of his birth.

"LINESMAN."

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"This way!" shouted Wharton. "Come and give him a few!"

"What-ho!"

Stephen Price, dazed and dizzy, and panting, struggled somehow to his feet. The swiping pillow missed him as he dodged. He started at a desperate run along the passage.

Frank Nugent switched on the passage light. Price was seen to vanish round the corner into the oaken gallery over the hall.

"After him!" shouted Bob.

"I say, you fellows, give him jip! Give him toco! Give him beans!" squeaked Billy Bunter. "I say—"

The juniors rushed down the passage.

All the Famous Five were up now. It was cold, in pyjamas, with bare feet—cold and chilly; but they did not stop to think of that.

Why Price, a Fifth Form man and a senior, was ass enough to go about skylarking after midnight, they could not guess, little dreaming of what had brought him to Billy Bunter's room. But they were all ready to impress upon him that he had better chuck it, whatever his reason might be. Pillows in hand, they rushed after Price.

There was thick darkness in the oak gallery over the hall. Price naturally did not stop to switch on a light as he ran.

He was only anxious to escape; and he hoped to get back to his room without the house being alarmed. He did not want another scene such as had happened before.

He tore along the gallery. The juniors were all behind him, and had not yet turned the corner, and it did not occur to him for a moment that there was anybody ahead of him in the darkness.

But there was! He crashed suddenly, headlong, into some unseen form, and there was a startled gasp.

The unseen form sprawled over, and Price sprawled upon it. He heard a breathless panting underneath him.

Who it was he did not know, and did not stop to inquire. He leaped to his feet, ran on, and dodged into the passage that led to his own room.

As he went, he heard a sound of scuffling, bumping, and exclaiming voices behind. Evidently the juniors, rushing after him along the dark gallery, had stumbled over the man he had knocked down.

Price did not pause.

The delay gave him time to escape, and he made the best use of it. Possibly the man was some servant who had been awakened—possibly Sir Gilbert Hilton himself! Price neither knew nor cared. He darted into his room, shut the door, and locked it after him. He was safe now, whether the pursuit was continued or not.

As a matter of fact, it was not! Harry Wharton, stumbling over the figure sprawling in the dark gallery, came down on it with a crash; and he had no doubt that it was Price!

Unaware that anyone else was up at that hour, it was rather a natural mistake in the dark. And the only sound that came from the sprawling figure, as he crashed on it, was a breathless, anguished gurgle.

"Gurrgrggh!"

Wharton scrambled up, planting his knee on a face as he did so. His pillow was still in his hands.

Up it went—and down it came!

Swipe!

"Urrrggh!"

Swipe, swipe, swipe!

"Take that, you silly ass!"

"Wurrgrggh!"

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"Got him?" panted Bob Cherry, groping up in the dark. He could hear a sound like the beating of carpet.

"Yes—here he is! Give him a few!" panted Wharton.

"Wurrgrggh!"

"Let's got at him!" exclaimed Johnny Bull.

"Give him beans, the silly ass!"

"Ow! Oooogh! Stop it!" came a gasping voice. "Oh dear! Ow!" The sprawling figure found its voice. "Ow! Stop! Oh!"

"That's not Price!" gasped Bob.

"Oh, my hat!"

"Who the thump—"

"What the dickens—"

Wharton ceased to swipe with his pillow! He realised that it was not Price of the Fifth who was getting the swipes.

There was a gleam of light in the dark gallery. Frank Nugent had brought a flash-lamp from his room. He flashed on the light.

The juniors stared at the sprawling man as he was revealed to view.

"Walsingham!" exclaimed Wharton blankly.

"Oh, my hat!" gasped Bob Cherry.

"The jolly old butler!"

"Great pip!"

A USEFUL LEATHER POCKET WALLET

goes to S. McIntyre, of 152, Lakedale Road, Plumstead, S.E.18, for supplying the following Greyfriars limerick:

Billy Bunter, who that day had copped it,
Threw an inkpot at Loder, who stopped it.
Loder sat on the ground,
And looked dazedly round,
So Bunter shouted: "Yah, beast!" and hopped it!

Note.—All jokes and Greyfriars limericks should be addressed to "Jokes and Limericks" Editor, c/o MAGNET, 5, Carmelite Street, London, E.C.4 (Comp.).

"The esteemed and venerable Walsingham!" ejaculated Hurree Jamsat Ram Singh, in amazement.

Walsingham sat up.

He was dizzy and breathless. Probably it was his first experience of a pillowing. It had knocked all the breath out of the portly butler.

"Oooogh!" he gasped. "Wooogh! Urrrrrggh!"

"Sorry!" gasped Wharton. "I—I thought it was Price—"

"Urrrrrggh!"

"That silly ass has been skylarking, and we were after him!" stammered the captain of the Remove. "I—I thought I'd got him when I fell over you."

"Urrrggh!"

Bob and Wharton lent the butler a hand to rise. He staggered to his feet, and leaned on the polished oaken rail of the gallery, panting for breath.

The juniors eyed him.

They were sorry for the mistake in the dark and for the pillowing the butler had received, which had been intended for Price of the Fifth. But they could not help wondering what Walsingham was doing up at that hour.

The house was in darkness—everybody was in bed, or supposed to be in bed. Walsingham was fully dressed, and evidently had not been to bed at all yet.

Price, so far as they knew, had been practical joking. But the portly, staid

butler of Hilton Hall could hardly be suspected of practical joking. Why he was still out of bed, and going about the house in the dark was an utter mystery.

Walsingham panted and panted.

After being barged over by Price, and pillowed by Harry Wharton, it was not easy for the butler of Hilton Hall to recover his stately calm.

"Awfully sorry, Walsingham!" said Harry. "I couldn't see you, of course, and that ass Price ran this way. Why hadn't you a light?"

"I—I—" Walsingham gasped. "I—I—" He broke off. "Please go back to bed, young gentlemen. Sir Gilbert would be very displeased if he were awakened again by such a disturbance!"

"Well, we shan't get Price now!" said Bob. "Sorry, Walsingham, but you should have had a light! Why the dickens hadn't you?"

Walsingham did not answer that question. He was gasping for breath and did not seem to hear it.

"Well, good-night, Walsingham!" said Harry.

"Good-night, sir!" Walsingham gasped.

"Shall I switch on the light for you?" asked Nugent.

"No—no! Please go back to bed!"

The Famous Five returned to their own quarters. Billy Bunter had already gone back to bed, and a snore could be heard behind a locked door.

"What the dickens was that butler chap up to, rooting about the house in the dark?" asked Bob, as the juniors reached their quarters.

"Goodness knows!"

"It's queer!"

"The queerfulness is terrific!"

"Well, no bisney of ours, I suppose," said Bob, and the Co. agreed that it was not, and went back to bed.

THE TWELFTH CHAPTER.

Boxing Night!

LIGHTS were gleaming from the many windows of Hilton Hall, casting ruddy light into the wintry darkness.

It was Boxing Night, and all was merry and bright. A wailing wind shrieked over the old roofs and among the chimney-pots and rattled the creaking branches of leafless trees. Outside all was wintry; but within was light and merriment. Motor-cars came continually up the dusky drive and landed guests at the great door. Mingled with the buzz of cheery voices came the strains of the band, already playing a merry tune.

Sir Gilbert and Lady Hilton received their guests, with smiling, hospitable faces. Walsingham and his myrmidons were all very busy. The great door stood open. The night, though bitterly cold, was fine and clear and frosty, and a myriad stars spangled the dark sky over Blackmoor. Harry Wharton, as he looked out from the brightly lit hall into the winter night, thought of the wretched man lurking on the moor with a feeling of compassion.

Nothing had been seen of the escaped convict since he had leaped the chasm on the rugged slope of the tor and escaped. The man-hunt was still going on, but without success.

Wharton started a little as he looked out and caught sight of a figure in uniform in the starry dusk of the terrace. It was Inspector Trevelly.

There was a chuckle at his side, and he glanced round at Bob Cherry.

"That's the jolly old bobby from Okeham!" said Bob. "Does he fancy that Convict No. 33 is coming to the dance?"



Everything was at stake for the hunted convict, and he was on Price with the leap of a tiger. Crash! His clenched fist struck the disguised Fifth Former of Greyfriars on the temple. Only one faint cry escaped the Greyfriars senior, as he fell. He was stunned!

Harry Wharton laughed.

"I say, it will make him jump if he looks in and sees Price of the Fifth!" murmured Bob.

Wharton glanced across at Price, who was standing talking to Hilton. Hilton was looking very handsome in a cavalier costume; Price, got up in his convict costume, looked anything but handsome.

But there was no doubt that it was effective, and it made rather a sensation. Price rather liked getting the spotlight, and he was getting it in his convict outfit.

With his face skilfully touched up with make-up, bushy eyebrows, and stubby chin complete he looked the convict to the life. His own natural appearance had quite disappeared, apart from the half-mask on his face.

"Silly ass to get himself up in that costume!" remarked Bob.

"He's done it well!" said Harry.

"Yes; but it's a rotten idea! Still, he's got everybody looking at him, and I suppose that's what he wants."

"I say, you fellows!"

"Hallo, hallo, hallo! What are you, Bunter?" grinned Bob.

All the Co. were in costume, and Billy Bunter was got up fearfully and wonderfully as a brigand. He had fastened on a pair of immense and fierce-looking moustaches that curled up almost to his eyes. But he seemed to be having trouble with those moustaches. Bunter was going to dance—he fancied himself in that line. But his heart was in the supper-room. He

had already dropped into that department, and there were traces of mince pies about his capacious mouth. Champing mince pies had loosened his moustache, and it was coming off.

"Eh? I'm a brigand!" said Bunter, blinking through the eyeholes of his mask, with a gleam of spectacles. "Rather nobby, what?"

"Oh, ripping!" said Harry, with a smile.

"I say, you fellows, got any gum or anything about you?" asked Bunter. "These beastly moustaches are coming off!"

"There's a bottle of fixing gum in my room!"

"Go up and fetch it, old chap!"

"Bow-wow!"

"I'll fix it for you, fatty!" said Bob. "I've got a pin here—"

"Wha-a-t?"

"Steady while I pin it on!"

Bunter made a backward jump.

"Beast!" he gasped. "Gerraway!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Billy Bunter disappeared. Apparently he did not want that troublesome moustache pinned on to his fat face!

Wharton looked out of the doorway again. A stocky figure appeared for a moment in the starlight, and disappeared again. It was a warder from Blackmoor Prison.

He wondered whether the convict had been seen near Hilton Hall. It seemed to him unlikely that the man would venture to approach the house while it was blazing with lights and crowded with guests. As he stood looking out there was a tap on his arm.

He glanced round at Cedric Hilton's smiling face.

"Come on!" said Hilton. "They're dancin', old bean! What's interestin' you outside?"

"I just saw a warder—"

Hilton started.

"A warder—here! Good gad, is that jolly old convict about?"

"Shouldn't wonder!" said Price, joining him and staring out into the frosty night. "Chance for somebody to pick up fifty pounds, Cedric."

Hilton shrugged his shoulders disdainfully.

"What rot!" he said. "I hope nobody here's thinkin' of that."

"Why not?" answered Price coolly. "Fifty pounds is worth baggin', and the man's a rotten character and ought to be rounded up. I've been askin' questions about him, and I hear that he's at Blackmoor—or was, rather—for knockin' a man down and robbin' him. If I could get hold of him I shouldn't turn up my nose at the reward, I can tell you."

Hilton's lip curled.

"Well, you're not likely to have a chance!" he said curtly. "I can't quite see you handlin' the man if you spotted him, Pricey."

Wharton smiled involuntarily at that remark. Price of the Fifth was anything but a hero, and certainly no one who knew him would have expected him to take an active hand in dealing with a dangerous character.

Price gave the junior an angry scowl.

"Plenty of men about to handle him

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if a fellow spotted him," he said. "I could do with that fifty."

"He's not likely to let you spot him!" grunted Hilton. "Forget it!"

"You never know your luck!" said Price.

"Oh, rot! Come along and hop!"

Price shook his head.

"Later!" he said.

Hilton shrugged his shoulders again and walked away with Wharton.

The orchestra was discoursing sweet melody now and the dancing was going on. The Co. were all going to trip the light fantastic, too. Three of them were good dancers; and Bob Cherry and Johnny Bull were willing, if not skilful! There were a good many guests of their own age, both boys and girls, and partners were plentiful. In a very short time Harry Wharton & Co. forgot all about the warders outside in the frost and the man they were hunting.

But Price of the Fifth was not thinking, at present, of the dance.

He was thinking of Convict No. 33 and of the fifty pounds reward offered for his capture, or information leading thereto. Price of the Fifth was hard up, and he had left more debts unpaid at the end of last term than he cared to think of. Hilton had been in the same difficulty at the term's end; but Christmas tips from wealthy relatives had seen him through. Price had no wealthy relatives to tip him, and the bare possibility of bagging fifty pounds in a lump sum was very attractive to his mind. And Price had his own reasons—good reasons—for believing that he could, if he liked, lay his finger on the unknown confederate who was helping, or trying to help, the escaped man from Blackmoor.

While the dance was going on merrily Price slipped quietly away, and tapped at the door of the butler's room. There were many servants to be seen about, but he noticed that Walsingham was no longer visible.

He tapped softly at the door of Walsingham's room and opened it.

Had the butler been there, he would have made some excuse or other. But he did not expect the butler to be there, and he was right.

The room was empty and unlighted. But the window was wide open, and a glimmer of frosty starlight came in.

Softly Price of the Fifth stepped into the room, crossed to the window, and looked out.

The window looked from the side of the house on a dark terrace. Price's heart was beating rather fast as he peered out into the December night.

From the distance came the strains of music, unheeded. Price had forgotten both dance and dancers; forgotten that he was in costume; forgotten everything but his certainty that he had the clue to the escaped convict fairly in his hand. Where was Walsingham?

Walsingham had fallen in a faint that night when the haggard face of the escaped convict had been seen pressed to a window-pane of Hilton Hall. Had he recognised that face?

Price had not thought of it at the time any more than anyone else. But the night the butler had encountered him in his convict garb he had evidently taken him for the Blackmoor man, and had addressed him as "Richard."

That had only puzzled him till he had learned that the convict's name was Richard Pike. After that he knew.

The disappearance of the bundle of clothes from Walsingham's keeping was exactly what he had expected. He knew—at least, he was sure—that Walsingham had placed that bundle in

the summer-house for the convict to find. It was the butler of Hilton Hall who was the secret helper of the escaped man of Blackmoor.

Price had no doubt about it.

And now the police and the prison warders were watching the building while the Boxing Night festivities were going on. That meant that they knew, or suspected, that Convict No. 33 was somewhere near Hilton Hall. They had seen him or picked up some trace of him. And Walsingham had gone out, evidently by the open window from his room.

What did it mean?

Price could see nothing on the terrace. He stepped over the low sill of the window.

Silently he moved along, wary and watchful. There was a sudden step, and a portly figure looked up in the gloom.

"You are here!" came a gasping voice.

It was the butler.

The next moment he detected the half-mask on Price's face, and knew that it was the Greyfriars Fifth Former in costume. He started back, biting his lip hard.

Price suppressed a grin.

He knew, as well as if Walsingham had told him, that the butler was there to look for Convict No. 33, and that he had for the moment taken Price for him. But Walsingham recovered his calmness in a moment.

"You startled me, Mr. Price!" he said apologetically.

"Sorry!" said Price. "I'm just taking a stroll to smoke a cigarette, Walsingham."

"Very good, sir!"

Walsingham hesitated. Then slowly he went on towards his room, and disappeared into the shadows. Price grinned. Faintly from the distance he heard the sounds of music. But he did not heed. If Convict No. 33 came, as Walsingham evidently expected, he would not escape unseen. Price drew into the deep shadow of a buttress, and watched and waited.

THE THIRTEENTH CHAPTER.

Struck Down!

CONVICT No. 33, shivering in the bitter cold, blotted himself behind the trunk of a tree in the gloom.

From where he lurked in the dark grounds he could see many lighted windows, and he could hear the strains of music from the orchestra engaged at Hilton Hall for the Boxing Night dance. He snarled savagely as he listened. The light and gaiety in the crowded building contrasted bitterly with his own desperate and forlorn condition.

There was snow under the trees, though it was no longer falling. The night was clear and frosty, the sky like steel, only dimmed here and there by the drifts of mist overhanging the moor. Footfalls came to the ears of the lurking convict, and every now and then a whispering voice. He was hunted, and knew that he was hunted, almost in the shadow of Hilton Hall. A track, perhaps, had been picked up in the snow by the men who had hunted him for days and nights; or perhaps it was suspected that his unknown helper was in the mansion of Sir Gilbert Hilton.

That was likely enough. They must guess that he had some motive for lurking in the vicinity of the Hall, instead of fleeing to a distance across the wild moors. And the blanket he had dropped

in his flight on Christmas morning might have been traced as belonging to the house.

Anyhow, they were hunting him as if they knew that he was there, and in the bitter cold and gloom he shuddered with the certainty that the toils were closing in on him.

Help he must have—food, clothes, money—if he was to escape after days and nights of bitter hardship. But they knew that he was getting help, and that gave them the clue they wanted. Crouching behind the tree, he listened. A voice spoke in a low tone within three yards of him; he caught the muttered words of Inspector Trevolly.

"There's no doubt—none! He is here, and he is close to the buildings. He will not get through to the moor again: he may dodge into some outhouse or into the mansion itself. We——"

Faint footfalls moved on, and the voice died into silence.

The convict gritted his teeth.

He knew that they were closing in on him. His escape to the open moors was cut off now. In the frosty shadows men were watching for him, and others were seeking him, hunting him, close to the buildings. He clenched his half-frozen hands with bitter rage. The night would end for him, in his cell once more, within the grim stone walls of Blackmoor Prison. There was little doubt of that. But, like a hunted animal, he meant to give all the trouble he could—to fight out the losing struggle to the bitter end.

A footfall close at hand! A stocky figure moved through the shadows of the trees and touched him.

It was a warder. A startled exclamation came from the man; but before it was fairly uttered, the convict's clenched fist struck, and the man went down heavily.

A shouting voice came from a little distance. Another shout followed. The fallen man gave a cry.

Panting, Convict No. 33 dashed away from the spot. Voices sounded and echoed through the shadows behind him.

On the terrace at the side of the mansion he crouched close against the wall, panting. A jutting buttress in the old stone wall was close at hand, and he crept along it to crouch in its shadow. As he did so a figure emerged from the shadow of the buttress—a figure so like his own that even in the gloom he halted, amazed, as he stared at it. A convict!

No. 33 stood transfixed.

A convict! Another escaped man of Blackmoor?

Then he discerned that a black half-mask was over the face, and the truth leaped into his mind. He knew that a fancy-dress dance was going on in the mansion; he had had glimpses of figures in costume at doors and windows. The half-mask on the face told its tale—this was one of the company in fancy dress.

He stood, with throbbing heart, not six feet from Price of the Fifth, who had not seen him. Price was looking towards the trees, listening to the low calling voices from the night.

But a second or two later Price became aware of him—perhaps a panting breath caught his ear.

He spun round.

"Oh!" gasped Price, falling back a pace hurriedly.

His face went pale under the make-up on it.

It was a quarter of an hour since Walsingham had left him. He had waited in the shadow of the buttress,

(Continued on page 22.)



If you want your Christmas Party to "go with a swing" sing the popular hits taken at random from William Wibley's great Christmas Pantomime, details of which are given below.

THREE cheers for the panto season, boys! And three times three for the sunniest and funniest panto of the lot—William Wibley's Christmas Extravaganza, "Cinderella"! I've had the luck to see the full dress rehearsal, and I can safely say that if Wibley's audiences don't burst themselves laughing over it, I'm willing to eat my best Sunday topper any old time you like!

Wibley's "Cinderella" is an original version of the old panto on entirely new lines, with lyrics by Dick Penfold and music by Claude Hoskins.

This is how Wibley arranged his leading parts:—

Cinderella	PERCY BOLSOVER
Prince Charming	BILLY BUNTER
The Ugly Sisters	WUN LUNO
Fairy Godmother	FISHER T. FISH
Lord Chamberlain	HURREE SINGH
Court Musician	WILLIAM WIBLEY
Court Jester	CLAUDE HOSKINS
	HORACE COKER

"What the merry dickens——!" you'll gasp, when you first run your peepers over that little lot. I admit I said it myself when I first read the cast. But when I saw the show, kids, I don't mind telling you I was jolly soon converted!

You can see for yourself, anyway, that there's no risk whatever of Wibley's panto being labelled "ordinary" or "common-place," with a cast like that! Take Bolsover major as Cinderella, for instance. With his size ten boots and leg-of-mutton fists and ferocious face, Bolsy certainly makes the most original Cinderella ever seen on any stage! But for the star turn of the piece, commend me to Bunter as Prince Charming. Our Prize Porpoise rolling about the stage in doublet and hose singing sentimental ballads is a sight guaranteed to bring tears of mirth to the face of a graven image!

Coker, incidentally, had to be told that he was the hero of the piece to get him into it—and this little misunderstanding on his part naturally makes him twice as funny as he would otherwise be!

Here I should mention that Dick Penfold has taken a rare lot of liberties with the story of Cinderella as it was told me when I was a lad. Most of the scenes seem to be laid at Greyfriars; the Ugly Sisters aren't half so villainous as Cinderella; and the competition held by Prince Charming in the last act is to decide whose foot is BIG enough for the glass slipper instead of small enough as in the old yarn! These examples will give you an idea of the extensive alterations Penfold has made. But they're amply justified, for "Cinderella" a la Penfold is a scream from start to finish!

The opening lines will give you some idea of the spirit of this unique panto:

CINDERELLA: My name is Ella; I'm the dame
As works among the cinders;
So "Cinderella" is the name
What boys yell through the winders!
UGLY SISTER No. 1: Here's sis and me! We are the goods—
Or that's what bozos tell us.
Our faces look like currant puds—
I guess that's why Cin's jealous!
UGLY SISTER No. 2: Me Ugly Sister Number Two.
They say me velly nicee.
Me velly fond—what tinkee you?—
Of boiled snails, lats and micee!
FAIRY GODMOTHER: There's my honoured and absurdful
nicefulness.
I guessfully think I'll jape her.
A jolly night of fun without ceasefulness
Is the honoured and proper caper!

How's that for an opening, lads? Whoopie! But it's when Wibley's all-star company get down to parodies of modern songs that they'll bring down the house! The Rising-Bell Chorus, sung to the tune of "Three O'Clock in the Morning," for instance, ought to be a real winner, with its pathetic refrain:

At half-past six in the morning,
Gosling begins to toll.
"Clang! Clang! Clang!" goes his warning,
Out of your beds you'll roll!
Cherry's armed with a sponge, which
Soon o'er your nappers ho'll squeeze!
Though you're still dozey and bed's so cosy,
Jump out and freeze!

Needless to say, Coker is kept at a discreet distance from the stage when Hoskins and Bolsover sing this little parody of "Did You Ever See a Dream Walking?":

Did you ever see a dream walking?
See Coker!
Did you ever hear a scream talking?
Hear Coker!
Did you ever have a scream fill you,
Though he's such a bore,
With laughs galore?
(He'll make your throat awful sore!)
Did you ever watch a freak dithering?
Watch Coker!
Did you ever hear a freak blithering?
Hear Coker!
Did you ever look Horace right in the eyes,
Murmuring quietly: "Phew!
Well, the scream that was walking
And the scream that was talking,
And the dithering freak was YOU!!!"

One of the scenes that will cause a sensation is Dicky Nugent's roller-skating act, in which a chorus of fags on roller-skates serenade young Dicky to the tune of "Wagon Wheels," with the words altered like this:—

Fag on wheels, fag on wheels!
Keep on a-turning
Wingate's meals.
Roll along, toast on prong,
Serve it up ready to kill!
Go 'long fag, there's a prefect on the landing,
'Neath orders you will soon be snowed!
Go 'long, fag, never mind him reprimanding,
Tell him tea and toast be blowed!
Fag on wheels, fag on wheels!
Keep on a-burning
Wingate's meals.
Roll along, toast on prong,
Fag on wheels, make your boss gro-o-o-oan!
Fag on wheels, make your boss groan!

Lack of space prevents my giving every item, but I really must find room for the brand-new rendering of "Oh, Play to Me, Gipsy," which Bunter sings to Hoskins in an unforgettable scene, ending in the collapse of a monster booby-trap over the piano on which Hoskins is accompanying the singer. Here it is:

Oh, play to me, Hoskins,
The pail's up above.
While I'm scoffing lemonade
Play songs of love!
Oh, sing to me, Hoskins,
And e'er you are gone,
The neat booby-trap I've made
Will fall upon
Your wooden head, dear chap;
And I'll feel bright
When I have crowned your nap
Per for to-night.
Oh, play to me, Hoskins,
The pail's up above.
While I'm scoffing lemonade,
Play songs of love!

Have I given you a faint idea of the fun and frolic that's in Wibley's Crazy Christmas Panto? Well, if I have managed to convey it, you can rely on the word of your old pal that it's twice as good as you think even now!

watching. He had been certain that, sooner or later, the butler would make some fresh move—that he would spot him in communication with the convict. But it was not the butler who had appeared; it was Convict No. 33, and Price backed from him in sheer terror.

A second more, and he would have been running.

But that second was not granted him. Everything was at stake now for the hunted man, and he was on the Fifth Former of Greyfriars with the leap of a tiger.

Crash!

His clenched fist struck Price on the temple. Only one faint cry escaped the Greyfriars senior as he fell.

He was stunned.

Convict No. 33 bent over him, with glittering eyes, ready to strike again. But it was not necessary. Price was unconscious.

There was a shout. Keen ears had caught a sound, and running footsteps followed.

They were coming!

The game was up! In a few moments more— But in those moments the hunted man's brain worked swiftly.

He grasped the half-mask from Price's face and fastened it on his own. He ran swiftly along the terrace to a spot where a window was open.

That was the only way left to him—into the house! There was a chance—a chance, at least—that if he was seen he would be taken for the guest in fancy costume—the fellow who was got up as a convict! It was the only chance left to the hunted man of Blackmoor, and he took it. Even as he leaped in at the open window there were footsteps on the terrace behind him.

He heard a sound of a stumble. A panting voice followed:

"Here he is!"

"We've got him!"

Inside the butler's room, Convict No. 33 panted. Pursuit had ceased—two or three men had gathered round the fallen figure in fancy dress on the terrace. For a moment he did not understand. Then it flashed into his mind that they had taken the fellow in convict garb for him.

Softly he closed the window. As he did so he heard voices again from the shadows outside.

"It's him!"

"Fainted, I suppose. Well, he's been through it, hard!"

"Get hold of him!"

They were carrying the insensible fellow away. Convict No. 33 grinned with savage mockery. It would be some time in the dark before they discovered their mistake. He had a chance!

THE FOURTEENTH CHAPTER.

A Change of Identity!

"PRICEY, old bean!"

Hilton of the Fifth tapped the dapper figure in convict garb on the arm. He was a little startled by the gleam in the eyes that turned on him through the eyeholes in Price's mask.

"I've been lookin' for you," he said.

Convict No. 33 muttered something indistinctly.

He was cool—cool as ice. Twenty, thirty, pairs of eyes had turned on him since he had emerged from the room by which he had entered the house; but there had been no suspicion in any of them.

Outside the warders had taken the unconscious fellow in convict garb for him. Inside, the guests of Hilton Hall were

taking him for the fellow he had knocked down and stunned.

He had avoided speaking so far; which was easy enough. But he could not avoid it now as this handsome fellow in cavalier costume came up and tapped him on the arm and addressed him as "Pricey." Evidently the fellow he had knocked down was named Price, and this was a friend of his.

"Been out of doors?" asked Hilton puzzled. "You're frightfully mucky, Pricey. Been out collectin' mud, or what? By gad, if old Trevelly looked in now he would take you for the man he's hunting for."

Convict No. 33 laughed. He thought that very likely.

"You're goin' to dance?" asked Hilton.

"Oh, certainly!"

The convict spoke in a low, husky tone, coughing as he did so. He knew that this fellow, whoever he was, would know the voice of the person he fancied he was speaking to. He assumed a husky cough for disguise.

"Catchin' a cold?" asked Hilton. "You must be an ass to go out in that rig, Pricey! It's freezing outside."

"I'm all right."

"You don't sound all right! Look here, I've been goin' to introduce you to my Cousin Amy—you've never met her, and I've asked her to keep a dance for you. I've told her how you hop, old man. Come on!"

Hilton dragged him away.

"I say, you fellows, there's that ass Price!" a fat voice was heard. "He'd get jolly well run-in in that rig if the bobbies saw him. He, he, he!"

A few minutes later Convict No. 33 was dancing with a tall, slim girl, who found her Cousin Cedric's school pal an excellent dancer!

Hilton, from a little distance, watched him rather curiously. It struck him that there was some change in Price, though he could not quite make out what it was. The figure was much the same; the garb was the same; the general appearance was the same; but there was some sort of difference. Cedric Hilton little dreamed how tremendous that difference was, however.

Another pair of eyes was fixed on the dancing convict, from the doorway of a dressing-room—eyes that almost bulged from a plump and portly face as they watched.

Walsingham stood there, rooted. A fat figure of a brigand with one moustache curling up into his eye and the other curling down under his fat chin, rolled into the room and poked the butler in the ribs with a podgy thumb.

"I say, stick this on for me!" said Billy Bunter. "The beastly thing keeps on coming off!"

Walsingham did not hear. His eyes were on the dancers in the distance, following the convict in a fascinated way.

"Deaf?" grunted Bunter.

He gave Walsingham another jab in the ribs.

"Where's the sticking gum?" demanded the Owl of the Remove. "Can't you make yourself useful? What the thump are you here for, I'd like to know? I say, Walsingham—"

"Don't bother, please."

"Wha-a-at?" Billy Bunter blinked at the butler in angry indignation and astonishment. "You cheeky ass, what do you mean? Find that fixing gum for me, and look sharp, see?"

Walsingham breathed hard. But he turned to give the fat Owl the assistance he wanted. Fixing gum was dabbed on

the troublesome moustache and once more it was righted, and the fat brigand rolled away. As he went out of the room, the convict passed him, coming in.

Bunter gave him a blink and a sniff. "I say, Price, you look an awful ass in that rig!" he said, and rolled on hastily before Price of the Fifth could reply—little guessing that it was very far from being Stephen Price that he had addressed.

The convict gave a quick glance round the room. Walsingham's bulging eyes were on him.

He stepped towards the butler.

"I spotted you!" he muttered. "You know me—"

"Richard!" breathed Walsingham, in a suffocated voice.

The convict grinned mockingly.

"Nobody here knows me, except you," he said. "But if I'm snaffled they will know me. Are you going to help me out?"

"You must be mad to come here!" breathed Walsingham. "They have taken you for Mr. Price, who is got up as a convict, or you would have been discovered at once. But if he is seen about—and I cannot imagine why he is out of sight all this time—"

"Never mind that! Help me and lose no time! I've got to get out of this."

"You should not have come! In my master's house—"

"Cut that out! I'm as anxious to go, as you can be to see the last of me. You're going to help me—blood's thicker than water! Get me out of sight, where I can change."

The butler of Hilton Hall stood for a moment as if in doubt. Then he nodded and opened a door into a small adjoining room. The convict passed through, and the butler closed the door after him.

There were beads of perspiration on the butler's portly face. He wiped them away with a trembling hand.

"Walsingham!"

He started at the sound of Cedric Hilton's voice.

"Yes, Master Cedric!" he stammered.

"Have you seen Price?"

"Mr. P-Price!" stammered the butler. "No, sir!"

"He came in here," said Hilton, puzzled. He was looking in from the hall. "I say, there's something up, Walsingham. Inspector Trevelly has come in, and he's speaking to my father—and he wants to see Price! Where the dooce can the fellow have got to?"

Walsingham caught his breath.

"I have not seen Mr. Price, sir, for some time—I saw him on the terrace outside quite a long time ago—"

"He came in here—"

"I did not see him, sir, if he did."

"I say, you fellows, he was in here!" came a squeaky voice. "I say, what do they want him for? I say, Walsingham, where is he?"

The music had ceased. Groups stood about with startled faces, and there was a buzz of amazed voices. Among the guests, several police-constables in uniform, and several warders from Blackmoor Prison, were moving about, scanning faces. Evidently something had happened.

Sir Gilbert Hilton came up, with Inspector Trevelly at his side, a startled crowd following.

"Is he here, Cedric?" rapped the baronet.

"No, father—and Walsingham says he hasn't seen him—"

"Is anything the matter, sir?" asked Walsingham.



As the Greyfriars juniors looked through the half-open door of the hut, they saw the butler of Hilton Hall sorting out clothing and other things from a large bag that lay open at his feet. On a bench, a few feet from him, sat the escaped convict of Blackmoor, devouring food with a wolfish greed. "Keep ready!" breathed Hilton. "Don't let him out!"

"The matter!" spluttered Sir Gilbert. "Good gad, I should say so! That fellow got up as a convict—it is not Mr. Price at all—it is—it must be—the convict himself! Where is he? Has he escaped?"

"Oh crikey!" gasped Billy Bunter.

"The convict!" exclaimed Harry Wharton.

There was a hum of startled voices. All through Hilton Hall, police and warders, guests and menservants, were searching for the man in convict garb. But they did not find him.

THE FIFTEENTH CHAPTER.

Hard Pressed!

"THE jolly old convict!"

"Great pip!"

"The great-pipfulness is terrific!"

Confusion and excitement reigned in the great building. It was a strange and dramatic interruption of Boxing Night's festivities.

The news spread like wildfire. The convict—the escaped crook from Blackmoor—was in the house somewhere! Dozens had seen him—without knowing that they had seen him! They had, of course, taken him for Price of the Greyfriars Fifth!

But Price of the Fifth was in evidence again now. A crowd surrounded him as he stood with haggard face, a great dark bruise on his temple.

Hilton helped him away to his room.

The story he told was buzzed up and down the house.

He had been knocked down and stunned by the convict, and he had come to his senses to find himself in the hands of the police—who had fancied that they had Convict No. 33. And the convict, as the only way of escape open to him, had coolly taken his place among the guests of Hilton Hall! Unless he had escaped since, he was still somewhere in the mansion. The hunt for him went on high and low.

Price, lying down on his bed with a racking headache, did not take part in it. But the Famous Five did, and many of the other guests. Hilton of the Fifth was in a state of great amazement. He knew now that the fellow he had spoken to, and whom he had introduced to his girl cousin, was not Price at all, but Convict No. 33. The nerve of the rascal was amazing. It was still more amazing what had become of him. He seemed to have vanished into thin air.

Harry Wharton & Co., throwing on coats over their costumes, joined a number of others who were watching doors and windows in the frosty air outside.

If the man was still in the mansion he was certain to be found, for the search was going on from room to room, and not a recess was likely to be left unexplored. It could only be a matter of time before he was rooted out.

Every door was guarded, and it was probable that he would seek to jump from a window—and the windows were almost innumerable.

"Hallo, hallo, hallo!" called out Bob Cherry as a portly figure loomed in the shadows. "Seen anything of him, Walsingham?"

The butler glanced round. All the juniors noticed that his plump face was pale.

"I—I have seen nothing, sir!" murmured Walsingham.

He was standing by a small window, which the juniors noticed was open. The room within was dark.

"Keeping an eye on that window?" asked Harry.

"Yes, sir—exactly! Perhaps if you young gentlemen went farther along, and—"

"Right-ho! Come on, you men!" said Wharton.

As the Famous Five passed along in the shadows, Walsingham put his head in at the open window of the little room.

"Quick!" he breathed.

A dark figure leaped from the window to the terrace outside. It was muffled in a thick overcoat, and a soft hat was pulled down over the brows.

Without a word to the butler, the dark figure cut across the terrace and leaped away into the frosty night.

Walsingham stood panting. He gave a cry, as a shout rang along the terrace from the direction taken by the juniors.

"Hallo, hallo, hallo! Who's that?"

Bob Cherry had glanced back and caught a glimpse of the vanishing figure in the glimmer of the stars.

"Who—what—" exclaimed Harry.

"This way!" shouted Bob. He

rushed back "Walsingham, did you see him? He must have got out of that window—"

"I—I—" stammered the hapless butler. "I—"

"This way!" roared Bob.

He rushed after the fleeting shadow in the gloom. His comrades were at his heels in a second.

Walsingham stood staring after them, his face like chalk. Cedric Hilton's voice was heard shouting:

"What's that? Have you seen him?"

He came running along the terrace. "This way!" came Bob Cherry's yell.

Hilton of the Fifth ran in the direction of his voice. Five or six others followed him at a run.

Across the dim lawn that stretched for some distance from the terrace a dark, nimble figure was running desperately. In the frosty gleam of the stars it was clearly visible for some moments, and all the Famous Five could see it as they sprinted after it.

"That's the man!" panted Wharton.

"Must be!" gasped Nugent.

The figure vanished under dark trees. It was seen again, running hard.

Hilton came racing after the juniors.

"Seen him?" he panted.

"Look!"

"There he is!"

The running figure had almost reached a wall that divided the grounds of Hilton Hall from the open moor. He was not recognisable as the convict; all that could be seen was a dark overcoat and a soft dark hat. But the fact that he was running desperately was enough.

"After him!" panted Hilton.

He put on a spurt and raced ahead of the panting juniors. The running figure reached the wall and made a frantic leap to catch the coping at the top. His hands slipped from an insecure grasp, and he fell back, stumbled, and rolled on the ground almost at Hilton's feet.

The dandy of the Fifth Form of Greyfriars pounced on him. Dandy as he was, Hilton had plenty of pluck. In

a moment the escaping man was struggling in his grasp.

"Got him!" yelled Hilton. "Help here!"

"Come on!" panted Bob.

The juniors tore up. The struggling man had gained his feet and was wrestling wildly to tear himself loose from Hilton of the Fifth. Suddenly he bounded free, leaving the overcoat in Hilton's grasp.

He darted away again, with the outstretched hands of the juniors almost touching him.

"Oh gad!" gasped Hilton, staring blankly at the overcoat in his hands out of which the agile convict had slipped.

"After him!" roared Johnny Bull.

The desperate figure bounded on ahead. Now that the coat was off, the juniors could see the convict garb that had been hidden under it. The man was Convict No. 33 of Blackmoor.

"It's the man—"

"This way!"

"After him!"

The fugitive was cutting across the lawn again. But the thick-set figure of a warder appeared ahead and headed him off. He spun round, and the juniors had a glimpse of his face, white and desperate, streaming with perspiration in spite of the icy cold, the eyes glittering like a hunted animal's. He glared round him and cut off in a fresh direction, escaping the grasp of the juniors almost by a miracle.

"After him!"

"We've got him now!"

The convict was heading for the wall again. Inspector Trevelly, panting, passed the juniors and rushed straight at him. Lanterns and electric torches were gleaming now, lighting up the wild figure as it ran.

It seemed that the convict was cornered. The burly inspector was hardly a yard behind him, and behind Mr. Trevelly came a shouting crowd, and in front of the fugitive was a high wall which he had already attempted to leap in vain. But desperation seemed to give him superhuman strength. He sprang at the wall, and

this time his hands grasped the coping and he hung.

The inspector, springing at him, staggered back from a savage kick that caught him under the chin. The next moment, before another hand could grasp at him, the convict had dragged himself to the top of the wall and rolled over to the other side.

A bump was heard as he fell. It was followed by the sound of running feet. Convict No. 33 was loose on the moor and in full flight. In a very few minutes pursuit was hot at his heels again, and the sound of shouting voices and the flashing of lights died away across the wilds of Blackmoor.

Walsingham met the Greyfriars juniors as they came back, breathless, to the house.

"Have they got him?" he asked in a husky voice.

Harry Wharton shook his head.

"No!" he answered. "But—"

"But they'll get him," said Bob cheerily. "They're right at his heels. They'll get him all right—don't you worry."

Walsingham gave him a strange look and turned away without replying.

THE SIXTEENTH CHAPTER.

A Startling Discovery!

"ROT!" said Hilton.

"Atchooooooh-oooh!" said Price.

It was the following morning, and Price of the Fifth was sitting up in bed with a muffler round his neck, a pile of pillows behind him, and a hot-water bottle at his feet. He alternately sneezed and coughed. Price had caught a bad cold on Boxing Night; which was not surprising. It put him into an extremely bad temper; which was not surprising either. His nose was red, his eyes watery, and he scowled.

Hilton, who had come in to see him, sat by the bed-side smoking a cigarette.

Price eyed him viciously.

"I tell you, it's so," he said. "I fancy old Trevelly suspects it, too, since that bundle of clobber was missing from the butler's room."

"Utter rot!" drawled Hilton.

"The police know that the convict has a friend in this quarter. It's as clear as daylight that it's somebody in Hilton Hall. And I know who it is—I've told you my reasons. It's your butler, Walsingham."

Price almost spat out the words. He had a big bruise on his temple; he was in the grip of a horrible cold; he was laid up for days. Any further attempt to bag the fifty pounds reward by watching the butler and getting a clue to the convict was out of the question. Now he had told Hilton what he knew; or rather, what he suspected. To his angry surprise and irritation, the dandy of the Fifth laughed at the idea.

"My dear man," said Hilton soothingly. "You'll forget this rot when you feel better. Walsingham's the most respectable old stick in Devonshire. I owe him some obligations, too—you know he's lent me money at times. He's been a good friend to me, in one way and another. You've dreamed all this."

"Then you don't believe it?"

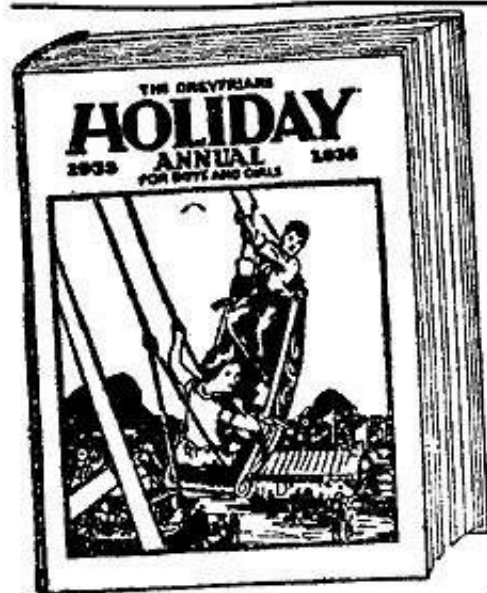
Hilton laughed.

"Rot! Of course not!"

"The police ought to know."

Cedric Hilton's face became very grave.

"Cut that out, Pricey! You're a guest here! My father isn't keen on you, but he accepts you as my school pal. I don't know what he would do if you



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started a yarn like that about his butler! But it would be somethin' pretty drastic, I think! Walsingham's been with him twenty years or more! He used to carry me on his back when I was a little kid. Don't be so mad!"

"I tell you—"

Hilton rose to his feet and threw away his cigarette.

"No use tellin' me! And if you tell anybody else, remember that our friendship's at an end, and you leave as soon as you're well enough to move; and I'll thank you not to speak to me next term at Greyfriars."

"You're a fool!"

"Possibly! But don't say any more!"

Hilton walked out of the room, leaving Price scowling savagely. The dandy of Greyfriars went downstairs, put on his coat and hat, and went out into the frosty sunshine.

He was quite aware of Price's suspicious and malicious nature, and he had no doubt that that was the only foundation of his startling theory. At the same time, he realised that there were many circumstances in favour of that theory, and he had a vague feeling of uneasiness. There was nothing in it—there could be nothing in it—but he was worried.

"Hallo, hallo, hallo!" came a cheery roar. "Like a snowball, Hilton?"

The Fifth Form man glanced round, with a smile. Harry Wharton & Co. were snowballing one another in merry spirits that frosty morning. Price's words had left Hilton with a bad taste in his mouth, as it were, and the sight of the cheery schoolboys did him good. But he was not disposed for a snowballing game with the fags and he shook his head and walked away.

"By gad!" he ejaculated suddenly.

He was thinking of Walsingham and of what Price had said. And he started a little at the sight of the man of whom he was thinking.

A portly figure in an overcoat was passing down a path from the house through the leafless, icy trees, and Hilton's glance followed it curiously.

Walsingham was walking quickly—unusually quickly for the portly and stately butler; and he carried a bag in his hand. Hilton's eyes lingered strangely on that bag.

It was rather large and seemed heavy. Where was the butler of Hilton Hall going, in the morning, bag in hand? Not on a journey—Hilton knew that he was not going away. He stood looking after the butler till the portly figure disappeared among the trees.

Many minutes after Walsingham had disappeared from sight, Hilton stood staring at the tracks he had left in the snow; his hands driven deep into his pockets, his brows wrinkled in troubled thought.

But for what Stephen Price had said, he would have taken no heed of the butler's proceedings. But he had to take heed now.

His brow grew darker. It was impossible—or seemed impossible, at least—for what could Walsingham's motive be? And yet—

Hilton turned at last and walked back to the oak avenue where the juniors were still snowballing one another. He called to them.

"You men like a walk?" he asked.

They came scampering up with cheery, ruddy faces.

"Yes, certainly," said Harry Wharton. He glanced rather curiously at Cedric Hilton's grave, clouded face. "Whither bound?"

"After the jolly old convict?" grinned Bob Cherry.

"Well, if we happened on him, you fellows wouldn't funk lending me a hand to bag him," said the Fifth Former.

"No fear!"

"The no fearfulness is terrific."

"Come on, then!" said Hilton.

He walked away in the direction taken by Walsingham.

Harry Wharton & Co. walked with him wondering a little. They soon discerned that Hilton was keeping to a track left in the snow which made them wonder all the more. However, they asked no questions.

COME INTO THE OFFICE, BOYS!

Your Editor is always pleased to hear from his readers. Write to him: Editor of the MAGNET, The Fleetway House, Farringdon Street, London, E.C.4. A stamped, addressed envelope will ensure a reply.

Put it there, chums! Here's the glad hand for each and every one of you. All my staff join me in wishing you the old, old wish

A MERRY CHRISTMAS
and
A HAPPY NEW YEAR!

In last week's Christmas Number I voiced similar greetings to my thousands of chums, but some of you will be new readers who did not get that particular number of the Old Paper. Anyway, it is a greeting that doesn't lose value by repetition. And what's more, you can take it from me that we're going to do our best to see that you enjoy this festive season.

Take a look at the contents of this issue, for instance. You've got the real type of fun and fiction you want at Christmas-time, haven't you? Frank Richards has certainly stepped in with the "real goods." This popular author certainly knows how to write a story that makes one sit up and take notice.

By the way, one of my girl readers, who signs herself "Daredevil Rheolaid," has written to me to ask if I know any word longer than the following:

"Llanfairpwllgwyllgogerychwyndrobicllantillillogogoch."

Phew! That's

A MOUTHFUL FOR YOU!

But, believe it or not, chums, that is the name of a Welsh village on the

They left the grounds by a little wicket gate. Hilton's glance swept the moor, but there was no one in sight. The footprints led away across the moor over an almost spotless expanse of snow.

Hilton tramped on grimly. He did not, he could not believe what Price had told him. But he was going to know.

Harry Wharton & Co. followed him in silence. They realised that something was "up," though they could not guess what it was. But if Hilton fancied that that trail might lead to the escaped man of Blackmoor, they were quite ready to back him up—ready and keen. It was fairly clear that that was what was in Hilton's mind. He did not speak a word as he tramped on, till suddenly,

about a mile from the Hall, he uttered a sharp exclamation.

"The old hut!"

"The which?" inquired Bob.

Hilton glanced at him, setting his lips. He waved his hand towards a clump of leafless trees at a distance banked many feet high with snow that had drifted in the winter wind.

"There's an old shepherd's hut there!" he said. "You can't see it—it's hidden by snow. But I remember it's there."

"Just the place for the jolly old convict to hide!" said Bob.

Hilton compressed his lips.

"It must have been searched," he

Isle of Anglesey, about two miles from the Menai Straits Bridge! She wants to know if any of my readers know a longer place name than this? Well, it's up to you, chums!

Curiously enough, I received another letter by the same post, from "Inquirer," of Kenton, Middlesex, who sent me along another long word. This was:

"Trichlorophenylmethyliodosalicyt."

It is a chemical name, and is known, for short, as "T.O.P." solution. But I think my Welsh girl reader takes the biscuit this week. You might write these words out and hand them to your chums. Ask them if they know any longer word. When they've given it up, just say:

"What about the word 'smiles'?
There's a mile between the first and the last letter!"

Now for next week's programme. You'll all be wondering what further adventures are going to befall Harry Wharton & Co. at Hilton Hall, and in next week's splendid long complete school yarn, which is entitled:

"THE FUGITIVE OF THE MOOR!"

you'll learn all about them. Take my advice and ask your newsagent to reserve a copy of next week's MAGNET for you. There's always an extra demand for the Old Paper at this time of the year, and I don't want any of my regular readers to be disappointed.

You'll enjoy, too, the special issue of the "Greyfriars Herald" and the further exciting chapters of Morton Pike's olden-time adventure yarn, not to mention another interesting Soccer talk by "Linesman." I am sorry I have had to hold over a number of replies to readers' letters, but I will deal with them all in due course.

All the best, chums, and all you wish yourselves!

YOUR EDITOR.

said. "But since then— Anyhow, we shall see! Keep your eyes open!"

"You bet!"

The footprints led directly towards the clump of frosty, frozen trees.

In silence, with a grim face, Hilton tramped on, followed by the Remove fellows. Walsingham with a packed bag had gone direct to that lonely, snow-hidden hut on the moor. Why?

The truth was borne in upon Cedric Hilton's mind. Price had been right! The shepherd's hut was a mile and a half from Hilton Hall—two or three miles from any other habitation. And Walsingham was there—he must be inside the hut as he was not to be seen on the moor. Why? There was only

(Continued on page 28.)

THE MAGNET LIBRARY.—No. 1,402.

CAPTAIN CRIMSON!

By
MORTON PIKE.

WHAT'S GONE BEFORE.

Dan Hickerman, an Excise-officer, arrives in Widewater, with the intention of putting "paid" to Tom Roke and his smuggler friends. He fails in his purpose, however, thanks to the intervention of "Captain Crimson," a mysterious highwayman, and two boy chums named Jack Lennard and Billy Jepp. Later, comes news that Prince Charles Edward, the Young Pretender, together with his Highlanders, has landed in Scotland, and is taking all before him on his march to London. In consequence of this, Lennard and Jepp join the Dragoons as gentlemen volunteers. Some four months later, a lone rider on the Derby road, wearing a three-cornered hat and a dark-blue coat over civilian attire, pulls up outside some deserted farm buildings.

(Now read on.)

Trapped!

THE lone rider dismounted, and, drawing a long pistol from a holster, stole softly round the silent buildings until he reached the house, again listening intently, his thumb on the latch.

When he lifted it at last, a low grunt of satisfaction passed his lips as the door opened, and, after another lingering look in the direction of the high-road, he entered the kitchen.

The room was empty, but the fire still smouldered on the hearth, and, striding to it, the man kicked the logs into a blaze, which showed him an empty cradle, a child's shoe on the stone-slabbled floor, cupboards standing wide open, and every sign of a hurried departure.

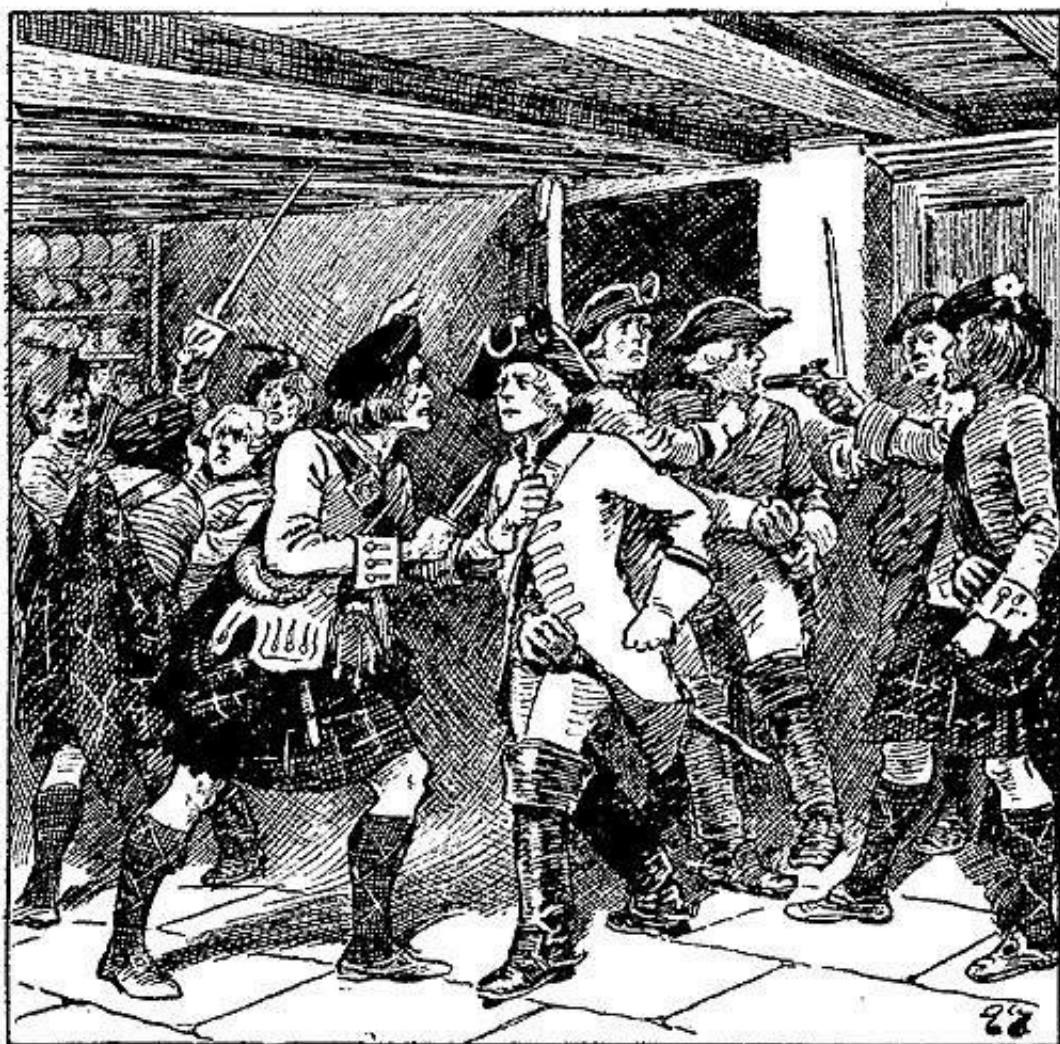
The only living thing visible was a large tabby cat, purring contentedly on the big kitchen table, its green eyes regarding the intruder with a stare of absolute indifference.

"H'm! I've found worse quarters in Flanders ere this!" said the man, half-aloud, as the rosy glow of the firelight shone on a square bottle on the opposite shelf. "All's fair in love and war," we're told."

Taking the bottle from the shelf, he drank deep, afterwards posting himself with his back to the blaze, the skirts of his cloak drawn aside in each hand that he might the better enjoy the grateful warmth.

All the while he was listening, his deep-set eyes on the closed door, as though he might be expecting someone, every sense keenly alert, like a man who carried his life in his own hands.

"Heigh-ho!" he sighed, after a while, letting fall his skirts, and emptying the bottle at a draught. "I'm loath to leave this warmth on such a night, but needs must!"



Jack's wrist was seized in a sinewy grip, and a knife was held perilously near to his throat!

He strode to the door again, set it ajar, his ear to the opening until, hearing nothing but the wailing of the frosty wind among the barns and byres, he went out into the darkness.

The tabby cat resumed its contemplation of the crackling logs, and the tall clock in the corner had ticked off ten solemn minutes, when those green eyes turned to the door again as it opened very softly, to meet another pair of eyes that were strained and bloodshot from their contact with the cruel wind.

The inquiring head that was thrust into the deserted kitchen wore a flat bonnet, with a cockade of white ribbon stitched to the tartan band, and the blade of a Highland broadsword gleamed in the firelight.

The man said something in a strange tongue over his shoulder, and those behind followed him quickly in, making hardly a sound in their shoes of untanned deerskin.

"Fortune smiles at last, my lord!" said the first comer. "We may sleep snug enough here, and join the army at streak of dawn."

A man entered on the heels of the others, booted and spurred, snow on the shoulder-capes of his cloak, discontent and ill-temper in his pale, flabby face.

"I suppose one must be thankful for small mercies!" he growled. "And 'tis warmer here than outside! I only hope

you'll find something for supper in this dog's hole!"

While the Highlanders—there were eight of them—set their long Spanish muskets against the wall, and drew the curtains across the window, my lord placed his pistols on the table, cuffed the unoffending cat brutally from its place, and seated himself in the farmer's armchair.

Very soon half a dozen candles lit up the room, and a ham, overlooked where it had hung among the low rafters in that sudden flight, had been cut into collops, and the frying-pan gave out a delightful odour as it sizzled on the fire.

To crown all, one of the foragers returned with a brown jar of strong-waters, and even my lord's ill-humour gradually melted at sight of it.

"His Highness the Prince should be well housed in Derby by now," he said. "I only hope Murray and his rearguard do not nose us out here, for I need a night's rest more than anything on earth! When we've supped, some of ye can bring a feather bed from above stairs and lay it on the floor for me. Egad, I'm as stiff as an old horse, and saddle-galled at that! Where in the plague's name are you going, sergeant?"

"To carry this drun to my cousin, Roy Frazer; he'll need it, out on guard under the hayrick by the loanside."

As the young Highlander opened the

kitchen door a whirl of snowflakes met him.

Four riders, chilled to the bone, in spite of their red cloaks, pulled up at the edge of a thick copse.

"I'll swear something moved in the hollow down yonder!" said Jack Lennard, dismounting stiffly to stamp his heavy boots in the white drift in an effort to warm his feet. "Hold my horse, Billy!"

"Have a care, old fellow!" warned Billy Jepp. "One cannot see twenty yards ahead in this snowstorm, let alone as far as the hollow!"

Jack smiled as he opened his cloak; looked carefully at the pan of the musket hanging by a swivel to the broad shoulder-belt, then, creeping cautiously along the lee side of the hazel copse, was out of sight in a moment.

As he reached the opposite corner of the trees the snow ceased suddenly and the wintry landscape lay before him in the uncertain twilight.

Below, at the foot of a sloping field, a straggle of farm buildings filled the dip, the only human habitation in sight. Beyond the farm the hills rose, dimly seen against the December sky.

The gentleman-volunteer had been right. Something was moving along the bare hedgerow on the left of the snow-covered slope—a solitary horseman, who stopped several times to peer through the hedge in the direction of the road which the watcher knew must lie somewhere away to the westward.

Dropping on to one knee, Jack waited, hidden, as he hoped, by the network of slender stems before him, and just as the snow began to fall again the man came riding straight for the spot.

"Stand, or I fire!" rang out the challenge. "Who are you?"

"Friend!" was the prompt reply, delivered with a musical laugh that was odd to hear under the circumstances. "Your voice betrays you, Master Lennard, even with that tremor in it."

The speaker reined up.

"Odds life, Major Dugdale, 'tis a mercy my finger had not pulled the trigger!" exclaimed Jack, jumping to his feet. "Seeing you were not in regimental attire, I took you for an enemy spy!"

"Instead of one who has been spying on the enemy, lad!" laughed the other. "But what brings you to this place alone?"

"Nay, sir, Billy and a couple of men are on the other side of the wood, and there are some patrols of the regiment a mile or so behind us. We were to feel the Nottingham Road in case the rebels went that way."

"And you've had your trouble for naught, since the rogues will make for Derby," said the horseman. "I heard it in Ashbourne, where the Pretender slept last night. But as there is no sign of them yet 'twill be risky work to show ourselves yonder. Call your fellows and we'll ride down to the farm, there. A brisk wood fire will not come amiss, and we will pick up the rebels' trail before sunrise."

"We're in luck's way, after all," said Jack, as Billy Jepp came up in answer to his chum's cry. "Major Dugdale has been out scouting. The Pretender's at Derby, he believes, and we're going to the farm below for the night."

Billy handed him his rein in silence, but Jack heard the white teeth close with a snap.

"Why, what's the matter?" he whispered, knowing his friend so well.

"I didn't say there was anything the

matter, but if his news is true we ought to carry it to the duke at once."

"I wonder how many miles you'd hope to cover on a night like this, my lad—to say nothing of blundering into one of Lord George Murray's lynx-eyed outposts?" came a mocking voice out of the snowstorm, which raged with fury just then.

Although the speaker had ridden within a horse's length of the two, they could not see him, so dense was the fall, and the little party cowered under the shelter of the copse for well nigh half an hour before the snow lulled again.

"Now!" warned the major. "Follow me, and lead your nags along the hedge-bottom, lest we show against the skyline."

In spite of the cold, the two lads felt a thrill in their veins, for this was soldiering in very earnest.

Once or twice as they descended the slope, their leader halted, but no sound came to their ears, the thick snow muffled the trample of horse-hoof and jack-boot, and in a few minutes they filed into an empty stable, glad to find hay still in the rack above the long manger.

"The house door is straight in front of you," said Dugdale, from the other end of the stable, where he was fumbling with his girth, "and the sooner you take possession the better."

Jack led the way, lifted the latch, and strode into the kitchen.

The next moment he gave a warning shout as his wrist was seized in a sinewy grip and a knife was held perilously near to his throat. The yellow candle-light showed him his three companions in like case, Billy alone struggling to put up a fight for it until three stalwart Highlanders threw him down on the stone flags and disarmed him, while another closed and bolted the door.

"Trapped!" exclaimed Jack Lennard, with something very like a sob.

"Stap my vitals, young man, you never said a truer word!" laughed a mocking voice from the other side of the table, where a white-faced gentleman was holding a cocked pistol in each hand.

"Ha, ha! Bind the rascals tight, sergeant. I bear Cobham a grudge for an affront he once put upon me, and since these fellows are four of his dragoons, we are now quits."

"Will your lordship not question the prisoners, that we may send their news to his Highness?" said the young sergeant, as his companions began to pinion their captives very thoroughly.

"When I require any advice from you, my good fellow, I will ask it," retorted his officer, and the sergeant's dark face flushed redly under the rebuke. "I am far too sleepy to trouble about news to-night." He uncocked his pistols gingerly. "'Tis a blessing we shall be in London four days hence, for I tell you, Mr. Duncan Frazer, the discomforts of campaigning begin to appeal to me less and less."

He spoke with a mincing, foppish air, and seemed to be a very superior kind of person—at any rate, in his own estimation.

Although Jack's wrist ached from the powerful young Highlander's grip, he liked him better, for his soldierly bearing, than the man he called "my lord."

As for Billy Jepp, still smarting from the effects of that struggle on the particularly hard floor of the farm kitchen, and having all the fighting instincts of a game-cock, he made no secret of his own views.

"You asked me, a while ago, Jack, what the matter was?" he said, turn-

ing his head to his companion in adversity. "What do you think of your wonderful Dugdale now?"

The words, jerked out in hot anger, produced a most remarkable change in my lord's manner.

His face grew a livid green, and his voice was strained and husky as he leaned over the table towards the speaker.

"What was that?" he demanded.

"Did I hear you say Dugdale?"

"You did!"

"What do you know of him?"

"Little to his credit."

"Nor I, either!" snarled his lordship.

"When did you see him last?"

Billy fortunately pulled himself up, and allowed discretion to conquer his wrath.

"That is for you to discover," he said firmly. "I am telling you nothing."

My lord looked at the highland sergeant.

"Is there no way of making this dog bark?" he queried. "On the Spanish Main, I have heard say, a candle flame under the thumb has often loosened the tongue."

Duncan Frazer drew himself proudly up, and his lip curled.

"I am here to fight," he said, "not to torture prisoners!"

"I shall not forget that mutinous speech," growled his officer, his face still haggard and livid. "Perhaps you will obey this order. Tie these men to yonder chairs, and post a double guard outside. I could wish now that we had followed the prince to Derby, after all."

After pacing up and down in a state of great agitation, Lord Trimmingham flung himself on to the bed which had been placed in front of the fire; fresh candles were lit on the table, and silence fell over the kitchen of that lonely farm.

Having secured his pistols, Major Dugdale was about to follow the others, when he suddenly stepped back into the dark stable again, stifling an oath.

For an instant he saw the four red cloaks outlined against the candlelight; and then as several kilted figures sprang upon them from the drift where they had been crouching, the door closed, blotting out the glimpse of that fierce struggle on the threshold, although the sound of shouting inside the kitchen came to his ears.

Darting across to the window where one ray shone through the faulty shutter, he tried in vain to peer in, but was rewarded by hearing his own name pronounced in hot anger by Billy Jepp, and my lord's startled response.

"That is Trimmingham's voice, if I ever heard it, the besotted fool!" he exclaimed, under his breath; and in a moment he was back in the stable, girthing up with feverish haste.

The candles on the table had burned half-way down, and my lord was snoring peacefully at last.

Wrapped in their tattered plaids with their arms beside them, the weary Highlanders lay on the stone floor by the fire, the young sergeant alone wakeful and alert, and every half-hour he got up noiselessly to visit the sentinels outside.

But even his sharp eyes failed to show him something that was in progress, although he looked keenly at the prisoners each time he went out and returned again.

The Highlanders had obeyed my lord's final order to the letter, tying the

four Dragoons securely, each to a rush-bottomed chair; their arms behind the chair backs, their ankles to the front legs. But in ranging them in a row along the kitchen wall, they had overturned Jack, so that he lay on his side, next to Billy.

It was a very undignified position, and the weight on his right arm numbed it cruelly. But everything in this strange world of ours has its compensations, and Jack would not have changed it, even for that feather bed, since it brought his wrists in close contact with Billy Jepp's spur.

He knew from the answering pressure of his chum's heel that Billy understood; the rest was only a matter of time. After working the cord against the sharp rowel for several anxious minutes, Jack freed his left arm.

It was just then that the young sergeant rose to make his rounds for the fourth time. As the door closed behind him, Jack looked up at Billy.

"Don't stir!" he whispered, groping in the pocket of his yellow vest, and, drawing out the shut-knife which the searchers had overlooked, he opened it with his teeth.

As he freed his own feet from their bonds the latch snicked sharply. He lay back with a stifled groan of bitter disappointment, knowing that discovery would be certain now. The sergeant, however, gave a low cry of warning in Gaelic without entering, which roused his sleeping comrades in an instant.

The four men sprang up as one, cocking their muskets, and then ran out in evident alarm. Bounding to the door, Jack closed it gently behind them, shooting the heavy bolt into its socket.

"The luck's turned, old fellow!" he exclaimed, cutting his chum clear.

Then he turned to the Dragoons who had been sound asleep, and severed their bonds in turn.

"What's happening out there?" whispered Billy Jepp. "Suppose it proves to be more of the rebel pack?"

Snatching up their weapons from the heap on the table, and giving no heed to Lord Trimmingham, who was snoring, they listened anxiously, hearing nothing for several moments until the discharge of a musket close at hand made them all start, and awoke the sleeper.

Five quick reports followed from different parts of the farmyard, a sharp shout in Gaelic, and an English voice, crying:

"At 'em, brave boys! Down with the rebel dogs! Give 'em no quarter!"

After that there came a lusty, eager yell; the unmistakable heavy snort and plunge of horses in the snow, the ring of steel on steel, and a chorus of "Hurrahs!" which seemed to ebb and flow.

Watch out for further exciting chapters of this popular adventure story in next week's MAGNET, chums!

HUNTED DOWN!

(Continued from page 25.)

one answer to that question—and Hilton set his teeth. The butler of Hilton Hall—his father's trusted servant—a confederate of an escaped crook—if that was the truth, the sooner it was made known the better.

The old hut was almost buried in snow. But as they drew closer, the juniors could make out the doorway.

It was open. The tracks led direct to the doorway; and they moved on quietly, their footsteps making no sound on the carpet of snow. Their hearts were beating fast now. A murmur of voices caught their ears. Hilton's eyes gleamed. Walsingham was there—and he was not alone! He did not need telling who the other was!

He glanced round at the juniors. "Keep ready!" he breathed. "Don't let him out!"

"You think—" whispered Wharton.

"I know!" said Hilton curtly.

"We're ready for him."

Hilton nodded and stepped on silently to the half open door and looked in. The juniors behind him looked in also. It was a rather startling sight that met their gaze. They fairly jumped at the sight of Walsingham.

The butler of Hilton Hall stood there. A large bag lay open at his feet. It was packed with clothing and other things. On a bench, a few feet from him sat the figure of the escaped man of Blackmoor—devouring food with a wolfish greed.

Hilton had expected what he saw. But Harry Wharton & Co gazed, dumb with amazement.

Hilton threw the door wide and stepped in. There was a startled gasp from Walsingham; a snarl of fury and terror from his companion. The butler turned, and his face was like chalk.

"Well, Walsingham?" said Hilton grimly. "What does this mean?"

Walsingham stood dumb. Every vestige of colour had drained from his portly face. The convict sprang up, his fierce eyes passing Hilton to the door—to behold there the group of juniors ready to cut off his escape. He backed to the farther wall, snarling like a cornered rat. Walsingham still stood motionless, overwhelmed.

"Master Cedric!" he said, at last, and his voice was husky, almost inarticulate. "Master Cedric!"

"What does this mean, Walsingham?"

The butler gave a groan. "You!" said Hilton. "My father's trusted servant—you have helped that scoundrel to escape—a villain who is wanted for robberies, for cracking safes—you!"

"Master Cedric—"

"That's enough!" said Hilton contemptuously. "You can explain to my father and to the police. As for your friend there, we shall take care of him, and take him back where he belongs!"

Walsingham, with a choked cry, threw himself between the Fifth Former of Greyfriars and the crouching, desperate convict.

"Stop! Master Cedric! Stop! For mercy's sake—"

"Stand aside!" snapped Hilton.

"Heaven help me!" groaned Walsingham. "He is my brother!"

"Your brother!" Hilton stared at him in incredulous amazement. "Are you out of your senses? That man—that thief—that convict—your brother?"

"My young brother—my brother Richard—and he was not always what he is now!" groaned Walsingham.

"I—I never knew he was in prison—I never dreamed that he was at Blackmoor—till that night when I saw his face at the window!" He shuddered.

"Then I knew! He knew where to find me, and he came—for help! Blood is thicker than water! He is my brother—my own flesh and blood! I could not abandon him! Master Cedric, I have been a good and faithful servant to you and to your father. Spare him, for my sake!"

Hilton stood as if petrified. His glance passed the bowed head of the butler to the crouching figure at the wall. Harry Wharton & Co. did not speak. Hilton broke the silence, at last.

"You can give him no more help, Walsingham! Promise me that, and I—"

"I promise! Anything, if you will spare him now!" groaned Walsingham.

Hilton picked up the bag. He made a sign to the butler, who, with a last look at the convict, went silently from the hut. Convict No. 33 said no word. With glittering eyes he watched the Greyfriars fellows. But he knew now that he was not to be taken.

Harry Wharton & Co. quietly left the hut. The portly figure of Walsingham, with bowed head, was disappearing across the moor. Hilton followed them out. He did not even look at the convict.

It was not till they reached the gate of Hilton Hall that Cedric Hilton spoke.

"You'll say nothing of this!"

"Nothing!" answered Harry Wharton.

"They'll get him—he's got no chance, now he can get no further help. But, for Walsingham's sake—"

"I understand! We shall say nothing!"

And nothing was said! Walsingham's secret was safe with the chums of the Remove, though their minds were made up that, if another chance came their way, the man from Blackmoor would not slip through their fingers.

THE END.

(Next week's yarn of Harry Wharton & Co. at Hilton Hall, is entitled: "THE FUGITIVE OF THE MOOR!" and is undoubtedly the best in the series. Make sure of next Saturday's MAGNET, chums, by ordering it from your news-agent to-day!)

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No 117 (New Series).

EDITED BY HARRY WHARTON.

December 29th, 1934.

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Fishy CAN Our Fighting Editor Says— FISH CAN SCRAP!

scrap—and with-
out my having to
resort to such
little dodges as I
told you about last week! That's my
sensational news for this week!
At the beginning of the week, I was almost
in despair. Once he found out that his
opponents had been "losing" to him as part
of a prearranged plan to give him more
confidence, Fish flopped completely.
Yet, with his rich uncle's visit looming
bigger every day, he was more anxious than
ever to win his laurels in the ring. But Fishy
simply could not fight!
I almost choked him up as a bad job.
And then, along came Tubb and saved the
situation!

It was quite unintentional, so far as Tubb
was concerned. All that Tubb did was to
borrow Fish's celebrated bunch of keys on
that evening and pay him with a couple of
French pennies. Tubb had no idea of helping
Fish's boxing career. He was simply
hiding Fish—that was all!
Next morning, in the daylight, Fish saw
that the coins were dead.
Wild? Believe me, dear readers, he was
foaming at the mouth! He went along to the
Third Form-room like a spring champion.
There, Tubb crowded his elbows by calmly
telling him that he didn't intend to change
the coins for good ones and that Fish could
jolly well go and eat coke!

Fish saw red! He would have slaughtered
Tubb then and there; but I luckily happened
to drift up and promptly suggested that the
argument be settled in a fit and proper
manner in the gym.
We had to restrain Fish forcibly to stop
him from fighting Tubb all the way along to
the gym! Nobody would have suspected
Fishy of funk in the course of that exciting
journey!

We fixed things up all right in the end and
the scrap duly began. And what a scrap
it was!
Tubb is a hefty lad for a Third Form kid
and possesses sufficient confidence to tackle
Dompsiey himself. He thought Fish was a
chick—but he got a rude awakening!
Right from the word "Go!" Fish waded
in. First he tapped Tubb's chin; then he
gave him one on the boko. After that, he
decorated him with the Order of the Thirk
Bar; and finally, he really got into his stride
and started knocking the unhappy young
Tubb all round the ring!

There could be but one end to Fish's
sensational exhibition. It came just before
the three-minute session was up, when a
regular pile-driver sent Tubb down for the
full count. Fishy had won all hands down!
And then, having so to speak, had his
two-pennorth, Fish came back to normal
and realised what he had done. He had
actually knocked out a youngster who,
though only a Third Former, was capable of
putting up a respectable show against most
members of the Remore!

Through his freshly donned specs.
Frank Nugent, who feels the cold more
than most, looked positively perished during
the recent frost.
We are asked, however, to deny the
rumour that he is changing his name to
Frank BLUDGEON!

"SAY, you n
bozos, I'm a
killer!" he yelled.
"I guess I always
knew I was, but I
noo I was, but I
never proved it even to myself till now! And
will you be proud of my world-conquering
exploit? I'll say he will! Whoopie!"
Can Fishy keep it up? That's the question
everyone's asking now. Uncle Al from
U.S.A. is due to land in a few days' time, so
the crisis will soon be here. Then we'll see!



Harry Wharton Reveals WHY BUNTER ENJOYED PHANTOM FEED!
Guests at Hilton Hall are still wondering why
Bunter took the jape hamper he received in such
good humour.
It looked a fine hamper when Bunter opened it.
But the contents were such as would normally give
Bunter fifty fives!

There was a turkey which proved to be only a
balloon and burst with a loud explosion at the first
touch of a carving-knife. There was a Christmas
pudding, which turned out to be part of a painter-
broker's sign, painted to represent a pudding. There
were mince pies which separated like in the face as
soon as the teeth were inserted in them. There was
a bottle of fruit cordial which tasted just like cold
tea, and other equally disappointing items.
Yet when he had got to the bottom of the hamper
and found nothing whatever of an edible nature,
Bunter just grinned and said it was a jolly good jape
and old Manly, who had sent it, was one of the best.
Not quite like Bunter, eh?

But I happen to know the explanation—and the
explanation makes it all clear.
At the bottom of the hamper, to atone for the
hoax, Manly had pinned a pound-note and his best
wishes to Bunter for a merry Christmas!
So there's no need to wonder any more!

PERCY BOLSOVER Says "I'M A PERFECT HOST, BUT—"
When chaps stay with me, my only thought
is for their well-being. Skinner and Snop are
spending part of the eve at my place, and
this applies to them. Just at present, the one
thing I study is how to give them the best time
possible. Some hosts think their duty ends
at feeding their guests and providing a little
amusement in the evening. Not so me!

I know jolly well that unless guests are
given plenty of exercise, they can't enjoy their
meals. So I don't content myself with feeding
them and switching on the wireless in the
evening. I give them plenty of exercise
during the day and thus stimulate their
appetites and make them fit for the evening
repast!

I've often seen guests at houses where
I've stayed fed up to the teeth with
Skinner won't get fed up with that at
my place, I can tell you!

I had them out of bed at half-past six
the first morning and had rushed them
into the bath-room and put them under
the cold shower before they knew they
were awake! Before breakfast, I had
rolled them in the snow and got the
blood coursing through their veins as it
hadn't coursed all through the term!
I knew better!

Christmas morning, I linked arms
with them and took them for a ten-mile
walk. All the way along, they were
pretending to be annoyed. Bless you,
that didn't worry me! I kept on
keeping on—so did Skinner and Snop!

A VIZZIT FROM A SANTA CLAUS!
BY DICKY NUGENT
"Hoory for Christ-
mas!" cried Jack Jolly of
the Fourth Form at St.
Sam's.

"Hear, hear!" grinned
Merry and Bright.
"Glad you're enjoying
yourself!" said Frank
Fearless, at whose mag-
nificent mansion the
chums of the Fourth were
spending the Christmas
week. "I can assure you
there'll be nothing to mar
your joy at Fearless
Towers—no prowling pre-
lects or no-moth-eat-
monsters, for instance!"

"What about
Dr. Birehennell, the Head?"
asked Merry, rather
anxiously.
"He's barred, too!"
chuckled Frank Fearless.
"But snuff of skool talk!
Let's get on with the
pleasures of the evening!"
added Fearless, as he led
the way through to the
lounge. "The patter has
arranged a little surprise
for you; he has asked
Waiter, the butler to dress
up as Santa Claus and dish
out the presents from the
Christmas-tree. Waiter
ought to make a ripping
Santa Claus!"

"Yes, rather!"
Jack Jolly & Co. fol-
lowed Fearless into the
lounge in a state of happy
expectancy.
"Just in time!" eggs-
citedly, Mr. Borehennell
declined. Mr. Borehennell
declined. Frank's patter, as
they entered, "Santa
Claus will arrive any
minute now—in fact, I
can't think what has made
him as late as he is!"

When the Pegg Hebeout went out
to aid a trawler aground off the
Coker of the Fifth does not know
Black Pike, Tom Redwing, who
was visiting old friends at Pegg,
made up the crew, as he had done
once before when living there.
The trawler's crew were saved.
Redwing is—as the Head said—
"a credit to the Remore!"

Mr. Fearless and his
guests jumped to their
feet in a flash.
"A barglar?" cried
Frank Fearless, eagerly.
"Where is he, Waiter?
We'll tackle the rascal,
whoever he is!"
"He's in the master's
study, opening the safe,
sir," answered the
trumbling butler. "He's
armed to the teeth. I make
mention!"

"Leave it to me," said
Dr. Birehennell, much to
everybody's surprise.
"This is a job for a man
of iron nerve and ruthless
determination. Lucky I
came along when I did!"
"The Head vanished,"
leaving Mr. Fearless and
his guests in a state of
grate astonishment.
A minute later, he re-
turned, holding, by the
scruff of the neck, the
masked marauder who
had been bargling Mr.
Fearless' safe. Straining to
relate, the barglar didn't
seem to have an ounce of
fight in him—and stranger
still, there was a sly grin
lurking about his lips.
"It's quite all right,"
said Dr. Birehennell. "He
put up a despatch fight, but
by sheer brute strength I
overcame him."
"Good!" exclaimed
Mr. Fearless. "You are a
brave man, and you are
welcome to stay at Fear-
less Towers for Christ-
mas!"

"Thanks awfully!"
smiled the Head.
"And now," said Mr.
Fearless, reaching for the
tellyphone, "I will ring up
at home. I'm awfully
glad you're all so delighted
to see me!"
At that moment Waiter,
the butler, rushed into the
lounge, with a terrified cry
of "Barglar!"

"Right in once!" he
said. "Pardon the slyly
unusual entry, Mr. Fear-
less; but I saw a window
opened, so I hopped in on
the sly. Then I spotted
this rig-out and simply
couldn't resist putting it
on. Well, now I've
arrived, I'll make myself
at home. I'm awfully
glad you're all so delighted
to see me!"

There is literally nothing that
Gerald Loder and a five-mile walk?
A.: One's an awful senior and the other's
on awful foot.
Q.: Why is Audrey Angel like a Christmas
pudding?
A.: Because he ought to be jolly well
boiled.

will, when we can afford to
look even at despatch rascals
like this man with a more
friendly eye. I suggest
that instead of sending
this man to a prison cell,
you make him up a parcel
of mince pies of sedera and
let him go scot free."
"Maybe you're right,"
said Mr. Fearless.
And the butler duly
rapped up a parcel of
mince pies of sedera and
handed it to the barglar,
who wished them all a
merry Christmas and then
marched off, with the
Head still grimly holding
him by the scruff of the
neck.

"Well, Dr. Birehennell
has certainly justified him-
self to-night, boys!" re-
marked Mr. Fearless, as
their footsteps died away
in the direction of the hall.
Jack Jolly & Co. would
have been a mazed, but
however, had they seen
what happened a minute
later on the front doorstep
of Fearless Towers. Had
they been there, they
would have seen the
barglar remove his mask,
to reveal the grinning face
of Mr. Lickham. The
master of the Fourth
Form at St. Sam's!

"Wicked like a charm,
sir!" they would have
heard Mr. Lickham say.
"What-ho!" they
would have heard the Head
chuckle. "As a result of
this neat little bit of work,
Lickham, I shall be an
honoured guest at Fear-
less Towers for the rest
of the hollidayer. Here's
something for
trouble!"

They would then have
seen several copper coins
change hands, and the
"barglar" and his "cap-
tor" shake very cordially
before parting.

CORRECTION
Just to correct the rumour that EVERY-
BODY enjoyed the ice carnival at Hilton
Hall, I want to announce that personally, I
DIDN'T. From my point of view, that ice-
carnival was a complete frost.—(Signed)
W. G. Bunter.

CONUNDRUMS
Q.: What is the difference between
Gerald Loder and a five-mile walk?
A.: One's an awful senior and the other's
on awful foot.
Q.: Why is Audrey Angel like a Christmas
pudding?
A.: Because he ought to be jolly well
boiled.

