

IN HOT WATER!

A Grand Long Complete School Tale of Harry Wharton & Co.

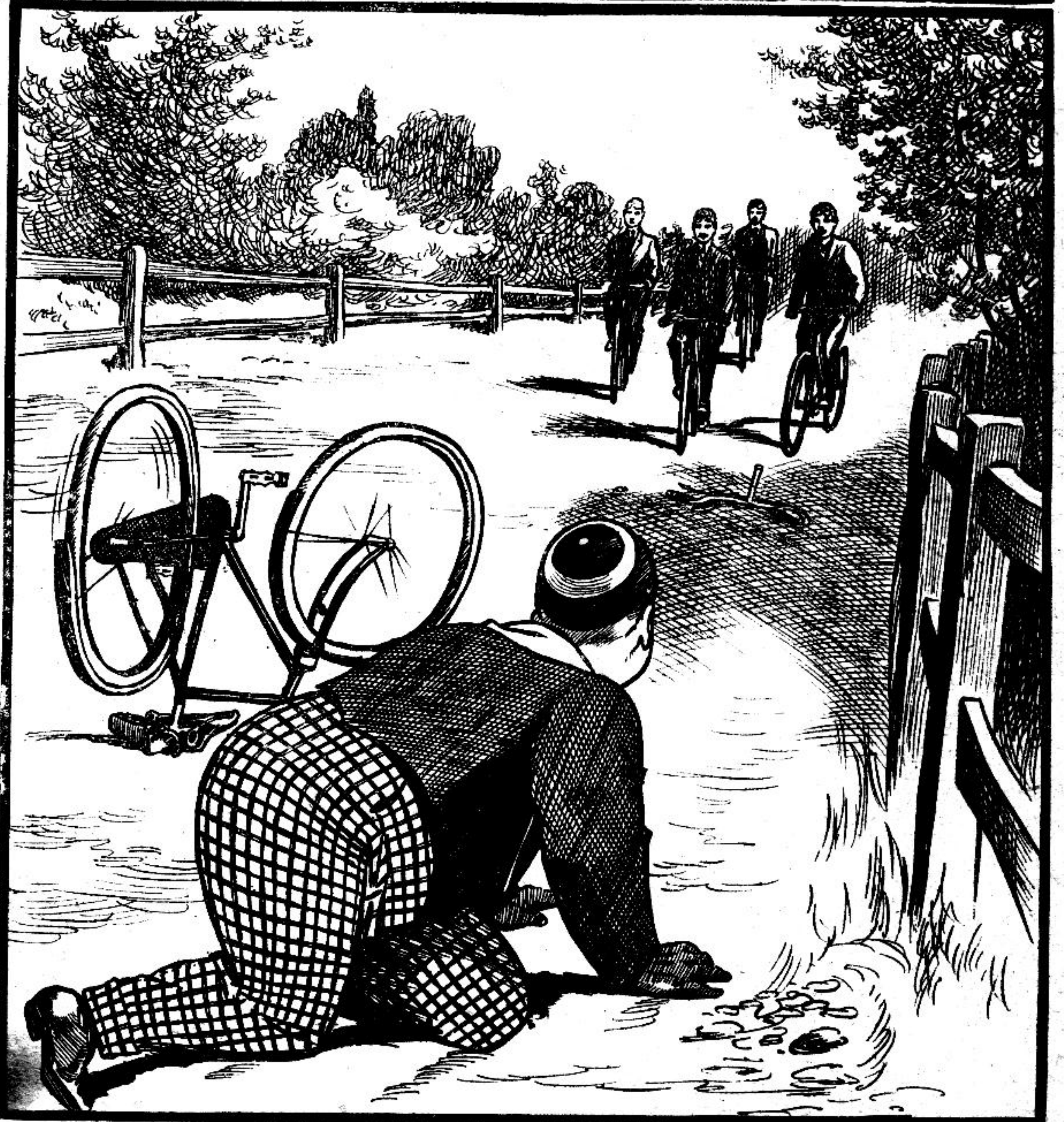


The Magnet 1st

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TRACKED DOWN!

(A Dramatic Scene in the Grand Long Complete Story in this issue.)

MY READERS' PAGE

OUR COMPANION PAPERS: "THE BOYS' FRIEND," 1d., Every Monday. "THE GEM" LIBRARY, 1d., Every Wednesday. "THE BOYS' FRIEND" 3d. COMPLETE LIBRARY. "THE PENNY POPULAR," 1d., Every Friday. "CHUCKLES," Price 1d., Every Saturday.

The Editor is always pleased to hear from his chums, at home or abroad, and is only too willing to give his best advice to them if they are in difficulty or in trouble. . . . Whom to write to: Editor, The "Magnet" Library, The Fleetway House, Farringdon Street, London, E.C.

For Next Monday:

"THE DESERTER!"

By Frank Richards.

Bob Cherry plays the principal part in next week's grand yarn, though it is scarcely necessary to say that the genial Bob is not "the deserter" of the title. That personage is quite another sort of individual—a waster and slacker for whom Bob cannot help feeling some sense of responsibility. But he is very much ashamed of him, and he does not tell even his best chums what is wrong—wherefore comes heavy trouble. Those chums back up Bob most loyally; but other members of the Form get hold of a Bunter yarn, and Bob finds himself under the necessity of punching heads. Nor is he the only member of the Famous Five who figures in a pugilistic role. In the upshot, Bob does what he should have done earlier—tells his chums what is really wrong. He finds them eager to help him out of the scrape. How they tried to do so you will read next week, and also what happens to

"THE DESERTER!"

POETS?

Spring is supposed to be the chosen season for poets. The weather lately has been anything but springlike, yet I have had more verses sent along to me within the past fortnight or so than for months before. I should like to say—in fact, I was going to say, but checked myself in time—verses good, bad, and indifferent. But it would not be true to say that any of them were actually good, though some showed promise. The average aspirant to the poet's bays seems to think that if he can only find rhymes the thing is done. He troubles very little about sense, and about metre not at all. Poetry cannot be written in this fashion, nor can even passably good verses.

"Hurrah for the MAGNET!
Hurrah for the 'Gem'!
When buying your papers,
Always buy them!"

sings one of our (more or less) tuneful band. I have no great fault to find with this, though the verse which followed it fell too far below its standard to quote. The advice in the four lines given is first-rate, the second and fourth lines rhyme quite nicely, and there is nothing amiss with the metre. But it cannot be said that there is anything great about the lines at best. They go with a swing, though; that's something. Too many of those I have seen were born dead lame!

TOMMY ON HIS "TOMMY"!

I am going to quote some more. They come from France; but their writer is scarcely to be numbered among the many real poets that we are told active service has produced. In fact, his verses are pretty bad as verses—I know he won't mind that candid criticism—but they are amusing, and they breathe that spirit of unconquerable cheeriness and pluck which is so characteristic of our gallant lads "over there."

We gits our candles for nothing;
We gits our bully beef;
And some biscuits most like coverlets,
What busts up our poor reef.
We gits no eggs for breakfast;
But the Boches send us shells,
And we dives into our dug-outs,
To be laughed at by our pals.
Sometimes we gits some bacon—
For swank we calls it "am."
For six sporting British Tommies
There's a little tin o' jam

And sometimes we get some rootie—
You civvies calls it bread.
If it ain't as light as fevers,
Still, it ain't as heavy as lead.

We gits it down us somehow;
We never sends it back,
Though it may be grown with whiskers
Wot have rubbed off from the sack.

The dust blows in our dixies;
There's dirt upon our mit;
So really you can't wonder
That Tommy's full of "grit"!

But I ain't a-goin' to grumble—
I'm feeling well and fit;
And there's one great consolation—
I'M A-DOIN' OF MY BIT!

There they are! You can't call them poetry. The rhymes are not all quite good, and I must own that the metre was worse before I made a few slight improvements in it. But—and it's a big BUT—the thing's alive! That's where most of our would-be poets fail. Their verses are not the result of their own thoughts or their own experiences; they are just words, words, words!

OUR NOTICES.

The notice form, with the rules, will be found on page 19 this week. Please note that rules must be adhered to. That's what they are for. And don't trouble to write and tell us that you have to cut your copy to get the form. We know that!

FOOTBALL.

Matches Wanted By:

- ROVERS F.C. (15)—3-mile r.—B. Nye, 799, Garratt Lane, Earlsfield, S.W.
- POMEROY UNITED F.C. (17-18).—G. Morgan, 22, Kimberley Rd., Upper Edmonton, N.
- DARFIELD BRITANNIA F.C. (14)—2-mile r.—A. Ginns, 5, Sutherland Mount, Harehills, Leeds.
- CARLTON F.C. (16)—S.W. neighbourhood.—H. S. South, 84, Franche Court Rd., Lower Tooting, S.W.
- A Wednesbury Team (13)—3-mile r.—A. H. Allen, 20, Stafford St., Wednesbury.
- NORTHBURY ATHLETIC F.C. (15½).—S. J. H., 26, Kennedy Rd., Barking.
- CAMBRIAN ROVERS F.C.—15-mile r.—H. Teale, 11, Leyburn St., Holbeck, Leeds.
- HACKNEY RANGERS F.C.—2-mile r. of Cambridge Heath.—A. Hart, 455, Hackney Rd., N.E.
- A Patricroft Team (15)—4-mile r.—A. Fishwick, 33, Ellsmere St., Patricroft.
- ST. MARY'S F.C. (16-17)—3-mile r.—A. Bartram, 17, Garnham St., Stoke Newington, N.
- KILBURN ROVERS F.C. (17)—3-mile r.—W. Hawkins, 290, Kilburn Lane, N.W.
- ELMFIELD F.C. (15)—4-mile r.—H. Yates, 27, Harper Rd., Walton, Liverpool.
- CRYPT JUNIORS F.C. (15½)—5-mile r.—E. Good, 37, Carlyle Avenue, Harlesden, N.W.

Your Editor

A Complete School-
Story Book, attrac-
tive to all readers.



The Editor will be
obliged if you will
hand this book,
when finished with,
to a friend. . . .

IN HOT WATER!

A Magnificent New Long Complete Tale of
Harry Wharton & Co. at Greyfriars School.

By FRANK RICHARDS.



Monson stuck out a foot, and Bob Cherry nearly sprawled. But as he staggered he caught Ponsonby by the nose, and held on like grim death. (See Chapter 8.)

THE FIRST CHAPTER. Guilty Paper!

"I SAY, Skinney, you know that chap—"
It was Billy Bunter who spoke, and his eager, half-whispered words were addressed to Harold Skinner, the cad of the Remove at Greyfriars.
"I don't know," said Skinner promptly. "You're talking riddles, I think, you fat ass!"
"Oh, really, Skinney—"
"Haven't got time to listen to you now. All I have to say

is that I don't know anything about any chap—and, if you take my advice, you won't know anything, either."

Skinner tried to speak coolly, but he was not really cool. And Bunter was very far indeed from being so. Though it was a cold day, perspiration was trickling down his little, fat nose, and his unwieldy body was trembling with agitation.
"You've got to listen, Skinney!" he said, clutching his fellow-junior by the arm. "You're in it as deep as I am; and if there's a row you needn't think I'm going to shield you—so there!"

Harold Skinner saw that he would have to listen, and, moreover, to do something to quieten Bunter's fears.

For when William George Bunter, having a secret to keep, got into such a state as this, it was tolerably certain that he would tell someone from sheer inability to keep it all to himself.

And Skinner did not want anyone told. That would not suit Skinner's book at all.

"You are a silly, fat chump!" he said politely. "If you must get opening that ugly mouth of yours wide, you'd better come along to my den. There's nobody in it; the Bunder's at footer."

Bunter, keeping a clutch on Skinner's arm, went with him. Skinner thrust the key into the keyhole from the inside as soon as they had reached the shelter of the study.

"I don't suppose that there'll be anyone listening, as you're this side of the door, Porpoise," he said. "But it's just as well to make safe."

Bunter sank into a chair, and mopped his heated brow with a handkerchief that had probably been cleaner a day or two earlier.

"I've been running," he explained. "You're running still," answered Skinner humorously—"cozing away perceptibly. If you go on like that, there won't be much of your classic figure left soon."

Bunter looked down in sudden alarm. He regarded his fat anatomy as the last thing in manly grace and beauty.

But there was no visible decrease, and the Owl breathed a sigh of relief.

"Don't sit there blowing like a hurricane in a fit!" said the humorous Skinner. "Get this trouble off your chest. But I warn you before you begin that if you try to drag me into any trouble I shall simply deny the whole thing!"

"You can't, Skinney! You had half of it—you know jolly well you did! And you ought to bear half the blame—more, really, because I wanted to take the pocket-book to the police-station—"

"Shurrup, you fat idiot!" gasped Skinner. "Do you want anyone to hear you talking about the pocket-book? It's just the very thing you've got to keep a closed mouth about."

"Bub-bub-but I've seen the man again, Skinney! He's in Friardale—at least, he was. He didn't see me, and directly I got round the corner I buzzed off as fast as I could go. That was my presence of mind," added Bunter, beginning to feel that he had something to be proud of.

"Leading to your absence of body, which was much more useful," replied Harold Skinner drily. "Well, as long as he didn't see you, what's the odds? He's no nearer finding out anything because he happens to be in Friardale again, I suppose?"

"It—it's so beastly dangerous to have the beast hanging around," said Bunter tremulously. "It takes away my appetite completely, and I sha'n't get a single wink of sleep to-night."

Neither Bunter's loss of appetite nor Bunter's sleeplessness appeared to Skinner as at all in the way of a calamity. Like many eminent philosophers, Skinner could bear the troubles of others with admirable fortitude.

But this was Skinner's trouble, too; and, though he was less alarmed than Bunter, he did not feel at all easy in mind.

A few days before Bunter had picked up in the Friardale Road a pocket-book, which had been discovered, on examination, to contain just over fifty pounds in Treasury notes.

Skinner, appearing before the Owl had even had time for a preliminary gloat over his treasure, had demanded halves, and had got it.

They had divided the spoil in the shelter of a barn near at hand. Skinner had been the first to leave the barn, and Bunter, with his heart in his mouth, had watched him talking to a man who seemed to be the owner of the lost pocket-book.

Skinner had lied, of course. That sort of thing was quite in his line. So it was in Bunter's. But Bunter was a clumsy liar compared with Skinner. The Owl stumbled, boggled, contradicted himself again and again whenever he had a false tale to tell. Skinner lied glibly and with easy assurance.

The man had gone, seeming to believe Skinner's denial. Skinner had thought that there was something queer about his manner. He did not know what, but something decidedly queer. Since then, thinking it over, the cad of the Remove had come to the conclusion that what the fellow was chiefly worried about was not so much the actual loss of the money as some other circumstance in connection with it; perhaps something in the pocket-book. But Bunter had searched that and had found nothing else. So he said, anyway.

They had seen the man again—the barest glimpse, by the light of a lamp on a dark road. And they knew now from

whence he came—from a house to which Harry Wharton and several of his chums had gone that night in a vain quest for petrol.

That house was quite a long way from Greyfriars, and the distance had made Skinner feel pretty safe. It was not pleasant to hear that the fellow had been seen in Friardale again. But it was like Bunter's absurd cowardice to run. Bunter would not have been recognised. There was no reason to suppose that the man would have ever seen him—though it was tolerably safe to presume that he would not have forgotten him if he had.

Billy Bunter was scarcely a common object of the seashore. "It's safe enough as long as you keep it dark, and he don't see me," said Skinner. "For the matter of that, I don't see what he could do if he did see me. I told him I hadn't seen his rotten pocket-book, and you bet I'm going to stick to that yarn through thick and thin."

"Bub-bub-but suppose he has the numbers of the notes, and finds out some of them have been changed?" said Bunter miserably.

"I'm safe, all the same. I haven't changed any of my whack!" cheerily replied Skinner. "What's more, I sha'n't change any of them until the holidays, and then I shall be far enough away from here."

On the whole, Skinner felt that he was out of peril, though he had shared Bunter's alarm to some extent at first.

But Bunter groaned in fear.

"I've changed some of mine!" he said. "Of course you have, Porpoise! We all know that money burns holes in your pockets!"

"Oh, really, Skinney! I had to change them. You rotters made me pay all the exes of that beastly Wethersden bizney."

"Well, who ought to have paid them?"

"You ought to have stood your whack, anyway. I call it jolly mean of you! But I've got your I O U's!"

"Keep 'em!" said Skinner kindly. "My autograph may be valuable some day—after I'm dead. But you'll die first, most likely—of fatty degeneration of something or other, or spontaneous combustion, or some luxury of that sort."

"You're a horrid beast, and I want that money now!" howled Bunter.

"Shut up! You'll have someone hear you!"

"I don't care! I want that money, and I mean to have it!" Skinner grew alarmed. He would have preferred not to see much of Bunter till the trouble had blown over. He certainly did not desire that anyone should hear him squabbling about money with the Owl.

"Hand over the I O U's, then!" he said.

"Not till I get the cash," replied Bunter firmly.

Bunter could be firm when he saw himself in the ascendant. Skinner groaned, and gave way. He produced a pound note.

"I suppose this will settle it?"

Bunter grabbed the note. "Yes—at least, nearly! But I'll forgive you the rest, Skinney. You know what a generous chap I am!"

"I know all about your beastly generosity," observed Skinner drily.

Bunter was scanning the note curiously.

"But I don't want this!" he said suddenly. "I want a good one!"

Something like an electric shock passed through Skinner. In a moment what had been dark to him before became clear.

In a moment—and for a moment only. Then he dismissed the guess at the truth which Bunter's words had caused him to make as altogether too wild.

"That note's all right," he said.

"But it's one of those we—we found," said Bunter. "I'd rather have another one to be going on with until—until it's—it's safe to change these."

"Well, you can't! I haven't got another."

"I suppose I shall have to keep this, then! But I think you're a mean beast, Skinney!"

"Think what you jolly well like, you fat rotter! I say, is that the pocket-book?"

Bunter had produced a pocket-book, and was tucking the note into it.

"Of course it is!" he said peevishly. "What do you suppose?"

"That anybody who wasn't absolutely potty would have burnt it before this. You silly chump! Don't you see what you're doing? Keeping in your pocket a bit of evidence that would be enough to hang you, if this was a hanging matter!"

Bunter tore from the pocket-book the wad of notes it contained, and hurled the thing itself into the fire.

At that moment the Bunder, ruddy from his exertions on the footer-field, came in.

THE 2nd CHAPTER. The Bounder Suspects Something!

Bunter departed at once. He did not care much for conversation with Herbert Vernon-Smith.

Skinner would also have gone; but he had not failed to note, as Bunter had, that the pocket-book, falling upon a place where the fire was almost dead, was by no means consumed.

He dared not pick it off, lest the Bounder should ask what it was. He was on tenterhooks, wishing his study-mate anywhere but there.

"Hallo!" said the Bounder. "There's something on the fire that doesn't look as if it should be burnt."

"What is it? I suppose you mean coal, at the present price—too precious to burn, eh?" replied Skinner, with an effort to seem easy and humorous. As he spoke he got before the grate, and stood with legs astraddle, so that it was difficult for Vernon-Smith to get near.

It was a false move—a bad one, with the astute Bounder concerned. In all Greyfriars there was no one, master or boy, wiser than the Bounder. He was up to every move in the game; and when he threw over his old ways and became honourable, he had seen no necessity for becoming guileless also.

"I don't mean coal. I mean that pocket-book," he said coolly.

And as he spoke, he pushed Skinner aside. It was not done roughly, but there was determination in it, for all that.

He took up the tongs. "Here, I say, you leave that alone!" rapped out Skinner. Vernon-Smith looked up at him in mild surprise.

"Yours?" he asked. "Yes—at least, no. What's it to do with you, anyway? It's Bunter's, if you must know."

"Then I object strongly to Bunter's burning his rubbish on our fire. That thing's going to smell horribly when it gets alight."

He had the pocket-book held in the tongs now.

Skinner got desperate. He might have been even more so if he had known that the Bounder already had suspicions as to him, Bunter, and the man who had come from the house on the road from Wethersden.

"Put that down! It's mine!" yelled Skinner.

"Oh, indeed! Thought you said it was Bunter's?"

"It is, really, but—but, anyway, it's not yours, Smithy, and it's a jolly caddish thing!"

"Go easy, Skinner, unless you're pining for a hiding!" snapped the Bounder.

"Now, tell the truth—if you know how—yours or Bunter's?"

Harold Skinner would have continued to claim the pocket-book if he had been quite sure that to do so would mean the Bounder's handing it over to him unexamined. But he did not feel at all sure of that.

And the heedless Bunter might have left something of a ghastly incriminating nature in it—who knew? Bunter was always doing silly things.

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Before they realised what was happening, Monson plunged wildly through the air, to land on top of Ponsonby, and Vavasour, the Highcliffe dandy, lay groaning on top of Gadsby. "Ha, ha, ha!" roared the Greyfriars juniors. (See Chapter 10.)

"I don't know anything about it, except that I believe it's Bunter's," said the cad of the Remove sulkily.

"My hat, you seem pretty uncertain about things to-day, Skinner! First you say it's Bunter's; then that it's yours; and now you think it's Bunter's! There's a lie somewhere."

"Have it your own way. The thing's nothing to do with me," snarled Skinner.

The Bounder put the singed article in his pocket. It was a blazer he was wearing. He took it off, hung it up, and went out of the room.

Hardly had the door closed behind him when Skinner was at that pocket.

And scarcely was Skinner's hand in it before the door opened again, and a grip of steel seized Skinner by the wrist.

"Done!" said the Bounder grimly. "Well, I did think you were a trifle more fly than that, Skinner! You'd better shut up shop as a rascal, and go in for—"

"Leave go of me!" panted Skinner, his face white and drawn now. For he saw that he had given himself away completely.

"Certainly!" said the Bounder cheerily. "Anything to oblige. But please understand that I don't care about having my pockets picked. It can't be done while my clothes are on me, and I object to it when they're not."

Released, Skinner slunk out. He felt very uneasy indeed. If there was trouble now, his sweet scheme of putting the whole burden of it on the fat back of Billy Bunter would not work. The Bounder would be in the way.

A curious expression was on Vernon-Smith's face as he opened the pocket-book and proceeded to examine its interior. He had no scruples about doing that. Skinner

and Bunter had been up to something together, he was sure; and he meant to find out what it was.

There was no name in the pocket-book. At first sight there seemed to be nothing in it at all. But the Bounder's keen eyes noted what many others would have missed.

The lining on one side was torn, and inside the torn part was what looked, at first glance, like a crumpled scrap of paper.

The Bounder took it out.

It was a pound note—the one which had been handed over by Skinner. In his haste the Owl had stuffed it behind the torn lining, instead of putting it with the rest, as he had intended.

An inscrutable expression was on the Bounder's clever, sharp face as he contemplated that note.

He rubbed it gently between finger and thumb. Then he held it up to the light.

"By jingo, it's a wrong 'un!" he muttered. "I begin to suspect something here. If those two don't look out, they'll be getting themselves into serious trouble!"

A wrong 'un! That, curiously enough, had been the thought which had flashed through Harold Skinner's mind—to be dismissed as absurd.

THE THIRD CHAPTER.

In the Tuckshop!

"**H**ULLO, Buntty, old pal!" said Sidney James Snoop affectionately.

"How goes it, Billy?" said William Stott, even more warmly.

Fisher Tarleton Fish, the Yankee Removite, went one better than even Snoop or Stott, for he gripped Bunter by the arm in an access of friendliness that would have been excessive had the Owl been his long-lost brother. Not that Fishy had a long-lost brother, or would have felt very friendly disposed to him if he had found one—unless the brother had turned up with plenty of what Fishy called the spondulics. Belonging, as he did, to the greatest nation on earth, namely, the mighty American nation, Fishy naturally worshipped with zeal at the shrine of the Golden Calf.

Just now Billy Bunter would not have surprised Fishy much if he had appeared in a halo instead of a rather dirty cap. For Bunter was known to be in funds, and there was nothing Fishy admired more than anyone with funds that might, by dexterity or by dirt-eating, be transferred to the pockets of Fisher Tarleton Fish—or employed in ministering to the wants of that distinguished neutral's inner man.

But Bunter had had some. He shook himself free from the loving grasp of Fisher T. Fish. To Snoop and Stott he deigned no answer but a scowl. All three had fed at Bunter's expense more than once during the last few days; but the Owl meant to stop all that. With his own hold on the ill-gotten wealth so insecure, he did not feel that he could afford to waste his substance in treating these spongers.

Bunter had complained to Skinner of loss of appetite.

The performance he proceeded to put up at the tuckshop failed to back up his complaint.

He fed alone, and doubtless felt that he could eat all the more since the toadies of the Remove were only looking on with watering mouths, not sharing, as before.

Rabbit-pies, tarts, doughnuts, cakes, and various other comestibles disappeared with a rapidity that would have seemed almost incredible to anyone who did not know Bunter.

Others besides the trio of toadies were present at the spectacle.

Wharton's remittance had not quite gone the way of all remittances yet. Enough was left to enable him to give a modest treat to a number of his chums. They finished, and watched Bunter.

Copious libations of ginger-beer were now being found necessary to wash down the solid food. Yet there was no visible slackening on Bunter's part. Perhaps the longing looks of Fish, Stott, and Snoop gave his appetite new edge.

"My hat!" remarked Bob Cherry. "There's going to be a giddy explosion here before long, I fancy."

"And Bunter—where was he?"

Ask of the wreck that all around

With fragments strewed the shop,"

said Squiff solemnly.

"He' and 'shop' don't rhyme, Squiff," said Frank Nugent.

"True, O king! But 'bust' and 'disgust' do, and if anybody ever saw anything more disgusting than Bunter—"

"I don't think it will take him that way," said Tom Brown thoughtfully. "Of course an explosion's possible. But you have to consider the fact that he has habituated—"

"Good word, Browney!" said Bob Cherry.

"His system to the storage of immense quantities of grub. That tells all against actual explosion. But it makes an apoplectic fit all the more likely. The poor ass can't hear, can he? If he was frightened there might be very serious results, and I shouldn't like to be responsible."

Bunter could hear. Tom Brown had taken good care that he should be able to. And the New Zealand junior spoke with such seeming gravity that already the Owl was beginning to feel uncomfortable.

"Rats! He can't hear a blessed word while he's stuffing like that," said Squiff. "He makes so much noise with his jaws that it would take a giddy Zeppelin bomb to make him hear anything but his own beastly row."

"Go on, Tom," said Piet Delarey. "This is interesting."

"Ye-e-es, in a way," said the New Zealander slowly. "But it's pretty horrible, you know. Apoplectic fits ain't exactly nice."

"What are the symptoms, Browney?" asked Nugent.

"It would be most fully interesting if the learned and ludicrous Brown would detailfully recount the disgusting symptoms," said Hurree Jamset Ram Singh, Nabob of Bhanipur, whom his chums called Inky.

"Well, first of all the destined victim gets sticky and hot," said Tom Brown, in measured accents. "His buttons press into him till they make marks on his flesh. His collar feels too tight."

Bunter was listening with all his ears now. He had even stopped eating to listen, though he had a dish of doughnuts before him.

He was hot and sticky. His buttons felt as if they were making marks on him. And most certainly his collar was too tight—he could hardly breathe!

He sat with a doughnut half-way to his capacious mouth, and drank in every word. Bunter was always a ready victim to the japes of Tom Brown, for the New Zealander had a way of seeming entirely serious when he japed.

The Owl wiped his clammy brow with that handkerchief which had seen better days. He wriggled his stool.

Snoop and the other two spongers grinned broadly, but Harry Wharton and his chums kept grave faces.

"Go on, Browney!" said Squiff.

The Owl thrust a forefinger between his collar and his neck. He could only just get it in, and for a moment was seized with dread, lest he should not be able to get it out again. But then, it was no ordinary forefinger.

"Oh, there's nothing much in it!" said Tom Brown. "Everybody's got to die some day; we all know that. But it isn't exactly the way I'd choose, I'll admit that. Matter of taste, I suppose."

Tom Brown seemed to Bunter the most cold-blooded wretch in existence. The Owl waited, with nervous apprehension, for his next words.

"I've heard of chaps who simply couldn't bear the idea of dying in bed," went on the Maoriland. "Wasn't there some old back-number in English history who asked to be drowned in a barrel of beer, or something of that sort? I dare say there are chaps who would reckon it quite a gorgeous thing to expire in a fit of apoplexy, brought on by cramming themselves above the Plimsoll-line."

"Gorgeous," said Nugent, "is the word. I thank thee, Browney, for giving me that. Hallo! What's the matter, Tubby?"

Bunter had fairly tumbled from his stool. His face was turning from pasty-white to green.

"You're a bub-bub-beast, Brown!" he spluttered. "You're all bub-bub-beasts! You'd be only too gug-gug-glad to see me lying dud-dud-dead in my gore!"

"It don't take you like that, Buntty," said Tom Brown, shaking his head. "There's no nasty mess about it; and I dare say it ain't so very unpleasant. You just—"

"Dud-dud-don't! You're making me feel kew-kew-quite ill!" wailed Bunter. "I sha'n't get a scrap of good out of the little snack I've had. It wasn't enough, really, to sus-sus-satisfy my hunger; bub-bub-but all that talk about—Ow! Yow! I couldn't eat another morsel if I was paid to!"

He rolled towards the door.

The pressure of his buttons was not by any means wholly imaginary. One of them parted at this moment, and shot across to the grinning group. It took Peter Todd, who had just come in, in the left optic.

"Here, cheese that, you fat clam!" cried Peter, in wrath. "I ain't here to be made a target of by you! Go and shoot your buttons somewhere else!"

"Oh, really, Toddy! Lul-lul-leave me alone, pup-pup-please! I don't know what might happen if you touched me! I feel most bub-bub-beastly ill, and I do believe I'm going to have a fit!"

"Serve you jolly well right!" said Peter Todd unfeelingly.

"You ain't really going, are you, Buntty?" asked Tom Brown blandly.

But Bunter was going. All desire for food had ceased in him.

He went, leaving quite a pile of doughnuts in front of his plate.

They had been paid for, too. Mrs. Mimble had seen to that. She gave no tick to Bunter. He had had to change another of those doubtful notes.

Snoop stretched out a furtive hand for the Owl's leavings. There was nothing finically high-minded about Sidney James.

"Drop it!" snapped Bob Cherry. "That grub's not yours!"

"It ain't yours either, is it?" snarled Snoop, clutching a doughnut. "Yarooogh! Wharrer doing, Cherry, you rotter?"

Bob had given Snoop a genial crack on the funny-bone. "Somebody's bagging your grub, Tubby!" said Nugent.

But Bunter, who had just reached the door, did not even turn his head to look. He gave vent to a hollow groan, and rolled disconsolately on.

THE FOURTH CHAPTER.

Anxious About Bunter!

"BUNTER'S gone to have his apoplectic fit in private!" laughed Harry Wharton.

"I hope he jolly well will have a fit of some sort!" growled Peter Todd, whose left eye watered and smarted.

"He did rather go it to-day, even for Bunter," remarked Johnny Bull.

"Master Bunter has been doing the same sort of thing for some days past, young gentlemen," said Mrs. Mimble, shaking her corkscrew curls sadly. "He really is the very greediest boy I ever saw! I have felt almost afraid to serve him sometimes."

"You aren't giving him credit, are you, Mrs. Mimble?" asked Harry.

"Indeed, no, Master Wharton! I should not dream of it—not even to the extent of a sixpence! He seems to have plenty of money just now."

"It's a puzzle," said Harry, knitting his brows.

"No bizney of ours, I guess!" Squiff said lightly. "I'm not Bunter's keeper, anyway."

Peter Todd frowned. He was not Bunter's keeper, either, but he felt some responsibility for the fat, silly fellow, who was a member of his study brigade.

They went out. Only Snoop, Stott, and Fish were left.

At once the three made a dash for the dish of doughnuts Bunter had left.

"Really, young gentlemen!" panted Mrs. Mimble indignantly. "For such I suppose I must call you, though not behaving—"

"Oh, you dry up!" said Snoop rudely. "You've been paid for the stuff, haven't you?"

"Great Christopher Columbus—yep!" chimed in Fish. "I rather guess and calculate that our friend Buntty kinder devised and bequeathed these hyer doughnuts to us when he went out to do the dying stunt!"

"Don't care a hang whether he did or not!" said Stott. "I mean to have my whack, anyhow."

"You're bad, wicked boys—"

"Hallo, hallo, hallo! What's the row, Mrs. Mimble?" spoke the cheery voice of Bob then at the door.

Before the good dame of the tuckshop could answer, Bob had seen what was wrong. Bob took prompt measures.

The head of Snoop and Stott came together with a force which should have ensured a solution of the question which of them was the harder, had their two owners been interested in that question.

Apparently they were not, however. They did not seem in the least grateful to the cheery Bob. Nor was that illustrious neutral, Fisher T. Fish, effusive in his gratitude when Bob caught him by the collar and clouted his head with considerable vigour and a heavy hand.

"Rush the rotter!" howled Stott, a little the least cowardly of the three.

But Snoop and Fishy failed to respond to that thrilling warery. Three to one was longish odds in an ordinary case; but when Bob Cherry was the one, and the three were scarcely fighting-men at best, the thing would bear a little calm reflection. And if anything in this world was more certain than any other thing, it was that Snoop and Fish would not fight if they took time to think about it first.

"Better put them back into stock, ma'am," said Bob, handing over the dish of doughnuts. "Bunter still owes you something on old accounts. I'm jolly sure. You three sweeps had better clear out of this!"

Scowling, the trio went, Fisher muttering something about waiting till he got his mad up.

Bob followed them out, and rejoined his chums. He found them still discussing Bunter.

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NEXT
MONDAY.

"THE DESERTER!"

EVERY
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ONE
PENNY.

"He's in my study, you know, and it's up to me to keep No. 7 straight," said Peter Todd.

"Don't envy you the contract!" growled Johnny Bull. "It's a pretty tough one—eh, Toddy?" said Squiff, grinning. "For a set of freaks—"

"Oh, you ring off, Field! Dutton's one of the best, though he does make a chap wild when he can't understand a blessed word you say. And Lonzy's all right, too, bar being a bit potty—and he can't help that, I suppose, can he? But that fat clam's the absolute giddy limit!"

"Still, it's hardly worth while to lie awake at nights to worry because he's happened on a pound note, is it, Toddy?" said Piet Delarey, with the touch of sarcasm that so often marked his speeches.

"Pound note be boiled!" replied Peter, more forcibly than elegantly. "The worm's got a whole wad of 'em!"

The rest looked at one another, and Bob Cherry whistled softly.

This was serious. When Bunter was in funds, it almost happened that someone else had lost something. Bunter was more fool than knave, so they all maintained; but his folly had been carried so far in more than one case that less charitable people had called him flatly a knave, and even worse things.

It was no wonder Peter felt worried; for Peter really did take a lot of trouble with the Owl, and if his principal instrument was a cricket-stump that was hardly his fault. Moral suasion scarcely met the case where Bunter was concerned.

"Perhaps his old shark of a pater has struck oil again!" said Frank Nugent.

Peter shook his head. "Tain't that," he said. "He would soon have told me if it had been."

"Seen the notes, Toddy?" asked Wharton.

"Don't I tell you I've seen them?" snapped Peter.

"How many?" asked Bob.

"How on earth should I know, ass?"

"Bow-wow! If you've seen them—"

"I didn't say I'd counted 'em, fathead!"

"Right-ho, brother! Don't get your silly wool off! How many should you think?"

"Five—ten—a hundred?" suggested Squiff, still grinning.

"Rats! You know jolly well Bunter wouldn't have a hundred pounds! But there were more than five. And—yes, I'm pretty sure there were more than ten."

"It's all serene, you know, Toddy," said Squiff. "He'll gorge himself till he has to go into sanny, and then you'll be rid of him for a bit; or, if he has boned them, the truth will come out sooner or later, and then he'll be sacked, and you will be rid of him altogether."

"Ass!" rapped out Todd, darting a withering look at the Australian junior. "A nice, disgraceful sort of thing that would be for No. 7, and for the whole Remove, and for Greyfriars, too, if you come to that!"

"Oh, come along, Browney! Come along, Piet!" said Squiff. "If this giddy meeting's going into a committee of Bunter protection, they may count us out."

The three Colonial juniors went off together. They had grown very chummy of late, and were generally to be seen in company, sometimes with Mauleverer, the slacker of the Remove, as a fourth. But, of course, their ways were a little too strenuous for his lordship.

"We ought to do something, Toddy," said Harry Wharton.

"The esteemed and disgusting Bunter should be obligefully made to accountfully explain his possession of such wealth," purred Inky.

"I'm going to do something," said Peter resolutely. "But I don't quite know what yet. A cricket-stump don't seem precisely to fit the case, though a little of that wouldn't be amiss to start with."

"When did you see the notes, Peter?" asked Bob.

"Just after classes. He didn't mean to let me see them, of course. They were in a red pocket-book—a cheap-looking thing that I've never clapped eyes on before."

"What's that about a red pocket-book, Toddy?" asked the Bounder, joining the group.

The matter was explained to him.

"Looks queer," he said thoughtfully. "Can't any of you fellows throw any light on it?"

They could not, and they said so.

The Bounder could have done. But he did not say so. He did not even mention the fact that he had the red pocket-book in his possession.

Which was very like the Bounder. He often chose to play a lone hand up to the point at which it was necessary to demand help. He did not forget that there had been times when his Form-mates had treated him with incredulity.

A Grand Long Complete Story of Harry Wharton & Co. By FRANK RICHARDS.

Herbert Vernon-Smith had not parted with all his old swank, though it was manifested in far less unpleasant ways now. Certainly he had not parted, and was never likely to part, with his self-confidence.

"I shouldn't worry, Todd," he said coolly.

"Thank you for nothing, Smithy!" snapped Peter.

Peter was really ill-tempered. But the Bouncer only grinned.

THE FIFTH CHAPTER.

Bunter Out of Luck!

WILLIAM GEORGE BUNTER rolled disconsolately across the Close, looking and feeling—distinctly unwell.

"Beasts!" he murmured. "I do believe, after all, they were spoofing me! I didn't have much more than a snack. I've eaten three times as much before now, and not ached—at least, only a little—after it. But that rotter Brown made me feel quite ill. Next time I'll have all the tommy packed up, and take it away with me to eat in the box-room."

But even that rosy dream failed to make the Owl feel happy. At the back of his mind was ever the dread that there might be heavy trouble on account of the notes. And he really felt unwell, too. Tom Brown had played on his imagination to some effect.

"Oh, really, I feel just as if I was sickening for some horrible disease!" he muttered. "P'r'aps there were germs on those notes. The chap may have been a Hun lying out to poison somebody. I wish I'd never seen them—no, I don't, though! There's nothing so awful as being peckish and not having a blessed bob to buy grub with!"

But he made up his mind that for the next day or two he would not change another note.

He rolled on. He rolled into the School House. He rolled upstairs.

In the Remove passage he encountered Mr. Quelch.

Bunter groaned inwardly. This was another stroke of bad luck.

"Bunter," said the Form-master sharply, "I gave you a thousand lines yesterday for gross misconduct!"

"Oh, really, sir! I hope it was not quite so bad as that! I assure you, sir—"

"The only guarantee of behaviour I care to take from you, Bunter," said Mr. Quelch drily, "is a visible improvement. I have no use for your promises. Have you done those lines—or part of them, for, of course, I know that a thousand lines are not done in five minutes?"

"Sus-sus-some of them, sir."

"How many?"

"Oh, a good whack, sir—I mean, quite a lot!"

As a matter of fact, Bunter had not even made a start on the imposition, and Mr. Quelch shrewdly suspected that.

"How it is that you are not at work upon them now?" he asked.

"Oh, really, sir! The other fellows—"

"These lines are your own personal concern, Bunter. What your Form-mates may be doing is not to the purpose."

"I—I do my best, sir," mumbled Bunter. "Sometimes I think you are a—little hard on me, sir. You don't seem to understand."

"Enough, Bunter! I fear that I understand your character only too well. Its leading features are gluttony and deceit. There is a smear of jam on your face now, and I am not at all convinced that you are telling me the truth."

"I've too much respect for you, sir, to tell you anything else," said the Owl virtuously.

"Fetch the lines you have done, Bunter!" rapped out the Form-master.

Bunter was taken aback.

"Now, do you mean, sir? This moment?"

"Yes; this moment, Bunter!" snapped Mr. Quelch, with a brow as black as thunder.

Bunter hurried off as fast as his fat little legs would carry him.

The situation was a critical one. Bunter could think of only one way out.

Peter Todd had also been endowed with lines, and Peter had been at work on his after prep on the previous evening.

Peter's handwriting was better than Bunter's. But no junior wrote lines in his best copperplate. Unless Mr. Quelch was unduly critical, they might be passed off as the Owl's.

Unfortunately for Bunter, Tom Dutton was in No. 7. Tom's deafness kept him from mixing so much with the other fellows as he might have done but for that affliction, and he was often in Bunter's way.

Had it been the meek and harmless Alonzo, Bunter would have ridden the high horse. But that sort of thing did not go with Tom Dutton.

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ON SALE
WEDNESDAY.

"THE WISDOM OF CUSSY!"

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Billy Bunter stole in on tiptoe, after reconnoitring hurriedly through a partially-opened door.

Dutton, busy writing home, did not hear or see him.

Bunter opened Peter's desk. It was locked; but the lock was an old one, and not strong enough to keep out the determined Bunter.

The lines were not on top. Bunter turned over the papers recklessly, leaving smears on every one he touched.

"Ah, here they are!" he murmured, in great relief.

Then he looked up, to find Dutton's gaze fixed upon him.

"What are you doing with Toddy's desk, you fat rotter?" demanded the deaf junior.

"Shush!" hissed Bunter.

He could hear Mr. Quelch pacing up and down in the passage.

"Lush? Rats! What are you talking about, fathead? Toddy's got no lush in his desk. He isn't that sort."

Bunter made frantic signs towards the door.

Tom Dutton could not, or would not, understand.

"What's the use of standing there like a fat fool, waving your ugly arms about like windmill-sails?" he said crossly.

"Oh, dry up, Dutton! There's Mr. Quelch outside! For goodness' sake, do dry up!"

"High? What do you mean, idiot? What's high? Oh, I see—dry, you say! It's no good looking for lush in Toddy's desk, if you are. What's the matter with a glass of water?"

The master's footsteps were not so near now.

With a vague idea that it might help him to make Dutton hear without allowing Mr. Quelch to hear also, Bunter put one hand on each side of his mouth, and bawled:

"Quelchy, you chump!"

"Don't try to make yourself into a giddy walking megaphone. Who's Welsh? No one here, except Morgan, that I ever heard of. And what's it matter? Lloyd George is Welsh, come to that, and I should hope you've got nothing to say

Billy Bunter was quite desperate now. He had found the lines. He was ready to make a bolt. But Dutton had risen and got between him and the door.

"You put that back in Toddy's desk!" said the deaf junior firmly. "I'm not going to let Toddy's belongings be meddled with by a sweep like you!"

Bunter tried to dodge past.

Tom Dutton would have made a pretty good Rugger back.

When he collared he collared hard and low. He collared Bunter now, and Bunter crashed over.

"Yarooogh!" he howled. "Stoppit, Dutton! Gerroff me! I ain't feeling very well, anyway, and—"

"What does all this mean?" spoke the steely voice of Mr. Quelch from the door.

Dutton heard that. He got up.

Bunter, looking pale and sickly, also arose.

"Whose desk is that you have been at, Bunter?" rapped out the master. It did not take a Sherlock Holmes to deduce the fact that the desk had been rifled. The trail of Bunter was very easily to be perceived upon its contents.

"Mum-mum-mine, sir!" stammered the Owl, with a last feeble attempt to brazen out the matter.

Tom Dutton had his hand to his right ear. Bunter did not know whether to hope that he had heard, or that he had not. Tom might blurt out the truth, but he would not sneak—not even about Bunter, and in a case like this.

"Oh, indeed!" said Mr. Quelch, with cold wrath. "It is curious that there should be letters addressed to Todd in it, then. What have you in your hand?"

"Mum-mum-my lul-lul-lines, sir!"

Mr. Quelch took the paper from him.

"And how do you account for the fact that your lines are in Todd's handwriting, Bunter?" he snapped.

"Oh, really, sir, there's some mistake—there must be!"

"There is, Bunter! You have made a very gross mistake in presuming to think that I was so easily to be deceived. Your conduct is atrocious! Dutton, whose desk is this?"

"Peter Todd's, sir!"

What else could Tom say?

"Bunter, come with me!"

The wretched Owl gave Tom a basilisk glare, and followed Mr. Quelch, looking positively Hunnish.

Peter Todd chanced to come in just as he returned. Bunter's fat hands were pressed under his armpits, and the tears were running like rain down his weirdly-contorted, fat countenance.

"What's wrong, porpoise?" asked Peter, grinning.

"Ow—yow! Dutton sneaked on me, and I've had six on each hand!" wailed Bunter.

"Rats! Dutton wouldn't sneak on anybody. That's not in his line!"

"Yes, it was lines, Toddy," said the deaf junior, catching that word. "That horrid fat spoofster tried to show off yours for his own; he got them out of your desk, you know!"

"Where's that cricket-stump?" yelled Peter. "Oh, stop him, Dutton!"

But Tom was just too late this time. Bunter fled, with Peter in hot pursuit. At the top of the stairs Peter was just near enough to land a kick.

Peter landed one.

"Yooop!" howled Bunter. "You beast, Toddy! I'll—"
Then he slipped in his haste, and started to roll down stairs.

Peter stood and watched him roll. The grin was still on Peter's face when he went back to the study.

THE SIXTH CHAPTER.

Bunter's Highcliffe Pals!

"HALLO, hallo, hallo!"

It was Bob Cherry who made this remark. He, with Harry Wharton and Frank Nugent, had just ridden over to Highcliffe to see their chums Courtenay and De Courcy.

The Greyfriars and Highcliffe juniors had not met since the day of the match at Wethersden, with its troubled journey home—troubled through the plottings of Skinner, Bolsover, Bunter & Co.

Now the trio found Frank Courtenay and the Caterpillar standing outside the Highcliffe gates, apparently with nothing in particular to do.

"Jolly glad to see you fellows!" said Courtenay. "I was getting more than a bit fed-up!"

"Nothing to do, and lots of time to do it in—eh?" said Harry.

"I'm glad Franky spoke for himself, and not for both of us, by gad!" drawled the Caterpillar. "For my part, lots of time an' nothing at all to do in it is just exactly an' precisely my line. I hope you fellows haven't come over to com-

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"Bow-wow!" said Bob.
"Does the poodle bite?" asked the Caterpillar gravely. "If there's any danger of that, I'll toddle, I think. I rather fancy hydrophobia would be a trifle too strenuous for me, by gad!"

"Oh, ring off, Rupert, do!" said Frank Courtenay. "You fellows coming along to have some tea?"

"Rather!" replied Nugent. "That's one reason why we came. The other was to talk about our next match."

De Courcy groaned.

"Don't you want us to come to tea, Caterpillar?" asked Bob.

"Oh, most certainly! An' I dare say I'll manage to live through the footer jaw; don't mind me. If you see me lookin' as if I was goin' to expire, it doesn't really mean anythin'. I can stand a lot, you know, though I look so delicate!"

The three Greyfriars juniors wheeled their bikes in. The Caterpillar lounged behind, looking his laziest.

No one who had not seen him in action could have imagined how the slight figure showed then as if composed of steel and whipcord. All the languor disappeared; dash and vim took its place.

Frank Courtenay was an all-round athlete of high ability, yet he firmly believed that his chum could beat him in anything he tried to do—if only he tried hard enough. But De Courcy's laziness was not wholly a pose.

"Hallo, hallo, hallo! Here's Peter Todd's bike!" said Bob in the bicycle-shed. "Peter's not here, is he?"

"I trust not," said De Courcy, with a shudder. "Worthy

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mandeer us for another fatiguin' match. Nice game, footer—to watch. But it's a deuced tirin' one to play!"

"Oh, cheese it!" said Courtenay, laughing.

"I emphatically decline to cheese it, Franky!" replied his chum, propping himself more effectively against a gatepost, as though to stand on his own feet unsupported was really more than he could do. "Since you infected me with the stern morality of the workin' classes, you have taken up the deluded notion that I am at heart as strenuous a person as yourself. Wrong, Franky—completely wrong! When I am strenuous it is against my wishes and convictions, an' with an effort that is positively exhaustin'. What's wrong, Cherry? Seen a ghost?"

For the genial Bob was standing open-mouthed, in an attitude of amazement.

"Nunno!" said Bob. "I was only thinking what an extremely industrious chap you are at chin-wagging, for a fellow who objects to doing anything in particular!"

"My dear fellow, talkin' isn't work, as long as you're not hurried over it. I like to talk, by gad! I like to give the benefit of my ripe judgment to any—er—anybody who's ass enough to listen! Just to talk—rippin' on like the wayside brook, don'tcherknow, an' to contemplate existence, with special attention to the doin's of the merry Pon—that's my line. Just to stand with my back against the gatepost, an' gaze at the roseate hues of early dawn—"

"I rather thought this was sunset," put in Wharton.

"Quite right, my dear fellow. What a very exact chap you are! Not surprised that our Franky loves you like a brother, in spite of the fact that you haven't been brought up with his advantages, imbibing from the very first the stern—"

"Oh, do dry up, and let a chap get a word in, Caterpillar!"

The Caterpillar looked at Bob almost reproachfully.

"My dear Cherry, the very last thing I should wish would be to stand in the way of your eloquence. Proceed!"

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NEXT MONDAY.

"THE DESERTER!"

person, Todd. One of the best, as my friend Franky's friends say. But strenuous—not at all a restful person, 'know!"

"Have you seen Toddy, Courtenay?" said Harry.

"No. I really don't think he's here. He would hardly come to see Pon & Co."

"I believe I can elucidate the seemin' mystery," drawled the Caterpillar. "The dear Gunter is here—fat fellow, you know. Takin' a little hand at nap with the merry Pon an' his sportive crew, no doubt!"

The Greyfriars three looked at one another. Harry frowned.

Bob bent and examined Toddy's bike.

"The porpoise hasn't done a lot of damage on the way here," he said. "Only three spokes gone, and a little of the enamel scratched off. That's nothing for him. But there's the ride back still to come, and it may be dark by that time, so he'll probably smash the thing up!"

"I gather," said the Caterpillar, "that—er—Bunter isn't exactly a first-class rider. I wonder Todd, an eminently practical person, though too strenuous, lends him a machine, by gad!"

"Toddy didn't," Harry Wharton said. "Bunter bagged it, and Toddy will walk into him with a cricket-stump when he knows!"

"Extremely pleasant for Grunter, by gad! Still, it's no funeral of ours—any more than the fact that the amiable Punter is now, in all probability, bein' industriously rooked by Pon & Co. I don't want to take away the character of the merry Pon—"

"You couldn't," struck in Bob Cherry.

"No? Well, possibly not. Or, to take another line, perhaps the dear Pon might not suffer by the loss of his present character. But I'm pretty sure, by gad, that our fat friend Shunter may be looked upon as one in the hands of the Egyptians—a sheep for the shearing, so to say!"

A Grand Long Complete Story of Harry Wharton & Co. By FRANK RICHARDS.

"We ought to have him out of it," said Harry, looking very serious.

Frank Courtenay's face showed that he agreed; but the other three were not quite in accord with them.

"Oh, hang Bunter!" said Nugent. "We didn't come over here for a row with Pon and his crew!"

"Hear, hear!" said Bob. "Leave him to it. If they do swindle him out of all his cash it will be for his good. He can't gorge so much!"

Wharton and Courtenay still looked doubtful.

"Oh, come along and let's have tea!" said Bob. "I'm jolly peckish! It may be rude to say so, but these chaps would know soon, anyway. We're not the fat oyster's giddy keepers, are we?"

"Cherry, your words are the words of wisdom, by gad!" said the Caterpillar, linking his arm in that of the energetic Bob. "Franky, be persuaded! Wharton, try to look cheerful! After all, Pon is not Sweeney Todd. He will not transform the dear Munter into pies. At worst, he can only skin him. We have neither part nor lot with the merry Pon. Not ours to tread the primrose path! Ours to wolf cake an' tarts, an' chat genially about Shunter's greed, or about how many runs we shall kick on Saturday, an' whether we shall put the other chaps on to bowl first if we win the toss. Jolly interestin' game, cricket! What! Footer, do you say? It's all the same. Interestin', both of them, but fatiguin'—horribly=fatiguin'!"

They went off, laughing, to the study which Courtenay and De Courcy shared, and for half an hour forgot all about the Owl of the Remove, except for a few minutes, during which they were discussing his share in the Wethersden business.

Meanwhile, the Owl was enjoying himself in Pon's study. The nuts made much of him. Bunter, in his usual state of being stony-broke, was to them an object of derision; but it was quite another matter with so affluent a Billy Bunter as this.

"I'll go the lot," said Bunter, in his largest manner. "I'm a sport, I am. I don't care if I have lost three quid or more; I'm not a beastly pauper! I don't care if I have gone down every blessed time I've called 'nap'! A fellow who takes things in the proper spirit knows that his turn is bound to come, if he only has the pluck to keep on calling up to the value of his cards!"

"An' the judgment to know what the value is, old chap—that's where you score," said Cecil Ponsonby, winking at Monson. "You've had rotten luck so far; but a fellow who knows the game as you know it is bound to come out on top in the long run. Call right up to the value—that's the ticket, old sport!"

"By gum, yes! An' a bit over, if anythin'!" said Gadsby. Ponsonby shook his head sagely.

"You're wrong, Gaddy, dead wrong," he said. "Right off the lines, in fact. But you needn't think you can teach my pal Bunter anything. He knows as much as all the rest of us together!"

"Absolutely!" said Vavasour.

"An' a bit over, if anything," added Gadsby.

This time his opinion was received with more favour. Ponsonby smiled approvingly, and Bunter smirked a fatuous smirk.

Behind his round glasses his little eyes beamed with gratified conceit. He felt at that moment that he really loved the merry Pon and his crew, though he had lost three pounds or more to them already, and was in a fair way to lose all he had if he went on for another hour or so.

He coughed uneasily at the smoke that clouded the apartment.

Though Bunter had often taken a cigarette in his attempts to emulate the ways of the bold, bad blades, he was not by any means hardened to smoking on the scale upon which the Highcliffe nuts practised that amusement. The Owl could stand any amount of flattery, but not a great deal of tobacco smoke. It affected his head, none of the strongest at the best of times. Possibly the nuts knew that.

"Get your nap, Bunt!" said Ponsonby.

With a lordly flourish William George Bunter threw down the ace of spades.

Each of the four followed suit.

Bunter produced the king of spades.

Ponsonby laid down the ten of spades—Monson the five.

Vavasour and Gadsby played small cards of other suits.

Bunter threw down the cards left in his hand.

"There you are!" he cried triumphantly. "I knew you couldn't lick me this time!"

And, indeed, it did look an absolute dead cert. For Bunter's three remaining cards were the queen and knave of spades and the ace of hearts.

"A regular cast-iron nap hand, Billy!" said Gadsby admiringly. And he winked slyly at Vavasour.

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"Hold on!" said Monson. "I really think we'd better play the hand out."

"What for?" asked Bunter, in extreme uneasiness. "You can't—"

"Will three more spades do it?" asked Monson. And produced them as he spoke. "Trumps, you know, old sport!"

"Oh, really! My luck's enough to drive anyone potty!" wailed Bunter.

THE SEVENTH CHAPTER.

Bunter Gets Desperate!

"BRAVO, Mon! You've saved us!" cried Ponsonby. "But it's rough on our pal Billy. Never mind, old sport, this sort of thing can't go on for ever, you know! Every blessed spade out!"

That may have been true. But that sort of thing was likely to go on as long as Bunter had any cash and would continue to play. For the nuts were four against one, and when any one of them dealt Bunter a "cast-iron nap hand" he dealt someone else five trumps!

"It was next door to a miracle!" said Gadsby fervently. As Gadsby had been the dealer, he knew perfectly well how very far short of the miraculous it came. But perhaps he was referring to his own sleight of hand—which was worthy of the great Pon himself.

"Absolutely!" said Vavasour.

But there was a limit even to Bunter's gullibility.

His memory was a very short one. Skinner would never have forgotten that the Highcliffe nuts had cheated him before, and, given the chance, were certain to cheat him again. Hazeldene had never forgotten how they had done him down. But Bunter, when battered up enough, could forget anything for a time.

Now he had begun to remember.

They had been cheating him all along, he was sure! The more he thought of it the more certain he felt. Dimly he began to perceive the way of it—helped possibly by the fact that he would have done just the same thing had he not been too utterly clumsy for sleight of hand!

Billy Bunter really did not deserve any sympathy. He was playing with fellows whom he knew to be crooks, with money that was not his own. And he was only playing straight because he was too big a duffer to play otherwise!

Yet so forlorn did he look as he sat there, gazing stupidly at the cards on the table before him, that few could have kept themselves from just a spasm of pity. His jaw had dropped. His spectacles were dim with unshed tears. But he was even more angry than sorry for himself.

"Now, then, settle up!" said Monson unpleasantly.

Hot and hasty words were upon the lips of William George Bunter. But he did not speak them. He was in the enemies' camp, and they were four to one. Not yet could he screw his courage to the sticking-point.

"I—I—I cu—can't settle up just now!" he faltered. "You chaps will have to take my IO U's!"

"Not jolly well likely!" yelled Monson. "Shell out, you fat cad!"

Bunter's left hand moved towards the pocket, in which a wad of notes still reposed. But he withdrew it quickly.

Why should he settle up? They had not really won his money. They had been cheating him all along—had given him no chance at all.

His one desire now was to get out without paying any more. Then he would give Highcliffe and its nuts the widest of berths in future.

"Shell out, Billy, old pal!" said Ponsonby, who failed to see, as yet, that the limit had been reached.

Ponsonby hoped to prevail by soft words. But the other three had no notion of keeping up any pretence of politeness.

"Out with it, you prize porker!" commanded Gadsby roughly.

"Dry up, Gaddy! Now then, Bunter, let's get on! What's a pound or two to a chap rolling in it, as you are?" said Pon.

"You've got to fork out, Fatty, absolutely!" said Vavasour.

But Bunter could be as stubborn as a mule when he chose. He chose now.

"I haven't got it," he said. "You've cleaned me out! Look here, what's the matter with my IO U's?"

"Nothing—if we were wastepaper merchants. But we ain't, as it happens," said Monson, getting nearer him.

"Barge the fat beast over and collar it!" howled Gadsby.

Bunter scrambled to his feet, overturning his chair, which went to the ground with a clatter.

"Keep off!" he yelled. "Don't touch me, or I'll shout the place down! You've cheated me all along, and now you want to rob me, too! Keep off, I say! Thieves! Sharpers!"

"Oh, gag the loafsome fat beast, or he'll raise the giddy place on us!" said Gadsby in alarm.

He made a dash at Bunter.

Then he reeled back, a good deal hurt, and even more surprised.

Bunter was not exactly lionlike. But he was capable of being roused. And he was fairly desperate now.

Bunter fought!

With odds of four to one against him, Bunter fought—in defence of that guilty paper in his pocket.

Vavasour came on. Vavasour was not the stuff of which heroes are made. But Vavasour was quite sure that Bunter was not, either, and that encouraged him.

But Vavasour staggered back, clapping a hand in anguish to a redly-streaming nose, convinced now that the lusty blow dealt to Gaddy was not the fluke he deemed it.

"Yarooogh!" he howled. "Oh, by dose!"

"Shut up, you idiot!" hissed Ponsonby furiously. "You'll—"

"Help, help! Murder! Fire! Thieves!" roared Bunter.

"Oh, pile in! Get the fat beast down and sit on his face!" cried Monson.

Vavasour, already having enough to go on with, got out of the way with all speed. The other three rushed at Bunter.

The Owl hit out right and left. His right smote the left ear of Monson, and it began to swell at once. His left got home on the classic nose of Cecil Ponsonby. Again he struck, and one of Gaddy's eyes was decorated with mourning hues—or soon would be.

Who could have dreamed that the fat slacker had it in him? The Highcliffe nuts were amazed.

But they had committed themselves now, and in the interests of self-preservation they had to go.

They piled in. Before the fierceness of their renewed attack the hero went down.

But, though they sat upon him—all four of them, even Vavasour plucking up courage for that—he still struggled, still shouted.

"Ow—you! Groooh! The fat cad's biting me!" howled Gadsby. And got off Bunter's face in a decided hurry.

Now, the Owl could make his voice heard.

"Help! Murder! Murder! Fire! Thieves! They're killing me! I shall be dead in another minute! Help!" he roared.

Mr. Mobbs heard, but he did not come. He had heard the voice of Gadsby, also, and it did not suit the book of Mr. Mobbs to meddle with the merry nuts, if meddling could be avoided. And as Dr. Voysey was out, this seemed a clear case for non-interference to Mr. Mobbs.

Others, nearer than the snobbish Highcliffe master, heard, too.

There came a rush of feet along the passage.

Bunter, struggling still, got a kick in on Monson's waistcoat, and Monson retreated howling.

"Yoop! The cannibal's biting my hand!" yelled Pon.

"Open this door!" sounded Bob Cherry's voice.

Bunter heard that familiar voice with relief inexpressible. Billy Bunter did not exactly love the genial Bob. On the whole, he rather hated him than otherwise, for Bob and Johnny Bull were less readily moved to sympathy or to a loan than Wharton, Nugent, or Hurree Singh.

But at a time like this it was good to know that Bob Cherry was on hand.

Not exactly on the spot, however! For the door was locked.

"Tell them you've made a mistake—that it was only a blessed lark! We'll jolly well flay you alive if you don't!" hissed Ponsonby in the Owl's ear.

But Bunter had got his mouth free by using his teeth.

"Sha'n't!" he panted. "Help! Bob, old man, help! Harry, old chap, are you there? Help! Courtenay—"

Ponsonby sat on Bunter's face, and stopped his cries.

"Open the door!" yelled Bob again.

"I rather fancy you'd better fall in with Cherry's suggestion, Pon," drawled the Caterpillar. "Cherry's a very determined chap, by gad, an' I shouldn't be surprised if he did somethin' desperate."

"You'd better open, Ponsonby, or there'll be trouble!" rapped out Frank Courtenay.

Ponsonby gritted his teeth. He could bear the Caterpillar's drawling insolence, though that galled him; but he did not know how to bear interference from his cousin, Frank Courtenay, whom he hated as he hated no one else in the world.

"Oh, come out of the way, Caterpillar! I'm going to smash that door in!" cried Bob.

Crash! Crash again!

The door was a pretty solid one. But Bob Cherry's charge shook it.

Vavasour looked alarmed.

"There's going to be a putrid row if they smash it in, Pon—absolutely!" he said weakly.

Ponsonby glared at him.

"Hang the row!" he snapped.

Monson began to weaken, too.

"I say, Pon, you know—"

"Confound you fellows!" howled the leader of the nuts. "You haven't the pluck of a mouse!"

"Hang you, you tub of lard, you've let us in for a sweet thing!" fumed Monson, giving the hapless Owl a savage kick.

Bunter wriggled his head free for a moment.

"They're kicking me to death, Bob, old man!" he wailed.

"I forgive you chaps all you've ever— Yarooogh!"

The door shook again as Bob charged furiously at it.

"They'll have it down, Pon, absolutely!" twittered Vavasour.

"Not likely!" said Pon, but with less confidence now.

Vavasour and Monson were wavering between dread of those outside and fear of Pon.

"Better open, I think," drawled the Caterpillar. "Cherry's such a very resolute chap, by gad! If you don't open there'll be a smash presently."

"There jolly well will!" said Harry Wharton grimly.

And now four of them charged the door together. Only De Courcy held back, lounging against the wall, hands in pockets, his face smiling, yet with them to the uttermost limit in heart, as they all knew.

The door fairly rocked this time.

Billy Bunter rolled over, away from it. Vavasour's scanty courage broke down completely. His hand was on the key, when the lock gave way before another hot assault.

The door burst open. It tumbled Vavasour over. It smote Bunter in the rear with a mighty smite.

"Ow! Yow! Clumsy beast, Cherry!" howled Bunter.

But Bob Cherry paid no heed to him. Over his prostrate form he rushed at Ponsonby. Wharton, Courtenay, and Nugent stormed in behind him.

The Caterpillar did not storm in. He lounged in elegantly, his hands still in his pockets.

"Now you're in for a warm time—by gad, you are, Pon, old sport!" he drawled. "I warned you, you know! You can't expect more from me. I hope it won't hurt your tender feelin's if I stay to witness the execution?"

THE EIGHTH CHAPTER.

The Gross Ingratitude of W. G. B.!

"PUT your hands up, Ponsonby!" rapped out Bob. "Just you stop it; you interfering cad, or I'll—"

"You'll what, Pon? Anything at all like this—or this?" inquired Bob, getting Pon's head nicely into chancery, and proceeding to beat a tattoo on his classic features with great gusto. "Better start in if you're going to do anything, because I don't mean to waste any time myself!"

It was quite evident to the struggling, snarling, suffering leader of the Highcliffe nuts that Bob was not wasting any time. But Bob's promptitude was not at all pleasing to him.

The other nuts showed no fight at all. Indeed, it could hardly be said that the great Pon showed fight. But then Bob showed enough for two, so that did not matter much.

"Easy there, old chap!" said Courtenay. "We haven't heard yet what is really the matter, you know."

Bob released Ponsonby at once.

"My hat, I'd forgotten all about that!" he said, looking at the battered face of his sullen victim.

"Don't worry, Cherry! If the amiable Pon hasn't deserved all you have administered, an' a little more, call me a Dutchman, by gad!" said the Caterpillar. Pon would have had to be very badly damaged before he got any sympathy from Rupert de Courcy.

And Ponsonby would have had to be hurt even more than he was before he would have felt any gratitude for Courtenay's intervention.

"Can't you mind your own business, Clare?" he snarled.

"Put your head back in chancery, an' p'r'aps he will, by gad!" said the Caterpillar. "You ain't precisely the most grateful chap I ever met, Pon."

"I don't want interference from Council School cads!" snapped Ponsonby.

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NEXT MONDAY.

"THE DESERTER!"

A Grand Long Complete Story of Harry Wharton & Co. By FRANK RICHARDS.



Bunter threw down the cards left in his hand. "There you are!" he cried triumphantly. "I knew you couldn't lick me this time!" And indeed it looked an absolutely dead cert. (See Chapter 6.)

"Here goes again, then!" cried Bob.

But Pon was in retreat. Bob pursued him round the table. Monson stuck out a foot, and Bob nearly sprawled. But as he staggered he caught Ponsonby by the nose, and held on like grim death, maintaining his equilibrium at considerable expense to the feelings of the unfortunate nut.

"Yow! Stoppit! You're pullid by dose off, you cad!" splattered Pon.

"A pity, too!" murmured the Caterpillar. "I always admired Pon's nose. Best-shaped nose at Highcliffe, by gad! But nevermore, as that horrid bore the raven said. In future it will be a 'dose,' the which I conceive to be nothing very high-class in the way of nasal organs."

Even the wretched nuts grinned at that. The Caterpillar's air of humorous detachment was really funny.

"Hold still, sweet youth, and you may save the precious article!" said Bob. "Struggle, and off she comes, for a cert!"

"You're pulling—not Bob—you know, Pon," grinned Nugent.

Ponsonby ceased to struggle. It was wisest so, and far less painful.

"This is pretty steep, if you ask me!" blustered Monson.

"We don't ask you!" returned Frank Courtenay contemptuously.

"Sit on him, Courtenay!" said Bob cheerily. "He won't be happy till he gets it. No good asking the Caterpillar—he might get his hair rumped."

"Precious steep, breakin' into chaps' studies, I call it!" went on Monson, presuming too far on the fact that he was not yet being handled. "And you'll have to reckon with Mobby— Here, hold on! Stoppit! Leggo by dose, Caterpillar! Ow! Yow!"

De Courcy had advanced. Delicately, as one who handles

Wharton." he said plaintively. "You might let a chap get his breath first."

"Hurry up, then!" snapped Harry, who knew quite well why the Owl delayed.

"I—I don't feel very well!" gasped Bunter.

This, for once, was the truth. It might be surprising that Bunter should tell the truth; but, considering all that had happened to him that day, one could hardly be surprised that he did not feel very well.

"Anythin' serious?" asked the Caterpillar, with mock sympathy.

"No—ye-es. I believe I'm injured internally," burred the Owl. "I shouldn't wonder if it proved fatal; and a nice sort of thing that would be for you fellows! You'd all have had a hand in it. But I forgive you," added Bunter, with almost excessive magnanimity.

"Thanks, awfully!" replied the Caterpillar. "As long as I'm forgiven I shall be able to take quite an interest in your experin' struggles; Grunter."

"You're a stony-hearted beast!" snapped Bunter.

He had determined on his line now.

There was no chance of getting back the money he had already lost. None of the rescuers, he fancied, would go to the trouble of forcing Pon and the rest of the nuts to disgorge. They would say that, even if he had been cheated, it was only what he had asked for. And perhaps they would not believe his story of having been cheated.

And he still had a wad of notes upon him—an amount which would ensure him too much to eat for some time to come. He shuddered as he realised what was certain to happen if Wharton once got to know of his ill-gotten wealth. Wharton, as a matter of fact, knew something about it. But Bunter was blissfully ignorant of that fact.

His mind was made up.

something fragile and precious, he took Monson's nose between thumb and forefinger. But the grasp that looked so delicate to those who saw was as a grasp of steel to the over-bold Monson. In haste he repented him of his protest. But repentance had come too late!

"Now then, Bunter, get up and stop howling! We want to know what the matter is," said Harry sharply.

Bunter rose to his feet, and stood looking very woebegone indeed.

His body was bruised and uncomfortable. But his mind was in even greater trouble.

For all too plainly now he saw that he had jumped from the frying-pan into the fire.

Nothing but hard lying would save him from questions that would, if answered truly, land him into a far worse scrape than he had been in when set upon by the thievish nuts.

For the life of him he dared not tell even half the truth to these fellows. He knew what the outcome of that must be.

Bunter did not mind telling lies. He would reel them off by the score. But these fellows knew him so well, and were so alert to pounce upon the contradictions that were the weak spots in Bunter's highly-developed talent for playing the Ananias role.

"I—I'll tell you all about it in a minute,

"Look here, you fellows!" he said. "I really don't think it's worth while to go any further into this affair. I—I—er—I—there was a little disagreement between me and my friends here—that's all."

"What?" gasped Bob Cherry, letting go of Pon's nose in his surprise, much to the relief of Pon.

"Just a little disagreement, that's all, Cherry," said De Courcy, not letting go of Monson's nasal organ.

They looked at Bunter in stern and angry amazement.

"I think we'd better leave him to his dear friends!" snapped Courtenay.

"An' apologise for our thoughtless intrusion, by gad!" added the Caterpillar, releasing Monson at last. "Sorry I can't bring myself to ask you to return the compliment in kind, Mon! I'm not quite sure your hands are clean, y'know."

It was said meaningly, and Monson understood, as his scowl showed.

"Oh, rot!" said Bob Cherry.

"Not at all, Cherry—not at all! Shunter should know best, by gad! I wouldn't be so rude as to contradict him. Vav, you image, just remember you're a dear friend of Grunter's—that's why he tapped your claret for you, by gad! Better apologise to Pon, Cherry! You dealt with him under a misapprehension. He an' his pals were only slaughterin' Punter out of excess of affection, you know. Blessed if I'm surprised, either. I almost begin to love the merry Grunter enough to slay him myself."

"Yes; I think not," said Bob. "Catch me apologising to a rotter like Pon!"

"Catch me accepting your apology, you outsider!" snarled Pon.

"Children! Really, you know, when Bunter's so kind an' forgivin', an' all that, it doesn't become you to behave thus," said the Caterpillar blandly.

"I'll pull the sweep's nose again!" growled Bob.

Ponsonby stepped back quickly, protecting the organ referred to with one hand, and came full upon Gadsby's toes.

"Ow! Clumsy ass, you are, Pon!" howled Gadsby.

Wharton looked at Bunter full in the face.

"Is that all you've got to say?" he asked very quietly, and yet in a way that made the Owl squirm.

"I—I—I can't see what good it is arguing, Wharton," he said feebly. "It was all a mistake—more or less."

"Then stay here with your precious pals!" said Harry bitterly.

But that did not quite suit Bunter's book.

"If you chaps are going back, I—I guess I'll go along with you," he said, in haste.

"Then something's gone wrong with your guesser, for we won't have you!" replied Bob Cherry.

But the Owl was afraid to stay. He knew that he could not trust the nuts of Highcliffe a single yard.

"They — they — I — I —"

"Well, I guess eyeing you won't hurt you, Tubby," said Bob cheerily. "There's a trifle too much of you for it to be worn down very quickly by eyeing."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I can't think you fellows can be so silly, really!" said Bunter peevishly. "I—I—they — they —"

"That's bad grammar, Porpoise," said Nugent. "You should say 'I eye them.'"

Bunter was getting desperate. He had seen Monson and Gadsby nudge one another. The

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merry nuts had some precious scheme against him, he felt sure.

So when Wharton and Courtenay turned to go, he followed them hastily, pushing past Bob and Nugent and the Caterpillar without any superfluous politeness.

At the door De Courcy faced round, hands in pockets again, and shook his head sadly.

"Rough luck, by gad, Pon!" he said. "Fancy your dear pal Bunter roundin' on you like this! Beastly rough, I call it!"

"Go to Halifax!" snarled Ponsonby.

THE NINTH CHAPTER.

The Merry Nuts on Bunter's Trail!

THE tea had not been cleared away in the study which Frank Courtenay and the Caterpillar shared.

Almost before he was well inside the door, Billy Bunter had seized a raspberry-tart and crammed it into his mouth whole.

He was reaching out for another, when the Caterpillar clapped him on the back.

"Feelin' peckish, Grunter—what?"

"Ow! Yow! Ow, you silly ass, De Courcy!" spluttered the Owl. "You've made all that stuff go the wrong way, and nearly choked me!"

"Now, by gad, it rather seemed to me that it was going the wrong way already," remarked the Caterpillar mildly.

"You're a disgusting pig, Tubby" said Bob frankly.

Bunter only groaned. He looked longingly at the remnants of the spread. But he dared not attempt to take more with the eagle eye of Bob Cherry upon him.



Mad with rage, Skinner struck furiously at Peter's face, staggering him, and grabbed at the notes in his hand. But Peter's grip held firm. (See Chapter 13.)

At last he thought he saw a chance. His podgy hand stole out.

But Bob wheeled round, and brought a heavy ruler down sharply on the thievish fingers.

"Yarough!" howled Bunter. "You beast, Cherry!"

"I say, Fatty, you've dropped something," said Frank Nugent.

Bunter made a grab. It was the wad of notes he had dropped in trying to dodge Bob. It had been fastened by a rubber band, annexed from Tom Dutton's desk; but the band had broken, and the notes were exposed to view.

Bob Cherry was quicker than Bunter. He had the notes in his hand now, and was staring at them in a very puzzled way.

"My only aunt!" he gasped. "Harry—you fellows, look here! The fat sweep must really have robbed a bank this time!"

"Give them to me, Cherry, you rotter! They ain't yours; they're mine! Hand them over! I'm jolly well not going to stand it!" howled Bunter.

He could see how grave all the others looked. Even Bob's sunny face was clouded.

"He'd better have them back, Bob," said Wharton slowly.

"This is a bit too fishy altogether for us to meddle in it. I wash my hands of the whole affair!"

"Surely the dear Pon an' his nice little friends didn't let you win an' actually pay you, Punter?" asked the Caterpillar.

"Don't tell me that unless you want me to expire on the spot, by gad!"

"They did, then!" said Bunter, catching at even so unlikely a yarn in his fright. "And I don't care if you die on the spot! You're a beast! The whole lot of you are beasts! Yah!"

And with that Parthian shot Bunter beat a retreat.

They let him go. Alone he went to the bicycle-shed, wheeled out Toddy's bike, mounted it clumsily, and set off.

The merry nuts saw him depart. They looked at one another. The same idea was in the mind of each, even in that of Vavasour, which was seldom guilty of harbouring an idea of any sort.

If they could catch Bunter alone, they would have him at their mercy. That was the notion of the nuts.

They bolted across, ran out their bikes, waited a minute or two to let their victim get ahead, and then took the road behind him, hot on his trail.

Perhaps they forgot about the other three Greyfriars fellows, or it may be that they thought them safe at Highcliffe for some time yet to come.

"Look at the fat cad wobblin' about!" said Gadsby contemptuously. "The giddy road ain't wide enough for him."

Billy Bunter was not an accomplished cyclist, though, of course, he believed himself one. But he was riding worse than ever to-day. It really seemed as though Toddy's machine had taken a dislike to him.

"Oh, dear!" he muttered. "I'm sure there's something wrong with the beastly thing!"

There was. Drury, who did not love Bunter, and was wrothy at not being asked to help in fleecing him, had attended to the machine some twenty minutes or so earlier. There had been a spanner in Drury's hand, and a malicious gleam in Drury's eyes. What Drury had done was a simple thing, but likely to prove troublesome to a duffer like Bunter. He had loosened the nut which fastened the handlebar in its socket; that was all.

"My hat, he's over!" yelled Ponsonby.

It was even so.

Bunter had described a wild half-circle which looked like an effort of a would-be trick rider at making a figure eight, and then had staggered and sprawled.

"Yarough!" he howled. "That beast Toddy! He must

have twigged that I was going to borrow his rotten jigger, and—"

Bunter's speech came to sudden stop. In trying to scramble up he had turned half round, and had seen the Highcliffe nuts bearing down upon him.

On his hands and knees in the muddy road, William George Bunter saw them come, and the heart of William George sank almost into his boots.

Not for one single, solitary second did he believe their intention to be friendly. As though he was, Billy Bunter was not such an ass as that.

He glanced wildly round him. There was no chance of escape. Peter Todd's bicycle lay in the middle of the road. The back wheel still revolved slowly in a futile sort of way. The handlebar had come right out of the socket, and lay some yards away.

"It's all right, Bunter, old pal! We'll help you up," yelled Pon.

"What's the good of bein' civil to the fat toad?" growled Monson. "He can't get away, an' there's no one in sight. We've got him, safe as houses!"

Bunter heard Ponsonby and did not hear Monson. But he behaved as if he had heard Monson and not Ponsonby.

"Ow!" he yelled. To his feet he scrambled, and bolted. As fast as his fat little legs would carry him he ran towards Greyfriars.

"Yoicks! Tally-ho!" sang out Gadsby.

The four merry nuts piled in on Bunter's trail. The fat little legs might go like machinery, but the bicycles of the nuts went faster.

Suddenly there came a crash.

"Yoop!" howled Vavasour. "Oh, hang it!"

Vavasour had not seen the handlebar in time. Possibly he never saw it at all. But his front wheel struck it.

And it was as though the solid road had sprung up and hit Vavasour. There was a rasping, grinding sound as the handlebar got mixed up with the spokes of his front wheel. Then the wheel buckled up, and the road came up to meet the merry nut.

Vavasour's comrades did not even pause. What sympathy they felt for him could be expressed later—and would not take long then. They sped on in pursuit of the hurrying Owl.

"Stop, you rotters! I'm killed!" yelled Vavasour.

"Pick you up soon, old sport, if you like to wait there for us!" shouted Monson.

Bunter looked over his shoulder. He saw Ponsonby, his handsome, sneering face red and perspiring, within ten yards of him.

"Ow! Chuck it, Pon, you beast!" he panted. "Lemme alone! I tell you I haven't got any more chink. I—I left the rest in my desk. It ain't in my pocket, so it's no good—Ow! Yarough!"

Pon's hand had touched Bunter's fat shoulder.

But it only touched. It did not grip.

With quite surprising agility Bunter dodged. Pon staggered and very nearly crashed down.

"Yah, cad!" howled Bunter triumphantly.

His short-sighted eyes were quick enough in that moment of emergency to spot a broken hedge-stake lying on the grass.

He snatched it up and thrust it hard at Gadsby's front wheel as that hero rode down upon him.

Gadsby gave vent to a fiendish yell, and crashed over.

"Yah!" howled Bunter again; but this time not quite so triumphantly.

For Monson, taking warning by what had happened, had jumped from his saddle. He threw his machine down on the grass and rushed at the fat victim.

And Ponsonby had turned, dismounted also, and was

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hurrying back. Gadsby was on his feet, and full of fury, too. Bunter made a bolt for the hedge.

The Owl's jumping abilities were by no means remarkable. But he was spurred now to a big effort, and if that hedge had only been two and a-half feet high instead of three, he might have topped it.

But it wasn't, and he didn't!

His feet caught, and he sprawled over the top of the hedge, lately trimmed and almost solid.

Not solid enough, however, to support the weight of William George Bunter.

"Grooh!" he wailed, as he felt himself sinking in, and a million thorns—more or less—puncturing his fat body. "Ow! Yow! Lemme gerrou! Yarough! I shall die, and my ghost will haunt you rotters to the last day of your beastly lives!"

The three nuts yanked him out, paying not the slightest regard to the safety of either his clothes or his person.

And now was mental misery added to the bodily torment of William George Bunter.

The hour of doom was on the point of striking. The thievish hands of Cecil Ponsonby were within a few inches of those cherished notes.

"Lemme alone, Ponsonby! I tell you, I ain't got any more notes! That was all I had—every blessed one—and—and I left the rest in my desk! Ow, ow, ow! Lemme alone! Thieves! Rotters! Help! Murder! Fire! Help! Yoo-ooop!"

Pon had got them. He flourished the wad of notes on high in savage exultation. Among Pon's aristocratic ancestors there may have been a pirate or two, or perhaps a sprinkling of highwaymen. Anyway, he was practising robbery like one to the manner born.

"Here they are, you chaps!" he cried.

"Fat, spoofing cad!" breathed Monson, giving Bunter a kick, in his virtuous indignation.

"Beastly Ananias!" said Gadsby, not to be outdone in unctuous rectitude. And he also kicked Bunter.

"Cads! Thieves! Rotters!" wailed Bunter. "You—you— Oh, I say, Pon, don't! They're mine! I found them—no, I mean, I had them sent to me by my pater! He's got a contract to rob the War Office, you know; at least, it isn't robbery, because anyone can do the War Office! Oh, I don't mean that! What am I saying? They're mine; they ain't yours! It's enough to kill a chap. I shall never survive it, I'm sure! Oh, don't, Pon!"

Ponsonby winked at the other two young rascals.

"Seems to me, Fatty," he said, "that you've got no more real right to these notes than we have; not so much, in

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fact. You say your measly pater's been robbin' the War Office. Well, the War Office is chuckin' away the country's money, and the country's us. So even if we bag the lot we're only gettin' part of our own back, an' you can write to the old hunks to swindle someone else, an' send you some more cash, so you'll be all right, by gad!"

"Hear, hear!" cried Gadsby. "That's logic, Pon!"

"My hat! The only decent thing to be done is to collar the giddy plunder, take out what the fat cad owes us, an' send the rest to some blessed war fund!" said Monson, as virtuously indignant as either.

"I don't want to be unfair to you, Bunter," said Pon, winking at the other two again. "But you swindled us, an' you've owned up that your governor's a thievin' old scoundrel. I dare say that ain't your fault, an' no doubt the rotten way you've been brought up has helped to make it difficult for you to understand the feelin's of gentlemen like us!"

"Absolutely!" said Vavasour, who had just limped up.

Bunter imagined that he discerned a gleam of hope.

"I—I dare say there may be sus—sus—something in what you say, Pon," he answered, ready to eat any amount of dirt if he might only preserve the bulk of his treasure. "I—I quite see it—really, I do! But I'm a higher-minded chap than you think, and I don't want to be unfair to anybody—least of all my friends. We're old pals, Pon, ain't we? Look here, I'll give you a quid each if you'll let me go!"

"Right-ho! Fork it out!" said Cecil Ponsonby.

"Bub—bub—but you've got it!" burred the Owl. "I mean out of—"

A burst of derisive laughter shut him up. There was small mercy in the nuts.

"He owes us— How much does he owe us, Gaddy?" asked Pon.

Before Gadsby could reply Bunter had increased his ransom.

"I'll make it two quid!" he said, with a desperate gulp.

"Rats!" snapped Monson.

"Oh, absolutely!" said Vavasour.

"I must have something left for myself, you know," mumbled the forlorn Bunter.

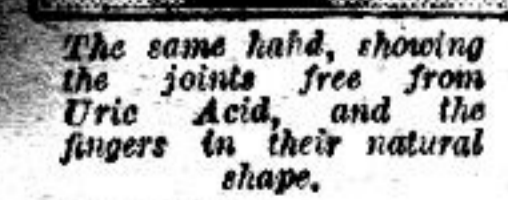
"Don't see why," said Gadsby. "You'll only go an' guzzle it, you gorgin' young hippopotamus!"

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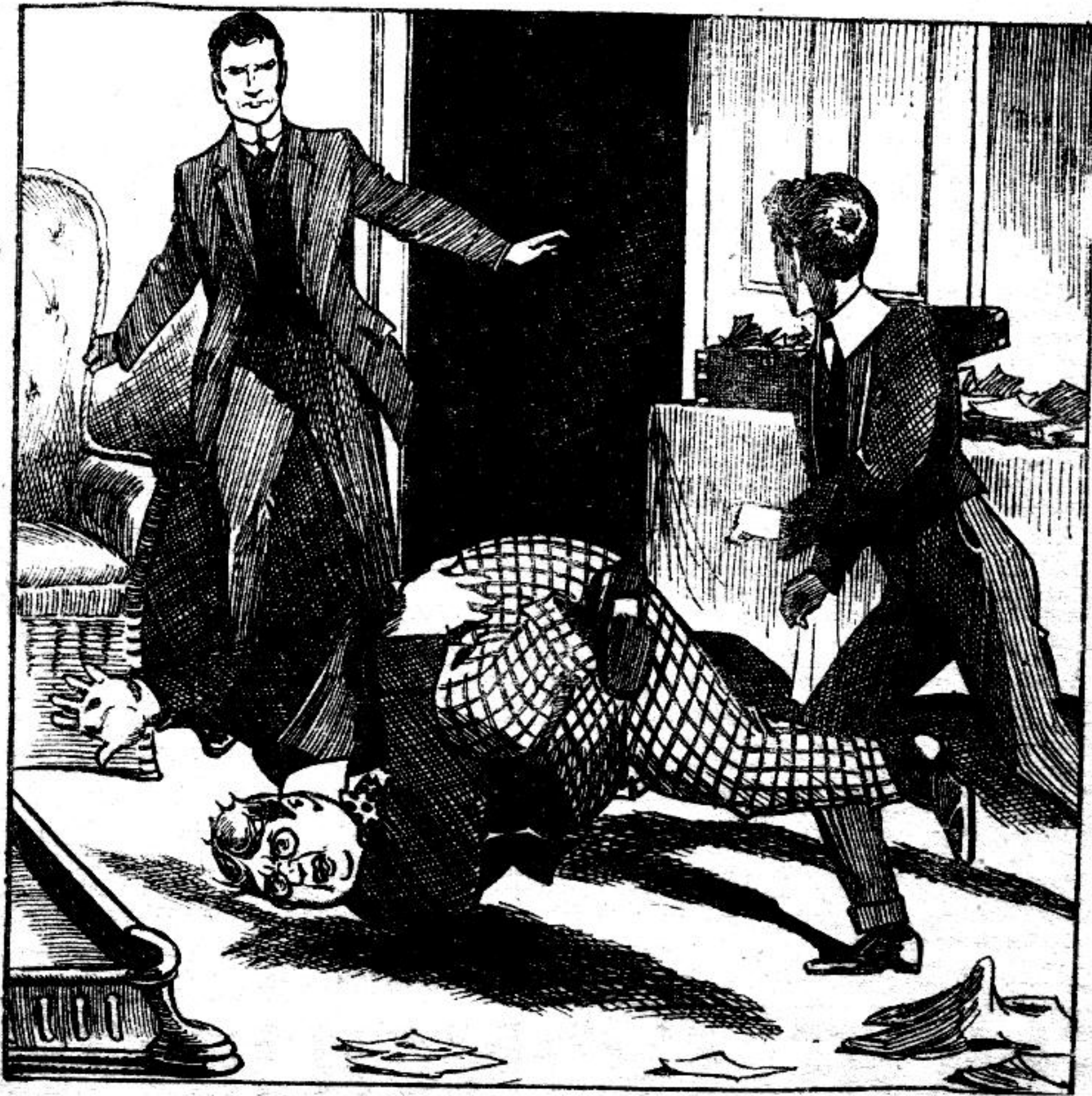
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"What does this mean?" spoke the steely voice of Mr. Que'ch from the door.
(See Chapter 5.)

Ponsonby handed Gadsby, Monson, and Vavasour three notes each; and, no doubt by accident, he took four for his own dividend.

THE 10th CHAPTER.
Bunter Will Not Tell!

"There you are. An' don't go away an' tell anybody that we didn't play the game, you fat worm!" said the genial and honourable Pon.

"Hallo, hallo, hallo!" The cheerful tones of Bob Cherry's voice came as a surprise to all the five.

"Help, Bob, old man! Help, Harry, old pal! They're robbing me, the beasts!" howled Bunter.

But even while he yelled he was thrusting into a safe hiding-place the few notes Ponsonby had returned.

"Pile in!" yelled Bob, jumping off his bike and letting it drop by the side of the road.

Harry and Frank were as quick as he.

Ponsonby & Co. were not of the stuff of which heroes are made. They were four to three—for Bunter was a non-combatant, for certain—but even with the odds they had no relish for a fight.

Like Aulus, the dictator, when the Romans were hard beset in that great battle by the dark lake, Pon looked north—

"North looked he long and hard."

For thence, if at all, might come reinforcements, perhaps with Drury or Merton as leader.

But Pon saw no Drury, no Merton; nothing but a muddy, winding road, which in the near foreground had the appearance of having lately been the scene of a cycle club's smash-up.

And Pon's heart failed him. As for Monson, Gadsby, and Vavasour, the hearts of those heroes had been ahead of Pon's in failure.

Bob Cherry seized Monson and Vavasour, and proceeded in a most businesslike manner to bang their heads together. Frank Nugent floored Gadsby, and pommelled him.

"Put up your fists, Ponsonby!" snapped Harry Wharton.

"Ow—yow! Droppit, you brute!" howled Vavasour, writhing in Bob's grasp.

"I'll jolly well slay you when I get up, Nugent!" panted Gadsby.

"Get up and fight, then, you rotter!" flashed Frank.

"Pax!" said Ponsonby.

Harry fairly glared at him.

This was beyond the limit.

"You can't come the 'kamerad' bizney with me!" said the captain of the Remove hoily.

"You're like any beastly Hun—hands up when you're cornered!"

"Don't be an utter idiot!" said Ponsonby sullenly.

"Well, for cool cheek that fairly takes the bun!" gasped Nugent.

"Bow-wow!" said Bob Cherry politely.

"What were you doing to that poor fat sweep?" asked Wharton.

"The poor porpoise is in an awful state," Nugent added.

"Absolutely!" chimed in the virtuous Vavasour.
"I—I— Oh, really, Pon, it's too thick! I've subscribed to ever so many funds, you know; I'm continually whacking out for them. I'm not mean, like some of our chaps; and I don't swank about what I've given, like Wharton and those cads!"

"You don't let your left eye know what your right ear's listenin' to—eh, Tubby?" said Ponsonby. "We twig. But two pounds don't go. Tell you what—make it three, an' we'll call quits! You tried to sneak off without cashin' up, you know. It's only right you should be fined for that."

"Besides, the fat rotter daren't let anyone know about those notes," said Monson. "There's something fishy about the way he got hold of them, I'm jolly sure!"

Bunter quailed and blanched. Ponsonby saw, and was quick to harp upon his fears.

"It wouldn't do to tell everybody everything, would it, Bunter?" he said. "Look here, you must make it three quid each. Then mum's the word!"

The groan of agony that burst from the overcharged breast of William George Bunter might have melted the heart of a Hun. But it did not melt the hearts of the Highcliffe nuts.

"I—I can't! Oh, really, Pon, I can't!"

"All right, then, my pippin! We'll collar the lot, an' send it to some giddy fund, that's all."

Pon began to cram the notes into his waistcoat-pocket.

Bunter caved in.

"I—I'll do it!" he wailed. "But it's cruel; it's beastly tough on me!"

"You do it of your own free will?" asked Gadsby.

"No, you beasts! I—I mean—oh, yes!"

Agony was plain to be read on the fat face of the nuts' victim.

"Looks as if he had been put through a mangle," said Bob solemnly.

"Only not quite so flat," said Nugent. "If Tubby had been through a giddy mangle he'd spread out wide enough to cover the road."

Bunter scowled at them. Bunter was by no means full of gratitude for this second rescue.

If he told his story the nuts would be forced to disgorge, he knew.

But how would he benefit? He would have to explain; and, once he had explained, he would not be allowed to keep even his few remaining notes.

"Ask Bunter if he's got anything to complain of before you start in to slaughter us," said Pon.

It was a bold move. But Pon was cunning, and he had read Bunter aright.

Seven pairs of eyes were fastened curiously upon William George Bunter. Pon gazed with as fixed a glare as any of the rest. He was out to bluff, and he meant to bluff well.

"Well, Bunter?" said Wharton impatiently.

"I'er—oh, really, Wharton, I must say that I never in all my life saw such chaps as you three are for butting into things that—that—that don't concern you! What's the good of making a giddy fuss, I should like to know?"

"My only Aunt Jemina Jane!" gasped Bob. "There was giddy fuss enough being made when we came up, I should say!"

"You yelled out that you were being robbed," said Wharton, fixing Bunter with a pair of eyes whose straight, stern gaze made the Owl feel very uncomfortable.

"That's so, for we heard you," said Nugent.

"If I hadn't seen with my own eyes that Tubby had wealth, I should be jolly sure the age of miracles hadn't passed," said Bob. "Who's going to believe at Greyfriars that Bunter has been robbed? Ha, ha, ha!"

"Oh, dry up, Bob! This is serious. Now, you fat worm, what made you sing out that you were being robbed if there wasn't really anything the matter?"

"I—I—I don't see why I should put up with being talked to in that abusive way, Wharton. You're not my keeper, I suppose?"

"Thank goodness, no! But you need one, and I've stood your friend many a time when you didn't deserve it."

It was true. Perhaps for just a moment Bunter's heart smote him. But gratitude never moved Billy Bunter long or far.

He looked from one to the other in bewilderment.

"Now, tell the truth, Bunter!" urged Ponsonby.

Wharton laughed harshly. He knew that it was not the truth Cecil Ponsonby wanted.

"What were they doing, you fat spoofer?" asked Bob.

"Well, they weren't exactly robbing me," answered Bunter slowly and cautiously.

"What, then?" snapped Harry.

"Just pup-pup-playing about!" stammered Bunter.

"Oh, you abject worm! I wonder why I'm such a giddy ass as to take any trouble about you?" snapped Wharton.

"So do I, old scout," said Bob Cherry.

"Leave Tubby with his dear nutty friends. I dare say they'd all like to pup-pup-play about a bit more!" grinned Nugent.

But Bunter took alarm again. The worst had not happened yet. He still had some notes left. He could not trust himself alone again with those Highcliffe rascals.

"I—I— Oh, really, you fellows, I'd rather come back with you!" he bumbled.

"And we'd rather you didn't!" said Wharton crossly.

"Much rather, Tubby!" said Frank Nugent cheerily.

"In fact, we'll see that you don't, Porpoise!" said the genial Bob.

"Oh, dear!" wailed Bunter. "Don't be beastly, you chaps! Besides, there's Toddy's bike. What are you going to do about that? You would hardly leave it lying there, I should think—and you pretending to be such chums of Toddy's!"

The Highcliffe nuts had slunk off towards their own machines. They wanted, above all, to get clear. Once that was accomplished, how much Bunter told or kept back was a matter of indifference to them.

They mounted in haste and rode off. Gadsby and Pon were in the lead. That was not Vavasour's fault. The lead was Vavasour's natural place—in a retreat. But his machine lay further back than those of the other three.

Ponsonby turned his head to shout defiance of the Greyfriars trio.

"Yah!" he yelled. "Cads! Wait and see, that's—"

Then his front wheel slewed on a greasy patch, and he barged into Gadsby.

"Ow-w-w! Yarooogh! Oh, you idiot, Pon!" howled Gaddy, as he toppled over.

Monson and Vavasour had also turned their heads. Before they realised what was happening Monson plunged wildly through the air, to land on top of Ponsonby, and Vavasour, the Highcliffe dandy, lay groaning on top of Gadsby.

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NEXT MONDAY.

"THE DESERTER!"

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"Ha, ha, ha! We've waited and we've seen!" roared Bob Cherry. "Do it again, you fellows, please! Tubby didn't see it properly, and it would be such a cheerful sight for Tubby after pup-pup-playing about with you and being—oh, beg Tubby's pardon!—not being robbed!"

The nuts were too badly shaken to attempt a reply. They were busy sorting out themselves and their machines, and telling each other, with a variety of choice epithets, exactly what each thought of the other's asinine stupidity.

"What's wrong with Toddy's jigger, Porpoise?" asked Bob.

"Oh, really, Cherry, I don't know! I'm not a low mechanic!" replied the Owl, with a sniff. "Toddy ought to be ashamed to own such a rotten thing. I reckon! The handlebars came away in my hands, and the beast of a bike pitched me off."

"I'll see to it," said Bob good-naturedly. "Come along, Franky! I shall want someone to hold it while I screw up this nut, and, of course, it would be too much to expect of a Bunter de Bunter."

"Well, of course, a fellow of my type is a bit above that sort of thing, Cherry, though I should hardly have expected you to have the sense to see it!" said the Owl, with a sniff.

Bob and Frank moved off to where the machine lay.

Bunter was about to follow them, but Harry stopped him.

"I'm going to have a bit better explanation of all this than you have given yet, Bunter," he said gravely.

"I don't see what more you have any right to know!" answered the Owl.

"Perhaps not, if you come to that. There is no very good reason why I should take a lot of trouble for a chap who lies like any Prussian, and doesn't know how to be decently grateful. But, after all, I'm the captain of your Form, and I suppose that gives me some sort of authority. And I don't want to see you run your silly fat neck into a noose."

"I suppose I can take care of myself, Wharton?"

"That's just what you can't do, you fat ass! If it hadn't been for us and Toddy, you'd have been sacked long ago!"

"You fellows think nobody has any sense but you, and nobody else has any right to any oof!" said Bunter peevishly.

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"Rats! Plenty of chaps have more oof than any of us except Inky. But you're not one of them, and you've only yourself to thank if fellows get suspicious directly they see you with more than five bob. And I dare say some chaps have more sense than we have. But you certainly ain't one of them. You're a born fool, or else a born knave—I'm not quite sure which. We've tried to believe 'fool' so far, but I'm hanged if it doesn't look jolly like 'knave' now!"

Bunter grew more and more alarmed. He did not like the notion of being thought a fool, but he was cunning enough to know that that reputation had stood him in good stead more than once.

But, alarmed though he might be, he had no intention of making a clean breast of the mystery, for that would mean losing the precious notes!

"I'm not going to tell you anything!" he said sullenly. "It's no concern of yours. But I suppose you chaps have got so used to sticking your noses into other people's affairs that you really can't help it now. A set of Nosy Parkers—Yarrough! Let me alone, you rotter!"

But Harry had done nothing more than give him a hearty shake. The Owl was positively insufferable. But he had been through enough for one day.

The shake seemed to have given Bunter an idea.

"I may have had a legacy, and I may not!" he said mysteriously. "I don't see that it's any bizney of yours, anyway!"

"Do you mean to tell me that the notes we saw were part of a legacy someone has left you?" snapped Wharton.

"I don't mean to tell you anything. And, after the way you chaps have treated me—shameful, I call it!—I don't intend to whack out my legacy to you, so you can make up your minds to that!"

"You disgusting worm!" burst out Harry furiously. "Who ever asked you to whack out to us? Go and get swindled again by that Highcliffe gang of sharpers! Go and gorge until you burst! But if I hear another word of rot from you, I'll warm you up, I promise you!"

Bunter stared in amazement. Bob and Frank, who had just come up, stared, too. Harry Wharton did not often let himself go like this.

"Hallo, hallo, hallo! What's the giddy row, old scout?" asked Bob.

"Oh, never mind! Give the fat idiot his bike——"

"Toddy's bike, you mean, Harry," said Nugent.

"What's the odds? If he smashes it up, he can pay for it—out of the blessed legacy he's never had, the fat Ananias!"

"Does he say he's had a legacy?" grinned Bob.

"Never mind what I say or what I don't say, Cherry——"

"I don't, Tubby; no one with a scrap of sense does!"

"I know what I know," said Bunter mysteriously. "Some day you chaps may be sorry for having doubted my word. I hope that bike's quite safe now?"

"It is," Bob answered. "I'm holding it. But I won't guarantee its safety or yours one moment after you hoist your fat lump of a body into the saddle."

Bunter looked at the bike very doubtfully. He did not understand that Bob was referring to his want of ability as a cyclist.

"Bar tricks, Bob, old pal!" he said.

"Oh, give him the bike and come along!" said Harry impatiently. "I'm completely fed up with the fat sweep!"

"I'll tell Toddy you're coming, Porpoise!" Bob remarked, as he handed over the machine.

"Oh, really, I—I'd rather you didn't say anything, Bob! Toddy don't know—at least, I mean, I'm not sure whether he heard me when I asked him whether he would lend me the bike."

"Thinking about Dutton, ain't you? Toddy's not deaf, that I ever heard of."

"Oh, come on, Bob!" shouted Harry, already riding towards the school.

Bob mounted and followed, unheeding the Owl's cries to wait for him.

THE ELEVENTH CHAPTER.

Skinner Is Afraid!

VERNON-SMITH was reading a local paper when Skinner came into the study which the two shared.

"Hallo, Skinner!" said the Bounder pleasantly.

"Here's something rather interesting!"

"Not to me!" said Skinner. "Not in that rag!"

And he snorted disdainfully.

It was a fact that the local papers did not, as a rule, contain much to interest the Greyfriars fellows, except when there was a report of one of their matches included. And that sort of thing did not in the least appeal to Harold Skinner.

"Oh, I think it is!" said the Bounder blandly. "It's about

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"THE WISDOM OF GUSSY!"

forged Treasury notes having been put into circulation in these parts."

The keen eyes of Herbert Vernon-Smith were on Skinner's face as he spoke. For the life of him Skinner could not help flushing, and then going pale. Back into his mind rushed that momentary suspicion of a day or two before. Was it possible that it was justified? If so—well, the sooner he got rid of the notes the better! His plan of keeping them until the holidays would not serve if they were wrong 'uns.

Skinner was no fool. He would probably, in the long run, have thought more than once or twice before he tried to pass stolen notes. He would never think of trying to pass forged ones.

But Skinner had no notion of taking the Bounder into his confidence.

"What's it to do with me?" he asked, raising his eyebrows and shrugging his shoulders in a very fair attempt to look indifferent.

"To do with you? Oh, nothing, of course!" answered the Bounder. "Only it's an interesting item of news which I thought might appeal to a fellow of your tastes."

"What tastes do you mean?" growled Skinner.

"Well, not to be rude, the taste for crookedness generally. You aren't quite the clean potato, you know, Skinney!"

Skinner grew more alarmed. The Bounder would not talk in this way unless he meant something pretty definite. And his suspicions had already been aroused. Skinner did not forget that.

"You weren't always the clean potato yourself, Smithy!" he said, with a feeble attempt at bluster.

"I was not; quite the contrary, in fact," replied the Bounder equably. "It isn't exactly cheerful to remember that one has been a rogue. Still, having been a rogue helps one now and then—in dealing with other professors of one's old trade, frinstance. Don't go yet, Skinney. I haven't half-finished!"

"I promised Snoop——"

"Tear up the scrap of paper! You're not so tied by your promises that it will hurt your conscience much. Do you recognise this?"

Skinner did at a glance.

It was that wretched pocket-book. Charred a little by contact with the smouldering coals, but not much damaged, it remained a very nasty bit of evidence indeed against both him and Bunter. Not that the Owl mattered! Skinner's chief regret just now was that he could not carry out his original plan of putting all the trouble—if trouble came—on Bunter's fat shoulders.

But the Bounder would not allow that. For one with his antecedents, the Bounder had a most uncomfortable notion of justice, even to chaps he didn't like, Skinner thought ruefully.

"It's that thing of Bunter's; nothing to do with me!" said the cad of the Remove.

"Ever seen this before?" asked the Bounder relentlessly.

It was a note he produced. That, also, Skinner recognised at once.

But, licking lips gone dry with nervousness, he lied.

"No! Where did you get it?"

"It was inside the pocket-book. Of course, I should have let Bunter have it at once, but—well, there's something distinctly suspicious about it! Unless I'm very much mistaken, it's one of those wrong 'uns!"

"Rats!" said Skinner. But Skinner's voice was very shaky, and his expression of unbelief carried no conviction to the astute mind of Herbert Vernon-Smith.

"Where did Bunter get that pocket-book?"

"How should I know? I'm not responsible for the fat bladder of lard!"

"Rather lucky for you you're not, Skinney, because it's going to be just as much as you'll fancy, and a bit over, to be responsible for your own share in this bizney!"

"I hadn't any share in it, you suspicious idiot!"

"Suspicious I am, my Harold; an idiot I certainly am not. If you are telling the truth—though miracles of that kind are hardly to be expected—so much the better for you. If you're not—no, as you're not—don't expect any help from me, however big a hole you drop into!"

"Look here, Smithy, what do you think is up?"

"There are forged notes about, and it's the duty of any loyal citizen who can give any information likely to lead to the detection of the forgers to give it. I can give you information, and I'm going to!"

"You fool!" screamed Skinner. "Do you think I forged the notes, or that that fat ass Bunter did? Perhaps you'll explain how we managed it?"

"I know very well that neither you nor Bunter forged them. You'll only have to account for possessing them. That's a penal offence, and I'm not so sure that you can

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explain it without bringing yourselves into peril of the law in another way.

Skinner's lower jaw dropped. How much did the Bounder know, or was it all merely suspicion?

"You'd better make a clean breast of it, Skinner. I'm going to move in the matter, and when I do I sha'n't be able to consider either your safety or Bunter's, you know!"

"I've nothing to tell you," said Skinner sullenly.

"It's your last chance!"

"Oh, hang you! Who are you to talk as if you held me in the hollow of your hand? You're as big a sweep as—as I am, anyway!"

"Not quite, Skinner, I think," said the Bounder blandly.

"Because I've washed since I tackled my last chimney!"

That speech would have left Bunter wondering. But Skinner understood. Whatever the Bounder had done in the past was no secret, and he was going as straight as any fellow at Greyfriars now.

Skinner went, and outside the door was surprised to find himself groggy in the knees. Perhaps he scarcely realised till then just how frightened he was.

Something must be done! And to tell Bunter would be worse than useless. There was no sage counsel in the Owl, and when he got frightened he let things out.

"Hallo, Skinney! I say, old man, I want a word or two with you."

It was Bunter who spoke, and Bunter was about the last person Skinner desired to talk to at that moment—not that he wanted to talk to anyone.

"Oh, buzz off, you fat dummy!" he said irritably.

Bunter did not buzz off. A great idea had come into the mind of William George during the still night watches. He meant to put that idea into execution. It had for basis the inducing Skinner to share his losses at the hands of the Highcliffe nuts the day before.

It was essentially a wild idea, but then Bunter's ideas were never remarkable for sanity. In ordinary circumstances, Skinner would have been just about as likely to give up even one of those notes as our one great statesman to surrender the most minute portion of his salary!

"Oh, come along, Skinney! I simply must speak to you, and there's no one in our study except Lonzy. We can turn him out."

Skinner went. After all, it was worth while to find out whether the Owl knew anything.

Lonzy was not there. The two had the small apartment to themselves.

"Look here, Skinney, I've had losses—heavy losses!" said Bunter impressively.

"It wasn't any of your fat you lost, then," replied Skinner, with a grin.

"Rats! I'm not fat, only well-proportioned and plump. But never mind about that now. I've only got about five quid left!"

"That's your funeral, not mine!" said Skinner. "How did you expect it would last out when you spent two or three quid every day at the tuck-shop?"

"I didn't!" howled Bunter. "I've only had a snack or two—just enough to stave off the pangs of hunger! I've been robbed!"

"Serve you right!" snapped Skinner.

But Skinner was beginning to form a plan. He was likely to prove much more open to persuasion than Bunter had dared to hope. Not in his wildest dreams could the Owl have imagined Harold Skinner parting with the whole of his share of the plunder!

Yet it was just this that the noble and generous Skinner contemplated doing!

"Oh, really, Skinney! That ain't much like a pal!"

"Well, who robbed you, fatty?"

"Those Highcliffe beasts—Pon and that gang."

"You mean that you played with them, and they rooked you?" said Skinner, who was not without experience of the ways of Pon and his merry band of nuts.

"No, I don't. At least—yes, they did that. But they robbed me, too."

And Bunter told his tale of woe—or as much of it as he thought fit to tell. He did not mention the names of Wharton, Cherry, and Nugent, though.

Skinner knew Billy Bunter well enough not to expect the whole truth from him; and, indeed, Harold Skinner was not a person who cared much about naked truth at any time.

"They do seem to have treated you pretty badly," he said, with more sympathy than Bunter had anticipated. "But that's not my affair, is it? And it's middling cool cheek for you to think that I'm going to shell out anything to you because you were ass enough to go among the Egyptians and get spoiled."

"What Egyptians?" asked Bunter. "Pon—oh, I twig! But the chink was all mine by rights, you know, Skinney!"

"That's a thing that's been worrying me a good deal, Bunter," said Skinner.

And he really looked worried. It was quite easy—it needed no acting—for he really was worried.

THE MAGNET LIBRARY.—No. 466.

NEXT MONDAY.

"THE DESERTER!"

EVERY MONDAY,

The "Magnet" LIBRARY.

ONE PENNY.

"What's been worrying you, Skinney? Do you mean the way you jumped on me and made me hand over?"

"Yes; and the doubt whether we had any right to the cash at all, you know."

It was small wonder that Billy Bunter opened his eyes widely. Satan rebuking sin—Saul among the prophets—Harold Skinner with a conscientious objection to keeping any money he could lay hold of!

Bunter did not quite realise that Skinner's conscientious objection was only a little less real than those of the strange beings who beseech tribunals to write them down cowards!

"Of course, we had a right to it!" gasped Bunter. "Ain't findings keepings? At least, I had a right, if you hadn't. Come to think of it, you were a bit grasping, Skinney."

"I almost think so myself," said Skinner meekly. He was half-inclined to talk about a change of heart, but he thought, on the whole, that sort of thing would be rather wasted upon an animal like Bunter.

"You'd better hand me over the lot," suggested Bunter with a fat chuckle.

"Oh, I don't know about that. It's a whack of money, and—well, very likely I sha'n't feel so bothered in mind about it by to-morrow. I've noticed that before."

So had Bunter. He considered it best to strike while the iron of that strange thing—the conscience of Harold Skinner—was hot.

"Oh, come now, Skinney, play up!" he said wheedlingly.

"Look here, Bunty, if I hand you over the money, it's on conditions," replied Skinner.

Bunter blinked behind his round glasses. He was ready to assent to almost any condition Skinner could make. His mouth watered as dreams of prolonged gorges floated before the eyes of his imagination.

The conditions were announced and agreed to. There was one of them Bunter did not relish; and when he agreed to it he did so with a mental reservation to the effect that he was not promising to carry it out at once—or, indeed, at any particular time.

But Skinner was more than a match for Bunter in cunning.

He marched the Owl to No. 6 Study, pushed open the door, taking care that he himself remained unseen, and thrust Bunter in.

Bunter now had all the notes, and Harold Skinner had Bunter's promise never to say a word about his share in the affair—for what that promise might be worth. Bunter had also undertaken to claim the pocket-book.

THE TWELFTH CHAPTER.

Bunter Is Also Afraid!

BETTER go and ask the Bounder what he thinks about it," said Frank Nugent. "He's pretty wide, and he may be able to give us a leg-up."

The Famous Five and Peter Todd had been in consultation for best part of half-an-hour. Squiff, invited to join the council, had refused flatly when told that its object was to see that Bunter did not get too deeply into trouble. The Australian junior was of opinion that labour for Bunter was labour in vain. Bob had suggested calling in Monty Newland; but Johnny Bull said he reckoned Newland had had more than enough of what Bunter considered gratitude when he pulled the Owl out of the scrape with the moneylender at Courtfield.

Even Peter Todd could not think of anything practical to do.

"But I know the legacy yarn is a beastly Prussianism," said Peter. "I should have heard about it if it had been true. Besides, Bunter is under age, and he wouldn't be allowed to handle a legacy."

They adjourned at length to Smithy's study.

The Bounder grinned when they told him what was the trouble.

"Yes; I rather fancy I can throw some light on it," he said. "As a matter of fact, I was thinking of taking the case up alone, though not precisely out of consideration for the dear Bunter, who deserves to get it in the neck, by Jove, if ever a chap did! See this?"

He handed over the red pocket-book, and told them the story of it. Then he showed them the counterfeit note, and also the paragraph in the local paper.

"I think I begin to see," said Peter Todd.

"Hanged if I do!" growled Johnny Bull.

"The notseeefulness is terrific, as far as I am personally concerned," purred Inky.

"It ain't exactly as clear as mud to me," said Bob, wrinkling his forehead.

"Go on, Smithy!" said Harry cagerly. "I begin to get

the hang of it. Those notes were in the pocket-book, of course, and Bunter and Skinner—"

"No positive evidence against Skinner," cut in Vernon-Smith. "He hasn't been seen with a wad of notes."

"Too slim for that," growled Johnny Bull. "But he was in it, you bet!"

"I think so. My notion is that they found the pocket-book, and agreed to divide the plunder. Bunter splashed about with his half. I don't doubt that he was paymaster for that little expedition to Wethersden for our joint benefit. I doubt very much whether he intended to be, though."

"Skinner wouldn't swank round with the notes—not his line," said Nugent.

"No. As the villain of the piece Skinner can knock spots out of Bunter every time. But there's more to it than I've told you yet. I rather fancy I know where the forgers are doing their work!"

Harry Wharton gave a prolonged whistle of surprise. Bob Cherry gazed wonderingly at the Bounder. Peter Todd passed his hand over his brow as if thinking hard.

"Don't you know, Bull?"

"Hanged if I do, Smithy! How on earth should I?"

"Only by using what you don't appear to have—a thinking apparatus! I guess De Courcy would jump at it if he heard what you've heard."

"I smell a rat!" cried Johnny. "That house where they wouldn't give us any petrol—where the chap threatened us with a revolver—the machines going in the basement. I've got it now!"

"Correct," said the Bounder, smiling.

"Then—well, I don't quite know—but I suppose that it couldn't really be called theft, Smithy, because the notes are worthless?" said Harry Wharton slowly.

The Bounder chuckled.

"Blessed if I ever saw another chap like you, Wharton!" he said. "You look after that fat ass as if he were the apple of your eye, instead of being an intolerable general nuisance! Todd's nearly as bad as you; but I must say Todd's way of looking after him appeals to me more."

Harry flushed. But he saw Vernon-Smith's keen eyes grow softer; and suddenly the resentment in him died down. The Bounder might be almost as hard on the surface as ever; but underneath there was a soft spot for just a few fellows. And Wharton knew, somehow, that among those few he held first place.

"But it don't amount to stealing, does it, Smithy?" asked Bob.

"You're another of 'em, Cherry! I don't know whether they can be said to have stolen the notes. But they stole the pocket-book. It may not be worth much; but it has a value. And don't forget that Mrs. Mimble holds two or three of those notes! The old girl isn't to be a loser, I suppose?"

"I say, Smithy, I'll come along with you to the police-station," volunteered Johnny Bull, thinking little of Bunter and Skinner, it was evident. "We might fetch out the Caterpillar, too. He's a lazy—"

Johnny stopped short, for at that moment the door was thrust open and Billy Bunter was propelled into the study.

"Hallo, hallo, hallo!" said Bob. "Here's the corpus delicti!"

"What are you calling me names for, Cherry?" asked Bunter peevishly. "Oh, I see you've got visitors, Smithy! I'll come another time."

But Johnny Bull had his back to the door, and outside waited Harold Skinner.

"There's no time like the present, Bunter," said the Bounder, grinning. "Make up your mind to a full confession, and we'll try to manage so that the sentence sha'n't be more than ten years or so."

"Taking into consideration your previous bad character," said Peter Todd grimly.

Bunter looked wildly from one to the other. These fellows knew something, it was evident.

"Was it anything about a red pocket-book, Bunt?" asked the Bounder blandly.

"Ye-es—a red pocket-book, Smithy," answered the Owl, hardly knowing what he said. "It ain't Skinney's, you know, it's mine. Skinney don't know anything about it. He never saw the thing."

"Go on!" said Vernon-Smith. "Can you keep count, Todd?"

"That's two, ain't it?" said Peter.

"Two what?" faltered Bunter.

"Thumping lies!" rapped out the head of Study No. 7.

"Oh, really, Toddy! You ought to know me better by this time!"

"I do, Porpoise, better than you seem to think!"

"So that red pocket-book's yours, is it?" asked Wharton sharply. "Where did you get it? Tell us that!"

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Bunter looked at him, and blinked. He looked at Bob Cherry, and blinked again. His eyes travelled round the circle of faces, and on every face, duffer though he was, he read something that made him feel very uneasy.

"I—I—oh, look here, you're too rough on me, you chaps!" he said pathetically. "I—I'm a rather nervous fellow, you know, and you confuse me so that I don't know what I'm saying. What I meant to say was that the pocket-book ain't mine at all, it's Skinney's! At least, I suppose it's his; but I shouldn't wonder if he hadn't any real right to it!"

"I've lost count, Smithy," said Peter Todd. "I'm only human, and they flow too thick and fast!"

"Why, here are Courtenay and the Caterpillar!" cried Frank Nugent, who was standing by the window.

THE THIRTEENTH CHAPTER.

Clearing It Up!

A MINUTE or two later Frank Courtenay and Rupert De Courcy had joined the Greyfriars fellows.

There were few greetings. It was evident that the Highcliffe pair brought news of no small importance.

While the attention of the rest was centred upon them Billy Bunter slunk out of the room.

But in the corridor he was collared at once by Skinner.

"You fat beast!" stormed Skinner. "I heard you! What did you promise me, eh?"

"I—I—oh, really, Skinney, it's no good talking about silly things like promises!" panted Bunter. "Don't choke me, you cad! Yooop! Leggo! You'd much better think of something to do to save us both from going to prison, for it's my belief those rotters know all about the bizney, and mean to give us up to the police!"

Skinner released the Owl, and staggered back.

He saw plainly now that all chance of keeping his share in the affair a secret had vanished like snow under a warm sun. It was a question whether the bigger share of the guilt would not be reckoned his, Bunter being such an ass.

A judge and jury might take a different view as to the relative shares of guilt. But the thought of a judge and jury was small comfort to the wretched and bewildered Skinner.

His mind cleared more speedily than Bunter's, however. In a few seconds Harold Skinner was himself again.

"Give me those notes, you idiot!" he snapped. "There's only one thing to be done; they must be burned at once! Then no one can prove anything against us."

"Bub—bub—but I—I—I can't, really, Skinney! All that money—oh, I can't part with it!"

"Fathead! Burbling donkey! It's not money at all; it's just waste-paper! Hand over! Is there a good fire in No. 7?"

Billy Bunter mumbled something as his confederate snatched the notes from his grasp. The tears were running down Bunter's fat cheeks. All his dreams of gorging to an unlimited extent were gone. He could hardly bear it.

Skinner dashed off—just in time to be too late! For Peter Todd had tumbled to the Owl's escape, and had rushed out to see Skinner bolting into No. 7 like a startled rabbit into its warren.

The notes were on the fire before Peter could seize the cad's arm. But Toddy snatched them off.

Mad with rage, Skinner struck furiously at Peter's face, staggering him, and grabbed at the notes in his hand. But Peter's grip held firm. And now in the doorway appeared the three Colonials—Squiff, Tom Brown, and Delarey.

"What's up, Toddy?" asked Squiff.

"Better come into No. 6, and bring him with you, you chaps," said Peter. "I'd rather not touch the worm. But I'll bring Bunter along."

Vernon-Smith's and Skinner's joint study was crowded. But room was found for the new-comers, and, in order that the leaders of the Remove should all have their share in the decision as to what was best to be done, Mark Linley, Rake, Newland, and Bulstrode were fetched in.

The Highcliffe fellows had indeed brought news!

"Pon and Gaddy arrested for trying to pass forged notes!" gasped Rake. "Oh, my hat! That's a nasty bizney for Highcliffe, Courtenay! I'm not crowing, mind you!"

"Better not crow till you know it all!" said Frank Courtenay, with a grim-set face. "It's nasty for us, but I'm not so sure that it won't be a deal nastier for Greyfriars when the whole truth comes out—if it ever does. I don't want it to, for your sakes; but, after all, that rotter Pon's my cousin, and—"

"You haven't heard the whole yarn yet, Courtenay," said Harry Wharton, frowning. "We've some beastly rotters at Greyfriars; but I don't think we've any highwaymen!"

"What do you mean, Wharton?" snapped the Highcliffe leader.

"Don't get your wool off, Franky," drawled the Caterpillar. "No good being surprised at anything the merry Pon does, by gad!"

The whole story was told, to the accompaniment of many exclamations and with much questioning.

"What's to be done?" asked Courtenay, looking at Bunter and Skinner with contempt beyond words.

"Poor beasts!" murmured the Caterpillar. "Don't be too hard on them, Franky, old son! They hadn't your advantages, you know, bein' brought up to the stern morality."

"Oh, dry up, Rupert!" groaned his chum. "I don't want to be too rough on the worms. They've got to get it in the neck, of course; but these fellows will see to that. We can't say a word for Ponsonby after what he's done. That's what's worrying me. And he'd never have had the chance to do it but for these two."

"There's Smithson down below," said De Courcy. "P'raps he has better news. Can't say it would grieve me greatly if the merry Pon had to find out for himself whether stone walls a prison make, as some poet chap or other said they didn't, by gad! But—"

Smithson came dashing in. "They've worked the oracle somehow, Courtenay!" he said breathlessly. "Told a dashed lot of thumpers, I dare say—but that's nothing at all to Pon and Gaddy. Anyway, they've made some giddy excuse. Mobby backed 'em up. Pon ought to ask the worm to his place for the holidays after that, I should say!"

The Bounder took the scorched notes from Peter Todd's hand, dropped them on the fire, and pressed them down with his heel.

"Here, I say!" cried Peter, aghast. "It's all serene, old chap!" said the Bounder, gripping Peter's shoulder. "No one's responsible but me. All I ask of the rest of you is keeping your mouths shut. The things had no value. I suppose I'm compounding a felony; but I've done worse things than that in my time."

"You're frank, by gad!" said the Caterpillar. But his face told that he was with Vernon-Smith all the way. Perhaps he and Bob Cherry were the only other fellows there who would have done what the Bounder had done off their own bats.

"Now," said the Bounder, "I want you and Bull, De Courcy, to come with me to the police-station at Courtfield!"

"No, don't—don't, Smithy!" wailed Bunter, falling on his knees, and clasping his hands in entreaty. "I'll never do such a thing again! I swear I won't!"

"Ass!" hissed Skinner, who saw that it was not to denounce

him and his fat fellow-criminal that the journey was to be made.

"You aren't in this, Porpoise," explained Peter Todd. "These chaps are going to put the kybosh on the other villains. We'll attend to you and Skinner!"

"Oh!" gasped Bunter, in relief. "Well, I must say they deserve it. Putting temptation in a fellow's way like that! And if it hadn't been for me," he added, beginning to get back his self-conceit, "they might never have been caught at all!"

"Smithy had a little to do with it, too, I fancy," grinned Bob.

"Pooh! Smithy—"

The Owl stopped short, for Vernon-Smith's eyes were upon him, and they made him feel uncomfortable. He was made to feel much more uncomfortable before that business was allowed to pass into the limbo of things half-forgotten. Pon & Co. had also some nasty times to go through. So, of course, had Skinner. It should have been a lesson for all of them. Whether it was to be, the future would show. Probably not!

As for the note-forgers, they were rounded up expeditiously and—to themselves—quite unexpectedly, thanks to the information given to the police by the three juniors who went over that wall. There was no difficulty in inducing the police to keep dark the names of their informers either. It was a case of "From information received," and the inspector got no end of praise, which he did not share with the trio, and which they had not the slightest desire to share with him!

"It's what they call poetic justice," said Frank Nugent. "Every chap who behaved like a wrong 'un in that bizney got it in the neck, more or less. Not all he deserved, but a bit to be going on with, anyway!"

"And someone took those notes off Mrs. Mumble," said Johnny Bull. "Must have been the Bounder, I guess. Well, he can afford it; but I call it jolly decent of him, all the same!"

"The Bounder's one of the best chaps going!" said Harry Wharton.

"The decentfulness of the esteemed and ludicrous Bounder is—"

"Terrific!" grinned Bob. "He's the chap I'm going to when I'm next in hot water, anyway!"

THE END.

OUR NOTICE COLUMN.

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- 2.—All notices must be written—one word in each space—on the form below, and if more than 24 words are needed, another form must be obtained. But we will accept one form from the "Gem" and one from the MAGNET, or the forms from back numbers may be used.
- 3.—The charge is 3d. for any notice not exceeding 24 words. If exceeding 24 words, 6d. The fee must be paid by penny stamps pinned—not stuck—in the space provided.
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5.—Insertion at any specific date will not be guaranteed, and no notice can be expected to appear in less than five weeks from its receipt, while it may have to be held back much longer. Nor will the Editor undertake to insert any notice in the exact form received. Space is precious, and readers should do their utmost to keep notices as short as possible. The argument that more than 3d. has been paid will not be heeded.

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Our Great School Serial.

THE FOURTH FORM AT FRANKLINGHAM.

By Richard Randolph.

THE PREVIOUS INSTALMENTS TOLD HOW

HARRY GRANVILLE, captain of Franklingham School, received an unpleasant shock when his cousin and enemy, CONRAD HARDING CARDENDEN, turned up there. Cardenden's object, as his cousin has good reason to suspect, is that of doing Granville a bad turn, in order that the uncle who is the guardian of both fellows may renounce him. On the same day as that on which Cardenden arrives there also turns up a very peculiar new boy, a junior named JOHNNY GOGGS. Goggs forms an alliance with BLOUNT, TRICKETT, and WATERS, also members of the Fourth Form, and the other juniors gradually come to see that Goggs is by no means the duffer they had taken him to be. He is a clever ventriloquist, distinguishes himself at footer, and plays a big part in putting his House on top in the school sports. He incurs Cardenden's hatred, and for his part is keenly on the watch to see that the new senior works no harm to Granville. Goggs has been put in Coventry by the juniors for an offence largely imaginary; but ALLARDYCE, the leader of Hayter's juniors, who has been mainly responsible for the sentence, walks across on Sunday afternoon and announces that he has seen his mistake. Goggs discovers a plot against Granville, and takes measures in advance to thwart it. He, Blount, Trickett, Waters, Allardyce, and another junior, Bliss, arrange a run-out on Sunday evening, and some fun in the ventriloquial way. But Goggs' real object in going is to watch lest Granville should come to harm through being too unsuspecting.

(Now read on.)

Out for a Lark.

He could not tell them all about it. They might grumble later on at his not having told them, should anything happen. But that was a minor matter. It was quite out of the question that he should give away Granville's secret.

They would go with him for the sake of a lark with Jarker and Buswell. But it was a mere chance whether they would even see the cabman and the constable. It ought to be possible to shepherd them towards the bridge—to have them in readiness in case they were needed.

"Now then, Goggles! You've had time enough to think it over, surely!" said Allardyce.

"It is not my habit to leap before looking," answered Goggs. "Has it occurred to you fellows that in order to enjoy this lark we must be guilty of the serious offence of breaking bounds?"

"Oh, rats! We'll chance that. It's easy enough to get out, when you know the way, and I'll bet ten to one we're not caught."

"Very well. I have another objection. Does it seem a proper and profitable manner of spending Sunday evening?"

"But it isn't really Sunday evening, old man," argued Bags. "That's over when we go to bed."

"And so, for all practical purposes, this may be considered as a Monday morning enterprise? I see," answered Goggs thoughtfully. "It is a new point of view for me, and I should like time to consider it."

"Oh, hang all that!" cried Allardyce. "Will you go, or won't you? That's the question. We can't do anything

without you. We don't want to spy on cook and her fancy men—only to have a lark."

"I will go," replied Goggs promptly.

His decision was hailed with delight. Allardyce rushed off to tell the great secret to the faithful Bliss.

Bliss came across a quarter of an hour later with an invitation to tea for the quartet.

"We mustn't talk about to-night," he said, "because the other chaps in our den don't know. But they're willing to be friends again, and all that. I say, I'm no end obliged to your chaps for letting me into it. It's the jolliest thing I ever struck. Do a bit of ventriloquism now, will you, Goggs?"

"Not just now, I think, Bliss," answered the new junior.

But less than a minute later a voice called from down below in the quad—or so it seemed:

"Are you going to stay there all day, Misery?"

"All serene, Dicebox! I'm coming!" shouted Bliss, and hurried off.

Goggs looked as solemn as a graven image. He continued to look solemn when Bliss burst in again.

"You boulder! It took me in completely!"

"Wasn't Dicebox there?" asked Wagtail.

"No! It was this old owl!"

"Was it, Goggles?"

"Bliss says so, Wagtail. It would be rude for me to contradict Bliss, even though he has called me an owl. Yes, I think it must have been me. You will recall that our friend Bliss asked for it."

Allardyce had received a hamper the evening before, and the tea was a sumptuous one.

"I say, you know, Goggles, if there's anything that's particularly good for the—the—oh, whatever you—"

Bags kicked Allardyce under the table. He had come very near indeed to letting out the secret. The two who were not in it gazed in surprise at his face as he realised what an escape he had had.

"For the bad wrist, you know," he went on, rather lamely, "don't mind saying so, there's a good chap, and we'll go easy with it, so that you can have a good whack."

"Thank you, Allardyce, but I do not think I will attempt to monopolise anything; though I should like a piece more ham if everybody isn't too busy to cut it up for me," replied Goggs.

Bed-time for the juniors was half an hour earlier than usual on Sunday evenings, and by nine o'clock a good many of the fellows in the junior dormitories were asleep.

But the half dozen adventurers were not. Five of them were looking forward with eagerness to the lark they expected. The sixth—Goggs—was wondering whether Granville had gone or meant to go, and how he could lead his little band to the right place at the right time, and keep them out of sight when he got them there.

For that matter, a glimpse of Granville would be quite enough to make them all ready to hide. But the problem of getting them there did not look easier as the time drew nearer.

At five minutes past nine the four slipped out of bed. They had got in with most of their clothes still on.

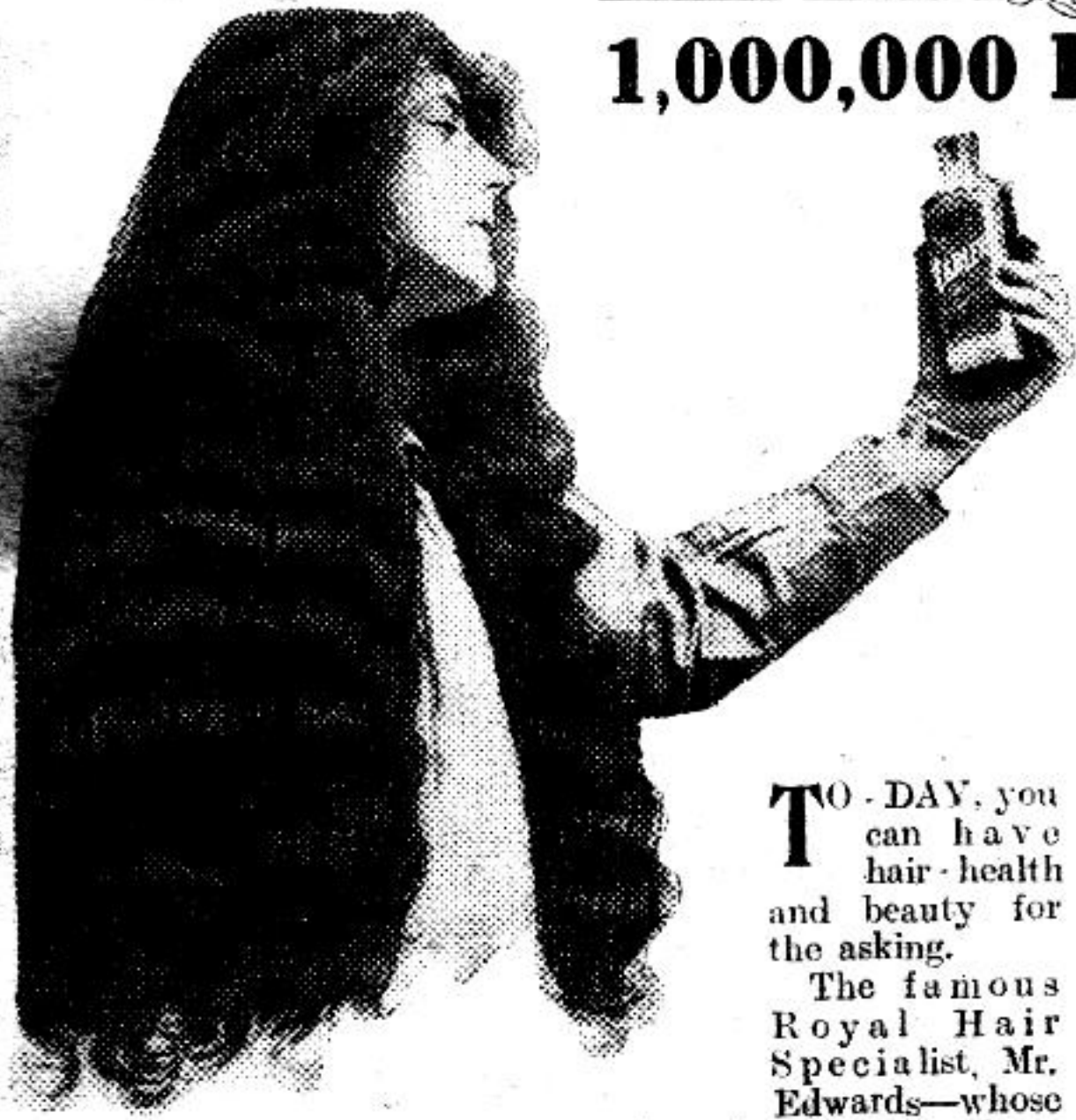
By ten minutes past they had joined the pair from Hayter's, and were clear of the school premises.

(Continued on page iv of cover.)

THE SECRET OF HAIR-BEAUTY

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"It is my most earnest ambition," says Mr. Edwards, "to give every man and woman an opportunity to prove for themselves what 'Harlene Hair-Drill' can actually do—has done already, in thousands of cases—to improve their hair both in quantity and quality. Just now, when hair troubles are more common than ever, I think my free offer of another 1,000,000 'Harlene' Outfits is most timely, and I anticipate a very great demand for them. I am positive that 'Harlene Hair-Drill' is the true secret of hair beauty and health, and I am anxious that everyone should at least give it a fair trial."

EASY LESSONS AND EXERCISES IN HAIR CULTURE.

It is Mr. Edwards' opinion, based on his unique and extensive experience as a Royal Hair Specialist, that a great deal of present-day hair trouble is due to lack of knowledge as to how to acquire and preserve healthy, beautiful hair. "Harlene Hair-Drill" is the Royal road to Hair Beauty. It occupies only two minutes a day, and you can try it now, free of cost. It has already won golden opinions from all who have tried and are still practising it.

If you suffer from:

- | | |
|---------------------|----------------------|
| 1. Scalp Irritation | 7. Over-Dryness |
| 2. Partial Baldness | 8. Scurf or Dandruff |
| 3. Straggling Hair | 9. Loss of Colour |
| 4. Falling Hair | 10. Unruly Wiry Hair |
| 5. Splitting Hairs | 11. Hair Thinning |
| 6. Over-Greasiness | 12. Arrested Growth |
- accept Mr. Edwards' offer to-day and try it for your hair's sake.

Here is what is offered free to-day to 1,000,000 applicants:

1. A bottle of "Harlene," the true liquid food and tonic for the hair.
2. A packet of the marvellous hair and scalp cleansing "Cremex" Shampoo, which prepares the head for "Hair-Drill."
3. A bottle of "Uzon" Brilliantine, which gives a final touch of beauty to the hair, and is especially beneficial to those whose scalp is inclined to be dry.
4. A copy of the new edition of the secret "Hair-Drill" Manual.

Once you have experienced the splendid hair-growing and hair-improving properties of "Harlene," after a Free Trial, you will always be able to obtain future supplies from your local chemist at 1/-, 2/6, or 4/6 per bottle. (In solidified form "Harlene" is now ready for Soldiers, Sailors, Travellers, etc., sold in tins at 2/9, with full directions as to use.) "Uzon" Brilliantine costs 1/- and 2/6 per bottle, and "Cremex"



There are thousands of people to-day suffering from Hair troubles, who, by accepting the splendid Hair Beauty Gift offered here, could unquestionably not only overcome these troubles, but greatly enhance the appearance of their hair. One million "Harlene Hair-Drill" Outfits are to-day offered to the public, and you, if you take pride in your appearance, will accept one of these Four-fold Gift parcels.

Shampoo Powders 2d. each, or 1/- per box of seven shampoos.

Any or all of the preparations will be sent post free on receipt of price direct from Edwards' Harlene, Limited, 20, 22, 24 and 26, Lamb's Conduit Street, London, W.C. Carriage extra on foreign orders. Cheques and P.O.'s should be crossed. Write to-day.

POST THIS FREE GIFT FORM

Fill in and post to EDWARDS' HARLENE, Ltd.,
20, 22, 24 & 26, LAMB'S CONDUIT ST., LONDON, W.C.

Dear Sirs,—Please send me your Free "Harlene" Four-fold Hair-growing Outfit as described above. I enclose 4d. in stamps for postage to any part of the world. (Foreign stamps accepted.)

Name.....

Address.....

THE FOURTH FORM AT FRANKLINGHAM.

(Continued from page 20.)

"It's beastly light, isn't it?" asked Wagtail. "We'd better keep close to the hedge, or we'll be spotted by some one."

There were very few people about, even when they reached the village, and the prospect of finding cook and her suitors began to appear less rosy. They felt that they had made just a little too sure of it, and began to grow rather despondent. The church clock chimed half-past nine just as they reached the Crown and Sceptre, which stood within fifty yards of the bridge over the railway.

"Oh, I say! It's Bussy to-night, not Jarker!" said Bags. "I'm afraid cook's a giddy old flirt!"

They drew back under a tree opposite the inn, for it would not be well that the constable should see them.

Someone came out of the Crown and Sceptre at that moment, and a flood of light poured from the door. It fell full upon P.-c. Buswell, stalking proudly along, with the relict of the late William Green, A.B., hanging lovingly upon his arm.

"Where's Aminadab?" asked Tricks.

"Don't you go for to be so blessed familiar with my name, Master Trickett!"

"Is that you, or is it really old Jarker, Goggles?" whispered Allardyce.

Goggs did not answer. But the voice of Jarker said:

"There they go! And 'er as good as promised to me! As good as promised, she was, and now 'angin' on to a fat lot of a bobble, good for nothin' but drawin' 'is wages at the expense of us 'ard-workin' men!"

"Don't take no notice," they heard Buswell say to cook. "He's a low feller, as don't know no better."

But cook was annoyed, and had no intention of letting that taunting voice go unanswered. She faced round towards the place whence it seemed to proceed.

"Don't hide yourself, Mr. Jarker!" she said hotly. "Come out and tell your lies in the open! As good as promised, indeed! That I never was, an' never looked upon you as no more than a friend, which I don't now, not by long odds!"

But Mr. Jarker did not show himself. Though he was not far away, he did not hear. For he sat in the tap-room of the Crown and Sceptre with a pot of beer before him, designing to drown in malt liquor the wound given to his tender heart by the sight of Mrs. Green in the company of his rival.

Goggs, while talking thus in Jarker's tones, was still on the watch. If Granville had gone to meet the anonymous letter-writer he must be very close at hand now. There was little danger of anything happening to him on the railway bridge, for at the moment several people were passing.

"Come along, my dear!" said Buswell coaxingly. "The man Jarker ain't worth the breath you're a-wastin' on 'im."

A bark sounded. Everyone who heard recognised it as Scamp's, though it wasn't.

"Oh, drat that dog! 'E's always turnin' up when 'e ain't wanted!" said Buswell.

"Now, then, Scamp! What's the matter with you?"

"Hang it, there's Grayson!" whispered Bliss.

A giggle from Tricks enlightened him.

"My word, if old Goggles isn't a knock-out!" he said admiringly.

But Goggs' heart was not in the game. He was watching—watching all the time.

And now he saw something. He saw Granville, and with him the purple-nosed fellow who had been in the barn the afternoon before!

Not So Funny, After All!

The rest saw, too. Buswell and cook had moved on, the constable in a very nervous state on account of Scamp's supposed presence in the rear.

Granville and Mr. Brighton Fortescue passed into the Crown and Sceptre together. They did not go in at the front, but by a side door. The light from a lamp fixed to the wall of the inn shone full upon them for a second, and there was no mistaking them.

"Well, I'm hanged!" said Bags, drawing a deep breath. "I'd never have believed it of old Granville!"

"Pub-haunting on a Sunday evening!" returned Allardyce, with just a touch of superiority, as of one belonging to a House whose prefects could not possibly be guilty of such a crime as this.

"Excuse me," put in Goggs, "but I understand it to be—for practical purposes—Monday morning! If that is true for us, it should be true for Granville."

"No, it's not. Because he hasn't been to bed yet," said Bags. "Oh, I say, old man, I wish we hadn't come! I'd fifty times rather not have seen."

"With a rotten outsider like that, too," added Wagtail. "Don't you think you're taking too much for granted?" said Tricks. "I suppose a fellow may go into a pub without meaning to get screwed, or even to drink anything? And I'm not going to believe Granville's a pub-haunter until I've had a jolly sight more evidence of it than this!"

Goggs squeezed the arm of Tricks. He could have hugged Bliss when that worthy said:

"That's the style, Tricks! I reckon it's up to us to have a little more faith in a fellow that we've always known to be dead straight."

"I didn't really mean that he was a regular pub-haunter, of course," said Allardyce, a trifle abashed.

Goggs wondered what it all meant. Granville, probably did not care to be seen talking to this shady customer on the bridge, he thought, and had agreed to go into the Crown and Sceptre with him. Probably the fellow was lodging there, and he might have a private room. But even so the fact considered that Granville was doing a foolish thing, from every point of view, and he felt very anxious.

"See here, I've had enough of this," said Allardyce. "Let's be getting back. It's not the ventriloquism that's wrong; old Goggs does it no end well. But somehow it wouldn't seem funny after this."

They started for the school. But something happened to delay them.

Along the road came two tall figures, and the juniors huddled up close together under a hedge, with their hearts in their mouths, for they heard the voices of their House-masters, and as the two drew nearer, could see old Scamp paddling along behind Mr. Grayson.

"Then, according to your theory, Buswell is a fraud," the six heard Mr. Hayter say.

"Certainly! I really have no doubt of it. I have never known Scamp to be mistaken, and he positively detests Buswell."

"But, my dear fellow, isn't that placing an exaggerated faith in a dog's instinct?" asked the younger master.

"Oh, hang it, if they get arguing it may be no end of a time before they move on!" muttered Bags in Goggs' ear.

The two men had stopped. Now Mr. Grayson said:

"I don't think so. A dog's instinct is a wonderful thing, Hayter! Take the case of that boy Goggs. Despite his queer appearance, I liked him from the first, when I saw him in town at his uncle's solicitors."

"So that's how you were able to mimic Grayson's voice before you'd ever seen him, as we reckoned!" whispered Tricks to Goggs.

"There was a dog in the office, an old and snappish fox-terrier, belonging to a member of the firm. He walked up to Goggs and made friendly overtures. His master said that not for years past had he done the like, and that the reason why he was brought to the office was that he was the terror of the neighbourhood if he chanced to be left at home. I wondered then what Scamp would think of Goggs. As you know, he does not make friends with the indiscriminating readiness that most bulldogs do. I mentioned him, and the boy said that he had never met a dog that he could not get on good terms with."

"And that's how you knew about old Scamp, you crafty bounder!" Tricks whispered.

"And the sequel?" asked Mr. Hayter.

"Why, the dog is devoted to the boy! He runs off to join him whenever he appears, and I have never known him to do the like with anyone else, though he has his friends among the rest."

Scamp was giving a most unwelcome proof of his affection at that moment. He had walked up to the object of it, and was greeting him with slobbery caresses.

"They'll spot us!" groaned Allardyce.

"No, not through Scamp," answered Goggs; "he won't bark, and when they start off again I'll just tell him to go."

"But they may miss him," said Bags.

They did not, however. They stood in the road, and went on talking. The night was wonderfully mild for the season of the year, and there was little hope that they would be driven to move on through feeling cold.

"By the way, it must be quite a relief to Buswell to know that Scamp is off the premises," remarked Hayter.

"No doubt it is. I am hoping that the dread of Scamp's return will hasten Buswell's departure," answered his colleague. "I have told Buswell that I will not have him there; but, of course, if he comes in the character of cook's accepted suitor I cannot persist in my objection. It is a pity. Cook is not a wholly reasonable woman, and she has a short temper; but my wife holds a high opinion of her, and will be sorry to see her throw herself away on Buswell."

"Scamp has a very strong dislike for that fellow you got me to take in exchange for Pennell," said Mr. Hayter.

(There will be another grand instalment of this exciting story in next Monday's issue of the MAGNET Library. Order your copy in advance.)