

Billy Bunter's Christmas Dream!

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Double Length Tale of **Christmas** Double Number *the Chums of Greyfriars*



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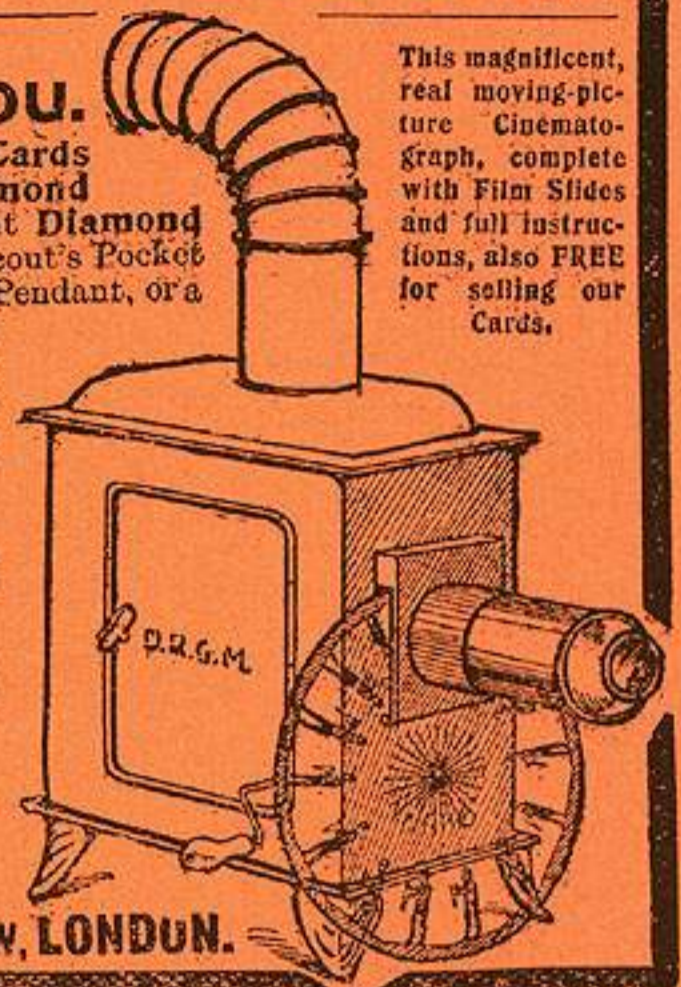


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A Happy Christmas to all my Readers—Editor.

Billy Bunter's Christmas Dream



A Double-Length, Complete School Tale of Harry Wharton & Co.

BY FRANK RICHARDS

THE FIRST CHAPTER.
Billy Bunter has a Little Scheme.

“CHRISTMAS!”
 “Yes.”
 “But it isn’t Christmas yet—”
 “I know it isn’t,” said Billy Bunter, sitting upright in the armchair in No. 1 Study in the Remove passage at Greyfriars. “I never said it was. But Christmas is coming—”
 “So is bedtime,” said Harry Wharton, with a glance at the clock on the mantelpiece; “and if you talk much longer, Bunt, we sha’n’t get our prep. done. We’ve left it very late as it is.”
 “Never mind the prep.—”

“Mr. Quelch will mind in the morning,” said Harry, laughing. “Never mind Christmas. Why, it’s some time yet before we break up for the holidays.”
 “Yes; I know that, and therefore—”
 “Oh, cheese it!” said Frank Nugent, dipping his pen in the ink. “You’re like the little brook, Bunter—you go on for ever.”
 Bunter blinked at Nugent through his spectacles. He was in a state of simmering indignation, but he managed to keep his temper. It wasn’t pleasant for a fellow who was making plans for the general happiness of the study to be sat upon in this way. Bunter was always being sat upon, but he was always objecting to the process, too. Nugent said that some fellows were never satisfied, and Bunter was one of them.
 “The go-on-for-ever-fulness is terrific,” murmured Hurree Jamsset Rara Singh, in his expressive variety of English, learned under the best tutors in the land of Bhanipur. “It would be an esteemed and boonful blessing if the excellent Bunter would hold his honourable jaw.”
 “I say, you fellows—”
 “Order!”
 “But it’s rather important, you know. It’s because Christmas isn’t here yet that I want to explain. You see, a Christmas pudding—”
 “No, I don’t see one.”
 “Do let me finish. A Christmas pudding is an important

matter. I've got a beautiful recipe, and I am a good cook. You'll admit that I cook jolly well?"

"Yes; and eat better than you cook."

"Oh, really, Nugent! You see, if you fellows would raise ten bob—I'd do it myself, only I've been disappointed about a postal order—just ten bob, I'd have the rippingest pudding that ever—ever—"

"Ripped?"

"That ever was made or tasted. I'd take the whole of the cooking upon my hands," said Bunter generously. "You could leave the pudding entirely to me."

"I expect you'd have the lion's share, anyway."

"I didn't mean that. I mean you could leave the cooking entirely to me. A hot Christmas pudding is just the thing, you know. I know it isn't Christmas yet, but it's Christmas weather. You can't deny that."

A terrific gust of wind shook the window as Bunter spoke and certainly bore out his words.

There was a storm upon the North Sea that evening, and even from Greyfriars the sound could be heard of the great billows dashing upon the rocks of the Shoulder.

The usually calm bay was foaming and whirling, and great breakers rolled shoreward, and spray lashed up over the slate roofs of Cliff House, which was nearer to the sea than Greyfriars.

In the Greyfriars Close, the old elms, long stripped of their last leaves, were creaking and swaying, and a groaning bough was scraping at the window of No. 1 Study with its outermost twigs.

The chums of the Remove paused for a few moments to listen to the storm. The wind was howling round the roofs of Greyfriars and singing in the old, wide chimneys.

Billy Bunter thought he had made an impression upon the Greyfriars chums, and he proceeded eloquently:

"Now, you can't deny that a hot Christmas pudding would be ripping on a night like this. I've got a ripping recipe. Just ten bob, and the thing's done. You just plank down ten bob, and I—"

"You walk off with it," said Nugent, "and that will be the last we shall see of it."

"But the Christmas pudding—"

"I don't suppose the Christmas pudding would ever exist outside your imagination, Bunter," said Wharton. "Give us a rest!"

"Oh, really, Wharton!"

"How the wind howls!" said Nugent, as a terrific gust rang round the old, grey building, and there was a crash of a breaking branch in the Close.

"By Jove, it does!"

"If you fellows can't trust me with money, this discussion had better cease," said Billy Bunter, with great dignity.

"A jolly sight better!" agreed Nugent. "Shut up!"

"The betterfulness would be terrific."

"I'm wasted in this study," said Bunter bitterly. "Other fellows would appreciate more what it was to have a good cook for nothing, and a fellow who's willing to spare no trouble. I've thought several times of changing out of this study into another."

"Pity you don't get further than thinking about it."

"Oh, really, Nugent—"

"Sorry for any ship on the Shoulder to-night!" said Harry Wharton, in a low voice. "Hark! You can hear the breakers!"

"Look here, Wharton!" said Bunter aggressively. "What are you going to do?"

"Oh, I'm going to do my prep.!"

Bunter rose from the armchair. He blinked at the three chums in turn, but they did not even see him; they were bent over their work, and busy.

"I thought I would give this study first chance," said Bunter.

"Declined with thanks!" said Nugent, without looking up.

"I'll go along to No. 13, and ask Bob Cherry—"

"Good! Buck up!"

"And if he won't hear of it, I'll raise a subscription in the Form, and make a big thing of it," said Bunter. "I sha'n't ask you chaps to taste the pudding."

"Horrid! Good-bye!"

Bunter blinked wrathfully. But the juniors refused to look up, and utterly declined to be disturbed by his threats, and at last he went out of the study, and slammed the door behind him with unnecessary violence.

Nugent grunted.

"I wonder if that chap ever thinks of anything but eating?" he remarked. "I think Bunter is getting more impossible every day. By George, how the wind roars!"

There was silence in the study for some time, save for the noise from without. It was a very cosy room, with the cheerful fire in the grate gleaming upon the red curtains at the window, and the dark-green patch of carpet. The juniors, with their heads bent, worked silently.

THE MAGNET.—95.

NEXT WEEK: "THE MAGNET" LIBRARY RETURNS TO USUAL SIZE AND PRICE: ONE HALFPENNY.

Suddenly Harry Wharton started up, his face pale, his eyes gleaming, his lips parted, his whole face full of strained attention.

"Hark!"

He held up his hand. His chums looked up, and listened too. From without came the roar of wind and the dash of rain against the panes, the creaking and groaning of the labouring trees.

"What was it, Harry?" asked Nugent, at last.

"Did you hear a gun?"

"A gun?"

"Yes."

Nugent shook his head, and they listened again with straining ears. They remembered an occasion before, when they had heard the minute-gun booming—a never-forgotten occasion, when Wharton had swum out to a wreck to the rescue. Was it a vessel in danger of the rocks of the Shoulder again?

But no sound came to their straining ears—no sound save the roar of the storm, the distant boom of the sea.

"You were mistaken, Harry," said Nugent, at length.

"They wouldn't give only one gun; they would keep it up."

"Unless—"

"Unless what?"

"Unless they had time only for one. You know the mists round the Shoulder in heavy rains."

Nugent shuddered.

"In that case it is all up with them."

"I suppose so."

"I don't think it was a gun, Harry. I hope it wasn't."

Harry Wharton nodded; but there was a shade on the faces of the juniors as they finished their prep. in the cosy study. While they sat there, secure within the walls of Greyfriars, in the cheery firelight, was a brave ship going to her death and doom on the savage rocks of the Shoulder, veiled by the mists of the rain?

THE SECOND CHAPTER.

A Chess Problem.

THREE juniors sat round a chess-table in the junior common-room at Greyfriars. One, a long-legged fellow, with rough hair and a frank, rugged face, was Bob Cherry, and he was playing chess with a lad who was a good foot shorter, and whose peculiar attire, equally unusual complexion, almond-eyes, and pigtail showed him to be a native of the Flowery Land. Wun Lung, the Chinese, was a great chess player, and Bob Cherry thought he knew something about the game. He was finding out now that he did not know as much as he had supposed. Mark Linley, the sturdy lad from Lancashire, was the third of the trio. He was looking on. A student of chess, he was glad to watch a good game, and this game was a good one on Wun Lung's part, if not on Bob Cherry's.

"I think I've got you now," said Bob Cherry. "I've been waiting for you to stick your queen over there, you know, and shove your king on bishop's fourth. What price moving my rook up two?"

Wun Lung smiled—that Celestial smile that was child-like and bland.

"Movee, lookee," he said.

"Wait a bit, though! Ahem! I should be leaving my king in check."

"Velly plenty muchee checkee."

"Hum! Perhaps I'd better shove the bish. on."

And Bob put out his fingers to the bishop and withdrew them again without touching it, and took another look. He had already learned that he must expect surprises in dealing with Wun Lung.

"I say, you fellows—"

Billy Bunter had just come into the common-room. He blinked round the room for some minutes, and finally spotted the chess-players. He came rolling over to the corner, and halted by the table.

"Don't talk," said Bob Cherry; "I'm playing chess!"

"Yes, but—"

"Shut up!"

"Oh, really, Cherry—"

"Kill him, Linley, old chap!"

Mark Linley smiled as Bob made that modest request. Billy Bunter started back a little, blinking at the Lancashire lad.

"Better shut up, Bunter," said Linley. "Cherry's busy."

"Look here, I've been up to No. 13 Study to speak to you chaps, and now I've taken the trouble to hunt you out here!" said Bunter, in an injured tone.

"Now go up to the study again, the 2, and stay there!"

"Oh, really, Linley—"

"Shut up!" roared Bob Cherry. "I've got this chap mate in four moves, if I'm not bothered."

"But it's important—"

"Brain him, somebody!"



"Look!" cried Tom Brown suddenly. The boat was grating on the sand, and beyond the water mark, still clinging to a broken spar, lay the figure of a man.

"It's about a Christmas pudding. I've got a scheme—"
Bob Cherry looked round wildly. There was a cushion behind him on the chair, and he grasped it.

"Will you shut up, or shall I biff you?" he shrieked. "I tell you I've got Wun Lung mate in four."

"Yes, but—"

Bob Cherry made a threatening motion with the cushion, and Bunter dodged hastily behind Bulstrode of the Remove, who had just come in. Bulstrode gave him a kick to get him out of the way, and Bunter gave a squeal. Wun Lung was grinning.

"No matee!" he remarked.

"I'm working it out," said Bob Cherry, leaning his chin on his hand, and screwing up his brows as he gazed fixedly at the chess-board. "Lemme see! Bish. to rook's fourth—then knight—ahem—rook—ahem—ah!"

"I say, Cherry—"

"Get away!" shrieked Bob Cherry. "Buzz off!"

"I've got a scheme—"

It was too much for flesh and blood to bear. Bob Cherry half started up, and grasped the cushion. With a deadly aim he hurled it at Bunter.

"Oh!" gasped Bunter.

He dodged just in time. The cushion missed him by two inches, flew past his head, and crashed on Bulstrode's ear.

"O-o-o-oh!" yelled Bulstrode.

He went spinning, and caught Hazeldene by the neck to save himself, and both of them went to the floor with a crash.

"Oh, oh, oh!"

"Yaroo!"

Hazeldene sat up, looking dazed, and Bulstrode scrambled to his feet, furious. He glared round in search of a victim, grasping the cushion.

"Bunter—"

"It wasn't me!" yelled Bunter quickly and ungrammatically.

"Who threw that cushion?" yelled Bulstrode.

"I did!" said Bob Cherry. "I didn't mean— Oh!"

"Then you can have it back again!" said Bulstrode.

And he hurled the cushion at Bob Cherry.

Bob instinctively put up his hands to protect his face, and the cushion crashed upon the chess-table. The round, one-legged table went flying, and the chess pieces scattered themselves in all quarters. Bob Cherry gave a yell of wrath.

"Ow! The chess!"

"Gamee spoilee—"

"You villain!" roared Bob. "Look at my chess! I had him mate in four!"

"No matee. Me matee in thlee," murmured Wun Lung.

"Rats!"

"Lats!"

"Look here, you heathen—"

"More lats!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Bulstrode. "Serve you jolly well right! You should be a little more careful before you sling cushions about!"

"You fathead—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I was chucking it at Bunter, and it hit you by mistake."

"Well, I was chucking it at you, and it hit the chess-table by mistake. Ha, ha, ha!"

"You cackling ass!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Stop that cackle!" roared the exasperated Bob. "Stop it, or I'll jolly soon stop it for you!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Will you shut it?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Bob wasted no more breath in words. He wanted somebody to lick, and Bunter had already scuttled off. He went for Bulstrode.

In a moment they were at it hammer and tongs, and the juniors formed a ring round them. Wun Lung began to pick up the scattered chessmen.

"Go it, Cherry!"

"Go it, Bulstrode!"

The young rascals were enjoying the fight, which lent a little agreeable variety to the evening. There was a sudden voice at the door.

"Stop that! Bed!"

It was Wingate of the Sixth, the captain of Greyfriars. The juniors crowded back, but the two combatants were too excited to see or hear.

Wingate advanced into the room and took Bob Cherry by the collar with one hand, Bulstrode by the collar with the other. In the powerful grip of the big Sixth-Former they had no chance.

With a wrench Wingate dragged them apart.

"Ow!" gasped Bob Cherry.

"Yow!" murmured Bulstrode.

"What's this about?" demanded Wingate, shaking them.

"A—a—a little argument about chess, that's all!" stammered Bob Cherry.

Wingate grinned.

"Well, you must solve your chess problems a little more quietly," he remarked, and he brought their heads together with a crack. "Now get to bed!"

Bob Cherry and Bulstrode rubbed their heads. They were very subdued as they went up to the Remove dormitory. Wharton & Co., from No. 1 Study, joined them on the stairs, having finished their prep. just in time.

"No more rowing," said Wingate significantly, at the dormitory door, "or I'll know the reason why! Get to bed!"

Bob Cherry tapped Wun Lung on the shoulder as Wingate went out.

"The game was mucked up, Wun Lung," he remarked. "I suppose you can't remember where all the pieces were, to put them back?"

Wun Lung shook his head.

"No savvy!"

"But, of course, you noticed that I was mate in four?"

Another shake of the head.

"No! Me matee in thlee!"

"Why, you young ass, I—"

"No savvy!"

"Well, of all the obstinate heathens! It was mate in four—"

"Matee in thlee!"

"Rats!"

"Lats!"

"You saw it, didn't you, Linley?"

Mark Linley shook his head.

"No, I didn't see either mate," he said, with a laugh. "I certainly didn't see any signs of yours, Bob."

"Yes, I was going to push up my bish—"

"But that would have left your queen uncovered—"

"Rats!"

Linley laughed. They tumbled into bed, and Wingate came and turned out the lights. Darkness settled over the Remove dormitory, but not silence. From without came the ceaseless boom of the storm.

From the darkness came a still, small voice.

"I say, you fellows—"

"By Jove, Bunter must have seen it!" exclaimed Bob Cherry. "Did you notice that I was mate in four, Bunter?"

"Eh? Were you playing chess?"

"Was I playing chess?" roared Bob indignantly. "Didn't you see I was?"

"I really didn't notice. I'm sincerely sorry if it was of any consequence. What I was going to speak to you about was my scheme. You see, a Christmas pudding—"

"Oh, blow your scheme!"

"But a Christmas pudding—"

"Oh, shut up!"

"Wharton—Nugent! I say, you fellows!"

Snore!

"I say, you fellows, about that scheme—"

Another snore, too deep and sonorous to be genuine. Bunter grunted, and turned over on his pillow, and began to snore, too.

THE THIRD CHAPTER.

Breaking Bounds.

PATTER, patter, patter!

Harry Wharton lay and listened to the rush of the rain on the windows of the dormitory, the roar of the wind in the leafless trees, and deeper, more terrible still, the boom of the distant breakers on rock and shifting sea-sand.

THE MAGNET.—95.

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He could not sleep.

It was not the noise that kept him awake—that was rather lulling than otherwise. It was the thought of the gun he had thought he heard while in No. 1 Study half an hour ago.

Was it a gun?

If so, the unhappy vessel had had time to fire only one. Wharton thought of the roaring seas sweeping round the great Shoulder—of the foaming waves lashing round the doomed vessel—of her pale crew, and passengers, perhaps, coming home to England, and it might be for Christmas!

He felt that he could not close his eyes till he knew whether there was a wreck on the rocks of the Shoulder that wild night.

He sat up in bed at last. It was very quiet in the dormitory; the roar of the storm did not keep the others awake.

"Nugent!"

There was no reply. Harry Wharton stepped out of bed, and tapped Nugent on the shoulder. His chum woke up at once.

"Who's that?"

"It's I—Harry."

"What the dickens are you doing out of bed?"

"I'm going down to the bay, Frank."

Nugent sat up in blank amazement. He tried to peer at his chum's face in the darkness, but he could only make out a dim shadow.

"You're—going—down—to—the—bay?" he said, in measured tones.

"Yes."

"In this storm?"

"Because of the storm, Frank."

"You'll be drenched—soaked—if you're not crushed by a tree or struck by lightning," grunted Nugent.

"I don't mind getting wet, and I'm not afraid of lightning," said Harry with a smile. "I can't help thinking it was a gun I heard, Frank."

"If it was, old chap, it's all over long ago."

"I—I suppose so; but I'm going. Will you come?"

"Well, you're an ass, but one fool makes many!" said Nugent, putting one leg out of bed and shivering. "I'll go if you do."

"And so will I!" said another voice. "Excuse my hearing your jaw—the thunder woke me up. It's a nice night for a walk, too."

"I'll be glad if you'll come, Bob."

"Oh, I'll come, if only to look after you!" grunted Bob Cherry, as he got out of bed. "No good putting on coats; a mac. would be soaked through in five minutes in this rain. We may as well make up our minds to be wet through."

"Well, it won't hurt us so long as we keep in motion, and have a good rub down immediately we get in."

"Oh, no, it will be good for the health!" grinned Bob Cherry. "But I'm game, if you two silly asses are! Shall I wake up any of the chaps?"

"No; we three will be enough. I don't suppose we can do any good, but—"

"But if you can I will lend a hand," said Tom Brown, the New Zealander, sitting up in bed. "You chaps going out?"

"Yes. Wharton thinks he heard a gun."

"Good! I'm coming!"

The juniors dressed quickly, without striking a light. They did not want to cause any comments on their proceedings, or to run risk of the matter being heard of outside the dormitory. Although Wharton's anxiety excused him, his action was a breach of the rules of the school, and it was very necessary to keep it dark.

They crept to the door of the Remove dormitory, and left it silently, shutting the door. Then they crept down the passage, and down the stairs at the back to a window looking out over the chapel green, which had been similarly used more than once before.

"Keep off my feet, you clumsy ass!" came a deep voice from Nugent.

"Keep your mouldy feet out of the way, then!"

"Don't jaw, you chaps!"

"Who's jawing?" demanded two voices together.

"Well, shut up, then! Here's the window."

"Black as your hat," said Tom Brown. "Lucky there's lightning, or we shouldn't be able to see a step of the way."

"We may get too much of the lightning."

"Oh, rats!"

Harry Wharton opened the window, and the chums of the Remove dropped out one by one. Then Wharton closed the window from the outside.

To find their way to the school wall was easy enough for the juniors in the pitchiest darkness, as a rule. But it was not easy to-night. The wind caught them as they left the angle of the building, and hurled them to and fro. Nugent clutched at Bob Cherry to save himself, and caught hold of him, unfortunately by the ear. Bob Cherry gave a wild

yell, which would infallibly have given them away, but for a gust of wind that drowned it with a greater volume of sound.

"What on earth's the matter?" muttered Wharton.

"Yow! Some ass had grabbed my ear!"

"Sorry!" gasped Nugent.

"Look here, none of your little jokes now!"

"I wasn't joking——"

"Then you're an ass——"

"This way," said Harry Wharton.

"That's all very well. That frabjous idiot has nearly grabbed my ear off!"

"Come on!"

Bob Cherry followed, grumbling. The four juniors, fighting their way through the wind in the open Close, gained the shelter of the wall at last, and stopped there for some minutes to recover their breath.

"My hat!" gasped Bob Cherry. "We shall have the gentlest little prom. in the world if the wind keeps on like this."

"We get the full force of it now, as it sweeps round the Black Pike," said Wharton. "It will be better in the lane."

"And worse on the shore."

"Can't be helped. Give me a bunk up on the ivy."

"Hark!"

"What is it?"

"I heard something!"

"Blessed if I don't hear something every second!" growled Nugent. "There's a row going on all the time. Are you ready?"

"There's somebody in the quad," said Bob obstinately.

"Rats! Nobody but us would be idiot enough to be out on a night like this."

"I thought I heard something, too," said Tom Brown of Taranaki. "Listen!"

They listened, crouching close to the wall. It would be no light matter to be caught by a master or a prefect just then, with their expedition not yet made, and the punishment for breaking bounds to be faced all the same.

There was a sound of gasping in the windy Close.

"My hat!" muttered Wharton. "It is somebody."

"Following us, too," said Nugent, between his teeth. "Is it some rotter from the dorm., or old Quelch on the warpath?"

"Lie low!" whispered Wharton. "He can't possibly see us, whoever he is."

"That's so."

"Not a sound! Keep close!"

The four juniors crouched under the dripping ivy. They were already drenched by the rain, and could not get much wetter.

They listened with straining ears.

Several times that sound of gasping came to them in the lulls of the wind, as if some person short of breath was fighting his way towards them.

He was coming closer, whoever he was, and the juniors thrilled with anxiety.

"Suppose we bump him, whoever he is?" suggested Nugent, in a faint whisper. "He couldn't see us, even if it's a master."

"Hallo, hallo, hallo! Here he is! My only hat! Bunter!"

A fat form, whirling along with the wind behind it for the moment, came towards the juniors at a rapid and helpless run, and ran right into them. And the exclamation it gave showed who it was plainly enough.

"Ow! Yow! Oh, really!"

It was Billy Bunter!

Harry Wharton stood quite still in his amazement. He had not known that the Owl of the Remove had awakened when he left the dormitory; and curious as Bunter always was to know all about other fellows' proceedings, Wharton had not expected him to brave weather like this for the sake of gratifying his curiosity.

Bob Cherry groped in the darkness for Bunter's shoulder, and closed his grasp upon something, which, a harder grip and a squeal from Bunter, showed to be a fat nose.

"Ow!"

Bob chuckled, and changed his grip to Bunter's shoulder. Then he proceeded to shake the fat junior as a terrier might shake a rat. A series of explosive gasps came from the Falstaff of Greyfriars.

"Ow! Ow! Yow! Ow! Ow!"

"You fat young rascal!"

"Ow! Ow! Ow!"

"What have you followed us for?"

"Yow! Yow! Yow!"

THE FOURTH CHAPTER.

Out of Bounds.

BOB CHERRY shook, and Billy Bunter gasped, for several minutes. It occurred to Bob at last that the fat junior could not very well answer while he was having his breath shaken out of him.

He ceased to shake Bunter, but retained a tight grip upon his collar.

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NEXT
WEEK:

"THE GREYFRIARS SKATERS."

NEXT
TUESDAY,

The "Magnet"

LIBRARY.

ONE
HALFPENNY.

"Bunter, what are you doing here?" demanded Wharton sternly.

"Ow!"

"You young porpoise! What did you leave the dormitory for?"

"I—I—I'm going to have some of the grub!" gasped Bunter.

"The what?"

"The grub."

"What grub?"

"I know jolly well you fellows sneaked out of the dorm. to have a feed somewhere," said Bunter. "I woke up just as you were going. I knew it at once."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I don't see why I should be left out. Where are you going to have the feed?"

"You young ass! We're not going to have any feed till breakfast to-morrow."

"Oh, really, Wharton——"

"We're going down to the bay."

"The—the bay!"

"Yes, to look at the sea, and see if there's a ship. You can come if you like," said Harry Wharton, with a laugh.

"Yah! I wouldn't be such a fool!" Bunter gave a grunt of deep discontent. "Do you mean to say that you fellows have come out for that, and that only?"

"Ha, ha! Yes."

"And there's not going to be a feed?"

"Not a bit of it."

"Honour bright?" asked Bunter suspiciously.

"Yes, honour bright."

"Ow! I've got wet for nothing. Yow! I shall catch a cold. Will you fellows help me get back to the dorm.? I could hardly get across the Close in the wind."

"Yes—I don't think."

"But—but I say, you fellows——"

"Let's get out," said Bob Cherry. "Bunter will go on jawing all night, if he can get anybody to listen. Give me a bunk up on the ivy."

"Right you are!"

"I—I say, you fellows——"

"Ow! I said a bunk up, not jam my napper against the bricks!" howled Bob Cherry.

"Oh, never mind——"

"Yow! But I do mind."

"I say, you fellows——"

"That's right, I've got hold now!" growled Bob Cherry, scrambling through the wet ivy to the top of the wall. "My hat! I'm in a nice state! Any of you fellows wet?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Here goes," said Tom Brown, swinging himself to the top of the wall. "Hallo! Did my foot knock against somebody?"

"Ow! Ow! Ow!" came from Bunter. "Oh, my napper! Yow!"

"Sorry! Ha, ha!"

"Ow! Keep your silly boot off my head, you chump!"

"Rats! Keep your silly head off my boot!"

"I'm hurt!"

"Well, what do you expect, if you jam your head against a fellow's boot? I shouldn't wonder if the boot is damaged, too."

"Yow! Ow!"

"I'm up," said Wharton. "Now then, Nugent, grip my hand, and I'll have you up in a jiffy."

"Right you are!"

"I—I say, you fellows, if it isn't a feed——"

"It isn't, you fat duffer!"

"Then you ought to see me back across the Close. I——"

"Oh, go and eat cokernuts! Up with you, Nugent!"

Bunter groped blindly after Nugent, determined that they should not all go. He caught hold of the Remove's ankle.

"Leggo!" roared Nugent.

"Yah! Look here——"

"I'll biff you with my other boot if you don't leggo!"

"Yes, but——"

Bump!

Bunter gasped as Nugent's boot clumped on his shoulder. He immediately grasped Frank's other ankle, however, and held it fast.

Nugent had one hand on the ivy. Wharton was holding the other. Bunter was now hanging on to both legs. Nugent wriggled and yelled.

"Leggo, Bunter!"

"Yah! Come down, and——"

"I'll fall on you!"

"Yah!"

"The young ass!" gasped Nugent. "I—I'm falling! Oh!"

"Here, hold on! I can't stand your weight on one hand!" gasped Wharton.

"I—I—I'm going!"

And he went!

There was a gasp like escaping steam from Billy Bunter, as a heavy body from above bumped upon him, and sent him rolling in the rain. Nugent sat in a puddle, and said things.

"Ow!" grunted Bunter. "I—I—I'm killed!"

"No such luck!" growled Nugent.

"Oh! My back's broken, and I think my neck!"

"Come here and let me see," said Nugent, doubling his fist.

But Bunter crawled away in the other direction. Nugent's tone was enough for him. He moved with surprising swiftness, too, considering that his back was broken.

Nugent scrambled into the ivy again.

"Not going to keep us waiting all night, I suppose?" suggested Bob Cherry.

"How could I help it?" hooted Nugent. "That chump was hanging on to my legs."

"Still, tempus fugit, you know."

"Rats!" said Nugent crossly.

"Here goes!" said Harry Wharton, swinging himself to the outside of the wall. "Mind how you drop!"

One by one the juniors dropped into the lane. There was a yelp from Bob Cherry as Nugent dropped on his toe—whether by accident or design was not apparent. Nugent said nothing on the matter; but Bob Cherry said a great deal. He was still referring to the matter, in fact, all the way down the lane as far as the slopes of the Black Pike. There the wind, sweeping round the Pike, buffeted them breathlessly, and talk was impossible.

It was fortunate that the Greyfriars juniors knew the way blindfold. For the darkness was blinding; they could not see a foot before them, and the wild wind hurled them to and fro as they went, so that they resembled drunken figures staggering down the lane.

Round the bend again, and they heard the thunder of the sea, and a dim vision of white foam glimmered in the distance through the dark.

Lights flashed through the night on the left of them now, and they knew that they came from the windows of Cliff House, the girls' school presided over by Miss Penelope Primrose. Harry wondered what Marjorie would say if she had known that four drenched Greyfriars juniors were passing under the windows of Cliff House at that hour.

Past Cliff House, the quartette tramped on, lashed by the rain, fighting the wind, and they halted at last with the white foam from the breakers curling on the sands at their feet.

THE FIFTH CHAPTER.

The Prey of the Storm.

THE sea was lashed to fury by the storm that swept over it. High round the rocks of the Shoulder the waves ran and roared, and a dull booming came from the hollow caves under the great cliff, as the sea invaded the deepest recesses. Only when the lightning zigzagged across the sky could the juniors catch a glimpse of the Shoulder, and of the wide ocean tossing outside the bay.

There were others on the beach besides themselves—burly men in oilskins, staggering in the wind. They were fishermen from the village of Pegg, and under their slouched hats their faces were anxious. A man with a wooden leg was stumping on the sand, muttering strange oaths as the breakers dashed their spray over him. Harry Wharton heard his voice, and ran towards him.

"Captain Stump!"

The old sailorman stumped to a standstill, and touched his cap.

"Master Harry! You out here—at this time o' night?"

"Yes. I thought I heard a gun."

"There was one gun, Master Harry," said Captain Stump, making a funnel of his big brown hands to convey his voice to Wharton. "They only had time for one, poor critters."

The juniors shivered.

"There—there was a ship!" cried Nugent.

"Ay, ay!"

"On the Shoulder!"

"Ay, ay! I figgers it out, young gents, that they was a foreigner, and they didn't see the lighthouse in the mist, and they ran right on the Shoulder. They fired one gun, that brought us all out of the Anchor, but they hadn't no time for more."

"Then she's gone down?" said Wharton, with a heavy heart.

"Ay, ay, Master Harry."

Wharton turned his glance seaward. A lightning-flash showed the towering cliff, the broken rocks at its base over

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which the water was wildly tumbling. Truly, a vessel had little chance of survival if she found herself there.

"And no one was saved?"

"Not likely."

"Anything come ashore?"

"Yes, a few spars. They're yonder, Master Harry."

A lantern was burning in the shelter of a rock, and there the wreckage had been dragged. The juniors looked at it—a broken foremast, with part of a boom still clinging to it, and rags and tatters of rigging.

"Poor fellows!" said Nugent, at last. "It's all up with them. It must be nearly an hour now since she struck."

"Yes."

"May as well get back."

Harry Wharton did not reply. He was standing, planted firmly against the wind, staring seaward. With every flash in the sky, the wild scene of turmoil was revealed for a fleeting moment, and Harry was trying to discover some trace of the wreck out at sea. But it was hopeless.

The timbers must have been ground to ruin at once on the sharp rocks, and it was equally hopeless for any of the crew to have gained the shore. The rocks upon which the vessel had come to grief were too far from the land.

"It's no good," said Bob Cherry, in a low voice.

Wharton nodded.

"I suppose not."

"The strongest swimmer could not live for two minutes in a sea like this, even if he wasn't dashed on the rocks," said Nugent, with a shudder.

"No; but—"

"But what, Harry?"

"I was thinking of the sea-caves. You remember the caves we explored, where we saw the smuggler, and nearly got drowned in the tide? There's a chance that a chap might get swept into them by the sea."

"A chance in a hundred."

"We couldn't get down to the caves till the storm's over," said Tom Brown, "and it will be jolly risky all day to-morrow, with the water running high. The fishermen wouldn't take out their boats near the Shoulder to-morrow."

Wharton nodded thoughtfully. It was, as Nugent had said, a hopeless chance that a swimmer from the wreck might have been swept into the cavern; but it might have happened. And, thinking of the possibility of a half-drowned, drenched sailorman crouching shivering among the rocks of the sea-cave, Harry longed to go to the rescue, on the merest chance.

But that was impossible now.

Until the sea went down it was impossible to even approach the cave, which so far as Harry knew, had an entrance only from the seaward.

"Look here, you chaps, we can get down here first thing in the morning, before brekker—"

"That's not a bad idea."

"I know it's the merest chance, but if it should happen so, think of the poor chaps shut up in that cavern, starving."

"We'll risk it, Harry."

"Hallo, hallo, hallo!" exclaimed Bob Cherry. "Something's turned up!"

There was a grouping of the fishermen round some object on the sands, tossed up by the waves. The juniors ran down towards them. Captain Stump was holding up a sailor's cap, and a fisherman was throwing the light of a lantern upon it. There was a name on the cap—the name of a ship!

The juniors, as well as the fishermen, read the name in the lantern-light. It was the May Queen.

"English craft," said Captain Stump, "or American. And all gone to Davy Jones's locker. Ah, it's a 'ard life for poor Jack!"

And the old sailorman stumped off towards the Anchor Inn for consolation. A strange expression came over Harry Wharton's face.

"The May Queen," he repeated slowly, as the juniors turned away.

"Have you heard of the craft?" asked Bob Cherry.

"Yes, I think so."

"You think so! How do you mean? I suppose you know?"

Wharton halted in the shelter of a rock, where he could speak without being deafened by the wind.

"I heard the name of the May Queen mentioned only yesterday," he said.

"At Greyfriars then?"

"Yes; by Monsieur Charpentier."

Bob Cherry whistled.

"The French master!"

"That's it. Poor old Mossoo knows somebody on board the vessel, I'm afraid," said Harry Wharton. "He was reading a newspaper in his study when I passed his window yesterday, and he beckoned to me. He was trying to make out the shipping news, and he seemed fogged, and asked

me to look at it and tell him when the May Queen was expected in port."

"By George!"
"It was easy enough for me, of course; but Mossoo is fogged by English newspapers. The May Queen was due in port to-day."

"Oh!"
"Mossoo thanked me for my assistance, and looked worried. I suppose because the vessel had been delayed."

"Poor old Mossoo! He's a harmless little ass, and it will be rough on him if he had a relation or a friend on this craft."

"Very rough."
"Ought we to tell him?" said Nugent hesitatingly.

"Well, he'll know soon enough, I suppose."
"No good hurrying up with ill news," said Wharton.

"Somebody may have survived—we can't be sure till tomorrow, anyway. Ill news can always wait."
"Yes, that's so."

"Let's get back to Greyfriars, and get a change."
"Good!"

And the juniors tramped away towards the school. They were thinking of Mossoo as they went. Monsieur Charpentier was a kind little man, and much liked by the Greyfriars fellows—much more liked than respected, as a matter of fact. He had no authority with them at all, and the rougher fellows often spent a pleasant half-hour in ragging him almost into hysterics.

When he took the Remove in French, he always came into the Form-room in a chastened mood, and he frequently left it with tears in his eyes. He tried to do his duty, and if he hadn't tried so hard, he would have got on much better with many of the Removites.

Still, though they ragged him, they liked him all the same, and despised him a little; and there were few who wouldn't have been sorry if anything had happened to "old Mossoo."

The juniors tramped back through wind and rain. The lights were out in Cliff House windows now. They reached the walls of Greyfriars, and clambered over into the Close, and fought their way through the howling wind back to the window in the rear of the building by which they had left the house.

Wharton climbed on the sill.
He was fumbling with the window for a full minute, and the others, waiting in their wet clothes, grew impatient.

"Buck up!" said Bob Cherry.
"I can't open it."

"Br-r-r-r! Got down, and let me try."
"It's no use," said Wharton, dropping from the window-sill.

"Why not?"
"It's fastened inside."

THE SIXTH CHAPTER. Billy Bunter Makes Terms.

BOB CHERRY climbed upon the window-sill, and tried the window himself. He had to admit that Wharton was right; the catch was fastened inside. He dropped from the sill again in dismay.

"It was Bunter!" he said, at last.
Wharton gritted his teeth.

"I suppose so. Can he have done it on purpose—or forgotten us? But that doesn't matter now. How are we to get in?"

"We can't get in."
It was too true!

The juniors were nonplussed. They could not unfasten the catch from outside, without breaking the glass of the window. And that, beside leaving tell-tale traces for discovery in the morning, would make too much noise.

They were shut out! Shut out, with the rain still beating upon them, and the wind tearing through their drenched clothes!

"My aunt Matilda!" said Tom Brown. "This is all right! I don't think Bunter would have been cad enough to shut us out, though. Somebody found the window open and fastened it."

"Possibly—it doesn't make much difference now. How the deuce are we to get in?" said Harry restlessly. "My hat! How it's raining!"

"Look round; we may find some window open."

The chums looked round the house, though with little hope. A light was burning in a bed-room window—the window of Monsieur Charpentier. Further off was a light in Dr. Locke's study. Mr. Quelch, too, the master of the Remove, had a light in his window. The rest of Greyfriars seemed to be asleep. Nowhere was there a door or a window open.

The Removites returned to the back of the building. To make their presence known, and ask for admission, was to betray themselves, and face on the morrow the penalty of breaking bounds at night.

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NEXT
WEEK;

"THE GREYFRIARS SKATERS."

A Splendid Tale of Harry Wharton
& Co. By FRANK RICHARDS.

NEXT TUESDAY, The "Magnet" LIBRARY. ONE HALFPENNY.

"Hark!" exclaimed Tom Brown suddenly. "Hark!"
Through the wind and rain came a sound of a window opening. It was above the juniors; and just above the window they had expected to find open. It was the window of the next landing above—not a room window.

The juniors crouched close to the wall. Who could be looking out of that upper landing window they could not guess, but they did not wish to be discovered.

A head and shoulders loomed out of the window.
"Are you there, you fellows?"

The juniors gave a gasp of relief. It was Bunter's voice.
"Yes," called back Harry. "Come and unfasten the lower window."

"Eh? I can't hear."
"The lower window is fastened."
There was the sound of a chuckle.

"Yes, I fastened it when I got in."
"What for, you young ass?"

"Oh, I'm afraid of burglars, you know!"
"Idiot! Come and unfasten it now. What are you doing up at that window?" demanded Harry Wharton, puzzled.

The fat junior chuckled again.
"You see, I can speak to you from this upper window without your being able to climb in," he explained.

"You dummy! Do you want to keep us out in the rain?"
"Oh, no! It depends upon yourselves."

"What?"
"I want to make terms first, that's all."
"My only hat!" said Nugent. "He's shut us out on purpose, because he wants to get something out of us."

"Oh, if his fat head were only within hitting distance!" murmured Tom Brown.

"What do you want, Bunter?" called out Harry, as calmly as he could.

"You wouldn't let me come to the feed—"
"There wasn't a feed, you young ass! I told you so. Do you doubt my word?" exclaimed Wharton angrily.

"Oh, no, of course I don't doubt your word, Wharton; but I think you might have let me come to the feed, all the same, especially as I got wet coming out," said Bunter. "I had a fearful job getting in again, in the wind. I was nearly blown away, and I had a narrow escape of losing my glasses. If they had got lost, I should have expected you fellows to pay for them. Have you been here long?"

"About a quarter of an hour, dummy!"

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"I suppose I fell asleep," said Bunter. "I've opened the window and called out two or three times, to see if you were back. You remember my scheme of making a Christmas pudding—"

"Is this a time to talk about Christmas puddings?" yelled Bob Cherry. "Come down and open the window."

"I want to settle about the Christmas pudding first, you know. It's important. I require ten shillings to work up to the recipe and make a small one. Are you fellows willing to lend me ten shillings? I've been disappointed about a postal order, or I wouldn't ask you."

"You—you fat beast!" said Nugent.

"Oh, really, Nugent, I don't think you ought to call me names, when I've stayed up on purpose to let you in!" said Bunter.

"Will you open this window?"

"Certainly. I'm sincerely sorry to keep you waiting in the rain, but I want to settle about that Christmas pudding, you know."

"We'll lend you ten bob."

"Thank you! But I've been thinking the matter over. I think upon the whole it's best to do things thoroughly. Don't you think so yourself?"

"Come and open the window, you toad!"

"Oh, really, Brown—"

"Are you coming?"

"Certainly. But about that pudding. I think if you chaps made it a sovereign, I could make it much better, and there would be more of it, you know. Think it over! I'm in no hurry; take your time."

The juniors murmured things. They were not likely to take much time, with the rain beating on their heads.

"We'll make it a sovereign," said Harry Wharton.

"Cash, of course."

"Yes, I had a postal order to-day from my uncle."

"Good! Oh, one more thing. No larks when you get in, you know—it's pax."

"Come and open the window."

"Is it pax?"

"No!" roared Bob Cherry. "I'm going to give you the hiding of your life."

"Then I'm sorry I can't open the window."

"You—you worm!"

"Oh, make it pax!" said Harry, laughing in spite of himself. "The beast's got us in a cleft stick. It's pax, Bunter."

"All of you?"

"Ye-e-es," said four unwilling voices.

"Good! I'll be down in a jiffy."

And the upper window closed.

The juniors outside waited as patiently as they could. Bunter's jiffy was a very long one. It was nearly five minutes before a dim outline of a fat face was seen inside the glass, and Bunter was heard fumbling with the catch.

The window slowly opened, and Billy Bunter blinked out into the rain.

"I say, you fellows—"

"Get your fat carcass out of the way."

"Oh, really, Cherry—"

"B-r-r-r-r!"

Bob Cherry plunged in at the window, and bumped Bunter out of the way. The dripping juniors scrambled in, and the window was closed. Then they looked at Bunter in the gloom. They had never felt more inclined to fall upon him and give him a fearful thrashing, as he certainly fully deserved. But they had made it "pax," and they were in honour bound!

"Let's get to the dorm," said Bob Cherry, "I'm wet."

"Well, I'm dampish," grinned Brown. "Hallo, what's that I've trodden on?"

"Ow! Yow! It's my foot!"

"Curious thing you can't keep your feet out of the way, Bunter."

"Yow!"

They hurried off towards the Remove dormitory. Bunter groped along in the darkness after them, and stumbled up the stairs. Bob Cherry turned his head.

"Quiet, you ass!"

"Ow!"

"What's the matter?"

"I've barked my beastly shin."

"Serve you right!"

"Oh! Ow!" There was a loud bump as Bunter fell on the stairs. "Yow! I'm hurt!"

"You fool! You'll wake the house. My hat! You've done it!"

There was a voice in the darkness—a voice with a strong French accent that the Greyfriars juniors knew well.

"Ceil! Vat is zat?"

It was the voice of Monsieur Charpentier.

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NEXT WEEK: "THE MAGNET" LIBRARY RETURNS TO USUAL SIZE AND PRICE: ONE HALFPENNY.

THE SEVENTH CHAPTER.

Monsieur Charpentier is Beaten.

THE juniors stood quite still.

There was a tense pause as the small, squeaky voice of the French master died away. Had he heard them speak—or was it simply the noise that had attracted his attention? Would he search further?

They waited, hardly breathing. Even Billy Bunter was silent.

"Ciel! Zere is no sound!" came the French master's voice again. "Mon Dieu! Is it zat I am mistaken?"

There was a stumble on the stairs.

"Ciel! I fall ovair somezing. I vunder vat it is zat I fall ovair?"

An agonised howl from Billy Bunter told him what it was.

"Ah! Garcon! It is a boy!"

"Oh! Oh! I'm squashed!"

"It is ze voice of Buntair."

"Oh! Oh! Wharton—help! Drag him off!"

The French master staggered to his feet.

"Ah! Zat you vait while I get a light," he said, gasping.

"I zink zat zere are many of you in zis. Vharton."

"Yes, sir," said Harry, inwardly chafing.

"You are zere?"

"Oh, yes, sir!"

"Stand vere you vas."

"Certainly, sir!"

The Frenchman struck a match, and lighted a gas jet in the passage. He looked at the five hopeful members of the Remove.

"Vharton, I surprise myself at zis."

"I'm sorry, sir."

"Sorry zat I catch you, you mean."

Harry made no reply.

"It is my duty to report you to ze Form-master, I zink," said Mossos. "Vy is it zat you go out on such a night and break ze bounds, mes garcons?"

"I thought I heard a minute-gun, sir."

"Ah! You zink zat zere is a wreck?"

"Yes, sir."

"You should not have gone out, all ze same. You might have been injured. You vill very likely catch ze cold, as it is."

"We shall if you keep us here jawing," murmured Bob Cherry, sotto voce.

"You speak, Sherry?"

"It's a very wet night, sir."

"Oui, oui, vous avez raison," said Monsieur Charpentier.

"It is very reckless of you to go out. I zink I takes you to Monsieur Quelch, hey?"

"Oh, sir!"

"You break all ze rules of ze school. But tell me, it it zat zere has been a wreck?" asked the little Frenchman, as a burst of thunder woke every echo in Greyfriars.

"Yes, sir, a vessel went down on the Shoulder."

The little French master shuddered. He had a tender heart.

"Helas! Zat is dreadful! Vas zere anyvun saved?"

"No, sir, as far as is known. Nothing has come ashore except a few spars, and a sailor's cap," said Wharton.

"Ah, it is terrible! Is ze name of ze ship known?"

Harry Wharton hesitated.

"You know ze name of ze ship, Vharton?"

"Ye-es, sir."

"Vell, vat is ze name, zen?" asked Monsieur Charpentier.

"The May Queen, sir."

Monsieur Charpentier stood quite still for a few moments, looking at Wharton with such a strange expression upon his face that the junior sprang forward.

"You are ill, sir."

"Non, non, non! Non, mon enfant!"

"I—I thought—"

"It is zat you give me a shock, Vharton," said Monsieur Charpentier, recovering himself. "I zink zat is not possible."

"It is quite true, sir. I hope you had no friends on board her, sir."

A strange smile flitted over the little Frenchman's pale face.

"Non, non," he said.

"I am glad of that, sir. I thought—"

"Zere vas somevun," said Monsieur Charpentier. "But no friend of mine—no friend of mine! Ah! You are sure zat no vun was save?"

"No one is known to be saved, sir. There may be a slight chance, that is all."

"Ah, it is terrible!"

"It's very terrible, sir."

"I zink zat you go to your dormitory, poys."

"Good-night, sir!"

"Good-night!"

The juniors turned away, and went to the Remove

dormitory. The little Frenchman remained standing where he was, under the lighted gas, for several minutes, his face working strangely. Finally, he turned out the gas and went his way.

Harry Wharton & Co. lighted the gas in the dormitory, stripped off their drenched clothes, rubbed themselves down roughly with towels, and were soon in a glow of heat which gave them confidence that they would not catch cold.

Billy Bunter, who was not wet, tumbled into bed at once. He had changed his clothes after coming in, and had taken several cushions to snooze on inside the landing window, where he had been asleep when the juniors returned from the shore.

Bunter was sleepy, but he was blinking with satisfaction.

"I say, you fellows," he remarked, "it's all right about Mossoo. He won't mention it to Quelch in the morning. He's a good-natured little beast."

"Oh, go to sleep!"

"Oh, really, Cherry——"

"Ring off!"

"About that Christmas pudding——"

"B-r-r-r!"

"Of course, I shall let you fellows have some. But if you like to make it two pounds instead of one, I'll make two big ones, and——"

"Shut up!" roared the juniors.

Bob Cherry grasped a boot, and Billy Bunter dodged under the bedclothes. Hurree Jamset Ram Singh sat up in bed.

"The lightful illumination is burning," he observed. "Have your honourable and esteemed selves been out?"

"Yes, rather! The outfulness was terrific!" grinned Bob Cherry.

"What have you been doing?" asked Bulstrode, from his bed.

"Getting wet."

"Anything else?"

"Yes, tired."

Bulstrode growled, and turned his head on his pillow again. Skinner was awake, and he blinked at the chums in the light.

"Was there a row when you came in?" he asked.

"One's just started," said Bob.

And Skinner said no more.

The four juniors rubbed themselves down till there was a glow of heat in every limb. They didn't want to run any risks. They discussed the curious incident of Monsieur Charpentier in low tones, unheard by the others.

"I was sure he had a friend or relation on that ship, by the way he was anxious about it yesterday," said Harry. "But it seems not."

"From what he said, I should have fancied it was more likely to be an enemy," said Nugent, thoughtfully.

Bob Cherry grinned.

"An enemy! Why, Mossoo hasn't vitality enough to have an enemy."

"No. He's not the kind of chap to make enemies, certainly," said Wharton. "I don't quite make it out. I suppose it's no business of ours."

"That's so," agreed Tom Brown.

"Are you chaps coming down to the caves early in the morning?" asked Harry. "We shall have to be up at daylight."

"Oh, yes, rather, we'll come!"

"The comefulness is great," murmured Hurree Singh. "I do not know what the talkfulness is about, but I shall also comefully accompany you."

"Right you are, Inky. We'll give you the yarn in the morning."

And the heroes of the Remove tumbled into bed; and in about one minute they were sleeping the sleep of the just. Billy Bunter was already in the arms of Morpheus, and his dreams were of Christmas puddings of gigantic size.

If his face had been visible in the darkness, a beatific smile might have been seen upon it. But presently the expression changed.

There was a sudden cry from Bunter's bed. Harry Wharton started out of a dream of storm and shipwreck, and sat up.

"What's that?" he cried. "Did somebody call?"

"Oh, oh!"

"Bunter! What's the matter?"

"Oh, oh! It—it's all right!" gasped Bunter, rubbing his eyes. "I—I suppose I was dreaming."

"You young ass! This is what comes of a heavy supper. Was it the nightmare?"

"Yes. I've had an awful dream—awful!" said Bunter. "I dreamed that I was sitting down to a Christmas pudding, and it suddenly faded away just as I was going to eat it. It was awful."

Wharton chuckled, and settled down to sleep again.

THE MAGNET.—95.

NEXT
WEEK:

"THE GREYFRIARS SKATERS."

NEXT
TUESDAY, The "Magnet" LIBRARY. ONE
HALFPENNY.

THE EIGHTH CHAPTER.

The Man in the Cave!

HARRY WHARTON awoke as the first beams of the winter sun penetrated the shadows of the Remove dormitory.

The morning was cold, but Harry jumped out of bed when he had been awake about two seconds. He shook his comrades, and soon awakened them. They turned out, Bob Cherry grumbling at the cold.

"Tain't rising-bell," said Skinner, looking out of bed.

"Go hon!"

"Silly asses! Fancy getting up before rising-bell."

Mark Linley's eyes opened, and he looked at the chums.

"Anything on?" he asked.

"Yes," said Harry. "There was a wreck on the Shoulder last night, and we're going down to look at the sea. Like to come?"

"Yes, rather."

And the Lancashire lad was out of bed in a twinkling.

"Are you coming, Wun Lung?" asked Bob Cherry, as the Chinese junior's eyes opened and glimmered from his pillow. Wun Lung belonged to No. 13 Study, where he chummed with Mark Linley and Bob Cherry. And a curious chum he was, sometimes.

"You goe out?" asked Wun Lung.

"We're going down to the sea. Like to come?"

"No savvy."

"It's a fine bracing morning."

"No savvy."

"Don't be a slacker."

"No savvy."

And the youth from the Flowery Land closed his almond eyes again. Harry Wharton & Co. finished dressing, putting on their thickest boots and scarves, and left the dormitory. They went downstairs, finding only an early housemaid about, who looked at them in surprise. They went out into the Close. The ground was strewn with twigs and boughs from the trees, torn down in the storm of the previous night.

"Some work for Gosling," grinned Bob Cherry. "A little exercise will do him good. Jolly high wind."

The wind was still high, and it sang about their ears as they went down the lane round the base of the Black Pike. But there was no rain, and the sky was clear, and a hard winter sunlight fell over the Pike and the wide meadows and long lanes. The juniors came in sight of Cliff House, and passed it on their way to the sea. A wooden-legged man was stumping on the shore. He touched his cap to the juniors.

"You're up early, young gents."

"Anything more come ashore?" asked Harry.

"A boat, and some spacs," said Captain Stump.

"Name on the boat?"

"Ay, ay! The May Queen."

"Then there's no doubt about it."

"No, young gents. And there's a press gentleman from Lannon here already, though how I don't know," said Captain Stump.

"Any—any bodies?" faltered Harry.

The old sailorman shook his head.

"There'll be some later, Master Harry. Though a good many of them will be sucked under in the hollow channels under the cliff yonder. Where are you going, sir?"

"We want cur boat."

The old sailorman looked alarmed.

"You're never going out with a heavy swell on the sea like this, Master Harry."

"We shall be all right."

"But, Master Harry——"

"Let's run the boat down," said Bob Cherry. "It's all right, Cap'n. We know how to look after boats before you were born, you know."

The old man shook his head solemnly, but the Greyfriars juniors ran the boat down to the water, and successfully launched it, in spite of the swell. Harry Wharton shipped the rudder, and they pulled into the bay.

The sea was indeed rolling with a heavy swell, and the boat rocked upon the heavy surges. It was no easy matter to pull for the Shoulder, and by no means safe to approach the cliff with so heavy a sea running.

But the Greyfriars juniors did not falter.

The idea was still strong in Harry's mind that some survivor of the wreck, perhaps two or three shivering and starving wretches, might be clustered in the cavern, hopeless of deliverance.

That thought was quite enough to make the lads brave the dangers of the rocks and the rolling waters.

Harry knew the place well, and he steered for the channel among the wild rocks and curling waves where the opening of the great cavern lay.

Within the ring of rocks the water was calmer, and the

A Splendid Tale of Harry Wharton
& Co. By FRANK RICHARDS.

worst of the danger was past. On smoother water, the boat floated into the cavern.

High over them arched the great, grey rocks.

Harry Wharton stood up in the boat, and lighted the lantern he had brought with him, sweeping the light to and fro as the boat advanced on the black waters.

Was any refugee lurking in the cave?

At high tide the lower cave was filled to the very roof with the surging waves, but it was possible to climb the rocks to a place of safety further back in the cave, where the hollow extended upwards into an upper cave.

But in the darkness and clamour of the storm, could any wretched refugee from the wreck have thus saved himself?

"We shall find no one," said Nugent, shaking his head. "If a man had been carried in here by the water, he must have been drowned."

"He might have floated up on the rising water, as we did once," said Harry.

"Without a boat?"

"He may have had a spar to cling to."

"True."

"Better call out."

"Hallo, hallo, hallo!" shouted Bob Cherry, his deep bass booming through the hollows of the great cavern. "Hallo, hallo, hallo! Ahoy!"

Boom, boom! came the echoes back.

"Ahoy! Anybody here? Ahoy!"

"Look!" cried Tom Brown suddenly.

The boat was grating on the sand. Beyond the water mark, still clinging to a broken spar, lay the figure of a man.

Harry Wharton sprang out of the boat.

He ran quickly to the still, terribly still form, and flashed the lantern light upon it. His heart stood almost still for the moment.

Was the man living?

Was it a dead body that the juniors had come to discover in the gloomy shadows of the cavern under the Shoulder?

The juniors in the boat held their breath, waiting for Harry to speak. The captain of the *Remove* knelt beside the still form.

He turned the face up to the light—a face of sallow complexion, with thin lips and an aquiline nose. The eyes were closed and still. The features were enough to tell Harry that he was looking upon the face of a Frenchman.

But the chest was moving slightly—the thin lips were parted. The man was insensible; but he was living!

Wharton gave a gasp of relief.

"He's alive, you chaps!"

"Thank goodness!" exclaimed Nugent, with a gasp. "I was afraid——"

"It's all right."

"The allrightfulness is terrific!" murmured the Nabob of Bhanipur.

"Get him into the boat, while I look round and see if there are any more!" exclaimed Harry, rising from the side of the insensible Frenchman.

"Right you are!"

Wharton moved up the cave, flashing the light of the lantern to and fro, and calling loudly in English and French alternately.

But there came no reply to the echoing of his voice.

Nowhere was there a sign of any other refugee, and it was soon clear that the Frenchman was the only man whom the grudging waves had swept past the barrier of rocks into the hollow cavern.

Wharton shuddered as he thought of what the man must have gone through, clinging to the spar, tossed to and fro in the blackness of the cave, and escaping death a thousand times by a miracle.

He returned to the boat.

The juniors had lifted the insensible Frenchman into it. As Wharton stepped in after him, the man's eyes opened wildly, and he moaned.

"He's coming to," said Bob Cherry. "No one else, Wharton?"

"No one."

"It's rotten! But it's something to have saved one life. The man must have died here," said Mark Linley.

"Yes, it is something—much to that poor fellow." Harry bent over the Frenchman, and met his wild eyes. "You are safe now, my poor fellow. Je suis ami—you are among friends."

"Ah! A moi—a moi!" moaned the man dazedly. "Ah! Ou suis-je?"

"You are safe—with friends," said Harry. "Can you speak English?"

The man's eyes seemed to become more intelligent.

"Ah! I am in Angleterre," he murmured. "Ah! I am saved! How—how did I come here?"

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NEXT WEEK: "THE MAGNET" LIBRARY RETURNS TO USUAL SIZE AND PRICE; ONE HALFPENNY.

He spoke good English, but with a strong accent of France.

"You were cast into the cave," said Harry.

"Ah! I remember."

"We came to look for any that might be there, and we found you. We are taking you to where you can get rest and food," said Harry gently.

The man nodded; he seemed too weak to speak. The juniors pulled out of the cavern. In the sunlight on the sea the Frenchman blinked weakly, and his eyes sought the towering mass of the Shoulder, with the gulls shrieking round the summit.

His face seemed to light up.

"What!" he muttered. "What is that cliff?"

"The Shoulder, we call it," said Wharton.

"Ah! I saw it from the sea—hier soir—yesterday evening. Ah!"

The man shuddered, and lay quiet again. The juniors could do nothing for him till they reached Pegg village, and they turned their attention to getting there as quickly as possible. With great care they steered their way through the rocks, the Frenchman shuddering as the foam leaped high round the gunwale.

Then a steady pull across the bay!

The Frenchman lay quiet, but presently he spoke.

"You—how came you to save me?" he said. "You are not fishermen—you are schoolboys. Whence do you come?"

"We belong to a school near here," said Harry.

"A school. Ah!"

"Yes, Greyfriars!"

The Frenchman gave a sudden cry, and sat upright; then, overcome by the effort, he fell back into the bottom of the boat again.

Wharton bent towards him.

"What is the matter? Do you know Greyfriars?"

"Greyfriars!"

"Yes."

"Ha, ha!"

It was a faint, chuckling laugh; but in words the Frenchman made no reply. He lay staring at the grey sky as the juniors pulled the boat in; but once or twice he gave that peculiar chuckle, a chuckle that the juniors did not like to hear.

THE NINTH CHAPTER.

The Survivor.

THERE was a shout on the beach as the juniors ran the boat in. The fishermen had seen that there was an addition to the number in the boat, and half a dozen of the brawny sons of the sea ran into the water in their big seaboots, to help the boat in, and to carry the exhausted survivor of the wreck ashore.

"Where did you find him, sir?" asked Trumper, a big, burly fisherman, as he reached in and picked up the Frenchman like a baby in his mighty arms.

"In the smuggler's cave."

"Good heavens!" said the fisherman.

He bore the Frenchman to the shore, and laid him on the sands. Captain Stump had already hobbled down from the Anchor with a flask of brandy. He placed a tin mug to the Frenchman's lips, and the man drank eagerly. The potent spirit brought a flush to his cheeks, and new light to his eyes.

Two girlish figures joined the crowd round the Frenchman. The juniors raised their caps as they saw Marjorie Hazeldene and her friend, Clara, of Cliff House.

"We saw you put out to sea, from a window," said Marjorie, with a smile to Harry. "We watched you till you were out of sight near the Shoulder."

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"And our hearts were in our mouths, too," said Miss Clara. "Why, you ought to have been dashed to pieces a dozen times."

"I'm jolly glad we weren't," said Harry, laughing.

"The gladfulness is terrific, most charming miss."

"And you found him in the smuggler's cave," said Miss Clara. "How lucky for the poor man! What is going to be done with him now?"

Wharton looked a little perplexed.

"He can't be taken to Greyfriars," he remarked. "He's too weak to be removed far. I suppose he had better go to the Anchor."

"Not at all," said a decided voice, as Miss Penelope Primrose appeared upon the scene. "He must be taken up to Cliff House. I will send for the doctor from Friardale."

"Werry good, ma'am," said Trumper. "Bear a hand, mates."

Miss Primrose bent over the Frenchman.

"We will take every care of you, my poor friend," she said, in her gentle voice, "and look after you till you can be restored to your friends."

"Merci, madame," said the Frenchman faintly.

"Ah, you are from a foreign country," said Miss Primrose, speaking in French. "All the more reason why we should take care of you. Marjorie, my love, will you run quickly up to the house and request Miss Locke to have a room prepared for this unfortunate man?"

"Certainly, Miss Primrose."

And Marjorie, with a bright smile to Harry Wharton, ran away, with Clara; and three or four sturdy fishermen followed, bearing the shipwrecked Frenchman.

The Greyfriars juniors followed as far as the gates of Cliff House, and then they turned their steps in the direction of the school.

They were already considerably late for breakfast, and it behoved them to get to Greyfriars as quickly as possible.

Harry Wharton's brow was clouded with thought as the juniors tramped home.

"Blessed if I like that chap," he exclaimed abruptly.

"Just what I was thinking," said Mark Linley quietly.

"He has a face that a chap couldn't trust. He looks like a fox."

"And he knows Greyfriars!" said Nugent.

Wharton looked troubled.

"There's something fishy about that," he said. "And something very queer about Mossoo's connection with the May Queen. This chap is a Frenchman, too. Yet Mossoo said he had no friend or relation on board the May Queen."

"And I suppose he ought to know!"

"Yes. But—" Wharton paused. "I wonder if we shall see anything of this chap at Greyfriars?"

The others were wondering, too. The Frenchman's face was not a pleasant one; and his look remained in their memories, with a feeling of disquietude.

They reached Greyfriars, and Gosling, the porter, gave them an extremely significant look as they came in.

"Which Mr. Quelch is in a bad temper," he remarked.

"Which he's waitin' for you. Wot I says is this 'ere—"

But Harry Wharton & Co. did not wait to discover what it was that Gosling said. They hurried on to the house.

Most of the fellows had finished breakfast when the juniors came into the dining-room. Mr. Quelch, the master of the Remove, was about to leave the Lower Fourth table. He turned his eyes very sternly upon the delinquents.

"Ah!" he exclaimed. "You have returned?"

"Yes, sir."

"What is your excuse for absenting yourselves in this way?"

The Form-master's tone was angry, but Wharton felt a sense of relief. Monsieur Charpentier had evidently either omitted or forgotten to report the escapade of the previous night.

"I am sorry, sir. We were delayed—there has been a wreck—"

"A wreck in the bay?"

"Yes, sir. We thought there might possibly be some survivors swept into the sea-caves, and we thought we'd go there and look, sir."

"Did you find any survivors?"

"Yes, sir, one."

Mr. Quelch's face relaxed.

"You must have run considerable danger, Wharton, in getting to the caves with such a sea as must be running now."

"Oh, we know the channels well, sir!"

"Ahem! It was wrong of you to go into danger. At the same time, you have certainly saved a life. Where is the rescued man?"

"Miss Primrose had him taken up to Cliff House, sir. She is looking after him."

"Is he injured?"

"No, sir; only exhausted. I think he will pull round all right."

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NEXT WEEK;

"THE GREYFRIARS SKATERS."

NEXT TUESDAY, The "Magnet" LIBRARY. ONE HALFPENNY.

"Well, Wharton, as your expedition has turned out so fortunately, I shall say nothing more about your being late for breakfast," said Mr. Quelch with a smile. "Have your breakfast now, and then come to the Form-room."

"Thank you, sir!"

And the chums of the Remove had the unusual experience of having the dining-room to themselves for breakfast. Not quite to themselves, however. Monsieur Charpentier remained after the others were gone. Mossoo appeared to be looking out of the window, but Wharton was certain that he had been listening to what had been said.

Monsieur Charpentier remained for some time looking out of the window, and the juniors had finished breakfast, and had risen to leave the dining-room, when the little Frenchman came hastily towards them.

He signed to them to stop.

"I have heard vat you say viz Mr. Quelch, Wharton," he remarked, with an effort, and with a strange flush coming into his cheeks.

"Yes, sir," said Harry.

"Zere is only vun man save from ze wreck of ze May Queen?"

"Only one, sir."

"Ze sheep vas an English sheep?" said Mossoo carelessly.

"Yes, sir; I think she was English."

"Zen ze man zat you have save is an English sailor, n'est-ce-pas?" said the little Frenchman, with ill-concealed anxiety in looks and tones.

Wharton shook his head.

"No, sir; the man we saved wasn't English."

"Ah! Non?"

"He's a Frenchman, sir."

Monsieur Charpentier sat heavily in a chair. His eyes were fixed almost stupidly on the juniors.

"A Frenchman?" he said at last.

"Yes, sir."

"Do you know his name, zen?"

"I did not ask it, sir."

"Zank you! It is enoff!"

The juniors walked out of the dining-room. The Frenchmaster remained sitting where he was. As they went out they heard him mutter to himself:

"Helas! So many brave men zey perish, and zat vun—zat vun he escape! Juste ciel!"

THE TENTH CHAPTER.

Bunter has Bad Luck.

BILLY BUNTER blinked at the chums of the Remove as they came into the class-room. The Owl was wearing an injured expression, and he began to whisper his woes to Harry as soon as the captain of the Remove sat down.

"Look out for Quelchy this morning. Wharton; he's in a beastly temper!"

"What have you been doing, you young ass?"

Bunter blinked at him indignantly.

"Well, that's a nice question to ask! I haven't been doing anything! I just suggested that as you chaps hadn't come in to lessons, it would be only fair for the rest of the Form to wait till you came, and he gave me fifty lines!"

"Serve you jolly well right!"

"Oh, really, Wharton—"

Mr. Quelch looked across.

"You are talking, Bunter!"

"Oh, no, sir!" denied Bunter promptly. "I haven't said a word, sir! I haven't opened my mouth, sir! I just said to Wharton—I mean, I didn't say a word—"

"Silence, Bunter!" said Mr. Quelch, as the class giggled.

"Yes, sir; but—"

"Silence!"

"Yes, sir; but a chap doesn't like—"

"Take fifty lines, Bunter!"

"Oh, sir! The same fifty as you gave me just now, sir, or another fifty?"

"Another fifty!" thundered Mr. Quelch. "And if you say another word, Bunter, I will double them!"

"Oh, really, sir—"

"Two hundred lines, Bunter!"

"Oh, but—"

"Three hundred lines!"

And even Billy Bunter though it time to shut up then. He sat glowering, his round eyes gleaming behind his spectacles.

He felt very much injured indeed, and when he felt injured, his usual way of getting his "own" back was by means of his gift as a ventriloquist. Ventriloquism was one of the few things he could do well. But it was a risky business with a master like Mr. Quelch, though Bunter had sometimes driven poor Mossoo almost crazy with it.

"I say, Wharton—"

"Shut up, you young ass!"

"I'm going to——"

"You dummy!" whispered Harry. "Queleh has his eye on you!"

"Well, I——"

"Three hundred and fifty lines, and show them up before bedtime, Bunter!" said the master of the Remove, in metallic tones.

And Billy Bunter snorted as he saw the whole of his evening thus summarily disposed of. He schemed vengeance, and watched his opportunity. A little later Mr. Quelch wanted to know what was one of the principal products of Canada, and a voice answered from the back of the class:

"Rats!"

The Remove-master gave a jump.

"What!"

"Rats!"

Mr. Quelch turned crimson.

"Who spoke?" he almost shouted.

"Rats!"

There was a hush in the class. Three times that impertinent reply had been given, and each time in a different voice from a different direction.

The Remove-master was almost gasping for breath.

"Boys, what is this? What! This is a concerted piece of impertinence! What does it mean? Who spoke?"

"Rats!"

"Stand out here!"

"Rats!"

"Boy!"

"Rats!"

The Remove-master was generally a grave gentleman, but he was nearly dancing now. He glared up and down the class.

Harry Wharton pressed Bunter's arm.

"You young idiot! Shut up!"

"Oh, really, Wharton——"

"I know it's you! Shut up!"

Bunter grunted.

Mr. Quelch looked over the boys in search of a guilty face. But, though all of them looked surprised and alarmed, no one looked guilty. Bunter kept his eyes on his desk.

"I do not know who the boys were who have thus insulted me," said Mr. Quelch, breathing hard, "but I——"

"Rats!"

The Form-master broke off.

His breath seemed to be taken away for some moments.

"I will find out——"

"Rats!"

"Bunter!" said Mr. Quelch, in a voice of thunder.

The fat junior jumped.

"Ye-e-e-es, sir!"

"You were speaking!"

"Oh, no, sir!"

"It was you who were speaking all the time!"

"I—I—I——"

"I remember now, Bunter, that you have claimed to be a ventriloquist, and I have no doubt that you have been uttering these disrespectful words!"

"Oh, sir!"

"Do you dare to deny it?" thundered the Form-master.

"I—I—I——"

"Answer me!"

"You see, sir——"

"Stand out here, Bunter!"

"If—if you don't mind, sir, I—I'd rather stay here!" faltered Billy, who didn't like the look in Mr. Quelch's eyes.

"Stand out here!" exclaimed the Remove-master, in a voice that made the fat junior jump again.

And Billy Bunter stepped out before the class.

"If you please, sir——"

"It was you speaking, Bunter!"

"You see, sir, I—I——"

"Hold out your hand!"

"I—I—I——"

Mr. Quelch took Bunter by the collar with his left hand, and grasped his pointer in his right. The pointer made rapid play, and the dust rose from Bunter's garments. Wild yells rose from Bunter.

"Ow! Oh! I didn't speak! I never said rats! I only said it once! It was only a joke, sir! I didn't say a word! Ow! Ow!"

Whack, whack, whack!

"Oh, ow, yow!"

"There, Bunter! That is for your impertinence, and telling me falsehoods!"

"Yow!"

"You deserve more than that, you absurd, ill-bred boy!"

"Yow!"

"Are you not ashamed of yourself?"

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"Yow!"

"Go back to your place!"

Billy Bunter hopped back to his place, but he seemed unwilling to sit down there. He hardly sat still for a moment for the remainder of the morning's lessons.

"You young ass!" muttered Wharton. "I warned you to chuck it."

Billy Bunter only groaned. When the Remove were dismissed, and the juniors crowded out, Frank Nugent clapped the fat Remove on the shoulder.

"Are you going to start the Christmas pudding now, Bunter?"

Bunter grunted.

"Am I in a state to make Christmas puddings? Oh, really, Nugent, I think you are awfully unfeeling."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Blessed if I can see anything to cackle at! The Christmas pudding can wait."

And it did wait.

THE ELEVENTH CHAPTER.

A Visitor for Mossoo!

HARRY WHARTON obtained permission before afternoon lessons to cycle over to Cliff House, and inquired of Miss Primrose about the rescued Frenchman. The wind had fallen, and it was an easy ride now down the lane to the bay. The captain of the Remove met Marjorie and Clara on the sands, with a crowd of the girls of Cliff House, and he stopped instead of going up to the school.

"You've come over to ask about the Frenchman?" said Marjorie.

"Yes. How is he?"

"He's well—and gone."

Wharton stared.

"Gone!"

"Yes. Haven't you seen him?"

"Seen him? No!"

"He came over to your school, I think."

"To Greyfriars?"

"Yes. He did not seem much the worse for what he had been through, after he had had rest and food," said Marjorie. "He was not a nice man, I think, Harry. He had an evil look in his eyes."

Harry Wharton nodded.

"I didn't like his looks much myself," he confessed.

"But he was very polite to Miss Primrose," went on Marjorie. "He thanked her for her kindness to him. He told her his name is Gaston Duprez, and that he had a friend at Greyfriars, and was going there."

"He must mean our French master."

"Ah, little Monsieur Charpentier! I did not think of that. I suppose so. I suppose one ought to feel kindly towards a shipwrecked man, but he looked quite evil, I thought," said Marjorie. "I was in the room when he said good-bye to Miss Primrose, and he had such a curious look in his eyes when he said he had a friend at Greyfriars. It was just as if he really meant an enemy, whom he was going to injure. I suppose it was only my fancy. But I don't like him."

"I hate him!" said Miss Clara, who always carried her likes and dislikes, and everything else, further than Marjorie.

"Oh, Clara!"

"So I do," said Miss Clara. "I think he is a wicked man. He kicked a dog after he left Cliff House. I saw him, and it ran away howling. He is a beast!"

"Well, I thought he looked rather a beast, and a chap who kicks a dog is a beast, right enough," agreed Harry. "I haven't seen him. I wonder whether he came up to Greyfriars. He didn't look the kind of chap our little Mossoo would have for a friend. Mossoo is a funny merchant sometimes, but he's as good as gold, and as in-offensive as a kitten."

Wharton remained chatting with Marjorie till it was night time to return to Greyfriars, and then he pedalled back in a puzzled mood.

He was evidently correct in his surmise that there was some strange connection between Monsieur Charpentier and the stranger from the sea.

Who could this man Duprez be?

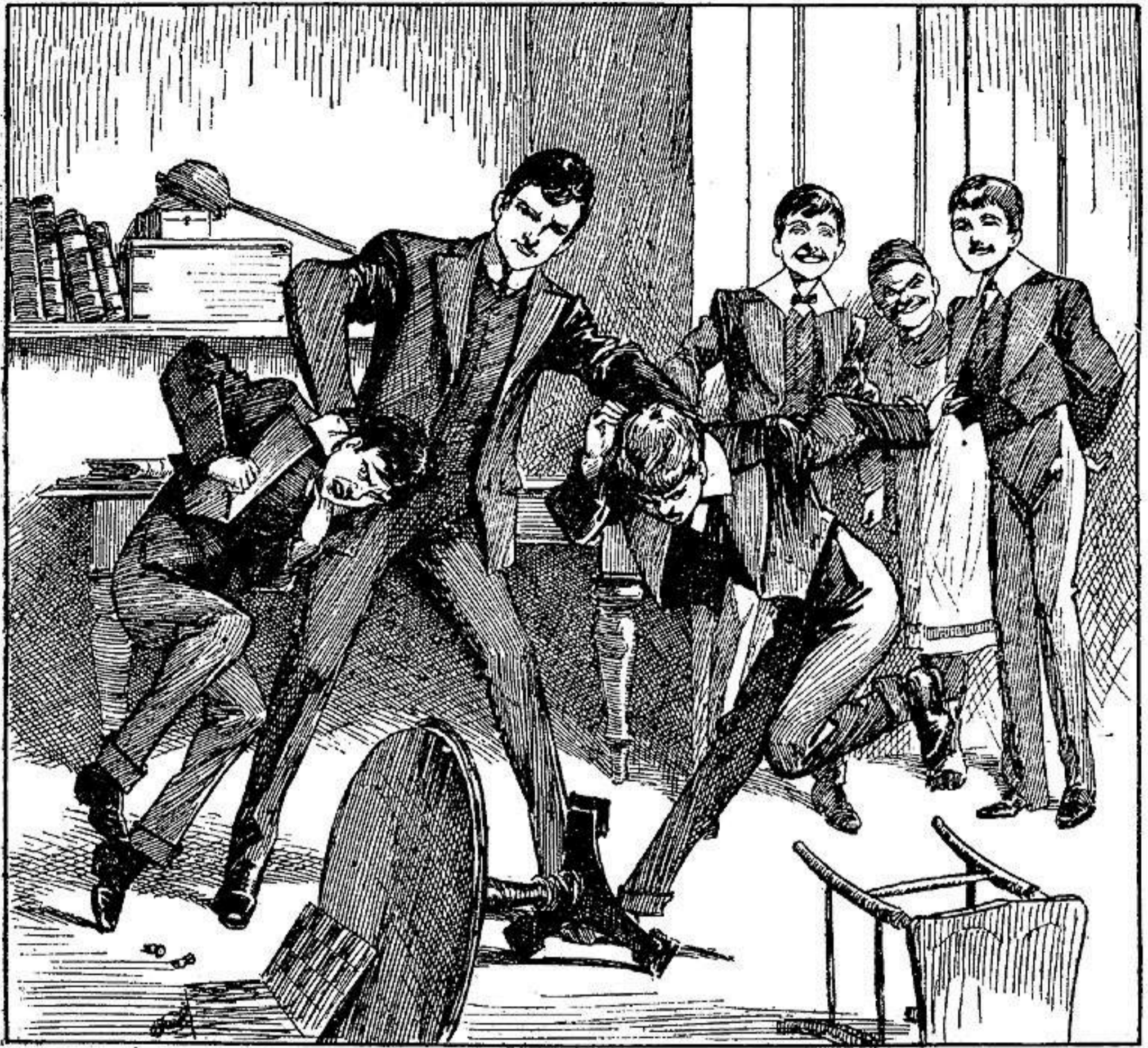
He certainly was not a friend of Monsieur Charpentier, and Mossoo had said that he was not a relation.

Little Mossoo was not the kind of man to have enemies. He had never made one at Greyfriars. Wharton could not understand it.

The Remove captain rode into the Close, and jumped off his cycle as he caught sight of a group of juniors talking to a stranger in the quad.

It was the Frenchman!

He had been provided with a change of clothes by the



With a wrench Wingate dragged the juniors apart. "Ow!" gasped Bob Cherry. "Yow!" murmured Bulstrode.

kindness of Miss Penelope Primrose, and looked very clean and decent, and very different from his former aspect.

He raised his hat to Harry as the latter came up, wheeling his bicycle.

"Ah! This is the young gentleman who rescued me," he said. "Monsieur, I thank you very much. It was very brave and noble of you."

Harry Wharton nodded.

"That is all right," he said. "I am glad I thought of looking in the cave, that's all."

"I find that I have a friend in this neighbourhood," said the Frenchman, who spoke almost perfect English. "A gentleman, who is a master at this college."

"Indeed!"

"Oui—oui! I was just inquiring for him. His name is Charpentier."

"Our French master!"

"Oui—oui! I was about to request one of these young gentlemen to show me to him."

"I will take you to his room," said Harry.

"Merci—merci!"

And the Frenchman followed Harry Wharton into the house.

Although his manners were extremely polite, and he had displayed the most lively gratitude for his rescue, he had not made a good impression upon any of the juniors.

"Blessed if I like the chap!" said Nugent. "What a queer look he had in his eyes when he spoke of Mosscoo. I don't believe he's Mosscoo's friend at all."

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"THE GREYFRIARS SKATERS."

A Splendid Tale of Harry Wharton
& Co. By FRANK RICHARDS.

"He's come here to see him," said Brown.

"May only be going to cadge from him, as a fellow-countryman."

"The probablefulness is terrific!"

"I shouldn't wonder," said Bob Cherry.

Harry Wharton was not feeling comfortable in his mind as he led the way to the French master's room. He knew that the visit of Gaston Duprez would not be welcome to Mosscoo. He knew that from the words the little Frenchman had let drop in the dining-room.

He tapped at Mosscoo's door.

"Entrez!" called out a faint voice.

Wharton opened the door.

Monsieur Charpentier was standing up, and his face was pale, his eyes had a scared look in them. It was clear that he fully expected his visitor.

"Duprez!"

He gasped out the name.

The newcomer smiled.

"Où, oui, mon ami! Oui, oui!"

"Zen you have come here?"

"Did you not have my letter?"

"Oui, oui, mais—"

"I have followed it."

Harry Wharton could not avoid hearing that much before he was out of the room. He closed the door, and heard no more.

His brow was clouded as he rejoined his chums, now going into the Remove class-room.

"Well, was Mossoo glad to see his countryman?" asked Brown.

Wharton shook his head.

"No. He was frightened, I believe. He looked it."

"Frightened!"

"Yes, if looks go for anything."

"But what can there be to be afraid of?"

Wharton made a restless movement.

"I don't know! Mossoo is as good as gold, but that dark fellow has some hold on him I imagine. I can't think how, or why. But monsieur doesn't want him to come here, and doesn't dare to order him out, that's clear."

"The fellow must be a rotter, then!"

"No doubt about that."

And Wharton was thinking it over with a perplexed brow when they sat down for afternoon lessons. It was not exactly his business, perhaps. But he liked Mossoo, and he knew that the kind and simple little Frenchman was frequently imposed upon. It looked as if an unscrupulous adventurer was getting the upper hand of him, in some way Harry did not understand, and the suspicion made the boy eager to interfere, and to send the stranger from the sea about his business. But he knew nothing of the affair, nor was he likely to know anything.

There was a French lesson for the Remove that afternoon, and when Mr. Quelch gave up his place to Monsieur Charpentier, many of the Removites looked at the little Frenchman curiously.

Monsieur Charpentier was evidently not himself.

He stammered and hesitated, made mistakes, lost the thread of his explanations, and was soon quite in confusion.

The better sort of fellows in the class saw that there was something amiss with him, and were as attentive as they could be to make things easier for him. A good many, however, took the opportunity of ragging the little Frenchman.

Billy Bunter thought it was an excellent opportunity of working off a little ventriloquism. His experiment with Mr. Quelch had turned out a failure, but the fat ventriloquist was eager to get level with somebody, and Monsieur Charpentier was a master, anyway, and an easy victim.

But the moment a rat was heard squeaking under the French-master's feet, causing him to jump and stare round in amazement, Harry Wharton's grasp fastened upon the shoulder of the Owl of the Remove.

"Stop that, Bunter!" he said, in a low voice.

Bunter blinked at him.

"Oh, really, Wharton!"

"Stop it, I say!"

"But—but—"

"No tricks on Mossoo this afternoon. Mind, if there's any nonsense, I'll give you a licking after lessons, as sure as a gun!"

Bunter snorted in disgust. But he knew that Harry Wharton was a fellow of his word, and that afternoon there was no more ventriloquism.

THE TWELFTH CHAPTER.

Diminishing Capital.

"I SAY, you fellows—"

Thus Billy Bunter, as the Remove came out after afternoon school. It was already dark, and flakes of snow were falling in the Close, and whitened the leafless branches of the old elms. The fellows were grouping in the passages, or going to their studies for tea, and Bunter ran down the chums of No. 1, talking at the door of the junior common-room.

They were discussing Christmas holidays, when Bunter came up and inserted himself into the group, blinking at them.

"I say, you fellows, about those lines."

"What lines?" asked Nugent.

"Those lines that Quelch gave me, you know."

"Go and do them!"

"There are three hundred."

"Well, it serves you right, doesn't it?"

"He says they're to be shown up by bedtime."

"Show them up, then!"

"If that's your idea of a joke, Nugent, I'm blessed if I can see where the fun comes in. Are you fellows going to help me?"

"Stuff!" said Harry. "You deserved the lines, and so you can write them. Besides, you know Quelch is so sharp. He detects different hands in the same impot."

"Well, I wouldn't mind doing a few in the beginning," said Bunter.

"Go hon!" remarked Nugent. "You are too good."

"Oh, really, Nugent! Look here, will you chaps do ninety each if I do thirty?"

"Oh, go and eat coke!"

"If I do the lines I sha'n't be able to make the Christmas

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pudding. It seems a pity, when I've raised sixteen shillings for the materials."

"Sixteen shillings! You had a pound."

"Well, you see, I—I had to have a snack, you know. I'm feeling very delicately lately, and I've got a feeling that I shall be indisposed if I don't keep up my constitution with constant nourishment."

"Well, we'll manage a hundred lines between us," said Wharton. "You can do the rest."

"I can't possibly, and—"

"Tell Quelch so, then."

"Oh, don't be an ass, you know! I—"

"Oh, buzz off!"

"But really—"

"Buzz off!" roared Wharton, in a tone that made Bunter skip.

And the fat junior went his way grumbling. But he did not go up to the study to do the lines. He went to the tuckshop to fortify himself for the task.

When the chums looked in at No. 1 an hour later for tea, they found that Bunter had commenced his task. He sat at the table, with a pile of buns on his left, and a pen in his hand. Of the three hundred lines he had written, so far, the following:

"Arma virumque cano."

He blinked at the chums.

"Here, get off that table," said Nugent; "we want tea."

Bunter assumed a decidedly injured expression.

"Oh, I say, you fellows," he exclaimed, "you can't have tea now. I want the table. I've got three hundred lines to do this evening, and I don't think it's fair for you to interrupt me."

"Take 'em into the Form-room."

"It's more convenient here, and—"

"And you've done three words out of three hundred lines," grinned Nugent, jerking the foolscap off the table to the armchair. "Get out of the way!"

"Oh, really, Nugent—"

"Br-r-r-r!"

They laid the table and put the kettle on. Bunter sat in the armchair and ate buns.

When Nugent began poaching eggs, the fat junior's face cleared, and he showed some signs of interest.

"I say, Nugent, I'll do that, if you like," he remarked.

"Of course, you fellows want me to have tea with you."

"No, we don't!" said Nugent coolly. "But I expect you will have tea with us, whether we want it or not, so you may as well poach the eggs. Get a move on!"

And Bunter began to cook. It was an occupation that suited him down to the ground, and his fat face became quite contented.

"If you chaps like to do my lines while I'm cooking, I've no objection," he remarked. "It will save time. I should like to be able to tackle that Christmas pudding this evening. Mrs. Kebble is making Christmas puddings now, and I could get her to boil mine along with hers."

"Rats!" said Nugent, without looking up from the book he was reading.

"Oh, really, Nugent! You see, it seems a shame to waste the twelve bob I've got for making a pudding—"

"You've got twelve! Twelve!"

"Well, you see, some of it's gone. You know how money does go," said Bunter. "I think I shall have to return to my original idea, and make a ten-bob pudding of it."

Nugent grunted. The eggs were dished up, and the juniors had their tea, Billy Bunter disposing of the lion's share, as usual. During tea the fat junior made a further attempt to enlist general aid towards getting the lines done, in vain. When the meal was over, he rose to leave the study.

"You can have the table now," Nugent remarked.

Bunter blinked at it.

"There's the tea-things on it," he said.

"Well, clear them off."

"Oh, really, Nugent, you know that I don't like exertion just after a meal. I believe you wouldn't care if I fell down dead on the carpet this minute."

"Oh, yes, I should! I should have to roll you out into the passage, and you're not a light weight."

Bunter sniffed indignantly, and went to the door. Like most people who make pathetic speeches as a habit, he never found his pathos taken seriously.

"What about the lines?" asked Wharton, laughing.

"I shall tackle them later," said Billy Bunter. "After all, there's plenty of time in the evening yet."

"Going to get the materials for the Christmas pudding?"

"Well, I don't know yet. I shall look in at Mrs. Mibble's."

And Bunter departed.

The chums of the Remove cleared the table, and settled down to their preparation.

When that was finished, they went downstairs, and the



Bob Cherry changed his grip to Bunter's shoulder, and proceeded to shake the fat junior as a terrier might shake a rat. "Yow! Yow! Yow!"

first person they met was Bunter, coming in with a smear of jam upon his face.

"Got the materials?" asked Nugent, with a grin.

The fat junior shook his head.

"No. Upon the whole, I don't see that it would be much good trying to make a Christmas pudding for five bob."

"Ha, ha! Five bob!"

"Well, some of the money's gone. I've paid Russell a little debt I owed him, and spent a little at the tuckshop. I felt myself coming over faint, and I had to have a snack."

"You must have needed it, just after tea, and the tea you put away, too," said Nugent sympathetically. "But I suppose that's a joke about your paying Russell?"

"Certainly not. I hope you don't think I'm the kind of chap to leave a debt unpaid, when I've got cash in hand."

"Well, considering how you got the cash, it wouldn't make matters much worse," said Harry Wharton drily.

"If you don't want to stand that sovereign, Wharton, I'm quite willing to put it down on the account," said Bunter, with dignity. "I'm not the kind of chap to be under obligations to anybody, I hope."

"The accountfulness of the honourable Bunter is terrific," murmured the Nabob of Bhanipur.

"Hallo, Russell!" sang out Nugent, as the Removite came by. "I hear that Bunter has been paying a debt?"

Russell grinned.

"He settled up twopence I lent him a week ago," he said.

"Blessed if I know what's the matter with him!"

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"Oh, really, Russell——"

"You young fraud!" said Wharton. "You've spent two-pence in paying Russell, and six-and-tenpence in the tuckshop, to reduce your capital to five bob."

"Well, that's what I said—it was partly in paying Russell, and partly for a snack. I suppose you don't want me to fade away and become a walking shadow?"

"Ha, ha! I don't think that's likely to happen."

"About that Christmas pudding, though," said Bunter. "If you like to do those lines, and make this up to a sovereign again——"

But the chums were walking away, and Bunter did not finish that advantageous offer. He drifted up to the study, and did his prep., after a fashion. Then he wrote two lines out of the three hundred, felt exhausted, and went to Mrs. Mimble's for refreshment.

At bedtime there was a gloomy expression on Bunter's forehead, and a big smear of jam on his mouth. Nugent poked him in the ribs, and he gasped.

"Done those lines, porpoise?"

"Oh, really, Nugent! How could I, when I've been busy all the time? I've done one per cent. of them."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Do you think Quelch will be waxy in the morning?"

"He'll be waxy to-night, I expect, as he told you to show them up before bedtime," said Nugent, with a chuckle.

"Oh, dear! It's curious how people pick on me to persecute," said Billy Bunter. "A good-natured, inoffensive

chap like me. I've been worrying over those lines so much that I haven't had time to make the Christmas pudding, and now the capital's diminished. It's no good trying to make it now."

"How much have you got left?"

"N-n-n-nothing."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I sha'n't be able to make the Christmas pudding now. It's rough, because I've got a ripping recipe. I suppose it's no good asking you to make up that sovereign again?"

"Not much."

"Some chaps are so selfish. I don't think a fellow ought to be selfish, you know. If you start a thing of that sort when you're young, it grows on you, and you grow into a beastly unpleasant kind of man, you know."

"Bunter!"

Billy jumped.

"Yes, sir?"

"Have you done your lines, Bunter?" said Mr. Quelch, frowning. "You have not brought them to me, as I bade you, and it is now your bedtime."

"I haven't finished them, sir."

"And why not?"

"I—I've been so hard at work, sir. The chaps in my study—er—wanted me to make a Christmas pudding for them, sir, and—and I didn't like to refuse."

"My only hat!" murmured Wharton. "What next?"

"Indeed!" said Mr. Quelch. "And have you made the Christmas pudding, Bunter?"

"No, n-n-not exactly made it, sir."

"Have you begun it?"

"Well, not exactly begun it, sir."

"Then how has it kept you busy?"

"Well, I—I've been turning it over in my mind, sir."

Mr. Quelch smiled slightly.

"How much have you done of the imposition, Bunter?"

"I—I've done some of it, sir."

"How much?"

"I've made a good start, sir."

"How many lines have you written?"

"I—I didn't count them, sir."

"But you can form a rough idea, Bunter. How many?"

"About—about three or four, sir," stammered Bunter.

The Remove-master frowned.

"Ah! Very well. The imposition is doubled."

"Oh, sir!"

"And if you do not bring in six hundred lines to me to-morrow night, Bunter, I shall deal very seriously with you."

And Mr. Quelch walked away, shaking his head, leaving the fat junior the picture of dismay.

Billy Bunter blinked at the Remove-master.

"I suppose you'll help me with the lines now?" he said.

"I suppose we shall have to, you troublesome little beast," said Nugent. "The next time you get an impot from Quelch, you'll get a licking from me, too."

"Oh, really, Nugent—"

"Scat! Get off to bed!"

THE THIRTEENTH CHAPTER.

Bunter's Raid!

THE Remove went to bed, but contrary to his usual custom, Bunter did not drop off immediately to sleep.

After the expenditure of a pound at the tuckshop, in instalments, even Bunter was not hungry. But he was thinking of Christmas puddings, or, to be more exact, one particular Christmas pudding.

After the prefect had withdrawn, and darkness reigned in the Remove dormitory, a still, small voice was heard from Bunter's bed.

"I say, you fellows—"

"Oh, go to sleep!" grunted Bob Cherry.

"I've got a little scheme—"

"Br-r-r-r-r."

"Oh, really, Cherry! It's about that Christmas pudding. I haven't been able to make it, owing to that imposition. But I find that Mrs. Kebble has made a big one, and has been boiling it this evening."

"I wish she would boil you."

"You see, I know where the pudding is—"

"Trust you for that," grunted Nugent. "I believe you know the latitude and longitude of every morsel of grub in the house."

"Well, a chap ought to keep his eyes open, you know."

"You do—and your mouth too. Shut it."

"You see," went on Bunter, "if one of you fellows liked to come and help me, I'd raid that pudding, and we should have a feed all the same. How do you like the idea?"

"Rotten!"

"Oh, really, Brown! I think it's a splendid idea! Mrs. Kebble makes ripping puddings, and her Christmas puddings are certain to be good. After all the trouble I've taken

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about the matter, too, it seems a shame that I shouldn't have any pudding."

"Oh, go to sleep!"

"I say, Bulstrode—"

"Gro-o-o-o!"

"Will you come down with me and—"

Snore!

"I say, Hazeldene—"

"Rats!"

"Ogilvy, old chap—"

"Boo!"

"I say, Wun Lung! Wun Lung, old fellow, you're not asleep, are you?"

"No sleepee," came the soft voice of the Celestial from his bed in the darkness.

"Good! Will you come down with me?"

"Me comee."

"Jolly good! You've got more pluck than all these fellows!" said Bunter, slipping out of bed. "I can tell you exactly where the pudding is—and I'll wait for you at the top of the stairs while you get it, you know."

"Me savvy."

"Rats!" exclaimed Harry Wharton. "Don't go, Wun Lung. Bunter will give you all the trouble and risk!"

"Oh, really, Wharton—"

"Allee lightee," murmured the Celestial, as he slipped out of bed and began to don his clothes; "allee lightee, my fiend. Me takee care."

"Bunter is bound to make some blunder."

"Me savvy."

"Well, if you will go, you will," said Wharton. "You're an ass!"

"Allee light."

Bunter was dressing in the dark, and grumbling as he bumped against things. He groped his way to the door at last.

"Ready, Wun Lung?"

"Allee leady."

"Good! Come on."

The door opened and closed. The juniors remained awake in the Remove dormitory, wondering how the adventure would turn out. Few of them thought that Billy Bunter would succeed in getting hold of the pudding the housekeeper had made in preparation for Christmas. It was certain to be locked up, for raids on the larder were not quite unknown at Greyfriars. Bunter was thinking only of the pudding and the feed, and did not take account of the difficulties in the way.

After about five minutes, the door of the Remove dormitory opened again and closed softly. There was a faint sound of footfalls.

"Hallo, hallo, hallo!" exclaimed Bob Cherry. "Is that you, Bunter?"

"No Buntel."

"Wun Lung!"

"Allee lightee."

The little Chinese crept back to his bed, and they heard him get in and settle down. There was also a sound suspiciously like a chuckle.

"But where's Bunter?" demanded Harry Wharton, mystified. "Is he getting the pudding?"

"No savvy."

"Is he coming back?"

"No savvy."

"Has he been caught?"

"No savvy."

"Look here, you young ass," exclaimed Wharton, sitting up in bed. "what's happened to Bunter? Why can't you explain yourself?"

"Allee lightee. We gooe down to next passage, and me sayee to Buntel me heal someting," said the Celestial.

"Well, and what then?"

"Me pushoe Buntel in study. Tellee him to wait till coastee clear."

"And then?"

"Me comee back to dolmittee," said the Chinese simply.

"You—you young rascal! Then Bunter's still waiting in the study?"

"What you tinkee?"

"And what was the sound you heard?"

"Windee blowee in tlee."

"Ha, ha, ha! I suppose Bunter didn't know that?"

"Buntel no savvy."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"My only hat!" grinned Bob Cherry. "It serves Bunter right, for being such a greedy little beast! I shouldn't

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wonder if he sticks in that study for ten minutes before he gets the nerve to look out."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

And the Removites settled down to sleep.

THE FOURTEENTH CHAPTER.

Unpleasant for Bunter.

BILLY BUNTER stood quite still, listening and palpitating.

Wun Lung, who had curious ideas of humour, had pushed him into the study and closed the door, and it was some minutes before the fat junior realised that the little Chinese had not followed him in.

"Where is he, the little beast?" murmured Bunter. "I don't suppose it was anybody coming! He must have dodged into another study. I wonder whose study this is—one of the masters' studies, I believe! Nice for me if he comes in and finds me here. Ow! I wonder how long I'd better wait?"

Billy Bunter listened intently.

He could hear no sound, and he ventured at last to open the door and peep out into the dark passage. As he did so, a very distinct sound of footsteps came to his ears.

He popped back into the study.

The footsteps came on, and there was a sound of voices outside the door. Bunter almost shrieked with terror. They were coming into the study—that study! The little Chinese had not foreseen that.

Bunter wondered for a moment whether he should make a blind rush, and get past the new-comers before they could recognise him. But he had not the nerve. As a hand fell on the door, and it was pushed open, the fat junior wriggled under the table.

There was a scratching sound as a match was struck.

"Ah, I see you have comfortable quarters, mon ami!"

"Oui, oui."

Bunter, under the table, held his breath. The voices showed him that the new-comers were Monsieur Charpentier and his friend, the man from the wreck. He was in the French-master's study.

Monsieur Charpentier raked up the dying fire, and sat down. The Frenchman from the wreck sat opposite to him in the arm-chair, and stretched out his legs. There was a cool and insolent smile upon his face.

"I shall be comfortable here for a few days," he said.

Mossoo made a gesture of denial.

"Ah, non, non!"

"But yes. Have you not presented me to the worthy head-master as your friend—your dear friend, who was saved from the shipwreck?"

"Ah, oui!"

"And has he not accorded permission for me to stay a few days?"

"Certainly. But—"

"But I have no great desire to stay," said Duprez, smiling ironically. "I would prefer London. I did not intend to stay with you. The shipwreck has saved me the trouble of a journey from London to Greyfriars. Voila tout."

"Ah, zat you alone should be saved!"

Gaston Duprez laughed.

"It was curious, was it not? And by the boys of this school!"

"Helas!"

"You would have been better pleased had I gone to the bottom of the bay," said Duprez, laughing.

"Ah, non! But—"

"Better tell the truth—it is natural! If I were at the bottom of the bay, I could not tell the doctor—"

"Silence!"

"Well, pay me, and let me go," said Duprez. "One hundred pounds, and I leave by the first train in the morning."

"You are mad! All my savings are not half the sum."

Duprez shrugged his shoulders.

"I will take that, and wait for more."

"Coquin!"

"Bah! Besides, cannot you help yourself?"

"What!"

"The doctor—does he not keep money in the place?"

The little Frenchman jumped up.

"Rascal! Scoundrel! Leave my room! Go! Va! I—"

"Bah! Keep cool!"

"Villain!"

"Nonsense."

"Leave—leave! Go, then!"

"If I go, I go to the doctor."

Monsieur Charpentier sank into his chair again. He made a gesture of despair.

"Mon Dieu, I am lost!"

"You are—if you are a fool," said Duprez coolly. "Bah! Have you nothing to smoke in this room? You do not offer me a cigar?"

"I have not cigars."

"Or anything to drink?"

"Zere is vater."

Duprez made a grimace.

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"I will not trouble you, thanks. Now— What was that?"

"Quoi! Vat?"

"I thought I heard somebody breathing in the room," said Duprez, looking round with a puzzled air. "I suppose that there is no one else in the room?"

"Non, non."

"Well, I will speak in French, and that will make all safe."

Billy Bunter grunted inaudibly.

In terror as he was of discovery and punishment, he was getting very interested in the conversation. It was pretty plain, even to Bunter's by no means keen intellect, that the man from the wreck was blackmailing the little French-master. Bunter would have given a great deal to know the secret.

But Bunter's French was the worst in the Remove, and he could hardly follow a word in the language the two talkers were now using.

He knew that Duprez was threatening, and that Monsieur Charpentier was feebly expostulating and pleading, but that was all.

And soon Bunter had other things to think of. He was getting cramped. The table was not a large one, and he was squatting most uncomfortably underneath it. The cover did not reach the floor, either, and he had to keep coiled up in the middle underneath, lest some of his limbs should come into view.

To change his position without making a sound was difficult, and Bunter postponed it till the latest possible moment.

But at last the pins and needles that were running through his limbs gave him no alternative, and he moved cautiously.

But the mere fact of movement brought on the pins and needles in his legs more severely, and he could not help emitting a loud gasp.

"Ciel!"

The two Frenchmen uttered the exclamation simultaneously, as they sprang to their feet.

Duprez lifted the corner of the table-cover, and revealed Bunter, now rolling in anguish on the carpet. He gave the fat junior a savage kick, and sent him rolling out into full view.

"Ow, ow, ow!" gasped Bunter.

"Cochon!" shouted Duprez. "You have listened!"

"Helas! It eez Buntair!"

"Ow, ow!"

Duprez glared at the Owl of the Remove furiously, while Monsieur Charpentier clasped his hands. But Bunter never heeded them. Had a pistol been levelled at him just then Billy would have taken no notice of it. He was in agonies of pins and needles, and had no thoughts for anything else. He squirmed on the carpet like a wounded worm.

"Ow! Yow! Yow! Ow!" he spluttered. "Ow! Groo! Yaroo!"

"The fool of a boy! What is the matter with him?"

"Mon Dieu!"

"Ow!" gasped Billy. "Cramp!"

He sat up at last, as the pain subsided. He blinked nervously at the Frenchman. Mossoo had sunk into his chair again, pale as death. Duprez was glaring at Bunter like a tiger.

"I—I think I'd better go," murmured Bunter, staggering to his feet, and squirming as he had a last twinge.

"Spy!" hissed Duprez. "You have listened!"

"I couldn't understand your lingo, mossoo," stammered Bunter. "I—"

"Ah, zat is true!"

"It may be a lie!" growled Duprez.

"Ah, non! Buntair is ze most stupid boy in ze Remove."

"Oh, really, Mossoo—"

"He have no more sense zan ze rabbit. He onderstand nozing."

"But we spoke in English at first," said Duprez.

"I didn't hear you," said Bunter. "Not a word. I'd scorn to listen! And it's no business of mine if you do blackmail mossoo, you know. I won't tell anybody."

Duprez uttered an oath.

"How did you come here, Buntair?" said Monsieur Charpentier faintly.

"I didn't mean to, sir. I just dodged in. I heard someone coming," said Bunter. "I came down with a fellow who wanted to get something. I'm sincerely sorry, sir!"

"You may go, Buntair."

"Thank you, sir!"

Duprez gripped the fat junior by the shoulder, and seized a cane from the table.

"Not without punishment!" he hissed.

"Ow!" yelled Bunter. "Leggo! Lemme alone! I'll go straight to the doctor, and tell him you're blackmailing mossoo, if you touch me! Yow!"

The face of Duprez was convulsed with rage for a moment; but he flung the cane upon the table without striking Bunter.

"Go!" he said hoarsely.
 And Bunter gladly skipped out of the study. Duprez turned to Monsieur Charpentier with a black brow.
 "Is that boy likely to talk?" he said abruptly.
 Monsieur Charpentier groaned.
 "He is ze most likely in all ze school. He is vat ze English call ze chatterbox."
 "Then it's a bad business."
 "Ciel! I know zat!"
 "What will you do?"
 "I know not zat yet. I vill try to keep him shut up."
 But the little Frenchman's expression showed that he had little hope of succeeding in his attempt to keep the Owl of the Remove "shut up."

THE FIFTEENTH CHAPTER.

No Credit.

BUNTER did not stop even to take breath all the way from the French-master's study to the Remove dormitory. He rushed breathlessly into the dormitory, slammed the door, and sank upon his bed, gasping.

The dormitory was asleep; but two or three fellows woke up and asked what the row was about, adding a few uncomplimentary expressions.

"I—I say, you fellows——"
 "Hallo, hallo, hallo! It's Bunter! Ha, ha, ha!"
 "I—I say——"
 "Ha, ha, ha!"
 "I've made an amazing discovery. I——"
 "Got the pudding?"
 "No; but——"
 "Ha, ha, ha!"
 "Blessed if I can see anything to cackle at! I've made a discovery. That French chap you fellows picked up in the cave is a blackmailer, and he knows something about Mossoo."

"Good! Go hon!"
 "It's true, you suspicious beast! Mossoo has committed a murder——"

"Where's the body?"
 "Not here, you idiot! He has committed a murder, or a robbery, or something——"

"Not much difference," grinned Bob Cherry. "Do go to sleep, Bunter. Dream about something less lurid next time."

"I haven't been dreaming, you ass!" said Bunter indignantly. "I heard them talking it over. Duprez wants a hundred pounds to go away."

"Whose hundred pounds?"
 "Mossoo's!"

"And what does he want them to go away for?"
 "Oh, really, Cherry, you are deliberately misunderstanding me! He does not want the money to go away—he wants it to go away himself. Mossoo has committed a series of ghastly crimes, from what I can make out——"

"Make up, you mean."
 "Ha, ha, ha!"

"I tell you it's all true. Duprez is going to hand him over to the hangman if he doesn't shell out, and agree to rob and murder the doctor in his bed!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"
 "You can laugh if you like."
 "Thanks! I will! Ha, ha, ha!"

"Well, it's all true, anyway!"
 "My dear Bunter," said Harry Wharton, laughing, "we know your yarns, you know. Why don't you make it a smaller one? You can't expect us to swallow whales like that!"

"I was under the table——"
 "Rats!"

"And they were talking, and Duprez said——"
 "Bosh!"

"Look here, Brown——"
 "Oh, go to sleep!"

"Then you don't want to hear about it?"
 "We don't want to hear such enormous whoppers," said Bob Cherry. "Go to sleep!"

And Bunter's story being received with derision on all sides, the fat junior felt that he could do nothing more than go to sleep. Like the youth in the story, who cried "Wolf!" so often, and was not believed when the wolf really came, so the imaginative Billy Bunter received no credit now that he was telling the truth—exaggerated, of course.

Neither did he find any listeners when the Remove turned out in the morning, at the clang of the rising-bell.

Bunter was beginning again, but Wharton cut him short.
 "You'd better get off that yarn, Billy," he said. "It's about the biggest humbug even you have ever worked off, and you look an ass, you know. Chuck it!"

"But, really——"
 "Take my advice, and chuck it."
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And Billy Bunter relapsed into indignant silence.
 Harry was thinking it over when he went down to breakfast that morning. There were many strange circumstances in connection with the Frenchman from the sea, and it was an undoubted fact that he was staying with Mossoo, and that Mossoo did not like it.

But it was impossible to trust a word Bunter said. Even if he related facts, they were so mixed, and full of exaggerations that the thread of truth could never be followed.

And Bunter's present yarn was one that wanted frowning down, in any case.

Harry could not help glancing at Monsieur Charpentier at breakfast. The little Frenchman was looking pale and worried. He was never much of an adept at hiding his feelings, and certainly he was not hiding them now.

Gaston Duprez was at the same table, and he was eating his breakfast with cool nonchalance.

Whether Bunter's adventure of the previous evening had disturbed him or not, could not be told from his manner.

The little French-master's eyes wandered towards the Remove table several times. Billy Bunter was too short-sighted to observe it, but Harry Wharton did, and he wondered whether, after all, there was something in the fat junior's story.

Bunter did not venture to tell his yarn again before morning lessons; but it was only bottled up, and was bound to come out again sooner or later, probably in a more wildly-exaggerated form.

As the Remove were going into the class-room that morning, Monsieur Charpentier came up to Harry Wharton with a troubled expression upon his face.

"Wharton! One moment!"
 "Certainly, sir!" said Harry respectfully.

"I wish to speak viz you affair ze morning lessons."
 "Yes, sir!"

"You vill come to my study affair zat you have had ze morning lessons, Wharton."
 "Very well, sir!"

"Zank you, Wharton!"
 The little Frenchman seemed very much relieved. He nodded amiably to Harry Wharton, and went his way, leaving the junior wondering what Mossoo could have to say to him.

Bunter nudged the captain of the Remove.
 "I say, Wharton——"

"Hallo! Don't bother!"
 "What did Mossoo say to you, Wharton?"
 "Mind your own business!"

"Oh, really, Wharton——"
 "Oh, shut up!"

Bunter looked injured, and they went into the class-room. Wharton was thoughtful all through morning lessons. Billy Bunter tried in vain to interest him in the important subject of Christmas puddings.

Even when Mr. Quelch was occupied, and it was safe to talk, Harry refused to discuss the subject.

Billy Bunter had to turn to Wun Lung for sympathy, and he found the Chinese junior quite willing to listen and give advice.

"You see, Mrs. Kebble has a ripping pudding in the cupboard downstairs," said Billy Bunter. "It seems a sin to have it left there, without sampling it, especially as we shall be breaking up soon for the Christmas holidays."

"Wun Lung tinkee so, too!" agreed the little Celestial.
 "We ought to lift that pudding, Wun Lung."
 "Naughty Buntel, to lob Misseeb Kebble!"

Bunter gasped.
 "What!"
 "Me tinkee bad boy."
 "Well, you heathen beast," said Bunter, "you came down with me last night to collar the pudding."

Wun Lung shook his head.
 "Me comee to shuttee you in studee."
 "You—you pigtailed heathen——"

"Buntel no lob pool Misseeb Kebble. Bad boy."
 "Oh, none of your rot, you know!" said Bunter. "We're entitled to have enough to eat, and I never get enough at meal-times."

"Lats!"
 "The question is, whether you'll help me."
 "No savvy!"

"I can keep guard at the top of the kitchen stairs while you nip down and get the pudding," explained Bunter.
 "I can cover your retreat, you know. I'm always willing to take the part with the—the most risk attached."

"No savvy."
 "Are you going to lend a hand?"

"No savvy."
 "You heathen beast! I'll manage it alone."
 "Buntel stealee pudding, pudding hauntee Buntel!" said Wun Lung solemnly.

"Eh? What?"

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"Climes committed at Christmas always blingee ghostee hauntee!"

"You superstitious ass!" said Bunter. "Besides, who ever heard of the ghost of a Christmas-pudding?"

"Me walnee Buntel!"

"Oh, you're a silly ass, you know!"

And when the Remove left their class-room, and Harry Wharton took his way to the French-master's study, Billy Bunter proceeded to lay his plans for annexing the Christmas pudding.

THE SIXTEENTH CHAPTER. Mossou Explains!

MONSIEUR CHARPENTIER was walking up and down his study with quick, nervous tread. He stopped, and glanced towards the door a dozen times, and then resumed his restless pacing. His face was pale and disturbed, and there was perspiration upon his brow.

"Ciel!" he muttered. "It is terrible! I, who have done nozzing—I, who am innocent as ze child to be still born—I am persecuted like zis! It is terrible!"

Tap!

"Zat you? Come in, mon enfant!"

Harry Wharton entered the study.

Monsieur Charpentier turned towards him eagerly.

"Ah! I zank you for coming, Vharton. Please close ze door. I do not vish any ozzers to hear vat I have to say viz you."

"No, sir?"

"I zink you must have observe, Vharton, zat I am very mooch worry and trouble joost lately?" said Monsieur Charpentier.

"Yes, sir, I have noticed it."

"You know zat zat man is not my friend?"

"I suspected so, sir."

"He is my enemy, Vharton—a pad, vicked man!"

"I am sorry I was the cause of his coming here, sir. But—"

The little Frenchman waved his hand.

"Zat is all right, Vharton! You vas brave, you save THE MAGNET.—95.

NEXT WEEK: "THE GREYFRIARS SKATERS."

his life—it is good! I would not zat even so vicked a man be drowned in ze shipwreck. You do vell, my boy! I am not sorry zat you save ze man. But he have brought mooch trouble to me. I tell you zis because zere vas a poy in ze Remove who was in my room last night, and he hear much of vat zat man say to me."

"Yes, sir."

"I have no doubt that he repeat vat he hear."

"He has been talking, sir; but nobody takes much notice of what he says," replied Harry. "He is too well-known as a chap who tells yarns."

The French-master looked relieved.

"Very good, Vharton! But—but I vish you to try if you can to stop him from ze talk—so zat the matter not come to be known all over ze school."

"I will do my best, sir."

"And zen, Vharton, I vill explain to you how—"

"It is not necessary, sir. I know very well that you can only be the victim of circumstances—that you have nothing to answer for, even if this man has some kind of a hold upon you."

The tears came into the little Frenchman's eyes.

"Zat is very good of you to say so, Vharton. I am glad zat you have so good an opinion of me."

"We all have, sir."

"C'est bien! But, because you trust me, Vharton, I vill explain. It was ven I was in France zat I knew Duprez. He vas a master at the school vere I vas at zat time. Zere vas money missing, and it was known zat it vas Duprez who had taken it. He run away. Ze police zey never find him."

"Then the police want the man now?" said Wharton, opening his eyes.

"Oui, oui, ze Paris police!" said Monsieur Charpentier.

"You vill understand zat Duprez is not his real name."

"I suppose not, sir."

"I never zink zat I hear of him again; but he keep me in sight. He tell me zat he accuse me of being his confederate in zat robbery in ze French school, and ruin me viz my reputation. I give him money, and he go. Now he come again, and he demand more morey. I zink I pay him some, and he go. You see, Vharton, I trust you. You

A Splendid Tale of Harry Wharton & Co. By FRANK RICHARDS.

"Will keep secret vat I have told you, and keep Bunter from talking?"

"Certainly, sir! But——"

"Vat would you say?"

"Why don't you defy the scoundrel, sir?"

The little Frenchman shivered.

"I dare not! Ze post of French-master in a big English school it is not easy to get, and the least suspicion against ze character——"

"The coward!"

"He know zat I dare not risk it," groaned the little master. "He know zat I not stay in ze place under a breath of suspicion."

Wharton's brows contracted.

"But if you kicked him out, sir, most likely he wouldn't have the nerve to go to Dr. Locke."

"Oui, oui! Possible! But if he did?"

"I think the Head would give you a chance, sir."

"It is zat I have a mozzer in France, who vill starve if I not send ze money," said Mossou. "I dare not risk it. I sall pay ze coquin—not so much as he ask, but enoff to make him go away."

"But he will return, sir."

"Possible!"

"You can't get rid of the villain for good by paying him money, sir. That's the way to make him stick to you."

Mossou made a despairing gesture.

"I know—I know! But I dare not run ze risk. You keep my secret, Wharton. I explain to you because you are to shut up Bunter."

"Certainly, sir!"

And Harry Wharton quitted the French-master's study.

He went away with his brows darkly wrinkled, and a bitter anger in his breast against the blackmailer who was troubling the inoffensive little Frenchman.

As he had expected, Monsieur Charpentier was frightened by a shadow. If he had been determined enough to face the blackmailer, the latter would have been powerless. But the terror of incurring suspicion in the head-master's eyes, and of having to leave the excellent berth he now possessed, made a coward of the little Frenchman.

He was likely to part with his small savings to satisfy the demands of the cowardly blackmailer, only to be fastened upon again at a future time when Duprez was once more in need of money.

"I wonder," murmured Wharton—"I wonder if we could help him? The best thing he could do would be to go to the Head at once and tell him all about it. I'm sure Dr. Locke would stand by him. But he won't do that."

Wharton's reflections were suddenly interrupted.

A fat figure, with a bundle under its arm, was scuttling along the passage, and it ran full into the captain of the Remove.

Wharton staggered against the wall, and the fat figure sat down with a bump, and the parcel flopped upon the linoleum with a soft flop.

"You young ass!" shouted Wharton. "Why don't you look where you're going, Bunter?"

"I'm sincerely sorry—ow—I was in a hurry!"

Bunter scrambled up, and glanced round nervously. He clutched up his parcel, and was bolting again, when Harry seized him by the collar.

"Ow!" gasped Bunter, as he was swung back.

"What have you got there?"

"H'sh! The pudding!"

Wharton burst into a laugh.

"The Christmas pudding?"

"Yes! Keep it dark!"

And Bunter scuttled upstairs, with the precious pudding under his arm.

He did not stop to eat it when he reached the Remove dormitory. He knew that there would be a hue-and-cry for the missing pudding. He wrapped it in an old newspaper, and hid it under the mattress of his bed, and dodged out of the dormitory.

He gave a yell as someone caught him by the sleeve.

"Ow! It wasn't I! I haven't seen the pudding!"

"Bunter——"

"Oh, it's you, Wun Lung! You startled me. It's all right! I've got the pudding!"

"Bad Bunter!"

"Oh, go and eat coke!" said Bunter. And he went on his way rejoicing.

THE SEVENTEENTH CHAPTER. The Christmas-pudding.

THERE was an ecstatic smile upon the fat face of Billy Bunter that afternoon. Mr. Quelch glanced at him several times, wondering. There was an imposition of six hundred lines impending over the head of Bunter, with punishment awaiting him if he did not get it written

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out by bed-time that night. It was not a time for looking contented. But Billy Bunter was looking very contented.

He was thinking of the pudding concealed in the dormitory, and the feed he had in prospect.

The imposition had escaped his mind for the time being, but it was abruptly recalled when the class was dismissed. Mr. Quelch signed to him to stop as the Remove were filing out.

"Bunter!"

Bunter halted.

"You have an imposition to hand to me to-night, Bunter."

"Ye-e-es, sir!"

"If it is not ready I shall cane you severely."

"Certainly, sir!"

And the smile faded off Billy Bunter's face, and he was looking very serious as he went out into the passage.

"Come up and do your lines now, Bunter," said Wharton.

"I'll lend you a hand."

"How many will you fellows do for me?" asked Bunter.

"I've told you. We can manage a hundred."

"That's not many out of six hundred."

"You ought to have done some at dinner-time, you young slacker. I suppose you know Quelch is in earnest. It means a licking if the lines are not ready to-night."

"Yes, I suppose so. You fellows might begin for me, and I'll go on. I—I've got to speak to Mrs. Mimble about something."

And Bunter scuttled off to the school shop before he could be further reasoned with. Wharton uttered an exclamation of annoyance.

"It's enough to make a chap tired of trying to help the young ass!" he exclaimed. "I don't believe he will do a single line."

"Quelch will warm him if he doesn't."

"He's trusting to luck, I suppose. Well, we'll do a hundred to be shoved in with the rest, but I don't believe he'll do a dozen lines to put to them."

Billy Bunter came into the junior common-room presently. A good many of the Remove asked about the Christmas pudding. It was generally known that Mrs. Kebble, the housekeeper, had missed a Christmas pudding from the larder, and it was not difficult for the juniors to guess that Billy Bunter had had a hand in its disappearance.

The fat junior shrugged his shoulders.

"I don't see what I should know about Mrs. Kebble's pudding," he remarked.

"Rats!" said Skinner. "You've had it."

"Oh, really, Skinner! As a matter of fact, I do happen to have a Christmas pudding at the present time, and I was going to ask some of you fellows to have a feed with me."

"I'm on!" said Skinner promptly.

"Same here!" grinned Stott.

"Lead the way!" said Hazeldene.

"I say, you fellows——"

"It's all right," said Ogilvy. "We'll all come. Where's the pudding?"

"Yes, but first——"

"Faith, the pudding comes first," said Micky Desmond.

"Lead the way to the pudding, ye gossoon."

"I've got six hundred lines to do, and I can't have the feed till they're done. It will weigh upon my mind, you know," said Bunter. "Any of you fellows going to help me with the lines?"

"Oh, hang the lines!"

"Where's the pudding?"

"I'm only going to invite the fellows who help me do the lines," explained Billy Bunter. "And I'm not going to have the feed till after the lines are done."

"Oh, rats!" said Bulstrode, walking away.

But the others lingered. They knew that Mrs. Kebble made splendid Christmas puddings, and some of them had seen the missing pudding. They wanted to sample it.

"Well, I'll do some for you," said Hazeldene.

"So will I!"

"Faith, and I'll lend a hand intirely."

"That's right!" said Bunter. "Begin at different points in the *Aeneid*, and mind you don't get mixed-up, you know. Wharton's doing a hundred for me, and you'll only have to do five hundred between you."

"You lazy young rotter! Aren't you going to do any yourself?" demanded Russell.

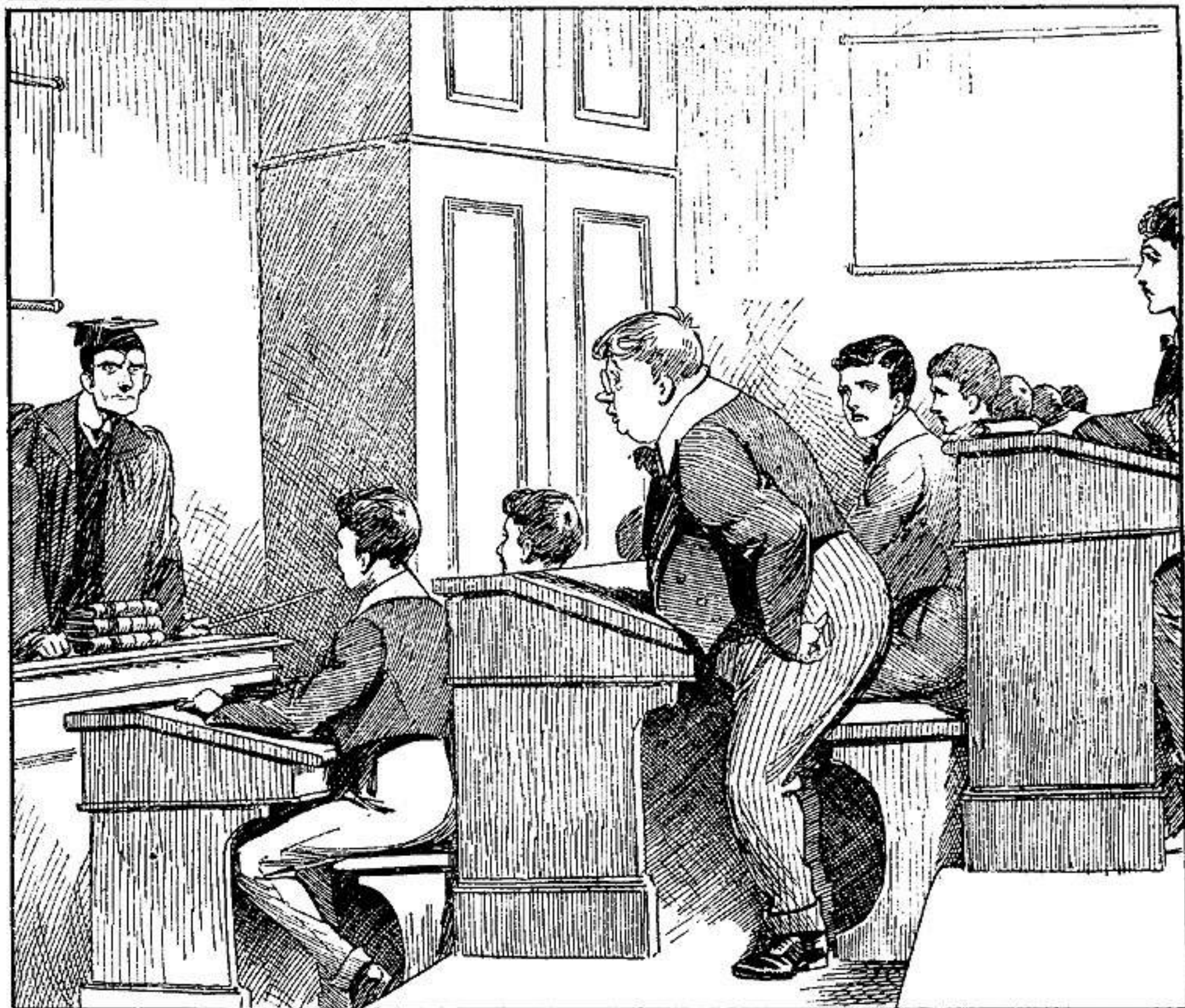
"Well, you see, I'm going to get the things ready for the feed in the dorm."

"Oh, all right! Buzz along!"

And Billy Bunter, leaving the juniors busy with his imposition, scuttled off to the Remove dormitory, which was, of course, deserted at that hour.

The juniors, who were to earn their share in the feed, set to work hard.

Five hundred lines was a big number, but it was not so very much divided between nearly a dozen fellows.



"Stand out here," Bunter!" roared the Form-master. "If—if you don't mind, sir, I—I'd rather stay here," faltered Billy Bunter, who didn't like the look in Mr. Quelch's eye.

Bunter had left them a specimen of his hand, and it was easy enough to scrawl big, sprawling characters that would pass for his, unless subjected to a close examination.

Mr. Quelch sometimes examined impots closely, but he was not likely to be too particular in the details of a six-hundred line imposition.

The foolscap was swiftly covered by the juniors.

Meanwhile, Billy Bunter was just as busy, though in a different way.

He went up to the Remove dormitory, and took out the pudding, lighting one gas-burner to illuminate the feed. He opened his box, and extracted a plate, knife, and fork. Then he carved the pudding.

Bunter had really intended to share his feed with the juniors who were doing his lines in the common-room, as a reward for their assistance.

The pudding was a large one, and there was really enough for all.

Billy had simply intended to have a "snack" before the others came up. Merely that, and nothing more!

But the temptation was too great!

The pudding was a splendid one, though, perhaps, it was not quite cooked enough, Mrs. Kebble having really intended to give it another boiling.

But that made no difference to Billy Bunter.

It was delicious, and the fat junior took snack after snack, till his fat face was shining, and his very jaws seemed fatigued with exertion.

But then he did not stop.

The pudding was half gone when the dormitory door opened, and Nugent came in to fetch his coat. He stared at the fat junior, who gave a jump.

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NEXT
WEEK:

"THE GREYFRIARS SKATERS."

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"Bunter! What on earth—?"

"Hallo!" said Bunter feebly. "I—I was afraid it was one of those chaps. Have you fellows done those hundred lines, Nugent?"

"Yes, long ago."

"Good! I—I'm just having a snack, you know."

"Have you eaten half a pudding that size?"

"Well, you see, I'm hungry."

"You'll make yourself ill."

"Oh, no. I'm never ill, except through insufficient nourishment," said Billy Bunter confidently. "That's all right."

"I shouldn't care to have your dreams to-night."

"Oh, I don't mind that! This is a ripping pudding."

"Young porpoise!"

And Nugent took his coat and went out. Billy Bunter went on with his snacks.

The Christmas pudding grew smaller by degrees and beautifully less.

Bunter was beginning to feel an uncomfortable tightness about his waist, and he had unfastened a few buttons of his waistcoat.

This gave him so much relief that he went steadily on, and at length there was nothing left on the plate but the mark where the pudding had stood.

Bunter rose to his feet.

"M-m-my hat!" he murmured. "I—I feel rather heavy! Perhaps I had better lie down a bit. Phew! The fellows would find me when they come here, though. They're bound to be a bit annoyed about that pudding. Some chaps are so selfish and greedy."

And Bunter reflected.

If the juniors slaving away at the imposition came and

found the pudding devoured, they were pretty certain to rag Billy Bunter, and they would probably tear up the lines they had written for him.

That had to be prevented at any cost.

Bunter, with a slow and painful tread, descended the stairs, and looked into the common-room. A pile of written paper lay on the table.

"Finished, you fellows!" asked Bunter heavily.

"Just on," said Ogilvy, looking up. "Hallo, you've been at the Christmas pudding!"

"Well, I thought I'd better take a snack, you know, to see how it was."

"Good! Is it all right?"

"First rate!"

"I dare say you've had the lion's share already, Bunter," remarked Russell.

"Well, I've finished," said Bunter. "Buck up with those lines, will you? I want to take them in to Quelch."

"No hurry before bedtime."

"Well, I want to get it over."

A few minutes later the lines were done. Bunter collected them up.

"We may as well get up to the dorm," said Trevor.

"Bunter can join us there as soon as he's been to Quelch. Where's the pudding, Bunter?"

Bunter coloured.

"You'll—you'll see a plate on my bed, as you go in the dorm," he said.

"Right you are!"

The juniors went upstairs. Bunter scuttled into No. 1 Study, and took up the hundred lines there, and with the whole imposition under his arm, made his way to Mr. Quelch's study. The Remove-master was not there, and Bunter laid the foolscap on his desk and withdrew.

He went upstairs again as far as the Remove passage in fear and trembling. There was a shout from further upstairs. He knew what it meant. The juniors knew that the pudding was gone.

"I—I suppose there'll be a row," murmured Bunter.

He went into Study No. 1. It was empty. To shut the door and lock it was the work of a few seconds.

Then Bunter, shivering on the inside of the door, heard the loud tramp of feet as the Removites came downstairs in search of him.

They passed the study, and went down to the common-room, but not finding him there, they came up to the study door.

Someone tried the handle on the outside, and immediately made the discovery that the door was locked.

There was a sharp rap of knuckles on the panels.

"Open this door!"

Billy Bunter did not reply. He sank down in the arm-chair and rested. He was feeling very uncomfortable in body as well as in mind.

For, great as was the fat junior's stowage capacity, he had really seriously over-eaten himself this time, and he was very near to being ill.

Thump! Thump! Thump!

"Open this door!"

Bunter neither stirred nor spoke.

"All right!" yelled Ogilvy, through the keyhole. "We know you're there, you fat worm. We know you've scoffed the whole pudding. We'll make you hop when you come out!"

"Begorra, and we will intirely!"

And the juniors tramped away.

THE EIGHTEENTH CHAPTER.

The Order of the Boot.

"MON enfant! Stop! I want to speak to you!"

Harry Wharton halted.

He was going down to the gates of Greyfriars with Nugent. The two juniors had their coats on, for there was a fall of snow in the quad, and a cold wind was blowing.

Harry started a little as Gaston Duprez loomed out of the gloom.

He wondered what the Frenchman could want with him.

Duprez came quickly up as he spoke, his black eyes scintillating as they rested upon the two juniors. Harry disliked the man thoroughly, and he did not waste much politeness upon him.

"What do you want?" he asked abruptly.

Gaston Duprez gritted his teeth.

"You are going out?"

"Yes, certainly."

"You go to the town?"

"We are going to the village," said Harry wonderingly.

"I don't see how it concerns you."

THE MAGNET.—95.

NEXT WEEK:

"THE MAGNET" LIBRARY RETURNS TO USUAL SIZE AND PRICE: ONE HALFPENNY.

"Ah, but I guess where you go," said the Frenchman savagely.

"I do not understand you."

"It is that you go to the police," said Duprez, between his teeth. "You think to bring them here and take me by surprise. Ah, I know!"

Nugent stared blankly. It immediately came into Harry's mind, however, that Duprez knew of that talk in the Frenchmaster's study.

He was silent, and the Frenchman went on savagely.

"Yes; I know all, you see."

"You know what you deserve, you mean," said Harry quietly.

Duprez sneered.

"Put it as you like. Do you deny that you are going for the police? Bah! I should not believe you if you did! I heard your talk with Charpentier; I was outside the window. I knew the weak fool was going to confide in you, and I listened."

"It was like you," said Harry scornfully. "You make me regret that I did not leave you in the cave."

The French adventurer shrugged his shoulders.

"It is too late to think of that, little monsieur. I have been watching to see if you should leave the school—and you are going. I know now that you have determined that if Charpentier will not resist me, you will do so. Well, you will not find me here when you return, Monsieur Wharton."

Harry drew a deep breath.

"Thank goodness for that, anyway!"

"Neither, perhaps, will you find Monsieur Charpentier here," said Gaston Duprez, with a sneer. "For ere I go, I shall go to the Head."

"You cur!"

"Bah! If my fangs are to be drawn, I will bite first for the last time!" said the adventurer, with a sneer.

"If I tell you that I am not going to the police——"

"Bah! I shall not believe you!"

The Frenchman turned away. Gosling had come out of his lodge to lock the gates, and he was looking at them curiously.

"Stop a minute, Gaston Duprez," said Wharton, in a low, steady voice.

The Frenchman looked back.

"What would you say?"

"You are going to the Head."

"Immediately!"

"And then to leave Greyfriars?"

"Oui, oui!"

"Gaston Duprez, I saved your life, surely something is due to me from you!" said Wharton. "You said you were grateful—will you not go without harming Monsieur Charpentier, who after all has never injured you?"

Duprez laughed mockingly.

"I have my revenge before I go," he said.

"And nothing will stop you?"

"Nothing!"

"Very well," said Wharton, between his teeth. "Since all is to come out, Monsieur Charpentier shall have the first word."

"What do you mean?"

"Lend me a hand, Nugent," said Wharton, without replying to the Frenchman.

"I'm with you, old chap."

And the two juniors sprang together upon the Frenchman.

Taken by surprise, Gaston Duprez reeled in their grip, and struggled furiously; but, powerful man as he was, he had to deal with two athletic lads in the pink of condition.

In a minute or less he was rolling in the snow, and then they grasped him and dragged him towards the gateway.

"Outside!" gasped Wharton.

"My honly 'at!" said Gosling, staring on at the scene in the blankest amazement. "Wot I says is this 'ere, wot do you mean by it?"

Neither of the juniors troubled to reply. The Frenchman, cursing furiously, was dragged out of the gateway, and flung into the mud and snow of the road.

"There!" exclaimed Wharton, his eyes gleaming. "Now go, and do your worst; but you will not do it by word of mouth!"

The Frenchman scrambled up, mad with rage. He was fumbling in his coat, and Wharton sprang forward as there was a gleam of steel in the dusk. Duprez, too mad with rage to care what he was doing, had a knife in his hand. But Wharton was in time. His clenched fist, hard and heavy as iron, with all his strength behind it, caught the scoundrel on the point of the jaw.

Duprez gave a choking gasp, and went over as if a cannon-ball had struck him.

Back, back, till with a crash he went into a half-frozen

ditch, and disappeared amid a spout of muddy water, his knife flying over the hedge.

"My hat!" said Nugent. "That's what he wanted! I think that will cool him!"

"Let's get in!"

The two juniors entered the gates, and Gosling closed and locked them. He had seen the gleam of the knife, and he was anxious to get strong locks and bolts between himself and the enraged Frenchman.

Gaston Duprez struggled out of the ditch.

He was streaming with water and mud and slime, and looked a pitiable object. He shook his fist madly at the gates of Greyfriars, and then tramped away down the road. He had evidently had enough.

"Wot I says is this 'ere," remarked Gosling. "Wot does it all mean—eh?"

"It's a conundrum," said Nugent blandly. "You have to guess the answer, and if you're right, you get nothing a week for life."

And the juniors walked back towards the school-house, leaving Gosling staring. Harry Wharton's face was very grave and hard.

"Well, the murder's out now, and no mistake," said Nugent. "You're not coming down to the village about the football after all, Harry."

"No. To-morrow will do for that, Frank. I must speak to Mossoo now."

"It's true, then, that that rascal knows something to Mossoo's disadvantage."

"Yes; or, rather, he has made up a yarn that Mossoo is afraid of. Mossoo is a good little ass, but he hasn't the spirit of a mouse. Duprez has frightened him, and he hasn't nerve enough to turn on the scoundrel."

"He'll have no choice now, though."

"No. Duprez is gone; but he is certain to write to the Head, and do Mossoo any harm he can, now he cannot hope to screw any more money out of him."

Nugent nodded thoughtfully.

"I don't see how you can stop that, Harry."

"I can't stop it; the only thing is for Mossoo to explain to the Head before he gets Duprez's letter. That can't come till the morning, anyway. Duprez will clear out, that's certain; he will expect the police to be set on his track. It's the letter that Mossoo must guard against. I'm going to tell him what's happened, and if he's got any sense he'll go straight to the Head, and pitch him the whole story."

"Good!"

And Harry Wharton went directly to Monsieur Charpentier's study.

THE NINETEENTH CHAPTER.

The Phantom Pudding.

NUGENT stopped at the door of No. 1 in the Remove passage, tried the handle, and then kicked forcibly.

"Hallo! What's this door locked for? Open it!"

"I—I say, you fellows, is that you?" came a faint voice from within.

"Yes, you fat duffer! Open the door!"

Bunter unlocked the door, and Nugent entered. Then the fat junior sank into the armchair again. He was looking quite pale.

"What's the matter, fathead?" was Nugent's sympathetic query. "What did you have the door locked for? A feed?"

"Oh, no! There was a misunderstanding about the pudding, you see; I—I ate it all, and the fellows seem to be grumbling about it."

"Porpoise—"

"Oh, really, Nugent—"

"Well, it will serve you right if you get a licking. Do you mean to say that you have bolted the whole of that big pudding?"

"I—I wish I hadn't now," grunted Bunter, with a groan. "I—I'm feeling very queer."

"Ha, ha! You must be."

"Blessed if I can see anything to cackle at. I feel quite queer, and the fellows will be making a fuss, as if this isn't bad enough."

Nugent grinned, and settled down to his prep.

It was a quarter of an hour before Wharton came into the study. Nugent looked up inquiringly.

"It's all right," said Harry quietly. "Mossoo's gone to the Head. He's going to tell him the whole yarn from the beginning."

"Good!"

"Of course, it will be all right. He was only frightened by a shadow, and that scoundrel Duprez knew it. He was playing on Mossoo's fears all the time, and it was all bluff from start to finish. If he had really gone to the Head, Dr. Locke would have had him kicked out of Greyfriars."

"But he will write?"

"I think so, on the off-chance of doing Mossoo a bad turn. But I don't think he'll succeed; in fact, I'm sure he won't."

"I—I say, you fellows—"

THE MAGNET.—95.

NEXT
WEEK:

"THE GREYFRIARS SKATERS."

NEXT
TUESDAY,

The "Magnet"

LIBRARY.

ONE
HALFPENNY.

"Rats! You go to sleep and dream about puddings," said Wharton.

"But you were saying—"

"Rubbish!"

"I told you all along—"

"Bosh!"

And Billy Bunter let the matter drop. As a matter of fact, he was feeling too uncomfortable inwardly to take much interest in Mossoo or anybody else.

Billy Bunter remained in the study the rest of the evening. He did not dare to venture out. When bedtime came, and he could no longer remain in the security of No. 1, he left the shelter of the study with fear and trembling.

But, to his amazement, the Remove seemed to have forgotten his offence. For, so far from ragging him, the fellows who were to have shared in that feed did not even mention the matter to him.

Bunter was relieved as well as surprised.

He was glad enough to let the matter remain where it was, and he went up to bed with the Form in a more easy frame of mind.

Had he been a little less short-sighted, and a little less occupied in his internal troubles, he might have seen that there was some joke on among the Removes. Wun Lung was grinning from ear to ear, and the fellows were constantly whispering to the little Celestial.

But Bunter observed nothing. He was only too glad to get peacefully to bed. He was feeling better now, but the pudding was weighing on his chest, as it were, and he felt beforehand that he was going to have a high old time in dreamland.

Wun Lung tapped him on the shoulder as he was taking his boots off. Bunter blinked at him inquiringly. The little Chinese was looking very serious.

"Buntel! Me solly."

"Eh! What's the trouble now?" asked Bunter peevishly.

"You takee Missee Kebbles' pudding."

"Oh, don't bring that subject up now!" said Bunter, in alarm. "That's all over and done with, you know."

"No savvy!"

"Oh, go to bed, and don't jaw about puddings! I don't want to hear anything more about puddings for years and years—until Christmas, anyway."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You lemberl me tellee you commit lobbely, and the pudding hauntee you," said the little Chinese solemnly.

"Oh, don't talk rot, you know!"

"Me walnee you!"

"Oh, shut up!"

"Me solly! Goodee-nighttee!"

"Rats!"

And Bunter turned in.

Wingate turned the light out, and the Remove settled down. Billy Bunter was soon snoring. In at the high windows of the dormitory came the glimmer of cold moonlight and the reflection of the glare of the snow.

Bunter was sleeping too soundly to hear any slight sounds that disturbed the stillness of the dormitory.

The fat junior was in the land of dreams—Christmas dreams.

He was dreaming of that big pudding, of which a considerable portion was lying like lead upon his interior.

He was locked up in a study, with a Christmas pudding clamouring at the door trying to get in at him. It was a curious dream, and a terrifying one, and Billy Bunter was mumbling in his slumber as he dreamt it.

Suddenly he felt a sharp pain, and woke.

He lay on his back, blinking up at the ceiling, and a glimmer of a strange phosphorescent light caught his eye.

He gave a gasp, and groped upon the chair beside his bed for his spectacles, and jammed them upon his fat little nose.

"Why—what—oh!"

Close before his eyes, floating in the air as it seemed, was a Christmas pudding.

A large almost round object, with a sprig of holly stuck into it, and a greenish glow surrounding it, floated before his gaze.

Bunter stared at it blankly.

The words of the Chinese came back to his mind, and he gave a gasp of terror as he realised that he was haunted by the Christmas pudding.

"Ow! Ow! Yow! Help!"

Bunter made a motion to spring from his bed, and in an instant the pudding vanished, apparently floating away in the air.

The fat junior rubbed his eyes.

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"Hallo, hallo, hallo! What's the row?" came Bob Cherry's voice.

"I—I don't know."

"What!"

"I've just seen a-a-a-a ghost, Cherry!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"It was a r-r-r-real ghost!"

"You young ass! What was it a ghost of?"

"A—a—a Christmas pudding!"

"Oh, rats! Go to sleep, you young duffer! It's that pudding you gorged lying upon your chest."

"I—I—I wonder if it is!" gasped Bunter, feeling that it must really be a dream, as the pudding had vanished from his sight.

"Oh, go to sleep!"

Bunter settled down again.

He was soon asleep; but the phantom pudding mingled with his dream. It was a most terrifying dream the fat junior was dreaming now. He dreamed that Mrs. Kebble had discovered who had taken the pudding, and the Head had handed him over to her for punishment. Mrs. Kebble proceeded to make a Christmas pudding of him. Bunter, in that easy way these things are accomplished in dreamland, stood by and saw himself mixed up in a large basin, and rolled up in a cloth, and put on to boil. Then, by a sudden change, he was in bed, and gazing upward again at a phantom pudding. It was floating before his gaze, lighted up by a strange phosphorescent light.

Bunter twisted and turned in his uneasy slumber, as the phantom pudding floated before his eyes, now rising, now falling, now almost touching his nose.

He gazed at it spellbound with terror.

And now it was slowly borne in upon his terrified mind that he was not asleep and dreaming at all, but wide awake—lying in bed with his eyes wide open, staring upward. Exactly when he had awakened he did not know; but he was certainly awake now.

And the phantom pudding!

It floated before his eyes, rising and falling—as his dream had pictured it.

Bunter lay quite still, scarcely breathing.

It was no dream now.

There was the phantom pudding!

He sat up in bed, transfixed, and gazed at the pudding.

Suddenly a terrific yell left his lips, and he rolled out of bed, and at the same instant the pudding vanished from sight.

Bunter rolled on the floor, still yelling.

"Ow! Help! Ghosts! Murder! Help!"

There was a sound of a suppressed chuckle, and a further sound of hurried getting into bed. But Bunter did not hear it.

"Help! Help!"

Harry Wharton jumped up.

"Help! Help!"

"What's the matter?"

"Ghosts! Murder! Spectres! Spooks! Help!"

"Ass! You've been dreaming."

"Help! Help!"

Wharton sprang out of bed. He had little doubt that Bunter had been dreaming the dreams of indigestion, but the fat junior was terrified, dream or no dream. Wharton struck a match and lighted the gas.

Bunter picked himself up. Harry caught him by the shoulder and shook him severely.

"Now, what's the row?"

"The g-g-g-ghost!"

"Where, you young duffer?"

"The g-g-g-ghost!"

Wharton looked round the dormitory. There was no sign of a ghost. There was a sound of a chuckle from Wun Lung's bed, and that was all.

"Look here, Bunter—"

"It was the ghost of the Christmas pudding!" wailed Bunter. "I—I'll never raid a larder again. I'll never touch Christmas pudding. Ow! Yow! The g-ghost!"

Wharton laughed.

"It's all right, you fellows," he said. "It's only Bunter been dreaming."

"It isn't!" yelled Bunter. "It was a ghost!"

"Well, where was it?" asked Nugent.

"Floating over my head—"

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Bob Cherry. "Look there!"

He pointed to a round dark object close to the ceiling over Bunter's bed. The ceiling of the dormitory was very high, and it was no wonder that it had escaped observation.

There was a hook in the ceiling, and over the hook passed a cord, one end of which was fastened to the round object, and the other end ran down to Wun Lung's bed. It was in the power of the Chinese to raise and lower the phantom pudding at will.

"It's that young beggar Wun Lung!" roared Bob Cherry.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Oh, really—"

Wun Lung chuckled, and released the cord, and the phantom pudding came down with a run. It was manufactured of an ancient football.

Billy Bunter blinked at it, and his face was a study. The dormitory rang with laughter.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Bunter's ghost! Ha, ha, ha!"

The door opened, and Wingate looked in.

"What's this row about? Why aren't you kids asleep?"

"It's all right, Wingate. It's only Bunter seeing ghosts."

"What!"

"The ghost of a Christmas pudding! Ha, ha, ha!"

Wingate looked at the phantom pudding, and his face relaxed. The stern expression changed into a smile, the smile into a grin, the grin into a laugh, and the laugh became a roar.

"You young sweeps!" he exclaimed at last. "Put out that light and go to sleep. Ha, ha, ha!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Bunter tumbled into bed. He did not say a word. But it was long before the Remove left off laughing and went to sleep.

The next morning—and for many days afterwards—the whole school laughed over the story of the ghost of the Christmas-pudding. Even Monsieur Charpentier laughed. He could afford to laugh now. For the cloud that had hung so darkly over the little Frenchman had lifted.

He grasped Wharton's hand when he met him that day.

"Ah, I zank you from ze heart, Wharton," he said. "It is you zat have save me."

"Is it all right, sir?"

Mossoo beamed.

"Oui, oui! Oh, it is more zan all right. Ze Head vas so sympathetic, and he assure me zat he never listen to ze man, and zat he trust me completement. He is ze great man, ze Head. I love him. He telephone for ze police to look for Duprez, so zat man nevair trouble me more. Zat is goot. And I owe you very moosh, Wharton, and I not forget."

And the little Frenchman wrung Harry's hand again.

"Jolly glad he's out of the trouble," said Nugent, when Harry told him. "He's a good little ass, and he'll have a happy Christmas now."

"And so shall we, I hope," said Wharton cheerfully. "Of course, you fellows are coming with me."

"I say, you fellows—"

"Hallo, Bunter! Seen any more ghosts?"

"Oh, really, Nugent—"

"I've heard a good many ghost stories at Christmas-time," said Nugent, with a chuckle. "But it was left for Bunter to see the ghost of a Christmas pudding. Ha, ha, ha!"

"Oh, really, you fellows—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

And it was a long, long time before Bunter heard the end of his Christmas dream and the phantom pudding.

The End.

(Another splendid story of Harry Wharton & Co. in next Tuesday's "Magnet" Library, entitled "The Greyfriars Skaters," by Frank Richards. Order your copy in advance. Usual size, usual price, one halfpenny.)

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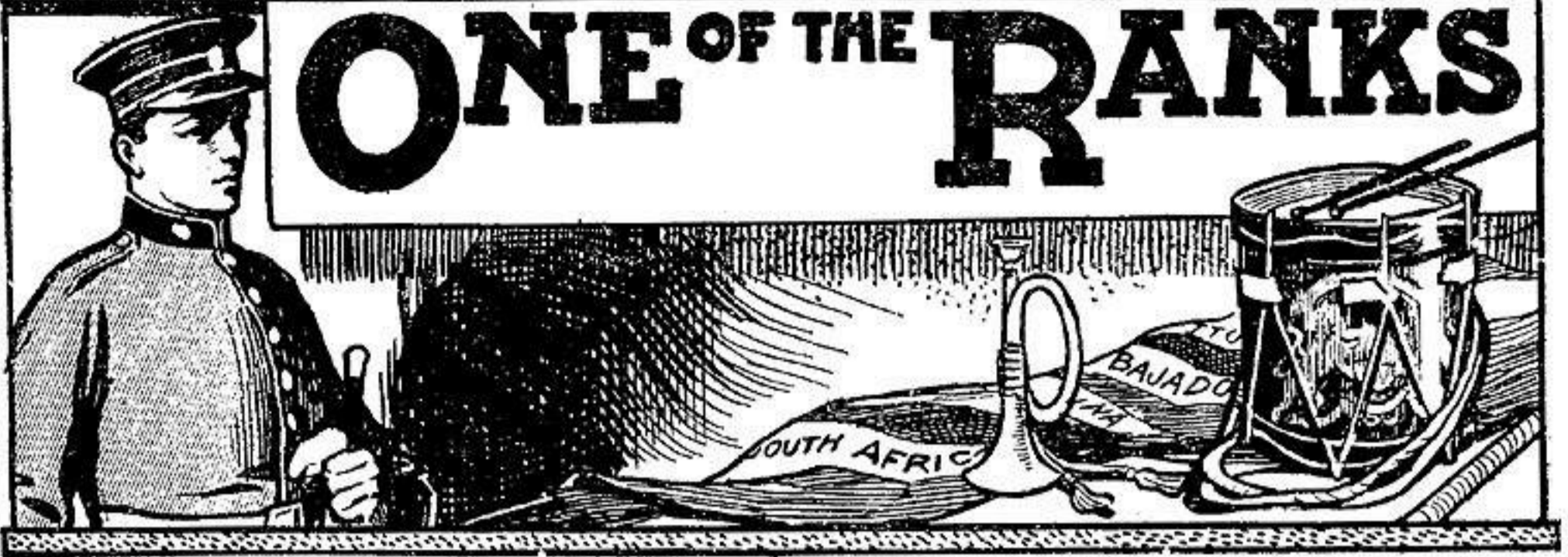
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Ronald Chenys is forced to leave Sandhurst through the treachery of his stepbrother Ian, and enlists in the Wessex Regiment under the name of Chester. Unfortunately for Ronald, Ian joins the Wessex as a subaltern, and, assisted by Sergeant Bagot and Private Foxey Williams, does his best to further disgrace Ronald. The unscrupulous Bagot, however, gets caught in his own toils, and is publicly degraded to the ranks. Foxey Williams meets his death mysteriously in a burning barn. The Royal Wessex are forming the garrison of Eastguard Forts, near Plymport, during manoeuvres. After some nights' weary vigilance, the enemy make an attack, and the Fort's guns cannot be supplied quickly enough with powder and blank-shot. Ronald is told off with a party of men to help in the magazine. Bagot, an ex-sergeant, attempts to blow the place up, and when Ronald captures him the two fall into the sea. They are, however, rescued by one of the enemy's torpedo boats.

(Now go on with the story.)

Ronald and Bagot are Put Ashore.

The two redcoat prisoners, saved from death in such miraculous fashion, were entirely forgotten by the sailors in their own desperate straits.

Straight down the broad, white path of light flung by the wheeling searchlights they fled. Fore and aft the savage guns barked sharp defiance to the gunners, raking them on either side. The sea forts to port and starboard, and the land batteries were outlined in the flame of guns, the emerald sparks of rifles, the flash and sicker of quick-firers, and the dazzling spurts of heavy artillery. The crash and thunder of the cannonade was overwhelming.

Then in a twinkling, as suddenly as it had commenced, the battle was over. By submarine cables the order was flashed to the sea forts to "Cease fire," and their thunder died away; the electric searchlights were switched off, and the sea left to the drizzle and darkness once again.

Now the reckless flight of the destroyer was checked, and the scattered flotilla closed in and circled back to read by the winking signal lamp on the semaphore tower the umpire's report upon their raid.

"Narwhal, Cachalot, Grampus," spelled somebody from the bridge. "Well, what the dickens have they got to say about us, I'd like to know? Out of action, eh? Hang their impudence! It was stopping to pick up those confounded redcoats that got us nabbed. By the way, where are those two? Order them to come forward, and let's hear what they've got to say for themselves."

Without waiting for the petty officer to come aft with the order, Ronald scrambled up and dragged Bagot on to his feet with him.

The latter had not spoken a word since his rescue. Exhausted and shaking with cold, he seemed too dazed to realise either his surroundings or the gravity of his position. If he had any recollection of the hideous crime of which he was guilty, Ronald could read no sign of it in the vacant eyes.

"Hallo, there!" came the same voice from the bridge, under which Ronald halted. "What the dickens do you mean by indulging in swimming exercise in mid-channel at this time of night? Stopping to pick you up has caused my craft to be put out of action, confound you! I wish now I'd left you to drown! What do you mean by it, eh?"

Now, Ronald, though he had fully made up his mind to

hand Bagot over to justice as a madman and a menace to his fellows, had no intention of relating an episode which was an undoubted stain upon the honour of his regiment to more ears than he could help. So he told briefly to the lieutenant in command of the destroyer how Bagot had fallen into the sea, and he had gone after him. He finished up by asking respectfully to be put ashore at Eastguard Fort, then just abreast of the destroyer.

"I'll see you hanged first!" was the curt retort. "If you think I'm going to bring up and launch a boat for your special benefit, you're mistaken. You'll be landed at Plymport, where we're bound now, thanks to you, and not before. Meantime, get below and dry your things; and, Spindler, just see that these men get a tot of hot grog inside them."

"Ay, ay, sir!" answered a petty officer. And the corporal and private were promptly ushered down into the crew's quarters, where the friendly bluejackets welcomed them with all the honours of peace and war.

By the time Plymport was reached and the boat was ready to take them ashore, Bagot's wits seemed to have cleared a little. The old, sullen look of hate loomed so darkly in his eyes that Ronald determined to take measures at once to safeguard against further treachery.

The boat set them ashore at a part of Plymport which was unfamiliar to Ronald, who, indeed, knew very little of the town. That it was not any of the dockyard quays was obvious by the line of ramshackle lofts and warehouses which jostled each other close to the water's edge.

Ronald was thankful for this, and no doubt it was due to the kindness of the coxswain of the boat, for before they would have been allowed to leave the naval dockyard gates they would have been subjected to a searching cross-examination by the police on duty, and this, for reasons stated, he was anxious to avoid.

Before he had time to ask his bearings, the sailors sang out a cheery "Good-night," and shoved off, and he was left alone with his prisoner.

The wharf was deserted. There was only one solitary gas lamp stuck at the corner of a ruined house to guide the chance wayfarer along the rough cobbled quay, beneath which the tide gurgled and fretted.

From the time they had been picked up by T.B.D. Grampus scarcely a word had passed between the two men. Not knowing how far Bagot was aware of his own mad act, Ronald thought it would be easier to handle him by not proclaiming him a prisoner until he was compelled to.

"Where away?" asked the ex-sergeant surlily, seeing that Ronald was hesitating.

"Nearest barracks!" he replied shortly. "Which are they? Do you know the road?"

"Yes, I know the road," answered the other, whose mouth, unnoticed by Ronald in the darkness, was pursed up with a sudden sinister smile.

Evidently the realisation that he held the whip-hand here was stirring his addled brain to further cunning.

"Fort Aboukir's nearest, corporal. They're only about half a mile, and the Hampshires are lying there," he added quietly enough.

"Then show the way," said Ronald, "and see you stick close by me."

Marching at Bagot's heels, and keeping a sharp eye open for signs of treachery, he followed the man down a succession

of dirty and ill-lit entries, between buildings apparently as mean and dilapidated as those on the quay.

"What rat-ridden quarter is this?" asked Ronald, breaking the silence at last, as they turned suddenly into a squalid slum, noisy with children playing and fighting in the mud even at that late hour of the night. In the open doors of the houses stood knots of loud-voiced, slatternly women, while here and there a rough slunk past, hands in pockets, or flattened against a sheltering wall out of the drip of the rain. Ronald noticed that all seemed to look, and tongues were stilled as they strode past.

Lest Bagot should make a sudden dash for liberty in this place, where, no doubt, a hundred hands would reach out at once to help him, Ronald had closed up to his side.

The move was not lost upon the ex-sergeant, who showed by the scowl upon his ugly face that he resented it. It was as much to put him off his guard again that Ronald asked the question.

"Duano," he answered surlily, and then, as an after-thought: "You'd better ask the way. I thought I knew it; but this street's strange to me. There's a pub. there, though, and after that ducking a drop of something warm would do us no harm."

Ronald called a halt, and considered. He was anxious to get the madman at the right side of a guard-room door as soon as possible. They must ask the way of someone.

There were two small bars in this public-house, both of which were crowded with as villainous a set of men as Ronald ever remembered to have set eyes on. A few were of the seafaring type, and foreigners at that; but the rest were of the same shambling, slinking tribe that populated the surrounding slums.

The landlord—a square-jawed, broken-nosed brute—bestowed a cunning leer upon the two soldiers as they steered their way towards the counter. It was plain to Ronald that Bagot had lied when he said the place was strange to him. A distinct signal of recognition from the landlord was checked, however, by a frown from the ex-sergeant. The landlord's eyes flashed to the stripe on Ronald's sleeve, and his face hardened at once.

"A guilty conscience," thought Ronald. "This man is one of the pack of scoundrels to be found in every garrison town who do a flourishing business in hiding deserters, and helping them to escape. I shall have to watch my P's and Q's. If he thinks I'm poking my nose into his business, or if Bagot turns on me now, I shall get short shrift. By Jove, I wish I had had him clapped in irons on board the destroyer!"

Ronald's call for two threepennyworth's of rum hot relieved the tension of the situation for a moment.

A small private room was behind the counter, with a curtained window overlooking the bar. The door of this was ajar, but the landlord hooked it to with his foot as he served the steaming drinks.

The furtive precaution did not escape Ronald's notice. Evidently it aroused the suspicions also of someone within, for, after a minute's pause, the dirty green baize curtain shielding the window was stealthily lifted. An eye appeared at the peephole thus made, and, lighting on Ronald's face, was instantly withdrawn.

"Hallo!" thought Ronald. "A deserter in hiding possibly. This is a place to make a note of. Meantime, the sooner I get my man out of temptation the better. I'll chance the road to the barracks, for I don't feel much like showing my ignorance in this den of thieves. Drink up, Bagot, we'll be moving!" he said aloud.

But the rum was piping hot, and Bagot choked and grumbled over it, as if anxious to delay. The landlord had disappeared for a moment into the little private room, but he came out looking harder than ever at the young corporal. At the same instant Ronald's eye happened to catch—reflected in a looking-glass behind the counter—a movement in the adjoining bar.

The swing-door had opened, and a weazened face—all awry, as if it had been wrung at some time or another and never straightened out again—had appeared in the aperture.

With a jerk of the head, a hideous grimace, and a pointing of a dirty forefinger to the partition behind which Ronald stood, he brought four of the ugliest of the ruffians in that bar to their feet. They swigged down their beer in a gulp, nodded meaningly to the landlord, and rolled into the street.

Ronald knew now that treachery awaited him. Of weapons he had none except his fists. Both belt and bayonet had been discarded when he entered the powder-magazine at Fort Eastguard, for no steel is allowed in there.

Bagot would get free for the time being. That was the least that would happen. But what puzzled Ronald was the method by which he had conveyed the news of his desperate plight to the master of hirelings behind the bar. No note had passed, he was confident, and scarcely a sign beyond a stare or the lift of an eyelid.

"Fall in, Bagot! We'll go now," he said, speaking with as much unconcern as he could assume.

THE MAGNET.—95.

NEXT WEEK: "THE MAGNET" LIBRARY RETURNS TO USUAL SIZE AND PRICE: ONE HALFPENNY.

"How about the way to Aboukir? You were going to ask that," answered Bagot, showing no anxiety to move.

"Fort Aboukir?" chimed in the landlord readily. "Close 'andy; fast to the right, third to the left." Then he gave a little jerk of his head for Bagot's private benefit. It seemed to satisfy the ex-sergeant, for he turned and led the way into the street.

Ronald stepped to the kerb, fists ready for a rush, and looked right and left. The ill-lit street was emptier now.

"Right we go!" said Bagot, scarcely troubling to conceal a triumphant grin.

"No, left!" answered Ronald sharply. "Step out, and don't argue!"

A snarl broke from Bagot's lips, confirming in Ronald's mind that treachery was afoot. The man stepped back as if to retreat into the bar again, but Ronald had him by the wrist in a trice. The next instant Bagot's face was contorted with the agony of the arm-lock which the corporal had put upon him. He opened his lips as if to cry out, but the breath ran from him in a choking gasp as the ruthless pressure was increased.

Before he could recover himself Ronald had dragged him fifty yards up the street. A narrow lane opened now to the right. It was a case of any port in a storm.

The landlord's directions he knew would be false, designed to lead him straight into the ambush awaiting them. By turning in almost any other direction he might escape to safety.

The alley was lit by a lamp from the street they had left. He had only dragged his prisoner some twenty yards when suddenly the lane was filled with shadows. Lumbering footsteps rang and echoed between the walls. They were pursued.

An extra pressure with that terrible grip, and Bagot dropped gasping on his knees, paralysed with pain. Ronald flung him behind him and turned at bay.

The foremost pursuer was already butting into him, head downwards. Bringing up his knee just as the man clinched, Ronald caught the ruffian such a thudding blow in the face as rolled him backwards senseless as a log. The second tripped over the first, and sprawled on all-fours.

The third was the man with the twisted face, who had mastered the cut-throat crew. He had a lump of iron ready in his hand. He leapt back cursing shrilly, yet afraid to come on, and only impeding the road of the rest.

Now other footsteps came racing in rear. Ronald's heart sank within him. Bagot had already gripped him by the knees, striving with maniacal ferocity to throw him to the ground. The crooked-faced man sprang in, hand uplifted for a felon-stroke. Ronald saved his head only by a desperate duck, and the full force of the descending iron bar fell upon Bagot's neck, felling him to earth again like a bullock.

Ronald could only gasp in horror at his comrade's fate. Then suddenly he was picked up from the ground as lightly as if he were a child. A mighty arm closed about his throat crushing the breath out of him, and an unshaven face, bristly as a scrubbing-brush, was thrust close to his.

"Ha, pig of a soldier!" hissed a voice he knew well. "Break dis hold if you can! It ees my durn now! Stand clear, you shaps, while I show him!"

Ronald felt his feet whirled from under him. The grip about his throat was suddenly released, and he was flung like an empty sack against the flint-studded wall. He seemed to rebound into space, borne upwards on a blast of scarlet flame, and then he knew no more.

Lieutenant Fairly Gets Leave—Cosgrave Is Astounded.

As may be easily imagined, Bagot's meteoric flight from the powder-magazine to the roof of Fort Eastguard, preceded by his scared comrades on "ammunition fatigue," and pursued by Lance-Corporal Chester, caused the wildest excitement among the garrison.

For a moment or two the gun-crews ceased firing altogether. A rumour spread like lightning that the magazine was alight, and everybody was expecting to be blown sky-high.

So plausible did this solution of the panic seem that the fire-pickets were mustered, and the magazine was on the point of being flooded, when cooler counsels prevailed.

With a gallantry none the less heroic because of the actual circumstances, Lieutenant Bob Fairly made his way calmly through the vaults containing powder and shell, and emerged, with his eyeglass still in his eye, to say that it was all a false alarm.

Unfortunately, he did not detect the torn cartridge and the heap of powder which Bagot had strown upon the floor ready for igniting.

There was no time to go further into the matter then, for the torpedo attack was being pressed home gallantly.

A boat was despatched to the rescue of the two men, the ammunition party returned to the magazine with confidence restored, and soon the hoists were hard at work lifting cartridges to the batteries, now thundering with redoubled energy.

What was the truth of the mystery no one had time to think. When, a little later, the boat returned to report failure, the word flew from mouth to mouth that the pair were drowned. Scarcely had this rumour time to make the circuit of the fort than a retreating torpedo-boat destroyer dashed into full glare of the searchlights, and there, clinging to her reeling decks, were the very men they had begun to mourn.

So, with a feeling that all is well that ends well, the garrison cheered, and awaited further particulars. Knowing Ronald for what he was, they knew he would waste no time in reporting himself at the earliest moment possible.

"It's a deuced puzzling thing," said Major Roberts, who was in command of the Wessex garrison, when the battle was over and the troops dismissed. "I saw them go past, myself, like two lunatics. I wonder what it all means? 'Pon my word, I think I ought to telephone and have them both arrested when they land!"

"Quite unnecessary, sir, I assure you honestly!" exclaimed Lieutenant Bob. "If it was anybody else but Chester I should agree, but the business is quite safe in his hands. Mark my words, we shall see him back here in the morning, even if he has to paddle across on a hencoop, with Bagot stuffed inside and handcuffed!"

But Lieutenant Bob was wrong. The morning passed, and still there was no sign of Ronald returning. A telephonic message elicited the fact that the pair had been landed the night before, but none of the garrison police knew anything of them, nor had they reported themselves at any of the barracks.

This was serious. Only Lieutenant Bob and Ronald's immediate chiefs in B Company smiled when it was suggested that both he and Bagot had deserted. Nevertheless, an order was issued for their arrest on sight.

Then a discovery was made which, when it leaked out, threw the garrison into a ferment. One of the artillery officers, taking stock of the store of ammunition in the magazine, chanced to enter the recess, on the floor of which lay the broken cartridge and the heap of powder which Bagot had striven to ignite. There was the match; one half burnt where it fell after Ronald had clutched it, smothering the flame in his hand.

That a diabolical attempt had been made to blow up the whole fort, with its six hundred living souls, was evident. It was impossible to keep the matter secret. In a few minutes it was in every mouth.

The Wessex men were appalled. Most of them, in their fierce thirst for revenge, condemned both the missing men out of hand as guilty. Else why had Ronald, at any rate, not been heard of?

This was a poser even to the lance-corporal's staunchest friends. They could only stoutly assert his innocence and suggest foul play. Some of them—those who had been present when Bagot had attempted to shoot Ronald in the barrack-room—knew to what length the ex-sergeant's mad hatred would take him.

It was to discuss the advisability of keeping this secret unbroken that Augustus Smythe—though only a new-comer in the regiment—called a meeting of the stalwarts of No. 4 Section.

Mouldy Mills and Hookey Walker both attended, sinking their hatred of the "cocky little counter-jumper," and forgetting their vows of vengeance on him for bankrupting the Royal Eastguard Fort Handline, Hook, and Bait Supply Association, in their anxiety for their missing comrade Chester.

"Now, look here, you chaps," said Gussie, rising to address the meeting. "We can't sit down and listen to all these lies against a fellow we all like and respect without doing something, nor can we go on punching the liars on the nose for ever."

"Hear, hear!" said Spud Murphy, whose knuckles were getting quite raw with this form of violent exercise.

"If we were going back to Woolchester it might be different, but we ain't."

"What?" yelled the others, to whom this was news indeed. They were all looking forward to being home in barracks before the week was out.

"No; I know what I'm talking about. Until this affair is settled up, and so as to keep it from leaking into the newspapers, we're going to be cooped up here in this fort, worse luck to it! I heard the news on the quiet, but it's true."

"Now, if we were ashore, what with a thousand rank and file to join in the hunt, we'd very soon turn Plymport upside down and shake Lance-corporal Chester out of it. That's where he is—Plymport; I'll bet a thousand pounds to an old shirt on that! Bagot's as dotty as a hatter, and madder than a mad dog. We know that for ourselves, for we saw him try to shoot Chester. Chester wanted us to keep that quiet, but I say the sooner everybody knows it the better. It'll clear our man and let them see the kind of desperate demon they've got to deal with. Chester has taken Bagot ashore without extra escort, knowing that he was strong enough to tackle two such beer-barrels as him single-handed; but Bagot has downed him somehow, and has got him boxed up somewhere, and Heaven only knows what game he ain't playing with him. The question is—"

THE MAGNET.—95.

NEXT WEEK;

"THE GREYFRIARS SKATERS."

A Splendid Tale of Harry Wharton & Co. By FRANK RICHARDS.

"T'shun!" roared Spud Murphy, the senior private present, suddenly leaping to his feet.

The meeting rose like one man, standing stiffly to attention. Two officers were standing silent in the doorway. Just how long they had been there everyone had been too intent on what Gussie was saying to notice. The men breathed afresh when they saw that the senior was Lieutenant Bob. The second was Ian Chenys.

"All right, my men, sit down!" said Lieutenant Bob, coming forward. "And go ahead, Private Smythe. I'm afraid I am guilty of eavesdropping, but I was very interested in what you were saying. The question is—what?"

"Whether we should not tell you all we know and think, sir," answered Gussie, rather taken aback.

"Most certainly. It seems to me that all of you are to blame for not informing us of this before. You knew this man was mad, and yet you stand by and watch him turned loose in a powder-magazine!"

"Excuse me, sorr," said Spud boldly. "It was Lance-corporal Chester himself that applied to Mr. Chenys to have him sthruck off that jooty, as Mr. Chenys will remember."

"I do," said Ian, turning with scowling eyes and answering the look of inquiry of his senior officer. "I regard all this as mere gossip—rubbish; a silly effort to whitewash a man who, in my eyes, is equally guilty of this hideous crime, and who I hope will be hanged when they catch him!"

"You are very emphatic," said Lieutenant Bob, in a low voice inaudible to the rest. "In England, at least, it is the law to assume that a man is innocent of a charge until he is proved guilty. Having no underlying interest—no ulterior motive in this case, I prefer to follow the national custom."

"Underlying interest! Ulterior motive!" blustered Ian. "What the deuce do you mean?"

"Nothing that can be discussed here," said Lieutenant Bob, regretting that he had let his angry disgust get the better of his discretion.

But the shaft had gone home. Ian turned as white as the limewashed wall behind him. For a moment he glared at his brother-officer as if he could have torn him asunder to see what secret it was he held in his heart; then he turned on his heel and continued on his way.

That a swift exchange of parry and thrust had taken place between the two officers the men were fully aware, even though they had not overheard a word. Lieutenant Bob felt this, and, half ashamed of his share of the scene, he gave a curt assurance that everything that could be done to discover the whereabouts of their missing comrade was being done, and then he, too, continued on his round.

Ian returned to his quarters, torn between conflicting emotions—joy that there was a chance that Ronald, left to the mercy of a maniac, might even now be removed from his path for ever; terror that Bob Fairly, in the hour of possible success, had fathomed his black secret.

He cursed aloud at this latter thought, and paced the tiny room in a frenzy.

Williams gone; Pushoffsky's mouth sealed; Slaney in ignorance that that brother of mine still lives—everything beginning to work as smoothly as a charm—and now that drawling fop comes prying round and threatening to spoil all! By Heaven, let him take care! I have had just about as much of all this as I can stand. I, too, shall go mad; but, unlike that fool Bagot, I'll see that there is some method in my madness!"

Lieutenant Bob went on his tour of duty quietly, as before as ever, but as he inspected the upper parapet of the fort the sentries there noticed that he remained for quite ten minutes in an embrasure, twiddling his eyeglass round and round and staring aimlessly out to sea.

After that he adjourned to the mess, and sat for another half-hour in an armchair, thoughtfully sipping a long brandy-and-soda. Ten minutes later he was seated in a whaler manned by a scratch crew from No. 4 Section, who rowed him with windmill strokes to the Chequer Fort, where he remained in private conference with Colonel Conger a full hour.

The result was a good deal of telephoning, during which the colonel got exceedingly peppery.

"Why the deuce, Fairly, can't you come out flatly with what you intend to do? Why all this mystery? What are you driving at?"

"I want a week's leave, that is all, sir?"

"Tut, tut! I know that. And you know that while this disgraceful affair is on we're all cooped up here like a lot of convicts! If you would only give me some clue as to what these inquiries are that you want to make, I might manage the permit quick enough. I know you've got some plan in your head for solving the beastly mystery; surely you can give me some idea what it is!"

"That, I am sorry to say, sir, is just what I cannot do," answered Lieutenant Bob. "I must ask you to give me all your confidence there. Later on I hope to justify it."

"Oh, very well!" snapped Colonel Conger, who always kept a soft corner in his heart for this young dandy. "I suppose I must take your word for it. The G.O.C. has told me to use my own discretion, and you can go."

Lieutenant Bob lost no time in taking advantage of the permit. Next morning found him in the mess of the Denbigh-shires—Cosgrave's regiment. Old Cos was sitting opposite in a long cane-chair, surveying the dandy with grim eyes, wondering what business had brought him all that way.

"Oh, just trotting round, looking up old faces!" Bob Fairly had said when he had offered to inquire; but Cos knew there was more behind it than this.

In any case, Bob was not an old friend of his. He had scarcely known him, and was by no means impressed with the little he had seen.

"By the way, we've got a chap from Sandhurst I expect you'd know—Ian Chenys," said Bob.

"Yes. I knew of him. I liked his brother better," answered Cos.

"Oh, what did he go into?" inquired Bob casually.

"He died."

"Oh!" exclaimed Bob; and, as if anxious to switch off on to a more cheerful subject, he added: "Ever do any boxing up here? I believe you were a great man with your fists when we met before."

"Yes, a bit," answered Cos modestly. "Do you ever put on the gloves now?"

"Not often; but I'm awfully keen on it for the men, you know. We've got some very promising stuff in the Wessex. There's one chap, Chester, of ours—a lance-corporal—"

"Yes; I've heard of him."

"He's a corker as a heavy-weight. Splendidly-built chap, too. I've got a photo. of him here somewhere. Oh, there it is!"

He handed an amateur snapshot to Cosgrave as he said this, and instantly the other's jaw dropped in amazement.

"Ronald Chester," said Bob, as if prompting him.

"Ronald Chenys!" answered Cos almost fiercely. "Why, it's old Ron to the life! It must be!"

"Quite so. That's my own opinion," said Bob Fairly quietly. "I have suspected so all along. I should like you to see him, though, and make certain."

"See him? But I don't understand!" said Cos, scarcely able to grasp it all yet. "Do you mean to say that Ronald Chenys is alive—to-day?"

"Well," said Bob Fairly, polishing his eyeglass nervously, "now you come to put it that way, I don't know that I can. You see, the whole thing is in a tangle—a deuced awful tangle, in fact—and if you can help me untwist it, I shall be—"

"My dear chap," said Cos, springing up, "old Ron was the best chum I ever had in my life! I've been mourning for him for months as dead, and now I know that he is alive I'll go to the end of the earth to help him!"

"Good!" said Bob. "We'll both go. For, by Jove, if what I fear is true, he's needing us! I'll spin you the yarn."

Gussie Makes a Confession— Picking up the Threads.

While Lieutenant Bob Fairly was packing his kit-bag, preparatory to starting for Aldershot on his visit to Cosgrave, he was somewhat surprised when word was brought up to him that Sergeant Kedge had brought a man who wished to speak to him.

He was not surprised, however, after what he had overheard at Gussie's meeting that afternoon to find that it was Gussie himself seeking an interview.

Dismissing the sergeant, Bob Fairly told Gussie to say his say.

"It's about Lance-corporal Chester, sir," began Gussie, rather weakly. "I've been thinking it over, and I've decided that—that—" Here he hesitated, and glared round wildly—"That I was wondering what you thought about it," he finished desperately.

"You've decided that you were wondering what I thought

about it, eh!" repeated Lieutenant Bob, unable to repress a smile.

"No, sir, not quite that—at least, I was thinking—"

Gussie, who had been balancing himself first on one heel, and then on the other, seemed to decide suddenly on the experiment of standing on neither, with the result that he nearly capsized himself into the fire-grate.

"You're a little bit mixed, it seems to me," suggested Lieutenant Bob, pretending to busy himself once again, so as to give Gussie an opportunity to compose himself. "Just start from the beginning once again. It's about Corporal Chester, you said. Well, what about Corporal Chester?"

"About him disappearing like this!" blurted Gussie.

"Quite so. You've got some solution of the mystery? Out with it! Let's have it!"

"Well, it isn't a solution exactly, though it may help to give a clue, but it's been on my conscience for weeks—ever since the fire. I don't like telling you, but I feel I must—that's in case I'm wrong, and it really meant him after all."

"Yes, go on," said the officer mildly, as if this rambling statement were quite satisfactory and intelligible.

"Yes, sir; you see, I thought it was Foxey they meant when they talked about that job, only now—" Again Gussie looked wildly round, as if a thousand demons were perched on the picture-frames watching him. "How many years should I get, sir, for telling tales about an officer even if they were true?" he gasped pathetically.

"Don't worry about that just now," said Lieutenant Bob, locking his bags and straightening himself up. "What job was this you thought referred to Private Williams?"

"That smack on the head, sir, and the fire when he was killed. I don't believe now that they meant it for him at all. I believe it was Chester they were after, only somehow Foxey poked that long nose of his in once too often. Mr. Chenys—"

Private Augustus Smythe having blurted out his name, promptly collapsed into a chair, looking as white as any ghost.

"Now, I've done it!" he groaned.

Lieutenant Bob Fairly took one look at him, and then poured him out a stiff brandy-and-soda.

"Yes, Smythe," he said, handing him the glass, "you've done it so far that now you'll have to tell me everything from the beginning, without glossing over a single fact or sparing anyone, even though he be a superior officer."

"All right, sir, I don't care what happens," said Gussie, screwing himself up. "I want to see Lance-corporal Chester safe, that's all. After that, I don't care if it snows round-shot—no, nor tread-mills either."

It took Lieutenant Bob over half an hour to get the details of that eavesdropping incident outside Pushoffsky's door strung together and shipshape. He made Gussie write it down, fact by fact, giving the conversation nearly word for word as he had heard it.

It related all about that mysterious bumping sound upon the planks, and Pushoffsky's boast: "It never fail yet. It lief no mark. Only a blue—" And Ian's scared interruption: "Shoo, I don't want to hear any particulars—hang it. How you like and where you like; but the sooner the better!"

"The only thing about this is the bump, as you describe it, did leave a mark, a very ugly mark," said

Lieutenant Bob, after Gussie had signed his name with a shaky hand.

"Yes, sir; but I don't believe that that was the job referred to at all," replied Gussie. "In my opinion, as soon as the red-cap sergeant went round after the woman's rig-zit which I left there, Pushoffsky put two-and-two together, and decided that they might have been overheard, and cleared out that night. We know that he was not seen all the day before the fire. The landlord of the Grapes swore to that!"

(Another long instalment of this splendid serial next Tuesday. Order your copy of THE MAGNET LIBRARY in advance. Price One Halfpenny.)



"The Greyfriars Skaters."

The next long Complete Tale will be, as I anticipate, anything but a frost; but, as Bob Cherry would say, you must let me *snow* what you think about it.

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The Editor

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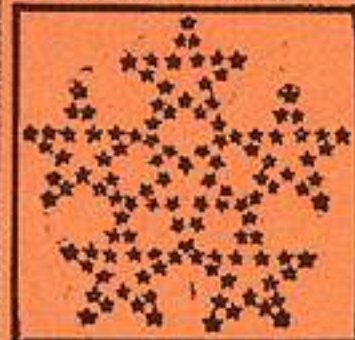
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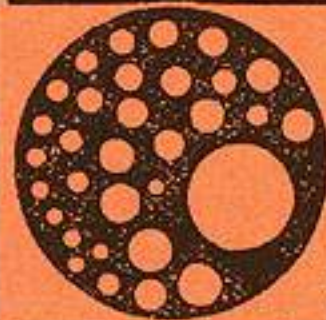
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