

THE
MAGNET

"THE SHADOW OF THE SACK!" Great Greyfriars Yarn Inside

The Magnet

2^D

*Billy Bunter's
Own Paper*



**WASHING DAY
AT GREYFRIARS!**

COME INTO THE OFFICE, BOYS AND GIRLS!

Your Editor is always pleased to hear from his readers. Write to him: Editor of the MAGNET, The Amalgamated Press, Ltd., Fleetway House, Farringdon St., London, E.C.4.

IN my last week's chat to you fellows I mentioned that an important announcement was to be made in this issue of the MAGNET.

For several weeks now I have been working at top pressure on a scheme that would have appealed to every British boy and girl. In fact, all preparations have been made, and the machinery was to be set in motion this week. Unfortunately, however, the acute paper shortage has forced me to postpone the scheme until some future date. To put you wise now as to what it actually was, would only tend to spoil the pleasant surprise that is in store for you—and you would not like me to do this, would you? Rest assured, it will not suffer in any way for the keeping.

Like all other papers—dailies and weeklies—the MAGNET has had to forgo some of its pages. This is only a war-time measure, of course. As you all know, paper has to be imported into this country, and this means shipping space—a very vital factor in this war. Anyway, the jolly old MAGNET will still play its important part in the country by appearing every week with its high-class stories which have done so much

to kill the black-out-blues. The curtailment of some of its pages does not mean that readers will be deprived of reading matter. A glance at this issue will show that. Instead of shortening the school stories, I have had them set up in a more compact type—a type, incidentally, that is more pleasing to the eyes. The illustrations, too, are somewhat smaller than of late—but they have in no way lost their interest. Mr. Chapman is seeing to that! During the last Great War the MAGNET was considerably smaller in size. Did it lose its popularity? Not the slightest bit! Neither will it this time. As our famous spokesmen have warned us time and time again, we must go sparingly with many things—paper especially—and like the true Britishers we are, we just take it in our stride. Come what may, we can always raise a smile, and it is this cheerful spirit that has made Great Britain what she is to-day!

A most interesting and lengthy letter comes from Mr. Gander, a newsagent, of Manitoba, Canada, who speaks very highly of the MAGNET. Enclosed with his letter is a copy of the "Transcona News" in which is a paragraph telling of the unique display to be seen in the window of his shop. It consists of very early copies of the MAGNET. These include No. 1, dated February 15th, 1908, six others dated at five-year intervals through the years since, and one more, which is the current issue. All these copies are from Mr. Gander's

vast collection. An interesting fact about the MAGNET stories—this paragraph states—is that the characters introduced in the first few issues still appear in the stories to-day; also that the Old Paper has enjoyed great popularity down through the years, having circulated all over the world, and that few schoolboys, or older boys, for that matter, can be found in Great Britain who do not know of Harry Wharton, Bob Cherry, Billy Bunter, and the many other Greyfriars characters. Thanks, Mr. Gander, for what you have done. My one regret is, however, that I am unable to pay a visit to Canada and see your window display myself.

From this week's school yarn you will have learned that all is not well with Harry Wharton. He's fallen foul of Mr. Hacker, the acid-tempered master of the Shell. The happy thought in Hacker's mind is to pin Wharton down so effectually that Mr. Quelch will be unable to stand by his head boy. But it's easier said than done, as the Acid Drop finds out to his cost in this great Frank Richards masterpiece, entitled:

"THE BATTLE OF THE BEAKS!"

You're in for a real feast of fun and excitement in this super story of Greyfriars. Don't get left! Ask your newsagent to deliver, or reserve for you, a copy of next Saturday's MAGNET. It's the only way to avoid disappointment.

YOUR EDITOR.

CRIME DOESN'T PAY! Another "DICKY NUGENT" Story in Picture Form

"Oh, crikey!" exclaims Billy Bunter.
"What a spiffing hamper!"

Next moment Bunter—and the hamper—
depart at 90 m.p.h.!

In his haste, Bunter fails to see the hoe
lying directly in his path.



Het reads on it. Up comes the handle,
and bang goes the hamper!

Bump! "Oooh!" Bunter drops to
earth, almost shaking the county of Kent.

Mrs. Mimble retrieves the hamper, and
all Bunter sees is stars

The SHADOW of the SACK!



By
**FRANK
RICHARDS**

BILLY BUNTER CATCHES HIS TRAIN!

NO room for two!" said Bob Cherry, shaking his head. "You silly ass!" roared Billy Bunter. "Who wants room for two?"

"You do, old fat man!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Really, there was not room for one—not, at all events, for one of Billy Bunter's ample proportions.

That carriage was already crowded.

At Courtfield Junction, on the first day of term, there had been a scamper for the local train for Friardale and the school. Greyfriars fellows swarmed up and down the train.

It was a case of first come, first served; and Billy Bunter, who had more weight to carry than most fellows, moved to slow time. He blinked through his big spectacles into a carriage already packed.

The railway company had provided accommodation for eight passengers in that carriage. It contained a dozen.

Harry Wharton & Co. were in it—that made five. Vernon-Smith and Redwing and Peter Todd had followed them in, making the full complement. Then Wibley and Lord Mauleverer, Hazeldene and Squiff wedged in. Some sat, and some stood, and all felt rather like sardines in a tin. Really and truly, there was no room for Billy Bunter—even if he had wanted room only for one!

Billy Bunter had inserted a fat head into the carriage. But the remainder of his fat person remained outside.

"I say, you fellows, make room for a chap!" urged Bunter. "I don't want to lose this train. Look here, Wharton, I don't mind if I sit on your knees!"

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Breathing hard, Wharton submitted to being walked along the platform with Hacker's bony paw on his shoulder!

"Oh, my hat!" ejaculated Harry Wharton. "I do! My knees aren't made of reinforced concrete, old fat bean!"

"Roll along the train, old porpoise!" said Bob Cherry.

"What about one of you fellows getting out?" suggested Bunter. "I don't mind which—any one of you—"

"He doesn't mind which!" grinned Bob. "This offer is open to all! Which fellow is going to jump at it?"

"The whichfulness is terrific!" grinned Hurree Janset Rain Singh.

"No takers!" remarked Johnny Bull.

"Beast!" roared Bunter. The fat Owl of the Remove stepped back from the doorway, apparently giving it up.

Harry Wharton reached out to pull the door shut.

Then Bunter moved forward again.

"Hold on—"

"Stand clear, ass!"

"Look here, take this bag off me—I don't want to carry it, if I'm going to walk to the school!" squeaked Bunter.

"Oh, all right!"

Bunter had a bag in one fat hand. Harry Wharton let go the door-handle and obligingly stretched out his hand to take the bag.

But Bunter did not advance the bag—he advanced the other hand, and grabbed Wharton's as it was outstretched, and tugged!

That sudden tug took the captain of the Remove entirely by surprise.

He was not expecting that! He was quite unaware that he was being trapped by the astute fat Owl.

A fellow reaching out of a doorway, off his guard, and suddenly tugged by the outstretched hand, had to go! Wharton went!

He landed on the platform on his knees with a roar, and sprawled.

"Oh!" roared Wharton.

His face grubbed on a dusty platform. Billy Bunter shot past him into the carriage. Bunter could move quickly sometimes—and this was one of the times! He was inside that carriage almost in a twinkling, and jamming down in Harry Wharton's corner seat.

The juniors in the carriage stared at him blankly.

Wharton, on the platform, staggered dizzily up.

Bunter, in the corner seat, grabbed the door and slammed it shut.

"Done it!" he gasped.

There was a shriek from the engine. "You fat villain—" roared Bob Cherry.

"You pernicious porpoise!" howled Frank Nugent. "I'll jolly well chuck you out on your neck!"

But the train was jerking into motion. Harry Wharton, breathless, and with quite an excited face, spun round at

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Super School Story Starring
HARRY WHARTON & CO.,
of GREYFRIARS.

the carriage door. A porter rushed between.

"Too late, sir!"

The train moved on.

Billy Bunter, in Wharton's corner seat, gasped with relief. He had caught that train, after all! The other fellows in the carriage looked at him with fearfully expressive looks. But Bunter did not mind expressive looks! It was too late to chuck him out—and that was that!

Harry Wharton, on the platform, glared after that train as it glided away with a glare rather like that of the fabled basilisk.

But basilisk glares did not worry William George Bunter. The fat junior had caught his train; and Bunter, at least, was satisfied.

NOT NICE!

"WHARTON!"

"Yes, sir!" answered Wharton, with a trace of a snap in his voice—not quite so respectfully, perhaps, as a Lower Fourth junior should have answered a Form-master, though the Form-master was not his own beak.

Mr. Hacker, the master of the Shell, gave him a severe look.

Wharton was not in the best of tempers.

His knees and his hands had established hard contact with the platform when Billy Bunter hooked him out of the carriage. Knees and palms felt sore. He had barely saved his nose—but though he had saved it from a hard knock, it had tapped on the platform and gathered a smudge of dust, of which he was, at the moment, unconscious.

He looked red, and ruffled, and a little untidy, and a little smudgy—not exactly as a Greyfriars fellow should have looked going back to school on the first day of term.

But that was no concern of Mr. Hacker. Quelch, his own beak, had a right to remark on it; the master of the Shell hadn't! Harry Wharton was not in a mood to be bothered by the Acid Drop.

But Mr. Hacker, who had an irritable desire to meddle, which he mistook for a sense of duty, raised a bony finger and stopped him on the platform. The train having gone, and the next not being due, Wharton had decided to walk across Courtfield Common to the school. But he came to an annoyed halt, at the behest of Hacker's bony finger.

"You are in a disgraceful state, Wharton," said Mr. Hacker severely. "You have, I presume, been indulging in horseplay on the train."

No answer.

"Do you hear me, Wharton?" asked Mr. Hacker, raising his voice a little.

"Yes, sir!"

"The knees of your trousers are dusty, your hands are dirty—even your face is dirty," said Mr. Hacker. "I have seldom seen a Greyfriars boy in such a state on the first day of term—even a small boy of the Second Form."

"Is that all, sir?" asked the captain of the Remove.

"What? What? Do not be impertinent, Wharton! As you were going towards the exit, I conclude that you intended to walk to the school?"

"Yes, sir!"

"I cannot allow you to walk in public in that dirty state! You will wash and brush down your clothes before you leave the station."

Harry Wharton's face flamed.

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This would have been bad enough from his own beak, Quelch; it was quite intolerable from a master who had nothing to do with the Remove.

"I'm sorry, sir," said Wharton, in a silky tone. "I never heard during the holidays that you had been made master of my Form, sir. I thought you were still master of the Shell."

Mr. Hacker's bony nose glowed pink at the tip. That was always a sign of rising wrath with the Acid Drop.

"If you mean, Wharton, that you will not obey my order, because I am not master of the Remove——" breathed Hacker.

"Yes, sir," said Harry Wharton coolly. "That is my exact meaning, sir!"

Hacker breathed hard through his reddening nose.

"Your Form-master, Mr. Quelch, is somewhere on the platform," he said. "I shall take you to him."

"I'm going out of the station, sir."

"You will either walk with me quietly, Wharton, or I shall take you by the collar!" flamed Mr. Hacker. His bony hand dropped on the junior's shoulder.

For a second, that bony hand came very near being punched off. But the captain of the Remove, intensely angry as he was, restrained that impulse. Hacker, after all, was a beak.

Breathing hard, he submitted to being walked along the platform with a bony paw on his shoulder.

They passed a group of Fifth Form men—and Coker of the Fifth chuckled, Potter and Greene grinned, and Hilton raised his eyebrows.

Wharton's face was burning as he was marched past that amused group. They passed some Fourth Form fellows—and Temple of the Fourth winked at his pals, Dabney and Fry, who sniggered.

A score of other fellows looked round. Harry Wharton was very near to knocking that bony paw from his shoulder, and cutting, when, fortunately, Mr. Quelch appeared in the offing.

Harry Wharton was glad to see the tall, angular figure and severe face of the Remove master. It was deeply exasperating to be led up to his Form-master like a culprit, in the sight of fifty fellows who were waiting for the next train. But Quelch, at least, would rid him of Hacker.

"Mr. Quelch!" barked Hacker.

"What is the matter?" asked Mr. Quelch quietly. "Have you had an accident, Wharton?"

"No, sir! A fellow was larking, and made me fall over on the platform," answered Harry.

"I hope you are not hurt, Wharton."

"Only a little, sir!"

"Mr. Hacker, will you kindly remove your hand from this boy's shoulder? I see no reason whatever, sir, why you should lay hands on a member of my Form!" said Mr. Quelch sharply.

The Acid Drop kindly—or, rather, unkindly—removed his hand from the junior's shoulder. He pointed a bony finger at Wharton's smudgy face.

"Is that the state, sir, in which a Greyfriars boy should appear in public?" barked Hacker. "I have brought this boy to you, sir, because he refused to make himself more cleanly and tidy at my order."

"I should take it as a favour, sir, if you would not expend your valuable time in giving orders to boys of my Form," said Mr. Quelch acidly.

Hacker gurgled.

"Oh, very well, sir. If that is how you receive my well-meant intervention,

sir, I have no more to say. If it is your wish that Remove boys should disgrace their school by appearing in public with untidy clothes and dirty faces, I certainly have no more to say!"

With that, the Acid Drop stalked away, deeply offended. Mr. Hacker never lost a chance of taking offence, so it was natural that chances often came his way.

"I think, Wharton, that you had better make yourself a little more presentable as soon as possible," said Mr. Quelch mildly. "I am quite assured, my boy, that you are not to blame in any way, nevertheless——"

"Certainly, sir," answered Harry. He had himself realised the need for a wash and a brush-up before this.

Mr. Quelch turned away, and the captain of the Remove hurried off to the washing and brushing-up department. He was the recipient, as he went, of many smiles and many remarks.

"Dirty little tick!" said Coker of the Fifth.

"Oh! These Remove kids never wash, I believe," remarked Potter.

"Not in the holidays, at any rate," said Greene, shaking his head. "They make the last wash of the term see them through the hols."

"What price soap?" called out Tubb of the Third.

"Soap ain't rationed yet, Wharton," said Nugent minor of the Second. "I say, my brother would lend you some soap—he's a pal of yours."

Those remarks, and many more of the same kind, followed the captain of the Remove, and he was glad to disappear from sight.

He was glad, too, that the second train had gone by the time he emerged newly swept and garnished. He had heard enough on the subject of washing.

The train was gone, the Greyfriars fellows and the Greyfriars masters were gone, and he walked out of a deserted station. As he tramped across Courtfield Common towards the school, his feelings were equally divided between a longing to tap Hacker's sharp nose and another longing to kick Billy Bunter all round the Greyfriars quad and back again.

PRICE IN PERIL!

HARRY WHARTON looked up at a hurried patter of feet.

Half-way to the school he had stopped to rest on one of the long wooden wayside seats on the road over the common.

A walk of a couple of miles was not much to the captain of the Remove, as a rule. But that bang of his knees on the station platform had made a considerable difference.

Billy Bunter, of course, had not intended to do any harm. All that Bunter had intended was to hook the captain of the Remove out of that carriage and bag his place—quite a masterly proceeding, in the opinion of the fat and fatuous Owl. Beyond that, Bunter's powerful intellect had not worked at all.

But he had done some damage without intending it. There was an ache in those banged knees, and after walking over a mile, Harry Wharton was glad to sit down and rest, and let the other mile wait a little.

He leaned back in the seat, looking over the expanse of green common in front of him, across the road. It was from behind him that the sudden patter of feet came.

From the direction of the river, somebody was coming in a hurry. The new-

comer passed round the end of the seat and sat down, gasping for breath—hardly noticing the junior there till he had sat down.

Wharton gave him a glance. It was Price of the Fifth. Price glanced at him at the same moment, and scowled.

There was no love lost between the two. Price was a black sheep in the Fifth—the kind of fellow who always had a smoke handy and a racing paper hidden under a cushion. Other fellows knew more about Stephen Price than his Form-master or his headmaster knew—and liked or barred him, according to taste.

Harry Wharton, certainly, did not like him. But a senior had little to do with a junior at school, and they came seldom in contact. But, as it happened, they had met in the holidays, and there had been a spot of trouble—which Price's instinctive scowl showed that he had not forgotten.

Harry Wharton, having recognised Price, turned his eyes away again, and gazed across the common. He did not like the company so suddenly bestowed on him; but he was not yet ready to resume his walk. He stayed where he was, ignoring the bad hat of the Fifth.

But, without looking at him, he could not help noticing that Price sat low on the seat, hunching himself so that his head would not show over the rather high wooden back.

That looked as if Price hoped to escape observation by some other person who had been behind him, when he arrived so hurriedly.

Wharton's lip curled as he noted it. Price had cut off from Courtfield Station, certainly not with the intention of going direct to the school, for here he was, more than an hour later.

He had just come from the direction of the river, and on the towpath was a resort that Price knew in term time—the Three Fishers—which he liked none the less, but rather more, because it was out of bounds.

It was not difficult to guess that Price had lost no time, on the first day of term, in renewing acquaintance with some sporting pal. But, judging by his present furtive uneasiness, that enterprise had not prospered. It looked as if Price had been spotted at his game. And if some Greyfriars beak had spotted him, his number was up. In which case, Harry Wharton had not much sympathy to waste on him.

He gazed steadily before him, taking no notice of Price. But he looked round at a sudden, low whisper:

"Wharton! I say, kid—"
"Well, what?" grunted the captain of the Remove. He did not want to speak to Price.

Price's face was uneasy and eager. He seemed to have forgotten mutual dislike for the moment, at least.

"Look over the back of the seat, kid, and see if you can spot anybody," whispered Price.

Harry Wharton stared at him.

"Why can't you?" he asked.
But there was no need for Price to answer that question. The next moment Wharton guessed the answer. Price was keeping his head below the level of the top of the seat-back, and he did not want to lift it to look over. He was hugging cover.

"Oh, all right!" muttered Harry. Somebody, it was clear, was after Price, and it could only have been someone in authority at the school. Price would not have wanted to dodge anyone else.

The idea of getting mixed up in the slightest degree in Price's shady scrapes was repugnant enough to

Harry Wharton. But a fellow in a scrape was a fellow in a scrape, and it was the natural instinct of a schoolboy to help another fellow who was up against it.

Wharton turned his head and looked over the back of the seat.

He started a little as he observed a portly figure coming across the grass directly towards the spot.

It was Mr. Prout, the Fifth Form-master at Greyfriars—Price's own Form-master. And he was quite near at hand, and evidently heading straight for that wayside seat.

"Can you see anyone?" breathed Price.

"Yes. Prout," whispered back Harry.

"Prout! Is he coming this way?"

"Yes."

"Oh gad!" muttered Price. "Then he saw me. Oh gad! The game's up. First day of term, too!"

Price had been hunched up on the seat; but now his weedy figure seemed to crumple. His pasty face whitened. Harry Wharton, little as he liked him, could not help feeling a spot of compassion at that moment. The wretched black sheep of the Fifth looked as if he had taken the knock, and taken it hard.

"What's up?" asked Harry, his voice low.

"The old ass!" breathed Price. "What was he barging along the towpath for—wandering about, the old goat, on the first day of term? Of course, I should have thought he was in his study at Greyfriars if I'd thought about him at all. Now—"

"But what—"

"Sure he's coming this way?" muttered Price huskily. "If he is, he knows I'm here, and he must have seen me. I—I thought he had. I never dreamed he was anywhere about when I— Sure he's coming here?"

"He's coming straight towards this seat. He will be here in a minute," answered Harry.

Price gave a mumbling groan.

"He had his eye on me last term," he muttered. "There were some things I— And now—" His mutter trailed off.

Then he made a sudden movement.

"Take this, Wharton!" he whispered. His hand touched Harry's on the seat. "For the love of Mike, take it, and keep it dark! Stand by a chap who may be sacked on the first day of term!"

"But what—"

"Quick!"

Wharton felt a crumpled paper thrust into his hand.

What it was, what it meant, he did not know; but he knew, at least, that it was something of which Price had to get rid before his Form-master nailed him, if he was to escape being expelled from Greyfriars on the day he arrived there for the new term.

There was no time for talk. Prout's portly form was already close at hand.

The captain of the Remove put his hand into his pocket, with the unseen paper in it, and Price gave a gasp of relief. That mysterious paper was safely out of sight as Mr. Prout's portly form came barging round the end of the seat. The Fifth Form master stopped, his eyes fixed on Stephen Price.

A NARROW ESCAPE!

"PRICE!"
Prout's voice boomed.
Prout was generally a kindly and affable man. He was called Old Pompous and Don

Pomposo in his Form, but rather affectionately than otherwise. Prout was keen on the more a friend than a Form-master game, and if he bored the Fifth with it a little, they tolerated it kindly.

Now, however, Prout did not look affable, and he looked much less of a friend than a Form-master.

There was thunder in his plump brow.

Price and Wharton rose respectfully to their feet as the Fifth Form master dawned on them. Of Wharton, a Remove boy, Prout took no notice whatever. Price, after passing the junior the mysterious paper, had edged quickly along to the end of the seat, and was four or five feet away from Wharton when Prout happened.

Harry Wharton, quite ignored by the Form-master, sat down again. Price remained standing, trying to keep his knees from knocking together.

"Yes, sir," faltered Price.

Prout stretched out a plump hand.

"Give me that letter at once, Price!" he boomed.

"That letter? What letter, sir?"

"Do not bandy words with me, Price. I saw you—I saw you distinctly—take a letter or a note that was passed to you, hardly more than ten minutes ago, by a disreputable person well known to me by sight. There is not the slightest doubt on the subject, Price. I saw you with my own eyes—with my own eyes!" repeated Prout, as if to make it clear that he had not seen it with anybody else's eyes.

Harry Wharton sat very still.

He knew now what was the mysterious paper that Price had cunningly landed on him to keep it from his Form-master's knowledge.

There was a feeling of deep resentment in his breast at having been made a party in this way to Price's shady trickery. But there was nothing that he could do. He could hardly have produced the hidden paper and betrayed the wretched fellow. He sat still and silent, looking across the common, as if intently interested in the scenery.

Prout's plump hand remained outstretched. But Price placed nothing in it. His sharp face assumed a perplexed look.

"I don't understand you, sir. I have no letter. If you are alluding to the man who spoke to me near the river, he—"

"I am!" boomed Prout. "A person called Sanders—a habitue of that disreputable place, the Three Fishers. I know the fellow perfectly well by sight. He handed you a letter."

"Not at all, sir." Wharton was astonished by Price's calmness as he replied, falsely, as the junior knew

"I do not know the man, sir. He spoke to me, but a fellow can't prevent a stranger speaking to him."

"What did he say, Price?"

"He asked me whether I knew that a Heinkel had been brought down, sir, over by Green Hedges."

"Do you deny, Price, that he passed a letter into your hand?" exclaimed Mr. Prout, just a trace of doubt in his manner now.

Price's coolness seemed to stagger him a little.

"Nothing of the kind, sir," said Price.

"I am most unwilling," said Mr. Prout, "to doubt the word of a boy in my Form. I trust my boys. I hope, I believe, that they trust me. It has always been my aim to be a friend, as well as a Form-master, to my boys. But—"

Evidently there was a "but"—and a considerable one!

"The man brushed against my arm, sir, by accident," murmured Price. "That may have given you the impression—"

"Do you declare, Price, that you have no such paper on you?"

"Certainly, sir!"

"Are you prepared to turn out your pockets?"

"At once, sir, if you wish!"

"Oh!" said Prout.

He eyed that precious member of his Form. There was a pause.

"My system," said Prout, at last, "is to trust my Form! But I cannot forget, Price, certain circumstances last term—certain very suspicious circumstances. I regret to say, Price, that I cannot trust you."

"I'm sorry to hear that, sir!" said Price meekly.

"In a word," said Prout, "I do not believe that my eyes deceived me—I am assured that the man Sanders passed you a note, and a communication from such a quarter is a very grave matter. It is my duty to ascertain, beyond the shadow of a doubt, whether that note is in your possession, Price! I shall be glad—very glad—if it is not! But I must ascertain the fact."

"I've no objection, sir."

"Very well!" said Prout grimly. "You will now accompany me to the school, Price—you will walk with me, and I shall keep you under my eye until we reach Greyfriars. I shall not examine your pockets here, Price! You will be searched, in my presence, by a Sixth Form prefect! If that note is anywhere about you, you will be taken to Dr. Locké, and your headmaster will deal with you. Come!"

"Very well, sir!" murmured Price.

The portly Form-master revolved on his axis and started. Price went with him. As he went, he cast a quick backward glance at Harry Wharton—a beseeching glance. The next moment his back was turned as he walked away with Prout.

Harry Wharton did not stir.

He sat where he was, watching the two go down the road in the direction of the distant spire that showed over the tree-tops. Price was going to the school under convoy; and had that perilous paper been still on him, Price's career as a black sheep would have come to a sudden termination.

Prout had been forced to doubt a little—yet he knew that his majestic eyes had not deceived him. If that paper was found on Price, he was done for—and Prout believed that it would be found on him.

Certainly it did not occur to him that with every step he was getting farther and farther away from that incriminating document!

Wharton did not move till the two of them were out of sight. Then he withdrew his hand from his pocket, with Price's paper in it.

He did not look at it. It was Price's, and he had no right to look at it, even if he had wanted to, which he certainly did not. It was some communication, probably from Bill Lodgey or Joe Banks, at the Three Fishers, which the man Sanders had handed to Price—something, most likely, about a horse. Harry Wharton's only interest in it was the question what he was going to do with it.

He was tempted to crumple it up and throw it away in the grass on the common.

But it was Price's, and he could hardly do that. He could hardly regret that he had taken it, annoying as it

was. Price was a worm, but no fellow wanted to see another fellow sacked, worm or not. He wanted to get shut of that rotten paper as soon as he could: Had Prout been satisfied and left Price at the seat, it would have been easy enough. Now, so far as Wharton could see, he could do nothing but keep it in his pocket till he saw Price again to hand it back.

With an angry grunt, he crumpled the paper into his pocket and left it there.

He rose to his feet at last, and walked on slowly towards Greyfriars School.

ABOUT SOAP!

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

"Walked it?" asked Frank Nugent.

Four fellows were waiting at the school gate.

Harry Wharton's face, which was a little clouded, brightened as he saw his friends.

With an ache in his knees, a pain in his palms, the remembrance of Hacker's unpleasantness, and last, but not least, getting mixed up in Stephen Price's dingy blackguardism, he was not in a happy temper.

"Yes, I've walked it!" he answered.

"You've taken your time!" remarked Johnny Bull. "Did that mad ass Bunter do any damage when he hooked you off the train?"

"Just a little! But that old ass Hacker wasted time," said Harry.

"Not a row with the Acid Drop?" asked Frank, rather anxiously. He had noted the cloud on Wharton's brow, and was feeling a little uneasy.

Before Wharton could reply, Skinner of the Remove came along.

Skinner gave the captain of his Form a sort of searching look, to his surprise, and the surprise of his chums.

"You look all right now," he said.

"Why shouldn't I?" asked Harry, puzzled. "What do you mean, Skinner?"

"Is it true that you never washed in the hols?"

"What?"

"Bunter doesn't, I believe," said Skinner blandly. "He was with you in the hols, wasn't he? Birds of a feather, what?"

Harry Wharton made a step towards Skinner—and Frank Nugent caught his arm. Skinner walked off laughing. Wharton was left with a crimson face.

"What was that grinning ass getting at?" asked Bob, perplexed.

"Oh! I owe that to Hacker!" said Wharton savagely. "I dare say it's all over the shop by this time. About fifty fellows saw the old ass ragging me at Courtfield."

"But, what—"

Harry Wharton snapped out a brief explanation. He had hardly finished speaking when Hobson of the Shell came up. He, like Skinner, stared at the face of the captain of the Remove.

"I say, is it true?" he asked.

"Well?" rapped Wharton. He guessed what was coming. "What?"

"Lots of fellows are saying that you turned up so jolly dirty, that my beak had to make you go and wash!" said Hobby. "Did Hacker really?"

"Your beak's as silly an idiot as you are!" was Harry Wharton's polite reply; and he walked away, leaving Hobson staring.

Wharton's friends followed him—suppressing smiles. The incident was absurd, but it was clear that it annoyed Wharton; and it was tactful not to smile.

By the door of the House stood Temple, Dabney & Co. of the Fourth. They exchanged grinning glances as the Famous Five came up. Temple had been speaking to his friends about the cricket prospects; but he changed the topic as the Remove fellows came in hearing.

"Fellow ought to wash!" said Temple. "I mean to say, on the first day of term, you know. Nobody cares what a fellow does in the hols, and I know the fags hate washing; but turning up at school with three weeks' grubbiness on a fellow's face—thick, I call it!"

"Oh, rather!" agreed Dabney.

"War-time economy, perhaps!" suggested Fry. "Prices have gone up, you know—some people economise on soap."

Harry Wharton paused, his ears burning. His friends, with a quick exchange of glances, bunched round him, and moved him on into the House. That gentle badinage from Cecil Reginald Temple and his friends really was not worth a scrap.

"I say, you fellows!" Billy Bunter's spectacles glimmered at the chums of the Remove when they came in. "I say, seen anything of Wharton yet? I say, I hear that he was whopped at Courtfield by old Quelch for turning up so dirty that he might have been taken for a chimney-sweep— Oh zrikey!"

The Owl of the Remove discerned Wharton among the other fellows, and cut off abruptly. He jumped away before a boot could reach him.

Harry Wharton breathed hard. He owed Bunter a booting for that astute trick on the train at Courtfield. Bunter did not wait for it! He disappeared promptly into space.

"Better go in and see Quelch, old chap!" said Nugent. "Everybody's been in by this time! We've got tea ready in the study—you don't want to join the mob in Hall?"

"No, that's all right; I'll be up in a minute or two."

Harry Wharton proceeded to his Form-master's study. He had to report his arrival, and hand over his medical certificate. He found Mr. Quelch—as Form-masters often were found on the first day of term—a little worried and a little crusty.

"You are very late, Wharton!" snapped Mr. Quelch.

"I've been delayed, sir—"

"You did not come by the second train; why not?"

"I walked, sir."

"Your health has not suffered, I hope, Wharton, during the holidays?"

"Not in the least, sir."

"Then I fail to see why walking from the station should have occupied you such a length of time."

Wharton compressed his lips.

"My knees hurt me a little, sir! I had rather a hard bang on the platform when a silly fellow tumbled me over."

"Oh!" Quelch's crusty look disappeared at once. "I am sorry for that, Wharton. Really, you should not have walked. Perhaps you had better tell the matron."

"It's all right, sir—only a spot of embrocation wanted," said Harry. A trace of sullenness had crept into his manner at Quelch's questioning, but it vanished at once at his Form-master's look of kind concern.

"Very well, Wharton; as you think best. You may go, my boy!" said Mr. Quelch benevolently.

Harry Wharton left the study. As he turned the corner out of Masters' Passage, he almost ran into Loder of the Sixth.

Loder signed to him to stop, and he did so impatiently.

There had been trouble in the hols with Loder as well as Price; they had turned up together at Eastcliff Lodge, where Harry Wharton & Co. had spent Easter. Loder, like Price, had not forgotten. As Loder was a prefect, he had to be regarded at school, if not in the hols.

"Oh! You've washed now!" said Loder. Evidently he had heard that story. "You grubby little tick, what do you mean by coming back to school looking like a guttersnipe?"

Harry Wharton did not answer that, but he breathed very hard.

"I shall keep an eye on you!" said Loder. "Mind, you can carry on as

SOMETHING FOR WHARTON!

"I SAY, you fellows—"
Billy Bunter blinked cautiously—very cautiously—into Study No. 1 in the Remove.

There were five fellows in that study, at tea.

The Famous Five preferred tea in the study to joining the mob in Hall. It was no end of a scrum in Hall on the first day of term. The study was cosy, and all was merry and bright. Under the influence of his friends' cheery company, and tea and toast and sosses, Harry Wharton had forgotten his annoyance, and his face was as cheery as any in the Co. Tuck-boxes had been unpacked, and the table groaned, as a

the same view before he ventured his fat person into the study.

The scent of tea and toast and sosses, the sight of a handsome cake, were almost irresistible. But Billy Bunter did not want to be kicked. It was a process that he had often undergone, but he had never grown to like it!

"Hallo, hallo, hallo! Here's Bunter!" said Bob Cherry. "Feel up to kicking him, Wharton, or shall I do it for you?"

"I'll do it!" said Harry, getting off his chair rather slowly. Embrocation had relieved, but not wholly dismissed, that stiffness in his knees.

"I say, old chap, you ain't shirty, are you?" asked Bunter, watching the captain of the Remove warily through his



As Wharton sprawled on the platform, Billy Bunter shot past him. Into the carriage!

you like in the hols, but if you don't wash here, look out for the ashplant! First time I catch you with a dirty face, you get six! Now cut, you dirty little tick!"

"Wha-a-t!"

"I said cut, you dirty little tick!" grated Loder. "Get a move on, before I make use of this ashplant! Grubby little ticks like you ought never to be allowed at Greyfriars!"

Harry Wharton cut, almost at boiling point, leaving Gerald Loder feeling that he had wiped off a little of an old score.

As Wharton went up the stairs, three or four Third Form fags below called up:

"Who don't wash?"

"Who can't stand soap?"

"Ha, ha, ha! Who hates soap?"

Wharton glanced down over the banisters at the grinning faces of Tubb and Paget and Bolsover minor. But the small fry of the Third were not worth slaying.

Wharton's feelings were deep. He was going to hear a lot of this—it was an amusing game to other fellows—it might be a week before it died out. And he owed it to that meddling ass Hacker. His feelings towards the master of the Shell, as he went on his way, were almost as acid as the Acid Drop himself.

novelist would say, under the goodly viands.

That was the kind of thing that appealed to Billy Bunter, even more than to the chums of the Remove, though they were late for tea.

Bunter was not late for tea. He had joined the mob in Hall, and done fairly well there. He had caught Herbert Vernon-Smith in the tuckshop, and the Bounder, genial on the first day of term, had stood him doughnuts. He had already borrowed half-a-crown of Lord Mauleverer, and expended the same in refreshment, liquid and solid. Any fellow but Billy Bunter might have felt disposed to stop at this. But Bunter always had shipping space for cargo—and the nose of a hunting-dog for tuck! So there he was, at the door of Harry Wharton's study—hesitating, however, to enter.

It was not diffidence, or the circumstance that he had not been asked, that made Bunter hesitate. Trifles like that never worried the fat Owl of the Remove. But he was rather afraid that Wharton might be shirty.

Wharton had given him quite an unpleasant look when he came in. It looked as if he was annoyed about that episode at the railway station. Bunter was prepared to forget all about it—to dismiss it as the trifle it was—but he wanted to be sure that Wharton took

big spectacles, ready to dodge. "It was only a lark, really, old chap! It wouldn't have happened, either, if you'd given me your place—and I asked you, didn't I?"

"You fat, footling, frowsy fathead. I've got about a dozen aches and pains—"

"He, he, he!"

"So you think that funny?" roared the captain of the Remove.

"Oh! No! Not at all, old chap! He, he, he! I—I—I mean, nothing of the sort, you know! Just a bit of a bump on a platform—you must be rather soft, old fellow! I say—Yaroo! Keep off, you beast!"

Billy Bunter jumped backwards into the passage.

Having no eyes in the back of his head, Billy Bunter naturally did not see Fisher T. Fish passing down the passage as he jumped. Fishy, for his part, naturally did not expect a fellow standing in a study doorway to jump suddenly backwards. He was taken quite by surprise. One of Bunter's heels came down on one of Fisher T. Fish's toes—and the yell that came from Fishy woke all the echoes far and wide.

"Yurroop! Wake snakes!" yelled Fisher T. Fish. "Aw! Carry me home to die! You fat clam—Yurroop! I guess I'll sure sock you a few!"

Bunter had escaped a boot in Study No. 1. But he did not escape a boot in the Remove passage. One of Fishy's feet was full of anguish. But he stood on it, and used the other with tremendous effect.

Thud, thud, thud!

Fisher T. Fish got in three on the tightest trousers at Greyfriars before the yelling fat Owl escaped up the passage.

Bunter disappeared into Study No. 7 yelling, and Fisher T. Fish limped on his way.

Harry Wharton, laughing, shut the door of Study No. 1, and tea resumed the even tenor of its way in that celebrated apartment.

It was about ten minutes later that the door opened cautiously, and a fat face and a big pair of spectacles glimmered in.

"Bunter's come back for the boot!" remarked Johnny Bull, with a grin.

"Yah! I ain't coming in!" snorted Bunter. "I've got something for Wharton! It's Toddy's, really, but you can have it as you need it so much, Wharton."

Whiz!

A little packet landed on the study table among the tea-things. Then the door slammed, and Bunter was gone.

The Famous Five stared at the packet. Harry Wharton's face crimsoned, and his eyes glinted. The Co., very carefully indeed, did not smile. It was a tablet of soap!

Evidently Peter Todd had unpacked it in Study No. 7, and the fat Owl had annexed it—for Wharton.

"By gum, I'll——" Wharton half rose.

"The fat ass!" said Frank. "Not worth bothering about, old chap!"

"I'm getting fed up with this!" Wharton sat down again, however.

"It's Hacker's fault!" said Bob Cherry. "We ought to make the Acid Drop sit up for it somehow."

"That meddling old goat!" grunted Wharton.

Tea finished, the captain of the Remove rose to leave the study. He had to find Price and hand him back his precious paper, and he was anxious to get it over.

"Coming down to Hall?" asked Bob.

"No—not just yet."

"I say, I wouldn't steer clear of Hall because of that silly joke about soap!" said Johnny Bull.

"It's not that, ass!" Wharton's voice was rather sharp. "I've got to see a man in the Fifth before I go down, that's all."

"If you're going to see Coker, we'd better all come!" grinned Bob. "Old Horace is too hefty for one Remove man."

"It isn't Coker."

Harry Wharton left the study—not explaining who it was, rather to his friends' surprise. The Lower Fourth had nothing to do with the Fifth, and it was rather unusual for a Remove man to have to see a man in the Fifth.

But Wharton had said nothing of Price and his precious paper, and intended to say nothing; it was not his business to talk about Price's dingy adventures, and he was only anxious to get the matter over and done with, and dismissed from his mind.

Leaving his friends in the study, the captain of the Remove walked down the passage to the landing.

A fat voice and a ripple of laughter greeted him as he reached it.

"I say, you fellows, I gave him a cake of soap! He, he, he! Well, if he

never washes, he wants it! He, he, he!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"But is it true that Wharton came back looking as if he hadn't washed for weeks?" asked Russell.

"Black as the ace of spades!" declared Bunter. "The Acid Drop nobbled him for it—I heard Coker say so. Quelch made him go and wash before he would let him leave the station. From what I hear, Quelch said that he would whop him if he didn't wash behind his ears this term."

"Oh, my hat!"

"And I say—— Oh crikey!" ejaculated Billy Bunter as the captain of the Remove dawned on him.

Bunter did not stay to finish his remarks. One look at Harry Wharton's face was enough for Bunter. He shot down the Remove stairs to the study landing, leaving a crowd of fellows laughing.

From the study landing Bunter blinked back—to see Harry Wharton following him. Wharton, in point of fact, had to cross that landing to get to the Fifth Form passage, to go to Price's study. Bunter was unaware of that. He gave a gasp of alarm and shot on.

The fat Owl dodged into the Fifth Form passage and blinked back round the corner.

Wharton was coming directly towards him!

"Oh crikey!" gasped Bunter.

He rolled up the passage to escape. A heavy hand on a fat shoulder stopped him. Coker, Potter, and Greene were standing outside their study. It was Horace Coker who grabbed Bunter, much incensed to see a Remove fag scuttling about in the quarters of the Fifth Form.

"You cheeky little toad!" said Coker. "What——"

"I say, leggo!" gasped Bunter. "Wharton's after me!"

"Wharton! That kid who doesn't wash?"

"Oh! Yes. I say——"

"Let him come here, that's all!" said Coker. "We'll jolly well wash him!"

Horace Coker released the fat shoulder and Bunter shot on. He stared down the passage towards the landing end.

Harry Wharton turned the corner and came up the passage, his hand in his pocket on the crumpled paper he was anxious to hand over to Stephen Price in his study.

But he did not reach Price's study! As he came by Coker's door, Horace Coker, grinning, grabbed him.

WASHING WHARTON!

"LET go, you dummy!" Harry Wharton snapped out the words as Coker grabbed.

He was not there for a row with Coker. He was in a far from placable frame of mind and had no patience to waste on the fathead of the Fifth.

Coker chuckled cheerily.

"You've chosen to come here," he grinned. "We don't allow fellows in this passage who don't wash!"

"You cheeky fool!"

"What?"

"Cheeky fool! Let go my shoulder, before I punch your silly nose!"

"By gum!" said Coker. "I'd like to see you punch my nose, you cheeky little unwashed tick—— Yaroooh!"

Coker saw it—or, at least, felt it—the next moment!

Harry Wharton hit out at Coker's

rather prominent nose, and Horace staggered and roared.

The next moment he fairly hurled himself at the Removite.

Harry Wharton gave grasp for grasp. He was nothing like the burly Coker's size or weight, but he was able to give even Coker a good deal of trouble.

But Potter and Greene joined in at once and grabbed him by the arms. In the grasp of three big Fifth Form men Wharton struggled angrily, but in vain.

"You silly dummies, let go!" he panted. "I've got to see Price——"

"You've got to be washed!" grinned Coker. "You haven't washed all through the hols, and now you're going to have a wash."

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Potter and Greene.

This seemed to appear quite funny to the Fifth Form men.

"Bring him along to the tap!" chortled Coker. "Punch my nose, will you, you young tick? Well, I'll wash you——"

"Let go!" roared Wharton, struggling furiously.

It had happened to Billy Bunter, in his fat career, to be washed forcibly. But the bare idea of it happening to himself made Wharton infuriated. But clearly Coker & Co. were in earnest. They believed, or affected to believe, that that junior had come back to school without washing, and they were going to wash him, just to give him a lesson!

"What the dooce is up?" Hilton of the Fifth looked out of the next study. "Is that an air raid, or only your voice, Coker?"

"We're going to wash this fag. Lend a hand. He's a regular little wildcat!" gasped Coker.

Hilton laughed, and went back into his study and shut the door. The dandy of the Fifth did not want to deal with a regular little wildcat.

"Buzz him along!" gasped Coker.

There was a tap at the upper end of the Fifth Form passage. In that direction Wharton was hustled. But he was not hustled easily. Little chance as a junior had in the grasp of three men of the Fifth, he disputed every inch of the way, fighting desperately.

Coker's nose received a second knock. Greene was startled by a jolt right in the eye. Potter found himself the sudden possessor of a cauliflower ear. Then the junior's arms were secured again; but he struggled and wrenched, and the whole party rolled over on the floor of the Fifth Form passage.

It was quite a wild mix-up.

Billy Bunter—at a safe distance—blinked at the scene breathlessly through his big spectacles. Two or three Fifth Form men glanced out of the games-study, at the landing end, and grinned and went in again. There was always a spot of horseplay on the first night of term; and it was like Coker to be mixed up in a shindy as soon as he got back to school. There was no help for the hapless junior; no Remove man was in sight, or likely to come in sight, except Billy Bunter, who simply blinked at the scene.

The struggle was quite Homeric. If Coker & Co. got the captain of the Remove as far as that tap, for the playful purpose of washing him, the getting him there was not going to be a playful proceeding. All three of them were gasping, and they got the junior up the passage foot by foot—almost inch by inch.

Wharton's state by that time was wildly dishevelled.

His collar and tie lay on the floor

outside Coker's doorway. His handkerchief lay a yard farther up the passage. His jacket, twisted over his tousled head, shed things from its pockets—a fountain-pen, a pencil, a crumpled letter, a penknife—everything that was in the pockets. Five or six buttons scattered among the other things. Still he resisted doggedly.

But overpowering odds did it. He was hustled at last up to the sink under the tap.

There he rallied, putting up a last struggle before his head was put under water by the too-playful Coker.

"Oh crikey!" breathed Billy Bunter. Wharton had been after him, as he fancied. Wharton, very probably, had been going to kick him if he came within reach of a boot. It was rather fortunate, really, that Coker & Co. were japing the captain of the Remove. It gave Billy Bunter the opportunity to get off the spot un-kicked.

The fat Owl rolled away down the passage, leaving the captain of the Remove and Coker & Co. much too busily occupied to give him heed.

But as he passed Harry Wharton's scattered property in the passage Bunter paused to pick up the scattered articles. Bunter could be good-natured, when it was not a lot of trouble.

He gathered up fountain-pen, handkerchief, penknife, pencil, a crumpled letter, and other odds and ends, and took them with him, to leave in Wharton's study. It was fairly clear that Wharton, when Coker & Co. had done with him, would not have leisure to bother about them.

Bunter disappeared, leaving a terrific struggle still going on at the sink up the passage.

Coker was going to give that fag a wash—partly, perhaps, because Coker of the Fifth thought that fags wanted washing, chiefly from a rather elephantine sense of humour. The junior's fierce resistance was making Coker & Co. rather excited and wrathful. There was a jet of red from Coker's nose, Greene had a pain in the eye, Potter a pain in the ear. Three Fifth Form men did not expect this sort of thing from a fag, and it ruffled their tempers. They handled that junior harder and harder.

The tap was flowing. Wharton's head was almost under it when he twisted away, and, shoving Coker, brought Coker's neck under it instead. A stream of water down the inside of his collar caused old Horace to roar and splutter in quite a frantic manner.

Then, with a combined effort, the three got the junior's head under the tap. Potter and Greene held it there, while Coker, still spluttering, lathered on soap. Luckily, the junior's foot landed suddenly on Coker's waistcoat.

Coker sat down with startling suddenness, and with a suffocated gurgle. "Urrrrgh!" was Coker's remark.

Wharton, with a desperate effort, twisted away from Potter and Greene now that Coker's mighty grasp was off him.

"Wurrrrrgh!" said Coker. The junior jumped away, dodged the grabbing hands of Potter and Greene, and shot down the passage, leaving a watery trail behind him.

Coker staggered up. "Yurrrgh!" said Coker. "Ooogh! Stoppim! Gurrrrrgh!"

Wharton, as Billy Bunter had guessed, had no time to think about the property that had scattered from his pockets—even if he was aware of the scattering. Neither had he time to remember Price of the Fifth, whom he had come to see. He did the Fifth Form passage like the cinder-path, and vanished round the

corner across the study landing—only in time.

Coker & Co. did not pursue him past the corner. Outside the Fifth Form territory he was safe.

The captain of the Remove went up the dormitory staircase, heading for the Remove dormitory and a towelling and a change—both of which he badly needed. It was not till he had dried and changed and was about to transfer various articles from the pockets of a drenched jacket to the pockets of a dry one, that he discovered that all loose articles were gone—among them, the

GREYFRIARS PORTRAIT GALLERY

No. 4.—TOM BROWN



Brown, to give him his nickname, hails from New Zealand—and is indeed a worthy representative of that great Dominion. When he first joined Greyfriars, Brown showed that he had his head screwed on the right way, and he very soon jumped into popularity with his schoolfellows. Brown is a front-ranker in the field of sport, and can be aptly expressed in these words—"a rattling good fellow!"

paper he had been taking to Price of the Fifth!

BUNTER'S BOMBSHELL!

"I SAY, you fellows—" Billy Bunter came into the Rag.

He came into that apartment with so wide a grin on his fat face that it almost looked as if it would go right round his fat head and meet at the back.

There was a crowd of Remove fellows in the Rag.

Four of the famous Co. were there—having gone down while Wharton was on his visit to Price in the Fifth. They were exchanging news and greetings with other Remove men—Smithy, and Redwing, and Lord Mauleverer, and Squiff and Tom Brown, Hazeldene and Toddy and Mark Linley, and there was a buzz of voices in which Billy Bunter's fat squeak was hardly heard.

But Bunter was going to be heard. He waved a crumpled paper in a fat hand, and yelled.

"I say, you fellows!"

"Hallo, hallo, hallo! Has Wharton kicked you yet?" called out Bob Cherry. "If he hasn't, I will! Come here."

"I say, listen to this!" roared Bunter. "I say, did you fellows know that Wharton was backing a horse?"

"What?" roared Bob. "He, he, he! I've found him out!" chortled Bunter. "I've jolly well found him out! He makes out that he looks down his nose at fellows who back their fancy, and all the while—"

"You howling ass, what are you burbling about now?" exclaimed Frank Nugent angrily.

"I say, you fellows, listen, and then you'll know all about Wharton!" said Billy Bunter. "Ain't he kept it dark, though? Fancy Quelch's face, if he knew—his head boy, you know! That's why he got in so late, of course—seeing his old pals—he, he, he! First day of term—he never lost any time, did he?"

"Is that podgy porpoise mad?" asked Bob Cherry, staring blankly at the fat Owl.

"Mad as a hatter, I think!" grunted Johnny Bull.

"The madfulness is terrific."

"He, he, he! Listen to this!" chortled Bunter. "All of you listen—I can jolly well tell you, it will make you open your eyes."

And the Owl of the Remove, with his fat face wreathed in grins, proceeded to read out from the crumpled paper in his fat hand.

"Dear Sir,—I got your letter all right, and you're on. I got to be at Wapshott for the three o'clock, but Soapy will give you this. You're on at three to one, and I don't mind saying that you've picked a good orse. Whoever told you about Snoodle knew what he was talking about.

J. B."

There was silence in the Rag, save for Bunter's fat squeak as he read out that remarkable epistle.

But it was followed by a buzz of voices.

"Kick him!" said Johnny Bull.

"You fat chump—"

"You Peeping Tom—"

"You blithering idiot—"

"Where did you get that, Bunter, you unspeakable dunderhead?" asked Frank Nugent.

"I picked it up!" grinned Bunter.

"Nice for the fellow who dropped it about, if a beak saw it!" giggled Snoop.

Tom Redwing gave his chum, the Bounder, an alarmed look. If any fellow in the Remove had had a missive like that, Tom knew which fellow it was likeliest to be.

Smithy laughed as he caught that alarmed look.

"Don't be an ass, Reddy!" he said. "If that was mine, do you think I should leave it about the House?"

"Then who—" muttered Redwing. The Bounder laughed again.

"Bunter says it's Wharton's!" he grinned.

"Bunter's a fool!"

"You pernicious porpoise, what's put it into your wooden nut that that muck belongs to Wharton?" asked Bob Cherry.

"He, he, he! He dropped it!"

"Wharton dropped it?" yelled Skinner.

"He jolly well did!"

"He did not!" roared Frank Nugent, his face flaming. "Why, I'll boot you all round the Rag for saying so!"

"Here, hold on—give Bunter a

chance!" exclaimed Boisover major.

"If he saw Wharton drop it—"

"He didn't, you dummy!"

"I did!" yelled Bunter. "He dropped it, and a lot of other things, when the Fifth Form chaps were rolling him over in their passage—"

"Is Wharton in a row in the Fifth?" exclaimed Bob. "He said he was going to see a man in the Fifth. What the—"

"Coker said he was going to wash him—"

"Wha-a-t?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"The cheeky ass!" roared Bob. "Come on, you fellows—we'll let that Fifth Form fathead see whether he can rag the Remove—"

"They ain't got him now!" said Bunter. "I saw Wharton going up to the dorm when I came down. He got away all right. I tell you, he dropped everything he had about him when they were tussling in the Fifth Form passage—and I picked them all up, excepting the buttons—and took them to his study. And this letter was one of them."

"And you read it, you fat worm!" said Lord Mauleverer.

"Eh? Yes! I mean, no!" said Bunter hastily. "I never looked at it, of course. I'm not the fellow to read a fellow's letter, I hope. I happened to see what was in it by sheer chance."

"Let's ask Wharton when he comes down!" grinned Skinner. "His Magnificence disdains to tell a lie, as we all know!"

"Whose it is doesn't matter so much as booting that fat worm for reading it!" remarked Lord Mauleverer. "Let's all boot him round the Rag!"

"Oh, really, Mauly—"

"All together!" agreed Bob Cherry.

"I say, you fellows—"

"Boot him!"

Billy Bunter made a rush for the door.

He had—as he expected—caused a sensation in the Rag. Bunter liked to cause a sensation. But after the feast came the reckoning. The fat Owl grabbed open the door, with Bob Cherry's boot close behind him, and shot out of the Rag.

The whole Co. rushed after him. They did not believe for a moment that that missive belonged to Harry Wharton, though evidently Bunter himself believed so. But whether it did or not, the fellow who had read another fellow's letter, and shouted it from the house-tops, required booting.

Billy Bunter flew down the passage.

He would not have escaped the avenging boots, but for the circumstance that Mr. Hacker was in the passage. Hacker was standing there talking to Mr. Capper—relating, in bitter tones, how unpleasant Quelch had been, when he, Hacker, had drawn attention to the disgracefully dirty state of a member of Quelch's Form.

Billy Bunter was in too great haste to see Hacker and Capper before he crashed into the master of the Fourth.

Four pursuers came to a sudden halt, as Billy Bunter reeled against one wall, Mr. Capper against the other, and the crumpled paper dropped from a fat hand at the feet of the Acid Drop.

PIE FOR HACKER!

BILLY BUNTER gurgled for breath.

Mr. Capper spluttered. "Quelch's boys!" said Mr. Hacker in his bitter voice.

"Oh crikey!"

"Dear me!" murmured Mr. Capper. "Bunter, you foolish, clumsy boy—dear me!" Capper righted himself, gasping.

"I—I—it wasn't me!" gasped Bunter. "I—I mean, they were after me. I—I never saw you, sir. I—I—"

"Go away, you stupid boy!" said Mr. Capper. Capper had had rather a shock, but Capper was always mildly benevolent.

"Disgraceful!" said Mr. Hacker. Hacker was never mild and never benevolent. Bunter had reason to be thankful that it was not the Acid Drop into whom he had crashed. "Even on the first night of term—pah! Bunter, how dare you race about the passages in that unmannerly manner?"

Four juniors faded back into the Rag—though not before Mr. Hacker spotted them. Bunter, unfortunately, could not fade out. Hacker, like the Ancient Mariner, held him with a glittering eye.

It was Hacker all over! Capper, the damaged party, had told Bunter to go—Hacker was not satisfied to leave it at that.

"They were after me, sir!" gasped Bunter. "I—I— Can I have that letter, sir?"

The letter lay close to the toe of Mr. Hacker's foot. He had not glanced down, and had not noticed it so far.

"What letter?" snapped Mr. Hacker.

"What do you mean, Bunter?"

"I—I've dropped that letter, sir!"

Then Hacker glanced down.

Quite a startling expression came over his face as he did so. The letter was on a single sheet of notepaper. It had fallen with the written side up. Mr. Hacker did not see all that was written at a glance; but he saw enough to make him jump.

"Upon my word!" ejaculated Hacker.

He stooped and picked up the letter himself. Billy Bunter, afraid to venture near, but in a very anxious state, blinked at him in dismay. Even Bunter realised that it was better for a beak not to see that missive from Joe Banks at the Three Fishers. But it was too late now.

"Upon my word!" repeated Mr. Hacker. "Look at this, Capper!"

"My dear Hacker, what—what—" said Mr. Capper. He had no desire whatever to look at a schoolboy's letter. He stared at Hacker in surprise.

"Look at it, I say!" repeated the Acid Drop.

He held the letter up so close under Capper's nose that the Fourth Form master could not help looking at it. Then Capper, in his turn, gave a jump.

"Bless my soul!" he said.

"This," said Mr. Hacker sourly, "had better go before Mr. Quelch, as Bunter is in his Form. Mr. Quelch does not welcome the most well-meant assistance from other members of the staff; but a matter like this, I think, is a little too serious for me to heed considerations of that kind!"

Hacker's eyes gleamed.

He would have repudiated quite sincerely a suggestion that he was glad of a chance of scoring over Quelch. He did not realise it himself. But that gleam in his cold eyes was expressive.

"I—I say, that ain't mine!" gasped Bunter, in sheer terror. There was no name on the letter of the person to whom it was addressed. It might have been anybody's. Billy Bunter's fat knees knocked together at the bare thought of going up to Quelch, accused of having had a letter from a racing man.

"You untruthful young rascal!"

exclaimed Mr. Hacker. "Only a minute ago you picked up this letter!"

"Yes, but it ain't mine!" wailed Bunter. "I picked it up upstairs—'tain't mine, sir! I was showing it to the fellows in the Rag, when those beasts—I mean those chaps—got after me!"

"Indeed! Then whose is it?" demanded Mr. Hacker.

"I—I—I don't know!" groaned Bunter. "I never saw a fellow drop it, and it wasn't Wharton!"

"Wharton?"

If Hacker's eyes had gleamed before, they fairly scintillated now.

Wharton! The junior who had answered him so insolently at Courtfield Station, and whose part Quelch had taken! Wharton!

"Oh, no," mumbled the miserable Owl, "not Wharton—not anybody! I—I just picked it up, that's all!"



"Oh gad!" muttered Price, hunching him.
"The game's up—fir"

"Those boys who were following you from the junior day-room were Wharton's friends, I think!" said the Acid Drop grimly. "Were they following you to recover possession of this letter, Bunter?"

"Oh, no!"

"Then why were they pursuing you?" "They—they were going to kick me for reading it out in the Rag, that's all!" mumbled Bunter. "They—they got shirty about it, and—and—"

"Because the letter was Wharton's?" "Oh, no! They didn't believe it was his!"

"Then you said that it was?" The Acid Drop was wringing it out word by word.

"Oh, no! Yes! I—I mean, I—I might have said so!" stammered the wretched Owl. "I—I might have said so just for a—a—a joke!"

"Did you see Wharton drop this letter or not?"

"Oh, no! I never saw him at all. I haven't seen him since we came back—I wasn't in the Fifth Form passage when Coker was ragging him, and I never picked up the things he dropped!" groaned Bunter. "He never dropped anything, and I haven't put them on his study table!"

"You had better go," said Mr. Hacker. He was satisfied now that that letter was not Bunter's

"Yes, sir! C-c-can I have the letter?" moaned Bunter.

"Certainly not!"

"Oh lor'! I—I say, Wharton will be awfully wild—I—I mean—"

"Go!" snapped Mr. Hacker with so sharp a snap that Bunter jumped and went.

He rolled away to Hall in a very dismayed frame of mind. He realised that with that letter in a master's hand, its owner—Wharton, of course—was booked for serious trouble. Still, Bunter had done all he could—he couldn't snatch that letter from the Acid Drop.

But he was worried about it as he rolled into Hall.

Fortunately, he encountered his minor, Sammy of the Second, in Hall—and Sammy had a packet of toffee. Helping Sammy Bunter dispose of that toffee naturally drove lesser matters from Bunter's mind, and he



self up on the seat, as Mr. Froot approached.
day of term, too!"

forgot all about Wharton and Wharton's letter.

That letter remained in Hacker's keeping. On Hacker's acid face was a grim smile when he left Mr. Capper.

Hacker was not going to act in a hurry—there was, after all, no proof of the ownership of that telltale letter, unless Billy Bunter's incoherent gabble was proof. Quelch was rather a tough customer to deal with in matters pertaining to the good name of his Form.

Hacker was not going to act till he had considered the matter very carefully. But he was anticipating quite a gratifying interview with Quelch before very long, and he smiled at that happy anticipation. Mr. Hacker would never have dreamed of admitting it, even to himself—but this was pie to him!

WHOSE LETTER?

HARRY WHARTON came into the Rag, showing no traces of the scuffle in the Fifth Form passage.

But there was rather a worried expression on his face; he was troubled about that letter. He did not, for the moment, notice the extremely curious glances that were cast at him,

or that every fellow there left off talking as he entered.

He glanced round and came over to his friends.

"Did you fellows pick up the things I found on my study table?" he asked.

"No—Bunter did," answered Bob.

"He's told us so."

"We never knew you were rowing with Coker till Bunter told us," said Frank Nugent. "He said you'd gone up to the dorm afterwards—"

"I had to change," said Wharton briefly.

"Did it hurt?" asked Hazel.

"Did what hurt?"

"We've heard that Coker gave you a wash—"

"Oh, don't be a goat, Hazel! I've heard enough of that!" snapped the captain of the Remove. "Where's that fat ass Bunter? I remember he was on the spot, though I'd forgotten him. Where is he now?"

"Lost anything?" asked Skinner, with a wink at Snoop.

Snoop giggled.

Harry Wharton looked at Skinner. He had sensed, by this time, an unusual atmosphere in the Rag.

"Better tell him!" said Johnny Bull.

"Better tell me what?" Harry Wharton's tone was not very amiable. "What's on—if anything is?"

"That fat ass, Bunter, hiked in here with a letter," said Bob. "He seems to have picked it up somewhere and fancied that it was yours."

"Oh!" gasped Harry.

"It wasn't, of course!" said Skinner blandly. "When Bunter read it out—"

"He read it out?" exclaimed Harry.

"Yes; so we knew it couldn't be yours," said Skinner, in the same bland tone. "You don't know anything about Snoodle at three to one."

Harry Wharton stood looking at Skinner, breathing hard, the colour rising in his cheeks.

He understood now that peculiar atmosphere in the Rag. He had found all his missing property in the study, with the exception of that letter—and now that he was told that it was Bunter who had picked up the things, he did not need telling that Bunter had read the letter—that being one of Bunter's ways. He realised now that Bunter had supposed the letter to be his—and had passed on the glad tidings, as it were, to the rest of the Remove.

Harry Wharton did not know what was in that letter—but it was clear that every other fellow in the Rag did.

The look that came over his face caused Skinner to back away a pace or two and leave the Bounder between him and Wharton.

Frank touched his chum on the arm.

"Nobody here believes that the letter Bunter read out was yours, old chap," he said. "He seems to have picked it up with the other things—some Fifth Form man must have dropped it—"

"And we can guess who!" grunted Johnny Bull. "Lots of fellows know that Price was up before the beak this afternoon, and they had a prefect there—Wingate of the Sixth. Price has been up to something."

"Pricey wouldn't drop a letter of that sort about!" chuckled Vernon-Smith. "Pricey's too jolly cute to do that!"

"Where's Bunter?" asked Harry.

"We were going to boot him, and he cleared off," answered Bob. "The

blithering owl fancied that that mouldy letter was yours—that's the sort of benighted chump he is. It was from one of that dingy crew at the Three Fishers—goodness knows who it was—some swab who's heading for the sack, anyhow."

"I don't know what was in that letter," said Harry. "But I can guess the sort. I hope I needn't tell you fellows that it was not mine."

"Of course you needn't, fathead! Smithy's, if it's anybody's in the Remove," said Bob.

The Bounder laughed.

"I don't strew that kind of correspondence about the House!" he said. "No more than Price does! Look here, Wharton, don't be an ass—if that letter's yours, the sooner you get it off Bunter the better. He may read it out in Hall next."

"I've said that the letter's not mine, Vernon-Smith!" said Harry, with glinting eyes.

"Quite!—And you've asked us where Bunter is! Do you want to see Bunter all of a sudden because he's such a fascinating chap, and you feel that you can't bear to miss him on the first day of term?" asked the Bounder sarcastically.

Some of the juniors laughed. It was perfectly clear to everybody that Wharton's inquiry for Bunter was connected with that letter.

"Shut up, Smithy!" said Bob hastily.

Smithy shrugged his shoulders.

"I've asked you fellows where Bunter is," said Harry, turning his back on Vernon-Smith. "Do you know?"

"No, but look here—bother Bunter!" said Bob uneasily. "You don't want that fat chump—he's not worth kicking!"

"It happens that I do want him, you see."

Harry Wharton walked across to the door, opened it, and walked out of the Rag.

He left his chums dumb and the other fellows in a buzz. But he was too angry and exasperated to care what the fellows were thinking—just then, at all events. He hurried away in search of Bunter—only anxious to reclaim that letter and get rid of it.

Bunter was not easy to find. He learned in Hall that the fat Owl had been there, and had gone. There were some masters in Hall, among them Hacker, and the Acid Drop glanced round at Wharton, as he heard him inquiring for Bunter. The Acid Drop fancied that he could guess why that particular junior was in search of Bunter!

Wharton did not even see the Acid Drop. He went out of Hall, his irritation growing as his search for the fat Owl was prolonged. A booting for Bunter was overdue, and the glint in the eyes of the captain of the Remove indicated that he was going to get it at last—when found!

TOO LATE!

OH!" ejaculated Billy Bunter. Bunter was found at last. He was in his study—No. 7 in the Remove.

Peter Todd, who had the pleasure—or otherwise—of sharing that study with Bunter, had left a box of caramels there. Bunter was finishing the last caramel when an exasperated face looked in at the doorway.

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Bunter blinked at that exasperated face in alarm.

"Give me that letter, you fat frump!" snapped Wharton.

"Eh? What letter?" stammered the fat Owl.

"Don't burble! Give me the letter before I kick you round this study!" exclaimed the captain of the Remove.

"I—I haven't got it!" gasped Bunter. "I'd give it to you with pleasure if I had it! I was going to put it back on your table, with the other things, only Hacker took it—"

"Hacker!" howled Wharton.

"Yes! He saw it, and grabbed it! Mind, it's all right," added Bunter hastily. "I told him it wasn't yours—I mentioned your name specially."

"You unspeakable idiot—"

"Oh, really, Wharton—"

"You spying, prying worm!" exclaimed Wharton, intensely angry and exasperated. "Why couldn't you leave it alone?"

"Well, I like that!" said Billy Bunter warmly. "That's gratitude, I suppose! I take the trouble to pick up all your things, instead of leaving them lying all over the shop, and that's how you thank a chap!"

Wharton glared at him.

It was true that Bunter had done a rather good-natured thing in collecting those scattered articles and taking them to Study No. 1. Wharton, certainly, had had no time to collect them, or even to think of them. But Bunter had found a letter among the other things. He had not been able to resist reading that letter, and taking it down to show other fellows. Now it was gone! Worst of all, it had fallen into the hands of authority.

"You say Hacker's got it, you fat owl?" snapped Wharton.

"Well, I know he picked it up when I dropped it, and he wouldn't give it back to me," said Bunter. "He read it—bestly, mean sort of thing to do, I think, as it wasn't his! Some people seem to have no principles at all."

"You read it!" shrieked Wharton.

"Oh! Yes! No! I mean— Here, I say, you keep off!" yelled Bunter, as the captain of the Remove rushed round the table. "I never read it—yaroooh! Stop kicking me, you beast! Whoop! I never saw it—never picked it up—never— Yoo-hoop! Whoop! Oh crikey!"

A boot landed three times as Bunter flew round the table. Then the captain of the Remove quitted the study, leaving Bunter roaring.

He went down the passage with a clouded brow.

Booting Bunter for his sins was little satisfaction. It might have done Bunter good, but it did not solve the problem of Price's rotten letter.

It could have been got back from Bunter. Getting it back from the Acid Drop was impossible. Merely inquiring after it would be as good as admitting ownership—and the owner of that letter, if discovered, was booked for a most uncomfortable interview with the headmaster. It was in Hacker's bony hands, and had to be left there.

Wharton paused on the study landing, wondering what he had better do.

He could only tell Price, when he saw him, what had happened to the letter. But he was not disposed to pay another visit to the Fifth Form studies. He had had enough of Horace Coker's playful manners and customs on the first day of term. He decided to look for Price in Hall after the next roll-call. But as he was going towards the staircase, Price and Hilton came

out of the Fifth Form passage together.

"There's the kid, Steve," said Hilton. From which remark, Wharton could guess that Price had told his pal about the episode with Prout.

Price came across eagerly to the junior, holding out an eager hand.

"Give it to me," he muttered.

"I can't!" answered Wharton curtly. Price's eyes glittered.

"You can't! What do you mean, you young sweep? Give me my letter at once! Why, you young rotter, if you're thinking of keeping that letter—"

"Don't be a fool!" said Wharton, unceremoniously.

"Yes, draw it mild, Steve!" drawled Hilton. "The kid's got no use for your giddy correspondence. He means that he's lost it."

"Lost it!" breathed Price. "Oh, you young fool—you fool—" He gave the junior a black and bitter look. "Tell me the truth, you little beast! Have you lost that letter?"

"I'm a fool all right!" said Wharton contemptuously. "I let you land your rotten racing muck on me! I was a fool, and no mistake! A pity I didn't let Old Pompous nab you with the letter on you."

"Will you tell me—" Price's nerves were in a twitter. He had pulled through with Prout, owing to Wharton, but he had been uneasy ever since about that wretched letter from Joe Banks, and he had looked for Wharton once or twice, without finding him.

"That fool Coker and his fatheaded pals ragged me when I was coming to your study to give it back to you!" snapped Wharton. "It dropped on the floor, and Bunter picked it up—"

"Bunter!" murmured Hilton. "Oh gad! Anythin' in it to identify you, Steve?"

"I—I think not—no, I'm sure not. Banks isn't such a fool as that," muttered Price. "I'd only glanced at it when I spotted Old Pompous bearing down on me, but I—I think—"

"Don't be frightened," said Wharton, with cool scorn. "There's nothing in the letter to give you away."

"You've read it?"

"No, you cur, I've not read it! I dare say you're cur enough to think that I would. But Bunter read it out to the Rag—and he thought it was mine, so there can't be anything in it to fix it on you."

Price breathed more freely.

"If Bunter's got it, why couldn't you get it back from Bunter?" he demanded.

"Because the benighted idiot dropped it, and Hacker picked it up and stuck to it!" snapped Wharton.

"Hacker!"

Price almost staggered.

"Brace up, old bean," said Hilton, with cheerful contempt. "If there's nothin' in it to identify you, the Acid Drop can't stick it on you. He won't think of you at all."

Price's pasty face looked more pasty than ever. The bare idea of that letter falling into a master's hands terrified him.

"Hacker doesn't know—" began Hilton, looking at the junior.

"Oh, no!" answered Wharton bitterly. "Hacker's more likely to think it was mine—I fancy he does—"

"Oh!" breathed Price.

"Well, you can say it's not yours, if they ask you—it isn't!" said Hilton. "Don't mention Pricey, that's all."

"Let him!" said Price, between his teeth. "Get this clear, you young fool—you've lost that letter, and you can take the consequences, if there are any. I'm having nothing to do with it. If

you think you can give me away—"

Harry Wharton laughed scornfully.

"If I had been going to give you away I should have done it when you planted that letter on me, right under Old Pompous' nose," he retorted. "You've nothing to get frightened about, you putrid funk!"

Price gave him a look of hatred, and turned away. The two Fifth Form men went down the staircase together, Price still in a scared state. Wharton followed them down more slowly.

There was another call-over in Hall soon afterwards, and his chums joined him, going in.

Harry Wharton did not fail to notice a good many smiles and whispers among the Remove fellows.

His friends probably expected him to explain the peculiar circumstances of that letter, but he did not. He did not utter a word on the subject, and they were left to make the best of that.

MORE SOAP!

"WHARTON!"

"Yes, sir!"

"What is this?"

"What is what, sir?"

"This!" repeated Mr. Quelch, in a sharper tone. He tapped with a lean forefinger on a parcel that lay on his desk in the Remove Form Room.

It was a bright May morning. On the first morning of term, work was always a little desultory. The hols were only just over. Fellows had not yet settled down to the collar.

In the Fourth Form Room, Temple & Co. were able to keep Mr. Capper talking about the books that were going to be used that term, through a whole lesson, and another after it. In the Fifth Form Room some astute seniors got Prout to speak about his holidays, and Prout went on and on, to the satisfaction of himself and his Form—the latter not fearfully interested in Prout's hols, but happy to postpone the evil hour when work had to begin.

Quelch was too wary a bird to be caught with such chaff. Quelch believed in getting down to it, from the word go, so to speak.

But even Quelch was not able to begin, on the stroke of time, the happy task of driving undesired knowledge into reluctant heads.

To Quelch's surprise, he found a large packet lying on his desk in the Form-room. To his further surprise he found that it was addressed in print letters to his head boy. Quelch was puzzled and annoyed, and wanted to know what it meant.

Wharton, like all the rest of the Form, could see the packet, but he could not see that it was addressed to him, or addressed at all, at the distance.

"Did you place this here, Wharton?" snapped Mr. Quelch.

"No, sir."

"Then who did?"

"I don't know, sir."

"It is addressed to you!" snapped Mr. Quelch.

"Is it, sir?" asked Harry. "I know nothing about it, if it is."

"You had better open it," said Mr. Quelch crossly. "I cannot understand why it is here. You had better open it."

"Very well, sir."

Wharton left his place, crossed over to the Form-master's desk, and picked up the parcel. He could not begin to guess what it contained, or who had placed it there, or why.

The other fellows watched him with

interest. It was very curious and unusual indeed for a parcel to be left for any fellow on his Form-master's desk. Quelch was annoyed, and the juniors curious. Still, time was being wasted, which was gratifying to the Form, if not to the Form-master.

Wharton cut the string, and unwrapped the wrapping paper. He lifted up an oblong object that was wrapped in thin soft paper.

That wrapping dropped aside, and revealed a bar of soap.

Wharton stared at it. The Remove master stared at it. The whole Remove stared at it, and there was a roar:

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Wharton's face crimsoned.

Overnight, he had almost forgotten Hacker's meddling unpleasantness and its result. He was reminded of it now. That jest was not going to be allowed an early death. Nobody at Greyfriars seriously believed that the captain of the Remove was a fellow who didn't wash. But a joke was a joke, and he, thanks to Hacker, was the victim of this one.

Wharton was not grinning. His face was crimson, and his eyes gleaming. Mr. Quelch was more puzzled and more annoyed than before.

"What does this mean, Wharton?" he exclaimed. "That is—is—is a bar of soap. There is no occasion whatever for a Remove boy to order soap. It is ridiculous! Soap is provided by the school. Any boy who prefers special tablets of soap is at liberty to purchase them, but a bar of soap—really, Wharton, I fail to understand this. What do you mean by ordering this soap?"

"I did not order it, sir!" answered Harry, with burning cheeks.

"Do you mean that it was delivered to you by mistake? It is very singular that it should be delivered in the Form-room, in any case."

"No, sir."

"Is this an absurd jest on your part, Wharton, to waste time on the first morning of term?" exclaimed Mr. Quelch sternly. "Tell me at once where this soap comes from, and why it is here?"

Wharton's lips set.

"It's a silly joke from some fathead, sir," he said. "It was started by Mr. Hacker not being able to mind his own business yesterday."

"Wha-a-t?" ejaculated Quelch.

Wharton's reply was not exactly the reply that the head boy of a Form should have made to his Form-master. But he was too exasperated to care much what he said.

Mr. Quelch looked at him hard. Then he recalled the incident at the railway station of the day before.

"Oh," he said, "I think I understand! This is a foolish act. But you must not speak of Mr. Hacker in that tone, Wharton. You may go to your place. You are not to blame, of course, for this foolish jest."

"May I take the soap, sir?" asked Harry, very quietly.

"What—what—why—"

"I should like to return it to the sender, sir, and explain to him that I do not want it."

"Very well, in that case, you may place it under your desk, Wharton. There is no occasion for laughter," added Mr. Quelch, with a severe glance at his Form, who seemed to think that there was. "This is a foolish jest in the worst of taste. Silence in the class!"

There was silence in the class; but there were a good many grinning faces

as Wharton sat down in his place, the bar of soap under his desk.

His face was set. Quelch had given him permission to return that gift to the sender, but probably he did not guess how the captain of the Remove was thinking of returning it. Wharton's friends, however, could guess easily enough, from the set look on his face, that the return of that bar of soap was not going to be a peaceful operation.

There were fellows in the Remove who thought Wharton's temper altogether too touchy. The fact was that he realised this himself, and was always on his guard against that fault. Yet at times it betrayed him unconsciously.

Certainly he was not taking this absurd jest about the soap as Bob Cherry would have taken it. Bob might have looked for the sender, and jammed the soap down the back of his neck; but he would not have been really angry. Wharton was feeling rather like the prophet of old—that he was angry, and that he did well to be angry.

When Mr. Quelch dismissed the Form in break, Wharton left the Form-room, with the bar of soap wrapped under his arm, and a look on his face that could not possibly have been called pleasant.

His chums, with an exchange of glances, gathered round him. Three of them were tactfully silent; one of them was not. Johnny Bull, with all his sterling qualities, did not shine in tact.

"What are you going to do with that, Wharton?" he asked, with a nod towards the parcel under Harry's arm.

"Let the fool have it back, as I told Quelch," grunted Wharton.

"I shouldn't bother about it if I were you," said Johnny, shaking his head.

"You're not me," Wharton pointed out, a little acidly.

"Well, if you're going to get shirty about—"

"Who's shirty?"

"Ain't you?" asked Johnny.

The captain of the Remove breathed hard, and did not answer.

"It's only a fatheaded jape," said Johnny. "Fellows will get tired of it in a day or less, if you let them rip. If you make a fuss, they'll get keen on it, and draw you all they can."

"Are you going on talking rot, Bull?" snapped Wharton.

"Eh?" ejaculated Johnny. "I don't call that rot!"

"I do!"

Johnny Bull looked at him and opened his mouth to reply. He was leisurely about it—Johnny never said anything in a hurry; he weighed his words, though not always with the result of producing tactful ones. Luckily, that pause gave time for an interruption.

Hobson of the Shell, in the quad with his pal Hoskins, called out to the captain of the Remove:

"I see you've got it! Used it yet?"

Harry Wharton spun round at Hobson of the Shell. He had been going to find out, if he could, who had sent him that bar of soap. Hobby's question solved that for him. Hobby had hardly finished speaking, when the captain of the Remove collared him.

WASHING-DAY!

"HERE—hold on—I mean, leggo—I say—" spluttered Hobson.

"Harry, old chap—" exclaimed Nugent.

"Look here—" exclaimed Hoskins.

"Wharton, old man—"

Hobby of the Shell was a bit of a thoughtless ass. He had entered into that jape on Wharton without thinking much. Certainly he had never supposed that it was going to lead to a battle royal in the quadrangle.

"Chuck it!" roared Bob Cherry.

He grabbed at Wharton.

"Let go, you silly ass!" snapped Harry.

"Oh, chuck it, old man!" urged Bob.

"Look here, let's wash Hobby with his own soap—you ain't going to scrap with the chap!"

For a moment Wharton's angry temper held sway. Then he burst into a laugh, much to the relief of his friends.

"Good!" he said. "Let's!"

"Look here—" bawled Hobson. "You leggo, or I'll punch you, you silly Remove tick! You— Oh, my hat! Ooooh!"

Hobby was a stalwart fellow, and certainly would have given a good account of himself in a scrap. But it was not going to be a scrap—Harry Wharton's loyal pals were not going to let him make a fool of himself to that extent. It was going to be a rag—as good as Hobby's jape with the soap, and a little more so.

Hobby, with his arms gripped on either side, was marched to the fountain in the quad. He went resisting; but he went.

Claude Hoskins rushed to the rescue. But old Claude, who was a musical genius, was no prizefighter; he knew all about diminished sevenths and consecutive fifths—especially, to judge by his compositions, consecutive fifths—but what he knew about scrapping could have been packed into a nutshell without removing the nut! Hoskins was strewn in a gasping and breathless state on the cold, unsympathetic earth, and left there—and five fellows rushed James Hobson to the fountain.

Splash!

Hobson's face went into the granite basin—accompanied by most of his head and shoulders. He spluttered frantically.

Harry Wharton dipped the bar of yellow soap into the water. He lathered it over Hobby's unfortunate face.

Ill-humour had quite passed away. This was Bob Cherry's way of handing over tit for tat; it was rather a strenuous way, but infinitely to be preferred to angry or sulky temper. The captain of the Remove grinned cheerily as he lathered Hobby's face with soap.

Hobby—wishing by that time that he had never dreamed of joking about soap—struggled, and spluttered, and roared.

But four fellows held him with his head over the fountain, while the fifth lathered; and there was no help for Hobby.

He had sent that soap to the captain of the Remove for a wash. He was getting the wash himself! And it was a most emphatic wash!

"I say, you fellows, look!" yelled Billy Bunter, rolling up with his eyes popping through his spectacles. "He, he, he! I say, just look!"

Plenty of fellows were soon looking! It was a very unaccustomed sight, and it drew an audience.

"You're wasting your soap, Wharton!" called out Skinner. "Don't you want it?"

A sudden poke, from a wet and lathery bar of soap, lauded on Skinner's nose.

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Skinner exploded into splutters, amid a howl of laughter.

Then Wharton resumed lathering the captain of the Shell.

The soap lathered freely. It foamed over Hobby's face, over his ears, over dripping hair, and down his neck. The hapless Hobby was getting into a really fearfully soapy state.

He howled and struggled, and yelled and gurgled.

"Urrgh! Will you leggo? Gurrgh! I'm chook-chook-choking—Gurrgh! Keep that out—gurrgh—out of my mum-mum-mum-mouth—gurrgh!"

"Keep your mouth shut!" suggested Wharton, still lathering.

"Wurrgh!"

"Yes, shut up, Hobby, old man!" grinned Bob. "You've asked for this, you know! Sat up and begged for it! Take it smiling!"

"Burrgh!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Cave!" shouted Vernon-Smith, from the crowd of laughing juniors. "Here comes the Acid Drop!"

"Oh, my hat!" ejaculated Bob. "Chuck it!"

"Let him come!" answered Harry. He was not disposed to sit up and take notice of the Acid Drop, the original cause of the trouble.

"But, I say!" muttered Nugent. "A beak—"

"He's not our beak!" Wharton lathered on.

Mr. Hacker was approaching the crowd round the fountain, an acid sneer on his bony face.

His impression was that a mob of Quelch's boys were making a disturbance—he could see a crowd of Removites. Quelch should have put a stop to this. He hadn't, not being in the offing, and Hacker was going to. It was Hacker's painful sense of duty again—which was regarded by others as a love of meddling in what was not his concern. When he came up, Hacker had no idea that a Shell fellow, of his own Form, was mixed up in the shindy. Hobby was too lathery for recognition.

"Stop this at once!" rapped the Acid Drop. "I will not allow it—you hear me? I will not allow this disturbance, Wharton! What are you doing?"

"Washing a dirty boy!" answered Wharton.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Silence! You, Wharton, are hardly the boy to find fault with others for uncleanness, judging by the state in which you returned to school yesterday!" yapped the Acid Drop. "No doubt there are many boys in the Remove in need of washing, but you are—"

"Rats!" called out the Bounder.

Hacker jumped and stared round.

"Who said that?" he exclaimed.

"I did!" answered Vernon-Smith coolly. "Who the deuce are you to say that we don't wash in the Remove?"

Mr. Hacker looked as if he were on the point of choking.

Only the reckless Bounder would have addressed a beak in that way; yet he was on safe ground. Hacker's words, repeated to Quelch, would certainly have roused that gentleman's dire wrath. Hacker had asked for this, as he often asked for what he did not want.

Meanwhile, Hobson was released. He had, after all, had enough. He stood drenched and spluttering lather.

Hacker—letting Smithy drop rather like a hot potato—turned to him.

Hobson's identity dawned on him as poor Hobby clawed lather from his face.

"Upon my word!" gasped Mr. Hacker. "Is that a boy of my Form? Is that Hobson?"

"Urrrrgh!"

"Are you Hobson?" thundered the Acid Drop.

"Gurrgh! Yes! Urrgh!"

"Wharton! How dare you? A boy of my Form! A Shell boy?" Hacker foamed with rage almost as much as Hobson with lather. "You impudent young rascal, you dare to play such a trick upon a boy of my Form—"

"I thought you liked fellows to be washed clean, sir!" said Wharton, with cool impertinence. "I think it's done Hobson good, sir."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Hacker made a stride at the captain of the Remove, apparently with the intention of taking the law into his own hands.

Wharton backed away. He was rather tempted to let the Acid Drop have what remained of the bar of soap; but perhaps Bob read that thought in his mind, for he jerked it away and tossed it into the fountain.

"Wharton! You impertinent young rascal—"

"I don't think Mr. Quelch would like you calling his boys such names, sir!" said Harry.

That answer did not pour oil on the troubled waters! It had rather the effect of adding oil to flame!

"You—you—you insolent young knave—" choked Hacker.

"I am sorry, sir, but if you are going to use such language I don't think I ought to stay to listen to it!" said the captain of the Remove.

And he turned on his heel and walked away.

Hacker fairly gaped after him.

"Wharton!" he roared.

Wharton did not even look back.

"Wharton, follow me to your Form-master at once!"

Wharton walked on.

"Some nerve!" murmured Hazel.

All the juniors looked breathlessly at Hacker, wondering whether he was ass enough to rush after the junior. A chase in the quad, with Hacker's long, thin legs whisking and his gown flying in the wind, would have been entertaining to the young rascals. But Mr. Hacker stopped short of that. He turned to Hobson again.

"Go into the House at once, Hobson, and dry yourself! I shall deal with that young ruffian—"

"Pip-pip-please, sir," stammered Hobby, "it—it's all right, sir! It was only a rag, and I started it—"

"Take a hundred lines, Hobson, and go into the House at once!"

Hobson squelched off to the House.

Mr. Hacker followed him, with a brow of thunder. He left a chuckling, chortling crowd round the fountain.

"Wharton's up for a row!" remarked Skinner.

"He's come back this term hunting for trouble!" jeered the Bounder. "He won't be happy till he gets it."

"Well, I don't think he'll get any more bars of soap, at any rate!" said Bob Cherry.

That, at all events, was probable!

HACKER GETTING ON WITH IT!

"NONSENSE!" said Mr. Quelch. Hacker's nose-tip glowed.

"Did you say nonsense, Mr. Quelch?" he asked very distinctly and harshly.

"That is the word I used, sir!" said the Remove master. "If you do not like the expression, I am sorry; but I can use no other."

It was after class. Hacker was in the Remove master's study.

On the first day of term, when nothing was very shipshape, every master had plenty to do; some were worried, some were snappy, none was at his very, very best! Mr. Quelch was not pleased to see Mr. Hacker in his study. He was not pleased to hear complaints, which he regarded as unreasonable, about his boys.

Quelch was, in the opinion of the Remove, rather a dry old stick; but he had one outstanding quality that they fully appreciated—Quelch would stand up for his Form! Probably because it was the first day of term, and Quelch had his full share of the worries of the first day of term, he expressed himself a little more emphatically than was his wont.

"Wharton's action, no doubt, was thoughtless!" pursued Mr. Quelch. "The action of the boy who sent him a bar of soap was equally unthinking. Obviously that boy was Hobson of your Form. One thoughtless jest has led to another. A little wildness is better ignored on the first day of term."

"If you decline to take this matter up, Mr. Quelch—"

"I do, sir! I will go further," said Mr. Quelch. "The whole matter is due entirely to yourself."

"What?"

"Your own action at the railway station yesterday, sir, is the cause of it," said Mr. Quelch. "Wharton met with some little accident, which gave him an untidy appearance. He explained it to me quite satisfactorily. It concerned no Form-master but his own. Your uncalled-for action, sir, led to the beginning of a foolish jest—which has had this result. To carry the matter further is to make a mountain out of a molehill. I regard such a proceeding as nonsense. Let it drop."

Hacker's thin lips set tight.

"I shall not let it drop, Mr. Quelch,"

he said.

"You may take it before the head-master, sir, if you choose to waste Dr. Locke's time with such nonsense!" said the Remove master. "Dr. Locke may not express himself as I have done—but his opinion will be the same, and he certainly will take no action in the matter. But you will, of course, act as you think fit."

Mr. Quelch stretched out his hand to a Form list—a polite intimation that the interview was at an end.

Mr. Hacker stood looking at him.

Hacker was not satisfied. He was not thinking of going to the Head—even Hacker dimly realised that so ridiculous a matter was not one to be carried into that majestic presence. But he was deeply exasperated and resentful.

"Then Wharton is to remain unpunished?" he asked at length.

"Undoubtedly—unless I see some cause for administering punishment," answered Mr. Quelch.

"A boy of my Form has been subjected to utter ruffianism—"

"He has been washed"—Mr. Quelch repressed a smile—"with his own soap!"

"I have been treated with the grossest disrespect in the presence of a number of boys—"

"I am sorry for that! But a master who extends his authority over a Form not his own—"

"Let us be plain, sir!" interjected Mr. Hacker. "You uphold this insolent boy, Wharton, in whatever he does, or may choose to do?"

"I do not regard him as an insolent boy by any means, and I utterly reject



“Yurroop! Wake snakes!” yelled Fisher T. Fish, as Bunter, jumping backwards, stepped on one of his toes. “You fat clam—yurroop!”

the description!” said Mr. Quelch warmly. “And certainly I uphold the head boy of my Form, in whom I have every confidence and trust.”

Hacker breathed hard. He was almost at boiling-point.

So far, he had not decided how to act in the matter of that letter. Now he decided all at once. If there was doubt in the matter, he disregarded it.

“Confidence and trust—in a boy of your Form who receives letters from disreputable bookmakers!” flamed out Hacker.

The words escaped him almost of their own accord.

Mr. Quelch gave a little jump and rose to his feet.

The look on Quelch’s speaking countenance was fearfully expressive. His gimlet eyes almost bored into the master of the Shell.

“Mr. Hacker, if those words have escaped you in mere annoyance, I call upon you to withdraw them!” he said in a voice of ice. “If you maintain them, sir, I demand proof of what you say, here and now, and without the loss of a moment.”

Hacker paused.

He was sure—quite sure—but, after all, there was no proof. There was nothing in that letter to identify the owner.

But Hacker had gone too far for retreat. He had hoped, by a judicious inquiry here and there, to make assurance doubly sure, before he enjoyed the happy experience of overwhelming Quelch with it. But he was committed now.

“I do not withdraw a single syllable of what I have said!” he retorted. “I had not intended to mention the matter on this occasion; but I am perfectly prepared to do so. Wharton did not return to school with the other boys yesterday—”

“That, sir, is entirely explained by the incident at Courtfield Station,” said Mr. Quelch. “I questioned the boy on that subject myself.”

“How he was occupied,” continued Mr. Hacker, as if the Remove master

had not spoken, “is for you, his Form-master, to ascertain. That he had in his possession a letter referring to horse-racing, that he had laid bets with a disreputable character admits of no doubt.”

“It admits of very considerable doubt, I think,” rapped Mr. Quelch, “and I tell you with the utmost plainness, Mr. Hacker, that if you do not substantiate what you have said, I shall place the matter before Dr. Locke.”

“It will be your duty to do so, sir,” said Mr. Hacker, “and I have little doubt that the boy’s expulsion from Greyfriars will be the outcome. Look at that, sir, and judge whether it is the kind of letter for a Greyfriars boy to have in his possession.”

Hacker threw the letter on the Remove master’s table.

Mr. Quelch picked it up and looked at it.

He read, from end to end, Joe Banks’ message to Price of the Fifth, delivered by the hand of Soapy Sanders.

His face set like iron as he read.

“The boy to whom this letter was addressed, sir, will no doubt be expelled, if he becomes known to the headmaster,” he said. “That it was not Wharton I am assured. There is no name on the letter, and I demand to know why you fancy—fancy, sir—that it belongs to Wharton of my Form.”

“Only from the fact that it was in his possession,” said Mr. Hacker. “If you are of opinion that one boy carries about letters addressed to another, such is not my belief.”

“In what way—”

“That letter, sir, was dropped at my feet by Bunter of your Form. Seeing its nature, I retained possession of it,” said Mr. Hacker. “Bunter explained that he had seen Wharton drop it while engaged in some disgraceful shindy with Fifth Form boys. It is for you, the Form-master of both boys, to judge whether Bunter was lying, or whether the letter was actually dropped by Wharton.”

Mr. Quelch drew a deep breath.

“My first impression,” continued Mr.

Hacker, “was that the letter was Bunter’s. From what he said, I judge that it was Wharton’s. In either case, it belongs to a Remove boy. You may judge which is the likelier of the two. I personally have no doubt whatever on the subject.”

Mr. Quelch did not answer.

He stood staring at the letter in his hand. That it was not Bunter’s, he did not need telling. The fat and fatuous Owl of the Remove was not the fellow for this kind of thing. Neither, indeed, was Wharton; yet if it belonged to either of them, it certainly did not belong to Bunter. The Acid Drop was right in that, at least.

“I shall inquire into this matter without delay, Mr. Hacker,” said the Remove master at last. “I shall require the strongest proof before I believe that this disgraceful letter was ever in my head boy’s possession. I shall question him on the subject without a moment’s delay.”

He touched the bell for Trotter.

Mr. Hacker left the study. A minute later, the House page appeared, and was sent to call Wharton to the study.

THE HALF-CROWN THAT WAS NOT!

BILLY BUNTER stood on the Remove landing, with an earnest and concentrated expression on his fat face.

He was going through his pockets, pocket after pocket, in the hope—the faint hope—of discovering something in the nature of coin of the realm.

Fellows did sometimes overlook a coin or two. Seldom, if ever, did Bunter. Still, there was a sporting chance—or the ghost of a sporting chance—and Billy Bunter went sedulously through his pockets, turning out sticky linings, with a faint hope, growing fainter as the search was unrewarded.

He was thus engaged when the Famous Five came up to tea. They glanced at Bunter’s performance with smiling interest.

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"Looking for a fiver or a tenner?" asked Bob Cherry.

"Eh?" Bunter blinked at him. "A tenner, as it happens."

Bunter was making that search in the faint hope of discovering a sixpence, a threepenny-bit, or even a penny. But Bunter was not the fellow to say so.

"A tenner! Oh scissors!"

"I must have left it at home," said Bunter, shaking his head. "My Uncle George tipped me a tenner; he usually does in the hols. But I remember now I laid it down on the grand piano in the blue drawing-room. I suppose I must have forgotten to pick it up again."

"Sort of thing a fellow would forget!" remarked Johnny Bull.

"I say, you fellows, it's rather tough being stony on the second day of the term!" said Billy Bunter. "I'm expecting a postal order—"

"Help!"

"Oh, really, Cherry, it will be here in the morning! If one of you fellows could lend a fellow a ten-bob note—"

"What a rotten coincidence!" said Bob. "I'd lend you a ten-bob note like a shot, old fat man, only—"

"Only what?"

"Only I left all my ten-bob notes at home on the grand piano in the pink boudoir!" said Bob, gravely.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Oh, don't be an ass!" said Bunter peevishly. "I say, Nugent, what about you? If you had a half-crown, old chap—"

"Mountains of them," said Frank Nugent; "only, as it happens, I left them stacked on the gilt-edged radio-gram in the main morning-room!"

"You silly ass!" howled Bunter. "I say, Bull—"

"Pound note any good?" asked Johnny Bull.

"Yes, rather!" gasped Bunter.

"Then I'm jolly sorry that I left all my pound notes in a pile on the diamond-studded whatnot in the purple parlour. I only hope the pile won't topple over before I go home next hols!"

"You—you—you silly cuckoo!" yelled Bunter. "I say, you fellows, I was going to stand a spread if I hadn't forgotten that fiver from my Uncle William—"

"That whatter?"

"I—I mean, that tenner from my Uncle George! I say, Wharton, old chap, you might lend a fellow half-a-crown, after all I've done for you!"

"My knees are still sore after what you did for me yesterday, you fat frump!"

"Well, look how I stood by you about that letter from your pals at a pub!" urged Bunter. "I might have told the Acid Drop it was yours. But I never told him. I specially told him it wasn't yours, old fellow—specially mentioned your name, you know—"

"You burbling cuckoo!"

"Hallo, hallo, hallo! Anybody been dropping half-crowns about?" exclaimed Bob Cherry, making a sudden stride across the landing and clamping down a heavy foot with a loud bang. "You dropped a half-crown here, Bunter?"

"Yes!" answered Bunter promptly. "Thanks for finding it, old chap! Take your hoof away, and let a fellow pick it up, will you?"

"Hold on a minute!" said Bob, keeping his hoof firmly where he had planted it. "You're such a fat old 'er! Sure you dropped one?"

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"Of course I am! I heard it drop!"

"Oh, my hat! Well, if you heard it drop, why didn't you pick it up?"

"I—I mean, I didn't exactly hear it drop! I—I mean, I should have heard it if—if—if I had—had happened to hear it, you know! I mean to say, I was hunting through my pockets for that half-crown when you fellows came up!"

"Not for a tenner?"

"No—yes! The tenner, too, but specially the half-crown! I had it in this pocket, and it must have dropped out when I was looking through the pocket! Look here, take your hoof off it!"

But Bob did not remove his foot.

"Must make sure that nobody else dropped it first," he said firmly. "Not one of you fellows, was it?" he asked, glancing round at the Co.

Four heads were shaken.

"It's mine!" roared Bunter, in great excitement. "I tell you it dropped out of this pocket when I was looking for the fiver—I mean, the tenner! Gimme my half-crown, Bob Cherry, you beast! 'Tain't yours!"

"Not mine," agreed Bob. "I'm not going to pick it up. But I'm not moving my foot till I'm sure about it. If it's yours—"

"Can't you take a fellow's word?" howled Bunter. "I keep on telling you I dropped it, don't I?"

Skinner, who was lounging against the banisters at a little distance, came forward.

"Have you found it, Cherry?" he asked.

"Found what?" asked Bob, staring at him.

"My half-crown!" said Skinner calmly.

"Your half-crown? Oh gum! Did you drop one as well as Bunter?"

"No, he didn't!" yelled Bunter, in alarm.

"Yes, I did," said Skinner. "It seems to have rolled, and I couldn't find it. Take your hoof off it!"

Bob Cherry's hoof remained as firm as if it was screwed to the landing. He was not, it seemed, going to move that hoof while the matter was in doubt. Two claimants to one half-crown certainly introduced an element of doubt.

"Gimme my half-crown!" roared Bunter.

"Oh, chuck it, you spoofer!" said Skinner. "Everybody knows you never had a half-crown! You were trying to borrow a bob off Smithy ten minutes ago!"

"Beast!"

"Chuck it, Bunter!" said Harry Wharton. "It's not yours, you fat fraud!"

"But is it Skinner's?" asked Bob. "We've got to make sure. Did you drop half-a-crown, Smithy?"

A dozen fellows were gathering round now, the Bouncer among them.

"Not mine," answered Vernon-Smith. "I don't strew half-crowns about, any more than letters from bookies! Perhaps it's Wharton's."

Harry Wharton gave the Bouncer a look as some of the fellows laughed, but did not speak.

"Gee-whiz!" exclaimed Fisher T. Fish, running his bony hands through his pockets. "I guess it's mine! Mine's gone!"

"Only just thought of it?" asked Skinner unpleasantly. "Look here, Cherry, let me pick up my half-crown before half the Form claims it!"

"I'm telling you!" exclaimed Fisher T. Fish. "I'll tell a man I've lost my half-crown, and I guess that that's the identical article! Cherry, big boy, you

give a guy room to pick up his half-crown!"

"I say, you fellows, it's mine!" roared Billy Bunter. "Skinner's telling whoppers, and you all know Fishy!"

"Anybody else dropped half-a-crown?" chuckled Bob. "Don't all speak at once!"

Nobody else claimed the half-crown. The dispute was left among the three—Bunter, Skinner, and Fisher Tarleton Fish. The three gathered round Bob as he stood with his foot clamped to the landing floor.

"Well, there seems to be a lot of money about in the Remove," remarked Bob. "Seven-and-six lost, and nothing found! You three chaps had better start hunting for your half-crowns before they're gone for good!"

Bob removed his foot at last. Bunter, Skinner, and Fisher T. Fish made a dive all together. But they checked that dive suddenly.

The space from which Bob had removed his foot was bare!

There was no half-crown.

They blinked at the bare spot.

"Why, there ain't a half-crown at all!" gasped Billy Bunter. "You said there was a half-crown, you beast!"

"I certainly didn't!" said Bob, staring. "Who said there was a half-crown? I asked you if you'd dropped one, that's all."

"Beast!" roared Bunter.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I—I thought you'd put your foot on it when you banged it down! What did you bang your foot down for?" yelled Bunter.

"Just to pull your leg, old fat man."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I fancied you'd claim the half-crown that wasn't there. You'll have to look for your half-crown somewhere else, Skinner," said Bob affably. "So will you, Fishy."

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

Skinner, with a very red face, backed out of the crowd. Fisher T. Fish, also pinker than usual, disappeared up the Remove passage. Billy Bunter shook a fat fist at Bob.

"Come on, you men," said Bob Cherry. "Time we got in to tea—now we've settled about that half-crown."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I say, you fellows—"

"Buzz off, old fat man, and look for that half-crown you've lost."

"Beast!"

The Famous Five went up the passage to Study No. 1, leaving a laughing crowd on the landing. They had hardly sat down to tea, however, when there was a tap at the door, and it was opened.

"Buzz off, you blithering bluebottle!" exclaimed Bob.

"Oh, Master Cherry—" said Trotter.

"Oh!" Bob had supposed that it was Bunter. "Sorry, kid! What's wanted?"

"Master Wharton wanted in Mr. Quelch's study, sir!" said Trotter.

"Rotten!" said Bob. "This is what comes of having a washing-day in the quad! We'd better all go!"

"Mr. Quelch said only Master Wharton, sir."

"Leave it to me!" said Harry; and he followed the House page from the study.

THE ONLY WAY!

HARRY WHARTON entered his Form-master's study without feeling unduly uneasy.

If the Acid Drop had been complaining about the washing of Hobson of the Shell, as he supposed, it was not a tremendously serious matter.

But as soon as he entered, he saw that there was trouble in the air—something a great deal more serious than the forcible washing of James Hobson.

Mr. Quelch was standing up, and his face was set in an expression that was rather alarming, though it seemed more anxious than angry.

Harry Wharton set his lips a little. He had, so far as he knew, done nothing whatever, beyond a schoolboy Jark, which, after all, was only tit for tat. A faintly sullen expression came over his face.

"You sent for me, sir?" he asked, in a very quiet tone.

"Yes, Wharton. Look at that letter!" said Mr. Quelch, indicating the crumpled missive on his table with a lean forefinger.

Wharton, in wonder, glanced at it, then he gave a violent start.

The letter lay with the writing uppermost, and he could see what was written. He had never seen it before, but he knew this must be the crumpled paper that Price of the Fifth had planted on him to escape the eagle eye of Prout. Bunter had told him that Hacker had it. He knew at once that the Acid Drop must have passed it on to Quelch.

He caught his breath.

Quelch's face, as he watched him, hardened. He had hoped, and believed, that that letter was quite unknown to his head boy; but he could see at a glance that Wharton knew it.

"You know that letter, Wharton?" he demanded sternly.

"I—I think so, sir!" stammered Harry.

"You think so? Answer me yes or no on the instant!" exclaimed Mr. Quelch.

"I can only say that I think so, sir," answered Harry Wharton steadily. "I have never read the letter till this minute, and did not know what was in it. But I think it is a letter I have seen."

"Has it been in your possession, or not?"

"If it is the same letter, yes."

"This letter is written by a disreputable man, from a disreputable place," said Mr. Quelch, breathing hard. "It refers to racing transactions. Do you admit having had such a letter in your possession?"

Wharton's heart beat unpleasantly. But he answered in a steady voice:

"Yes, sir!"

"Then this is the letter?"

"I suppose it is, sir."

"I have been informed that you dropped this letter, and that it was picked up by Bunter."

"I did drop a letter, and Bunter did pick it up; and I've no doubt that this is the same letter," answered Harry, in the same steady voice.

Mr. Quelch looked at him.

"I hardly understand this, Wharton," he said, after a long pause. "There was an occasion, once, when I lost my trust in you, partly owing to an unfortunate misunderstanding, partly to your own stubborn temper. This misunderstanding was cleared up, and I resolved at that time never to be misled in the same way again. Yet now—what am I to think? You admit associations for which, as you know, any Greyfriars boy must be sent away from this school."

"Nothing of the kind, sir!" said Harry. "That letter does not belong to me, and I had not read it."

"You had it in your possession?"

"I've said so, sir."

"Do you mean that you can explain this matter? I'm only too anxious that you should do so. You can surely

understand, Wharton, that I am anxious that this term should not commence with the expulsion of a boy in my Form in whom I have had every confidence."

The trace of sullenness vanished from Wharton's face. He made a step nearer to the Remove master.

"I give you my word, sir, that that letter has nothing whatever to do with me," he said earnestly. "I never wanted to touch it, I never read it, and when I had it, I only wanted to get rid of it."

"It belongs to another boy?"

"Yes, sir."

"His name?"

Wharton did not answer that.

"If you mean, Wharton, that you, acting as head boy, took this letter from some boy in the Remove—"

Mr. Quelch paused, and Wharton could see that the name of Herbert Vernon-Smith was in his mind.

"I don't mean that, sir," he answered. "I don't think it's a head boy's duty to go so far as that. I've certainly never done so. I can't tell you whose letter it is, but I'm bound to tell you this much, that it does not belong to any fellow in the Remove."

"A boy in another Form?"

Quelch, it was clear, was glad to hear that.

"Yes, sir."

"You are aware, Wharton, that if the ownership of this letter is traced with certainty, the owner will be expelled by the headmaster?"

"I know that, of course, sir. That's why I can't give his name."

Mr. Quelch gave him a long, doubtful look. His faith in his head boy had been shaken once, and he had learned that it was a mistake. It was not to be easily shaken again. But—

"Explain how this letter came into your keeping, Wharton, if it is not yours," he said at last.

Wharton paused before he answered. He could not give Price away, that was certain. He disliked and despised him, but he could not hand him over to the chopper. But he had to clear himself—if he could! He was in danger of the fate he could not bring upon Stephen Price.

"I will tell you, sir," he said. "I only hope that you will believe me—it's the truth, anyhow. That letter was passed to me by another fellow, who was afraid of being caught with it on him. He would have been caught if I hadn't put it in my pocket. That is all."

"You helped the young rascal, who deserves to be expelled from the school, to escape detection? Is that your defence?"

Wharton coloured.

"We don't look at it like that, sir," he answered. "A fellow helps another fellow out of a scrape, even if it's a chap he wouldn't touch with a barge-pole."

"The boy in question is no friend of yours?"

Wharton almost laughed.

"No, sir; Remove men don't have friends in the Upper Forms. If he were in the Remove I'd boot him!"

"A senior boy!" exclaimed Mr. Quelch.

Harry Wharton bit his lip. He had let that much out, without thinking.

"Yes, sir!" he answered reluctantly.

"A fellow I don't like, and have had rows with whenever we've come in contact. I wouldn't breathe the same air with him if I could help it. But—"

"But what?"

"But I couldn't let him down when

he was for it!" said Harry steadily. "No fellow would have."

There was a long pause.

Mr. Quelch more than half-believed all this, and wanted wholly to believe it. But he knew very well that if such a defence was taken on trust, no culprit would ever be pinned down.

"I have my duty to do, Wharton," he said, after a long, long pause. "The facts, as they stand, condemn you. This letter was admittedly in your pocket—it has come to my knowledge by accident. What you have told me might be said by any boy in your position—by the senior boy of whom you speak—if a master had found him with this letter on him."

"I know that, sir," said Harry, in a low voice.

Another long pause.

"Obviously," said Mr. Quelch, "this matter cannot remain where it is. You say that this letter belongs to a senior boy. With the senior Forms I have nothing to do. Certainly it would be my duty to report such a boy to his headmaster if I knew of his conduct. But—" He paused again. "But in the very peculiar circumstances, Wharton, and in the interests of justice, I will say this—if this senior boy will come to me, and bear out your statement, I will let the matter rest in oblivion; you can tell him that he has nothing to fear from telling me the truth."

Wharton's face brightened.

Mr. Quelch, as he noted it, felt a sense of deep relief. He realised that it was not a non-existent senior boy, invented to get out of a bad scrape.

"I'm sure he will do that, if he has nothing to be afraid of, sir," said Harry. "He's as frightened as a chicken; but if I can tell him that you pass your word not to report him to his Form-master or the Head, of course he will come to you at once and tell you how it was. Any fellow would."

"Then lose no time, Wharton!" said Mr. Quelch, quite genially. "Assure this boy that, in the circumstances, my object is only to clear a member of my own Form from suspicion; and when that is done I shall dismiss the whole matter immediately from my mind."

"Yes, sir!" said Harry.

He left the study with a weight off his mind. And he left his Form-master also with a weight off his mind.

A FIGHT IN THE FIFTH!

"GET out!" Stephen Price snapped those words as if he had bitten them off. His eyes, which had a greenish gleam in them, fixed on Harry Wharton, half uneasily, half threateningly.

"Don't be a goat, Steve!" Hilton was always cool and placable. "If the kid's found that letter—"

"Oh!" said Price. "Is that it?"

There was a scent of cigarette smoke in Hilton's study in the Fifth as Harry Wharton entered. Smokes, clearly, had been whipped out of sight at the tap on the door.

Price, the day before, had been saved from the sack by this junior playing up and seeing him through—reluctantly, resentfully, but feeling that he could do nothing else. But gratitude for services rendered did not worry Price a great deal.

He was bitterly annoyed, and a little alarmed, by the loss of the letter, and deeply incensed by the way Wharton

had talked to him on the subject. It was not pleasant for a senior man, who prided himself on being a bad hat, to find himself treated with cool scorn and contempt by a junior in the Lower Fourth.

"Is that it?" he snapped. "Have you got the letter?"

"No," answered Harry.

"Then what do you want here? I suppose you know that you're not wanted in this study?"

"I'd as soon step into a tap-room, as a matter of choice!" retorted the captain of the Remove. "But I've got to speak to you—and it's about that putrid letter. Hacker's handed it to Quelch. The old goat seems to have thought it was mine; and I've got to prove to Quelch that it wasn't."

"Oh!" Price rose to his feet, his eyes glittering. "So that's it? You've landed yourself in a row by sheer carelessness—by dropping a letter about the House—and you fancy you can pass it on to me!"

"Let the kid speak, Steve!" drawled Hilton.

"Do you think I don't know what's coming?" muttered Price, between his teeth. "He's given me away, and he fancies I will stand for it! I'll let him see!"

"Have you mentioned Price's name, kid?"

"Don't be a fool, Hilton!" was Harry Wharton's answer.

"Wha-at?"

"I said don't be a fool!"

Hilton stared at him. Then he grinned.

"That means that the answer's in the negative, I suppose?" he said. "Keep a stiff upper lip, Priccy. The kid's said nothing!"

"Then what does he want here?"

snapped Price, his stare at Wharton full of suspicion and hostility.

"I'll tell you, if you'll listen instead of squealing before you're hurt!" said Harry Wharton. "I've told Quelch the facts, without mentioning names. I can't expect him to get it down without any proof."

"Gad, I should think not!" said Hilton. "Even Capper wouldn't take it down—it sounds altogether too thin. It happens to be true, but it doesn't sound true. Any man in a scrape could spin such a yarn."

"That's what Quelch said. But he said that if the senior would come to him, and tell him how it was—"

"What?" yelled Price.

"Do let me finish! Quelch promises to let the matter go no further. If you own up to him, you're in no danger. He's not your beak, and for the sake of clearing up the matter he will undertake to put it right out of his mind as soon as he knows how it stands—as soon as he knows that I've told him the truth."

"Looks as if he more than half believes it already, from that," said Hilton. "He's an old sportsman! You're all right, Priccy!"

"And do you think he would keep his word?" sneered Price. "He wouldn't drop a syllable to Prout or the Head?"

Wharton stared at him.

"Quelch keep his word?" he repeated. "You know that he would keep his word, if you're not mad!"

"I know I'm not chancing it!" sneered Price. "Quelch may mean it, or he may not; but if I told a beak that Joe Banks sent me letters by way of Soapy Sanders, I know that I should never be safe. I can't afford to confide that kind of thing to a beak!"

"Quelch only wants to know the facts, so that he can know whether I'm pulling his leg or not," said Harry, breathing hard. "He told me to tell you that you had nothing to fear. You simply tell him it was your letter, and that you passed it on to me. That will be the end of it. You know that you can trust a man like Quelch."

"I can see myself doing it!"

"Priccy, old man—" murmured Hilton.

"Don't you jaw, Cedric! Do you think I'm fool enough to put my head in the lion's jaws like that?" snarled Price. "I'm saying nothing—unless I'm asked. And if I'm asked, I know nothing about that letter—never saw it, never heard of it, never dreamed of it! If that kid's fool enough to drop it about the House, he can take what's coming to him!"

Harry Wharton stood staring at Price.

He was taken by surprise. He knew that Price was a rotter, and that he had not the courage of his miserable blackguardism, but meanness and cowardice to this extent surprised him. It had never even crossed his mind that Price would refuse.

"You cur!" broke out Wharton. "Can't you see what you're doing? You're not asked to own up to Prout. That would be the sack. I know you've not got the pluck for that, and don't expect it. Quelch is making a big concession simply to get at the truth about a fellow in his Form. You've nothing whatever to be afraid of—he's passed his word—"

"Shut the door after you!" said Price.

"Are you going to Quelch?" roared Wharton.

"No! And don't shout here, unless you want to be kicked out of the study!"

"Steve, old man—" murmured Hilton.

"You shut up, Cedric!"

"You're asking the kid to give your name—"

"Let him!" said Price, gritting his teeth. "It won't do him any good. If he gives my name, he will have to prove it. I'd like to know how!"

"Oh gad!" said Hilton.

"Will you go to Quelch and see me clear, after landing me in this, and without running any risk?" panted Wharton.

"No! Get out!"

"You cur—"

"That's enough!" Price stepped to the door and threw it open. "Get out—before I throw you into the passage!"

Harry Wharton did not stir. He stood with his fists clenched, his eyes blazing at Price.

He was to be left to it. He had helped the wretched black sheep of the Fifth out of a scrape, and he was left in the scrape. There was no danger in what Price was asked to do, but his mean soul saw danger where it did not exist, and he would do nothing. There was not even the last resource, of giving him away—he could not be given away, as Wharton now realised, if he was prepared to deny the whole transaction—as evidently he was.

"You cur!" breathed Wharton. "You unspeakable cur! You reptile!"

"That will do!" Price grasped the junior by the shoulder, to swing him through the doorway.

The next instant, Wharton's fist was crashing in his face.

Price staggered back against the table, which rocked under the impact,

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He reeled there, panting for a moment, and then fairly flew at the junior.

Wharton did not budge an inch.

He was a junior, against a senior; but he was a sturdy junior, and Price was a very weedy senior. But in his rage and indignation he would have stood up to Price if the weedy black sheep had been as hefty as Horace Coker.

He gave out left and right as Price rushed at him. He rocked under a savage punch in the face, but he gave it back hard, and Price got as good as he gave, and a little over.

Hilton sat and stared as, for two or three minutes, that fierce scrap went on. His lip curled as Price backed away from it.

"Lend me a hand here, Cedric, you fool!" panted Price, backing away from lashing fists.

"I'd rather lend the kid a hand, in the circus!" sneered Hilton. "But he doesn't seem to need it."

"Oh!" gasped Price, as a hard set of knuckles came home on his thin nose. He hurled himself at the junior, and was met by a jolt on the chin that sent him staggering, followed up by another jolt that laid him on his back on the study carpet.

Wharton stood looking down at him.

"That's something for you, you rat, at any rate!" he said, panting. "Get up and I'll knock you down again before I go!"

Price lay gasping for breath, his eyes gleaming sheer evil. The captain of the Remove turned his back on him, and walked out of the study.

FOR IT!

"HALLO, hallo, hallo!"

"Don't you want any tea?"

"What the dickens is up?"

The Co. were looking for Harry Wharton. They found him in the quad, tramping under the elms, his hands driven deep into his pockets, and his brows blackly knitted. There was a bruise on his face, and a streak of red, which he did not heed, and of which he seemed unconscious.

He came to a halt as they joined him.

"Been scrapping?" asked Bob uneasily.

"Eh?" Wharton passed his hand over his face. "Yes!"

"Who's the happy man?"

"That cad Price!"

"Coker yesterday, and Price to-day," said Johnny Bull. "You seem keen on rows in the Fifth, old man. Did he whop you?"

"No; I whopped him!" snapped Wharton.

"Oh, my hat! A Fifth Form man—"

"A sneaking rat!" said Harry.

"Well, Pricey ain't a nice chap," said Bob uncomfortably. "We had a row with him in the hols, too. Look here, we've waited tea—"

"Better go and get on with it," said Harry.

"Well, come on."

"I've got to see Quelch again."

"What for?" asked Frank Nugent.

"The sack, I expect," answered Harry bitterly.

"My esteemed fatheaded Wharton," murmured Hurree Jamset Ram Singh.

"It may come to that—I don't know! I'm blessed if I know what to do—or say. I was trying to think it out! I've got to go back to Quelch, and if he hikes me off to the Head, I shan't be surprised."

"You've done nothing to be sacked

for," said Bob. "Oh," he added—"that letter! Has Quelch—"

"Yes."

"That letter wasn't yours," said Bob. "You've made half the Remove believe that it was—but it wasn't! Hacker passed it on to Quelch?"

"Yes!"

"And Quelch thinks—" gasped Nugent.

"What is he going to think?" said Harry savagely. "I've told him how it was, without mentioning names—not that it would have done any good to mention names, as I see now. That cur's ready to deny the whole thing—"

"Suppose you tell us how it was," said Bob quietly. "Two heads are better than one—and five better than two."

"I don't mind telling you—only don't shout it all over the Remove. I was bound to say nothing about it. But now— Oh, listen!"

Wharton told his friends how it was, briefly, and they listened with lengthening faces.

"You shouldn't have let that sweep land his rot on you yesterday," said Johnny Bull, when he had finished.

"Fat lot of good telling me that now!" snapped Wharton. "If it happened over again I'd chuck his putrid letter in his face. But I did it."

"Can't quite expect a beak to get that down," said Bob slowly. "Price could have told the same story if you'd let Prout nab him! Old Pompous wouldn't have believed a word of it! Why should Quelch?"

"Yes, why?" said Harry. "He trusts me, and Old Pompous doesn't trust Price an inch—that's a difference. But—"

"Is Quelch waiting for you now?" asked Frank.

Harry Wharton gave a bitter laugh.

"No; he's waiting for Price. He supposes, as I did, that a fellow would do that much, after landing another chap like this! Price won't!"

"By gum!" said Bob.

"I've got to go back to him and tell him the chap won't play up—though he's been told there's no risk. If I give him Price's name, Price is ready to deny the whole thing from start to finish. But I'm not going to give him Price's name—I've got a limit, if that cur hasn't. But—second day of term, and up before the Head for pub-crawling! Precious news for my uncle and aunt at home, even if I'm not kicked out. Oh, that rotter!" Wharton clenched his hands.

"Well, you're for it, old chap," said Johnny Bull. "If you hadn't let that rat land that letter on you—"

"I've had that!"

"Yes; but if you hadn't—"

"My esteemed Johnny," murmured the Nabob of Bhanipur. "A still tongue is the stitch in time that saves a cracked pitcher from going to a bird in the bush."

"Oh, let Johnny run on!" said Wharton sarcastically. "It's jolly useful to get good advice a day too late."

Johnny Bull opened his lips—and shut them again.

"No good hanging it out," said Harry. "I've got to go to Quelch and tell him. Goodness knows how it will turn out. I'm glad I left Price on his back in his study—that's something."

The Famous Five walked across to the House with glum faces. Five heads might, as Bob said, be better than one, but none of the five could think of a way out of this.

"I say, you fellows!" Bunter's fat squeak greeted them as they went in. "I say— Oh crikey! Been pushing

your face against somebody's fist, Wharton? He, he, he!"

"It's that fat chump's fault!" growled Bob. "If he hadn't played that mad trick at the station yesterday it wouldn't have happened. Boot him!"

Billy Bunter did not linger to be booted—if that would have been of any use. He departed on his highest gear.

The worried five went along to Masters' Passage. Four members of the Co. waited at the corner, while Harry Wharton went on to his Form-master's study. He had to see Quelch, and, whatever the result was going to be, he wanted to get it over.

He tapped and entered.

Mr. Quelch looked up quickly, expecting, no doubt, to see that senior boy who was to tell him how the matter stood. He stared at Wharton.

His head boy faced him, with crimson cheeks. The feeling that what he was going to say was not going to be believed gave confusion to his looks, and a falter to his tongue.

"I—I've come to tell you, sir—" Wharton stammered.

"The senior boy you mentioned has not been here, Wharton!" said the Remove master coldly. "Have you told him?"

"Yes, sir."

"Then why has he not come?"

"He won't!"

"Indeed! And why not?"

"Because he's a frightened rat, that's why! I can't help it! If you can't take my word about that letter, sir—and I suppose I can't expect you to—I shall have to go to the Head. That's all, sir."

It came out in a burst, and then there was silence.

Mr. Quelch did not speak: he sat looking at Harry Wharton, his gimlet eyes fixed on the flushed face.

Those gimlet eyes were very keen. Hacker probably would have read guilt in that flushed face. But Henry Samuel Quelch was a wiser man than Hacker.

Likewise, he could see the very visible signs of recent combat in Harry Wharton's face. He could guess how and why they were there.

"Have you been fighting, Wharton?" he asked, breaking the silence with that rather unexpected question.

"Eh? Oh! Yes, sir!" stammered Wharton.

"With a Remove boy?"

"Oh! No, sir."

"A senior boy?"

"I—I— Yes! I—I—" Wharton's cheeks were burning, and he was more confused than ever. With so serious a matter in hand, he could not understand Quelch referring to such a trifle. But Mr. Quelch had his own reasons.

The grimness of his countenance relaxed into the faintest of smiles.

"Take up that letter, Wharton!" he said. His lean forefinger indicated the missive from Joe Banks, lying on the table.

"That letter, sir?" Harry Wharton picked up the letter from the table.

"You may drop it into the fire, Wharton."

"Oh! Yes, sir!" stammered Harry.

The letter vanished in a spurt of flame.

Harry Wharton turned back to his Form-master. The gimlet eyes were fixed on him keenly, but with a glimmer of a smile in them.

"In this matter, Wharton," said Mr. Quelch, "I am in a somewhat difficult position. But I have trusted you, and

shall continue to trust you. I accept your word about that letter, and the matter is at an end. You may leave my study."

Wharton still stood looking at him, hardly realising that that spot of trouble, which had looked like turning out so terribly serious, was over. Quelch was already bending over a Latin paper—for the delectation of his Form the following day—and dipping his pen in the ink. Wharton stared at the top of his head.

He found his voice at last.

"Thank you, sir!" he stammered.

He left the study.

"Well?"

Four voices shot that monosyllable at Harry Wharton as he reached the corner of the passage. Four faces regarded him anxiously.

He laughed.

"O.K.!" he said.

"But what—"

"It's all right. That putrid letter's gone in the fire—and Quelch takes my word about it. By gum, the old bean is a brick!" said Harry, with a deep breath. "If it had been the Acid Drop—"

"Quelch always was a downy bird!" said Bob. "Quelch knows what's what! Thank goodness it's all right!" "You're well out of it, old man!" said Johnny Bull. "Quelch has jolly well stretched a point—lots of beaks wouldn't. You can jolly well see now that you were an ass to get mixed up in it at all—"

"Speech may be taken as read!"

"If you hadn't let that sweep land it on you in the first place—"

"What about tea?" asked Harry.

"I was saying if you hadn't—"

"And I was saying what about tea? Anybody hungry?"

"Yes, rather!" grinned Bob Cherry.

"Come on!"

"But if you hadn't—"

"Come on!" roared Bob, and he grabbed Johnny and rushed him off.

The other three followed, laughing.

It was a cheery party that went up to Study No. 1 in the Remove to tea. That spot of trouble had blown over, and all was calm and bright—for the present, at least; though, had the chums of the Remove only known it, they were at the beginning of what was going to be a rather exciting term.

THE END.

(Don't miss the exciting sequel to this story: "THE BATTLE OF THE BEAKS!" You'll find it in next Saturday's MAGNET.)

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chance!" exclaimed Boisover major.

"If he saw Wharton drop it—"

"He didn't, you dummy!"

"I did!" yelled Bunter. "He dropped it, and a lot of other things, when the Fifth Form chaps were rolling him over in their passage—"

"Is Wharton in a row in the Fifth?" exclaimed Bob. "He said he was going to see a man in the Fifth. What the—"

"Coker said he was going to wash him—"

"Wha-a-t?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"The cheeky ass!" roared Bob. "Come on, you fellows—we'll let that Fifth Form fathead see whether he can rag the Remove—"

"They ain't got him now!" said Bunter. "I saw Wharton going up to the dorm when I came down. He got away all right. I tell you, he dropped everything he had about him when they were tussling in the Fifth Form passage—and I picked them all up, excepting the buttons—and took them to his study. And this letter was one of them."

"And you read it, you fat worm!" said Lord Mauleverer.

"Eh? Yes! I mean, no!" said Bunter hastily. "I never looked at it, of course. I'm not the fellow to read a fellow's letter, I hope. I happened to see what was in it by sheer chance."

"Let's ask Wharton when he comes down!" grinned Skinner. "His Magnificence disdains to tell a lie, as we all know!"

"Whose it is doesn't matter so much as booting that fat worm for reading it!" remarked Lord Mauleverer. "Let's all boot him round the Rag!"

"Oh, really, Mauly—"

"All together!" agreed Bob Cherry.

"I say, you fellows—"

"Boot him!"

Billy Bunter made a rush for the door.

He had—as he expected—caused a sensation in the Rag. Bunter liked to cause a sensation. But after the feast came the reckoning. The fat Owl grabbed open the door, with Bob Cherry's boot close behind him, and shot out of the Rag.

The whole Co. rushed after him. They did not believe for a moment that that missive belonged to Harry Wharton, though evidently Bunter himself believed so. But whether it did or not, the fellow who had read another fellow's letter, and shouted it from the house-tops, required booting.

Billy Bunter flew down the passage.

He would not have escaped the avenging boots, but for the circumstance that Mr. Hacker was in the passage. Hacker was standing there talking to Mr. Capper—relating, in bitter tones, how unpleasant Quelch had been, when he, Hacker, had drawn attention to the disgracefully dirty state of a member of Quelch's Form.

Billy Bunter was in too great haste to see Hacker and Capper before he crashed into the master of the Fourth.

Four pursuers came to a sudden halt, as Billy Bunter reeled against one wall, Mr. Capper against the other, and the crumpled paper dropped from a fat hand at the feet of the Acid Drop.

PIE FOR HACKER!

BILLY BUNTER gurgled for breath.

Mr. Capper spluttered.

"Quelch's boys!" said Mr. Hacker in his bitter voice.

"Oh crikey!"

"Dear me!" murmured Mr. Capper.

"Bunter, you foolish, clumsy boy—dear me!" Capper righted himself, gasping.

"I—I—it wasn't me!" gasped Bunter.

"I—I mean, they were after me. I—I never saw you, sir. I—I—"

"Go away, you stupid boy!" said Mr. Capper. Capper had had rather a shock, but Capper was always mildly benevolent.

"Disgraceful!" said Mr. Hacker. Hacker was never mild and never benevolent. Bunter had reason to be thankful that it was not the Acid Drop into whom he had crashed. "Even on the first night of term—pah! Bunter, how dare you race about the passages in that unmannerly manner?"

Four juniors faded back into the Rag—though not before Mr. Hacker spotted them. Bunter, unfortunately, could not fade out. Hacker, like the Ancient Mariner, held him with a glittering eye.

It was Hacker all over! Capper, the damaged party, had told Bunter to go—Hacker was not satisfied to leave it at that.

"They were after me, sir!" gasped Bunter. "I—I— Can I have that letter, sir?"

The letter lay close to the toe of Mr. Hacker's foot. He had not glanced down, and had not noticed it so far.

"What letter?" snapped Mr. Hacker.

"What do you mean, Bunter?"

"I—I've dropped that letter, sir!"

Then Hacker glanced down.

Quite a startling expression came over his face as he did so. The letter was on a single sheet of notepaper. It had fallen with the written side up. Mr. Hacker did not see all that was written at a glance; but he saw enough to make him jump.

"Upon my word!" ejaculated Hacker.

He stooped and picked up the letter himself. Billy Bunter, afraid to venture near, but in a very anxious state, blinked at him in dismay. Even Bunter realised that it was better for a beak not to see that missive from Joe Banks at the Three Fishers. But it was too late now.

"Upon my word!" repeated Mr. Hacker. "Look at this, Capper!"

"My dear Hacker, what—what—" said Mr. Capper. He had no desire whatever to look at a schoolboy's letter. He stared at Hacker in surprise.

"Look at it, I say!" repeated the Acid Drop.

He held the letter up so close under Capper's nose that the Fourth Form master could not help looking at it. Then Capper, in his turn, gave a jump.

"Bless my soul!" he said.

"This," said Mr. Hacker sourly, "had better go before Mr. Quelch, as Bunter is in his Form. Mr. Quelch does not welcome the most well-meant assistance from other members of the staff; but a matter like this, I think, is a little too serious for me to heed considerations of that kind!"

Hacker's eyes gleamed.

He would have repudiated quite sincerely a suggestion that he was glad of a chance of scoring over Quelch. He did not realise it himself. But that gleam in his cold eyes was expressive.

"I—I say, that ain't mine!" gasped Bunter, in sheer terror. There was no name on the letter of the person to whom it was addressed. It might have been anybody's. Billy Bunter's fat knees knocked together at the bare thought of going up to Quelch, accused of having had a letter from a racing man.

"You untruthful young rascal!"

exclaimed Mr. Hacker. "Only a minute ago you picked up this letter!"

"Yes, but it ain't mine!" wailed Bunter. "I picked it up upstairs—"

"'tain't mine, sir! I was showing it to the fellows in the Rag, when those beasts—I mean those chaps—got after me!"

"Indeed! Then whose is it?" demanded Mr. Hacker.

"I—I—I don't know!" groaned Bunter. "I never saw a fellow drop it, and it wasn't Wharton!"

"Wharton?"

If Hacker's eyes had gleamed before, they fairly scintillated now.

Wharton! The junior who had answered him so insolently at Courtfield Station, and whose part Quelch had taken! Wharton!

"Oh, no," mumbled the miserable Owl, "not Wharton—not anybody! I—I just picked it up, that's all!"



"Oh gad!" muttered Price, hunching himself up on the seat, as Mr. Froot approached.

"The game's up—first day of term, too!"

"Those boys who were following you from the junior day-room were Wharton's friends, I think!" said the Acid Drop grimly. "Were they following you to recover possession of this letter, Bunter?"

"Oh, no!"

"Then why were they pursuing you?"

"They—they were going to kick me for reading it out in the Rag, that's all!" mumbled Bunter. "They—they got shirty about it, and—and—"

"Because the letter was Wharton's?"

"Oh, no! They didn't believe it was his!"

"Then you said that it was?" The Acid Drop was wringing it out word by word.

"Oh, no! Yes! I—I mean, I—I might have said so!" stammered the wretched Owl. "I—I might have said so just for a—a—a joke!"

"Did you see Wharton drop this letter or not?"

"Oh, no! I never saw him at all. I haven't seen him since we came back—I wasn't in the Fifth Form passage when Coker was ragging him, and I never picked up the things he dropped!" groaned Bunter. "He never dropped anything, and I haven't put them on his study table!"

"You had better go," said Mr. Hacker. He was satisfied now that that letter was not Bunter's

"Yes, sir! C-c-can I have the letter?" moaned Bunter.

"Certainly not!"

"Oh lor! I—I say, Wharton will be awfully wild—I—I mean—"

"Go!" snapped Mr. Hacker with so sharp a snap that Bunter jumped and went.

He rolled away to Hall in a very dismayed frame of mind. He realised that with that letter in a master's hand, its owner—Wharton, of course—was booked for serious trouble. Still, Bunter had done all he could—he couldn't snatch that letter from the Acid Drop.

But he was worried about it as he rolled into Hall.

Fortunately, he encountered his minor, Sammy of the Second, in Hall—and Sammy had a packet of toffee. Helping Sammy Bunter dispose of that toffee naturally drove lesser matters from Bunter's mind, and he

or that every fellow there left off talking as he entered.

He glanced round and came over to his friends.

"Did you fellows pick up the things I found on my study table?" he asked.

"No—Bunter did," answered Bob.

"He's told us so."

"We never knew you were rowing with Coker till Bunter told us," said Frank Nugent. "He said you'd gone up to the dorm afterwards—"

"I had to change," said Wharton briefly.

"Did it hurt?" asked Hazel.

"Did what hurt?"

"We've heard that Coker gave you a wash—"

"Oh, don't be a goat, Hazel! I've heard enough of that!" snapped the captain of the Remove. "Where's that fat ass Bunter? I remember he was on the spot, though I'd forgotten him. Where is he now?"

"Lost anything?" asked Skinner, with a wink at Snoop.

Snoop giggled.

Harry Wharton looked at Skinner. He had sensed, by this time, an unusual atmosphere in the Rag.

"Better tell him!" said Johnny Bull.

"Better tell me what?" Harry Wharton's tone was not very amiable.

"What's on—if anything is?"

"That fat ass, Bunter, hiked in here with a letter," said Bob. "He seems to have picked it up somewhere and fancied that it was yours."

"Oh!" gasped Harry.

"It wasn't, of course!" said Skinner blandly. "When Bunter read it out—"

"He read it out?" exclaimed Harry.

"Yes; so we knew it couldn't be yours," said Skinner, in the same bland tone. "You don't know anything about Snoodle at three to one."

Harry Wharton stood looking at Skinner, breathing hard, the colour rising in his cheeks.

He understood now that peculiar atmosphere in the Rag. He had found all his missing property in the study, with the exception of that letter—and now that he was told that it was Bunter who had picked up the things, he did not need telling that Bunter had read the letter—that being one of Bunter's ways. He realised now that Bunter had supposed the letter to be his—and had passed on the glad tidings, as it were, to the rest of the Remove.

Harry Wharton did not know what was in that letter—but it was clear that every other fellow in the Rag did.

The look that came over his face caused Skinner to back away a pace or two and leave the Bounder between him and Wharton.

Frank touched his chum on the arm.

"Nobody here believes that the letter Bunter read out was yours, old chap," he said. "He seems to have picked it up with the other things—some Fifth Form man must have dropped it—"

"And we can guess who!" grunted Johnny Bull. "Lots of fellows know that Price was up before the beak this afternoon, and they had a prefect there—Wingate of the Sixth. Price has been up to something."

"Pricey wouldn't drop a letter of that sort about!" chuckled Vernon-Smith. "Pricey's too jolly cute to do that!"

"Where's Bunter?" asked Harry.

"We were going to boot him, and he cleared off," answered Bob. "The

blithering owl fancied that that mouldy letter was yours—that's the sort of benighted chump he is. It was from one of that dingy crew at the Three Fishers—goodness knows who it was—some swab who's heading for the sack, anyhow."

"I don't know what was in that letter," said Harry. "But I can guess the sort. I hope I needn't tell you fellows that it was not mine."

"Of course you needn't, fathead! Smithy's, if it's anybody's in the Remove," said Bob.

The Bounder laughed.

"I don't strew that kind of correspondence about the House!" he said.

"No more than Price does! Look here, Wharton, don't be an ass—if that letter's yours, the sooner you get it off Bunter the better. He may read it out in Hall next."

"I've said that the letter's not mine, Vernon-Smith!" said Harry, with glinting eyes.

"Quite! And you've asked us where Bunter is! Do you want to see Bunter all of a sudden because he's such a fascinating chap, and you feel that you can't bear to miss him on the first day of term?" asked the Bounder sarcastically.

Some of the juniors laughed. It was perfectly clear to everybody that Wharton's inquiry for Bunter was connected with that letter.

"Shut up, Smithy!" said Bob hastily.

Smithy shrugged his shoulders.

"I've asked you fellows where Bunter is," said Harry, turning his back on Vernon-Smith. "Do you know?"

"No, but look here—bother Bunter!" said Bob uneasily. "You don't want that fat chump—ho's not worth kicking!"

"It happens that I do want him, you see."

Harry Wharton walked across to the door, opened it, and walked out of the Rag.

He left his chums dumb and the other fellows in a buzz. But he was too angry and exasperated to care what the fellows were thinking—just then, at all events. He hurried away in search of Bunter—only anxious to reclaim that letter and get rid of it.

Bunter was not easy to find. He learned in Hall that the fat Owl had been there, and had gone. There were some masters in Hall, among them Hacker, and the Acid Drop glanced round at Wharton, as he heard him inquiring for Bunter. The Acid Drop fancied that he could guess why that particular junior was in search of Bunter!

Wharton did not even see the Acid Drop. He went out of Hall, his irritation growing as his search for the fat Owl was prolonged. A booting for Bunter was overdue, and the glint in the eyes of the captain of the Remove indicated that he was going to get it at last—when found!

TOO LATE!

"OH!" ejaculated Billy Bunter.

Bunter was found at last. He was in his study—No. 7 in the Remove.

Peter Todd, who had the pleasure—or otherwise—of sharing that study with Bunter, had left a box of caramels there. Bunter was finishing the last caramel when an exasperated face looked in at the doorway.

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