



## THE RIVAL ENTERTAINERS!



**WHO SHALL HOLD THE CONCERT? FIGHTING IT OUT!**  
(An Exciting Scene in the Magnificent Long, Complete School Tale contained in this Issue). 22-3-18

# ... THE ... RIVAL ENTERTAINERS!

A Magnificent, Long, Complete Story  
of Tom Merry & Co. at St. Jim's.

By MARTIN CLIFFORD.



## CHAPTER I.

### The Boot for Bunter!

"I CONSIDER—"

"Errrrr! you fellows—"

"Wally, you fellows—"

"Dry up, Gussy!"

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy screwed his celebrated monocle into his eye, and stared wrathfully at the other occupants of Study No. 6.

"I wouldn't dry up, Blake! As I was about to remark, I consider—"

"What you consider doesn't count," said Digby. "Keep that sn-trap of yours closed. We shall be behind with our time. Bunter waits them by tomorrow."

"My dear Dig—"

"We're fighting against time as it is! needed Bunter. If you want to do any justice, this will be time," said Digby. "It's extremely important," perched Arthur Augustus. "I've got an idea."

"My hat!" said Blake, in surprise. "How can any idea of yours possibly be important?"

"He has, ha!"

Arthur Augustus rose up in wrath. He rose up so suddenly that the inkpot was bowled over, and the neatly-written pages of Blake and Herries and Digby were swamped with blue-black fluid.

"You clumsy idiot!" roared Jack Blake. "Look what you've done now!"

It means writing one line all over again," growled Digby. "This is the result of Gussy getting ideas. Next time you get an idea, you see, smother it—close it! Take it away and bury it!"

Arthur Augustus ruefully surveyed the damage.

"Never mind the lines," he said. "Never mind!" howled Blake. "Why you suffer, we shall get 'em doubled if they're not handed in by to-morrow!"

"I'll give you a hand, dear boy," said Arthur Augustus generously.

"All right," said Blake, somewhat mollified. "Now, what's this brainy idea of yours? Get it off your chest, and don't take all this talking to your ears. I was going to propose," said Arthur Augustus aggressively, "that we hold a grand Victory Concert!"

"A what?"

"A really first-rate celebration, to commemorate the victory of the Allies. Strategically conceived, nobody seems to have thought of it before, and it would give a certain prominence, and a world go with a swing."

"My hat!"

"We could cut Tom Mewby & Co. out, too, by makin' it solely a Fourth Form enterprise."

"True, O king!" said Herries. "That's not half a bad wheeze, even though it's Gussy's."

"We could bag the Public Hall at Wayland," said Jack Blake thoughtfully, "and make a charge for admission. The profits could go to the Cottage Hospital. What do you think Dig?"

"I'm in favour," said Digby, "on one condition."

"And that is—"

"That Gussy takes a back seat. His singing would ruin any sort of concert."

"Dig, you utter wretch—"

"He's quite right!" grinned Jack Blake. "At the same, we can't very well leave you out after you suggested the show."

"I should think not!"

"There's no reason why the affair shouldn't be a bumper success," Blake went on. "We'll tell Clive and Leynon and Julian and the other fellows, and we'll make 'em understand that it's strictly a Fourth Form business. If any of the Sixth got to know about it they'd be running a rival show in next to no time."

"Yaas, wathah! We must do it absolutely off our own bat, dear boys! I am prepared to spicing a fish for the purpose of buyin' togs—"

"Good for you, Gussy!"

"And I will promise to sing my songs down to a minimum of a dozen—"

"Oh!"

"And I'll write and ask cousin Ethel to come along and play the piano."

"Cheers!"

"You'll want a cornet solo in between each turn," said Herries thoughtfully.

"Shall we, by Jove!" said Blake warmly. "We don't want the audience to jump to the conclusion that it's an air-band warning!"

"My cornet sounds a jolly sight better than Gussy's comb-and-tissue-paper voice, anyway!" retorted Herries.

Arthur Augustus turned crimson.

"Unless you take back that remark, Herries," he said, "I shall be compelled to submit a useful dividend!"

"Fax!" said Digby. "My interests, you should never let your angry passions rear; your little hands were never made to tear each other's eyes!"

"He, ha, ha!"

"We don't get very far with the Victory Concert if the leading lights are going to wipe each other off the cloth," said Blake. "I was we used to work and prepare the programmes. We shall want plenty of local colour in the songs. The hall will be packed with St. Jim's fellows."

"Yes, rather!"

"Lay, you fellows—"

The door of No. 6 opened cautiously, and a FA junior, whose face was adorned with a pair of big spectacles, blinked in. The intruder was Billy Bunter, who was masquerading at St. Jim's as his cousin Wally, the latter having gone to Greyfriars in his place.

The occupants of the study had fully intended to let only a few members of the Fourth know what was going on, and those few would be fellows who could be relied upon to keep their mouths shut. Bunter would not have been one of them. In fact, Bunter of the Fourth was the last person to be told to whom Jack Blake & Co. would have entrusted their secret. They did not know that the fat junior had been listening at the keyhole to the whole of their conversation.

"I see, you fellows—"

"Javel!" said Jack Blake curtly.

"This isn't a home for prize porkers," said Herries.

"Oh, really, you know—"

"If you don't buzz off, we'll get Gussy to sing to you!" grinned Digby. "That ought to do the trick."

Arthur Augustus was about to protest when Bunter exploded a bombshell.

"Topping wheeze of yours, this Victory Concert," he said genially. "That's what I've dropped in to see you about."

"You—you spring rotter!" said Jack Blake in disgust.

"Oh, really, Blake! You were raising your voices so much that I couldn't help hearing a—a casual word or two. What I want to know is, where do I come in?"

"You don't," said Herries grimly. "You go out!"

"In quick time!" said Digby. "The study's had too much Bunter already, Seat!"

"Ahom! If you fellows would care give me a nominal fee—say, five bob—be pleased to give a turn at the concert."

"Bai Jove!" gasped Arthur Augustus.

"Did you eah?"

The Fourth Formers regarded him with the utmost contempt.

Known that he was Bunter of Greyfriars, they expected such conduct.

Wally Bunter was a complete waster.

Both Bunter and Jack Blake were in a bad temper.

By the time he reached the stairs, where he was waiting in a heap, Bunter bitterly

having played the spy outside Blake's study.

"So you want to give a turn, do you?" said Jack Blake. "Well, you can give one now—a funny one!"

So saying, he gave Bunter a gentle shove with his boot, and the fat junior disappeared down the stairs like a luge ball, gathering impetus as he went, and yelling vengeance at the top of his voice.

With a final shout Jack Blake turned on his heel and went back to Study No. 6.

## CHAPTER 2.

### Blake Declines to Withdraw.

**W**ILLIAM GEORGE BUNTER was feeling sore—mentally and physically. He had imagined that Jack Blake & Co. would have jumped at the chance of enlisting the services of such a star performer as himself. But he had imagined a vain thing. The chums of Study No. 6 had shown him quite plainly that he was not wanted.

Long experience had opened Bunter's eyes to the fact that a concert was usually followed by a feed. That was chiefly why he had offered his services. Nothing would have delighted his heart more than to partake of a vast spread of delicious performance. But, as he happened to be one of the performers, this would be denied him. Wherefore, Bunter's brow was sad, and he began to reflect that, life at St. Jim's was not, after all, a great improvement on life at Greyfriars. The fellows no longer showed him homage and respect, as they had done on his arrival at the school.

Bunter rolled dejectedly into the quadrangle. He was at war with the world in general, and with Jack Blake & Co. in particular.

"Wish I could think of a dodge for raking those rotteners all out," he muttered. "Wonder how I can spoil their little game?"

Then, sighting the Terrible Three of the Shell, Bunter's face brightened. He would tell Tom Merry & Co. of the plot which was afoot in the Fourth. Possibly the Shell would then set up a rival concert party, in which Bunter would be given a leading part. Happy thought!

The fat junior rolled towards the Terrible Three. Monty Lowther promptly buttoned up his pockets.

"No postal orders cashed in this establishment!" he said.

"Look here!" said Bunter. "I want a—"

"Yes, we know perfectly well what you want," said Tom Merry, "but there's nothing doing!"

"I want a word with you fellows!"

"Oh, up my little man!" said Monty Lowther encouragingly. "Trot out the good tidings!"

"Well, I—supposed to be passing Blake's study just now, and I heard 'em say—"

"Well, well!" said Lowther, looking at the Shell's wince.

"What was that?"

"Bunter. They look small, but they're the best of the Victory Concert."

"Well, well!" said Lowther, looking at the Terrible Three. "They could not have staged a better show if he had suddenly hurled a bomb at their feet."

For some days past Tom Merry & Co. had been pulling their heads together, and making arrangements for a Victory Concert, to be performed exclusively by

the Shell. And now—the Fourth had hit upon a similar idea!

"Oh, my hat!" said Manners. "That's done it! Good-bye to our merry secret!"

Billy Bunter blinked at the trio.

"Were you fellows getting up a show as well?"

"We were!" growled Tom Merry. "I suppose you've been eavesdropping outside our study, and given the game away to the Fourth?"

"Oh, really, Merry! I shouldn't dream of doing such a thing!" said Bunter, really innocent for once.

"I'm not so sure," said the captain of the Shell. "You're a heady spy, anyway, and we've a short way with spies. Bump him, you fellows!"

"Ow! Hold on—I—I mean, leggo!" yelled Bunter.

But the Terrible Three were not in a successful mood just then. They laid violent hands on the fat junior, and Billy Bunter descended three times on the flagstones.

"Now, clear off!" said Tom Merry. "And if you catch me listening at a key-hole again you'll be stayed alive!"

"Yow-ow-ow!"

Billy Bunter limped painfully away, groaning and gasping as he went. Within the last hour he had been chastised with a cricket-stump, kicked down a flight of stairs, and soundly bumped. It was as if a series of obstacles had taken place, with Bunter in the middle on each occasion.

When the fat junior had gone, the Terrible Three exchanged glances.

"What rotten luck!" said Manners. "The Fourth have begged our wheeze. What are we going to do about it, Tommy?"

"Of course, they will have to withdraw," said Tom Merry.

"Oh, of course!" said Monty Lowther. "They're likely to do that—I don't think," granted Manners. "They're bound to be as keen on giving the show as we are."

"Let's come along and tackle Blake," said Tom Merry. "P'raps, if we put it to him nicely, he'll cave in, and give us a clear field."

"I'll wager a camera to a chess-pawn he won't!" said Manners.

The Terrible Three went along to Study No. 6. A discordant sound greeted their ears as they approached.

"What the merry dickens—!" began Tom Merry, in astonishment.

"Fear not, fair youth!" chuckled Monty Lowther. "It's only Gussy singing."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Inside the study Arthur Augustus was going strong. His voice, if it had no other qualities, was certainly penetrating.

"Drink to me only with thine eyes, An' I will drink with mine—"

Blake and Herrie, and Digby had stopped their ears. They fervently hoped that their aristocratic chums would succeed in losing his voice before the concert came off.

Arthur Augustus was still warbling unmusically when the Terrible Three marched in.

"Anybody sawing wood in this study?" asked Monty Lowther blandly.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Arthur Augustus glared at the humbug of the Shell.

"Woolly, Lowther! It is very rash of you to interrupt me in the middle of a verse! I was just gettin' into my stride!"

"Oh, cranberry!" said Manners, with a shudder. "Then the saints preserve us from when you're fully wound up!"

"What do you Shell bounders want!" demanded Jack Blake.

"We've come to tell you," said Tom

Merry. "that you needn't go to any further trouble in the matter of the Victory Concert. It's being given by the Shell."

"What!"

Jack Blake & Co. were on their feet at once.

"In an affair of this sort," explained Monty Lowther, "you want really first-class performers. That's where the Shell comes in. We can deliver the goods!"

"Hear, hear!" said Manners.

"It's up to you, Blake, old man," said Tom Merry. "Withdraw!"

"Withdraw!" shouted Blake. "Not for a pension! What do you take us for?"

"There isn't room for two Victory Concerts, you know—"

"And there isn't room in this study for a set of cheeky asses!" said Digby wrathfully. "The Fourth are giving this show. Everybody else can keep off the grass!"

"Hats!"

"The suggestion of a Victory Concert came from me originally," said Arthur Augustus, with dignity.

"You! Well, I like that!" said Tom Merry.

"Monty Lowther mooted the idea a week ago. In fact, we've already got our programme out and dried. It's up to the Fourth to retire the goods!"

"Without bloodshed, if possible," added Monty Lowther.

"If you think we're going to chuck the idea to please you, you're jolly well mistaken!" said Jack Blake. "We're going ahead!"

"All serene! Then there's nothing more to be said. We're going ahead, too. And if we don't lick the Fourth into a cocked hat I'm a Dutchman!"

"Ta-ta!"

And the Terrible Three, having stated their views on the subject with their usual frankness, retired to their study in order to discuss a plan of campaign for the future.

## CHAPTER 3.

### War to the Knife!

#### "NOTICE!"

"A GRAND VICTORY CONCERT has been arranged by the Fourth Form of the School House. The performance will take place in the Public Hall at 8 o'clock on Saturday evening at seven sharp. The cream of the St. Jim's theatrical talent will be on the spot. We anticipate a crowded house, and patrons are therefore requested to

#### LINE UP EARLY!

"Prices of admission: Reserved seats, 1s.; unreserved, 6d. Should any member of the Shell wish to attend, will they please note that necks and collars must be scrupulously clean! They will be searched before admission, and any ammunition, in the form of rotten eggs, etc., found on their persons will be duly confiscated."

"It is hoped that

COUSIN ETHEL WILL BE AT THE PIANO!"

"All profits will go to the Cottage Hospital."

"N.B.—The public are requested to bear in mind that the Fourth are running the show. Beware of worthless imitations!"

"Signed Jack Binky, Manager."

Such was the announcement displayed boldly on the notice-board next morning for all St. Jim's to see.

Jack Blake & Co. had realised that it was no use trying to keep the affair a secret any longer. Bunter had known what was going on, and anything that

The Gem Library.—No. 555.

Bunter knew would swiftly penetrate to every corner of the school. The Fourth-Formers had therefore made their plans public. When the hour arrived, they were determined to stick to their guns and see the thing through.

Jack Blake's announcement had a varying reception. Some of the seniors smiled, and Kildare was heard to say that he would take a couple of seats. The girls turned up their noses and declared that the performance would be a complete wash-out.

"Gussey's already a first-class comedian," said Wally D'Arcy. "There's no need for him to emphasize it by going on the stage!"

As for the Shell, they were indignant. They read the notice two or three times over, and their indignation waxed hotter with each perusal.

"The cheek of it!" gasped Manners. "The colossal nerve of it!" stormed George Alfred Grundy, "What nerve and collar! Indeed! Something will have to be done about this, Merry. Let's go along and slaughter the cheeky asses!"

"No go!" said Monty Lowther dubiously. "We could wipe up the Fourth Form passage with them, but it wouldn't make any difference. They'd carry on with the show!"

"You are going to take this lying down!" booted Grundy. "You are going to turn the other cheek after being insulted like this!"

"Feast your eyes on this notice-board in an hour's time, old son, and you'll see that the Fourth aren't the only people who can sling compliments about!"

"You are an idiot not to wipe 'em off the face of the earth!" growled Grundy. "If you had your own way, you'd have them sent to the front." They went a series of straight lifts!

"Lie down, you giddy Bolshevik!" said Monty Lowther, and stalked away with Wilkins and Omit. He did not approve of Tom Merry's methods. If he—Grundy—had his own way, the Fourth would be hammered so ruthlessly that they wouldn't feel like holding a concert at all.

Talbot joined the Terrible Three at the notice-board. "The Fourth seems to be going strong," he said. "They appear to imagine they're cocks of the walk."

"Gussey's going to warble, and Herries is going to bring the roof down with his cornet, and they've got the cheek to call it a Victory Concert!" snorted Manners.

"Of course, you are not going to let them mess up the show, are you?" "Rather not!" said Tom Merry. "The Victory Concert will come off, right enough. The only difference is that it will be given by our little selves, and the Fourth can go and eat cokes!"

"Hear, hear!" Talbot accompanied the Terrible Three to their study. In that famous apartment, the home of many a brainy whoopee, and the editorial sanctum of "Tom Merry's Weekly," the juniors fell to discussing how they might get their own back on the Fourth. Tom Merry suggested drawing up an announcement to rival Blake's, and this was agreed to.

Shortly afterwards, the announcement which had caused such a sensation among the juniors was deprived of its place of honour on the notice-board. It was still there, but beside it was another such notice imposing notice, couched in the following terms:

**"NOTICE!**

"WHEREAS certain cheeky asses in the Fourth have seen fit to desecrate the THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 583.

school notice-board with theirummy-rot, the Shell desires to make it known that a

**GRAND VICTORY CONCERT**

will be given in the Public Hall at Weydon on Saturday evening at seven sharp—NOT by the aforementioned cheeky asses, but by

**TOM MERRY'S CONCERT PARTY!**

"An up-to-date programme has been prepared, and every performer is a first-rate star. Why listen to Gussey's stale songs and Herries' unspeakable cornet? Roll up and see a real live show!"

"The price of admission will be sixpence to everybody, the proceeds to go to the Cottage Hospital. Cousin Ethel will be asked to preside at the piano. Members of the Fourth Form will be admitted, provided they behave like good little boys, and show civility and courtesy to their superiors of the Shell. Any disorderly conduct will result in their being shut out on their noses!" (Signed) TOM MERRY.

The grins vanished from the faces of Jack Blake & Co. when they read Tom Merry's outspoken announcement. They had not expected their challenge to be taken up so promptly.

"I regard Tom Merry as being quite outside the pale!" said Arthur Augustus in great indignation. "He's had the cheek to outsize my single!"

"That's about the only sensible thing he's done!" said Blake.

"Let's tear his trashy notice down!" suggested Herries.

Jack Blake shook his head.

"That would hardly be playing the game," he said. "After all, the Shell has a much right to ask a notice on the board, but we've got to set the bounds to go along and set the bounds what we think of them."

"Straight from the shoulder!" said Digby.

The incensed Fourth-Formers went in search of the Terrible Three. They found Study No. 10 on the Shell passage deserted.

"Seen Merry and his little lambs!" asked Jack Blake, as Skimpole passed.

The genius of the Shell blinked.

"I have reason to adduce," he said, in his ponderous way, "that Merry, Manners and Lowther, and many others, are making vociferous noises in the lecture-hall. I understand they are rehearsing for the Victory Concert."

"Oh, are they?" grunted Herries.

"We'll give 'em Victory Concert! Come on, kids!"

The Fourth-Formers hurried round to the lecture-hall. They were met at the entrance by Grundy, Wilkins, and Gunn, together with a few of the rank and file of the Shell.

"Stand aside!" said Jack Blake sharply.

"We want to see Tom Merry!"

"More rate!"

"Pway let us pass!" said Arthur Augustus, with dignity.

"No aliens allowed at rehearsals!" said Grundy shortly.

"If you don't get out of the way we'll smash you!" said Blake.

"You're welcome to try it on!"

Jack rolled up his sleeves, and rushed at George Alfred Grundy. The movement was the signal for a free fight.

The Fourth-Formers were determined to force an entry into the lecture-hall. The Shell were equally determined that they shouldn't. Tom Merry had placed Grundy on guard outside the door, and Grundy was accompanied by some very useful fighting men.

The Shell were in superior numbers,

and gradually Jack Blake & Co. were forced back along the passage.

"Shock it into 'em!" pantod Grundy. "There's been asking for this for a long time!"

And Grundy's fist, shooting out, came into violent collision with Arthur Augustus D'Arcy's astronomical chin.

"Yawwoooop! Grundo, you wuff wotah!"

Herries' fist, again shot out, and the swell of St. Jim's landed on the floor of the passage with a fearful concussion. He looked a very complete wreck when he staggered to his feet. His collar was torn, his tie was streaming loose, and his noble countenance was sadly battered.

Meanwhile, Herries and Digby, who had been putting up a plucky fight, were reluctantly compelled to throw up the sponge; and Jack Blake could not be expected to hold out single-handed.

With a whoop of triumph the Shell fellows followed up their advantage, and the shams of St. Jim were compelled to beat a retreat to their own quarters.

Their interview with Tom Merry & Co. was unavoidably postponed!

**CHAPTER 4.**

**Not a Success!**

**W**HAT price a wheezal, deah boys?"

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy fired the suggestion at his study-mates next day.

The lecture-hall, but the Fourth had removed all traces of their skirmish with the Shell, and they were eager to proceed with their preparations for the Victory Concert. It had been advertised for Saturday evening; but so far the Fourth had held no rehearsals.

"We've got a move on," said Jack Blake. "We've got the songs and things all mapped out, anyway. That's something. What about bagging the lecture-hall?"

"Can't be did!" said Herries. "Those Shell bouncers have collared it again. They've got a guard of about a dozen outside, armed with cricket-stumps."

"Oh, my hat!"

"We're not obliged to rehearse in the lecture-hall," said Digby. "What's the matter with the Common-room? There won't be anyone there just now."

"I'll go and scout out the west of the fellows," said D'Arcy.

"And I'll just see if my cornet's in trim," said Herries.

"No, don't, old chap!" said Jack Blake hurriedly. "Your cornet will keep."

"I want to make certain it goes all right," said Herries. "Some cheerful idiot has been using it to break coal with, or something. It's got a dent in it like Gussey's toppor after a snow-fight."

"Pity the chap who dented it, didn't do it in altogether!" murmured Digby.

"Eh? What was that?" demanded Herries sharply.

"Ahem! I was saying that you'd better go and fetch the other fellows."

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy accompanied the Fourth Formers to the Common-room and Clive and

Levison agreed to term

"I've done my share, Arthur Augustus Robey," said Cardew. "I composed some touchin' ditties which ought to go down well—unless you sing them, that is!"

"Bai Jove! I wessent that remark! Unless you withdraw it at once I shall have to request you to put up your hands!"

"Bow-wow!"

Arthur Augustus gave a warlike snort. The matter might have proceeded further had not Clive and Levison promptly marched the swell of St. Jim's from the study.

"Life's too short for scrapping," said Clive, "and we value our study furniture. Come on!"

Julian and Kerriah and Bolly joined the party, and the Fourth-Formers went along to the junior Common-room, at the entrance to which Blake and Digby and Herries were making for them. The latter carried his instrument of torture.

"Good!" said Jack Blake. "Now we can set the ball rolling."

The Common-room was, to all intents and purposes, deserted. The members of the concert-party were just too late to see a fat figure plunge behind the screen.

Billy Bunter had been on a raiding expedition during the afternoon, and he had gathered much spoil. From various studies he had succeeded in commandeering a currant-cake, a pot of jam, some muffins, and a bottle of ginger-beer. Bunter knew that the Common-room was usually deserted at that hour, and he had carried his ill-gotten gains thither in order to devour them in comfort. On hearing footsteps outside, he had contrived to dodge behind the shelter of a friendly screen just in the nick of time.

"Now," said Jack Blake briskly, "the first item is mine. I think."

"Mine!" said Herries.

"You are both wrong," said D'Arny. "I give the opening song. 'Yaaa, let me like a soldier fall—'"

"You'll fall sooner than you think if you don't dry up!" growled Blake. "Am I the manager of this show, or am I not?"

"Oh, cut the cackle and come to the house!" said Levison impatiently.

Jack Blake mounted a form, and commenced to sing "Asleep in the Deep." There was no piano accompaniment, but Blake had a fine voice, and it rang through the Common-room.

"Stormy the night, and the waves roll back,

Bravely the ship doth ride—"

"Louder!" came a voice from behind Blake.

The singer spun round sharply.

"Don't interrupt!" he snapped.

"Hark how the lighthouse bell's solemn cry

Rings o'er the sullen tide!"

"That lighthouse bell must have been something like your voice, Blake, old chap!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Muss-suum-my hat!"

Jack Blake could scarcely believe his ears. He was not accustomed to this sort of thing. Had it been D'Arny or Herries, he would have supposed the boys—Blake—should be taken in by some ruse or other. He kept his eyes fixed on the speaker.

"The boys keeps chipping at me."

"The boys keeps chipping at me."

"The boys keeps chipping at me."

"The boys keeps chipping at me."

"The boys keeps chipping at me."

"The boys keeps chipping at me."

"The boys keeps chipping at me."

"The boys keeps chipping at me."

"Look here," said Jack Blake, closely in his hands hard, "I'm fed up! Who is it keeps bawling it? Is it you, Herries?"

"No fear!"

"Then it's you, Dig!"

"Right off the wicket!" said Digby.

"Whatever my private opinion of your voice may be, I've got sense enough to keep it to myself."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Levison came forward.

"We don't seem to be making much headway," he said. "I think I'll sing."

"John Peel" now, just to show you how it's done."

"Hold on—"

"What about my cornet solo—"

"And my recitation—"

"To say nothing of my conjuring turns—"

"Oh, rats!" said Levison. And he prepared to sing.

"Yaaa, wathah! No use tryin' to back out of it, dear boy."

Levison grew angry.

"I wasn't singing, I tell you!" he exclaimed. "And if any fellow doubts my word, I'll trouble him to meet me in the gym—"

"No need for that," said Jack Blake grimly. "I'll give you a jolly good licking here and now!"

And Blake rushed at Levison, who promptly squared up to him in turn. Before any blows could be exchanged, however, the door of the Common-room opened, and Kildare of the Sixth glanced in.

"That's enough!" he said sternly. "No scrapping in here. Clear out, all the lot of you!"

"Oh—"

"We're having a rehearsal, Kildare—"

"If you're rehearsing a prize-fight, you



The driver was about to reply, when Jack Blake ran forward and tugged at his muffer. Then he wrenched off the hat, and gave a shout of mingled rage and astonishment. "My hat! It's Kerri!"

"Do you see Jack Blake, in his socks

and gaiters, with a face like a boot that has lost

its way!

He thinks he can get up a jolly good

play,

But he'll find his mistake in the

morning!"

"Bai Jove! That's a very extraordinary version of 'John Peel,' Levison—"

"And not very complimentary to Blake, either!" grinned Clive.

Jack Blake doubled his fists and strode up to Levison.

"I'll make you sit up for this!" he snorted. "Put up your hands!"

Levison looked dazed.

"I wasn't—I wasn't—"

"You think you can come here and take a rise out of me—what!" Blake went on.

"Pat!" said Levison hastily. "I tell you, there's a ghastly mistake somewhere! I've not been singing at all! I didn't open my mouth!"

"Oh, come off it, Levison!" said Digby. "We all heard you, plainly enough."

can chuck it!" said the captain of St. Jim's. "Out you come! And if there's any further trouble you'll hear from me!"

Reluctantly the Juniors trooped out of the Common-room. Their first rehearsal had been very far from a success.

When they had gone, and Kildare's footsteps had also died away, Billy Bunter emerged from his place of concealment.

"He, he, he!" he chuckled. "Serve the boaster jolly well right! If Blake had been civil to me the other day, instead of chucking me out of his study, this wouldn't have happened. I've got my own back now, anyway!"

And Billy Bunter rolled out of the Common-room, feeling that life was once more worth living.

#### CHAPTER 5.

##### MANNERS FIRST A WAY.

TOM MERRY tapped on the door of Study No. 6 on the Fourth Form passage.

"Come in!" growled four voices.

The captain of the Shell obeyed.

"Oh, it's you, is it?" grunted Jack Blake, who was still feeling decidedly sure after the failure of his rehearsal. "I suppose you've come to tell us that you've changed your minds, and decided to leave the Victory Concert in the hands of the Fourth?"

Tom Merry laughed.

"Not exactly," he said. "In fact, it's the other way. I've come along to give you fellows a final chance to withdraw."

"Great Scott!"

"You needn't have troubled," said Jack Blake. "We're still as determined as ever to carry the thing through. Keep off the grass—that's my advice to you!"

"Fear, hear!" said Harrier.

"To give you fellows a final chance to withdraw, even if it shows!"

"If you beseech us on bended knees to cry off, we won't! That's straight from the shoulder."

"We're not backing out at any price," said Blake.

"No; wathah not!"

"Why des'nt they do as reasonable!" said Tom Merry. "It's no use fighting against the Shell. You're running your head up against a brick wall."

"We'll chance that."

"Now, don't be a silly ass—"

"Certainly not," said Blake. "I know you hate competition."

"Tom Merry frowned.

"All right," he said. "I've given you a chance to withdraw, and you won't take it. You can look out for squalls!"

And Tom Merry strode out of the study, slamming the door behind him.

"What luck?" asked Monty Lowther, when the captain of the Shell rejoined his chums.

"They won't budge. They're as obstinate as a pack of blessed mules!"

"Then there's only one thing for it," said Manners, "we must prevent them giving the concert."

"Yes—but how?"

"By getting them out of the way."

"What!"

"Kidnapping them," said Manners. "Any old thing, so long as they're prevented from turning up at Wayland on Saturday."

"But how on earth—"

"It's easier than it sounds," said Manners. "I happen to know the arrangements Blake & Co. have made for Saturday night. They are going to hire a motor-char-a-banc from Wayland."

"Another of Gussy's fivers gone West?" chuckled Monty Lowther.

"The char-a-banc's due to arrive at St. Jim's at six-thirty," Manners went on, "to take the whole crowd along to the Public Hall."

"But where do we come in?" asked Monty Lowther.

Manners lowered his voice.

"We must hold up the char-a-banc!" he said.

"How's that going to help?" said Tom Merry. "If the thing doesn't turn up, Blake & Co. will walk. It will make them a bit late, but they won't mind that."

"I haven't finished yet," said Manners. "My idea is that somebody we know and are trust—Kerr, of the New House, first-rate—holds up the char-a-banc on its way here, change seats with the driver, and comes along to pick up Blake & Co. Instead of taking them to the Public Hall at Wayland, he will arrange to give them a rare old joy-ride, and leave them stranded about twenty miles away so that it will be impossible for them to give the concert. Meanwhile, we shall toddle off to Wayland and give the performance, and everything in the garden will be lovely. You get me, Steve?"

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"My hat!" exclaimed Tom Merry and Monty Lowther in unison.

"I don't see why Kerr should be any likely to see Manners," Kerr has done this sort of stunts before without being spotted. He can impersonate anything or anybody. It will mean tipping the driver of the char-a-banc a quid or two, but we can manage that between us. What do you think, Tommy?"

"I'll see Kerr's thought was expressed by a thump on the back which made Manners howl."

"It's top-hole, old scout!" said Tom Merry.

"What a sell for the Fourth!" chuckled Monty Lowther. "I should like to see your expressions as your chivvies when they get landed miles away from anywhere! They will be worth a guinea a box!"

"I'll go and explain matters to Kerr," said Tom Merry. "He's sure to rally round and support the cause."

"As Tom Merry was crossing the quad, Bunter of the Fourth rolled up to him.

"I say, Tommy, old chap—"

"Tom Merry to you, please!"

"I want to speak to you about the Victory Concert. Do you want it to be a complete wash-out?"

"I'm not sure," said Tom, in surprise.

"Well, it's a bit if you don't count me in. I'm a first-rate actor, you know. A good many members of the Bunter family belong to the profession."

"Which—the looting profession?"

"Acting, you see! You've heard of Sir Irving Wilson Barrett, Bunter, suppose. He's a good one. Well, I shouldn't have thought those fellows could be so ignorant—"

"Look here, said Tom Merry. "I've no time to waste. You're no use to us unless you exhibit you as a same-like constructor."

"Oh, really, Merry! I'll pull you to concert-party could be a real success without me. I can do all sorts of comic stunts."

Tom Merry hesitated.

"I can't promise anything," he said at length. "You're in the Fourth, and this is a Shell affair, pure and simple. Well, I'll think it over and let you know definitely on Saturday."

"Good!" said Bunter. "Here, I say, don't walk away when I'm speaking to you! Will there be a feed after the show?"

"Sure thing!"

"A real pre-time feed, I mean—not one of the old war-time cracks!"

"There will be enough grub to make your old ancestor, Sir Bunter de Grunter, emerge from his grave smacking his lips!" laughed Tom. "But don't start bawling me in Spanish. I haven't promised you anything yet."

Tom Merry passed on into the New House. He found Figgins, Kerr, and Wynn, the celebrated trio, at prep.

"Welcome, little stranger!" said Figgins. "Have you come to see us about the Abbotsford match?"

"No, I don't want to speak to Kerr. I don't clear out," added Tom Merry, as Figgins and Fatty Wynn rose to their feet. "I know you fellows can be trusted to keep mum."

"As mum as mice!" said Fatty Wynn.

Tom Merry outlined the scheme Manners had suggested. The New House juniors listened breathlessly.

"Are you game, Kerr?" asked the captain of the Shell, when he had finished.

"Yes, rather! I haven't had any excitement of this sort for ages."

"That's good. I knew you'd turn up, though. Will you drop in at our study on Saturday about six?"

"Rely on me," said Kerr. "It's going to be rather a delicate job, but I'll do my best."

"Always come to the New House for brains," said Fatty Wynn. "Kerr's about the only fellow at St. Jim's who could tackle a thing like this without being bowled out."

"Yes; you've shown jolly good judgment for once," said Figgins. "Good luck to the show!"

"Thanks!" said Tom Merry.

And he went back to the School House in high feather. It was an uncertain world, he reflected, but, taking one consideration with another, it certainly seemed that, so far as the Victory Concert was concerned, the Shell held all the cards.

#### CHAPTER 8.

#### On the Wrong Track.

BILLY BUNTER rolled discontentedly into the quadrangle after dinner.

It was the day fixed for the concert, and a half-holiday.

Bunter was at a loss what to do with himself. He didn't play footer, and he was stony—his usual condition. Moreover, he was hungry.

Dinner had satisfied Bunter about as much as a lump of sugar would satisfy an elephant. He had only had one helping of pudding, and his repeated efforts to persuade the other fellows to pile things on his plate had met with a chilling response.

"I'll give anything for a rattling good feed!" murmured Bunter. "I shall get one to-night after the show, if I'm lucky; but a bird in the hand is worth two in the bush!"

Bunter paused under the elms to think out ways and means. His time-honoured story of the postal-order was played out, even at St. Jim's.

He could not hope to raise the wind that way. And Dingo Pagels, at the tuckshop, regarded him with a cold and distant eye. She had already informed Bunter, politely but firmly, that her terms were strict cash. There could be no question of tick.

The only thing for it, Bunter decided, was another raid on the studies. But study-raiding was a risky business; and the fat junior had received too many buldings and linkings of late to want an encore.

Bunter was still turning the problem over in his mind when his attention was directed to the bicycle-shed, from which four juniors emerged pushing their machines. They were Jack Blake & Co. of the Fourth year.

As the cyclists passed through the quad they appeared to be in deep discussion. Bunter watched their movements with curiosity; and then a gleam of enlightenment came to him.

"It's a feed!" he muttered.

Instinct told him that Jack Blake & Co. were on their way to a good feed. Bunter's mind whirled as he saw falling and drinking. Why not have a party of fellows in the study? They would be naturally jumpy, and he would be there they were talking.

"Gussy's fiver!" said Bunter, standing tensed up.

"That's where I come in," said Bunter, as he pushed his bicycle into the clock-work.

There were several machines inside. Bunter made a hurried selection, and took the best. He was a past master in the art of borrowing bicycles without permission.

Costing a wary glance over his shoulder, he hastened down to the gates and caught up with Jack Blake & Co. in the roadway.

"Hallo!" said Blake, pausing in the act of mounting his bike. "What do you want, porpoise?"

"I'm coming along, Blake, old chap!" said Bunter.

Blake glared.

"You're doing nothing of the sort!" he said. "Travel!"

"Oh, really, you know—"

"Vamoose!"

But Billy Bunter showed no inclination to relieve the Fourth-Formers of his company. They could slang him till they were tired; but he meant to be on the spot when that feed took place.

"Bai Jove!" said Arthur Augustus Macey suddenly. "Whose jiggah have you borrowed, Bunter?"

"Oh, it's Levison's!" said Bunter, blinking at the name on the saddle.

"Levison's an old pal of mine! He said I could borrow his bike whenever I liked—"

"Oh, you fibber!" said Digby. "Levison's got about as much affection for you as he has—and that's precious little! If you don't sheer off there will be a dead Bunter found lying in the gateway!"

"I'm coming along!" said Bunter firmly.

"We'll soon see about that! Hold my bike, Horrie—"

Jack Blake caught Digby's eye, and checked him at the name on the saddle.

"It's all right, Bunter!" he said genially. "You're welcome!"

The juniors mounted their machines and rode away, with Bunter puffing along in the rear.

"What's the little game, Blake?" asked Horrie.

"Just a bit of leg-pulling, that's all!" whispered Blake. "Bunter imagines we're going to a banquet, or something of the sort. We'll disillusion him—but not yet."

The joke was passed round, and the cyclists began to put the pace on. Jack Blake & Co. were in excellent condition, and they meant to give the persistent Bunter a good run for his money, so to speak.

Billy Bunter, puffing and blowing like a grampus, had all his work out out to keep up.

"I—I say, don't be beastly! Wait for a pal, you know!"

But the juniors pedalled away vigorously. By the time they had climbed the next hill the perspiration was streaming down Bunter's fat face, and his legs on the verge of collapse. Bunter was not an athlete, and but for the entrancing prospect of the feed he would have thrown up the sponge there and then.

It was not until the old-fashioned High Street of Wayland was reached that the juniors slowed up. They alighted, with many thanks, and waited for Bunter to join them.

"You're awfully!" panted Bunter, ruffling up his hair. "Thought you'd give me a good run, you? I can see what your pal's up to! You want to do me out of a bit of the feed!"

"Oh, really, you know—!" Blake in surprise.

"I'm barbling about now."

"I'm here here for a feed, haven't you?" said Bunter in alarm.

"No, no, Blake. We've come here to stow—"

"To stow away took!" said Bunter. "Ah! I knew it all along!"

"Who's talking about stow, you say? We came to stow away a lot of lumber in the Public Hall, so that it will be all clear for the show to-night."

"Oh!"

Bunter's jaw dropped. His fat face was working convulsively.

"Then—then there's no feed!" he stammered.

"Nix!"

"Oh, you rotten! Oh, you spoofing beast!"

The look of fury on Bunter's florid face was so comical that Jack Blake & Co. roared with laughter.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Hard cheese, Bunter!"

"No doughnuts giving begging, old man!"

"No delicious mince-pies!"

"No nice, puffy pastries that melt in the mouth!"

"Nothin' whatever, doab boy—"

"Except a nice, pleasant ride back to St. Jim's," said Horrie.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"He floundered a fat fist at the laughing juniors."

"I've a jolly good mind to wipe up the ground with you!" he howled.

"Go ahead, harrot!"

Bunter did not go ahead. Instead, he clambered on to Levison's bicycle and rode off, fuming.

But Bunter's disappointing experience had not yet reached a climax. When he got to St. Jim's, grumpy and breathless, he canonized into Levison in the quad.

"Look where you're going, you clump!" snapped Levison. Then, recognizing his property, he gave a shout which made Bunter turn pale.

"My bike!" he yelled.

"Nunno, old chap!" said Bunter hastily. "It—it belongs to my pal D'Arcy—"

Levison wasted no more time in words. He made one bound at Bunter, and the bicycle careened wildly half a dozen yards away.

"Take that, you fat worm—did that, and that!"

Bunter took them. He had no choice in the matter. The first was a punch in the chest that knocked all the breath out of his fat body, and the second and third were hefty blows on the nose and chin respectively.

Billy Bunter rolled over on his back in the quad, wondering why the stars had appeared in the heavens before they were due.

"There!" panted Levison, recovering his machine. "If you lay a finger on this bike again your life won't be worth living!"

And Levison strode away, leaving the fat junior lying in a confused heap, groaning in dire anguish.

And the burden of his plight was:

"Ow, ow, ow, ow, ow!"

## CHAPTER 7.

### A Change of Identity!

SIX chimed out from the old clock-tower at St. Jim's.

In another hour the Victory Concert was due to commence.

Whether the Fourth or the Shell would succeed in giving the concert was still an open question. Each party had arranged for the curtain to rise at seven; though whether it would rise upon Tom Merry & Co. or Jack Blake & Co. none could say with certainty. Tom Merry & Co., however, and Figgins, Kerr, and Wyn of the New House, had a very shrewd idea.

The Fourth were in high feather. The Shell had left them alone recently, and it looked as if Tom Merry & Co. might be at an advantage, and leave the affair in the hands of their rivals. That was what Jack Blake thought, anyway. He would not have thought so had he seen Tom Merry & Co. at that moment. The Terrible Three were chuckling in anticipation of the success of their little scheme.

Kerr of the New House kept his promise.

He turned up at Tom Merry's study shortly after six.

"Still game?" asked the captain of the Shell.

"Game as you like!"

Merely Lovell looked at his watch.

"Time you got busy, old sport," he said.

"And don't make a hash of it, whatever you do," cautioned Manners. "Do you know your part all right?"

"I like a look!" said Kerr. "At six-thirty, the three boys arrive to take Blake & Co. to Wayland. I've got to intercept the driver before he gets here, tip him a quid, and change tops with him. Then, disguised as the driver, I come along here and take our young friends on board. After which I take 'em for a nice ride in the country, and hold 'em up miles away from anywhere. Meanwhile, you fellows will go along to the Public Hall and give the concert."

"You seem to have got it off pat," said Tom Merry. "But—"

"What are you looking about now?"

"Are you sure that you can drive a char-a-banc all right?"

"Am I sure I'm alive!" said Kerr scornfully. "I was driving cars before you were breeched!"

"You haven't a license, you know, and—"

"Bother the license! What is going to stop me on a lonely country road after dark, I should like to know!"

"You'll be all right if you look after yourself," said Manners. "Better get on the move now."

Kerr paused in the act of leaving the study.

"Rely on me!" he said. "Everything shall go without a hitch."

"Good luck!" sang out Tom Merry.

Kerr nodded, and went down into the quadrangle. Having secured himself that the coast was clear, he clambered over the school wall, and walked briskly along the road in the direction of Wayland. He strained his ears for the sound of the approaching vehicle.

Presently it came. Kerr had proceeded about a mile along the road when the char-a-banc swept into view, with a gleam of headlights.

Kerr sprang into the middle of the road, and gave a shout.

"Stop!"

The driver had to comply, or else lay himself open to a charge of manslaughter.

"What's the little game?" he demanded, peering closely at Kerr through the gloom.

"I want to borrow this char-a-banc for the evening—"

"Eh?"

"Likewise your top-coat, your hat, your goggles, and your muffler!"

"My stars! You're wanderin' in your mind, ain't you?"

"I'm quite sane. —Back up, there's a good fellow!"

"In this a Dick Turpin stunt?" asked the astonished driver. "If it is, I might tell you that you'll get no change out of me!"

Kerr went closer, and unfolded the plot.

"We want to take a rise out of the Fourth Form fellows," he explained. "This old 'bus will be quite safe in my hands. I've driven those sort of things before."

The driver gasped at Kerr's cool tone of voice.

"It—it can't be done!" he said. "I've never heard of such a thing!"

"Look here!" said Kerr. "I've plied myself to carry this through, and if I fail to bag the char-a-banc I shall never be able to look anybody in the face again. Come, take a spot!"

The driver seemed to be wavering.

"Pr'aps this will help you to make up your mind," said Kerr, handing over a Treasury note.

The man grinned.

"Done!" he said, at last. "You'd better give me your name, in case anything should happen to the char-a-banc. I'm responsible for it, you know."

"I'm Kerr, of the New House at St. Jim's. And I'll undertake to see that the 'bus is brought back to the garage to-night."

"If it isn't," said the driver, "it will cost me my job."

"Is your mind at rest, old sport," said Kerr.

And he proceeded to don the driver's heavy coat over his Etons.

With the addition of the hat and the goggles, and the muffler drawn up over his chin, Kerr felt that he would pass muster. It was extremely unlikely that Jack Blake & Co. would smell a rat.

"How do I look?" he asked.

"O.K.," said the driver. "You're sure you can manage the job all right! It's a dark night, and there are some tricky corners."

"I know every inch of the road for miles," said Kerr. "Don't you worry. I should hop home, if I were you. Rather chilly hanging about without a top-coat, eh?"

"I guess it won't take me long to get indoors," said the driver. "I live just as handy. What time can I expect the char-a-banc to be returned?"

"About ten," said Kerr.

"Right ho! You'll find me at the garage when you bring it back. So long!"

"So long!" said Kerr.

The driver looked anxiously at the New House juniors, took his seat at the steering-wheel. But any doubts he might have entertained as to Kerr's driving abilities were soon dispelled. The char-a-banc was maneuvered skillfully along the narrow road, to be swallowed up at length in the darkness.

"I oughtn't to have done it," reflected the driver, as he set off homevards. "But the kid seems all right. He's got nerve enough, anyway. Jolly good luck to him!"

As Kerr swung through the open gateway of St. Jim's, he discovered a group of impatient Fourth-Formers.

"You're late!" growled Jack Blake, as Kerr slowed up. "The arrangement was for six-thirty, and it's jolly nearly seven."

"Yess, wathah! We demand an explanation from you, my man," said Arthur-Augustus D'Arce.

The driver mumbled something inaudible.

"I believe you have been drinkin' your wascal!" said the swell of St. Jim's sternly.

"Rats! I—I mean, I'm a teetotaler," said Kerr, in a gruff voice, "I was delayed on the road."

"Well, buck up, for goodness' sake!" said Herries. "There's a crowded house waiting to see us in Wayland."

The juniors clambered into the char-a-banc. They would not have swarmed in with such eager haste had they known their driver and their destination.

Kerr chuckled softly to himself in the darkness, and drove off in the direction of Wayland.

Snatches of the Fourth-Formers' conversation came to his ears from time to time.

"We've left the Shell standing!" said Jack Blake.

"Yes, rather!"

"Tom Merry & Co. will have to sing small after this," chuckled Digby. "He quite thought he was going to cut us out, but he didn't realize what he was up against."

"People who try to pit their brains against ours," said Herries, "usually get it in the neck!"

"Anybody seen Tom Merry & Co. this evening?" asked Levison.

Nobody had.

"I expect they've got on clean collars and things, and come along to see the show like well-behaved little boys," said Digby. "Well, we won't disappoint them. There's some ripping turns."

"Jolly comfortable 'bus this," said Jack Blake, settling himself in his seat.

"Your remittance came just at the right moment, Gussy."

The char-a-banc swept along at a good pace. The lights of Wayland loomed up, glimmered on either side for a moment, and were gone again.

"Hallo!" exclaimed Dick Julian suddenly, sitting bolt upright in his seat.

"We've gone past the Public Hall! We've left the High Street behind! Hi, driver! What's the little game? Stop, you madman!"

#### CHAPTER 8.

#### Bowled Out!

"STOP!" bawled the rest of the juniors, how thoroughly alarmed.

Kerr's only answer was to quicken his pace.

The spirit of adventure had him fairly in its grip, and he was enjoying himself immensely.

Something like a panic broke out inside the vehicle.

"The frillah's off his wockah!" "O'er drunk!"

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"Stop him!"

Jack Blake grew almost purple. He leaned over the side of the char-a-banc, and flourished his fist at the driver.

"Stop, you thundering idiot! Show up, you fat-headed chump! Do you realize that we've left Wayland miles behind!"

Kerr bent his head closer to the steering-wheel and made no response. He was playing his part well, glancing at his watch, he realized that in a very short time Tom Merry & Co. would commence the Victory Concert, with their rivals well out of the way.

Part of the audience would be expecting the Fourth, but they would get the Shell instead, and some of them would not be sorry. Tom Merry & Co. were experts in the art of fun-making.

Meanwhile, the fellows in the char-a-banc writhed and chafed. They could not get sufficiently near to the driver to stop him; neither could they alight from the vehicle, for it was now speeding along at a corking pace.

"This is the absolute giddy limit!" said Digby. "What can we do?"

"Nothing—except wait," said Jack Blake. "My hat! We'll make this tame lunatic of a driver go through the mill when we get hold of him!"

"Just think of it," said Herries, his voice rising almost to a scream. "A crowded house waiting for us, and everything ready—except the performers!"

"It's awful!"

The driver continued to forge merrily ahead. He must have heard the outspoken threats of his passengers, but he didn't seem to mind.

"It is never going to stop!" gasped Levison. "We must be nearly over the Buxex border by this time!"

When the driver did stop at last the juniors hadn't the remotest idea of their whereabouts. They had left the familiar district around St. Jim's miles and miles behind.

As soon as the char-a-banc jolted to a halt the exasperated passengers swarmed out into the roadway.

Jack Blake was almost weeping with rage and chagrin.

"You—you—" he spluttered, clenching his fists and glaring at the driver—"you'll be lynched for this!"

"Pleasant evening, isn't it?" said the driver cheerfully. "Hope you've enjoyed your ride, young gentlemen!"

"You faithful wretch!"

"Collar him!" yelled Blake.

Kerr realized that the jape had reached a stage where his own personal safety was involved. But he had plenty of pluck, and was quite prepared to pay the piper. He would get a rough handling was certain, but he had the satisfaction of knowing that he had kept his compact.

The infuriated juniors closed in upon him, and he set his teeth and prepared to face the music.

"Have you anything to say for yourself, you villain?" asked Arthur-Augustus D'Arce.

The driver wagged his head. Jack Blake ran forward, and seized him by the muffler. Then he pulled off his hat, and gave a shout of rage and astonishment.

"My hat! It's Kerr!"

Angry exclamations arose from the baffled juniors.

"Spoofted!" yelled Herries.

"Diabed, diddled, and done!" fumed Levison. "Oh, you bouncer! Tom Merry put you up to this!"

Kerr grinned ruefully. The fat was in the fire now with a vengeance.

"You must admit you walked into the trap very nicely," he said. "I had you on a string."



"And we'll have you on a stretcher for playing this idiotic jape!" growled Jack Blake. "You've mucked up the Victory Concert!"

"Set your little minds at rest," said Kerr coolly. "The Victory Concert won't suffer. The Shell are well away with it by this time. I should think."

"Oh, my aunt!"

"That was the last straw. The Fourth-Formers could have kicked themselves for having played into the hands of the show so easily."

"But," gasped Kerr. "Don't come in a crowd like that. Fair play's best!"

The Fourth-Formers were exasperated beyond measure. They proceeded to express their feelings by bumping the driver until he asked in every breath:

"Ow-ow-ow!" grunted Kerr. "You demons! You've busted my ribs, I think!"

"Serve you jolly well right!"

"What's to be done now, dear boys?" asked Arthur Augustus D'Arcy.

"There's only one thing for it," said Blake. "We must bump back to Wayland in record time, and step those Elbell bouncers."

"But we can't!" said Herries. "The show will be nearly over by the time we've tramped all those miles!"

"We're not going to tramp, fadhead! If Kerr can drive a blessed char-a-banc, I can, too. Hop in, you fellows! There's no time to waste."

"You can't take that 'bos!" shouted Kerr. "It's in my charge!"

"Brrrr!"

The angry Fourth-Formers clambered into the vehicle, and with a good deal of difficulty Jack Blake managed to tow it round in the roadway. Then he drove away at a reckless pace, hoping against hope that the Shell would yet be prevented from giving the Victory Concert.

The unhappy Kerr rose nastily to his feet, and watched the lights of the char-a-banc disappearing in the dim distance.

He was powerless to prevent the action Blake had taken. Still, he had done his best, and that knowledge consoled him slightly as he brushed the dust from his clothes and started on the long, long tramp to Wayland.

## CHAPTER 9.

## Hammer-and-Tongs!

THE Public Hall at Wayland was packed to overflowing.

St. Jim's had turned up to a man to witness the performance.

Cousin Ethel had come over, too, at the special request of Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. She expressed surprise at the non-appearance of Jack Blake & Co.

"Barely they are giving the concert!" she exclaimed.

"Ahem!"

"The arrangements have been slightly altered," said Tom Merry.

"And who are running the show?"

"Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, as usual, but he's awfully backed if you'd believe it for us," threw in Manners.

"With pleasure!" said cousin Ethel.

"But—I don't quite understand. Where is Arthur? Where are Blake and the officers?"

"Oh, they are—otherwise engaged," said Monty Lowther. "They'll turn up later."

"If they're lanky!" murmured Tom Merry.

Cousin Ethel could see that something was amiss. She knew of the rivalry which existed between the Fourth and

the Shell, but little did she dream that at that precise moment Arthur Augustus and his chums were being whirled miles away from Wayland in a motor-char-a-banc.

Tom Merry & Co. soon got busy behind the scenes. Some of the juniors garbed themselves in pizazz costumes, and adorned their faces with grease-paint. Others hastily ran through their songs and recitations to make certain that they were word-perfect.

"I say, you fellows—"

"Billy Bunter had let himself in at the side door, and stood blinking at the juniors behind the scenes.

"Buzz off, Bunter!"

"Can't you see we're busy?"

"Look here," said Bunter, "what about your routine, Tom Merry? You said I was to give a turn at the concert."

"I said nothing of the sort. I merely promised to think it over. And, on due consideration, I've come to the conclu-

And, to the relief of the performers, he made himself scarce.

Meanwhile, the audience was washing impatiently. From the body of the hall came the incessant stamping of feet and the hum of voices.

"Back up, there!"

"Don't keep us waiting all night!"

"You're half an hour late already!"

Tom Merry was about to lead his men on to the stage when there was a sudden and unexpected stampede in the doorway, and Jack Blake & Co. came in with a rush. They were muddy and breathless and dishevelled; but they had reached the hall in time to intercept their rivals, and that was all that mattered.

"Oh, my hat!" gasped Manners in dismay. "They're here!"

"Yes, we're here!" said Jack Blake grimly. "Thought you were begging our show, did you? Well, you thought wrong. This is where the Fourth come into their own."



Blake gave Bunter a gentle shove with his boot, and the fat junior disappeared down the stairs.

sion that the audience wouldn't be much interested in an animated barrel of lard."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Billy Bunter fairly exploded.

"Beast! Rotten! Yah! I wouldn't take part in your muddy concert not if you outstayed me till you were blue in the face! I hope the audience gets you with rotten eggs!"

"Nice, charitable sort of person, isn't he?" said Monty Lowther. "Shall we flay him alive, or merely wring his neck?"

"If you won't let me give a song and dance," said Bunter, his little round eyes gleaming behind his spectacles. "I shall ask cousin Ethel if I can turn over the music for her. She'll be awfully backed. I've got a very winning ways with girls, you know."

"If you dare go within a dozen yards of cousin Ethel," said Manners. "we'll scalp you!"

"I'm jolly well coming to the end afterwards, anyway!" said Bunter.

Tom Merry's face was a picture. He saw at once that the plot had worked smoothly, and that Kerr's identity had been discovered.

At the same time, the captain of the Shell had not the slightest intention of giving in to the new-comers.

"In Cousin Ethel's hall!" asked Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, looking round.

"She's waiting for us at the piano," said Tom Merry.

"For us, you mean," said Blake.

"Eh! This is our show!"

"Care!" exclaimed the Fourth-Formers unanimously.

Several hundreds of well-shod feet continued to clump impatiently on the floor of the hall. The audience was nearing the end of its tether.

Tom Merry passed his hand perplexedly over his brow. He realised that if a pitched battle between the Shell and the Fourth took place behind the scenes

there would probably be no concert at all.

"Look here, Blake," he said, "be a sport, and let's carry the thing through now we've started."

Jack Blake shook his head stubbornly.

"Nothing doing," he said.

"You haven't a dog's chance of giving the concert."

"Neither have you, now that we're here to prevent you. It cuts both ways, doesn't it?"

Proform of the New House, who had volunteered to act as stage-manager came forward with a suggestion.

"The only way," he said, "is for the rival promoters to fight it out. If Tom Merry wins, the Shell gives the concert, if Jack Blake wins, the Fourth give it."

"That sounds fair enough," said Tom Merry, after a pause. "Are you game, Blake?"

"What do you fellows think?" asked Blake, turning to his followers.

"Go in and win!" said Digby.

"Yas, wathah!"

"All serene," said Blake. "We'll settle it that way."

Kildare of the Sixth stepped into the improvised dressing room. He was looking annoyed.

"Are you kids never going to start!" he exclaimed. "We've all fed up with waiting."

Tom Merry explained the situation to the astonished captain of St. Jim's.

"The Fourth insist on giving the show, and so do we," he said. "Consequently, I'm going to fight Jack Blake, and the winning side—"

"Wuzt!" said Monty Lowther.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Kildare looked grave.

"Can't you settle it in a lost dinner?" he asked. "I'll come along to see a concert, not a prize-fight."

"There are some boxing-gloves handy, Kildare," said Jack Blake. "Make it a six-round contest, with yourself as referee. It's no use trying to settle it any other way."

Kildare hesitated, and finally gave his consent.

"I'll explain matters to the audience," said Monty Lowther.

And he went on to the platform and faced the clamorous crowd.

"Gentlemen," he exclaimed in ringing tones, "I much regret that you have been kept waiting, but there is a difference of opinion as to who is giving this show. So Tom Merry and Jack Blake are going to fight it out here and now. It's going to be a six-round contest, and if there's no knock-out the referee will award the verdict on points."

"Hurray!"

"Take 'em come on the stage and fight!"

"Yes, rather!"

"It'll be the star turn of the evening!"

The idea of a boxing-match to start off with appealed to the audience immensely. A ringing cheer went up when the participants stepped on to the stage.

"On your knees!"

"On the ball!"

Kildare glanced at his watch.

"Ready, you two?" he asked.

The rivals nodded.

"Very well, then. Time!"

Managers and Digby, who were guarding the interests of Tom Merry and Jack Blake respectively, sprang clear, and then the fight began.

There was little to choose between the combatants. The exciting events of the evening had tired Jack Blake a little, but he was spurred on by indignation at the Shell's japs. Tom Merry was slightly shy of his feet, but at the same time, if he could only stand up to the

captain of the Shell for six rounds, giving as good as he got, he felt he had a good chance of getting the verdict.

Blake certainly delighted his backers in the first round. Twice he broke through his opponent's guard, and twice Tom Merry gasped as Blake's gloved fist thumped against his ribs.

"Beavro, Blake, deah boy!"

"Keep it up, old scout!"

But Tom Merry was too seasoned a boxer to be thrown off his balance by Blake's early success. He could take a great deal of punishment; and, although the honours of the first round rested with Blake, the Shell followers were not dismayed.

The second round was tame, both boxers seeming to hold their energies in reserve.

"Back up, there!" cried the audience impatiently.

"The lot's have some fireworks!"

The desire of the onlookers was more than gratified in the third round. Jack Blake went "all out" at his opponent, and when he landed with his left on Tom Merry's jaw—a hefty blow—the Fourth cheered loudly.

Jackie's winning all along the line, "said Herron, with great satisfaction.

"The show's over, after all!"

As if to make Herron eat his words, Tom Merry rallied. He sent Blake to his knees at the conclusion of the round, and it was an anxious moment for the Fourth. But for the call of "Time!" Blake's position would certainly have been dangerous.

Round four saw Tom Merry on the defensive. He was lasting out better than Blake, and he fought less wildly. Blake's right arm struck hard, as Blake knew to his cost.

Before that round ended the Fourth-Former had an overwhelming desire to crawl away and rest. The sea of faces in front of him, and the dazzling glow of the footlights, made him dizzy. But he held on doggedly, and he was smiling when he came up for the last round but one.

A host of in-fighting followed, in the course of which both Tom Merry and Jack Blake were too warm to be comfortable. They each had bellows to mownd when they returned to the ministrations of their seconds.

"Last round, old chap!" murmured Manors, opening his loader's heated face. "Think you can do the trick?"

"I'll have a jolly good shot at it!" replied Tom Merry cheerfully.

"Time!" rapped out Kildare.

The last round contained more thrills than all its predecessors combined. Though physically weary of the tussle, Jack Blake was an efficient fighter. His head was swimming by this time, and lights twinkled wickedly before his eyes like yill-o'-the-wiaps.

He stood his ground gamely, however, and twice Tom Merry was driven back.

But the Shell fellow was not to be denied. He came on a-raid, and smashing upper-cut, which Blake just failed to ward off, lifted the Fourth-Former off his feet, and he went to the boards with a crash.

"Hurray!"

"That's the stuff!" chorried Monty Lowther. "His number's up, now, Tommy!"

But Monty Lowther had not made sufficient allowance for Jack Blake's powers of endurance. Kildare had begun to count the Fourth-Former out, a proceeding which didn't appeal to Blake at all. He managed to struggle to his feet, and the crowd, at the same time, Tom Merry had not expected his opponent to survive that upper-cut. He

was taken by surprise, therefore, when he saw Blake come at him again.

Mustering all his remaining strength for a final blow, Jack Blake sailed in; and then, to the unbounded delight of the Fourth, the captain of the Shell roared, and measured his length on the platform.

"Hurray!"

"Well lit, Blake!"

"A knock-out, by Jove!"

But the Fourth-Former was rather premature. Tom Merry got to his feet again before Kildare could finish the count. He rushed at Blake, who shook his groin with a fagged but disapproving expression on his face. He held his own no longer. This, he told himself, was the end.

And so it was; but not the ending which Blake had anticipated.

Before Tom Merry could clinch with his opponent the referee called out "Time!" and the boxing contest was over.

The hall was in an uproar.

"How had it gone! To whom would Kildare award the verdict? It was difficult to tell who had had the best of the fighting."

"Blake faced the audience."

"The result," he announced, "is a draw!"

"My hat!"

"Honour our!"

"What's going to happen now?"

Nobody quarrelled with the verdict. It was fair enough. But the problem as to whom the referee would give the concert was still unsolved.

And unsolved it might have remained had not cousin Ethel, who had been watching the glove-fight with sparkling eyes, come to the rescue with a suggestion so simple, so natural, that the jammers could hardly resist themselves for not having thought of it before.

"Why not join forces?" she said. "Let the Shell give their best tunes, and the Fourth theirs. That would seem the fairest way."

"Weslly, Ethel," said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, "you are a most remarkable girl."

"Miss Cleveland's quite right," said Tom Merry. "We ought to amalgamate. What do you say, Blake?"

"Half a loaf's better than no bread," said Jack Blake. "I'm on!"

And the performers vanished behind the scenes, followed by a ringing cheer from the audience.

## CHAPTER 10

## Quite a Success!

FROM the outset the Victory Concert went with a swing.

The audience, once more in a good humour, applauded heartily.

Even when Arthur Augustus D'Arcy set their teeth on edge by rendering

"Yas, let me like a soddah fall," the fellows forgot to their duties at him. But they were very quick to ask for an encore.

Digby had a song with Tom Merry. It was a parody on the "Gibbet and Sullivan" song.

And when the words:

"When I was a boy and went to school, My governess wrapped me in cotton-wool.

She padded my chest with a muffer warm, And I cried when they chivied me in the dorm.

I cried and cried so effectively, That now I am the ruler of the Shell, you see!"

A roar of laughter went up at Tom Merry's expense. Cardew had evidently

heard of the celebrated occasion when Tom Merry had arrived at St. Jim's wrapped up in blankets, so to speak, by his deoting governess, Miss Priscilla Prescott.

"Digby, you ass!" muttered Tom Merry, flushing crimson. "There's no need to go ahead with that puff. Cut it out!"

But Digby proceeded merrily:

"I worked in class like a good little chap. And I figured in many a thrilling escapade. I spoke out bullies in study and in the hall."

"The fellows all voted me a young Greek god."

"I punished the rotters so relentlessly, that you know I am the ruler of the Shell, as you see!"

"The captain of the Shell, who was elected to public criticism in this form."

"I carried daggers at Digby. But that cherry youth finished his song amid loud applause."

Gardner of the Fourth had composed quite a number of doggerel effusions, mainly concerning the Shell. The efforts were crude—for Gardner wasn't a poet—but they always "got there." In fact, the Fourth turned, the Fourth seemed to be scolding all the boys.

Presently, however, Monty Lowther came into the limelight with a ditty of his own, and the satires of the Fourth were reciprocated with interest.

"There's a cheeky young dog in the Fourth, Who is monarch of all he surveys;

He's as green as a leek in there, a kink in his eye, And in Bedlam he'd finish his days.

He's at war with the Shell, naughty lad! But finds it a grievous mistake;

You're right in assuming he's mad, For the name on his collar is—Blake!"

"My hat!" exclaimed Jack Blake, springing to his feet. "That's what!"

"You must admit it's true to life, old chap!" chuckled Herries, who, although a staunch supporter of Blake, had rather enjoyed Lowther's verse.

Jack Blake snorted.

"I'll be damned!"

But before the dominant leader of the Fourth could make his intentions clear Monty Lowther had well away with the second stanza.

"There's a fellow who escaped from the Zoo, He caught his foot in a chain; If he burned his shins, no pain would mourn him."

"It certainly gives 'em a fall! He's a chap to avoid after dark, For his face isn't handsome like Merry's;

He's a very misguided young spark, And the name on his collar is—Herries!"

The audience, long since fed up with Herries' earnest, shouted their approval.

Herries jumped up, with a murderous expression on his face.

"Lowther, you beast!" he shouted. "I'll jolly well screw you for this!"

"Bai Jove! Lowther was certainly wicket on the wicket that time, Herries!" said Arthur Augustus Di'Arcy.

Herries scowled, and Monty Lowther went ahead with his song.

"There's a dandy of whom you have heard;

His spats are a dream of delight. His best Sunday topper, if seen by a copper,

Would get him arrested on sight. His socks are of brilliant hue,

His tastes are fastidious and fussy; I would add that, between me and you,

The name on his collar is—Gussy!"

It was Gussy's turn to look blue. The sentiments of that verse didn't appeal to him in the least. He screwed his famous monocle into his eye, and regarded Monty Lowther with a severity which should have checked Monty's flow of song. But it didn't. The humorist of the Shell went on, cheerfully slanging the leading lights of the Fourth in turn.

The evening wore on merrily. The

show. But it seems that they've got a finger in the pie after all."

Figgins described the events of the evening—how Tom Merry had boxed a six-round contest with Jack Blake without forcing a decision, and how cousin Ethel had proposed the linking of forces.

"You've missed the best part of the show," said Fatty Wynn.

"So long as I've missed Gussy's tender side, I'm happy!" grinned Kerr.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"By the way," said Kerr suddenly. "do you fellows happen to know what became of the char-a-banc? I promised to take it back to the garage."

"Blake saw to that all right," said Figgins.

"Good! I was beginning to think it had done the disappearing trick."

"Hallo!" said Fatty Wynn at length. "Lowther's taking cousin Ethel's place at the piano. What's the game?"

"Cousin Ethel's going to give us a song," said Figgins.

"Hurrah!"

Gussy's girl cousin was the possessor of a splendid voice—neither powerful nor penetrating, but very clear and arresting for all that. The audience cheered her to the echo, and an encore was demanded and given.

When the next item was about to be rendered, a plaintive voice came from one of the front seats.

"I say, you fellows—"

"Dry up, Bunter!"

"Suffocate him, somebody!"

"I say, it's time this show was finished!" said Bunter, standing up in his place and blinking protestingly at the performers.

"I'm jolly peckish, I can tell you! Cut out the rest of the programme, and let's get on with the food. That's fair, isn't it?"

"Listen to all this piffle on an empty stomach!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Levison major came forward on the platform.

"Hold on, Bunter!" he said. "There's a little recitation that I want to get off my chest before we finish. It's an ode to a prize porker—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Bunter tried to protest, but the fellows were him promptly set on him. And Levison went ahead with his recitation.

"Who's always getting in the way? By spying outside study doors?"

"Who wakes the echoes with his snores!"

"Why, Bunter!" came in a chorus from the rest of the concert-party.

"Who frequently gets killed and slushed? Who roars—? Er—By he's squashed—As much as the Great Unwashed!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Why, Bunter!" yelled everybody.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I say, you fellows, that's piling it on too thick, you know!" gurgled Bunter.

"Gerroff no chest, Durrance, you heastly Hun! Yaroooooop!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"On the ball, Levison!"

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Victory Concert was three-parts through when a forlorn and dusty junior stag raved into the hall. It was Kerr of the New House.

"Kerr had experienced a very sorry time of it. The events of that evening were likely to rankle long in his memory. From that remote country spot where he had come to grief, he had made a weary journey back to civilization. A good-natured farmer had given him a lift part of the way in a trap; but most of the route had been covered on foot. At the sight of the Shell fellows on the platform, however, Kerr forgot his weariness and discomfort, and cheered as heartily as any in the audience. He had feared that Jack Blake & Co. would have begged the show, in which case all his efforts would have been wasted.

Figgins and Fatty Wynn beckoned to Kerr, and he squeezed himself into a seat in between them.

"My hat!" said Figgins. "You look fairly fagged, old man! What happened?"

"Blake twiggid my di-guise," said Kerr ruefully. "I thought it would be all up with the Shell's chances of giving the

"Ha, ha, ha!"

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"Who frequently gets killed and slushed? Who roars—? Er—By he's squashed—As much as the Great Unwashed!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Why, Bunter!" yelled everybody.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I say, you fellows, that's piling it on too thick, you know!" gurgled Bunter.

"Gerroff no chest, Durrance, you heastly Hun! Yaroooooop!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"On the ball, Levison!"

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"Who at one sitting scooped a ham,  
Six doughnuts, and a jar of jam?  
Then said 'How jolly then I am!'"  
"Why Bunter?"  
"Good old grandmamma!"  
"It ain't fair!" booted Bunter, wroth  
himself free from his tormentors.  
"It's libel! I'll tell Railton! I'll complain to the Head!"  
"Ha, ha, ha!"

Lorison finished his recitation to the accompaniment of loud laughter from the audience and withdrew from Bunter.

A few more songs followed, terminating in a grand chorus; and the Victory Concert, voted by everybody to be one of the biggest successes of the term, was over.

As the members of the audience filed out of the hall a final cheer went up for the benefit of the promoters—a cheer which rang very pleasantly in the ears of the performers in general, and Tom Merry and Jack Blakie in particular.

#### CHAPTER II.

##### Bunter Dictates His Terms.

BILLY BUNTER rolled out of the Public Hall well in advance of the others.

The fat junior was feeling extremely annoyed.

Contented, as a rule, was wasted upon Bunter; but Lorison's song had hit him home. Bunter had been the laughing-stock of the audience, and he had resented it keenly.

Another reason for his annoyance was that Tom Merry had, in Bunter's opinion, played him a shabby trick. Bunter had expected to be the "star turn" of the evening. He had looked forward with intense delight to holding the audience spellbound by his own wit and on the stage. Yet, when he had approached Tom Merry behind the scenes, the captain of the Shell had curtly sent him about his business.

All along the line Billy Bunter had received more kicks than pennies. His luck had been out at every turn.

But he meant to score at the finish. He would show these St. Jim's fellows that he was not the sort of person to take things lying down. He would get his own back. And the more he thought about it the more Bunter's little round eyes gleamed behind his spectacles.

The fat junior had heard of course, full details of the magnificent spread which was to follow the Victory Concert. He knew that the choicest dishes and the most tempting viands had been set out in the junior common-room for the benefit of the performers, and he meant to be in at the death, so to speak.

Bunter had already mapped out in his mind a plan of campaign. He would scotch back to St. Jim's with all speed, take possession of the junior common-room, and hold the fort against all comers.

It was a daring venture, especially for a fellow not given to daring actions, but William George Bunter was very determined on this occasion.

He emerged into the street, and looked round.

Wayland slept peacefully under the stars. Hardly a light was visible in the houses, and the old-fashioned High Street was almost deserted.

Outside the Public Hall stood a number of bicycles belonging to the St. Jim's fellows. Bunter meant to bag

them. He had no time to pick and choose, for the fellows were already beginning to stream out from the main exit.

Bunter seized the first machine which

came to hand. It was the property of Knox of the Sixth, and Knox himself happened just in time to see the fat junior calmly wheeling his machine into the middle of the road and preparing to mount it.

"Bunter," he roared, "come back, you fat thief!"

But Bunter had no intention of falling into the hands of the Philistines.

With great difficulty—the machine was too big for him—he pedalled away in the direction of St. Jim's.

"Stop him!" yelled Knox excitedly, as a crowd of fellows rushed up to see what was going on. "Bunter's boned my bike! After him, some of you kids!"

"After him yourself!" growled Jack Blakie. "We're not doing any peripateticizing on your account."

Knox scowled.

"I'll deal with you later, Blakie," he said.

Then, turning to the row of bicycles, Knox selected the most reliable-looking of those which happened to be Kildare's—and rode full tilt after Bunter.

"Go it, Knox!"  
"Lot it rip!"  
"Two to one on Bunter!"

The perfect gritted his teeth, and rode on.

His task of catching Bunter was not an easy one. The road took several sharp turns, and Bunter had no lights on his machine.

After five minutes' hard riding, however, Knox distinguished a shadowy figure in front. He gained upon it rapidly, and then, to his satisfaction, he heard the laboured grunting of Billy Bunter as the latter prepared to tackle a short hill.

"Got you, you young cub!" snarled Knox. "It's no use your going on."

But Knox spoke too soon.

There was a sudden report, and the perfect's back tyre dragged in the dust.

Knox uttered a savage imprecation. He was banished of his prey, after all!

Billy Bunter chuckled, and rode on into the darkness.

He had left Knox behind, and so far as he knew, there were no more pursuers.

All the same, Bunter was not enjoying himself. He had to stretch his fat little legs to their fullest extent in order to ride Knox's machine at all, and he was swaying from side to side in a most perilous manner.

Presently St. Jim's came in sight, and Bunter quickened his pace. At the same moment the rays of a halcyon lantern flashed across the fat junior's path.

"Wot's all this 'ere!" demanded a gruff voice. "Young rip! Which I'll save the lor on yer for reckless ridin', to say nothin' of bein' without lights!"

With a startled gasp, Billy Bunter recognised the portly form of P.-C. Crump, who was returning home from his boat.

Bunter dared not stop. For all he knew, the night watch might have sounded his puncture, and renewed the chase.

Straining over the handle-bars, Bunter rode on.

"Get out of the way," he yelled, "or I'll run you down!"

The representative of the law promptly skipped to one side; but Mr. Crump was less agile than in the days of his youth. Bunter's front wheel cannoned into his leg, and he went sprawling in the roadway.

Bunter himself nearly swerved into the bank opposite; but he righted himself in the nick of time, and scrooped on to St. Jim's.

The gates were open, for Taggles had

been instructed not to close them until all the fellows were back from Wayland. Bunter went whirling through into the quadrangle.

The fat junior was fagged out by this time. The ride had taxed his physical energies to the full.

Hurling Knox's bike at the foot of the School House steps, Bunter puffed his way along to the junior common-room.

"This was only just in time, as it happened."

Several of the performers had returned from Wayland on their bicycles, and the footsteps and voices were audible in the passage before Billy Bunter had time to take stock of the numerous good things with which the tables were stacked.

"This way for the feed!" said a voice which Bunter recognised as Lowther's.

"The Fourth are coming along with cousin Ethel," said Tom Merry.

"We can wire in and do any cooking that's necessary."

"Oh, can you?" murmured Bunter. "I think I've got a say in that, Tom Merry!"

So saying, the fat junior hurried to the door and locked it on the inside.

Someone turned the handle the next instant; but the door refused to budge.

"Hallo!" said Talbot. "Something's gone wrong with the works!"

There was a impatient hum of voices from without. A crowd of juniors thumped and hammered for admission.

"Who's in there!"

"We want to come in!"

"Buck up and open this door!"

A fat chuckle came from within.

"My hat!" exclaimed Tom Merry.

"It's Bunter!"

There was a roar from the rest of the juniors.

"Bunter!"

"How going to woff our feed!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" cackled Bunter, through the keyhole. "This is where I smile! You fellows thought you were going to do me out of the feed, but you thought wrong! I'm going to pile in in a minute, as soon as I've got my bearings. I'll tell you what the stuff tastes like!"

"Let us in, you fat worm!" roared Tom Merry.

"Not this evening," said Bunter. "Some other evening!"

The crowd in the passage exchanged significant glances.

"We shall have to bust the door in," said Manners.

Tom Merry shook his head.

"Can't kick up such a shindy at this time of night," he said. "Besides, cousin Ethel will be along in a jiffy. That fat beast has got us in his power!"

Bunter certainly held all the cards. He was the man in possession. He knew that the juniors could not resort to violent measures, in the circumstances, and he felt confident that he could keep them at bay just as long as he chose.

"Bunter, you beast!"

"Bunter, you fat worm!"

"We'll jolly you for this later on!"

"Open this door, you fat worm!"

Bunter paid no heed to these angry exclamations. He was feeling very peckish, and contemplated making a start on the good things.

Reinforcements arrived in the passage. The Fourth-Formers, in company with cousin Ethel, had come on the scene. They listened in amazement as Tom Merry explained that Bunter was holding the fort against all comers.

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy rapped sharply on the door.

"Buntah! I must request you to unlock this door at once! Cousin Ethel is here!"

"Sorry, Gussy, old pal," said Bunter. "But I really can't let you in—except on two conditions."

"What are they?" demanded Jack Blake.

"Firstly, that I'm allowed as much grub as I can tackle; and, secondly, that you fellows will keep your paws off me."

"Done!" said Tom Merry.

"It's the only way," he added, turning to the crowd. "Better than kicking our heads here indefinitely."

The others agreed.

"That's a promise, mind!" came Bunter's voice. "You won't stop me from going to my heart's content! And you fellows may so much as a finger on me!"

"Growned Tom Merry."

Bunter unlocked the door, and the masters crowded into the Common-

They glared at Bunter as if they would like to dribble him round the room. But they had given their promise; and they consoled themselves with the knowledge that Knox of the Sixth owed Bunter a little debt, and would probably pay it in full!

"Make yourselves at home!" said Bunter, his fat face beaming like a full moon.

"Weally, Buntah, I wegard you as bein' absolutely outside the pale!" said Arthur Augustus severely. "We promised not to touch you, p'vided you let us in; but if you start makin' yourself objectionable in the presence of cousin Ethel, we shall have no option but to kick you out!"

"Hear, hear!"

"I vote we give Bunter his share of the feed, and let him have it on the mat!" said Monty Lowther. "Can't let him give an exhibition of a South Sea Island cannibal in here!"

"Look here," said Bunter wrathfully, "you made me a solemn and sacred promise—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Oh, let him stay!" said cousin Ethel, laughing. "In Bunter's case, absence coukin't possibly make his heart grow fonder. And, after all, he had a very sorry time of it at the concert."

So the juniors, who always paid heed to cousin Ethel's wishes, gave in; and Bunter stayed!

## CHAPTER 12.

## A Feast of the G &amp; I!

IT was a very merry gathering. The united efforts of the Fourth and the Sixth had produced the happiest results; and the leaders of the two Forms, their rivalry forgotten for the time being, laughed and chatted together in high good humour.

In the junior Common-room, the accommodation of a study being too limited, the bumper repast was prepared, and the performers were present to a man.

Figgins and Kerr and Fatty Wynn had been invited, too, to the unbounded delight of the Falstaff of the New House, who declared that his appetite had seldom been in better trim.

Cousin Ethel, who had agreed to spend a short stay at the school as the guest of the Head's wife, occupied the place of honour at the head of the long table, and the Terrible Three, loyally assisted by Jack Blake & Co., worked like niggers to see that everyone was well supplied with good things.

"How's the rabbit-pie going, Monty?" asked Tom Merry.

"Ripping!" said Lowther. "It's looking healthy and sunburnt already!"

"That means you're burning it, you duffer!" said Fatty Wynn, starting to his feet. "I'll give you a hand with it. There's nothing I don't know about warming up rabbit-pies!"

"Or stowing 'em away!" chuckled Monty Lowther.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Oh, my hat!" murmured Bunter. "What a stupping spread!"

With bulging eyes the fat junior gazed upon the tempting viands. There was the rabbit-pie—a dish fit for a King, as Fatty Wynn expressed it, there was cold fowl and venison; and on the serving-tables there were peaches and prunes and pineapple, and the choicest assortment of pastries which Bunter ever remembered to have seen. Stone bottles of ginger-pop were ranged like miniature forts at intervals down the long table.

Billy Bunter smacked his lips. The quality of the food seemed excellent; and even with the quantity he could find no fault. There was sufficient to satisfy the cravings of a dozen Bunters—and that was saying a good deal.

"I say, you fellows—"

Bunter's voice broke in upon the conversation of the feasters.

"Hand me over that toasting-fork, Tommy!" said Monty Lowther.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Look here," said Bunter wrathfully,

"it was downright beastly of you fellows to start without me! You don't know how to treat an old pal!"

"The nobility and gentry must be served first," said Manners.

Bunter was not allotted a seat at the long table. The juniors saw to that. But they gave him a free hand at one of the serving tables; and the brisk and effective manner in which Bunter cleared that table made every-body gasp. Bunter started on the solids, and by the time he came to the less substantial things he looked as if he might burst at any moment. His jaws put in a great deal of overtime; and the fat junior felt, as he sampled once after another, that such a grand luck-in simply atoned for all the misfortunes he had been called upon to suffer during the past few days.

"Hadin't you better draw the line somewhere, Bunter?" said Jack Rako anxiously. "You'll be too ill to turn up for lessons on Monday."

"A fat lot I care!" mumbled Bunter, bolting a huge lump of preserved ginger. "I mean to make hay while the sun shines. Goodness knows when I shall get a chance like this again!"

"Ho, ha, ha!"

Bunter was not the only person who enjoyed himself that evening. The rest of the fellows kept high revel; though they were careful not to gorge to such a dangerous extent as Bunter. How the fat junior would eventually manage to drag himself up to his dormitory was a mystery. He grew more and more drowsy as his tremendous orgy progressed, until finally he curled up in his seat and sank into slumber, with a smile of placid contentment on his jumpy and greasy face.

His arms were crossed in the region of the waistcoat, and he was at peace with the world.

"Least Academy picture—the End of a Perfect Day!" said Monty Lowther.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The celebrations drew to a close. Toasts were proposed, and honoured with acclamation; and the faces of the feasters glowed happily in the ruddy light.

Everybody agreed that the banquet was one of the best and jolliest ever held within the historic walls of St. Jim's; and everybody agreed, also, that it formed a fitting climax to the brief but exciting feud of the Rival Entertainers.

THE END.

(Don't miss next Wednesday's Great Story of Tom Merry & Co. at St. Jim's—"BUNTER THE BILLIONAIRE!"—by Martin Clifford.)

## "THE SCAPEGRACE OF REDCLYFFE!"

A Grand New School Story of the Chums of Redclyffe.

By HERBERT BRITTON.

STARTS ON  
MONDAY—  
DON'T  
MISS IT!

IN NEXT  
MONDAY'S  
"BOYS'  
FRIEND"



# THE MADNESS OF COKER

Specialty contributed to "The Greyfriars Herald." By GEORGE BLUNDELL

**H**ORACE JAMES COKER, the bright particular star of the Fifth, has lately yet tumbled to the fact that the name of the shipper of the Fifth is George Blundell—not Horace James Coker. He has also got to learn that the Form folder chosen has no use for fellows who put the leather through their own team's goal.

But this is by the way. The yarn which I am now cosubscribing to write for the "Greyfriars Herald" concerns Coker's adobe habit of perverting the English language. He can't spell for tiffin, and sometimes—especially when under a strain of great emotion—he misses out letters, or even whole words, and spoils the sense of the thing—if anything written by Coker could possibly have any sense at all!

Take a case in point. The other day Coker wrote to his Aunt Judy—well I had an aunt like her, by the way—and said if she'd kindly arrange to let him have a pond, as he wished to entertain some of his schoolfellows. He really meant "pond," of course. But Aunt Judy, thinking he wanted to indulge in open-air bathing, wrote me about the Head if he could possibly place one of the local ponds at her nephew's disposal!

That affair was soon put right; but close upon its heels came another incident, which scared the life out of Coker's valiant horsemen, Potter and Greene.

It was in this wise. Coker had somehow caught a crass for cooking—and when Coker sets a crass of this sort there are usually unpleasant results in store for Potter and Greene. The present case was no exception.

When Potter and Greene went along to the study one evening to join Coker in a feed, they found he had been busy cooking apple-dumplings. The recipe for the dumplings was supplied by Coker's own valiant brain. He scoured such artificial aids as "Mrs. Boston's Cookery Book."

"You're just in time," said Coker, when Potter and Greene came in. "I've found some nasty things about my steak-pudding yesterday, but you can't find fault with these apple-dumplings. They're above suspicion."

"Eh?" gasped Potter.

"Nasty things?" growled Greene.

"What was that?" demanded Coker sharply.

"Ahem! I—I was just saying that they were fit for kings!" stammered Greene.

"Of course they are! In fact, they don't get grub like this in the Royal Household every day. Fit in, you chap! The dumplings are done to a turn."

Coker looked down to a table, also. His face was red and garbled, and he looked as if he had been trying to roast himself.

Potter and Greene died in. To their everlasting regret, they devoured those dumplings. The apples were raw, and the crass—well, mere words would cover a long way short of describing that crass!

Coker's chums were already off-colour as a result of sampling his steak-pudding. By the time they had finished those dumplings they were something more than off-colour. They were desperately sick.

"Over" muttered Potter. "I've got a pain!"

"Same here," faltered Greene. "Coker, you thumping ass, I believe you've poisoned us!"

Coker started up in wrath.

"It's like you to look a gift horse in the mouth!" he roared. "Why, those dumplings were prime!"

"Good!" You'll swing for this!" gasped Potter. "I feel awful! I'll never feed in this study again—if I survive, that is."

"No-my hair!" spluttered Coker. "If that isn't black ingratitude! I should jolly well like to know what all! Come back, you silly name!"

But Potter and Greene were fed up with Coker, and fed up—in more senses than one—with Coker's apple-dumplings. They had stood a great deal from Coker of late, and they wanted nothing more to do with him—until he had got over his cooking crass, anyway.

So they came along to my study—No. 1 in the Fifth Form passage—and asked if they could make it their home for the time being.

"It will be a tight squeeze," I said, "but if Blundell doesn't mind you can dig it here for a bit."

"Welcome," said Blundell.

No Coker was left to sample his unmarvellous dishes alone. He came along to No. 1 next day to take Potter and Greene back to the fold, but they wouldn't budge. They ignored Coker's presence entirely—sent him to Coventry, in fact. These apple-dumplings had caused trouble in the family with a vengeance!

Matters went on like this for three days. When Potter and Greene encountered Coker in the passage they cut him dead. Coker was awfully ratty about it at first, and he offered to meet his former study-mates in

(Continued on Col. 1, Page 12.)

## TEN LITTLE DUFFER BOYS.

- Ten little duffer boys, all neat and fine; Guilty led his head six hat, and then there were nine.
- Nine little duffer boys, writing on a slate; Coker couldn't spell at all, and then there were eight.
- Eight little duffer boys planned a trip to Devon; Wynon got very sea-sick, and then there were seven.
- Seven little duffer boys got into a fix; Grandy tried to think it out, and then there were six.
- Six little duffer boys—only six alive—Sixtyn turned Paethel, and then there were five.
- Five little duffer boys—there weren't any more—Fivey yawned and stretched himself, and then there were four.
- Four little duffer boys had a war-dogs tea; Six Jimmy swallowed aspirates, and then there were three.
- Three little duffer boys—so very, very few—Two Long couldn't "navy" it, and then there were two.
- Two little duffer boys—the life is nearly done—Dutton heard wrong, lost his "rag," and then there was one.
- One little duffer boy was left when all had gone. Alburn tried to pack his trunk, and then there were none.

## TEN LITTLE SCHOLAR BOYS.

- Ten little scholar boys in swotting did combine; One didn't Xerr for Latin, and then there were nine.
- Nine little scholar boys studied Greek till late; One really couldn't Breek it, and then there were eight.
- Eight little scholar boys had singing at eleven; One found he couldn't Mark the time, and then there were seven.
- Seven little scholar boys heard all about the Styr; Brody yawned, he felt the stick, so then there were six.
- Six little scholar boys at "angles" did arrive; Pashid, he got "stuck" on one, and then there were five.
- Five little scholar boys read German—what a bore!—One who would will this case!" signed one, and then there were four.
- Four little scholar boys from lessons tried to flee; The master heard one Rassel (ruffin), and then there were three.
- Three little scholar boys were learning "the song"; Lawrence wished enfranchisement from, and then there were two.
- Two little scholar boys thought Mappin was their foe; One flew away on a Red wing, and then there was one.
- One little scholar boy was left when all had gone; He tried to work in Ernest, and then there were none.

Contributed by MONTY LOWTHER of St. Jim's.



