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'THE GREYFRIARS WINNERS!'

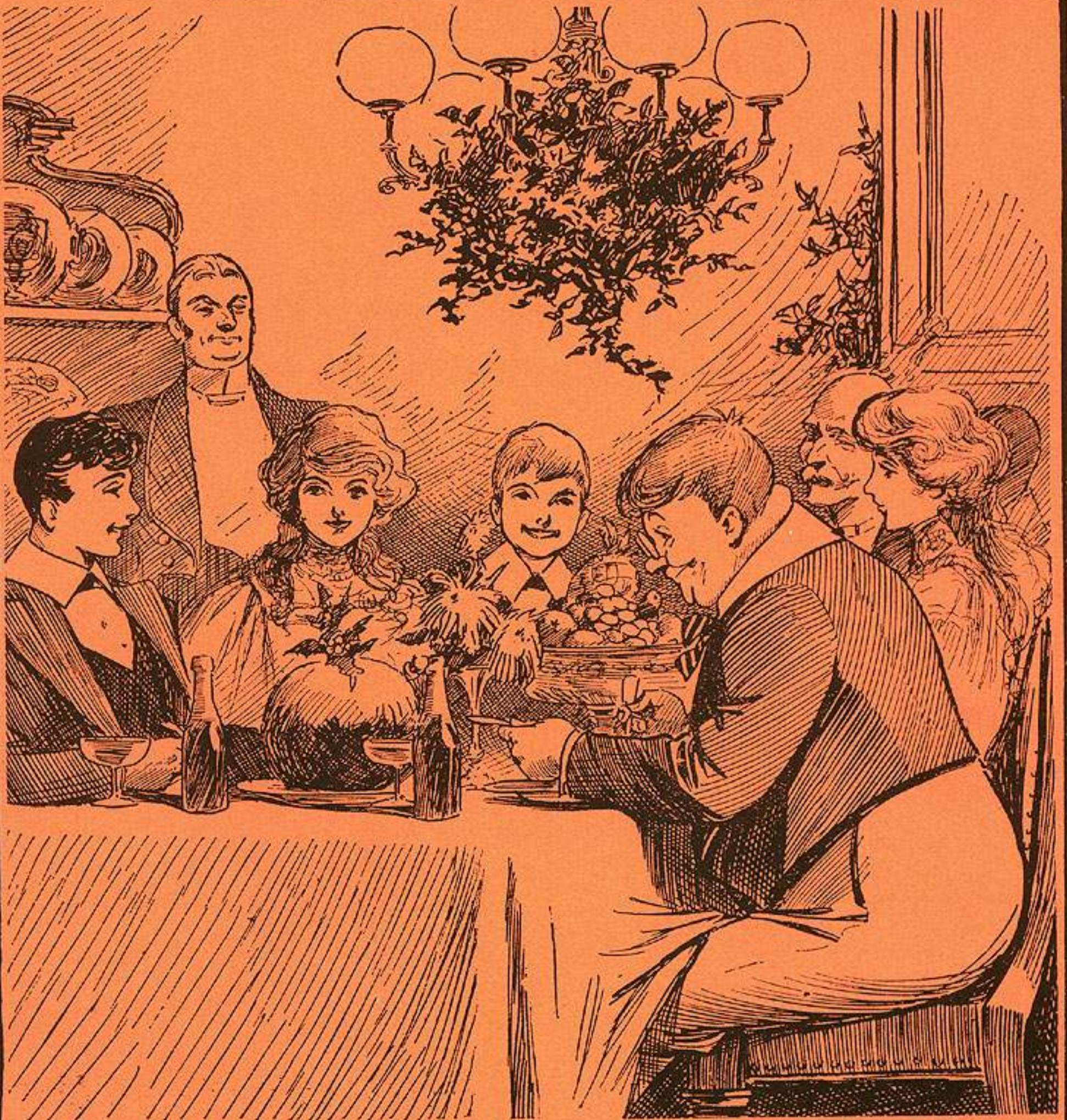
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NO. 98.

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By Frank Richards.

VOL. 4.



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The Christmas Winners



THE FIRST CHAPTER. Off for Christmas.

"**N**OTHING like Christmas!" said Bob Cherry. He stood on the steps at the great door of Greyfriars, with his coat turned up about his ears, and a scarf flying in the December wind, and his nose and ears very red. There were a group of Greyfriars juniors there, and they were waiting for the brake to come and take them to Friardale Railway Station.

Greyfriars was breaking up for the Christmas holidays. All the juniors were in high spirits. School was very well, but holidays went one better, as Nugent put it. And the Famous Four—Wharton, Nugent, Bob Cherry, and Hurree Jamsset Ram Singh—were to spend the vacation together at Wharton's place—with, of course, the inevitable Billy Bunter.

Bunter told wonderful yarns of his home and his people, but it was always observed that just before holidays he assiduously fished for invitations to other fellows' places, and if he could not obtain them, he would invite himself, or take it for granted.

A Splendid, Long, Complete
School Tale of
The Boys of Greyfriars.
BY
FRANK RICHARDS.

Harry Wharton was the favoured party this year, and Bunter had attached himself to the Famous Four to go to Wharton Lodge.

"Nothing like Christmas," repeated Bob Cherry, as the snowflakes came fluttering about his ears on the wind. "It's an old institution, and a jolly good one."

"Oh, really, Cherry—"
"Hallo, hallo, hallo! That you, Bunter?"
The fat junior was rolled up in coats and rugs till he could hardly move. He strongly resembled a barrel wrapped in cloth. His fat, red face, little nose, and big spectacles glimmered out of the folds of a huge scarf.

He blinked at Bob Cherry.
"You jolly well know it's me, Cherry!"
"Thought it was a cask at first," said Bob Cherry, "and you must admit you look awfully like a German sausage walking on its tail."

"Oh, really—"
"Where's that blessed brake?" exclaimed Harry Wharton, stamping to keep his feet warm. "Goslin is late, as usual."

"The lateness is terrific," said Hurree Jamsset Ram Singh. "But I think I see the honourable Gosling approachfully coming."

"I say, you fellows—"
"Here he is!" exclaimed Frank Nugent. "Now, then, Gossy, hurry up. Do you want us to lose the train?"

"He's unwilling to part with us," said Bob Cherry, shaking his head. "That's what's the matter with Gossy."

Gosling grunted.

"Wot I says is this 'ere——"

"Oh, cheese it, Gossy, and bring the brake up to the steps!"

"I say, you fellows——"

"Shut up, Bunter!"

"Oh, really, you know, I want to speak about something awfully important! Have you fellows got anything to eat in the train?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Blessed if I can see anything to cackle at. It might be serious to get hungry in the train in this weather. I have to think of my constitution, too. You know I'm delicate——"

"Careful with that box, Gossy. Shall I help you?"

"Wot I says is this——"

"I say, you fellows——"

"In you get, Bunter!"

"But, I say——"

"Here, lend me a hand with him, Bulstrode, will you?" exclaimed Bob Cherry. And Bulstrode, in a good temper for once, grinned and nodded and lent a hand.

"Here, I say, you fellows, hold on—I mean leggo! Ow!"

But they did not let go.

Two strong pairs of hands grasped the fat junior, and he was jerked out of the doorway. Wrapped up in coats and comforters and scarves as he was, Billy Bunter was about as active as a barrel, and he could not resist.

"Ow!" he gasped. "Yow—I—I—ow!"

Bulstrode's foot had slipped on the steps, which were smooth with frost. He sat down violently, and Bunter went rolling.

"Oh!" roared Bob Cherry.

"Ha, ha, ha!" gasped Nugent. "Look at Bunter!"

Bulstrode and Bob were sitting on the top step, gasping. But Bunter could not possibly save himself. He was rolling over and over down the steps into the snow.

Strange and unearthly gasps came from him as he rolled.

He stopped at last in the snow at the foot of the steps, and lay half imbedded there, grunting as if by steam-power.

Harry Wharton, laughing, descended the steps to pick him up. Billy Bunter sat up in the snow and gurgled:

"Ow, ow! Where's my spectacles?"

"Ha, ha! Sticking on your nose!"

"Oh, really, Wharton! Oh dear, so they are! I—I've had a shock to the system."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"If my glasses had got broken you would jolly well have had to pay for them, some of you!" grunted Bunter, as Wharton dragged him to his feet. "Ow! Don't be so jolly tough! I'm hurt! I think my backbone's injured!"

"I'll test it," said Bob Cherry, raising his fist in the air. Bunter squirmed away.

"Ow! Idiot! Keep off! I——"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Oh, get into the brake, Bunt!" said Harry, laughing. "You'll be the death of me. Your backbone is all right, or you wouldn't be wriggling about like that."

"Oh, really——"

"Get in!"

"What about something to eat in the train?"

"Nugent's got a bundle of sandwiches."

"Better arrange for a lunch-basket——"

Wharton and Bob Cherry seized the fat junior, and hurled him into the brake. He landed there among a host of legs. The brake was filling up with fellows who were going by the same train as Harry Wharton & Co.

"Faith, and the elephant's on my feet!" exclaimed Micky Desmond, giving Bunter a shove in the ribs with his boot.

"Ow!"

"Here, keep off me!" said Ogilvy, giving the fat junior a shove back again.

"Ow!"

Morgan and Russell bestowed shoves upon the fat junior as he rolled on them, and then Elliott gave him a push that rolled him out. He rolled on Harry Wharton, and rolled him on the ground. Bunter rolled over him.

"Ow, ow, ow!"

"You shrieking ass!" roared Wharton, struggling from underneath. "What's the little game?"

"Ow, ow! My leg's broken!"

"Your neck will jolly well get broken if you keep up this sort of thing. Here, lend me a hand, somebody!"

"Ow, ow! Leggo!"

Billy Bunter was yanked up and hurled into the brake again.

"Keep your feet on him till we start," said Wharton, looking in after him with a very red face.

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THAT MOTOR-CYCLE given away by the Editor of

"Faith, and we will intirely!"

"Ow, ow! Yow! Gerrooh!"

A dozen or more feet were laid upon the Owl of the Remove, and he grunted and squirmed under them, but he could not rise. The laughing juniors clambered in, and the brake was full. The crowd round the School House door waved their caps, and Mr. Quelch looked out of his window, and waved his hand to the juniors. They waved their hats back again, and the brake rolled away to the gates.

"Merry Christmas!"

"Hurrah!"

"Ow! Lemme gerrup!"

"Let him get up now," said Harry laughing. "Keep quiet, Bunter, or down you go again. Well, we're off now—home for the holidays!"

And the Greyfriars chums gave another cheer, that rang far and away through the leafless trees as the brake rolled on to the station.

THE SECOND CHAPTER.

Bunter Takes a Snack.

"I SHALL want a foot-warmer," said Billy Bunter. The juniors were in good time for the train. They secured a carriage to themselves, and Billy Bunter immediately settled down into a corner seat. Bunter had a way of taking the most comfortable place on all occasions. The study armchair at Greyfriars had been purchased by a whip-round among the chums—excepting Bunter; but it was Billy Bunter who always used it, and regarded it as his particular property.

It was very cold in the railway-carriage, and Billy Bunter wanted a foot-warmer, and he naturally settled down amid the lion's share of the rugs, and waited for somebody else to get it for him.

As a matter of fact, there was a foot-warmer already in the carriage; but it was on the other side, and the short-sighted junior had not perceived it.

"It's cold," said Bunter. "I can keep pretty warm, except for my feet. I shall want a foot-warmer. The chap will bring one if you tip him, Wharton."

"This one will do for me," remarked Bob Cherry, dragging it along, and then setting his feet upon it. "Here you are, you fellows! Room for more!"

"The roomfulness is great, and the coldfulness of the honourable feet is terrific!" murmured Hurrec Janset Ram Singh.

And he immediately planted his feet beside Bob's. The Nabob of Bhanipur felt the cold of an English winter very keenly. He was wearing a fur-lined coat that wrapped him from his ears to his ankles, but he was still cold.

"Room for my tootsies?" said Nugent. "Here you are, Harry!"

"Right-ho!"

"I say, you fellows——"

"Sorry, Bunt; no room for more!"

Bunter blinked at them wrathfully.

"Look here——"

The train jerked and started. A porter slammed the carriage door. They glided out of the station between snow-piled embankments.

"I say, you fellows——"

"Hallo, hallo, hallo!"

"I want a foot-warmer!"

"Whistle for one," suggested Bob Cherry.

"Oh, really, Cherry——"

"You can have a fifth part of this, if you like," said Wharton, laughing.

"I want a whole one!"

"Go hon!"

Billy Bunter grumbled. But he finally squirmed along, and took up a fraction of the foot-warmer. Bob Cherry withdrew his feet, which were of a good size.

"You can keep your feet warmer by stamping," he remarked, and he stamped.

There was a terrific yell from Billy Bunter.

"Ow!"

"What's the matter now?"

"Ow! You've stamped on my foot!"

"By Jove, I thought I felt something under my boot! Did it hurt?"

"Ow!" yelled Bunter. "You've squashed it!"

"Sorry! Ha, ha!"

"You beast! Yow, yow!"

"Curious thing that Bunter's always complaining about something," said Nugent, with a yawn. "Some chaps are born to bother people."

"Ow, ow!"

"Bunter is born to trouble as the sparks fly upfully," remarked the Nabob of Bhanipur.

"PLUCK" IS WORTH HAVING.

"I say, you fellows," said Bunter, as the pain in his foot subsided, "what about those sandwiches? You didn't forget them?"

"Here they are!"

"I'll mind the parcel, if you don't mind. It will be safe with me."

"Will it?" said Bob Cherry dubiously. "None of your little snacks, then!"

"Well, I was thinking that I'd better have just a sandwich to keep me going," said Bunter. "Then I'll wait till the rest of you feed, before I have a meal."

And he opened the parcel. The train was rushing on through a snowy landscape. Gaunt, leafless branches, laden with snow, shook and trembled in the winter wind. It was cold and keen, but very seasonable, and the juniors enjoyed it. They pictured snowballing and skating and sliding when they reached Wharton Lodge.

Billy Bunter took his "snack," and went on taking snacks. The chums of the Greyfriars Remove, who all belonged to Harry Wharton's Amateur Operatic Society, enlivened the journey with singing. But Bunter was too busy for that.

The parcel of sandwiches—a good-sized one at the start—became smaller by degrees, and beautifully less, till Bunter's groping fingers found nothing but crumbs in the paper. But by that time even the Falstaff of Greyfriars was satisfied, and he settled down in his corner to sleep. He had secured the foot-warmer to himself by this time, and had also annexed Bob's rug in addition to his own, and he felt contented.

He snored a deep bass along with the singing.

"Hallo, hallo, hallo!" exclaimed Bob Cherry, as the train whizzed through a station. "More than half-way! I'm getting peckish."

"Same here!"

"The samefulness is terrific."

"Where are those sandwiches, Bunter?"

Snore!

"Bunter! Bunter! Beast! Billy!"

Snore!

"Sandwiches!" exclaimed Bob Cherry, shaking the fat junior and awakening him. "Where are the sandwiches?"

"Eh? Oh, really, I—'tain't rising-bell! Lemme alone!"

"Ha, ha! You're not at Greyfriars now, duffer! Where's the tommy?"

Bunter rubbed his eyes sleepily, and put his spectacles straight on his fat little nose.

"Eh? What? I'm hungry."

"Well, we're going to feed now, if we can find the sandwiches," said Nugent. "What have you done with them?"

"Eh? The sandwiches?"

"Yes. Where are they?"

"Well, you see—"

"Here's the paper," said Wharton. "My only hat! They're all gone! Bunter has wolfed them!"

"The—the horrid porker!" exclaimed Bob Cherry. "Scoffed the lot?"

"All but a few crumbs."

"I—I say, you fellows—"

"You horrid cannibal! Chuck him out of the train!"

"I—I had to take a snack, you know," stammered Bunter.

"I—I didn't really notice they were all going till I had eaten the last one, you know, and—and then it was too late."

The juniors glared at him. The weather was keen, and they had healthy, boyish appetites. It was a long way yet to Wharton Lodge, and they were hungry.

"I—I say, you fellows, it's all right!"

"Well, we can't kill him, and anything else would be inadequate," said Harry Wharton, laughing, and sitting down. "Let's get on with the chorus."

"I—I say, you know—"

"Shut up, Bunter!"

And they sang, keeping it up as long as they could; but long before they arrived at Wharton Magnus they ceased. They were very hungry indeed; and, in fact, Bob Cherry cast cannibalistic glances at Billy Bunter.

As for Bunter, he went to sleep again. He was not hungry. As the train drew near the final station, the fat junior began to mumble in his sleep.

The juniors caught a couple of words several times repeated.

"Christmas pudding!"

They could not help grinning. It was plain enough what was the subject of Billy Bunter's dreams.

The train stopped at last in Wharton Magnus Station. Bob Cherry took Billy Bunter by the ear, and gently assisted him to rise.

"Ow!"

"We get down here. Do you want to go on to the West of England?"

"Ow! Leggo!"

But Bob did not let go till Bunter was safe on the platform.

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NEXT WEEK:

"BILLY BUNTER'S RESOLUTIONS."

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THE THIRD CHAPTER.

In the Snow.

"SNOW!"

"I say, you fellows—"

"It's snowing—"

"Yes. I say—"

"Oh, shut up, Bunter! I suppose a little snow won't hurt you."

"I wasn't thinking of the snow. I—I've lost something. I think."

Billy Bunter was going excitedly through the innumerable pockets of his countless coats. He thrust his fat hands into pocket after pocket, but without finding what he sought.

"Come on!" said Harry Wharton. "We're going to walk to the Lodge, and the luggage will be sent on."

"I—I say—"

"You'll get a good feed as soon as we get in," said Nugent consolingly. "What is it you've lost? A packet of chocolate?"

"Oh, really, Nugent—"

"A saveloy, or a sandwich?"

"It's—it's a paper."

"What was wrapped in it? Something to eat, of course," said Bob Cherry.

"No; it was a recipe."

"A—a what?"

"A recipe," said Billy Bunter, diving into pocket after pocket. "I must find it. I cut it out carefully, you know, as I've got a good wheeze on the subject. You know that last Christmas some of the Remove had a pudding competition."

"That's ancient history."

"Yes, I know; but history repeats itself, you know," said Bunter. "I had a ripping recipe for making a Christmas pudding, Wharton, and I thought it would be a splendid opportunity while we were with you at the Lodge."

Wharton looked puzzled.

"I don't see how. The facilities won't be as great as at the school, I should think."

"Well, not so far as cooking goes, perhaps; but then the ingredients—you see, they're awfully expensive for a really good pudding, and—and I'm short of tin, owing to being disappointed about a postal-order. Now, I know your aunt is a wonderful housekeeper, and keeps a big stock of everything."

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Bob Cherry. "He's thinking of raiding the larder already."

"The ha-ha-ha-fulness is terrific."

"Nothing of the sort, Cherry," said Bunter indignantly. "But I suppose Miss Wharton will give me the materials for a Christmas pudding. It will save money, you see, having the materials given to you for nothing. That's business."

Harry Wharton laughed.

"Well, that will be all right," he said. "I'll put in a word for you with my aunt, Billy. But do come along; we've got to walk through the snow."

"Oh, all right! But that recipe—"

"Never mind the recipe now. We're hungry. We haven't bolted the whole supply of grub, you know, like a certain young walrus."

"Oh, really, Wharton! I must have the recipe, you see. I dare say I left it in the train. Will you go back and look for it, Nugent?"

"I should have to go forward, ass. The train's gone on."

"Oh, dear! Perhaps I dropped it on the platform. I remember a clumsy brute ran into me. Look here, I'll wait in the refreshment-room while you chaps look on the platform."

Bob Cherry took Bunter by the back of the neck and propelled him out of the station.

"There's no refreshment-room here," he said, "and we're not going to hunt on the platform. We're going to the Lodge."

"Ow! Leggo!"

"March, then."

"But my recipe—"

"Blow your recipe!"

"Look here, Cherry, I'm not going without—Ow! Leggo my ear! Yow! I'll come. I'll come at once. Yow! Leggo!"

And Bunter came.

The juniors tramped out into the snow. It was falling thickly. The road was white, the hedges gleaming with a

ANSWERS

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

spotless coat; the leafless branches of the trees looked like the gaunt arms of spectres.

Bunter shivered and grumbled.

"It's jolly cold! Look here—"

"Are you too tired to walk?" asked Bob Cherry, as they came to a slope in the ground, where the lane ran down the hill towards the Lodge.

"Yes, I am. I think—"

"We'll help you along."

"Well," said Bunter thoughtfully, "if you fellows like to make a chair with your hands, you know, and carry me between you, you may. I think it would be a good idea."

Bob Cherry winked at Nugent.

"Are you willing to carry Bunter with me, Frank?" he asked.

"Can't you see I'm eager?" demanded Nugent.

"Come on, then!"

"Careful, you fellows!" said Bunter. "Mind you don't let me fall. I don't know what would happen if I started rolling down here."

"It would be worth seeing."

"I jolly well don't want to see it. Careful!"

Bob and Nugent stooped, and grasped hands, to make a "chair" for the fat junior. Billy Bunter gathered his coats round him, and sat down. At the same moment Bob and Frank parted hands, and Bunter sat down further than he intended, bumping into the snow.

"Oh!" he gasped.

Before he could attempt to rise, Bob gave him a push with his foot, and with a wild, gasping yell Bunter rolled down the slope.

The slope was steep; the snow was thick. Bunter went down at a good speed, which increased as he progressed on his way.

The snow gathered round him as he rolled, and to the juniors, gazing after him, he had the aspect of a huge and increasing snowball.

"My only hat!" gasped Bob Cherry. "They say that a rolling stone gathers no moss. A rolling porpoise gathers lots of snow, anyhow."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"By Jove, he'll be smothered!" exclaimed Harry, laughing. "You are a reckless ass, Bob. Let's go after him."

He ran down the slope.

Bunter was already rolling to the bottom, and as he came out on the level he stopped, and lay gasping and panting in a mass of snow.

Harry Wharton seized him by the shoulders and dragged him out.

"Feel all right?" asked Bob Cherry. "You've saved about a hundred yards walking."

"Ow!"

"It was splendid! I've never seen anything like it outside a circus," went on Bob admiringly. "How do you do these things, Bunter?"

"Ow!"

"A little short of breath, old chap?"

"Ow! Beast!"

"What's the matter?"

"Ow! I've broken my neck—I mean my leg!"

"Ha, ha! You're not sure which, I suppose?"

"Yow! Beast!"

"Well, if that's all the thanks a chap gets for helping a chap on his way, it's the last time I'm going to do a good-natured thing."

"Yow! I'm hurt."

"Where?"

"I've broken my arm, and I've got snow down my neck."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I'm too exhausted to walk. Wharton will have to send a trap for me."

"Right-ho!" said Harry. "Wait here, and I'll send one as soon as I get to the Lodge. It will get here in about an hour."

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Bob Cherry, as he saw the expression on the fat junior's face. "Will that suit you, Bunty?"

"I say, you fellows—"

"Come on!" said Harry. "Bunter is going to wait for the trap, and we'd better get on, so as to send it to him as quickly as possible."

But the idea of standing about in the snow for an hour did not appeal to Billy Bunter.

"I'm coming with you," he snorted.

"But you can't walk with a broken leg."

"I think, perhaps, it's only a sprain."

"My dear chap, if you walk with a sprain you may lame yourself for life. The best thing you can do is to sit down here in the snow and wait for the trap."

"Perhaps it's not sprained. It causes me fearful agony when I move it."

"Then you can't come with us. The sight of a chap in

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fearful agony always makes me feel bad," said Bob Cherry emphatically. "Come on, you chaps, and leave Bunter here."

"It's not paining so much now," exclaimed Bunter, dashing after the juniors as they started. "I'm not going to stay here."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Blessed if I can see anything to cackle at," growled Billy Bunter, wiping his spectacles. "I think you're a set of beasts. I think—"

"My dear ass, we can't stay here and miss meals while we listen to what you think. Get a move on."

And Billy Bunter tramped on, grumbling all the way—a sort of grumbling accompaniment to the cheery chat of the Famous Four.

THE FOURTH CHAPTER.

Bob Cherry's Little Joke.

"GOOD!"

That was Billy Bunter's remark as he stepped into the dining-room at Wharton Lodge.

Miss Wharton, the colonel's sister, knew boys well, and knew that on a cold day in December they were certain to have healthy appetites.

And while they were taking off their coats and changing their boots, and rubbing the snow off their ruddy faces, the good old lady was superintending the preparation of a lunch that satisfied even the exacting eye of Billy Bunter.

The other fellows were hungry, too, and they were almost as pleased with the sight of the well-spread table as William George Bunter was.

The fat junior blinked round with great satisfaction as he sank into his chair.

"This is what I call ripping!" he remarked. "There's something very exhilarating in a good meal, you know. My people don't understand how important it is for me to have plenty of solid nourishment. I think I shall often come and stay with you for week-ends, Wharton."

"Go hon!"

"You're too good, Bunter," said Bob Cherry seriously. "Won't you come and stay with me for a few week-ends, too? I'll see that you have plenty of exercise, and don't over-eat yourself."

Billy Bunter deigned no reply to that frivolous remark. He was too busy to talk, as a matter of fact.

His mouth was full, and his jaws wholly occupied with the duty of mastication.

Colonel Wharton and his sister came in to chat with the boys while they lunched, but Billy Bunter said no word.

He devoted his whole attention to the lunch.

By this means he was finished by the time the others had done, and had travelled through four or five times as much as any of them.

When he finally sat back in his chair there was a broad and somewhat greasy smile of contentment upon his fat face.

Bob Cherry clapped his hand upon his shoulder.

"Feel up to a run, Bunty?"

Billy Bunter shuddered. After the meal he had put away he felt that anything in the shape of physical exercise would kill him.

"Oh, no, Cherry! Don't shake me, please!"

"Are you going to skate?"

"No! Oh, no!"

"Now, look here, Bunter! The ice is frozen on the lake, and we're going to skate, and you know what a dab you are at skating."

Bunter blinked at him.

"That's right enough, Cherry, I know, but I don't feel like skating now. I'll come down to-morrow and show you fellows how to skate."

"Well, will you come and play leap-frog?"

Bunter shivered.

"No, I won't! I'm tired with my journey, and I want a rest."

"Rats! If you start lying about after feeding you'll grow fat, and you know you don't want to spoil your slim, elegant figure."

"Oh, really, Cherry—"

"Wharton's having a dance on Boxing Day, and Hazeldeno is coming and bringing his sister. You want to be in form, and look as slim and graceful as usual."

"Look here—"

"Oh, let him sleep," said Frank Nugent, laughing. "He will, anyway, whether you let him or not. Would you like us to help you up to our room, Bunty?"

"No, I wouldn't!" said Bunter, remembering how he had been helped along the lane. "I think I'll go and lie down a bit now. I feel quite fatigued."

"Tired in the jaw?" asked Bob sympathetically.

"No, you ass!"

"Sure you don't mind staying up there alone?" asked

Bob, as Bunter went upstairs with slow and heavy steps. "There's a ghost in this house, you know."

"Oh, rats!"

"It's a fact. Ghost of a dead-and-gone Wharton who was biffed on the crumpet with a battleaxe, and never smiled again. He appears to people who've been drinking—ahem, I mean he appears to people at Christmastime with a face covered with blood—"

"Ow!"

"A chivvy simply dripping with gore, and red as—as—as your nose, Bunter. If you see him you cut and run."

"Oh, don't be an ass!"

And Bunter went on upstairs, and left Bob grinning. The story of the ghost, which was a legend attached to the house, might have scared Bunter at night, but it was barely dark yet, and the house was full of life, and Bunter was too sleepy to care about ghosts. He went into the large room which the five juniors shared, and blinked at the big fire that was blazing away in the grate. The weather was bitterly cold, the fire was of wood, and roared in the wide, old-fashioned chimney. Bunter drew a big armchair up to the fire with a beatific grin of contentment. He stripped off his tight jacket and waistcoat—much tighter since his lunch—and drew on a large and voluminous dressing-gown. Then he settled down in the armchair, put a cushion behind his head, and went to sleep.

In two minutes a deep bass snore was echoing through the room, and was audible to the juniors when they came up to put their coats on.

Bob Cherry chuckled as he heard it.

"Good old Bunter! He's at it already!" he remarked.

The juniors entered the room, and Bunter's snore grew louder. Bob Cherry paused beside his chair and looked down at him. Bunter, with his mouth open and his fat face shining, was not exactly a thing of beauty.

"Lovely boy!" said Bob tenderly. "His people must be proud of him, and dote upon his image—I don't think! Wake up, Bunter! Ain't you coming skating?"

"Groo!"

"Wake up!"

"Groo!"

Bob Cherry shook the fat junior, but Bunter was too deep in the arms of Morpheus. He did not even open his eyes.

"Not much good," said Nugent, laughing.

"No. I only wanted to see if he would wake."

"Why?"

"A jape, my son. Watch your uncle."

Bob Cherry took a bottle of red ink from his writing-case and dipped the corner of a handkerchief in the fluid. With a liberal hand he dabbed the red ink all over Billy Bunter's face, till the fat junior's complexion shone like a setting sun. More and more ink he added, till it ran over the dressing-gown, and there was not a fraction of the fat junior's physiognomy that was not glowing red.

The others, watching him, grinned.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Even that shout of laughter did not disturb Billy Bunter. He snored on steadily.

The ink dried on his face in the light of the fire, and it certainly gave him a most peculiar aspect.

"Come on," said Harry. "It will be too dark for skating soon."

And leaving Billy Bunter alone in his glory the juniors took up their ice-skates and went to the frozen lake.

THE FIFTH CHAPTER.

The Ghost of Wharton Lodge.

"OH!"

"Help!"

"Oh!"

The skaters had had a good time on the lake. The ice was thick and hard, and quite safe; they skated till the deepening winter dusk drove them off. After two or three collisions in the dark they gave it up.

Then, as they tramped back towards the house, carrying their skates, a sudden burst of uproar greeted them.

Harry Wharton started.

"What on earth's the matter?" he exclaimed.

"Fire, I suppose," said Nugent. "Come on!"

They dashed into the house.

In the hall stood Colonel Wharton, with a perplexed look on his face, and a terrified maid-servant clinging round his neck.

"Dear me!" exclaimed the colonel. "What can be the matter?"

"Oh, oh!" gasped the maid.

"Jane! What—"

"Save me!"

"Oh, dear! Jane, what is the matter?"

The old gentleman tried to disengage himself, but in vain. The maid seemed to be terrified out of her wits.

She clung convulsively to the old soldier, and he tried in vain to disengage the arms from his neck.

"What is the matter, uncle?" asked Harry, in amazement.

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NEXT
WEEK:

"BILLY BUNTER'S RESOLUTIONS."

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

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Colonel Wharton shook his head.

"I haven't the faintest idea, Harry. Jane has just rushed downstairs and fallen upon me like this. She seems to be frightened."

"What's the matter, Jane?"

"Oh, oh!"

"What has happened?"

"Oh—oh—oh! Mercy!"

"I have sent John to see if there is anything upstairs," said Colonel Wharton. "Jane must have imagined she saw something in the dark—"

"Here comes John!"

"My hat! He looks scared, too!"

John came down the great staircase three steps at a time. His face was white and scared. He sank upon a seat in the hall and gasped.

"Oh, sir! Oh!"

"What is it?"

"She—she saw it, sir!"

"What?" roared the colonel irately. "What did she see? What have you seen, blockhead? Take this girl away, somebody."

"Oh, oh!" moaned Jane.

"Oh, lor'!" groaned John.

"What is it, you duffer?" demanded Harry, shaking John by the shoulder. "What the dickens is it you are mumbling about?"

"The ghost!"

"The what?"

"The ghost of Wharton Lodge!"

"You've been drinking!" said Colonel Wharton fiercely.

"You've been drinking, you blockhead! Jane has been drinking, too!"

"Oh, sir—"

"Go up again and—"

"Oh, sir! I—I'd rather you discharged me, sir! I daren't, sir! Oh—oh!"

"The ghost!" murmured Jane, still clinging convulsively to the unhappy colonel. "The ghost! His face was all streaming with blood!"

"What?"

"Covered with blood, sir!" gasped John. "I saw it myself."

"You are mad!"

"It was the ghost, sir. I never believed in it till now, but there it was, sir, a-stalking along the passage, sir, in a trailing robe, his face all red with blood."

"Impossible!"

"The ghost of Sir Reginald Wharton, sir—"

"Idiot!"

"Who was murdered in the east wing by—"

"Fool!"

"I saw it, sir!"

"Harry take this girl away, will you, while I go and see what the foolish donkeys have been frightened about?" said the colonel, fuming.

But Jane tightened her grasp.

"Oh, no, sir! Don't leave me! I'm so horrified, sir! It was the g-g-ghost!"

"Don't be silly, Jane!"

"Oh! Help! The ghost!" shrieked Jane. "Don't leave me, sir!"

Jane seemed to be going into violent hysterics, and the unhappy colonel gave up the attempt to release himself.

"Oh, be quiet, girl!"

"The g-g-ghost!"

"Harry, go and see what is the matter!"

"Certainly, sir!"

"Let us all go!" exclaimed Nugent.

"Come on, then!"

The juniors, considerably perplexed—for John and Jane had evidently been really frightened by something—ascended the stairs.

Harry had related to his chums the story of the ghost of Wharton Lodge; but, of course, none of the boys placed any faith in the weird old legend.

They ascended the stairs, and the sound of a swishing robe in the passage on the right, which led to their own quarters, caught their ears.

They halted involuntarily.

The passage was dimly lighted, and in the gloom they caught sight of a figure advancing towards them, with a robe sweeping behind, and the face of it a glaring crimson.

"My only hat!" gasped Nugent, backing away towards the stairs. "I—"

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Bob Cherry.

"Eh? What—"

"It's all right!"

"What do you mean?"

"It's Bunter!"

"Bunter!"

"Yes. Don't you remember, I inked his chivvy red?" roared Bob Cherry. "Ha, ha, ha!"

And then the juniors laughed, too.

They recognised the flowing robe as Billy Bunter's voluminous dressing-gown, and the glaring red face as that of the fat junior, plus the red ink.

"Bunter!" exclaimed Wharton, laughing. "Billy, what on earth are you parading round in a dressing-gown for?"

There was no reply from the fat junior.

The Greyfriars chums approached closer to him, and Billy Bunter turned round, and retraced his steps, without a word or a sign.

Wharton drew a quick breath.

"Don't touch him! He's walking in his sleep!"

It was Billy's old trick of somnambulism again. The juniors followed him back to his room. There he crossed to the armchair, sat down, and slept peacefully.

Bob Cherry chuckled.

"That is what comes of eating enough for three," he remarked. "Bunter always gets taken like this after over-eating himself."

"Shall we wake him?"

"Oh, no! Let him sleep it off."

And the juniors left Bunter to sleep it off. They descended the stairs, and explained matters. But it was some time before John and Jane could be convinced that it was not really the ghost of Wharton Lodge that they had seen.

In fact, they refused to be convinced till they had been to Billy Bunter's room, and looked at the fat junior, when his most substantial and unmusical snores fully convinced them that he could not by any possibility be a ghost

THE SIXTH CHAPTER.

Bunter does not Skate.

BILLY BUNTER awoke at last.

He sat upright in the armchair, and snorted.

The room was dark, and the fire had burnt low, and Bunter was not feeling very comfortable. In the first place, his feet were cold, and in the second, it never is comfortable to wake up after a sleep following a huge meal.

Bunter grunted.

"I think somebody might have come up and called me," he murmured. "It must be pretty nearly dinner-time, I should think."

He rose from the armchair, and struck a match.

His watch showed it to be eight o'clock, and as dinner at Wharton Lodge was at seven, it was likely to be very nearly over by now.

Billy Bunter switched on the electric light, and proceeded to make himself presentable for dinner.

Bunter was short-sighted, and if he caught sight of his reflection in the glass, he did not notice what an original hue his complexion had assumed.

It was Bunter's habit to get done with as little washing as possible. He had a theory that too much washing was bad for the skin. He generally had a theory to bear him out in any habit he had formed, and, in fact, he had a truly scientific way of making facts of all sorts agree with his theories.

But if washing was bad for the skin, Bunter's skin ought to have been in a high and palmy state, for it certainly never got an over-dose of washing.

On the present occasion he contented himself with giving his face a rub with the towel—a rub that had no effect whatever upon the ink, which was dried hard.

Then he left the room to seek for dinner.

Billy Bunter was feeling extremely injured. If he had been wakened he would have grumbled at having his sleep disturbed, and as he had not been wakened, he grumbled at being allowed to be late for dinner.

He was hungry again, of course, and dinner was the most important thing in the world to him just then.

He went downstairs, and made his way towards the dining-room.

"Oh, lor'!"

It was John, and he nearly dropped a tray he was carrying as he caught sight of the fat junior.

He knew now that Bunter was not a ghost, but the aspect of the Owl of the Remove was sufficiently startling.

Bunter stared at him haughtily.

"I'm late," he said. "I hope they haven't finished dinner."

John grinned.

"Yes, sir; and they're gone out into the grounds, sir, to do some skating by moonlight, sir, and the colonel and Miss Wharton have gone to watch them, sir."

"Oh, well, I—"

"There's some guests, sir—Miss Hazeldene and Miss Trevlyn and Master Hazeldene have come over, sir."

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Bunter blinked with satisfaction.

"Good! Look here, I want some dinner! I—"

"Yes, sir. The colonel said you was to have it as soon as you came down, sir. But if you please, sir—"

"I'm fearfully hungry!" said Bunter. "Buck up with it!"

"Yes, sir; but—"

"Don't waste time! Can't you see I'm hungry!"

"Yes; but—"

"Oh, buzz off, and don't jaw!"

"Very good, sir!" said John demurely, and he gave up the attempt to inform Billy Bunter of the state of his face, and walked away.

Bunter went into the dining-room. He sat down, and waited hungrily. John brought him his dinner, and watched him eat it, with a lurking smile on his face. There was no one else in the dining-room.

Billy Bunter took less time over his dinner that evening than was his custom.

He could hear the merry shouts of the skaters from the grounds, where the winter moon was soaring over the frozen trees, and he was anxious to join the merry party. Marjorie Hazeldene was there, and Bunter never could get the idea out of his head that Marjorie was fascinated by his charms and attractions.

But he made a very good dinner.

That was a thing he never missed if he could help it. He was too short-sighted to catch the lurking grin on John's face.

When he had finished, he walked out of the dining-room, through the French windows on the terrace, and descended to the ground.

He grumbled to himself as he made his way towards the frozen lake.

There were a group of cheery skaters upon it, and among the rest, Bunter caught sight of two girlish figures, whom he guessed to be Marjorie and her friend, Clara Trevlyn.

He hurried on as fast as his fat little legs would carry him.

Colonel Wharton and Miss Wharton were by the lake side. They were not skating, but they had come down to watch the young people amusing themselves in the brilliant winter moonlight.

Miss Wharton's kind old face peeped out of a mass of furs, as she sat in a garden seat with her feet on a stool; and the colonel, wrapped in his greatcoat, was moving about to keep himself warm.

He glanced towards Billy Bunter as the latter came up.

The full, round moon, sailing high above the grounds of Wharton Lodge, made the scene almost as light as day.

Colonel Wharton stared blankly at the fat junior.

"B-b-Bunter, is that you?"

"Yes, sir," said Bunter, raising his cap to Miss Wharton. "I'm sorry I overslept myself, and was late for dinner, sir. Nugent ought to have called me. I've come down to skate."

"Really, Bunter—"

"I haven't any skates with me. I was going to buy a new pair, but I was short of funds just before leaving Greyfriars owing to a disappointment about a postal-order. I dare say Inky will lend me his. I'm a dab at skating, sir."

"But—but—"

The colonel stared helplessly at Bunter.

"Yes, sir?"

"Are you aware, Bunter, that—that your face—"

"Oh, really, sir—"

"It—it is red—"

"Yes; I've got a good colour, sir," said Bunter cheerfully. "I keep a good complexion, you know, because I keep up my constitution with plenty of nourishing food, and don't spoil the skin by using too much soap, you know. I say, you fellows, I want a pair of skates."

The skaters looked at Bunter, and Bob Cherry doubled up.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"What's the matter, Cherry? Blessed if I can see anything to cackle at! I want a pair of skates!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Bob.

It was not quite safe to go into paroxysms of laughter upon the ice, on skates. Bob Cherry's legs flew away from under him, and he ceased laughing suddenly, and tried to recover himself.

One of his legs flew into the air, but the other kept to the ice, and he rushed helplessly along like a skating stork.

"My hat!" gasped Nugent. "Is that a new kind of performance you've just learned? I—Ow! Oh, you duffer!"

Bob Cherry's outstretched leg caught Nugent on the chest, and he went sprawling. His wildly-waving arms, as he fell, smote Hurrec Jamsset Ram Singh, and there was a yell from that dusky son of the Indian Empire.

Hurree Singh sat down on the ice with a bump, without knowing precisely how he got there.

Marjorie and Clara were both skating towards them, and in a few seconds they would have been down, too, but Harry Wharton saw the danger and sped up in time. He caught the two girls by the arms, and before they realised their danger, he had steered them clear of it, and they were circling on the open ice.

"My hat!" said Miss Clara, who was much given to using boyish expressions.

"Oh," exclaimed Marjorie, "thank you, Harry!"

"Glad I was in time," said Harry, as he skated on between the two girls. "You would have had a nasty fall."

"I say, you fellows—"

"You young ass!" roared Bob Cherry, struggling to his feet. "You cheerful lunatic."

"Oh, really, Cherry—"

"I—I—I'll squash you—I'll—"

"Oh, really, you know, it's not my fault you're a clumsy ass," said Billy Bunter. "You'd better give me your skates, as you can't keep up on them."

"You—you—"

"I want to borrow a pair of skates, and you'd better let me have yours. I want to take Marjorie round the lake. You see—"

"Oh, that face!" gasped Nugent, covering his own with his hands. "Take it away, Bunter, and either wash it or bury it."

"Oh, really, Nugent—"

"Take it away!"

"It's your fault I went down, you fat porker!" shouted Bob Cherry wrathfully. "What do you mean by bringing a face like that out with you?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"My dear boy," said Miss Wharton, in her gentle voice, "your face is quite red—dreadfully red. What has happened?"

Bunter, amazed, rubbed his hand over his face. His exertion in hurrying down to the lake had made him perspire and the wetted ink came off on his hands. He gazed at his fingers in horror.

"Blood!" he gasped.

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

"I—I—I'm wounded!" gasped Bunter. "I—I'm bleeding to death! Get a doctor—quick!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I—I feel that I'm dying," moaned Bunter, and he sank upon the ground. "Help! Murder! A doctor! You heartless beasts! A doctor—quick!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Help!"

"It's all right, Bunt!" shrieked Bob Cherry, nearly falling over again in his merriment. "It's all right, you ass. It's only ink."

"Ink!"

"Yes, red ink."

"Oh, really, Cherry—"

"That's what it is, you young ass! Somebody's inked your fat chivvy for a jape, while you've been snoozing. Go and wash it."

"Who was it?"

"Oh, don't ask me conundrums! Go and clean off the ink."

Billy Bunter blinked wrathfully at the laughing juniors, and his wrath was increased as he saw that Marjorie and Clara were laughing, too. He toddled off to the house, to wash off the ink; but he found it no light task.

There was no skating for Bunter that evening. It was over long before he finished his ablutions. And when he had finished, the ink was not all gone. There was a red rim round his face which caused a general smile when he appeared in the drawing-room later in the evening.

THE SEVENTH CHAPTER.

The Christmas Pudding Competition.

THE next few days passed quickly and pleasantly enough to the Greyfriars juniors. They always contrived to enjoy a holiday; and under the present circumstances a holiday could scarcely fail to be enjoyable. They had the run of Colonel Wharton's fine old place; and between skating and sliding, and snow-fighting in the daytime, and a thousand devices for indoor amusement in the evenings, they passed their days and their nights merrily enough. Even Billy Bunter, though generally inclined to grumble, was happy. The fare at the Lodge was of the best; and what was more important in Bunter's eyes, there was an unlimited quantity of it; and there was no one to cry "halt" when he was inclined to distinguish himself, as was unhappily the case at Greyfriars.

All that weighed upon Bunter's mind was the loss of the valuable recipe; for he had set his mind upon the Christmas pudding competition.

The other juniors sniffed at reviving what they termed an old wheeze; but Bunter pointed out that what had been done once could be done again, and that they had the

advantage of experience. And when at last he found the recipe, there was no stopping him. The finding of the precious document was quite simple; it was in one of Bunter's pockets, and he had overlooked it in his previous searches. When it turned up, Bunter immediately rushed off to acquaint the chums of the Remove, with the fact that there was no longer any obstacle in the way of the Christmas pudding competition.

He found Harry Wharton & Co. in the gun-room. There was a thick fall of snow outside, a blur of frost on the window-panes. The gun-room was very cosy, and was a favourite resort of the juniors, especially as it adjoined a small gallery where target-shooting was allowed to Harry and his guests.

Harry Wharton was cleaning a rifle, and Bob Cherry and Nugent were fencing. Hurree Janset Ram Singh was sitting on a chest, reading a little book which seemed to be printed in spider-legs and ants and caterpillars but which was in reality a volume in his native language. Billy Bunter burst excitedly into the room, making the juniors jump, and Bob Cherry gave Nugent a poke under the chin with his foil.

"Oh!" said Nugent.

"A hit," said Bob.

"Yes, a very palpable hit, as your Poet Shakespeare says playfully," remarked the Nabob of Bhanipur.

"It was that ass Bunter—he made me jump."

"I say, you fellows—"

"Shut up, Bunter!"

"But I say—"

"Get out!" roared Nugent. "You've spoiled my fencing already—if you don't bunk, I'll give you a jab."

"Oh!" gasped Bunter, retreating from the threatening foil, and backing into Wharton. "Keep off, you ass!"

"You keep off, Billy," said Wharton, pushing back the fat junior. "What are you backing into me for?"

"I'm sincerely sorry, Wharton. I didn't see you."

"Are you going?"

"No, I'm not going, Nugent; I'm going—"

"That's rather contradictory," laughed Harry.

"I mean, I'm not going; because I'm going to explain a rather important matter. You see, I've found the recipe."

"What recipe?"

"Oh, really, Cherry, you can't have forgotten—the recipe for making the Christmas pudding."

"Oh! Well, now go and lose it again."

"I say, you fellows, I really think we ought to have the Christmas pudding competition, you know. It's such ripping fun; and then, there will be the puddings to eat when we've done; and under the circumstances, too, we can get the materials for nothing. That's a point you oughtn't to overlook, you know."

"Trust you not to overlook a point like that."

"Well, really, Nugent, it's business, you know. Now, are you fellows agreed—it looks like being rainy weather for a bit, and it will be an indoor occupation."

"Oh, all right!" said Bob. "I suppose you're going to offer big prizes for the winner."

Bunter blinked at him dubiously.

"I was thinking of big prizes," he said. "I should be very glad to offer them myself. I am expecting a postal order to-day. You see, it must have arrived at Greyfriars after I left, and Mrs. Kebble has been very slow in sending it on. But it can't get here later than to-day, I think. If it is large enough, and comes in time, I will offer a series of prizes for the best pudding. Otherwise, perhaps Colonel Wharton will offer prizes. It really doesn't matter who offers the prizes, you know, so long as they're offered."

"Naturally."

"I was thinking of two prizes—a prize for the winner, who makes the best pudding, and a prize for the loser, who makes the worst—a booby prize, you know."

"Then you're sure of scoring."

"Oh, really, Cherry! Now, I think the first prize ought to be a purse of ten guineas—"

"Going to stand that out of your postal order?"

"Well—ahem!—I think upon the whole we'd better arrange the prizes without reference to the postal order. The post is so disorganised at Christmas-time that one never knows when a letter will come. I think perhaps we had better put it to Colonel Wharton, and suggest that he provide a purse of ten guineas."

"Rats!"

"Well, perhaps five guineas—"

"You mean fivepence, of course."

"Oh, really, Nugent—"

"We'll make up a prize between us, and make it a good pair of skates," said Harry Wharton.

"Good wheeze!"

"Well, yes; I could be content with that," said Bunter

reflectively. "I want a pair of skates, too. I want to skate badly."

"Ha, ha!" roared Bob Cherry. "You can do that."

"I mean I want to skate very much, Cherry. Now for the booby prize—"

"A thick ear," suggested Bob.

"Any old thing will do," said Bunter, who did not think that he was likely to make the worst pudding. "Say a pencil-case. Nugent's pencil-case—"

"You let my pencil-case alone!" said Nugent wrathfully.

"Oh, really, Nugent, I don't think you ought to be selfish at a time like this. Well, suppose we say Bob's pocket-knife with the three blades—"

"Rats!" said Bob promptly.

"Well, there's Wharton's watch. It's a good watch, and keeps splendid time, and is—"

Harry Wharton laughed.

"You needn't enumerate the qualities of my watch," he said. "I haven't the least intention of offering it as a Bunter prize."

"A booby prize, Wharton."

"Same thing."

"Look here—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Blessed if I can see anything to cackle at. Look here, if you fellows are going to make this the occasion for exhibiting disgusting selfishness—"

"I've got a suggestion to make," said Nugent. "There's Bunter's camera. It's a rotten camera, but all right for a booby prize."

"If you think I'm going to part with my camera, Nugent, you're jolly well mistaken."

"Now, don't be selfish, Bunter."

"Perhaps Colonel Wharton will offer something," said Bunter hastily.

"We'll make up five bob and buy something," said Nugent. "That's the simplest way. You're not going to screw things out of the colonel."

"Oh, really, Nugent—"

"Shut up! Now, when is the game to come off?"

"May as well start at once," said Bunter. "The sooner the puddings are done, the sooner we can eat them. I can do with any amount of Christmas puddings."

"Good! Now about the materials—"

"I'll speak to my aunt about that," said Harry, with a smile. "I've no doubt that will be all right. I say—a good idea—Marjorie's staying near us with Hazel, you know. I'll go over and ask her if she'd care to join in the cooking competition."

"Good!" exclaimed Bob Cherry immediately, throwing down his foil. "I'll come with you."

"So will I," said Nugent. "I should like a walk in the snow."

"The likefulness of my honourable self would also be terrific," remarked the Nabob of Bhanipur, closing his book and slipping it into his pocket.

"Perhaps I'd better come—" began Bunter.

"Yes, do," said Bob Cherry heartily; "we'll have a snow-fight on the way, and the one who hits Bunter with a snowball in the eye the most times takes a prize."

"On second thoughts, it's cold, and I'll stay in," said Bunter.

And the Favourite Four tramped over to Hazeldene's place without the Owl of the Remove. They left Billy Bunter sitting with his feet on a fender, eating mince-pies—that is to say, in the seventh heaven for Bunter.

THE EIGHTH CHAPTER.

Making the Puddings.

MARJORIE HAZELDENE entered into the Christmas-pudding competition with great zest. So did her friend Clara. The two girls, with Hazeldene of the Remove, were staying at a house, for Christmas, within a mile of Wharton Lodge, and so the party at the Lodge saw a great deal of them when the weather was at all good. Both the girls studied the noble art of cookery at Cliff House with Miss Penelope Primrose, and they had a natural prejudice in favour of feminine cooking. They had not the slightest doubt that they would carry off the prize, and as there was only one first prize, and neither wanted the booby prize, they agreed to make the pudding between them and share the proceeds. They smiled at the idea of a Greyfriars pudding being anything like a Cliff House pudding, and Harry Wharton and his chums had their doubts, too; but Billy Bunter had no doubts. The natural superiority of the male sex was a firm article in the faith of Billy Bunter, and as he considered himself a specially favourable specimen of his sex, he naturally concluded that he could do things better than any mere girl. It was a firmly fixed opinion in Bunter's mind that the prize would go to one of the party at the Lodge,

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and the booby prize would go to the girls; and the one at the Lodge who had the best chance, in his opinion, was William George Bunter.

The juniors lost no time in setting to work.

It was agreed that the puddings were to be completed and ready for tasting by the judging committee on Christmas Eve. Marjorie and Clara were to come over to the Lodge for Christmas, and they would carry specimens of their joint handiwork with them. The selection of the judging committee was easy. Colonel and Miss Wharton agreed to taste and judge and award the prizes.

Miss Wharton was very kind, too, in the matter of providing the materials. Although her careful housekeeping soul was pained by the prospect of waste, she laid open her supplies to the juniors, and allowed them to take what they liked.

They helped themselves liberally.

Billy Bunter, having the run of the larder and the pantry, helped himself not only to pudding ingredients, but to jams and preserves of all sorts, and very nearly made himself ill instead of making a pudding.

His valuable recipe he kept to himself. He said it would be giving up his natural advantage if he acquainted the others with the valuable secret. As no one wanted to see the recipe, however, he was not troubled about it. The other fellows did not think that it was quite as valuable as Bunter imagined.

The cook had smilingly agreed to boil the puddings, and all the juniors had to do was to make them.

That they now set about doing.

Each of them had a large pan for mixing, and the free run of the supplies, and the sight of the five juniors at work in the kitchen was worth seeing.

Billy Bunter took his jacket off and rolled up his sleeves, and set to work in the most businesslike manner.

He had a huge pile of ingredients round him, and the piles rapidly diminished, even before he had commenced making the pudding.

The explanation was simple. Bunter took a succession of "snacks," and raisins and currants and peel and so forth disappeared down his throat in an endless stream.

Bob Cherry chuckled.

"You must be getting rich yourself, I should think, to judge by the amount you're stowing away," he remarked.

"Well, you see, I require a snack now and then."

"The snackfulness of the honourable Bunter is terrific."

"Oh, I can't live on bananas like you, Inky. I've got a delicate constitution, and it requires keeping up by taking constant nourishment."

"The constantfulness is great."

"Hand me over the raisins. Bob Cherry, fetch me some more raisins, will you?"

"Not much!"

"I say, Wharton, you might fetch me some raisins."

"Rats!"

"Nugent, will you—"

"No, I won't!"

"Lot of selfish rotters! You know how tired it makes me to walk about when I'm working! I never met such selfish chaps in my life before!"

And Bunter went sulkily to fetch the raisins himself.

Colonel Wharton came down into the kitchen to see how the juniors were getting on. He found the boys with big white aprons on, their sleeves tucked up, and their hands and wrists smothered with dough, and their faces dabbled with it.

The old soldier looked on with a smile.

"Getting on?" he asked.

"Oh, yes, rather, sir!" said Nugent. "I'm getting on like a house on fire. I can't remember whether I've put any suet in, but except for that—"

"Curious," said Bob Cherry. "You have to put salt in a Christmas-pudding, I believe, and I can't remember if I've put any in. I suppose I may as well shove in some more."

"You chaps ought to have got a recipe," said Bunter, as the smiling colonel retired, and he blinked at his comrades with an air of superior knowledge. "Now, my recipe is ripping. It gives the exact proportions, and all that. I've sorted out everything into little heaps, you see, in exactly the required quantities. That's business."

"But you keep on gorging on the heaps," said Nugent.

"Well, I make them up again, you know."

"In the exact proportions?" grinned Frank.

"H'm! Well, near enough. Don't want to be too exact, you know. This is pudding-making, not mathematics."

And Billy Bunter went on with his work. He had his fat hands in the pudding, mixing away manfully, when he felt an itch on his nose—a worrisome itch that frequently assails you when you have your hands occupied and cannot scratch the nose.

Bunter twisted up his features in the hope of relieving the



The terrified maid-servant clung round Colonel Wharton's neck, and gasped "Oh! Oh!"

"Dear me!" exclaimed the Colonel, "What can be the matter?"

troublesome itching that way, and the aspect of his face became positively alarming.

Bob Cherry caught sight of his face, and uttered an exclamation.

"Hallo, hallo, hallo! What on earth's the matter, Bunter? Are you going in for St. Vitus's dance?"

"No. Oh, oh!"

"What is it? Something in your eye?"

"My nose itches."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Blessed if I can see anything to cackle at! I say, you fellows, I can't use my hands—they're in the pudding. Scratch my nose for me."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Look here, I say—"

"Rub it on the hearthrug," suggested Nugent. "You can go down on all fours and give it a good rub."

"Oh, really, Nugent—"

"Then biff it against the wall."

"I—I say, scratch it for me; it's—it's awful!" said Bunter, screwing up his face fearfully. "It's horrid, you know!"

"But we've all got our hands in the puddings," said Bob Cherry.

"Then give it a rub with your elbow."

"Oh, all right!"

"Mind, gently does it! No larks!"

"Bring it over here," said Bob Cherry, doubling his arm.

Billy Bunter approached him, and Bob gave the junior's fat little nose a rub with his elbow—a rub that was so sudden

and so hard that Billy Bunter uttered a yell and sat down on the floor.

"Oh!"

Bob Cherry looked down at him.

"Is that enough, Bunt?"

"Ow!"

"Does it itch now?"

"No, it doesn't! Yow!"

And Bunter, blinking wrathfully through his spectacles, went back to his pudding-making. Bob Cherry chuckled softly.

THE NINTH CHAPTER.

Something like Shooting.

THE puddings were finished at last, and the cook deposited them in large saucepans, and promised that each should boil the specified number of hours. They should boil so many hours that day and so many the next morning, so that they would be nice and hot in time for lunch on Christmas Eve, when the judges were to taste them.

Billy Bunter went off to clean himself from the traces of the pudding—which were scattered very nearly all over him—with a contented grin.

He was pretty sure in his own mind that he was booked for the ice skates, the principal prize, but he meant to make sure by tasting the puddings for himself when they were taken up in the evening.

If there were any doubt about it in his mind after he had

tasted them then it would be time to take other measures, for Billy Bunter was serenely ignorant of the rules of "playing the game," and the fact that he wanted the prize seemed to him a sufficient reason why he should get it.

The puddings having been made, and the traces of them cleaned off hands and faces and clothing, the juniors adjourned to lunch.

Billy Bunter made an excellent lunch. He said that making puddings always made him hungry. Considering that he put more of the materials into himself than into the puddings, that would have been a matter for surprise—with anybody but Bunter.

After lunch, Harry Wharton walked over to the windows to look at the weather.

Snow was coming down in a thick and blinding mass, and the ground was heaped with it, the trees and shrubberies heavy-laden.

"No going out," said Bob Cherry, with a shake of the head.

"Not much."

"The not-muchfulness is terrific."

The early winter dusk was descending; the snow glimmered white through the growing gloom.

"Let's go and get some shooting," suggested Nugent.

"Good wheeze!"

Billy Bunter sank into an armchair.

"I say, you fellows, I'll join you later," he said. "I think I require a short rest after making that pudding. I'll look in presently, as I'm rather a dab at shooting, you know, and I think I can show you fellows some things."

And the fellows grinned, and left him snoozing in the armchair.

Wharton switched on the electric light in the gallery adjoining the gun-room. At the end of the gallery was a target, and more than once Wharton had spotted the white. Harry was a very good shot, both with rifle and pistol, and it was one of his favourite amusements when he had a chance of indulging it.

The chums loaded and banged away merrily, riddling target after target, but Wharton came an easy first.

They had been at it about a quarter of an hour when a fat form rolled into the gallery, and Bunter blinked at them.

"I say, you fellows, I think I'll give you a show now. You'd like to see some real shooting, I suppose, after all that piffle?"

"Good!" said Bob Cherry, with a grin. "Do you know which end of the gun to hold?"

"Oh, really, Cherry——"

"Mind," said Wharton. "I remember Billy once looking down the barrel of a gun to see if it was loaded."

"I'll load for you, Billy, if you like," said Nugent.

"Oh, all right!" said Billy Bunter, who, as a matter of fact, had very dim ideas as to how to load a gun, but he smiled a superior smile all the same. "I like somebody to load for me. It's a bother to attend to those petty details oneself."

Nugent chuckled, and the others grinned. Frank was selecting a cartridge from a box containing only blanks. He did not mean to trust a loaded firearm into the hands of a fellow like Billy Bunter.

If Bunter did not succeed in shooting somebody else, he would certainly have contrived to shoot himself, and Nugent did not want any fatalities during the Christmas holiday if it could be helped.

Nugent loaded the rifle, and gave it to Bunter. It was as harmless as a weapon could be; but Bunter was a little nervous in taking hold of it.

"Don't point it towards me, you ass!" he exclaimed.

"There have been lots of accidents through silly asses pointing loaded firearms at people."

Nugent chuckled.

"Well, here you are. Don't point it at me!"

Bunter took the rifle, blinked at it, jammed it awkwardly to his shoulder, and swung it round, till it covered all the juniors in turn.

His finger was on the trigger all the time, and had the rifle been loaded four lives would have been in danger.

As it was, the juniors did not show any sign of fear.

"Which one of us are you going to pot?" asked Bob Cherry. "I'd rather you did anybody but me. I haven't made my will."

"A jolly necessary precaution, if you go out shooting with Bunter," laughed Harry.

"I don't like to see this jealousy of a chap, because he happens to be a dab at shooting," said Bunter, blinking at them.

"Ha, ha, ha! Go it!"

"Where's the target?"

"Just in front of your nose."

"Well, I'm short-sighted, you know. I think it would be only fair if I walked half-way to the target before I fired."

THE MAGNET LIBRARY.—96.

THAT MOTOR-CYCLE given away by the Editor of

"My dear chap, you can walk right up to it if you like. You couldn't hit it unless you touched it with your muzzle."

"I think this jealousy is——"

"Fire!"

Bang, bang!

Billy Bunter jumped as two rifles went off close to him.

Wharton's bullet was in the white, and Bob's in the next circle. Bunter brought the gun swinging round again.

"Look here, don't fire while I'm getting ready!" he exclaimed. "It shakes up my nerves like anything."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Get on with the washing, Bunter."

"I say, Bunter, do you mind if we keep on firing while you're between us and the target? I suppose you don't mind?"

"You—you murderous maniac!" shrieked Bunter. "Turn that gun away!"

"It isn't loaded."

"How do I know? Lots of accidents——"

"And it isn't pointed at you, either."

"Well, don't point it, then. Look here, be quiet for a bit while I get a shot. You're trying to muck up my shooting from sheer jealousy!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Jealousy like this, of a chap of your own study, isn't a joking matter. You ought to try to bring yourselves to a better frame of mind. What I say is——"

Bang!

"Oh, oh!"

"It's all right, Bunter; you were yards away!"

"Look here, will you shut up while I have my shot?"

"Oh, certainly! Buck up!"

Bunter blinked at the grinning juniors suspiciously, and walked forward towards the target with the rifle at his shoulder.

He did not stop till his muzzle was within six feet of it, and then he blinked along the barrel in great style.

"Go it!" shouted Bob Cherry.

"Oh, really, Cherry——"

"Fire!"

"I don't think I'm quite near enough."

"Ha, ha, ha! Go on and touch it!"

"You see, I'm rather shortsighted," said Bunter, blinking along the rifle. "Perhaps I'd better get a little nearer."

He walked on another pace, and caught his foot in a bench near the wall. No one but Bunter would have walked into the bench, but he was blinking along the barrel, and did not see where he was going.

He staggered, and dropped the rifle, and as it fell it struck the floor and exploded.

Bang!

Billy Bunter gave a yell.

"Oh, oh! Help! I'm shot!"

And he bumped down on the floor. At the same moment Colonel Wharton entered the gallery.

THE TENTH CHAPTER.

Not a Fatality.

COLONEL WHARTON gave a start, and his face changed colour under the bronze sunburn, as he heard Billy Bunter's terrified yell.

"Shot!" he exclaimed. "Good heavens!"

"It's all right, sir——" began Bob Cherry.

"Help!" moaned Bunter. "I'm shot! Oh, dear!"

The colonel ran forward, and knelt by his side. Billy Bunter lay on the floor, groaning like one in fearful agony.

For a moment a dreadful fear crossed Harry's mind that Nugent had made a mistake in the cartridge, and put in a loaded one, and that Bunter had really hurt himself.

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"PLUCK" IS WORTH HAVING.

"Frank," he exclaimed, "are you sure?"
 Nugent chuckled.
 "Quite sure!"
 "You know Bunter," grinned Bob Cherry. "I wonder if there is a bigger coward unhung than William George?"
 "Not much!"
 "The not-muchfulness is terrific."
 "Oh!" groaned Bunter.
 "Where are you hurt, lad?" asked the colonel kindly, trying to raise the fat junior. "Was it your own gun?"
 "Ow! Yes! I fell over something, and the rifle went off, and the bullet pierced me to the heart. Ow!"
 "My dear lad, you cannot be shot through the heart, or you would be dead. Where do you feel the pain?"
 "In my chest. Ow!"
 "Let me see."
 "Get a doctor. I'm dying. I forgive you, Bob Cherry."
 "Hallo, hallo, hallo! What on earth have I done to be forgiven for?" demanded Bob.
 "I—I forgive everybody," moaned Billy Bunter. "I—I— Tell my father to pay all my debts. I believe I owe you fellows some small sums?"
 "By Jove, I believe you do!" said Nugent.
 "I have never been treated well in No. 1 Study, and never had enough to eat there, but I bear no malice. Oh, this agony is awful! Ow! I'm bleeding to death. Send for a doctor. I—I'm sorry I was going to muck up the Christmas puddings."
 "What?"
 "I—I— Oh! Help! I'm expiring!"
 "Come, come!" said the colonel. "I cannot see a sign of blood!"
 "Ow! I'm bleeding internally. Ow!"
 "Let me examine—"
 "It's too late! I—I'm dying!"
 Colonel Wharton dragged open the fat junior's jacket and waistcoat. There was no sign of blood anywhere.
 "You are not wounded!" he said, rather disgustedly.
 "Oh, really, sir, I suppose I ought to know whether I'm wounded or not!"
 "Well, you are not!"
 "I distinctly felt the bullet bang me on the chest."
 "There is a slight bruise. Perhaps the rifle struck you on the chest?"
 "Yes, I know it did—the muzzle."
 "Then it is curious that the bullet did not touch you, and it certainly did not."
 "Perhaps it has gone right through me."
 "Nonsense!"
 Bunter sat up. The juniors were laughing almost hysterically. It was dawning even upon the obtuse mind of Billy Bunter that he was making an ass of himself.
 "I've had a narrow escape!" he exclaimed. "A wonderful escape! I wonder where the bullet went to?"
 "Ha, ha, ha!" yelled the Removites.
 Bunter blinked at them, and then approached the target and blinked at that. He uttered an exclamation of surprise.
 "By George, here it is!"
 "What's that?"
 "The bullet hit the target fairly in the centre. Here's the hole."
 "Ha, ha, ha!"
 "Blessed if I can see anything to cackle at! It was a wonderful shot—fired with marvellous presence of mind just as I was falling down."
 "Ha, ha! That was Wharton's bullet!"
 "Bosh! I have hit the centre!"
 "It is very curious where the bullet went, as the muzzle of the gun appears to have knocked against Bunter's chest," said the colonel, looking perplexed.
 "There wasn't any bullet, sir," grinned Nugent.
 "What! No bullet?"
 "No, sir. I knew better than to let Bunter monkey about with loaded firearms, and so I put in a blank cartridge."
 The colonel smiled.
 "Dear, dear! It is very fortunate that you did, under the circumstances, or there would certainly have been an accident."
 Bunter's face was a study for a minute.
 "Ha, ha, ha!" roared the juniors.
 "I say, you fellows, it's beastly mean to try to belittle my exploits like this," said Bunter at last. "There's the bullet-hole in the white—"
 "That's Wharton's!"
 "Oh, don't start romancing, Bob Cherry! I don't like to see this jealousy, I don't, really. I fired at the target—"
 "But you said that the rifle went off as you fell down," said the colonel.
 "Ye-es; but I fired at the same time, sir, with wonderful presence of mind, and there's the hole in the target to show where the bullet went."
 "I don't think you had better handle firearms any more, Bunter," said Colonel Wharton, with a smile. "I feel responsible for you while you are here."
 "Certainly, sir! I don't want to do any more shooting

now I've shown these fellows what I can do. I'm a dab at shooting, you know."

"Indeed?"

"Yes, certainly. I'm a first-class shot. I'm going to join the Territorials when I grow up, you know. I'm sorry to say that your nephew is rather given to minimising my doings in every way. You mustn't be prejudiced by what he says."

The colonel laughed, and walked away, and Bunter soon followed. He said that shooting had made him hungry, and as he had made friends with the cook, he was always sure of a comfortable corner in the kitchen, and something to eat at any time of the day.

The juniors finished their shooting, untroubled any more by Billy Bunter, who was content with having shown them what he could do.

At bedtime the fat junior was looking very thoughtful as he went upstairs. Bob Cherry looked at him curiously, but said nothing.

Bob had not forgotten the confession Bunter had stammered out in the shooting-gallery, when he believed himself injured, and he was thinking of it now. He wondered if it was the same thought that brought a shade to the brow of Billy Bunter. However, he said nothing, but he resolved to keep an eye on the fat junior.

If Bunter meant to interfere with the puddings, he could only do it at night, and Bob meant to wake up if Bunter left the room after bedtime.

He did not care to remain awake and watch, but he resorted to a simple expedient for awakening himself if Bunter left his bed.

He was last in bed, and after switching off the electric light, he placed a chair just inside the door, where anybody approaching the door would be bound to run into it.

On the chair he laid a couple of portmanteaux, which would tumble over if the chair were violently jolted.

This occupied Bob only a few seconds; and then he tumbled into bed, in the contented consciousness that Bunter could not leave the bed-room without awakening him.

Bob sank into a deep and dreamless sleep, as he usually did; and he slept on, while the sounds in the house died gradually away, and all was silent.

Suddenly he awoke.

He woke with the sound of a crash in his ears, and he started and sat up in bed, straining his eyes through the darkness towards the door.

"Hallo!" exclaimed Harry Wharton's voice. "What's the row there?"

There was no reply.

"Who was that?"

"It's—it's all right, you fellows," came Bunter's quavering voice. "I—I was taking a turn or two because I couldn't sleep, you know, and—and I knocked down a bag."

"Oh! Well, don't make a row."

"All right."

The juniors settled down to sleep again, with the exception of Bob Cherry. Bob chuckled softly and remained awake. He knew that his suspicions were not without grounds now. Bunter did not return to bed; but ten minutes later his whispering voice was audible in the room.

"You fellows asleep?"

There was dead silence. Wharton, Nugent, and Hurree Singh were asleep, and Bob Cherry did not choose to speak.

"I say, you fellows, are you asleep?"

Dead silence!

Bob Cherry, straining his ears to listen, heard the sound of the door opening cautiously, and then of its closing again.

Bob Cherry hopped out of bed in the dark, and hurriedly dragged on his clothes.

He knew very well now that Bunter was on the track of the Christmas puddings, which had been taken up, and were now in the kitchen, waiting a further boiling on the morrow.

Bob quietly left the room, and made his way noiselessly downstairs.

As he went down the kitchen stairs, a gleam of light caught his eyes. He crept to the kitchen door, which was half open.

The gas was alight, and Bunter was there.

THE ELEVENTH CHAPTER.

Foul Play.

BOB CHERRY made no sound as he stood at the kitchen door. He watched Bunter's movements, and "lay low," like the famous Brer Fox.

Billy Bunter never once looked round. He was too busy for that.

He had the puddings on the table, and had the cloths undone, and he was tasting each of them in turn, hacking off chunks with a knife.

Although the puddings were not finished cooking, that made no difference to Bunter; and although his purpose was to taste the puddings, he took enough of each to make a meal for any ordinary person.

His own he tasted first, and Bob Cherry grinned silently as he saw a wry expression come over the fat face.

The wonderful recipe had evidently not panned out so well as expected, and Bunter was not wholly pleased with the result of his endeavours.

He moved to Bob's own pudding next, and tasted it—then Harry's, then Frank's, and finally Hurree Janset Ram Singh's. At the last he made a wry face.

Then he stood and scratched his chin thoughtfully, looking at the puddings.

Bob, curious to know what he would do next, made no sound. He was hardly prepared, however, for the fat junior's next move.

Bunter drew a bottle from his pocket, and with quick movements of his hand he emptied it over the three puddings he considered better than his own.

Hurree Singh's pudding escaped, evidently because the fat junior did not consider that it had a chance in the competition.

Bob Cherry stood transfixed. His first thought, as he recovered himself, was to rush in upon the fat junior, flatten him down on the floor, and paste him with the spoiled puddings.

But he restrained himself.

He reflected that the puddings were now spoiled, and he could not save them, and so he thought he would wait and see what was the outcome.

Bunter mixed the liquid into the puddings as well as he could, and Bob, catching sight of the bottle, saw that it had contained liquid blacking.

The puddings, of course, would be utterly spoiled and uneatable. However bad Bunter's pudding was, it must take the prize now—unless the Cliff House girls took it. With their pudding, of course, it was not in Bunter's power to interfere. But with his lordly contempt for the gentle sex, and all their works, Bunter had no fears in that direction.

He proceeded now to wrap up the puddings again, and to replace them where he found them. Then he turned out the gas.

Bob Cherry shrank back into an alcove as the fat junior came out of the kitchen. He did not want to be discovered just then.

Billy Bunter passed within three paces of him, without having the least suspicion that he was there, and went upstairs.

Bob waited till he was gone, and then crept into the kitchen.

He lighted the gas, and dragged out Bunter's pudding, and unwrapped it on the table. He tasted it, and found that it was barely passable. But it was certainly better than the puddings Bunter had put the blacking into.

Bob still looked at the pudding with a thoughtful expression.

Billy Bunter fully expected to carry off the prize now, and his unsportsmanlike unfairness apparently did not weigh upon his mind at all.

Bob smiled grimly as he thought of it. If he could help it, Bunter should not benefit by his act of bad faith.

Bob was considering. Finally a gleam came into his eyes, which showed that he had thought of an idea.

He left the kitchen, and did not return for ten minutes. When he returned, he laid a package on the table, and opened it. It contained powdered cement.

Bob chuckled softly.

He took a knife, and proceeded to dig lumps out of Bunter's pudding. Into the gaps thus made he poured the cement, and then wetted it, and then jammed the chunks of pudding back again.

This he did until more than a pound of cement had been transferred to the interior of Billy Bunter's Christmas pudding.

Then, grinning gleefully, Bob Cherry wrapped the pudding up again, and put it away with the others.

He concealed the cement-bag, turned out the light, and left the kitchen. He returned to the bed-room with caution. But it was hardly necessary. Billy Bunter, returning in the dark, had not noticed that Bob Cherry's bed was empty. And Bunter was now in bed, sleeping soundly.

Bob Cherry, with a blissful smile, tumbled in, and was soon sleeping as soundly as Bunter.

He did not wake again till the winter sun was streaming into the window on the morning of Christmas Eve.

Then he jumped out of bed, and called his comrades with stentorian tones, and they followed suit, with the exception of Billy Bunter. The fat Removite rolled his head on his pillow, and yawned.

THE MAGNET LIBRARY.—93.

THAT MOTOR-CYCLE given away by the Editor of

"I say, you fellows, I don't think I'll get up just yet. I'm tired."

"You went to bed as early as we did," said Bob Cherry.

"Didn't you sleep well?"

"Well, no, not all the time."

"Been gorging, I suppose?"

"Oh, no!"

"You didn't go down in the night?"

"What should I go down in the night for, Bob Cherry? I'm too sleepy to jaw. Don't make a row, you fellows, and I can get to sleep again."

"That you jolly well can't!" exclaimed Bob Cherry, jerking the bedclothes off Bunter. "You're going to get up."

Bunter sat up shivering.

"Ow! Oh! Beast! Groo!"

"Up you get!"

"It's too c-c-cold! Gimme those blankets!"

"Rats!"

"Look here——"

"Hand me your sponge, Wharton, will you? Bunter can't get up without assistance."

"Certainly! Here you are."

Billy Bunter bounced off the bed as if he were made of indiarubber.

"Stop it!" he yelled. "I'm all right! I'm getting up!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Beasts!"

"Buck up, Billy! There's the Christmas pudding competition to-day, you know, and you're certain to carry off first prize—I don't think."

And Bunter grumbled and dressed. Bob Cherry watched him curiously as he dabbed at his face with a scarcely wet sponge.

"Aren't you going to wash this morning?" he asked affably, as Bunter began to put on his collar.

The fat junior blinked at him, but did not deign a reply. Bunter's distaste for soap and water was a proverb in the Remove. Indeed, some of the fellows in the Form had laid a plot for giving him a lesson on the subject, but the proceedings had been interrupted by the breaking up for Christmas. It was a pleasure in store for Bunter when he returned to Greyfriars in the New Year.

The snow was not falling this morning—everything was frozen hard. Marjorie and Clara and Hazeldene were due in the morning, and the juniors waited eagerly for their arrival.

When they came, Hazeldene was carrying a big basket, in which he grinningly informed the juniors reposed the famous Christmas pudding, the work of the united efforts of Marjorie and Clara.

"It will want a little more boiling, that is all, and then it will be hot for lunch," Marjorie explained. "I think it is a very nice pudding."

"What-ho!" said Miss Clara.

"I am sure it is," said Wharton gallantly. "I don't suppose we've got much chance against you, as a matter of fact."

"Oh, really, Wharton——"

"Except Bunter, of course. If his pudding is anything like his shooting and his skating, it must be tremendous."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I believe my pudding will be a success," said Bunter.

"Anyway, I jolly well know the others will be rotten enough."

"How do you know?" asked Bob Cherry quickly.

"I—I mean I think so."

"Oh!"

The pudding was taken in, and given into the careful hands of the cook, and then the boys and the girls spent a pleasant hour or two skating before lunch. Billy Bunter, of course, wanted to skate. He informed Marjorie that he was a dab at skating, and offered to take her round the lake.

"You remember seeing me on roller-skates at Greyfriars, I dare say," Bunter remarked.

Marjorie smiled involuntarily.

"Yes, I remember," she said demurely.

"I'm a dab at skating. But I'm better on ice than on rollers, you know. Shall I show you some fancy skating before taking you round?"

"Oh, yes, please do!" said Marjorie, who hadn't the remotest intention of risking life and limb by skating with Bunter, but did not wish to say so if she could help it.

"I say, you fellows, give me some skates."

"Here you are, Billy."

Harry Wharton had brought out some extra pairs of skates. Billy Bunter sat down on the bank and stretched out his fat legs.

"Shove them on for me, will you, Wharton?"

Harry laughed, and did so. Then Bunter essayed to rise to

"PLUCK" IS WORTH HAVING.

his feet. What became of his feet he never quite knew. But he knew what became of the rest of him. The rest of him bumped on the ground with a bump that brought a gasp from the fat junior like escaping steam.

"O-o-o-o-o-o-och!"

THE TWELFTH CHAPTER.

Bunter does not Win.

"HA, HA, HA!"

It was an irresistible roar of laughter, in which the two girls joined helplessly. After Bunter's assurance that he was a "dab" at skating, and his offers to take Marjorie round the lake, his sudden collapse was funny enough.

The fat junior lay on his back, dazedly gazing up at the sky.

"W-w-w-what was that?" he murmured.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Was it a-a-an earthquake?"

"Oh, my hat! Ha, ha, ha!"

"W-w-w-what has happened?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Bunter sat up dazedly.

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"You idiot! You've nearly lamed me!"

"Better give Bunter a wide berth," grinned Bob Cherry, shooting by with Marjorie's hand on his arm. "He ought to be labelled 'Dangerous to Skaters!'"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Ow! I say, you fellows, you might help a fellow up, instead of standing grinning there! I'm not used to these skates yet!"

"Oh, chuck it!"

"Oh, all right! If you won't help me——"

"Let's help him, Inky!" said Nugent. And the Nabob of Bhanipur nodded a cheerful assent, and they seized the fat junior and dragged him up between them.

Bunter simply could not stand. His legs shot in all directions, and he kicked the nabob's feet away from under him in a few seconds.

Hurree Jamsset Ram Singh reeled over, and bumped on the ice, and lay there looking as if a cannon-shot had struck him.

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2nd, 3rd, 4th,
and 5th Prizes,
and 200 Consolation
Prizes.

"It's all right," said Wharton good-naturedly; "you can't skate, that's all. Shall I take you round for a turn or two till you get used to it?"

"Oh, really, Wharton——"

"Shall I take you round?" exclaimed Harry impatiently.

He wanted to take Marjorie round, and he was wasting time on Billy Bunter. Bunter, as usual, was trying the patience of his friends right up to the limit.

"Well, I suppose you might as well," said Bunter sulkily.

"There's something wrong with these skates."

"The skates are all right," grinned Nugent; "it's the skater!"

"This jealousy——"

"Oh, come on!" said Wharton. And he lifted the fat junior up.

Billy Bunter's feet thrashed out wildly.

"Oh!" yelled Wharton, as he received a kick from one of them; and he let go, and Bunter flopped down again, this time on the ice.

"Ow! You've let go!"

THE MAGNET LIBRARY.—98.

NEXT WEEK: "BILLY BUNTER'S RESOLUTIONS."

"Hurt, Inky?"

"Oh!" groaned the nabob. "The hurtfulness is terrific. I think that the honourable Bunter should be fastened up with an esteemed chain. Ow!"

"I say, you fellows——"

"Steady, Bunter!"

"I—I—I'm going!"

Billy Bunter threw both his arms convulsively round Nugent's neck, and hung on to him, his whole weight falling upon the unfortunate junior.

Bunter was not a light weight. Nugent staggered under the load.

"Get off!" he gasped. "Chuck it!"

"I—I c-c-can't."

"Idiot! Ass! Duffer! Gerroff!"

"I—I—I——"

Nugent was collapsing under Bunter's weight. As a last desperate resource, he tried to skate away. His feet certainly did skate away, but his head remained in the grasp of Billy Bunter, and he bumped down at full length on the ice—Bunter, of course, bumping down with him.

"My solitary turban!" ejaculated the Nabob of Bhanipur. "The fallfulness of the honourable Bunter is great, and his fathheadedfulness is terrific!"

"Ow!" "Help!"

"Leggo!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Harry Wharton skated up and dragged Bunter away from his victim. Nugent dazedly rose, with Wharton's assistance.

"Help me up!" gasped Bunter. "I really think I shall be all right now!"

"Will you?" said Nugent grimly.

He knelt and unfastened Bunter's skates, and threw them upon the bank.

"Now, you scoot!" he said. "You'll get damaged if you get in the way any more!"

"Oh, I say——"

"Shut up!"

"But I——"

"Scoot!" roared Nugent. And he looked so dangerous that Bunter thought he had better obey.

The fat junior sulkily dragged himself off the ice, but when he went indoors he was consoled by an armchair before a roaring fire.

Bunter sat in the armchair and dozed by turns, and by turns kept his eyes on the clock. He counted the minutes. He was thinking of lunch-time, and the Christmas puddings. He was anxious for lunch, and he was anxious for the prize. It had been finally decided that the first prize should take the form of two pairs of skates, and the colonel had insisted upon standing them; while the booby prize was a monkey on a stick, costing a shilling, to which the Famous Four had contributed threepence each.

The booby prize, however, did not enter into Bunter's thoughts. After the precautions he had taken, it was impossible that his pudding could be the worst of the four—at least, so he imagined. He had no suspicion as yet that Bob Cherry had watched his midnight proceedings, and given him a Roland for an Oliver.

Lunch-time came at last. The skaters came in, merry and rosy, and Bunter left his seat before the fire equally ruddy, but less fit. But he was feeling as hungry as anybody—he could always be relied upon for that.

A merry party sat down to lunch. And when the meal drew to its end, and the solemn-faced John brought in the Christmas puddings, there was a stir of expectation.

Marjorie and Clara's pudding certainly looked the best, and when it was cut and tasted, it was pronounced very good indeed. Billy Bunter showed his appreciation by asking for a second helping, and he would have asked for a third and a fourth, had not attention been diverted to the remaining puddings.

Hurree Singh's was the second one tasted. Hurree Singh was quite innocent of any knowledge of cookery, and he had put pepper and salt and a little mustard into his pudding. The judges made wry faces, and Hurree Singh's pudding was sent away scarcely tasted.

"The cookful art is not my forte," remarked the nabob resignedly. "I trustfully hope that the other puddingful preparations will be of much superiority."

"What-ho!" said Nugent.

Nugent's pudding was tasted next.

It was worse than Hurree Singh's. There was a peculiar flavour about it, and the colour was very dark. Colonel Wharton called the flavour peculiar, but the others called it poisonous.

Nugent himself was decidedly puzzled.

"Blessed if I can make it out!" he said frankly. "I haven't the faintest idea what I could have put in it to give it this flavour!"

Bob chuckled. The judges tasted Wharton's pudding next—barely tasted it. It had the same strange flavour as Nugent's, only more so.

"Can't make it out," said Wharton. "I hadn't the faintest idea it was like this. It's not fit to eat."

"Try mine!" said Bob Cherry.

Bob Cherry's pudding was tried, and pronounced the worst of the three. The flavour of the salt Bob had put in was mixed with that of the liquid blacking Bunter had added, and the result could not be considered pleasing to the palate.

The judges were making decidedly wry faces now. It was borne in upon their minds that they had undertaken a difficult, if not dangerous, task in making this adjudication. But the colonel stuck to his guns gallantly, and Bunter's pudding was tasted next.

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THAT MOTOR-CYCLE given away by the Editor of

The first fragment was not so bad, and the colonel was encouraged to take a larger piece. Then he began to cough and choke.

"What's the matter, sir?" asked Bunter in alarm. "My pudding's all right, sir!"

"Groo!"

"What is it?"

"It's—it's full of sand or something!" exclaimed the colonel, with a very red face. "It is absolutely uneatable!"

"What!" almost yelled Bunter. "My—my pudding uneatable!"

"Yes, certainly."

"Impossible! There's some mistake!"

"Try it yourself," said Colonel Wharton. "I cannot undertake to test it again."

"But—but it's ripping, sir!"

"Well, eat some!" grinned Bob Cherry.

"Of course I will!"

And Billy Bunter defiantly crammed a large forkful into his mouth and chewed. The next moment his teeth were grating on the cement.

"Ow! Ow! Yow! Oh! Groo!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Yow! Somebody's been putting sand, or stones, or something, in this! I didn't make it like this! There's been foul play! Yah! Yow!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"It is most extraordinary!" exclaimed the colonel. "Something seems to have happened to all the puddings!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"The first prize must undoubtedly be awarded to Miss Hazeldene and Miss Trevlyn jointly," said the colonel, glancing at his sister.

Miss Wharton nodded.

"And as Bunter's pudding is undoubtedly the worst of all——"

"Hear, hear!"

"The booby prize will be awarded to Bunter."

"Hear, hear!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I say, you fellows——"

"Hurrah!" ejaculated Bob Cherry. "The biter bit! Hoist with his own petard! Ha, ha!"

"What do you mean, Bob Cherry?"

"Ha, ha! Really, there's something wrong with all the puddings," grinned Bob. "It would almost seem as if some chap shoved liquid blacking into some of them, so as to spoil their chance of the prize——"

Bunter's jaw dropped.

"And as if somebody else came along and shoved cement into the pudding made by the chap he saw playing that trick," went on Bob cheerfully.

"Oh!"

"What!" exclaimed Wharton. "Why—Bunter—you worm——"

"I—I say, you fellows——"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Worm!" said Nugent. "Of all the mean tricks——"

"I—I say, it was a joke, you know!" said Bunter feebly.

"I—I wasn't going to take the prize, really. That is to say, I—I——"

"Worm!"

"Oh, really, you know——"

Colonel Wharton rose to his feet.

"The first prize is awarded to Marjorie and Clara," he said.

"Pray accept this prize, my dear girls—and I really think Harry must have anticipated your being the winners, as he selected two pairs of ladies' skates as the first prize. Bunter, you take the booby prize. Here it is. I must say you have richly earned it!"

Bunter mechanically took the monkey on the stick. He sat speechless, with his prize in his hand, after the others had gone.

The chums of the Remove forgave Bunter the trick he had played upon them, but they did not let him hear the end of it for a long time.

The Christmas pudding competition had provided plenty of fun, at all events; and Marjorie's pudding was eaten with much relish. The rest were buried in the garden.

The dance at Wharton Lodge on Boxing Day was keenly enjoyed by the Greyfriars boys and the Cliff House girls—and as much as any by the kind old colonel, who was always happy in seeing happy young faces round him. And the chums of the Remove agreed that it was as happy a Christmas as they had ever spent together.

THE END.

(Another splendid tale of Harry Wharton & Co. next Tuesday, entitled "Billy Bunter's Resolutions," by Frank Richards. Order your "Magnet" Library in advance. Price One Halfpenny.)

"PLUCK" IS WORTH HAVING.

ONE OF THE RANKS



A Splendid Tale of Life in the British Army.

A BRIEF RESUMÉ OF THE EARLIER CHAPTERS.

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 Ronald is told off with a party of men to help in the magazine. Bagot, the 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, and are eventually put ashore. From that moment the two men disappear, so Gussie, one of Ronald's comrades, persuades Mouldy Mills, another friend of Ronald's, to stay behind when the Wessex leave Plymport, and make a search for the missing men.

(Now go on with the story.)

In the Den of Thieves—A Bold Ruse—The Dungeons of Castle Gate.

It took a good deal more argument than this to convince Mouldy and screw his courage to the sticking-point, but the discovery that it wanted less than an hour to closing-time finally clinched the matter.

"All we've got to bother about is the first train in the morning," urged Gussie comfortably. "As for the cash, you can leave that to me. I've got plenty."

Having booked their kits in the cloak-room, they stepped into a growler and steered their course in safety through those streets haunted by the picquets and the garrison police. Reaching at last a point near the water-side, which Mouldy had some dim recollection of, they dismissed the cab, and continued their way on foot.

Traversing a region of substantial warehouses and stores, they suddenly entered a network of slummy streets and narrow courts, in which they quickly lost their bearings. A peep of the dark harbour quickly set them right again, however, and in a few minutes they had turned into the same street which Ronald and Bagot had entered three nights before.

"Here we are," whispered Mouldy, nodding his head in the direction of a square of light, which, on closer investigation, proved to be a tavern window.

Gussie had been noting with restless eyes the squalid surroundings, the hushed voices as they approached, the lowering, suspicious glances darted at them as they passed.

They crossed the road. Someone, lounging with his back to the beer-shop window, suddenly turned at the sound of their steps.

Whether by accident or design he struck the panel beneath the window twice with his heel, then slunk across the road, and disappeared into a doorway opposite.

Gussie caught one clear glimpse of the face before it could be averted. It was the man who had dogged them to the railway-station—who had smuggled the mysterious letter into Ian's hand.

So they were hot upon the track!

Just as Gussie thrust open the grimy swing-door of the

THE MAGNET LIBRARY.—98.

NEXT
WEEK:

"BILLY BUNTER'S RESOLUTIONS."

Spyglass, as the sign over the door proclaimed the name of the beerhouse to be, something squirmed and wriggled round his legs, making him lurch forward into the bar with very unsteady gait.

It was Ronald's terrier, which had almost tripped him up. Loth to leave Plymport without his master, Rough had abandoned the advance party, bound for home and Woolchester, and gone back once more to his futile hunt along the quays and docks, where, some instinct told him, Ronald lay in dire need of help.

This was not the first time the tousled, muddy little beast had ranged the slums of Castle Gate, but so far he had never had friends to help him in his search. Hence his delight at meeting Gussie and Mouldy.

As Gussie stumbled and clutched wildly at the handle of the door an inspiration flashed into his brain.

So far, neither he nor Mouldy had hit upon any definite plan of campaign. How they were to allay the landlord's suspicion and alarm at the sight of them, and to delude him into believing that their presence had nothing to do with Ronald's disappearance, they were leaving very much to chance.

Gussie thought he saw a way now, however, so, instead of springing upright, as a sober man would have done, he remained hanging on to the door-handle, grinning amiably at the occupants of the bar.

"Good evening, gemmelen!" he hiccupped, launching at the same time a kick at Mouldy on the step behind him to apprise him of the change of tactics.

On the other side of the sloppy, zinc-topped counter stood the landlord, obviously taken aback at the sight of this unwelcome reinforcement of the Wessex battalion in his house.

His first fear was that news of his connection with the kidnapping of their comrade had leaked out, and that this was a picquet come to the rescue.

The double kick on the door outside, given by the man on guard, was a warning of danger, anyway.

A second glance, however, reassured him. Neither Gussie nor Mouldy were armed. Moreover, only a man who had been imbibing not wisely but too well would have taken the elaborate precautions that Gussie took to ensure the success of the final stage of his journey, which was from the door to the empty corner of a settle beside the bar.

Steadying himself carefully by the door-handle, and searching round feebly for a grip of Mouldy, who was still only half awake to his leader's ruse, Gussie made a wild zigzag for the seat, and, missing it, sat heavily on the sawdust floor, dragging his burly comrade half on top of him.

The ruffianly crew drinking at the bar burst into a roar of laughter at this lamentable exhibition.

"Act, you ass!" hissed Gussie in Mouldy's ear. "It's our only chance!"

Mouldy, being quick of wit, tumbled to the business at once. Picking up Gussie's "Brodrick" for him, he put it carefully on his head, the wrong way round.

"Gerrup, Gussie, old boy!" he commanded, hoisting the still-smiling Gussie on to the seat. "Pull yersel' together. We're among pals now."

Even the landlord, savage as he felt at the intrusion, had to smile at this, and Gussie saw that they had made a good beginning, at any rate.

"That'sh right, then!" he said comfortably, pulling out

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

a handful of money, which made the eyes of the other occupants of the place narrow and glitter. "Lan'lord, old chap, here's a quid, so let's celebra' the occashun—great occashun—when me an' my old friend Mo'l'y here—Mo'l'y Millsh, one of the best—shakes off the dusht of the Bri'sh Army from our bootsh f'r ever. We've done with the Army—we've d'shorted, an' now we're goin' to live like gemmelmen. Mo'l'y, ol' boy, ashk our pals what they will 'ave, an' ashk 'im, too"—as a new-comer entered the bar. "Ashk everybody—the whole wi' world if you like. I've got brassh enough."

Gussie, however, felt by no means as comfortable as he looked at the sight of the latest arrival, for he was none other than the man with the twisted face, who had given warning with his boot-heel on the panels of the Spyglass that there were red-coats in the street.

Nor did he miss the cunning look of suspicion which flashed from the man's eyes to the landlord's. Gussie was not surprised by this. There had been nothing at all in their gait as they came down the street to account for this sudden collapse into shameful intoxication.

The landlord's suspicion was aroused, too, and even Rough, who had sneaked into the bar at their heels, was obviously uneasy.

Their heads were in the lion's mouth, however, and there was no going back; so Gussie and Mouldy only worked the harder, growing more and more bitter and noisy in their condemnation of the Army and all its works, and the more pressing in their invitation to all and sundry to drink to its everlasting destruction.

The roughs in the bar were nothing loth, and a second gold coin soon followed the first.

Closing-time was forgotten. The police don't bother Castle Gate too much with their presence. It is a convenient patch of cover, left undisturbed so that birds of a feather may be deluded into flocking together.

Then, once in a while, a grand drive of this criminal preserve takes place, and a heavy bag results.

The man with the twisted face stepped into the street again, and smuggled himself into the little parlour behind the bar.

Gussie, in the midst of an apparently drunken frolic, noticed his grimy paws appear round the door and pluck the landlord's sleeve. The latter promptly retreated inside.

"You think they are narks, then?" said mine host anxiously to the other.

"They're both Wessex men, ain't they? And they weren't so bad as this when they came up the street, I'll swear! What's the tale they're telling?"

"That they're deserters. I believe I've seen the big 'un afore, too, along with Mike Lennan," said the landlord, mentioning Mouldy's former confederate, with whom he had once arranged to desert.

"Ah, well, take my tip, and watch 'em! It's a rum thing that when we've got them two of theirs hid up that these blokes happen to drop in like this. I don't like the look of it, I tell yer. Still, one thing's certain."

"What's that?"

"Stick to 'em now you've got 'em, in case they know too much already. Put some of that powdery stuff of yours in their drink, and get 'em under; then we can decide what to do with 'em. P'r'aps Pushoffsky knows 'em."

"Or his friend the officer," said the landlord. "Did you manage to give him that note?"

"Yes; but he went off in the train just the same."

"That's nothing. Woolchester ain't twenty miles, and he can motor back. According to Pushoffsky, we'll have him back afore daylight. It seems there's a pile of money 'anging on the job, though I don't care a brass farthing as long as I get my price."

"Nor me," sniggered the man, twitching his jaw from side to side in a demoniacal grin. "Down goes the money, up goes the sluice, and in comes the tide—eh? Arter that down goes the tide, and out goes th—"

"S-h! 'Old that ugly jaw of yours, can't you?" snarled the landlord, tipping the contents of a paper packet into two pewter-pots of fresh-drawn beer. "Anyhow, you're right about sticking to them two. Besides, one of 'em's got money on him—ten quid, perhaps. After they've got this stuff down 'em they won't want to move for another fifteen hours. Meantime, we'll get Pushoffsky and the officer-bloke—it's no good trying Bagot, he's too far gone—to run their eye over them, and see if they guess what their game is."

Still another noisy battering of pewter-pots on the zinc counter proclaimed that Gussie's hospitality was not yet exhausted.

The disappearance of their friend with the face askew, and the appearance of his dirty paw round the door of the private parlour, told the astute young man that suspicion was far from being allayed, and that something was afoot.

That it was a thousand to one that that something would prove to be treachery, he had made up his mind. He wanted to force matters now to the test. In the role of deserters, they must bargain for a hiding-place and help. At his call for another round, the array of pots was once more filled.

His own and Gussie's remained on the floor beside their seat, still untouched except that each had managed to spill a good deal of the contents on the floor.

When it came to replenishing their own pewters, he noticed that full measures were produced from a shelf just inside the door of the private parlour. He nudged Mouldy, to be on his guard at this, but he took the pots from the landlord's hand, and stumbling as he turned to Mouldy, he effected, under cover of the counter, a swift change for one of the pewters on the floor. This he pushed into Mouldy's fist, holding his hand over it as if to prevent him dipping his nose in at once, but really to hide the fact that it was already half emptied.

"One minute," he cried, "we'll have a health this time. Lan'lor's health—my health, this time. Your health, everybody's health, an' down wi' the Government, an' law, an' police, an' everything! Musical honoursh, too. 'Fo-or we are j'sholly goo' fellowsh!"

The chorus was taken up with tremendous zest, and there was such reaching over everybody's shoulder and clinking of pot-rims that nobody was surprised when Gussie lost his balance for about the twentieth time, and sank to the floor once more.

But it was only for an instant. He was on his legs again immediately, bawling like the rest, drinking deep at every line. But the pot he held was not the one the landlord had handed to him.

The poisoned liquor was even then trickling unnoticed among the deep layer of sodden sawdust underfoot.

Yet the effect could not have been more potent. Gussie drained his drink and only sank back on to the settle to roll off it again in absolute insensibility.

Mouldy, taking his cue, did likewise, only he fell back into the arms of a man, who promptly let him fall full length, so that his head was brought up with a stunning crack on the boards. There they lay like logs.

As if this was not an uncommon ending to a stranger's visit to the Spyglass, and a signal for discreet retirement moreover, the rest promptly blundered out into the street, kicking poor Rough savagely before them, and leaving the two soldiers to the tender mercy of their host and his confederates.

(Another long instalment of this thrilling serial next Tuesday.)

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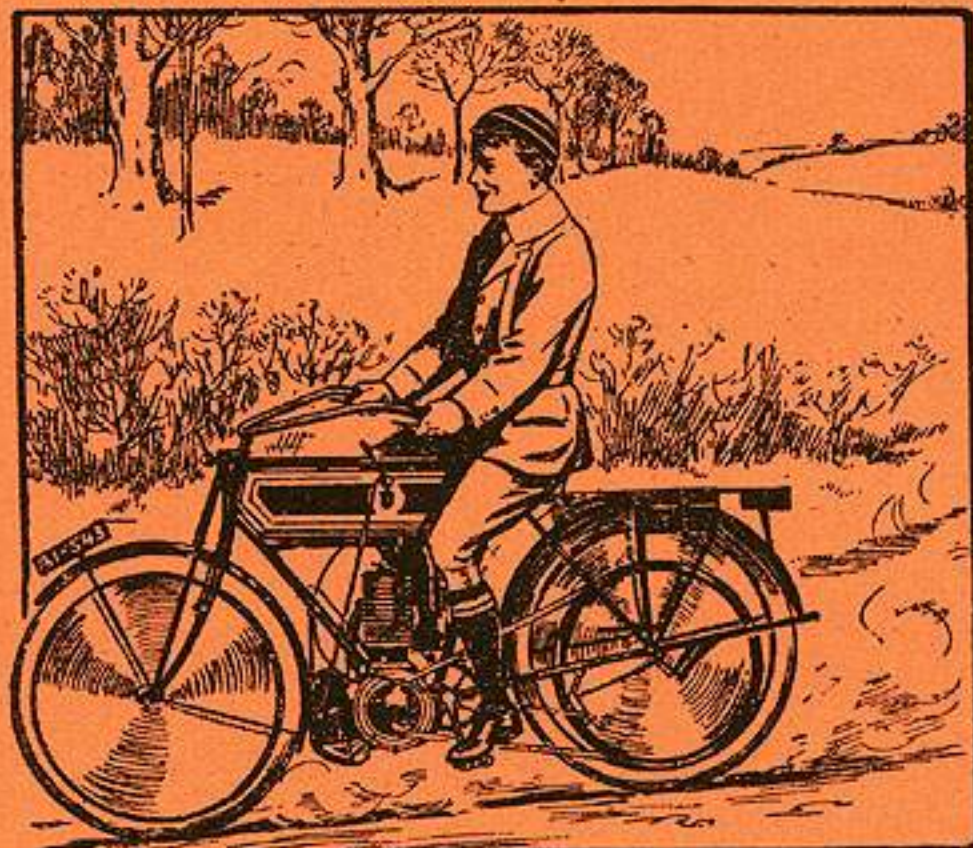
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