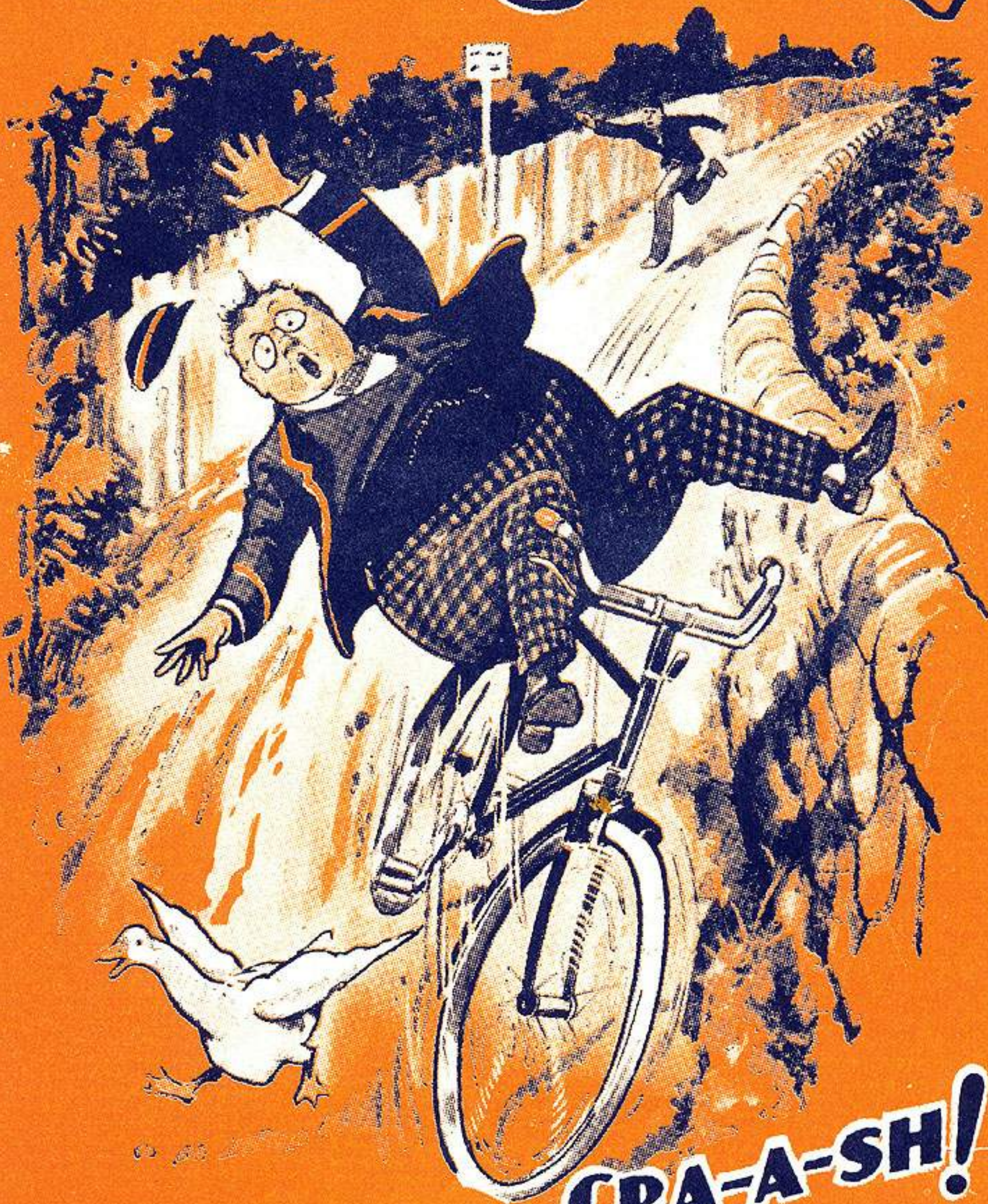


The Best School Story of the Week - - - "THE BOY WHO WOULDN'T MAKE FRIENDS!" By FRANK RICHARDS.

The Magnet ^{12th}



CRA-A-SH!



COME INTO the OFFICE, BOYS - AND GIRLS!

Your Editor is always pleased to hear from his readers. Write to him: Editor of the "Magnet," The Amalgamated Press, Ltd., Fleetway House, Farringdon Street, London, E.C.4. A stamped, addressed envelope will ensure a reply.

I PICKED up the first letter from my mail this week, and got quite a thrill when I saw that it was signed "Inquisitor." I had horrible ideas about the Spanish Inquisition and fancied myself being placed on the rack, or shoved in boiling oil, and things of that sort.

However, "Inquisitor," who hails from Manchester, only wanted to ask me a few questions. The first concerns

THE TORTOISE.

He wants to know when tortoises hibernate. As a matter of fact, this depends largely on the weather and local conditions. I happen to have a couple of tortoises myself. One of them buried itself in my garden over a couple of months ago. The other one I put in a box filled with grass, which I placed in a warm corner in the house. As soon as the weather begins to get cold, tortoises look out for a warm spot. If you keep tortoises, the best plan is to put them in a box with plenty of grass or hay, let them bury themselves in it, and then see that the box is kept in a warm spot. A corner near the kitchen fire is best. After that, don't worry about them until next spring. When the weather becomes warm enough for them, they'll come out—and be just as lively as they were before they went for their long winter's sleep.

In reply to the other questions "Inquisitor" asks: Billy Bunter weighs 14 stone, and Harry Wharton and Bob Cherry are both 15 years of age.

Now for a letter from "R. F. F." of Richmond, Surrey.

HE MAKES YOUR EDITOR BLUSH with pride, because he says so many complimentary things about THE MAGNET.

With regard to his query about Claude Rains, the film actor, he will be pleased to know that this actor is British, and appeared on the stage for many years before he went into films. Like many other British actors, Claude Rains went to Hollywood, but it will not be long before he is seen in quite a number of films, including British ones. If my chum cares to write to the managers of his local cinemas, they will be only too pleased to tell him when they are screening the next film in which this particular actor appears.

I AM afraid that "W. A." and "F. E." of Englefield, near Reading, will find a little difficulty if

THEY WANT TO JOIN THE "MOUNTIES."

There are so many anxious to join this wonderful corps that the waiting list is a long one. Recruiting is not carried out in this country for the "Mounties." It's not easy for anyone who has been used to our British climate to face the rigours of the North-West. My chums would have to go to Canada in order to join—and the chances are that they would find themselves unsuitable.

So far as the Grenadier Guards are concerned, any post office will be pleased to supply particulars of recruiting in this or any other corps. In most big towns there is an Army Recruiting Office, with an official in charge who will give full particulars of any branch of the British Army in which one may be interested.

Now comes a query from a West Hartlepool reader, who asks me if I can tell him what is

THE WORLD'S DEEPEST DIVE.

This was made by an American diver who was working on the construction of the San Francisco-Oakland Bay Bridge. The actual depth of the water was only about forty feet, but it was necessary to go down another 200 feet in order to find a solid foundation. A caisson with a false bottom was used to dredge into the mud, until the depth of the hole was 245 feet under the surface. Then the diver went down, thereby establishing a world's record for deep water diving on any construction work.

An American reader has sent me along some particulars of what is claimed to be

THE MOST LUXURIOUS BUS

in the world. We've got some pretty good night-travelling buses in this country, but we'll have to "go some" if we want to beat the new cross-country sleeper-bus which has been started on a run between Los Angeles and Kansas City. This bus carries twenty-five passengers, each of whom has a sleeping berth. There are five compartments (all told, in the bus, and they are equipped with wireless, a mirror, hot and cold running water, and a portable table. A corridor runs the entire length of the bus down one side. In the day-time the sleeping berths are converted into cushion lounge seats. The walls of the bus are insulated to guard against changes in the weather. The power plant is placed at the back of the bus, to eliminate noises. There is, however, a false radiator front, and behind it is a spacious luggage compartment. Besides the driver, there is a porter, who has a "kitchenette" from which light lunches and other refreshments can be supplied to the passengers. "Some" bus, eh?

NOW for a few RAPID-FIRE REPLIES

to other questions fired at me by readers: What is the World's Greatest Power Plant? The hydro-electric plant at Dnieproges, on the Dnieper River in Russia. It cost about twenty-two million pounds to construct.

What is the Longest Canal in the World? Russia also claims this record. The Baltic-White Sea Canal, recently opened, is 141 miles in length. The longest river route for navigation connects Moscow with Archangel, and is 2,100 miles in length.

Who Was "Sixteen-String Jack"? A highwayman, whose proper name was Jack Rann. He received his nickname

because of the blue ribands with which he used to decorate himself. He was a most audacious criminal, and managed to keep the Bow Street runners at bay for a long time. But they got him in the end, and he was executed.

Has a Toy Balloon ever Crossed the Atlantic? Yes. One was released from New York, and was subsequently picked up at Edale, in Derbyshire.

What is the Lowest Part of North America? Death Valley, in California. It is 250 feet below sea level. It is also the hottest place in North America.

Is there such a thing as an Automatic Revolver? No, an automatic is a pistol, not a revolver. In a revolver, the barrel revolves as the shots are fired. With an automatic the bullets rise up into the barrel from the magazine.

How Many Ribs has a Python? It has been calculated that a python 30 feet in length has no fewer than 600 ribs!

Are any Horse Races Held without Jockeys? Yes. In Mexico riderless horse races are frequently held. The horses compete against each other without carrying any jockeys.

Here is a curious little paragraph which I have unearthed for you:

WHO WANTS TO BUY A PRISON?

Do you realise that this country is becoming so law abiding that some prisons have been standing empty for years—and are frequently sold at "bargain prices" to anyone who wants them? Just a little while ago the disused Cambridge Prison was sold for a few pounds. The gallows, in perfect working order, were sold for only one guinea! But prisons are not the only buildings which sell cheaply nowadays. Some years ago an entire South Country resort was auctioned for £1,250—and it cost nearly a hundred thousand pounds to build!

One of the biggest bargains ever made was by a man who bought

A CASTLE FOR 2s. 6d.!

It was the thirteenth-century Castle of Montemalo in Italy. Just a short while ago the biggest bid at an auction sale was seven lire, which is worth approximately two shillings and sixpence. So the castle was "knocked down" for that amount! In this country castles are worth quite a lot of money, although I know one famous old castle where you can rent one of the towers, furnished, for as little as two guineas a week. In many places abroad, old castles are standing derelict, and can be bought quite cheaply. If you don't want a castle, what about an entire village? There's one up for sale now—the village of Horton, near Northampton. If you happen to possess a rich uncle, what about dropping him a hint that a village would make a most useful and attractive birthday present!

As space is getting rather short, I must hold over a number of other paragraphs and answers to queries until next week and tell you what is in store in next week's issue of the MAGNET. First of all comes:

"THE OUTSIDER!"

By Frank Richards

the second yarn in our grand new series featuring Eric Wilmot. Mr. Hacker thinks he has done a big thing for his nephew in obtaining for him admission at Greyfriars. But the master of the Shell has made the biggest mistake in his life, for Wilmot is most unhappy in his new surroundings, which is somewhat mystifying to Harry Wharton & Co. When you've finished this first-rate yarn, you'll find thrills galore in our super sea and adventure story. And just to round off this super issue, there'll be a "Greyfriars Herald" supplement, another contribution from our pet Rhymester, and another chat with

YOUR EDITOR.

The BOY who WOULDN'T MAKE FRIENDS!

By FRANK RICHARDS



In the opinion of Harry Wharton & Co., of Greyfriars, one Hacker in the school is enough and to spare! Now, like a bolt from the blue, comes the Shell master's nephew, Eric Wilmot . . . whose room is voted better than his company!

THE FIRST CHAPTER.

Bunter Asks For It!

"START at two!" murmured Bob Cherry.

Bob spoke in a low voice—which was far from his usual custom. Bob's voice, as a rule, had rather a megaphonic quality, and his remarks could easily be heard by all whom they might concern, and a good many whom they did not concern.

But in the Remove Form Room, during class, it was necessary for a fellow to be cautious.

Mr. Quelch was looking in his desk for a book, and had his back turned momentarily to the Form. His gimlet eyes were not on his class; but his ears were equally sharp. So Bob whispered.

Harry Wharton nodded.

It was safer not to speak. Talking in class was frowned upon severely by Herry Samuel Quelch. Quelch liked to see his boys, in class, concentrated unremittingly on their lessons. That liking was seldom wholly gratified.

"On the bikes—" went on Bob.

"Quiet!" breathed Frank Nugent.

"Quelch can't hear! We shall get to St. Jude's before three—"

"Yes; shut up!"

"Putting it on a bit, you know. Rip-ping day for a ride."

Mr. Quelch glanced round from his desk. Perhaps a faint murmur of a voice had reached his keen ears.

Bob was promptly silent.

A fellow might get a detention, for talking in class. And a detention that afternoon would have been simply awful.

It was a clear, bright, frosty, January day, and that afternoon was a half-

holiday. On such a day, Bob, more than any other fellow in the Greyfriars Remove, felt the call of the open spaces. Detention would have been an awful disaster.

However, Mr. Quelch turned back to his desk, and resumed his quest of the book he wanted. He was not likely to find it in a hurry, as Vernon-Smith, just before third school, had transferred it to the wastepaper-basket under the desk. Happily unaware of that little jest of the Bounder's, Quelch turned over the papers in his desk, growing puzzled and irritated, while Smithy winked at Redwing, and grinned.

The rustle of papers in the Form-master's desk broke the silence of the Form-room. Under cover of that rustle Bob went on, still in a cautious whisper:

"St. Jude's have a match on to-day, you know—they're playing some school—I forget the name—"

"Topham!" said Harry.

"Yes, that's it, Topham! We want to see how St. Jude's shape, as we're playing them later in the term—"

Mr. Quelch glanced round again.

"Is anyone speaking in class?" he inquired, in a rambling voice.

Dead silence.

A pin might have been heard to drop in the Remove Form Room.

Nobody answered the question.

Mr. Quelch resumed the search for the vanished volume. He was surprised and annoyed by his failure to find it in his desk. He grew more and more annoyed as he continued the search. It was not a judicious moment for any Removite to take risks.

Bob Cherry was silent for a full minute. Then, after a cautious glance

at Quelch, he resumed, in a still lower whisper:

"We shall see the game at St. Jude's, and then we can bike over to Lantham or Courtfield for tea. See? Tea out."

"You won't tea out if Quelch catches you wagging your chin, fathhead!" murmured Johnny Bull.

"My esteemed Bob," breathed Hurree Janset Ram Singh, "speech is silvery, but silence is the cracked pitcher that goes longest to the well."

"I say, you fellows—" whispered Billy Bunter.

Billy Bunter had heard the whispering with absolute indifference, till Bob mentioned teeing out.

Then Billy Bunter sat up and took notice.

Teeing out—or in, for that matter—was always an interesting matter to William George Bunter.

A football match at St. Jude's did not interest Bunter. He did not want to know how they were shaping at Soccer at that school. He had no desire whatever to stand about, on a cold and frosty afternoon, watching fellows kicking a ball. His opinion of the Famous Five was, that they were a quintet of silly asses, to think of passing a half-holiday in that fatheaded way, when they might have been frowsting over a study fire.

But if tea was to follow the match, that put a different complexion on it. Bunter was willing to watch a football match, if it was to be followed by a spread at the Pagoda, in Lantham, or the bun-shop in Courtfield.

He leaned over his desk, his little round eyes quite eager behind his big round spectacles.

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"I say——"
 "Shut up, ass!" murmured Bob.
 "But, I say, I'll come!" said Bunter.
 "I'm fearfully keen on football, as you fellows know——"
 "Oh, my hat!"
 "Quiet!"

"But if you're going on the bikes, make it a bit later," suggested Bunter. "Mine's got a puncture, and I shall have to get one of you fellows to mend it."

"Ware, beaks!" hissed Bob.
 Mr. Quelch was looking round again. He was quite exasperated by that time by his failure to find the vanished volume. His gimlet eyes fixed on Billy Bunter.

"If anyone is talking in class——" rumbled Mr. Quelch.

Silence!
 The Remove sat like stone images under Quelch's gleaming eye. Then, once more, the Remove master turned to his hopeless quest.

Bunter only waited till his head was turned. Bob Cherry had realised the value of discretion, and he said no more. But discretion was not numbered among the many gifts of William George Bunter.

"I say, you fellows——" whispered Bunter. "I say, it's a pretty long step to St. Jude's on the jiggers! I can do it all right, of course, but you fellows would very likely crock up. What about a taxi?"

No answer!
 Harry Wharton made Bunter a sign to be silent; but he did not venture to speak. Even from the back of Quelch's head, an observant eye could detect that he was getting dangerous!

"I'll stand the taxi!" went on Bunter. "That's all right! I'll stand you fellows a taxi with pleasure. One of you can lend me five bob—it won't run to more than that! What?"

Silence!
 "If I stand the taxi, you fellows can stand the tea!" went on Bunter. "That's fair! Better have it at Lantham—they have jolly good prog at the Pagoda. Leave it to me to order the spread, if you like! I'm rather a dab at that sort of thing!"

"Bunter!" Mr. Quelch whirled round from his desk and rapped: "Did you speak, Bunter?"

Bunter jumped. In his keen interest in teeing out, he had almost forgotten Mr. Quelch. Now he was reminded of him.

"Oh, no, sir!" he gasped.
 "I heard you speak, Bunter!"
 "Oh, no, sir! Not a word!" gasped Bunter. "I was only saying to Cherry that——"

"It appears," said Mr. Quelch, in a deep voice, "that my class cannot maintain silence even for a few moments, while I am occupied. Bunter, you will be detained for one hour this afternoon."

"Oh crikey!"
 "You will return to the Form-room at two o'clock, Bunter——"

"Oh lor'!"
 "And if you speak again, I shall cane you!"

Bunter did not speak again.
 Quelch gave up the search for the missing book, and carried on without it. Billy Bunter sat with a fat, dismayed face through the remainder of third school.

That detention washed out the trip, so far as Bunter was concerned. Which dismayed Bunter—and, no doubt, ought to have dismayed the Famous Five. But, to judge by their cheery looks when

the Remove was dismissed at last, they were able to bear the loss of Billy Bunter's company with considerable fortitude.

THE SECOND CHAPTER.

Sticky!

BOB CHERRY cut down to the bike-shed immediately after dinner.

A recently repaired puncture on his jigger had shown signs of giving more trouble, and Bob wanted to make sure that it was all right, before he started with his friends on a long spin, up hill and down dale.

His chums waited for him to rejoin them with the news that it was all right. After a quarter of an hour had elapsed, however, they began to entertain a mis-giving that, instead of being all right, it was all wrong!

So they walked down to the bike-shed, to see how Bob was getting on, and found him with his jigger up-ended, his face red with exertion, and his usually sunny expression quite absent.

"Puncture?" asked Johnny Bull.
 Bob looked at him over the upside-down jigger.

"Oh, no!" he answered, with biting sarcasm. "I've turned the bike upside down because I prefer to ride it that way! Makes a bit of a change."

Sarcasm was not, as a rule, one of Bob's failings. It looked as if that puncture was giving him some trouble.

Harry Wharton, Frank Nugent and Hurree Janset Ram Singh smiled, and were silent. They knew when silence was golden.

But Johnny Bull grunted.
 "No need to be shirty about it!" he remarked.

Tact was not Johnny Bull's long suit.
 "Who's shirty?" inquired Bob.

"Sounds as if you are! I think——"
 "You do?" asked Bob. "Oh, don't pile it on, old chap! Tell us an easier one! I don't want to doubt your word, of course; but do you seriously expect any fellow who knows you to swallow that?"

Johnny Bull stared at him.
 Then he grinned, and was silent.

He was not, perhaps, quick on the up-take, but he realised by that time that the least said the soonest mended.

Bob Cherry had a tube of solution in his hand. He seemed to have been using it rather liberally. There was some on his fingers, a dab on his nose, a smear or two on his trousers. He laid it down, while he made an examination of the tyre. That examination did not seem to encourage him. His brow wrinkled deep and dark.

"All right now?" asked Nugent.
 "No!" said Bob curtly.

"Can we help?" inquired Harry.
 "Thanks; but it's trouble enough already!"

"Hem!"
 Bob's sunny temper undoubtedly was deteriorating. A minute or two later he stared round as if in search of something. He murmured expressively as he stared, without finding what he sought.

"Looking for something?" asked Johnny.
 "Not at all! I'm just twisting my neck about to exercise it! Good for the neck muscles!"

"Oh, don't give us any more sarc, old chap! If you're looking for that solution——"

"Fancy Bull guessing that, when it's as plain as daylight!" said Bob. "Well, I am looking for the solution! If you know where it is——"

"You're kneeling on it."

"Wha-a-at?"

Bob Cherry bounded up.
 A squashed tube was exuding the last remnant of its contents on the knee of his trousers.

Bob gazed at it.
 So did his chums! With heroic efforts they suppressed a desire to chuckle. Bob's expression showed it was no time for chuckling.

In silence—his feelings being too deep for words—Bob went into the bicycle shed for more solution. Still in silence, he came back with it.

"I say, you fellows!" Billy Bunter rolled up. "I say, got a puncture, Bob, old chap?"

Bob did not waste any "sarc" on Bunter as he had on Johnny Bull. It was a very, very troublesome puncture, and his feelings were growing deeper and deeper—too deep for sarcasm.

"Rotten old tyre!" said Bunter. "Why don't you buy a new tyre, old chap?"

Bob breathed hard and deep. Bunter was right. It was an old tyre, and really a new inner tube was needed. But a new inner tube cost certain shillings, which, at the moment, Bob did not happen to have in his possession.

"Lots of trouble for nothing," said Bunter, blinking at him. "I shouldn't mind spending a few bob on a bike, old fellow."

"Will you shut up, Bunter?" asked Bob, with ferocious calm.

"Oh, really, Cherry! If you're hard up I'll lend you enough to get a new tyre—when my postal order comes! I'm expecting it to-morrow."

Bob dabbed solution, and made no answer.

"I say, you fellows," went on Bunter. "I've got to get into the Form-room at two. You heard what that beast Quelch said! What about waiting for me?"

"Ripping idea!" said Frank Nugent. "We're going over to St. Jude's to see them play Topham, and the game will be over by the time your detention's up. I suppose that wouldn't matter?"

"Well, no!" said Bunter. "After all, what's the good of standing about getting your feet cold? My idea is, cut that right out, and go straight over to the Pagoda at Lantham for tea."

"Fathead!"

"Better still—the bunshop in Court-field," said Bunter. "It's nearer—see?"

"Ass!"

"Look here, Wharton, are you going to wait for me, or not?"

"Not!"

"Well, I dare say you won't have started, if you're going to wait for Cherry to get through with that puncture," said Bunter. "He, he, he! Looks as if he's going to make a day of it!"

"Shut up, ass!"
 "He, he, he!"

Bob Cherry rose from beside his exasperating jigger. He gave Billy Bunter a rather deadly look.

"That's done!" he said.
 "Oh, good!" said Harry Wharton cheerfully. "We shall be off in lots of time, old chap!"

"The lotfulness will be terrific!" declared the Nabob of Bhanipur.

"I think it's all right now!" said Bob. "Shan't have to wait long for it now, and——"

"I say, now you've done yours, Cherry, what about doing mine?" asked Bunter. "I shall have to have my bike—to come after you, you know."

"Idiot!"
 "If you're going to be a selfish, lazy beast——"

"I'm going to kick you if you don't shut up!" roared Bob. "Can't you roll away, and give a fellow a rest, you blithering owl?"

"Well, I think you might mend a chap's puncture," said Bunter. "I've got detention! It won't be so much trouble as yours; mine isn't such a putrid old tyre! I can afford a new one when I need one—see? You could do it in ten minutes."

After more than twenty minutes on his own puncture, Bob Cherry did not seem, somehow, keen on spending another ten on Bunter's.

"Rotten slacker!" said Bunter. "I say, Nugent, are you going to mend my puncture for me?"

"I don't quite think so, old fat bean!"

"What about you, Bull?"

"Rats!"

terrific crash and clang, and Bob gave a roar of wrath.

"You clumsy ass! If that puncture's busted again—"

"He, he, he!"

Bob jumped at his bike! He glared at the mended tyre! He pressed it and squeezed it—and breathed fury.

"Oh my hat!" said Johnny Bull. "Another bust?"

"What do you expect of a rotten old tyre like that?" argued Billy Bunter. "Besides, you can't mend a puncture, Cherry! You're too clumsy! You—I say, here—what—Keep that stuff away! Oh crikey! Yarooooooh!"

Bob Cherry hurled himself on the Owl of the Remove. With one hand he grasped him by the collar. With the other, he squeezed solution over his fat face. He squeezed it liberally.

—more, in fact! He did not want any down his fat neck! He gurgled, he spluttered, and he flew!

By the time Bob came out of the shed Bunter had disappeared over the horizon. And Harry Wharton & Co., feeling that Bob would be better left to himself at such dire moments, judiciously took a walk round the quad—and Bob Cherry wrestled manfully with that puncture, till, at long last, he won the victory.

THE THIRD CHAPTER.

Coker's Catch!

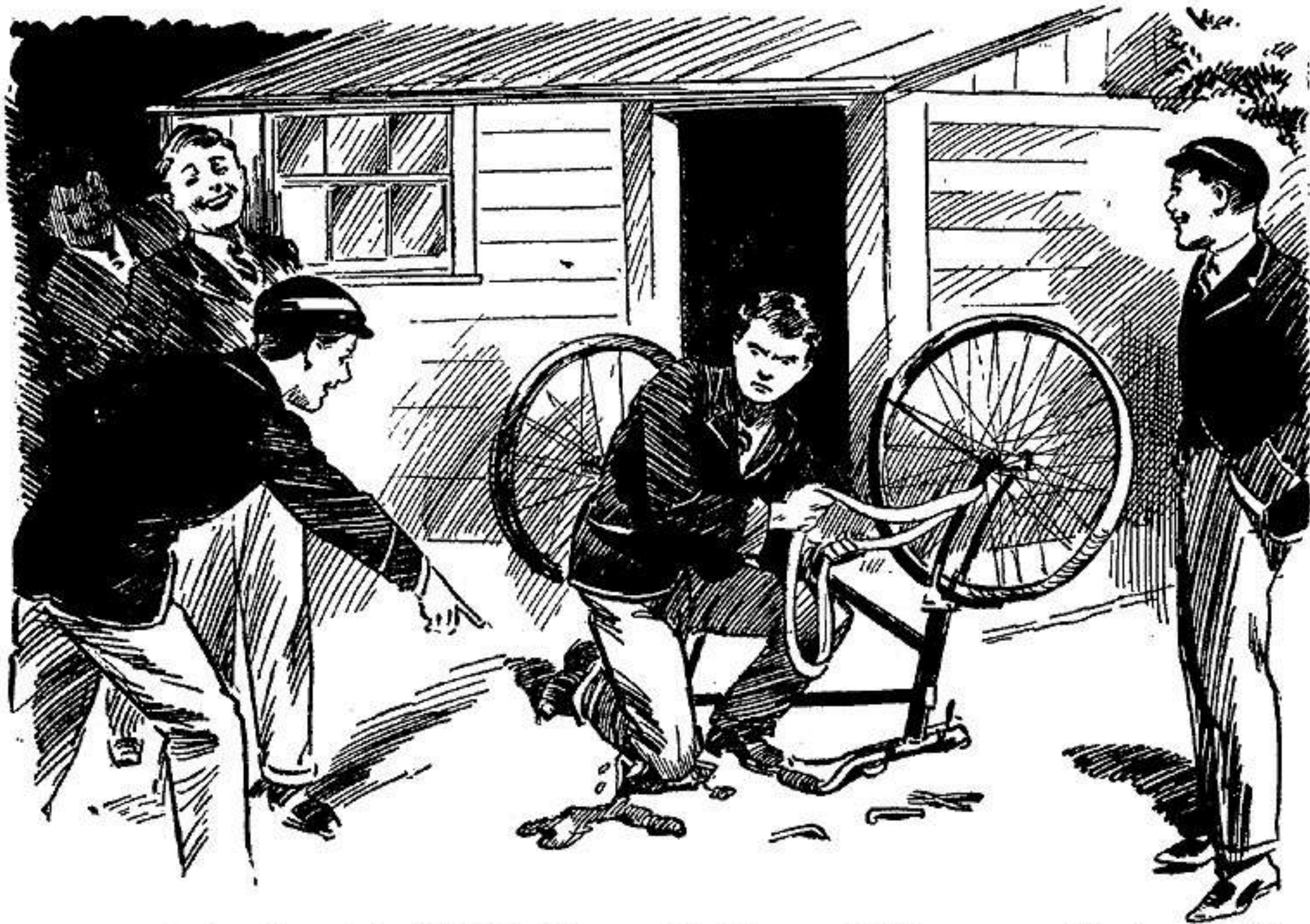
"SEEN Potter?"

"No!"

"Seen Greene?"

"No!"

Coker of the Fifth snorted.



"Puncture?" asked Johnny Bull. "Oh! No!" answered Bob Cherry, with biting sarcasm. "I've turned the bike upside down because I prefer to ride it that way!" A minute later, Bob stared round as if in search of something. "If you're looking for the solution," said Johnny, "you're kneeling on it!" "Wha-a-at!" gasped Bob, suddenly noticing the squashed tube exuding the last remnant of its contents on the knees of his trousers.

"What about Inky?"

"The ratfulness is terrific."

"Well, of all the rotten slackers!" said Bunter. "Never seen such a lazy lot. Did you say you'd do it, Wharton?"

"If I did, I never noticed it!" answered the captain of the Remove.

"Well, if that puncture isn't mended, I mayn't be able to come over and join you at St. Jude's," said Bunter crossly.

"Oh, good! If anybody mends that puncture for Bunter, I'll punch his head!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Yah!"

Billy Bunter turned away with an angry grunt.

Perhaps it was by accident that he barged into Bob's up-ended bike as he turned. Perhaps it was not by accident.

Anyhow, the bike went over with a

"Urrrrgh!" gurgled Bunter, as some went into his mouth. "Gurrgh! Beast! Leggo! I say, you fellows—Yooooooh! Grooogh! Oooch!"

"There!" gasped Bob. "Take that!"

"Urrrrgh!"

Billy Bunter staggered away, clawing at a sticky face with sticky hands. He spluttered and gurgled as he clawed.

"Ow! I'm all sticky! Wow! I say—grooogh—beast—oooogh—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Look at me!" shrieked Bunter. "I say—urrgh! Beast!"

"Wait till I get some more!" gasped Bob. "I'll let you have some down your silly neck—"

He rushed into the bike-shed.

Billy Bunter rushed in the opposite direction.

He had as much solution as he wanted

He was standing beside a bicycle, in the road, when Harry Wharton & Co. wheeled their machines out.

They were rather in a hurry; Bob's puncture had a little delayed starting. Still, they paused to answer Coker as he called to them.

The Famous Five were looking, and feeling, merry and bright. They had sketched out quite an enjoyable afternoon.

A swift ride through the clear, frosty air, then watching a good game of Soccer, and exchanging friendly greetings with old acquaintances at St. Jude's, then another spin, and tea at the Pagoda, at Lantham—and then another ride round till they had to get in for calling-over. It was not a programme that appealed to Billy Bunter—

with the single exception of the episode of tea at the Pagoda—but it seemed a very cheery sort of half-holiday to the strenuous heroes of the Remove.

But there was no time to lose now. At the best, they did not expect to arrive at St. Jude's in time to see the kick-off. So, really, they had no time to waste on Coker.

Ignorant of that fact, Coker went on crossly:

"The silly asses! I told them plainly to wait for me here! I didn't mean to be more than a few minutes, and I told them so! That ass Hacker stopped me and jawed, you see! The way beaks jaw!"

Harry Wharton & Co. were aware of the way beaks would "jaw." At the present moment, however, it was the way Coker jawed that mattered! Really and truly, they had no time to listen to Coker.

"Just because I punched Hobson!" said Coker. "Fancy the Shell beak jawing me for that! Pretty state of things Greyfriars is coming to, when a Fifth Form man can't punch a cheeky fag in the Shell! I jolly nearly told Hacker what I thought of him."

Coker snorted angrily. Evidently he had not enjoyed the conversation of Mr. Hacker, the master of the Shell.

"Hold on!" he rapped, as the juniors began to mount. "Look here, Potter and Greene must be somewhere about. I distinctly told them to wait, and I wasn't much over half an hour! What are you grinning at?"

"At a silly ass, if you want to know, old bean?" said Bob Cherry affably. "Come on, you fellows!"

"I said hold on!" rapped Coker. "Look here, young Wharton, cut into

the House and see if they've gone in."

"Eh?"

"Deaf?" snorted Coker.

Harry Wharton laughed.

"Sorry, old man, I've no time to listen to your little jokes!" he said, and he put a leg over his machine.

"You young ass!" hooted Coker. "I'm not joking!"

"You are, old man! You're an unconscious humorist!" explained Wharton. "No end funny, if you only knew it!"

And he pushed off. Coker of the Fifth never could quite understand that he could not give orders to the Remove fellows, though really they did their best to make it clear to him.

"Look here——" he roared.

"Rats!" said Wharton, over his shoulder.

The next moment that shoulder was grasped, and he was hooked off his machine. He gave a yell as he came down on the road with a bump, and his bike went jangling.

"Now——" roared Coker.

Coker got no further.

Like one man, the Co. left their jiggers and jumped at Coker! Five bikes sprawled as five pairs of hands were laid on Horace Coker—and the next moment Coker was sprawling, too. He was also bawling!

Bob Cherry seized Coker's large ears as he sprawled and bawled, and tapped his head on the road.

"Tap, tap, tap!"

"That will do for Coker!" remarked Bob. "Now let's push off!"

Leaving Coker strewn and roaring, the chums of the Remove picked up their bikes, mounted, and rode off.

Coker scrambled up.

He was dusty. He was untidy. He

was crimson with wrath. He forgot Potter and Greene, who so unaccountably had not waited half an hour for him. He grabbed his bike, put a long leg over it, and shot off in pursuit of the Famous Five.

"Hallo, hallo, hallo! Jolly old Horace is after us!" chuckled Bob Cherry, as he gave a glance back over his shoulder.

"Cheeky ass!" growled Johnny Bull. "Let's stop and mop up the road with him!"

"No time!" said Harry. "We shall be late at St. Jude's as it is! Let old Coker run on."

The chums of the Remove spun swiftly away on their machines. After them, going strong, rushed Coker of the Fifth.

Coker was anxious to get to close quarters.

Previous experiences with the heroes of the Remove might have warned Coker that getting to close quarters with them was likely to prove neither grateful nor comforting.

But experience which is said to make fools wise, never had that effect on Coker of the Fifth.

Besides, the juniors were going all out, which looked as if they were fleeing from the wrath to come! In point of fact, they were in a hurry to get over to St. Jude's, but to Coker's eyes they seemed to be in panic flight. And he charged after them as fast as his long and brawny legs could drive the pedals round.

Several miles slid by under the whirling wheels; and Coker had not gained.

But now Redclyffe Hill lay ahead of the riders, and on that rather steep rise Coker counted as a certainty on the juniors creaking up, or at least slowing down.

"Carry on!" said Harry Wharton, as the bikes came up the rise. It was rather usual for cyclists to wheel their machines up that hill, but there was no time to lose now.

They pedalled hard up the hill.

It was rather rough going, and it was hard work, but they did not slow down. Coker, behind them, was gasping a little. He expected to see the five jump out of their saddles any minute—when Coker was going to rush them down and mop them up, as they so richly deserved.

Pop!

"Oh, crikey!" gasped Bob.

"What's that?" asked Johnny Bull, glancing round.

Bob Cherry slowed and dismounted. The rough going on Redclyffe Hill had done it. That wretched puncture had broken out again.

"Oh!" said Johnny, comprehending.

The Co. came to a halt and jumped down. Bob Cherry stuck his bike against a wayside tree and made an examination. His face grew longer and longer as he did so. His chums watched him. In the stress of this new disaster, they forgot all about Coker of the Fifth—coming up hand over hand.

"Bad?" asked Harry, at last.

"Putrid!" grunted Bob.

"We shall see a lot at St. Jude's at this rate!" remarked Johnny Bull.

Bob gave him a glare.

"Nobody's asked you to stand around and stare, like a cow at a train!" he pointed out. "You're no use, and you can't be ass enough to suppose that you're any ornament! Get on to St. Jude's, and leave me to it!"

"Look here——"

"Well, why don't you go?" hooted Bob.

"Because I'd rather stay with you, old chap!" answered Johnny affably

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Bob stared at him. But the soft answer turneth away wrath, and Bob's clouded face broke into a grin.

"Well, it's rotten," he said. "I don't believe I can do anything with that putrid tyre. I'll try, of course. But you men had better push on—I don't want to muck up your half-holiday."

"Rot!" said Harry.

"The rotfulness is terrific, my esteemed and idiotic Bob."

"Well, here goes, then!" sighed Bob.

"I—Hallo, hallo, hallo! I forgot that mad idiot Coker—here he is!"

Horace Coker came up with a rush. He knew nothing about the puncture, and he supposed that the steepness of the hill had stopped the juniors. He felt that he had calculated well.

"Now, then—" panted Coker, as he jumped off his machine.

And he rushed at the Famous Five.

They still had no time to waste on Coker—but they had to waste some, in the circumstances. Coker started in to mop up the cheeky juniors—and for some wild and whirling minutes Harry Wharton & Co. had to forget all about punctures, and football matches, and concentrate on Coker.

They concentrated.

The mopping-up duly took place. But not as planned by Coker—the difference being that it was Coker who was mopped.

The chums of the Remove collected some damages. But the damages collected by Coker of the Fifth were beyond numeration, at least, without going into very high figures.

After five hectic minutes a breathless, dizzy, and dismantled Coker was deposited in a dry ditch, where he rolled in nettles. Leaving him there, the juniors returned to Bob's bike.

Bob got busy on that bike.

The other fellows kept a wary eye open for Coker, when he crawled out of the ditch and the stinging nettles.

But Coker of the Fifth required no further attention. Mopping-up no longer had any appeal for Coker. Without even a word, the breathless and dusty Horace picked up his jigger, and wheeled it away. He was feeling too used-up even to mount it. He limped and lurched away, and the chums of the Remove were left to themselves—and the puncture.

The puncture, really, gave them enough to think about. Bob Cherry wrestled and strove with it, and his friends watched him with silent sympathy, and their chances of seeing anything of the football match at St. Jude's grew smaller by degrees, and beautifully less.

THE FOURTH CHAPTER.

Bunter the Hunter I

BILLY BUNTER was released from detention at three o'clock. He rolled out of the Form-room, with a frowning fat brow.

He had not the slightest expectation that the Famous Five had waited for him. Only too well he knew the selfishness of human nature!

Harry Wharton & Co. had planned a cycling afternoon, with a visit to St. Jude's thrown in, and Billy Bunter had cheerfully sought to turn it into an expedition to a teashop, and a spread, for the single and sole behoof of W. G. Bunter. And they had not been taking any, which was not, perhaps, surprising—but very annoying to the fat Owl.

Now that he was out of detention the fat junior had no time to lose. He had

to get to St. Jude's before the game was over.

Not that he cared two straws or one about the game, or whether St. Jude's beat Topham or whether Topham beat St. Jude's. But after the match was over the fellows who had gone there to see it, would remount their bikes and ride—and Bunter had to catch them, if he was to accompany them to the real and important function of the afternoon—tea!

If he had known exactly where that important function was to take place, he might have headed direct for the spot—but he did not know! All depended on getting to St. Jude's before the Famous Five left.

Biking was out of the question. Apart from Bunter's bike being in its usual dilapidated state, he was far from keen on a ride of ten miles—moreover, if Bunter had had to ride ten miles, he would have been more likely to arrive at St. Jude's, in time for their next football match, rather than the present one.

Getting a train from Courtfield was no resource. No train would have landed him there in time, not to mention the difficulty of travelling on the railway without the preliminary proceeding of buying a ticket.

Any fellow but Billy Bunter would have felt that it was rather a hopeless case. But the fat Owl had his own methods.

There was only one way—taking a taxi. Bunter had thought it out while under detention in the Form-room.

It was generally easy to bag a telephone on a half-holiday when many of the staff were taking their walks abroad.

It was easy to phone for a taxi, and buzz off in the same. That was what Bunter had decided to do.

Having ascertained that Mr. Hacker, the master of the Shell, was out, the fat Owl cheerfully proceeded to Hacker's study and rang up the taxirank at Courtfield.

Then he donned hat and coat, rolled out of the House, and out of the gates, and walked up the road to meet the taxi on its way.

He had hardly covered a hundred yards when the taxi came buzzing along the road over Courtfield Common, and Bunter held up a fat hand.

"St. Jude's School, as fast as you can go!" he said, as he stepped in.

"Yes, sir!"

Bunter sat down, and the taxi whirled on.

He grinned cheerfully as it ate up the miles.

Lots of fellows in Bunter's place would not have grinned. The fare was likely to be about seven-and-six. Bunter had the sum of exactly one penny in his pocket.

But he had thought it all out. Bunter was, he flattered himself, the fellow to think things out. He was one of those clever fellows.

He was going to offer the Co. a lift in the taxi to the teashop; they could park the jiggers somewhere. If they accepted, they would naturally be responsible to the taximan.

But that was only the first string to Bunter's bow. If they declined the lift, as was extremely probable, he had another card to play.

The taxi-driver, if not paid, was certain to make a fuss. Bunter knew, from a lot of experience of that kind, that taxi-drivers, in such circumstances, always did. Could the Famous Five, before a lot of St. Jude's fellows, let the man kick up a fuss about his fare? Hardly! They would have to lend

Bunter the necessary sum to satisfy the man.

Bunter counted on that as a certainty. Harry Wharton & Co. would not want an angry and indignant taximan rooting about St. Jude's for a Greyfriars fellow who had bilked him.

So it seemed to Bunter he was all right.

Bunter had told the driver to go as fast as he could, and the man obeyed instructions. The taxi fairly flew. There was no doubt that Bunter would be in plenty of time for the finish of the match, even if he did not see the whole of the second half. So long as he glued himself on to the Famous Five before the finish, it was all serene.

Had not the taxi been going so very fast, and had not Billy Bunter been so short-sighted, he might have noticed something of interest, as he shot up Redclyffe Hill.

That was a group of schoolboys gathered round an up-ended bike, under a tree near the road.

But the fat Owl did not even see them as he shot by, let alone recognise them.

He sped on towards St. Jude's, happily unconscious that he was leaving Harry Wharton & Co. farther and farther behind, with every revolution of the wheels.

Neither did the Famous Five observe the taxi or its occupant. Their attention was given to Bob and his bike, and too many cars passed on the road, to draw their attention.

Bunter sped on, in a cheerful mood.

A sound of shouting greeted his fat ears, as he drew near St. Jude's. He distinguished the word "Goal."

Evidently the game was on.

The taxi jarred to a halt at the school gates. Bunter alighted.

"Wait here," he said breezily, "I shan't be long."

"Yes, sir."

The taximan backed his car to the roadside, away from the gates, and waited, as bidden. Bunter rolled in.

He was no stranger to St. Jude's; he had gone over with the Greyfriars team on occasions of the matches. Most of the Lower School of St. Jude's seemed to be gathered on the football ground, watching the game. Among so many fellows, packed round the ground, it was not surprising that Bunter did not spot the Famous Five in a hurry. He had, as yet, no suspicion that they were not there.

They had had plenty of time to get to St. Jude's, long before Bunter, so he naturally supposed that they were there—little dreaming that they were still halted halfway, while Bob Cherry wrestled and strove with a rebellious puncture.

"Goal!"

It was a roar.

"Good old Wilmot! Goal!"

Billy Bunter gave a careless blink at the game.

He noticed that it was a small bunch of fellows who shouted "Good old Wilmot!" not the St. Jude's crowd. Apparently they were Topham men, who had come over to cheer their team, and Wilmot was one of the Topham footballers.

Wilmot, whoever he was, had just bagged a goal, and his friends roared and cheered.

"They've got a good man there!"

Bunter heard a St. Jude's man remark, as the players went to the centre of the field.

"Jolly good!" remarked another. "That's his third goal! That sportsman brought his shooting-boots with him from Topham!"

Billy Bunter blinked at Wilmot of Topham. He saw a handsome and athletic lad, whose face looked very bright and happy. Wilmot of Topham was evidently enjoying his success in the match.

The ball was kicked off again; but Bunter gave its career no further attention. He blinked round in search of Greyfriars fellows.

They were not to be seen.

He rolled here, and he rolled there, but he failed to spot the Famous Five—which was very annoying.

Bunter was short-sighted; but he would have needed telescopic vision to spot the Famous Five just then, as they were five miles away!

Bunter did not suspect that. He suspected that they had spotted him and were keeping out of view. It had happened, more than once, that fellows were not so anxious to see Bunter, as Bunter was to see them.

He had to find them. Apart from the urgent and important consideration of a spread at the teashop, the taximan had to be paid. He simply had to find the elusive five.

"I say, you fellows, have you seen any Greyfriars men about?" he asked, addressing a group of St. Jude's juniors.

"No; none here, I think," was the answer.

"Some friends of mine came over to see the game," explained Bunter. "I know they're here."

"Sorry—haven't seen them."

Bunter resumed his search.

"Goal!"

"Hurrah!"

"Wilmot! Wilmot!"

The little bunch of Topham men were yelling again. Wilmot had bagged his fourth goal, which was rather a remarkable performance, for St. Jude's were quite good men at Soccer. The Topham skipper clapped him on the back, in the field; and the Topham followers roared and cheered.

"Time for another yet," Bunter heard one of the Topham men remark, looking at his watch. "I say, four goals to one is something to tell the fellows when we get back! Isn't Wilmot a corker?"

"It's Wilmot's game!" remarked another. "Hurrah!"

"Bravo, Wilmot!"

"Give us one more, Eric old man!"

"Hurrah!"

One of the Topham crowd yawned.

"I say, it's jolly cold here!" he remarked.

None of the others answered that remark. Their eyes were glued on the game. Bunter was blinking at the Topham group, to see whether he could spot a Greyfriars cap among them. He had hunted everywhere else.

"Only five minutes to go!" went on the fellow who had spoken. "Thank goodness for that!"

One of the other Tophamites turned his head at that, and snapped:

"Oh, shut up, Crawley! What the thump did you come over for, if you didn't want to see the game? What do you care for footer, anyhow? Backing horses is more in your line!"

"Look here——"

"Rats!"

Bunter grinned at the expression on the face of the fellow called Crawley.

He had a rather narrow, and far from pleasant, face—and it looked less pleasant than ever, as he scowled at the fellow who had snapped at him. That fellow, however, ignored his exist-

ence—his eyes were on Wilmot, in the field.

Crawley, scowling, left the group, and lounged away towards the school buildings.

"I say," Bunter addressed him as he paused—"I say——"

The Topham man stared at him.

"What the dooce do you want?" he snapped.

"Have you seen any Greyfriars fellows about?"

"Never heard of Greyfriars, and shouldn't know one if I saw one!" grunted Crawley, and he lounged on.

"Beast!" breathed Bunter.

Crawley, of Topham, certainly did not seem a very agreeable sort of fellow.

He disappeared into the House, and Billy Bunter resumed his hapless hunt for the Famous Five. He was beginning to feel a deep misgiving now.

A sudden commotion among the crowd drew his attention. The game was over.

The Topham men, cheering, gathered round Eric Wilmot as he came off the field with the other players. Bunter gave the handsome, flushed, happy face one blink—but not a second one! Now that the game was over, and the crowd on the move, he made a last, desperate search for the Famous Five. Wilmot, and his four goals, filled the thoughts of the Tophamites, but mattered nothing whatever to Billy Bunter.

Up and down and round about, the Owl of the Remove sought for the five and found them not.

And it was borne in on his fat mind, at last, that they were not there!

Why they weren't there, was a mystery; but it seemed clear, at last, that they weren't!

And Bunter, with a sinking heart, thought of the taxi waiting in the road—and from the bottom of that sinking heart he wished that he had not been so fearfully clever. For, as the chums of the Remove were not there, it was a certainty that they were not going to pay the taximan! It was equally certain that Bunter wasn't, as he hadn't any money! On the other hand, the man had to be paid—that was another paralysing certainty!

"Oh lor'!" said Bunter.

THE FIFTH CHAPTER.

Luck for Bunter!

"SEEN anything of my friends?"

"No, sir!"

"Five fellows on bikes, one of them a darkey."

"No!"

Billy Bunter breathed hard.

The taximan had seen nothing of the Famous Five. If they had dodged Bunter, and left, they could hardly have got away unseen. The driver, standing by his car, chewing a cigarette, would assuredly have noticed them. It was Bunter's last hope—had the man seen them go, he could have driven in pursuit. Now his last hope was gone.

It looked as if they had never been there at all. It was inexplicable, as they certainly had intended to see that match at St. Jude's. Something had happened to stop them, apparently.

Bunter could have groaned.

In other circumstances, the fat Owl might have dodged away, leaving an infuriated taximan to stew in his own juice, as it were! But that would have been futile, in the present circumstances. He had telephoned the man

from Greyfriars, and if he did not see his passenger again, the man would simply drive to the school to ask for his due. If there was going to be a row, it was better to have it here than at Greyfriars—with his Form-master, and perhaps the Head, barging in!

The taximan was waiting cheerfully enough. As he charged for waiting, he was in no hurry to get going. And as he knew that Bunter belonged to Greyfriars, he had no doubt about his fare—as yet!

Bunter opened his lips—and closed them again! A "row" was better there than at Greyfriars, doubtless; but it was horribly unpleasant, all the same.

Indeed, he could hardly hope that a "row" would be the end of it. Taximen have to live, like other men, and they cannot live on rows! Suppose, after the "row," the beast drove to Greyfriars to complain and demand payment!

It was awful to contemplate!

"I—I think I'll look round for them!" stammered Bunter at last; and he rolled away from the taxi.

That was simply a trick to gain time, to try to think out this new and awful problem. Bunter knew that it was useless to look round for them—he knew that they were not anywhere about St. Jude's.

In the stress of this unlooked-for worry, Billy Bunter actually forgot the spread he was missing! He would have been willing to give up all idea of sharing in that spread, if only he could have thought of some way out of the fearful difficulty in which his cleverness had landed him.

But he couldn't!

Possibly he realised, in those distressful moments, that honesty was the best policy! But that discovery, though useful for future reference, did not help him now.

What was he going to do?

That question, with Bunter, generally meant, whom was he going to do? But now there was nobody to be "done."

Bunter ambled about the road, in distressful thought and anxiety. The taximan chewed his cigarette and waited, with undiminished cheerfulness. The fat young gent was running up a bill, but the taximan did not mind, if the fat young gent didn't!

"Oh crikey!" moaned Bunter.

The desperate idea even came into his mind of trying to raise the wind from a St. Jude's man. Lunn, the junior skipper there, was rather friendly with Harry Wharton & Co., and no doubt he had seen Bunter, and knew him by sight. But——

Bunter had plenty of cheek—it was indeed his greatest gift! But even more than Bunter's cheek was required to barge in on Lunn at St. Jude's and ask him for a loan of ten shillings.

But what was he going to do?

He blinked at a fellow who came along from the direction of the school. The taxi was parked by the roadside, at some little distance from the gates.

Bunter supposed that it was a St. Jude's fellow coming along, and he almost made up his fat mind, if the fellow turned out to be an acquaintance, to make the desperate attempt to "touch" him for a loan.

He blinked at the junior as he approached, and gave a snort of disappointment and disgust.

It was not a St. Jude's fellow at all; it was a Topham man—that fellow Wilmot, who had taken the goals.

It was rather odd that the Topham



"Hold on!" shouted Coker. "Sorry, old man," said Wharton, putting a leg over his machine, "I've no time to listen to your little jokes!" The next moment, his arm was grasped, and he was hooked off his machine. "I said hold on!" roared Coker. "And I mean hold on!"

goal-getter should be walking away from St. Jude's by himself. But Bunter was too deep in his own problem to think or care about that curious circumstance.

But even Bunter, with his fat thoughts concentrated on himself, could not help noticing a strange and startling change in Eric Wilmot's looks, as the Topham fellow came nearer.

Half an hour ago Bunter had seen him come off the football field, flushed and bright and cheery, surrounded by enthusiastic friends. Now his handsome face was white as chalk, his lips were trembling, his eyes drooping, and he walked on blindly, like a fellow so deeply under the stress of emotion that he did not know or care where he was going.

Bunter gave him a second blink—and a third! Then he fairly fixed his eyes and his spectacles on the Topham fellow in amazement!

What on earth could be the matter with the chap? Only half an hour had elapsed since his happy triumph, and he looked like a fellow who had "taken the knock," and been completely knocked out.

So white and worn, and utterly disheartened did the Topham fellow look, that the waiting taximan looked at him very curiously, as well as Billy Bunter.

As he came past the spot where the taxi was standing, the Topham junior seemed to come out of a daze at the sight of it. He stepped towards the vehicle.

"Taxi," he said. "Good! Take me to Redclyffe station—quick!"

"Sorry sir; engaged!" said the driver.

Bunter rolled up.

"It's my taxi!" he said, blinking

curiously at Wilmot's pale, stricken face.

"Oh! Sorry!"

The Topham fellow was turning away.

"Hold on!" said Bunter. "I can give you a lift, if you're in a hurry."

Wilmot paused.

That, for some unaccountable reason, he was anxious to get away as quickly as he could from the spot where he had played so great a game and from his friends was quite clear.

It was an utter mystery to Bunter, but the fat junior saw in it a gleam of light in the deep darkness of his own problem!

"Jump in!" he said encouragingly.

Wilmot did not look like a fellow keen on accepting favours from strangers.

In spite of his desire to get away, he was evidently unwilling to accept a lift from a fellow he had never seen before.

But at that moment another fellow appeared from the school gateway. It was the narrow-faced fellow, Crawley.

He glanced down the road, and Wilmot saw him. A sudden red came into the pale cheeks, and Wilmot turned quickly to the cab.

"Thanks!" he said, and stepped in.

Bunter followed him in.

"Redclyffe station!" he said to the driver.

"Yes, sir."

The taxi buzzed. Wilmot had fallen, rather than sat, in a seat. Bunter squatted by his side, blinking back with a grin at Crawley in the road.

Why Wilmot had suddenly made up his mind to accept the lift, rather than encounter one of his own schoolfellows mystified Bunter more than ever. But it rather amused him to see Crawley

come along at a run, and then stop as the taxi dashed off.

The narrow-featured Topham fellow was left in the road with a scowl on his face.

St. Jude's was out of sight in a couple of minutes. It was not a long run to Redclyffe station, but it was long enough for Billy Bunter to get going on his plan of action.

Wilmot sat, a drooping figure, almost hunched on his seat. Whatever it was that had happened since the football match—and it was clear that something must have happened—it had crumpled him up. The fellow who had looked so fit and keen on the football field, had a dazed and helpless look now. Billy Bunter would have felt sorry for him if he had had time to bother about anyone but himself.

"Feeling the strain—what?" he asked breezily.

Wilmot did not answer, but he looked at the fat junior.

"Hard game!" said Bunter. "I watched it, you know! I'm rather a whale at footer, at my school."

A faint smile glided for a second over Wilmot's harassed face. But it was gone at once.

"You want to keep fit for the game," said Bunter sagely. "I never get knocked up by a game as you are now."

Wilmot gave him another look, but did not speak.

"Glad I was able to offer you a lift," went on Bunter. "I can tell you, you're looking pretty sick. But, I say, I hate to mention it, but I'm rather short of tin, and going out of my way like this will put something on the fare! You won't mind standing your whack?"

"Glad to!" said Wilmot, with great dryness.

"That's all right, then," said Bunter affably. "To tell you the truth, I'm in rather a fix! I left my money behind when I came out. Look here, as you want the taxi, you can have it if you like, and I'll hop out. What?"

"Eh! Yes! Anything you like."

It was clear that the Topham fellow was hardly listening to what Bunter was saying. But Bunter wanted it plain. He did not want a disgruntled taxi-driver calling to see him at Greyfriars later.

"You don't mind settling the fare?" he asked.

"Eh! No! If you don't want the cab, I'd be glad to have it to myself!" muttered Wilmot.

That was not exactly complimentary, but it was welcome. Evidently the Topham fellow wanted to be alone—even Billy Bunter's fascinating company seemed to have no charms for him! But that suited Bunter—in the peculiar circumstances!

"Well, if you're willing to pay what the man's got on the clock——" said Bunter.

"Yes, yes!"

It seemed that the Topham junior was not only willing, but eager, so long as he got rid of Bunter!

"It's over ten bob now——"

"That's all right!"

Bunter was glad to hear it.

"Well, if you don't mind——"

"Not in the least! Leave it to me! Thanks!"

He was actually thanking Bunter for landing the taxi on him! Wilmot seemed to have taken the knock that afternoon in some mysterious way; but there was no doubt that Billy Bunter was in luck!

Bunter told the driver to stop. He stepped out, and the driver looked at him.

"My friend's taking on the taxi and paying the fare," explained Bunter airily.

The driver glanced at his new passenger.

"That all right, sir?" he asked.

"Yes, yes! Drive to the station—quick!"

"Yes, sir."

The taxi buzzed away with Eric Wilmot.

Bunter was left on the Redclyffe road, blinking after it—his awful problem solved!

His last blink at the parting taxi showed him a white, tortured face; then Eric Wilmot was gone from his sight; and Billy Bunter, having wondered for about a minute what was the matter with the fellow, dismissed him from his mind, and in about another minute forgot his existence!

THE SIXTH CHAPTER.

Bunter Borrows a Bike!

"HALLO, hallo, hallo!"

"Bunter!"

Five juniors walked bicycles up the last slope of Redclyffe Hill.

Over the crest of the hill, from the other side, came rolling a fat, tired, breathless, and disgruntled Bunter.

How long Bob Cherry had spent on that wretched puncture his chums did not really know. It seemed like hours and hours and hours.

Bob was determined. He had, so to speak, got his teeth into that tyre, and he was going to mend it, or "bust."

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As it turned out, it was the tyre that "bust."

Long and patient labour did not set that puncture right. Once, hopefully, Bob fancied it was all right, and the bike a going concern again. Mounting it proved otherwise. The tyre flattened again—worse than before. Bob's chums exercised patience while he had another "go."

But when Bob discovered that the inner tube was split, beyond the power of repairing, even Bob gave it up. Wheeling the bike was the only resource.

By that time, the football match at St. Jude's, if not already over, must have been near the finish; and it was quite certain to be long finished before the juniors could reach the spot on Shanks' pony.

They had to give up St. Jude's as a bad job. Which was the reason why Bunter had not found them there.

Still, there would be time for a spin before lock-up at Greyfriars, if they walked on to Redclyffe, and got the bike put in order at the cycle-shop there. That was better than nothing.

As there was nothing else to be done, they did that.

Five fellows, keeping resolutely cheerful, walked up Redclyffe Hill, pushing the bikes—Bob's going far from easily on a flat tyre.

Thus it was that they met Billy Bunter face to face. Bunter had started to walk home.

It was a long walk, a weary walk, and a woeful walk. Bunter, at first, had been so immensely relieved at getting out of the difficulty with the taximan that he had hardly given a thought to the walk home.

But by the time he had covered half a mile, he gave it many thoughts—all of them dismayed and disgruntled and dismal.

Half a mile was enough for Bunter—if not too much! And four more weary miles lay between him and Greyfriars School! Unless he could pick up a lift of some sort, Bunter was likely to crawl into Greyfriars in a state of collapse.

So it was a happy meeting to Bunter.

He blinked at the five through his big spectacles, and came to a gasping halt! Among the five, he could hardly doubt that he could borrow the railway fare to Friardale.

"I say, you fellows!" he gasped.

"Taking a long walk, old fat man?" asked Harry Wharton, puzzled. It was quite surprising to see Bunter so far from home on foot.

"Oh, really, Wharton!"

"Tired?" grinned Nugent. Bunter looked tired.

"Ow! Yes!" groaned Bunter. "I say, you fellows, it was pretty thick to let me down like that!"

"Who's let you down, fathead?"

"I looked for you at St. Jude's!" snorted Bunter. "You told me you were going to be there, and you never turned up!"

"Oh, my hat! Have you been to St. Jude's?" exclaimed Bob. "You saw the footer match, while we missed it! Did St. Jude's win?"

"Blessed if I know!" answered Bunter. He had already forgotten that trifling detail.

"You must have watched the game pretty keenly, if you don't know who won!" remarked Johnny Bull.

"Oh, blow the football match!" grunted Bunter. "You let me down! I say, if you're going to tea in Redclyffe, I'll walk back with you."

"We're not!" said Harry Wharton, laughing. "Tea's washed out, old fat

bean. We're going to spend the money at a cycle-shop instead."

"What utter rot!" snorted Bunter. "Well, look here! Lend me my fare home. I can walk to the nearest station, then, see?"

"You shouldn't have come over if you hadn't your fare back!" grunted Johnny Bull.

"Beast!"

"Oh, let's see what can be done!" said Harry Wharton resignedly. "If Bunter waddles down the hill to Redclyffe Station, he can get home for a bob, third——"

"If you think I'm going to travel third-class, Wharton——"

"I think you're going to travel third, if you travel at all, you fat idiot! But if a third-class fare's no use to you, say so—I can find something else to do with the bob."

"If you're going to be mean, Wharton, hand over the bob, and I'll get off!" grunted Bunter.

Wharton handed over the necessary "bob." Bunter sniffed, doubtless by way of thanks, and dropped it into his pocket.

"I say, you fellows, it's a quarter of a mile down the hill to the station," he grunted. "One of you lend me a bike to do it on, will you?"

"Eh?"

"I'll leave the bike at the station for you to fetch. See?"

The Famous Five gazed at Bunter.

Having already walked the bikes up that long, long hill, one of them was to walk a bike up again, for a distance of a quarter of a mile—to save Bunter's fat little legs a walk downhill!

That was Bunter's idea!

But it was nobody else's! The fact was, of course, that nobody but Bunter mattered in the least! But the chums of the Remove were unaware of that fact, as it happened!

"Come on, you men!" said Johnny Bull, and he started. And Frank Nugent and Hurree Singh grinned, and wheeled after him.

"I say, you fellows," squeaked Bunter. "I say, Wharton——"

"Roll off, you fat ass!" said Harry Wharton, and he followed his friends.

"I say, Cherry——"

"Fathead!" answered Bob.

"Lend me your bike, old chap?"

"I don't think you'd enjoy riding it, if I did!" chuckled Bob. The fat Owl had not noticed the flat tyre. "Anyhow, I'm going on! Ta-ta, fatty!"

Billy Bunter's eyes gleamed behind his spectacles.

He was not going to walk that quarter of a mile if he could help it! And it seemed to him that he could help it. His cleverness came to the fore again!

The hill was rather steep. A fellow once started on a bike, going downhill, would go like an arrow, and be instantly beyond recapture. It would not be necessary to pedal—it was a free-wheel run all the way. As if to help Bunter in that masterly strategic scheme, four of the Co. had gone on, and that gave him a start, ahead of possible pursuit from Bob's comrades.

"Hold on, Cherry!" gasped Bunter. "I say, I want to tell you—I remember now—that football match——"

"Well, I don't want to be left behind," said Bob, glancing after his comrades, and unaware that that was exactly what Bunter did want. "Cut it short, old man!"

"Topham won!" said Bunter.

"By gum, did they?" said Bob, interested. "They must be a pretty good team, then. I know St. Jude's are

shaping jolly well. Did old Lunn bag anything?"

"I never noticed."

"What was the score?"

"I forget!"

"Oh, my hat! You seem to know a fat lot about it!" said Bob. "Is that all you've got to tell a chap?"

"I—I saw some jolly good goals taken," said Bunter. "There was a Topham chap who played up wonderfully—chap named Wilson, or something, I forget—quite in my style, you know—bagging goals right and left—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Blessed if I see anything to cackle at! Let's see, I think I remember the score—two to one—or three to one—or four to one, perhaps—either that, or something else—"

"Oh crumbs!"

"Or something of the sort," said Bunter. "I say—"

"Thanks for giving me such an accurate description of the match, old bean. I'll get on now," said Bob. His friends were disappearing over the crest of the hill ahead.

"I'll wheel the bike a bit of the way for you," said Bunter.

"Don't trouble."

"Pleasure, old chap!" declared Bunter, and he took hold of the bike.

Bob Cherry was an unsuspecting fellow. He had not the remotest idea of Bunter's felonious designs on that bike. But he was surprised!

It was so utterly unlike Bunter to offer to take trouble on anyone else's account that it was a little difficult to believe.

Still, when Bunter grasped hold of the bike, as if to wheel it, it seemed genuine, and Bob let go the machine. He had done all the wheeling he wanted, if it came to that, and certainly it would have been rather a relief to have that rocky jigger wheeled for him a bit of the way up the hill.

"Ow!" he ejaculated suddenly, as a pedal banged on his leg.

"Better walk clear, old chap!" said Bunter.

Bob gave him six feet of space. He did not want another bang from a pedal. It did not occur to him that Bunter wanted room to turn the bike—now that the other fellows were at a safe distance.

That occurred to him a few seconds later—as Bunter, suddenly and swiftly, whirled the bike round. With unusual activity, the fat junior bounded into the saddle, and the bike shot away down the hill.

Bob stood almost petrified.

"Bunter!" he gasped "My bike! Why, you fat villain! Stop!"

He leaped in pursuit.

But on the steep slope the bike shot instantly far from reach, as the astute Owl had calculated.

But there was one thing upon which Billy Bunter had not calculated, and that was a flat front tyre. He had that discovery yet to make.

He made it suddenly and painfully.

Had the bike been in good order, there was no doubt that Billy Bunter's strategic scheme would have succeeded. He would have raced away to the railway station, and would have been gone in the train before Bob could have covered the distance on foot.

But the bike wasn't in good order. It shot away down the hill a dozen yards, but so rockily and bumpily that Bunter realised, even in that brief space of time, that something was wrong.

Rough going on a steep slope was no place for a fellow to try riding on the rim. The bike rocked and bumped and waddled, and suddenly crashed.

Bunter flew.

What happened he hardly knew. But he knew that he was sitting in the grass beside the road, with more aches and pains distributed over his fat person than he could have counted. And he was yelling wildly.

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Bob.

He came along at a run and picked up the bike. Bunter sat and roared.

"Yoop! Yaroo! I'm killed! My neck's broken! Wow! My leg's smashed! Whoooooop! I say—Yarooop!"

"Can't you get up?" asked Bob.

"Ow! No! Wow!"

"Then I shall have to kick you where you are!"

Bunter found that he could get up. He got up quite quickly.

"Beast! Keep off! Ow!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Bob Cherry grasped the jigger and wheeled it up the hill again.

Billy Bunter gasped and spluttered, and rolled away on foot for the railway station. It was an aching and painful Bunter that got into the train, and rubbed bumps and bruises all the way back to Greystones.

THE SEVENTH CHAPTER.

What's Happened to Hacker?

JAMES HOBSON of the Shell breathed hard and deep as he came out of the House on Saturday afternoon.

Hobby, generally a very cheery and good-tempered fellow, looked grim and gloomy, almost fierce.

Which was a surprise to Harry Wharton & Co. as they sighted him in the quad. That afternoon the Remove were playing the Shell in a Form match; and when football was on Hobby generally looked merry and bright.

"Hallo, hallo, hallo! Enjoying life, old bean?" asked Bob Cherry, giving the captain of the Shell a smack on the shoulder.

"Fathead!" said Hobson.

"My esteemed and absurd Hobson, what—" murmured Hurrce Jamset Ram Singh.

"Br-r-r-r!" said Hobson.

"What's up, old scout?" asked Harry Wharton.

"Hacker!" said Hobby, in concentrated tones. "Hacker! My beak! If you men ever hear of Hacker being brained with a ruler in our Form-room, you'll know that he asked for it a lot of times before he got it!"

Whereat the chums of the Remove grinned. Hobby, evidently, was boiling; but they did not think it probable that so tragic a fate would ever fall to the lot of his Form-master.

"Hacker biting this morning?" asked Bob sympathetically. "He's a bit of an acid drop, I know."

"The acidity is terrific!" agreed the Nabob of Bhanipur.

"All in the day's work, old chap!" said Johnny Bull, very comfortingly. "We get the sharp edge of Quelch's tongue pretty often in the Remove. Taking 'em wide

and large, Hacker doesn't bite oftener than Quelch."

"Something's up with him," said Hobson glumly. "He's like a bear with a sore head to-day. I've heard that he bit Prout in Common-room. He's generally pretty civil to the Fifth Form beak, but I've heard that he shut him up like a pocket-knife at brekker."

"Old Prout wants shutting up at times!" remarked Nugent. "Quelch snaps at him every now and then. Beaks will be beaks, you know!"

"I fancy he's had a letter that's upset him," said Hobson. "I know he's pulled a letter out of his pocket in the Form-room six or seven times this morning and looked at it, with a face as black as—as—as yours, Inky!"

"My esteemed idiotic Hobson—"

"Income-tax, perhaps!" said Bob. "These elderly sportsmen often let off steam when they get a pleasant little note from the Inland Revenue Department. I've heard my pater sometimes."

"Well, whatever it is, it's upset him," said Hobson, "and he's passed it on to us! We've had just one long rag this morning in the Shell!"

"Rough luck!" said Bob.

"Brace up, old bean!" said Harry. "Hacker has his little ways—they all have—but he's not a bad old bean, really."

"Oh, I know that!" grunted Hobson. "Only the other day he barked in when that silly idiot Coker was being cheeky and jawed him—not that I wanted him to, you know; still, he did, and it was amusing to watch Coker's face. Hacker's an acid drop, but a man can stand him, as a rule. But now—"

"Well, it's a half-holiday to-day, and you're done with Hacker," said the captain of the Remove.

"That's all you know!" groaned Hobson. "We've got detention!"

"What?"

"Hacker got worse and worse!" groaned Hobby. "He caned Stewart and Hoskins, and gave me lines. That was bad enough! I tell you, he handed out lines in tons—chucked 'em over like confetti! Some of us started shuffling our feet—not stamping, as he chose to call it; but perhaps we did make a bit of a row. Well, we thought it was time to let him know where he got off—sec? Then he squealed out detention."

"Oh crikey!"

The Famous Five looked grave enough now.

Detention for the Shell that afternoon meant washing out the Form match. Evidently Mr. Hacker must have been in a very truculent mood that morning.

"Well, you seem to have asked for it," remarked Johnny Bull. "We shouldn't stamp in the Remove-room, whatever Quelch did."

"Perhaps you haven't the nerve!" suggested Hobson.

(Continued on next page.)

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"We haven't the fathomedness, anyhow."

"Look here, you cheeky, silly, gabbling Remove tick—"

"Order!" said Harry Wharton. "No rags, old beans! That won't do any good. I say, Hobby, Hacker may feel better after dinner, and let you off. Dinner often has a soothing effect on beaks."

"That's the idea! Ask him nicely after dinner, and point out that there's a football fixture!" said Frank Nugent. Hobson shook his head.

"I'd no more go to his study than I'd go into a tiger's den!" he said impressively. "I'm barring Hacker till he gets over this, whatever it is!"

"But, my dear chap, we're going to play football!" urged Wharton.

"Looks as if we're not!" groaned Hobby.

"Dash it all, if you won't try it on, I jolly well will!" said Harry. "I've a right to point out to him that he's mucking up a football fixture when we're playing in it!"

"Try it on, if you like!" said Hobson. "Guard with your left when you tackle him, that's all!"

And James Hobson, driving his hands deep into his trousers pockets, tramped away in the quad, looking like a fellow who had collected most of the troubles of the universe in a big bunch.

"Well, this is rather thick!" said Bob, with a whistle. "We're getting rotten luck in footer this term, my beloved 'earers! Last Wednesday we were dished over seeing the game at St. Jude's, and now our Form match is washed out owing to Hacker getting out of bed on the wrong side!"

"It's not washed out yet," said Harry Wharton. "Hobby ought to speak to him after dinner. But if he won't, I will."

When the bell rang for dinner, and the juniors went in, Harry Wharton & Co. turned their eyes on the Shell table. Mr. Hacker lunched when his Form dined, like most of the staff, and he was in his usual place.

But he was not, as Bob remarked in a whisper, looking his usual bonny self.

His face was grim and glum—an expression reflected in the countenances of most of the Shell fellows.

Whatever it was that disturbed Mr. Hacker, it seemed that it was still going strong. He had, at the best of times, rather an acid temper, though he was, like all the masters at Greyfriars, a dutiful beak, and a good and conscientious man in his own way. But his looks betrayed the fact that his temper just at present was not merely acid, but pure vinegar.

However, Harry Wharton hoped that dinner might have its usual ameliorating effect. Certainly he was not going to scratch the Form match that afternoon if it was possible to induce Mr. Hacker to rescind his sweeping edict.

Moreover, that Form match was of unusual import, as it happened. For it happened that Vernon-Smith, who had been a tower of strength in the Remove team last term, had turned up for the new term quite off colour—a thing that may happen to the best and keenest footballer. The captain of the Remove was going to give his chum, Frank Nugent, a trial in the Bounder's place, and the game with the Shell was an excellent opportunity.

Naturally, Wharton wanted to know how Frank was likely to shape in the eleven before meeting such teams as Highcliffe, Rookwood, St. Jim's, or St. Jude's. He was very keen on that match with the Shell taking place as scheduled.

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And so, having waited awhile for dinner to produce the hoped-for soothing effect on Hacker, the captain of the Remove made his way to Masters' Studies, and tapped at Hacker's door—gently and respectfully.

He knew that Mr. Hacker was in his study—and he hoped that he was not taking a nap in the armchair. He hoped to find him, soothed by a good dinner, taking a brighter and happier view of the universe and the things therein—and prepared to make concessions to anxious footballing fellows!

Having delivered that gentle tap, Wharton opened the door and gave quite a jump!

Hacker was there, as he expected. He was not napping in the armchair. Neither, unfortunately, was he in a soothed state, taking brighter views. He was standing at the telephone, barking into that instrument, having apparently just got his man at the other end.

"I should say so! Yes! Shocked! Shocked indeed! Amazed—dismayed! I can find no words to describe my feelings! Of course, I will come! I am bound to stand by Eric, even—"

Hacker ceased to bark, suddenly, as he spotted a face at the door. Harry Wharton was quite taken aback. He realised that this was an unfortunate moment for calling on Hacker!

Undecided whether to back out and close the door, or to step in, he was hesitating, when Hacker spotted him, and barked:

"What! Who— Wharton! What do you want here? How dare you walk into my study? Go away at once! I shall complain to your Form-master of this intrusion! Shut that door instantly!"

Harry Wharton, with deep feelings, stepped back, and shut the door. Obviously, it was useless to ask favours of Hacker just then.

His friends were waiting for him in the quad.

"What luck?" asked Bob.

"What did Hacker say?" asked Frank Nugent.

Wharton made a grimace.

"He bit! He was on the phone, jawing somebody! I shall have to leave it till later. Dash it all, the man can't keep on being shirty permanently, because he's got some family trouble on his mind."

But leaving it till later proved no resource. For within ten minutes, the chums of the Remove beheld Mr. Hacker, in coat and hat, striding down to the gates. He strode out, and was gone.

THE EIGHTH CHAPTER.

It's An Ill Wind—

"I SAY, you fellows!"
"Oh, shut up, Bunter!"
"But I say, what's up with Hacker?"

"Blow Hacker!" said six or seven fellows at once.

The Famous Five, and several other Remove men, were consulting with Hobson, and Hoskins, and Stewart, and some other Shell fellows.

Football was in all their thoughts. But Mr. Hacker was gone out, leaving his Form under the sentence of detention.

It was impossible now to ask him to wash out that sentence—and it was scarcely possible to get on with the game, with the sentence still in force. If Hacker walked in, and found his Form playing football, it meant something in the nature of an earthquake—in Hacker's present mood.

On the other hand, if he was gone for

the afternoon, the risk could be taken. It looked as if he had forgotten having detained the Shell—he had not taken the trouble, at all events, to see them into detention before he went out. Still, they were not due for detention till two o'clock, and he might come whisking in before two, if he had only gone for a walk.

In such a doubtful and worrying state of affairs, the footballers had no use for Bunter's chin-wag! They waved him impatiently away.

"But, I say," persisted Bunter, "old Hacker looks fearfully upset. He will have to run to catch that train, too!"

"Train! Has he gone to catch a train?"

All faces brightened. If Hacker had gone to catch a train, it looked as if he was gone for the afternoon. Wharton remembered that he had been saying on the phone that he would come—some-where or other.

"How do you know, Bunter?" demanded Hobson.

"I heard him asking Quelch about trains," explained Bunter. "Quelch told him that there was an up train at two, from Courtfield."

"By gum! If that's where he's gone—"

"He was asking Quelch about the trains to London!" said Bunter. "I say, Quelch looked at him! He could see that he was fearfully upset! So could I. I wonder what's happened? say, you fellows—"

"If Hacker's gone off to London—"

said Hobson, with a deep breath.

"Looks like it!" said Hoskins.

"Forgotten that he's kept us in!" remarked Stewart. "Unless he's spoken to a prefect about it—"

"What a bit of luck!" said Bob Cherry. "We're all right, you men. Hacker's gone for the day."

"We're under detention, all the same!" muttered Hobson. "But—but I think—in the circumstances—"

"Wait till two o'clock," said Stewart sagely. "If Hacker's tipped a prefect, we shall hear by then. If not—"

"If not," said Hobson, "even Hacker won't expect us to detain ourselves. He will be disappointed if he does."

"We've a right to wait till our beak walks us in," said Stewart, "and we've a right to play footer while we wait."

"Hear, hear!"
"I say, you fellows—"

"Bunter, old fat bean, there's a packet of toffee in my study," said Harry Wharton, laughing. "Buzz off and bag it!"

The captain of the Remove felt that Bunter had earned a reward.

Bunter rolled off promptly. The Remove and Shell fellows waited rather anxiously for two to strike.

It looked as if Mr. Hacker, in his upset state, had rushed off to catch the train for London, utterly forgetful of the sentence on his Form. But it was so unlike Hacker, as a rule, to forget such things, that it seemed rather too good to be true. The footballers were hopeful, but anxious. If Hacker had left instructions with a prefect, there was nothing doing. But if he hadn't, and it looked as if he hadn't, all was serene.

Wingate of the Sixth came sauntering across the quad with Gwynne of that Form. Wingate, as a rule, was very popular with the juniors—so was Gwynne. But now the juniors eyed the two seniors with deep distaste. Both of them were prefects—and either or both might have been left the task of herding the Shell into detention.

But Wingate and Gwynne walked on, unheeding the anxious group. Remove



Wharton opened the door of Mr. Hacker's study, and was quite taken aback to see the master of the Shell standing by the telephone. "I should say so!" barked Hacker into the transmitter. "Yes! Shocked! Shocked indeed! Amazed—dismayed—I can find no words to describe my feelings! Of course, I will come—I am bound to stand by Eric——" Wharton hesitated whether to back out or stay in.

and Shell breathed freely again. Two was striking now.

"Hallo, hallo, hallo! Here comes Loder!" breathed Bob Cherry.

Loder of the Sixth came along. He came directly up to the group, and their hearts sank. Were all their hopes to be crushed at the last moment? If the execution of Hacker's sentence had been left in the hands of the bully of the Sixth, there was no hope.

"Hobson!" rapped Loder.

"Yes, Loder!" almost groaned Hobby.

"Where are your lines?"

"Lines!" repeated Hobson, with a start.

Loder smiled sarcastically.

"Forgotten that you had a hundred lines?" he asked. "I believe you're playing football this afternoon! Well, no football till you've handed in your lines."

Loder, as usual, was making himself unpleasant. To his astonishment, Hobson's face brightened up. Loder stared at him. It was the first time, in his experience, that a junior had looked bucked on being asked for lines.

He did not know that Hobby had been expecting something much worse! But the juniors, seeing now that Loder knew nothing about the detention, all smiled cheerily.

"Oh, all right, Loder!" gasped Hobson. "I've nearly done them—I'll bring them to your study in a quarter of an hour."

"No football till you do!" grunted Loder, and he walked away again, quite puzzled.

The juniors exchanged happy glances. "Right as rain!" said Harry. "Hacker hasn't left word! Cut off and finish your impot for that tick, Hobby—lots of time before kick-off!"

"What-ho!" grinned Hobby.

There was another alarm when Walker of the Sixth was seen coming out of the House with Carne. But Walker and Carne went down to the gates, and walked out. At a quarter past two, Hobby handed in his lines to Loder—and by that time it was clear that all was well. Hacker, utterly contrary to his usual custom, had forgotten a punishment. It was a plain proof that he was fearfully upset.

The two teams gathered on Little Side, in cheery spirits. Hacker was in the London train, safe off the scene. No person in authority had been left to carry on with the detention. The Shell were perfectly within their rights in staying out till they were shepherded in. And, as the canny Stewart had pointed out, they had a right to play footer, if they liked, while they waited for Hacker.

So they played footer.

It was real luck. It was indeed so very lucky that Mr. Hacker was so fearfully upset that they rather forgot to sympathise with him in his unknown and mysterious trouble.

Clearly something very startling must have occurred to upset Mr. Hacker, so much and to take him off to London, forgetful of a sentence passed on his Form.

But the juniors were not thinking of that—they were thinking of Soccer.

Bad luck for Hacker was, in the circumstances, good luck for his Form—as the proverb declares, it's an ill wind that blows nobody good! The ill wind for Hacker was a favourable breeze for the Shell!

James Hobson had the additional satisfaction of winning that game. That was not, of course, quite so satisfactory to the Remove. They had played the Shell once already that term, and

beaten them—now, as Hurree Jamsu Ram Singh remarked, it was a boot on the other leg! Frank Nugent, in the Bounder's place in the front line, played up his hardest; and he played quite a good game—but he was not in the same street with Smithy, when Smithy was at his best. The Shell were an older Form, and it would have been a hard tussle at the best of times—now it proved a little too hard.

Vernon-Smith stood and looked on, with rather a sneer on his face.

Smithy was well aware that he was off colour, and that his skipper had no choice but to try a new man in his place; but it irritated him, all the same, to hang about while other fellows played football. And probably he was not wholly displeased to see that Frank, with all his efforts, failed to fill the vacant place satisfactorily.

"Sorry, old man!" Frank remarked to his captain when the game was over, the Shell having been victorious by two goals to one.

"My dear chap, we can't win every match!" answered Harry.

"Smithy may pull up in time for Rookwood!" said Nugent.

Wharton nodded, without replying. He was very keen to keep his best chum in the Remove team if he could; but he had to bite on the fact that Frank was not the man for the Rookwood match, if a better could be found.

Hobson & Co. went off, bucked and cheerful. Mr. Hacker had not come in, and everything had gone well. Hobby had a lingering uneasiness about the view Hacker might take of the matter when he did come in. Still, they had had the game; and that was that.

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The Boy Who Wouldn't Make Friends!



(Continued from page 13.)

THE NINTH CHAPTER.

Quite A Surprise For Hobby!

HOBBY, old man—” Harry Wharton looked into Hobson’s study in the Shell after prep.

Hobson and Stewart and Hoskins were there. Hoskins had produced his fiddle—which was a signal for his study-mates to find sudden and pressing business elsewhere. Hobson was just remarking that he had to see Temple of the Fourth about a Form match when Wharton looked in.

“Hacker—” said Harry. “Has he come in?” asked Hobson. “He wasn’t in at tea-time. Hacker’s been making a jolly day of it.”

“He came in some time ago, and went to the Head!” answered Wharton. “He’s been with Dr. Locke a long time.”

“Does he still look shirty?” asked Hobson anxiously.

“Well, no! But he’s just asked me to look for you, and send you to his study.”

“Oh gum!” Hobson looked dismayed.

“Look here, it’s all right,” said Harry. “Even Hacker wouldn’t expect fellows to walk into detention without being told.”

“But you say he’s been to the Head—”

“Can’t have been about that; he would see you first, if he was going to report you to the Big Beak.”

“Yes, that’s so,” said Hobson, relieved. “And—and you say he doesn’t look so shirty as he did?”

“No; he looks a bit worried, I thought; but not crusty! He seems to have got over his tantrums,” said Wharton encouragingly.

“Well, I’m glad of that, at least,” said Hobson. “I suppose I shall have to go and see him. Anyhow, we had the game.”

James Hobson proceeded to his Form-master’s study—not in a happy mood.

It was a relief to hear that Hacker no longer looked shirty; but even at his best, he was rather an acid gentleman. And though all the Shell fellows felt that they had acted quite within their rights that afternoon, they did not feel sure that Hacker would see eye to eye with them!

Hobby, in fact, was expecting trouble; and he wondered whether it meant only a “royal and imperial jaw,” or lines, or a whopping! It was not a happy Hobson who tapped at Hacker’s door and entered.

Mr. Hacker was seated in his arm-chair by the fire, gazing into the latter with a clouded and thoughtful brow.

He did not look bad-tempered now; but he did look like a man who had found serious trouble of some sort, and upon whose mind it weighed.

He glanced round at Hobby.

“Come in, Hobson,” he said. “You may shut the door.”

Hobson shut the door. He stood before his beak, waiting for the storm to burst. But Mr. Hacker did not seem in a hurry to begin. He gazed at Hobson in a thoughtful way and seemed to be undecided how to get going.

“If you please, sir—” ventured Hobson. He felt that it might be judicious to get in his defence first.

“What?” barked Mr. Hacker.

“I mean, sir, as you went out—” stammered Hobson.

“What?”

“I—I mean, we had to wait for you, sir,” explained Hobson hopefully. “And—and we just played footer while—while we were waiting—”

“You played football!” repeated Mr. Hacker. “Indeed!”

“Our match with the Remove, sir—and—in the circumstances, sir, I—I think, as we had to wait, that—that it was all right—and—and—” Hobby’s voice trailed off under Mr. Hacker’s frigid stare.

“I don’t understand you, Hobson,” said the master of the Shell testily. “Why should you not play football on a half-holiday?”

Hobson almost jumped. That, certainly, was not the reply he had expected from Mr. Hacker.

“I—I mean—” he stammered.

“Well, what do you mean, Hobson?”

“I—I mean—the—the detention—”

“Upon my word!” said Mr. Hacker.

“Oh, quite so, quite so—I fear that I must have forgotten, in the stress of other matters. Upon my word! It quite slipped my mind, Hobson.”

Hobson breathed hard. He could see now that the sentence of detention had slipped Hacker’s mind so completely that he had forgotten it altogether—till Hobby reminded him now!

Evidently, that was not why he had sent for Hobson. Hobby could have kicked himself for having reminded him. Still, how was a fellow to know?

“Quite!” said Mr. Hacker. “Is it possible, Hobson, that because this matter slipped my attention, you—”

Signs of “shirtiness” were only too clear in Hacker’s face. Hobson suppressed a groan! It was coming now! But it did not come!

Mr. Hacker checked himself.

“Well, well,” he said, amazing Hobby, “as I forgot the matter, Hobson, possibly my boys felt entitled to forget it also. You appear to have acted somewhat thoughtlessly, Hobson, but—well, well, we will say no more about the matter.”

“Oh, thank-you, sir!” gasped Hobson.

It was rather difficult for Hobby to believe his ears! The upsetting of Hacker that day seemed to have done him good, Hobby thought!

“It was on quite another matter that I sent for you, Hobson!” went on Mr. Hacker.

Hobby realised that now. He could only wonder what the “other matter” was. Not a row, evidently, for Hacker was looking amiable—as amiable as Hacker could look!

“The fact is—” Mr. Hacker paused for a moment.

“Yes, sir!”

“The fact is—” Mr. Hacker began again. He still seemed undecided how to begin, and Hobby’s wonder increased.

“The fact is—” He coughed. “Hem! You were speaking of—of football! As it happens, my nephew is a very keen footballer, and no doubt it will—er—” Hacker paused again. He was rather unused to being amiable, and the new

mood came rather jerkily. “I believe he is a very good footballer indeed!” he added.

“Is he, sir?” said the wondering Hobby. He had never heard of Mr. Hacker’s nephew before—never thought of Hacker having one, indeed he had hardly thought of the stiff, acid master of the Shell as a human being at all, with ordinary human ties.

And what Hacker’s nephew had to do with Hobby was a mystery. Hobby, so far as he could see, was never likely to meet the kid.

“My nephew Eric,” went on Mr. Hacker, “is coming to Greyfriars on Monday, Hobson.”

“Oh!” said Hobson.

He began to understand.

It was much to Hobby’s credit that he did not allow his face to betray the dismay he felt.

One Hacker was enough, in Hobby’s opinion! Two Hackers would be altogether too much of a good thing! And a young Hacker in the Shell—some beastly little tick, of course—it was absolutely rotten!

“You will meet him on Monday, probably!” said Mr. Hacker.

“Yes, sir,” said Hobson, trying to look as if he liked the prospect. “I—I—I shall be—be glad to meet Hacker, sir.”

“Eh! What do you mean? Oh! My nephew’s name is not Hacker,” said the master of the Shell. “His name is Wilmot—Eric Wilmot.”

“Oh!” said Hobby. “I shall be glad to meet Wilmot, sir! Is—is—is he coming into the Shell?”

Hobson hardly dared to hope for an answer in the negative!

But his luck was in that day! The answer came—in the negative!

“No, Hobson!”

“Oh!” said Hobson.

A minute or two ago Hobby had been trying not to look dismal. Now he tried not to look glad!

“He was in the Lower Fourth Form at his last school,” said Mr. Hacker. “He will go into the Lower Fourth here—the Remove! I have arranged the matter with the Head to-day. I—” He broke off, as if he realised that he was saying more than was necessary to Hobson.

“Eric—I mean, Wilmot—will arrive on Monday.”

“Yes, sir!”

As the new fellow was not coming into the Shell, Hobby did not quite see how it concerned him at all. Neither would he have expected a man like Hacker to bother much about a schoolboy nephew. Still, as Hobby admitted, you never could tell! Hacker might have had lots and lots of deep family affection bottled up under his crusty exterior.

Anyhow, it was clear that he was concerned about this chap Wilmot, or he would not have sent for Hobby to speak to him on the subject.

“I think you will probably like Eric—I mean, Wilmot, Hobson,” said Mr. Hacker. “I believe he is very popular—a very agreeable boy.”

“Greasy little tick!” was Hobson’s unspoken comment.

Aloud he said:

“Oh, yes, sir!”

“He will be new here,” said Mr. Hacker. “Of course, he has been to school before; but—as I say—he will be a stranger among us! If you are able to do anything, Hobson, to make his first days at Greyfriars—er—easier—I should say—er—pleasant—I am sure, Hobson—”

“Certainly, sir!” said Hobson. “We don’t see much of the Remove, in the Shell, as a rule; but if I come across

young Wilmot, I'll be decent to him, sir."

Hobby meant that, quite sincerely. There was a chance that Hacker's nephew was not a tick—he might be quite unlike Hacker! But, tick or not, it seemed to be this chap Eric who was the cause of Hobson escaping trouble over the detention. One good turn deserved another.

"Thank you, Hobson," said Mr. Hacker, very graciously. "The fact is, Hobson, I shall feel obliged if you find any way of showing my nephew some little friendly attention. You might, perhaps, speak to your friends in the Remove on the subject. I very much desire my nephew to be happy here."

It was borne in on Hobby's surprised mind that Hacker really was a human being after all! There was real feeling in his voice as he spoke. Hobby, who had the kindest heart in the world, quite warmed.

"I'll do anything I can, sir! I'm sure I shall like the chap! I'll look for him on Monday, sir."

"Thank you, Hobson," said Mr. Hacker.

And Hobby left his Form-master's study, greatly relieved, rather puzzled, but resolved to do his best for the new fellow—even if, as Hobby feared, he turned out to be a greasy little tick!

THE TENTH CHAPTER.

A Spot of Mystery!

"KINDLY remain a few moments, Wharton."

"Certainly, sir!" Head boy of the Remove was not wholly his own master like other fellows. When the Remove was dismissed in break, on Monday morning, they went out joyfully into keen, frosty air—and head boy waited to hear what his Form-master had to say.

In point of fact, Wharton would have been glad to scuttle out after the others. But as Mr. Quelch asked him kindly to remain, there was no choice in the matter; and he had to remain, whether kindly or unkindly. Hoping that Quelch would cut it short, he stood by the master's desk.

Mr. Quelch looked at him over the desk.

"A new boy comes into the Remove to-day, Wharton," he said.

"Oh, yes, sir!" said Harry.

"You were aware of it, Wharton?" asked the Remove master, raising his eyebrows a little.

"Hobson told me, sir—his Form-master's nephew is coming," said Harry. "Mr. Hacker told him so on Saturday."

"Oh! Quite, quite!" said Mr. Quelch. "Well, Wharton, this boy—er—Wilmot—joins us to-day."

Quelch pursed his lips, and his brows knitted a little. Wharton, noticing it, wondered whether Quelch disliked the idea of having another beak's relative in his Form.

Hobson had told Harry about it. Loyal old Hobby, willing to do all he could, had asked the captain of the Remove to give the new kid a friendly word, if he happened to see him, and to refrain from kicking him for a day or two, even if he asked for it.

To which Wharton, grinning, had assented at once. Wharton had not had an easy first term at Greyfriars himself, and he remembered how much a little kind help meant to a new boy in a new world. He was prepared to be

quite decent to Hacker's nephew, even if he asked to be kicked!

Mr. Quelch was silent for a moment or two, and Wharton waited. The impression strengthened in his mind that Quelch did not want Hacker's nephew in the Remove. If that was the case, however, Quelch was certainly not likely to confide the fact to his head boy. Still, it was clear that he had something to say to Wharton about young Wilmot.

"Wilmot—er—arrives to-day," said Mr. Quelch, overlooking the fact that he had already told Wharton that. "And—er—I have decided to place him in your study, Wharton."

"Oh!" said Harry.

He looked as equable as he could. There were only two fellows in Study No 1 in the Remove—himself and Nugent.

There were three or four in most of

the studies. So there was nothing to grumble at in Hacker's nephew being landed on him. True, he did not want a new kid in the study—but he was a reasonable fellow.

"I trust, Wharton, that you will make Wilmot welcome," said Mr. Quelch, answering Wharton's unspoken thoughts.

"Certainly, sir!" said Harry. "I dare say we shall like him all right."

"Yes, yes, probably!" said Mr. Quelch, as if he doubted it himself. "I believe he is a rather keen footballer, Wharton—I understand that he was considered so at his former school—and that, doubtless, will recommend him to you, as football captain in the Form."

"Oh, yes, rather, sir," said Harry, with a cordiality that made his Form-master smile.

It occurred to Wharton, at once, that if this chap Wilmot was really hot stuff,

(Continued on next page.)

GREYFRIARS INTERVIEWS

(1)

"Once upon a time," so runs the story,
"A certain lord named Mauly went berserk.
Perhaps in search of novelty or glory,
He actually started on some work!
For nearly five whole minutes he was busy,
And then, when sheer exhaustion made him wince,
He turned and fell asleep, completely dizzy,
And in that state he's lasted ever since!"

(2)

This limp and lazy lord is not a dullard.
No fear! His brain is very sharp and out.
He never lets his view of life be coloured
By prejudice which reason may refute.
He gives his judgments honestly and fairly,
No matter what discomforts they may make,
And as his friends acknowledge, Mauly rarely
Has known the pain of making a mistake.

(3)

With little fear of violence or booting,
I went along and knocked at Mauly's door.
There came no answer, save a kind of hooting,
Which I at once decided was a snore!
So in I went, and found the fathead dozing,
Full length upon the sofa he had lain.
His mouth was gently opening and closing,
And from his nose there came a sound of pain!

(4)

This may be false, but there is no denying
That Mauly spends his life in slumber deep;
A decent chap, whose only vice is lying!
Yes, lying on his sofa fast asleep!
While other fellows chase the bounding leather,
Or dive into the river for a swim,
Old Mauly sleeps, and never minds the weather,
Which makes so little difference to him!



(5)

I took a hefty grammar from the table,
And, with a tear, I dropped it on his map!
The howl he gave was like the Tower of Babel,
As he was thus awakened from his nap!
"Oh, gad! You dangerous ruffian!" he chanted,
And then, extremely wrathful, I suppose,
He swiftly clutched that grammar up and planted
The volume fairly on my Roman nose!

(6)

"Yaroo!" I roared, my merziment forgotten,
As tenderly I nursed the damaged place;
For you'll agree, I think, it's simply rotten
To bung a grammar at a fellow's face!
It made me wild, so I picked up the grammar
And went to throw it—when I heard a cough!
And saw old Mauly flourishing a hammer—
And so, on second thoughts, I let him off!



(7)

"And now a word with you," I said severely,
"I've come here for an interview—don't rag!"
But Mauly yawned, and turning over, merely
Replied in feeble tones: "It's too much for me!"
I prodded him a little with my finger,
Said I: "Wake up, you limp and lazy lord!"
He said: "I'm goin' to sleep, you needn't linger!"
And as I watched him angrily, he snored!

(8)

I must have woke the fathead times unnumbered,
But every time I woke him, he said:
"Soat!"
And then he simply closed his eyes and slumbered,
As if he thought me satisfied with that!
At last I had to own myself defeated.
With mournful brow I walked toward the door.
The last I heard from him as I retreated
Was—just a single loud defiant SNORE!

he might solve that little difficulty about filling the Bounder's place in the Remove eleven.

"In other respects," said Mr. Quelch, "I do not know how you will find him. I have, of course, never seen him, so far; but Mr. Hacker, his uncle, has—er—a high opinion of him, I believe."

Wharton listened respectfully, wondering more and more.

It was perfectly clear that there was something in Quelch's mind which he was not going to utter. For some reason, he was perturbed about that new kid coming into the Remove. Why, was rather a mystery, for the fact that he was another master's nephew could hardly account for it.

"I have a special reason for placing this boy Wilmot with you, Wharton," went on Mr. Quelch.

Then he stopped quite suddenly. It was just as if he had approached perilously near to the secret thought in his mind, and was alarmed at the danger of giving it utterance.

"Yes, sir," said Harry. "That's all right, sir! We can't grumble at having him in our study—Bob has four fellows in Study No. 13, and—"

"Oh, yes, yes!" said Mr. Quelch. "Quite so; but that is not the reason. You are a sensible boy, I trust, Wharton."

"Thank you, sir!" said Harry blankly.

"Nugent, also, is a boy of very steady character," said Mr. Quelch musingly. "I have a very good opinion of both of you."

Wharton hardly knew what to say. This was quite pleasant hearing, of course. It was gratifying to learn of Mr. Quelch's excellent opinion of him and his chum. But it was surprising and perplexing. Quelch could hardly mean that Wilmot was some sort of a "bad hat," likely to have a bad influence on any but boys of steady character. But really it sounded like it. Certainly he had never spoken in such a strain before, on the occasion of new fellows coming into the Form.

Mr. Quelch opened his lips again, and Wharton waited with considerable curiosity to hear more. But the master of the Remove closed them, with what he had been going to say unuttered.

He drummed on the desk with his fingers. Wharton suppressed a smile while he waited.

He knew, just as if Mr. Quelch had told him so, that there was something on his Form-master's mind with respect to the new boy, Wilmot. It was something he could not tell, but which made him secretly uneasy.

Was the chap some untrustworthy tick? But surely he must be all right if Dr. Locke let him come to Greyfriars at all! And a master's nephew, too! But there was something—that was clear.

Again Mr. Quelch opened his lips. Again he closed them. Then he said abruptly:

"Thank you, Wharton! You may go!"

Wharton went.

He glanced back, without thinking, as he left the Form-room, and was quite surprised by the expression he caught on Mr. Quelch's face. Quelch was frowning darkly and his lips were set in a tight line. That glimpse was more than convincing. Quelch, for some reason, hated the idea of Hacker's nephew in his Form! Whatever it was he had been unable to tell his head boy, it weighed deeply and heavily on his own mind.

Wharton hurriedly went down the passage.

His friends were waiting for him outside the House, and they gave him inquiring looks.

"You've been a jolly long time!" said Nugent. "Not a row with Quelch. I hope?"

"Oh, no! Far from it," said Harry, laughing. "Quelch has been telling me what a nice chap I am."

"Lots of Form-masters don't know much about chaps in their Forms!" grinned Nugent.

"Oh, quite—he has been telling me what a nice chap you are, too!"

"Oh! In that case a Daniel come to judgment!" said Nugent, laughing.

"But seriously, I can hardly make Quelch out," said Harry. "He's planting that new kid in our study—you remember I told you that Hobby said his beak's nephew was coming into the Remove to-day—"

"I say, you fellows—"

"Shut up, Bunter! We're getting him in our study," said Harry. "Quelch seems worried about it somehow—blessed if I can guess why."

"I say—"

"Roll away, Bunter!"

"I say, you fellows, my postal order hasn't come!" said Bunter, blinking solemnly at the chums of the Remove through his big spectacles. "I've looked in the rack, but there's no letter for me. If one of you fellows has got half-a-crown he doesn't want—"

"There's one thing," said Harry. "Quelch says that Wilmot was a good footballer at his last school—"

"What was his school?" asked Bob.

"Quelch never said! But if he's good at Soccer he may come in useful," said Harry. "You see—"

"I say, did you say a new kid's coming?" asked Billy Bunter, with some interest. Bunter had a natural interest in new kids. New kids hadn't heard of his celebrated postal order! And a fellow who hadn't heard of it was more likely to cash it than a fellow who had! "I say, what did you say his name was?"

"Wilmot!" answered Harry.

"I believe I know somebody of that name," said Bunter, wrinkling his fat brow in thought. "I've heard that name somewhere lately."

"Poor old Bunter!" said Bob Cherry commiseratingly.

"Eh? What do you mean, 'Poor old Bunter'?" demanded the fat Owl, blinking at him.

"I mean, if you know the new chap he knows you—and he won't be likely to lend you anything if he does."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Beast!" yapped Bunter. "I say, you fellows—about my postal order—"

Harry Wharton & Co. walked away to join other Removites in punting a footer about—apparently quite uninterested in Bunter's postal order.

When they went in for third school Wharton noticed that Quelch still had a very thoughtful frown on his brow, and wondered whether he was thinking about Hacker's nephew. He was feeling very curious about that youth by this time, and rather interested to see him to see what sort of a merchant he was.

Towards the end of third school there was a tap at the door, and Mr. Hacker glanced in.

"If you can spare a moment, Quelch—" he said.

Mr. Quelch did not like sparing moments while class was on. But he went to the Form-room door.

The two masters spoke together in a low tone that did not reach the Remove. But Mr. Quelch's voice came to their ears suddenly as he spoke with some emphasis.

"Really, Mr. Hacker, I see no reason for a Remove boy to miss a whole lesson this afternoon."

"Oh, very well, sir!" said Mr. Hacker snappishly.

He went away, and Mr. Quelch came back to his Form. His lips were tightly compressed. What Hacker had wanted was a mystery to the Remove—though if he had wanted a Remove fellow to cut a class any Remove fellow would have been extremely willing to oblige him. However, whatever he had wanted, it was clear that Quelch had declined, and that was that!

THE ELEVENTH CHAPTER.

Hobby in Luck!

"HOBSON!"

James Hobson jumped.

"Oh! Yes, sir!" he gasped.

It was close on the finish of third school, and Mr. Hacker had left his Form-room. He had gone down the corridor, in point of fact, to speak to Quelch at the door of the Remove Room. The Shell did not know why he was gone, but they were naturally pleased at his going—it gave them a little welcome relaxation.

Hobby's relaxation took the shape of dropping an ink-ball down the neck of Chowne of the Shell. Chowne's antics, when he felt that ink-ball sliding down his back, entertained Hobby.

Then Hacker's voice barked as he came in at the door.

Hobby gazed at him in dismay.

He had no doubt that Hacker had spotted his little jest on Chowne, and was going to make it clear, perhaps with the aid of the cane, that a Form-room was not a proper place for jesting.

Instead of which Mr. Hacker merely said:

"I wish to speak to you, Hobson, after this class. Remain here."

"Yes, sir."

Mr. Hacker glanced at the Form-room clock. It still wanted one minute to time for dismissal. Hacker was not the man to dismiss his Form even one second ahead of time. So the Shell stared when he dismissed them—sixty seconds before they were entitled to escape from Hacker and class.

Unexpected as it was, it was very welcome, and the Shell scuttled away cheerfully. Hobson remained to hear what Hacker wanted.

"I think I mentioned to you, Hobson, that my nephew arrives to-day," said Mr. Hacker.

"I remember, sir!" said Hobby.

"I should like him to be met at the station at Courtfield," said Mr. Hacker. "You might care to go, Hobson."

Hobby looked at him.

If Mr. Hacker supposed that Hobson might "care" to waste his time on a benighted new kid Mr. Hacker showed very poor judgment.

Hobby certainly was going to be kind to the little beast when he came. He had a kind heart, and he was a fellow of his word. But going down to meet a train at Courtfield was rather too much of a good thing. Hobby, naturally, had his own occupations, quite enough to fill up his time before the bell rang for afternoon class.

It was scarcely possible to refuse the request of a Form-master. But Hobson did feel that it was rather thick!

"Oh, of—of course, sir!" he stammered. "But—but as Wilmot is going into the Remove, sir, perhaps if a Remove chap went—"

"I have thought of that, Hobson!" said Mr. Hacker.

"What I mean is, sir, it would be



During Mr. Hacker's absence from the Form-room, Hobson took advantage of the welcome relaxation by dropping an ink-ball down the neck of Chowne. He jumped the next moment, however, as the Form-room door was thrown open and a voice barked: "Hobson!" It was Mr. Hacker returning!

more pleasant for him—a fellow of his own Form—” said Hobson hopefully.

“Quite so, Hobson, but it appears to be impracticable!” said Mr. Hacker. “Mr. Quelch is not prepared to allow a Remove boy to miss a class for the purpose.”

Hobson started.

It flashed into his mind, from Hacker's words, that the new tick was going to arrive while class was on!

That put an entirely different complexion on the matter!

Hobby, naturally, did not want to use up his own fully occupied leisure between dinner and school by rotting about at a railway station, meeting a new kid! But he was willing—more than willing—to sacrifice a class for that purpose!

Hobby was prepared to cut a class to meet a new kid—or for any other reason whatsoever! The reason mattered less than cutting the class! Hobby would willingly have gone to Courtfield, or anywhere else, to meet Hacker's nephew, or Hacker's great-grandfather, for that matter—in lesson-time! Hobby bucked up at once.

“My nephew,” resumed Mr. Hacker, “will arrive at Courtfield Station by the two-thirty train, Hobson.”

Hobson smiled genially.

At two-thirty that afternoon the Shell would be in the Form-room, and doing Roman history with Hacker.

Hobson was going to lose the knowledge he might have acquired of the Twelve Cæsars. But he did not mind.

He was, in fact, in luck, and he knew it. Any other man in the Shell would have jumped at the chance.

“I'll be awfully glad to meet the chap, sir,” said Hobson, sincerely enough. “I'll bring him safe to Greyfriars, sir. It will be a real pleasure to me, sir,” added Hobby, with undoubted sincerity.

Mr. Hacker smiled quite genially.

Perhaps he did not realise how much “cutting a class” had to do with Hobby's enthusiasm.

Anyhow, he was pleased.

“Thank you, Hobson!” he said.

“Not at all, sir,” purred Hobby.

“No doubt you will find my nephew easily enough,” said Mr. Hacker. “He is, of course, a stranger to you, but he—”

“Oh, easy, sir!” said Hobson. “I'll spot him all right. Rely on me, sir.”

“Very well, Hobson.”

Hobson went joyfully away. He quite liked Hacker at that moment, and was prepared to like his nephew.

The crusty old beak certainly seemed fond of his nephew, and, owing to that, Hobby was going to have a pleasant trot on a fine frosty afternoon, while less fortunate fellows were grinding in class. So Hobby fully approved of crusty Form-masters being fond of their nephews.

“Hallo, hallo, hallo! Enjoying life?” roared Bob Cherry, catching sight of Hobby's bright face as he came out of the House.

Hobson grinned.

“I'm in luck,” he said. “I say, I've got leave from class this afternoon to go and meet that new tick, Wilmot—old Hacker's nephew, you know. I get out of a whole class. You can tell Quelch when you see him again that I'm jolly glad he wouldn't let off a Remove man.”

“Oh!” exclaimed Harry Wharton. “So that was what Hacker wanted!”

“Look here! That's not cricket!” exclaimed Bob indignantly. “Wilmot's a Remove man, and a Remove man ought to be sent to meet him—if anybody. I'd be quite glad to go myself.”

“Same here!” grinned Frank

Nugent. “We've got Latin grammar this afternoon.”

“The samefulness is terrific!” agreed Hurrce Jamset Ram Singh. “The esteemed Quelch might have stretched a point.”

“I'd have gone, if he'd asked me,” remarked Johnny Bull, with a nod.

“Bet you would!” chuckled Hobson. “But I'm jolly well going! You can tell Quelch I'm much obliged to him. Ha, ha, ha!”

“Quelch is a bit of a sweep,” said Bob. “He might have obliged another beak. It's pretty plain that's what Hacker came to, ask him. Crusty old merchant to refuse to oblige another beak!”

“Jolly glad he did!” grinned Hobson. “You kids can stick in class with Quelch, and think of me trotting over to Courtfield. Ha, ha!”

“Gentlemen, chaps, and sportsmen!” said Bob Cherry. “Quelch seems to me a disobliging old sweep. We can't tell him what we think of him. But it's too thick. Hobson's bagged a jaunt that properly belongs to the Remove, and, as we can't bump Quelch, I think we'd better bump Hobby.”

“Hear, hear!” said the Co. at once. “Hold on! I say!” yelled Hobson, as the grinning five collared him. “I say—Whoop! You cheeky fags! Yarooop! You bump me, and I'll jolly well—Yurrgggh!”

Bump!

Hobson was rather a hefty youth. But he was no use in the grasp of five pairs of hands.

He swung off his feet, and earth and sky reeled round him. Then he tapped on the quad, and roared wildly.

“Give him another!” said Bob.

Bump!

“Yarooop!” roared Hobson. “Oh, my hat! I'll jolly well—Yoooop!”

"One more for luck!" said Bob. Bump!

"Whoop!"

Then the Famous Five walked away, chuckling, leaving James Hobson sitting on the earth, gasping for breath, crimson and winded.

It was quite some time before Hobby recovered sufficiently to rush off in search of Hoskins and Stewart to tell them of his good luck.

THE TWELFTH CHAPTER.

Meeting Eric Wilmot!

A HANDSOME face looked out of a window of the train that stopped at Courtfield Junction at two-thirty.

Handsome as that face was, it had on it an expression of sullen despondency that considerably marred its good looks.

Eric Wilmot, Hacker's nephew, the new fellow for the Greyfriars Remove, looked out gloomily on the platform.

He saw that it was Courtfield, his destination. Yet oddly enough he seemed in no hurry to alight from the train.

He sat and stared glumly.

His eyes fell on a rather burly fellow in a Greyfriars cap with a rugged, good-humoured face standing on the platform, gazing along the train.

But he had never seen Hobson of the Shell before, did not know him, and was not interested in him. He gave him only a cursory glance.

Other passengers alighted—but not many. There was no rush of traffic at Courtfield.

Hobson watched them all.

But none of them could have been Hacker's nephew. There was a stout

farmer, a nurse with a child, a young lady typist from Chunkley's Stores, Mr. Pilkins, the estate agent, Mr. Lazarus, the second-hand merchant, and a couple of men who looked like commercial travellers. Hobby did not know Hacker's nephew by sight; but he could see that none of this collection could possibly be Hacker's nephew.

He wondered whether the new tick had lost his train.

Hobby did not mind if he had. He was willing to fill in the time at the pictures while he waited for the next train.

Still, Hobby was a conscientious chap. He was going to make sure. Hobby knew what a silly ass a new kid might be—he had been a new kid himself. If the young tick was on the train, it was Hobby's duty to see that he got off at Courtfield.

So he walked along the carriages, staring into one after another. Thus he came to spot the handsome, sullen face that looked out of a window.

He halted.

This fellow looked as if he might be the man. The train stopped several minutes at Courtfield, and it was not restarting yet. Still, if the tick did not know that he had got to his station, it was time he was told. Hobson jerked open the carriage door.

"You happen to be Wilmot?" he asked.

The sulky face stared at him.

"That's my name!" came the curt answer.

"Going to Greyfriars?"

"Yes."

"Well, this is your station. Hop out! You'll get carried on goodness knows where if you stick in!"

Wilmot made no answer. Neither did he stir. Hobson stared at him, puzzled.

"This is Courtfield!" he said.

"I know that."

"Oh, you know it!" said the mystified Hobby.

"Yes."

"Why don't you get out, then?"

"You're asking a lot of questions for a stranger," said Wilmot, with the same sulky look and tone. "May I suggest that you mind your own affairs, and leave me to look after mine?"

Hobby breathed rather hard.

"I've been sent here to meet you," he said. "I'm Hobson of the Shell at Greyfriars. Hacker's my Form-master."

"Oh!"

"Well, are you getting out?" demanded Hobby.

Wilmot seemed to be considering it. What there was to consider was a mystery to Hobson. The fellow knew that he had got to his station, and did not seem to care whether he was carried on past it or not. Which was a frame of mind absolutely incomprehensible to James Hobson.

"The train will be going on in a tick," said Hobby.

"I don't care!"

"You don't care?" ejaculated the astonished Hobby.

"No."

"Well, my only summer hat! Your uncle will care, I fancy, if you don't turn up at school!" gasped Hobson. "And the Head may have something to say, and your Form-master, too—old Quelch. Are you off your rocker, or what?"

"Oh, don't bother!"

Hobby regarded him grimly.

He had arrived at Courtfield, full of the kindest intentions towards his Form-master's nephew. He was prepared to be very decent indeed to the fellow who had got him out of a class with Hacker. Now his feelings changed. He was conscious of a keen desire to plant a set of knuckles in that sulky handsome face.

However, he refrained from doing so. He stepped back.

"Well, please yourself," he said.

"Hacker sent me here to meet you, but I suppose he wouldn't expect me to yank you off the train by your ears."

Wilmot shrugged his shoulders. But he seemed to make up his mind, and stepped from the carriage.

There was a scream from the engine. The new boy had made up his mind only just in time. The train rolled on, leaving him standing on the platform with Hobson.

Taking no notice of the Shell fellow, he walked along towards a box that had been dropped out by the guard.

Hobson followed him.

"I say, Wilmot—" he began. Hobby was puzzled and mystified and far from pleased, but he wanted to be as decent as possible to this very unusual new kid.

"Yes—what?" Wilmot spoke curly over his shoulder without turning his head.

"They'll send your box on—you needn't bother about that!" said Hobby.

"I'll speak to the porter."

"I can take it with me on a taxi, I suppose."

"You can if you like, of course, if you've got tin to blow on taxicabs!" said Hobson. "But I say, it's a ripping walk over the common! Topping afternoon for a walk!"

"I don't care for it."

"Well, look here," said Hobson restively, "I don't see taking a taxi! It will get us to the school in next to no time!"

"I've got to get there, haven't I?"

"Yes. But there's no blessed hurry! If you're keen on seeing Quelch, I can



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tell you I'm not keen on getting back to the Shell Form-room!" said Hobson warmly. "I shall have to go into class again when I get back, of course!"

Wilmot stared at him.

"Do you mean that you don't want to come in the taxi?"

"Yes, I jolly well do!"

"Well, I haven't asked you, have I?"

Hobson crimsoned.

"Hacker's sent me for you!" he exclaimed. "I shall have to stick to you, of course!"

"What utter rot!"

"Oh, quite!" said Hobson savagely. "It doesn't matter to me, I can tell you, if a new kid goes mooning about missing his station and getting lost! If you think I care two straws, you're jolly well mistaken—see!"

"I don't think so!"

"Well, you'd be jolly well mistaken if you did! But I've got to carry out Hacker's orders—see?"

"Rubbish!"

Leaving Hobson rooted to the platform, the new fellow went along to the porter and directed him to have the box placed on a taxicab.

Hobson rejoined him as he went off the platform. Wilmot was taking no notice of him, but Hobson was not to be ignored. He was keeping his temper with great difficulty.

"Look here, Wilmot," he said, "be a reasonable chap! Let your box be sent on, and let's walk."

"I don't care to."

"I shall have to come in the taxi if you do. It's pretty rotten. Look here, new kids are not supposed to put on roll like this!" said Hobson. "Fellows who put on roll at Greyfriars get kicked for it!"

"Bother Greyfriars, and you, too!"

"Don't you want to come to Greyfriars?" asked Hobson blankly. That obvious fact dawned on Hobby's rather slow brain at last.

"No, I don't!"

"Well, you're all sorts of an ass!" said Hobson. "Chap has to go to some school, and if he has to go to school, it's rather a catch to get into the best school going!"

Wilmot stared at him and laughed—not a pleasant laugh.

"Is that what you think of Greyfriars?" he asked.

"Of course it is!"

"Then you're more sorts of an ass than I am! I wouldn't be found dead in the place if I could help it!"

"You wouldn't be found dead at Greyfriars!" repeated Hobson dazedly.

"No!"

"You cheeky tick!"

"That's enough!"

Wilmot walked out of the station. Hobson, with a red and frowning face, tramped after him.

Kind-hearted Hobby had never ragged a new kid. But he felt powerfully tempted to rag this one bald-headed! Only by a very powerful exercise of self-control did he restrain himself from collaring Eric Wilmot there and then and mopping up the slushy pavement with him.

The box was placed on the taxi. Evidently Wilmot intended to take the cab, regardless of Hobby's wishes in the matter. But Hobby made another effort.

"Look here, Wilmot—"

"I'd rather you left me alone, if you don't mind," said the new junior. "If you've come here to meet me, I'm obliged, and that's an end of it! But I don't see any reason for my uncle to send a fellow to meet me here—I know my way about, and I'm not going into

his Form, either! Do you take me for a kid that's never been to school before?"

"Oh, you've been to school before, have you?" grunted Hobson. "Well, I don't know what school it was, but I can see they didn't kick you enough!"

Wilmot gave a shrug of the shoulders, which had a very irritating effect on the Shell fellow.

"Well, look here," said Hobson, "I think you're a rotten tick, Wilmot! And if you weren't a new kid, I'd jolly well punch your head—see?"

Wilmot looked at him.

"Never mind my being a new kid!" he retorted. "Get on with it as soon as you like! I'm feeling like punching somebody!"

"By gum!" said James Hobson. He came very near taking the fellow at his word. But he made an effort and refrained. "Well, the Remove are getting a prize-packet in you, and no mistake! I dare say they'll take some of the cheek out of you before you're many days older. You're going to take this taxi?"

"I've said so!"

Wilmot settled the matter by stepping into the vehicle.

"Well, I call it rotten!" said Hobson. "This means that I shall be landed in the Form-room again. I never saw such a tick! But if you're going in the dashed taxi, I shall have to, as Hacker sent me for you!"

"You've forgotten one thing!" said the new junior, staring at him icily from the taxi.

"What's that?"

"That I haven't asked you!"

"Look here—"

"Drive to Greyfriars School, please!" said Wilmot to the taximan; and he drew the door shut with a slam.

Hobson stood staring.

The taxi whirred away down Courtfield High Street, leaving Hobson standing on the pavement and still staring. He stared after the vanishing vehicle as if fascinated. It disappeared in the traffic of the High Street.

"Well, I'm blowed!" said Hobson.

It was all he could say.

THE THIRTEENTH CHAPTER.

Uncle and Nephew!

HARRY WHARTON & CO., grinding Latin grammar in the Remove room, heard a taxi drive up to the House. They wondered whether it portended the arrival of the new fellow, Wilmot.

No doubt the same thought occurred to Mr. Quelch, for he was observed to pause and listen for a moment. But Quelch carried on, apparently indifferent to the fact that a new member of his Form might, or might not, have arrived.

But if Mr. Quelch was not interested, another beak was. Mr. Hacker left the Shell room at once when he heard the taxi stop.

He was on the step of the House when Eric Wilmot descended from the cab. His eyes fixed on the handsome sulky face.

Wilmot paid the taximan and glanced round him with a cold, careless, indifferent glance. Then, as he saw his uncle, he coloured a little, and came up the steps.

Mr. Hacker frowned as he saw that his nephew was alone. He shook hands with Wilmot, without much cordiality on either side.

"Where is Hobson?" he asked.

"Hobson!" repeated Wilmot.

"I sent a boy of my Form to meet you at the station. Has he allowed you to come here alone? I shall—"

The look on Mr. Hacker's face hinted of trouble to come for Hobson. But Wilmot broke in at once.

"Oh, that fellow! He met me at the station!"

"Why did he not return with you, then?"

"I didn't want his company!"

"What? I sent him specially to meet you. He should have returned with you. I shall punish him—"

"He's not to blame," said Wilmot.

"He is very much to blame!" snapped Mr. Hacker.

"I mean, I wouldn't let him come in my taxi."

"What! And why not?"

"I didn't want him."

Mr. Hacker looked at his nephew.

"Did Hobson tell you I had sent him to meet you, Eric?"

"Yes."

"And you chose to leave him behind?"

"Yes."

Mr. Hacker breathed hard through his nose.

"Wait here, while I speak to Gosling about your box!" he said curtly.

"Very well!"

Eric Wilmot waited, with an expressionless face—save for the cloud of sullenness that seemed habitual to it. He hardly gave a glance about him, indifferent to the place in which he found himself. When his uncle rejoined him, and signed to him to follow, he followed the master of the Shell to the latter's study.

There Mr. Hacker surveyed him, with a look that was a little puzzled, and still more displeased.

"You seem to have treated Hobson very uncivilly, Eric," he said at last.

"I didn't mean to be uncivil!"

"He is a very good-natured boy," said Mr. Hacker. "He was prepared to be friendly with you."

"I don't want him to be."

Mr. Hacker compressed his lips.

"Are you so sure of making friends that you can afford to be rude and uncivil to the first Greyfriars boy you meet?" he snapped.

"I'm not keen on making friends here?"

There was a long pause. Mr. Hacker stood staring at the handsome face, as if trying to penetrate through the mask of sullen indifference that hid Eric Wilmot's thoughts and feelings.

"This will not do, Eric!" he said at length. "A sullen and sulky temper will not help you here."

Wilmot made no reply.

"You have little cause to display such a temper," said the master of the Shell warmly. "You should be grateful and thankful, Eric. You have such a chance, as you could not possibly have expected after what happened at Topham. You must be aware of that."

"I know!" said Wilmot, in a low voice.

"It is only the fact that I, your uncle, am a member of the staff here, that has obtained admittance for you to this school!" said Mr. Hacker sharply.

Wilmot winced.

"I know!" he repeated.

"You may look upon it as a small thing!" said Mr. Hacker, with a note of angry indignation in his voice. "But I can assure you, Eric, that my interview with the headmaster on the subject was far from pleasant. I am not a man to ask favours—and I had to ask a favour—a great favour—and Dr. Locke found

difficulty in granting it. Do you imagine that it was agreeable to me?"

"It was good of you, uncle!" said Wilmot. "I'm grateful! I know it must have come hard—I'm no fool!"

"You might, then, show a little better feeling, and a better frame of mind, I think!" said Mr. Hacker acidly. "But for my intervention, your school career would have ended when you left Topham!"

"I wish it had!" muttered Wilmot. "I never wanted to come here!"

"What—what?"

"I know it was a big chance—and I can understand why the mater jumped at it. But—but—" He broke off.

"That is nonsense! It is a great chance for you, and you must make the best of it. Judging by appearances, you seem bent on making the worst. Think of my position!" snapped Mr. Hacker. "The headmaster was doubtful—only my earnest assurance of my faith in you moved him, at last, to give you this chance. It was intensely humiliating to me to have to explain the position to your future Form-master, Mr. Quelch—"

Wilmot started, as if an adder had stung him.

"Does he know?" he panted.

"He had to be told, as your Form-master, naturally. Dr. Locke made a condition of that, and I could hardly object."

The handsome face was flooded with crimson.

"What's the use of my trying to make a fresh start here, if it's tattled all over the school?" muttered Wilmot.

"Have a little common sense!" snapped Mr. Hacker. "Do you suppose that your Form-master will tattle, as you disrespectfully term it? No one knows anything of you, with the exception of the headmaster, your Form-master, and myself. The boys know nothing, except that you are my nephew. They have probably never even heard of Topham School; and you, naturally, will make no reference to it. You start here with an absolutely clean sheet—and it is such a chance as you can have had no right to expect."

"I know! But—"

"Mr. Quelch is not pleased—you can understand that. But you have it in your own hands to win his good opinion. He is a just man, and will judge you by your conduct here."

"How can I face him, if he knows about—"

"You have, I hope, a clear conscience!" snapped Mr. Hacker. "All that I have done for you has been done on the understanding that your conscience is clear, in spite of appearances, of the terrible cloud you are under!"

Wilmot lifted his head proudly.

"My conscience is clear enough!" he answered firmly. "I've never done anything that I'm ashamed of!"

"I hope so—I believe so!" Mr. Hacker's voice was earnest, yet with a lingering dubiety in its tone. He was not by nature a trusting man—he was a little distrustful and suspicious. Something in his tone struck Wilmot, and the boy's handsome face crimsoned again.

"If you don't believe me, uncle—"

"I have said that I do!" said Mr. Hacker acidly. "That suffices! But, as I have said, it is by your conduct that you will be judged here. Your conduct, Eric, must be absolutely exemplary. You owe that, at least, to me. And my advice to you is to forget that you ever were at Topham—to dis-

miss from your mind all that may have happened there—"

"As if I could!"

"You will make new friends here—"

"I don't want to make friends here!" muttered Wilmot. "My friends are at Topham—and what must they be thinking of me now!"

"Dismiss that from your mind! What cannot be cured, must be endured! Make the best of your new life, not the worst! Surely you can see that that is good counsel, Eric?"

"Yes, yes! I'll try!"

"Very well! I must return to my Form now—I have left them too long! But I will take you to the House-dame first. Later, when Mr. Quelch is disengaged, I will take you to him. Come!"

Eric Wilmot followed his uncle from the study.

THE FOURTEENTH CHAPTER.

Where's Wilmot?

"I SAY, you fellows! Seen that new chap—Wilson, or Wilkins, you know—"

"Wilmot, fathead!"

"I mean Wilmot!" said Billy Bunter. "I say, seen him? I've been looking for him! What are you grinning at, I'd like to know!" added Bunter warmly, as the Famous Five smiled—broadly.

"Give him a rest, his first day here!" suggested Bob Cherry. "Tell him about your postal order to-morrow, old fat man."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Oh, really, Cherry! I say, I think I know the chap!" said Bunter. "I told you fellows I'd heard the name of Wilmot lately. I can't quite remember where it was, or when—but—"

"Looks as if you know him a lot!" grinned Bob.

"Well, not a lot, perhaps!" admitted Bunter. "But well enough to—"

"To ask him to lend you half-a-crown?"

"No!" roared Bunter. "Nothing of the kind! To speak a civil word to a new kid—that's what I mean. I believe in being kind to a new kid!" added Bunter loftily. "You know what I did for you, your first day here, Wharton?"

"I remember," assented Wharton. "You borrowed a bob! And now I come to think of it, you never squared. I'll have the bob now!"

"I don't mean that, you ass!"

"I do!" said Harry. "Bob, please!" He held out his hand.

Billy Bunter snorted, and rolled away, leaving the chums of the Remove chuckling.

"By the way, where is the new kid?" asked Nugent. "He must have come."

"Must have," said Harry Wharton. "But I've seen nothing of him. Hacker may have had him to tea, as he's his nephew; but he wouldn't be keeping him all this time, unless he's fearfully fond of his company."

After class, the juniors had expected to see something of the new fellow. Wharton and Nugent had some little interest in him, as a new member of their study; also, they were mildly curious about the fellow. With the intention of being nice and agreeable, they had laid in a rather decent spread at tea-time, intending to ask Wilmot to share it, and at the same time to make him better acquainted with themselves and their friends.

But Wilmot had not turned up at tea-time, and the Famous Five tea'd in Study No. 1 without him. Certainly

they did not miss him; and, in point of fact, forgot him. Now they were reminded of him, and they began to wonder what had become of him.

"Might look round for him," remarked Wharton. "We told Hobby we'd be civil to him. Hacker put it to him, and he put it to us. If he's wandering about somewhere and doesn't know how he got there, we might take him in hand."

"Let's!" assented Nugent.

"Hallo, hallo, hallo, there's Coker!" exclaimed Bob Cherry. "Looking as if the earth belongs to him, as usual! What about knocking his hat off?"

"We're going to look after Wilmot."

"Oh, bother Wilmot! You look after Wilmot while I look after Coker, then!"

Johnny Bull and Hurrce Singh accompanied Bob, to look after Coker. Harry Wharton and Nugent went to look for Wilmot.

"Seen a new kid about, Smithy?" asked Wharton, as they came on the Bouncer.

"No."

"Seen a new kid about, Toddy?"

"No."

"Bless him!" said Wharton. "Perhaps he hasn't turned up, after all! Hallo, Skinner! Seen a silly ass mooning about?"

"Eh? Yes!" answered Skinner, at once.

"Oh, good! Where is he?"

"Speaking to me now!" said Skinner blandly.

"You silly fathead!" roared Wharton, and he walked on with Nugent, leaving Harold Skinner grinning.

"Hobby will know," said Nugent. "He went to the station for him, you know. Let's ask Hobby."

"Good egg!" assented Wharton, and they went into the House and proceeded to Hobson's study in the Shell.

There they found James Hobson. He was talking in rather emphatic tones to Hoskins and Stewart, when the Removites arrived.

"Did you pick up that new sheep at the station, Hobby?" asked Harry.

Hobby frowned darkly.

"Don't talk to me about him!" he said. "Blow him!"

"The kid's put Hobby's back up!" explained Stewart, with a grin. "Hobby hasn't taken a fancy to him."

"I was just telling these fellows about him," said Hobson. "Only I can't think of a word for him! The tick!"

"Then you did meet him?"

"The worm!" said Hobson.

"Did you bring him in?"

"The rotten sheep!"

"Where is he now?"

"The cheeky cad!"

Evidently Hobby had met the new fellow, and had not taken a liking to him.

"Hobby, old man, you never ragged a kid on his first day!" exclaimed Wharton.

"No, I didn't!" growled Hobby. "But if he hadn't been a new kid, I'd have mopped up Courtfield with him! The sneaking outsider!"

"But what did he do?" asked Nugent, in wonder.

"Cheeked me!" said Hobson. "Took a taxi, and left me standing! Of course, I was glad to be left. I wanted to walk it! But the cheek, you know! After I went to the station to meet him! Lucky for him that he's not in the Shell—we'd lynch him! You can have him in the Remove! He may suit you—a rotten, cheeky, uppish, sulky cad, asking all the time to have his head punched!"



"You don't want to come to Greyfriars?" asked Hobson, the obvious fact dawning on his rather slow brain at last. "No, I don't!" snapped Wilmot. "I wouldn't be found dead in the place if I could help it!" He walked out of the station, Hobson, with a red and frowning face, accompanying him.

"Sounds nice!" said Harry. "But where is he now, if he came?"

"Don't know, and don't care!" answered Hobson. "I haven't seen him since he left me standing on the pavement at Courtfield and buzzed off in his blessed taxi! Blow him!"

"If he took a taxi to the school, he must have got here."

"I suppose so! Tell him to keep out of my way, if he doesn't want his nose pushed through the back of his head!"

Wharton and Nugent left Hobby's study. They exchanged rather curious looks as they went.

"What sort of a sportsman can the fellow be?" murmured Wharton. "Hobby isn't the chap to take a dislike for nothing. Everybody gets on with Hobby. Hacker's nephew must be a bit of a tick."

"More than a bit, I should think," said Frank. "Nice to have him in our study! Hallo, there goes the bell! We shall see him in Hall."

It was the bell for calling-over. Wharton and Nugent looked round when they joined the rest of the Remove in Hall. But there was no unfamiliar face in the ranks of the Remove.

"I say, you fellows, that new chap isn't here!" squeaked Billy Bunter. "I say, did he come, after all?"

"He came all right!" said Hazeldene. "Seen him?" asked Harry.

"I saw Hacker taking a chap to Quelch's study just after class. Looked a sulky sort of brute."

"He's cutting roll!" said Nugent.

"Oh, a beak's nephew can do as he likes!" sneered Skinner.

"Rot!"

Roll was taken by Prout, master of the Fifth. Mr. Quelch was present, and Wharton noticed that his eyes were keenly on the Remove. When the name of Wilmot was called, and there was no answer, Mr. Quelch compressed his lips very tightly. Whatever might be the

reason of Wilmot's absence, it was clear that his Form-master had expected him to be present, and was annoyed.

After call-over, Mr. Quelch signed to his head boy, and Wharton stopped as the others went out.

"Do you know where Wilmot is, Wharton?" asked the Remove master.

"I haven't seen him yet, sir."

"It is very singular," said Mr. Quelch. "If you see him, Wharton, tell him to come to my study."

"Certainly, sir."

Wharton left the hall in a state of surprise. In the Rag, he found a good many fellows discussing Wilmot and his proceedings. It was known that he had arrived at the school; that he had had an interview with his Form-master—after which he seemed to have vanished. Apparently he had gone out of gates. Smithy remarked that the young ass was getting Quelch's rag out, to begin with.

When the Remove went up to their studies for prep, the new boy had not turned up. Wharton and Nugent sat down to prep in Study No. 1 without the company they had expected there.

Billy Bunter gave them a blink at the doorway on his way to No. 7. "Wilmot here?" he asked.

"No, ass!"

"He can't be out of gates now!" said the Owl of the Remove.

"Looks as if he is!"

"Well, I'm jiggered!" said Bunter. And he rolled on to his own study and prep.

THE FIFTEENTH CHAPTER.

The Wet Blanket!

"COME in, ass!"

Prep had been going on for half an hour, when there was a tap at the door of Study

No. 1. Wharton called out without looking up as the door opened.

Fellows were not supposed to leave their studies during prep, but, like other imperfect mortals, Remove fellows often did what they were not supposed to do. So Wharton took it for granted that his visitor was a Remove man who preferred conversation to preparation, by way of a change.

But he jumped up the next moment, with a crimson face, realising that it was not a junior who had entered.

"Oh!" he gasped. "Sorry, sir!"

Mr. Quelch took no notice of his head boy's rather unfortunate greeting.

"This is Wilmot, Wharton!" he said.

"Oh, yes, sir!" stammered Harry.

Wharton and Nugent looked at the boy who followed Mr. Quelch into the study.

Wilmot had turned up at last. The chums of Study No. 1 regarded him with some curiosity. They saw a slim, but athletic fellow, with handsome features, and dark blue eyes, and dark wavy hair. Wilmot was a good-looking fellow. But a cloud of sulky depression was on the good-looking face.

They had no doubt that Quelch had "jawed" him for his extraordinary conduct. He was not likely to have caned a new boy; but he was certain to have spoken to him very plainly. The look on the Remove-master's face was very grim.

"Wilmot," he said, coldly and formally, "this is your study! This is Wharton, the head boy of your Form; the other is Nugent. You will remain here during preparation; but you need do none yourself your first evening."

With that Mr. Quelch left the study.

The door closed after him, and Wilmot was left standing, looking at his new study-mates.

There was an awkward pause.

"So you're Wilmot?" said Harry, breaking the silence.

"Yes."

"Did Quelch jaw you?" asked Nugent, with a grin.

"Yes."

"You don't seem to mind."

"No."

"I say, it was rather thick, walking off like that," said Frank. "The beaks are rather particular about fellows turning up for roll, you know."

"They are at most schools, I believe."

"You've been to school before?"

"Yes."

"Then you knew you were asking for a row?"

"Oh, yes!"

"Quelch didn't whop you, did he?" asked Harry.

"No."

"Well, he wouldn't your first day, and I expect he would go as easy as he could with another beak's relation. But what on earth did you cut roll for?" asked the captain of the Remove.

"I went out."

"I guessed that one!" said Harry, with a smile. "But I suppose you knew that you had to get in for calling over?"

"Yes."

"But you didn't turn up."

"No."

It was rather difficult to establish a friendly atmosphere with a fellow who answered only in curt monosyllables. Not that Wilmot looked as if he desired to be friendly. He looked tired, as if he had covered a great distance in that walk out of gates, and he looked sulky. That was all.

"Did they teach you any words except 'yes' and 'no' at your last school?" asked Frank.

Wilmot stared at him for a moment and coloured. He did not answer. He crossed over to the fire, and stood leaning on the mantelpiece, with his hands in his pockets.

Wharton and Nugent looked at him, and looked at one another, and resumed prep. There was deep silence in the study.

After a time Wharton glanced round at the new fellow. He had not moved. Tired as he looked, he had not sat down. He stood leaning on the mantel, his eyes fixed before him in a gloomy stare.

"Squat in the armchair, kid," said the captain of the Remove. "There's a 'Holiday Annual' on the shelf, if you'd like it."

Wilmot started, as if roused out of a deep reverie and brought suddenly back to his surroundings. He nodded, and sat down in the study armchair, but he did not seem to want to read. Now that he was sitting down his gaze fixed on the embers of the fire in the grate.

Prep was resumed. Exactly what to make of that unusual new fellow was a mystery to the two Removites. Wharton put aside his books at last. He had never had any experience of such an absolute wet blanket as this fellow before, but he could feel for a boy who was down in the mouth on his first day at school. And if the fellow was going to stick in that study, it was for the general comfort to establish friendly relations.

"Like Greyfriars?" he asked, by way of a beginning.

"No!"

Wharton coughed.

"You'll like it all right when you shake down," he said.

"I doubt it."

"Um! I've heard that you play a good game of Soccer."

The hard, indifferent face brightened a little, as if the right chord had been touched. But it set again as dark and sulky as before.

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"I shan't play Soccer here," said Wilmot briefly.

"Why not?"

No answer.

"We're pretty keen on it here," said Harry. "We run a team in the Remove, and have regular fixtures. Anyhow, you'll have to play in games practice—that's compulsory, unless a fellow's a crook. Did you play for your school?"

"You're asking me a lot of questions."

Wharton stared.

"Can't you answer a civil question?" he said. "As I happen to be football captain in the Form, I should have to see how you shape at the game, anyhow."

No reply.

"Look here, Wilmot," said the captain of the Remove quietly, "you're put in this study, and we're landed together for the term. Civility costs nothing."

The new fellow, staring into the fire, did not seem to hear him. Wharton's cheeks flushed.

"You seem to have put Hobby's back up," he said, "and no wonder—"

"Who's Hobby?"

"The chap who met you at the station—"

"Oh, that fool!"

"Hobby's not a fool," said Harry. "He may not be very bright, but he's a good chap, one of the best at Greyfriars."

"I don't care what he is."

Wharton breathed hard.

"I don't know where you've been to school before, Wilmot," he said, "but they don't seem to have taught you much in the way of manners."

"If you don't like my manners, you can leave me alone."

"You won't have to ask that twice!" said Harry curtly, and he rose to his feet. "Coming down, Frank?"

Nugent nodded, and put away his books. The study door opened, and a fat face and a large pair of spectacles loomed in.

"I say, you fellows," squeaked Billy Bunter, "has Wilmot come?"

THE SIXTEENTH CHAPTER.

A Surprise For Two!

ERIC WILMOT started violently. He sat bolt upright in the armchair, his eyes fixed on the fat face of Billy Bunter in the doorway.

Every vestige of colour drained from his cheeks.

So startled was his look that Wharton and Nugent could hardly have failed to notice it. They stared at him blankly.

He did not heed them. He gazed at Bunter as if the fat junior in the doorway had been the ghost of William George Bunter instead of William George in the flesh—and plenty of it.

The fat Owl blinked round the study through his big spectacles. Eyes and spectacles landed on the junior in the armchair.

"Oh, here you are, Wilmot!" said Bunter affably. "You've turned up, what?"

Wilmot did not speak. He only regarded Billy Bunter with the same fixed stare.

Why the sight of Bunter produced such an effect on him, made Wharton and Nugent wonder. Bunter, certainly, was not a pleasing object to look at. But even Bunter was not, as a rule, calculated to produce this startling and dismaying effect on the beholder.

Bunter rolled in.

"I say, you fellows, that's Wilmot, isn't it?" he asked.

"Yes, that's Wilmot," said Harry Wharton. "You said you knew him—and it looks as if he knows you, Bunter."

"Well, I fancy we've met," said Bunter. "I heard the name only lately somewhere, and—"

Bunter broke off suddenly.

He stared at Wilmot, his eyes almost popping through his spectacles. At closer range, he recognised the junior at once.

He remembered now where he had heard the name of Wilmot. He had heard it, shouted by the Topham men, on the football field at St. Jude's.

He had seen Wilmot before—on the St. Jude's field, happy and triumphant, enthusiastically cheered by his friends. He had seen him again, white and harassed and dazed, looking as if he had "taken the knock," and been knocked out.

And now he saw him—Wilmot, of Topham, in Study No. 1 in the Remove—a new fellow at Greyfriars! Only last week he had been a Topham man, playing football for his school at St. Jude's. Now he had come to Greyfriars as a new boy! The astonished Owl blinked at him in blank amazement.

"You!" he gasped.

Wilmot found his voice. It came husky:

"You!"

"Great pip!" said Bunter.

Wharton and Nugent looked from one to the other. What this could possibly mean, beat them hollow.

"You!" repeated Wilmot. "I'd forgotten your existence. I never knew you belonged to this school. If I'd known—"

He checked himself.

"So you know Wilmot, Bunter?" said Frank Nugent.

"Oh! Yes, rather!" said Bunter. "At least, I met him last week! Didn't I, Wilmot?"

Wilmot did not answer. His brain, at the moment, was in a whirl. His uncle had warned him—for good reasons—not to mention the name of his last school, at his new school. If the Greyfriars fellows learned that he had been at Topham, they might learn, also, why he had left Topham so suddenly, in the second week of the term. And here was a fellow whose existence he had forgotten till this moment, who knew that he was a Topham man! Little had he dreamed, when he met that fat and fatuous fellow near the gates of St. Jude's, that he would meet him again in a few days—at Greyfriars.

Bunter blinked at him.

"I say, fancy meeting you here, Wilmot!" he said. "I knew I remembered your name, when I heard it, but I never thought it was you, of course! I say, why did you leave your last school?"

Wilmot winced as if he had been struck.

Wharton and Nugent exchanged a look. Whatever this mysterious affair might mean, it was no concern of theirs, and they did not want to butt into another fellow's affairs. And, little as they liked the new fellow, they could not help taking pity on the dumb misery in his face. They left the study and went down the passage.

"You left jolly suddenly, didn't you?" Bunter was going on, as they left. "Fancy you being here, you know, when only last week—"

Slam!

The study door closed, cutting off the rest of Bunter's remarks.

Wharton and Nugent knew that it must be Wilmot who had slammed it. They went down in silence to the Rag.

(Continued on page 28.)

DAN of the DOGGER BANK!

By DAVID GOODWIN.

The Sham Derelict!

KENNETH GRAHAM, son of a millionaire shipowner, is rescued off the Dogger Bank by the crew of the fishing trawler, Grey Seal.

His past life a blank, he is given the name of "Dogger Dan," and signed on as fifth hand under Skipper Atheling, Finn Macoul, Wat Griffiths and Buck Atheling.

Aware of his nephew's fate, and knowing that he will be heir to the shipowner's money when his brother dies, Dudley Graham engages Jake Rebow and his cutthroats of the Black Squadron to get Kenneth out of the way for ever.

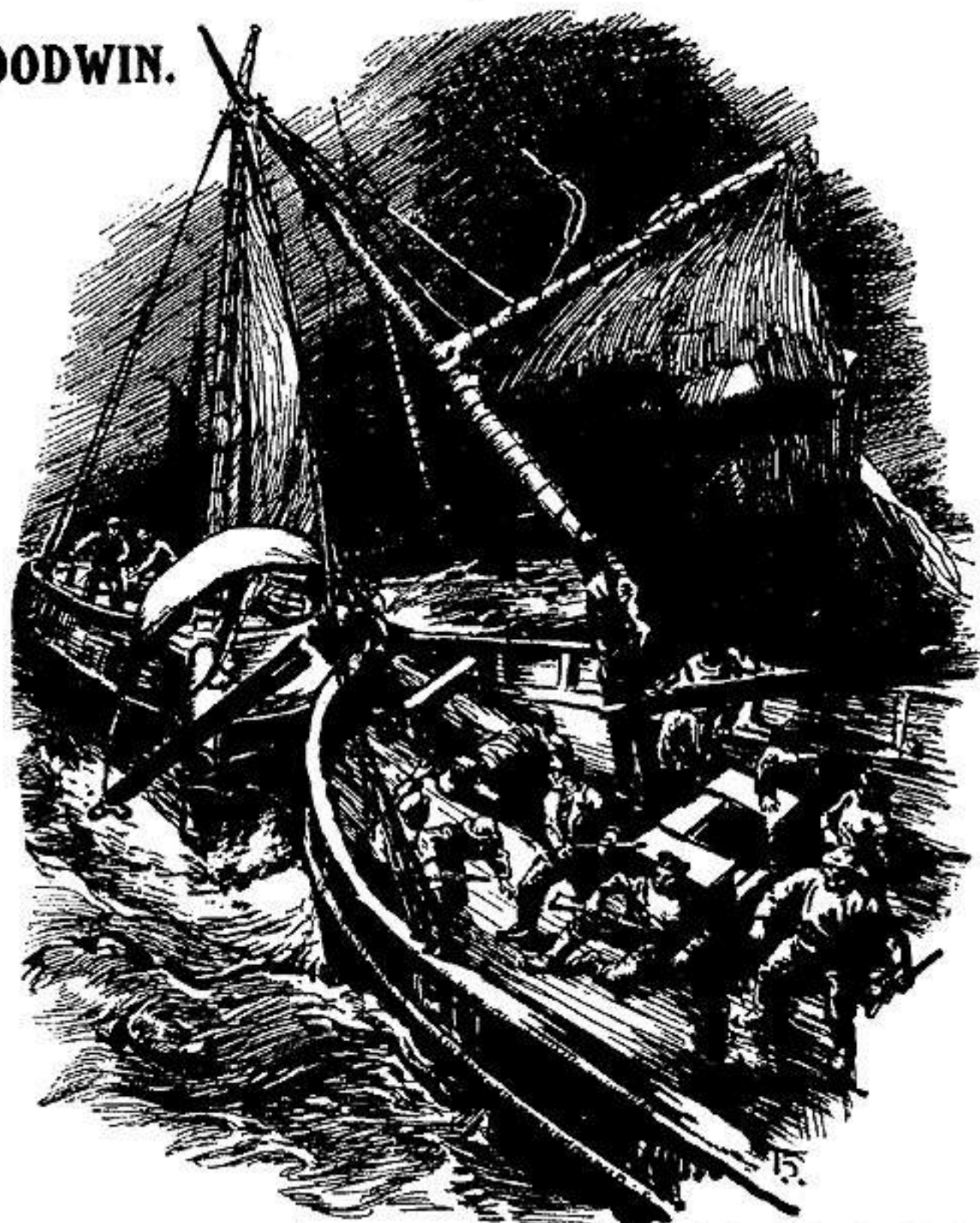
Following a fruitless attempt on their lives by Rebow's confederates, Dan and Buck Atheling catch the crew of the Adder, the Black Squadron's flagship, smuggling. Boarding the trawler, they imprison the two men left in charge and make for port.

Caught in a hurricane, they are wrecked on a sandbank, the only occupant of which is a wealthy old Dutchman named Jan Osterling.

After leaving the old man for a time, they return to find him dying as the result of a brutal attack made on him by the two prisoners from the Adder.

Before breathing his last, Jan asks the boys to hand over his savings to his nephew Max, in return for which he hands them a chart disclosing the whereabouts of a hidden treasure worth £5,000 to be divided between them.

Dan and Buck eventually rejoin the Grey Seal, which is saved from destruction by the timely intervention of a German gunboat chasing the smugglers.



Swooping round, the Wasp crashed full into the Narwhal, striking her in the bows, and tearing the forestay right out of her. Down came the Narwhal's mast with a crash!

"Whew!" said Buck, as a distant humming in the air rose to a shriek, and swept down upon the Seal. "Here's the squall at last!"

"Round with her!" cried Atheling. "Haul down a pair o' reefs, an' quick about it!"

A snorting, tearing wind—the sudden gale of the North German coast—struck the stout trawler nearly flat. Her quick, handy crew had all they could do to get her under control, and by the time she was reefed down the sea was rising angrily, and she plunged and bucked wildly, smothered in stinging spray, with a dead lee-shore under her.

"We must claw off an' get sea-room!" said Atheling. "Sheet your jib home!"

"Dad," cried Buck, making his way along the reeling deck to where his father stood at the helm, "don't put to sea! Run her into the gateway. There's treasure on that island—five thousand pounds in gold! An' if we leave it now, we may lose it for good!"

Atheling, braced at the kicking tiller, stared at his son in speechless surprise.

"Did ye get a knock o' the head when ye were ashore there?" he said.

"Ay, an' plenty of 'em!" replied Buck. "But it's the truth, dad! Tell him it's true, Dan!"

"It is, cap'n," said Dan. "There's five thousand pounds lying in the sand there, and I've got the title-deed and plan for it in my pocket!"

Hurriedly, raising his voice above the roaring gale, wiping the spindrift from his eyes, Dan told, in as few words as possible, all that had happened on that grim island, whose deadly shore the Seal was even then trying to claw away from. It sounded a wild tale as Dan told it, jerkily and hastily, through the roar of the salt wind.

Atheling listened as best he could while intent on his work. The eager earnestness of the boys impressed him. All the same, it was plain he did not believe the story.

"You're mad, both of ye!" he growled at last. "Go below an' quit this foolishness!"

"It's true, dad, on my honour!" pleaded Buck. "Do, for Heaven's sake, turn her, and run into the gateway! We'll pilot you in!"

"The gateway!" roared Atheling. "Risk my smack on an unknown bar in a gale o' wind an' darkness! Ye're raving mad, both o' ye! Not a word more—go!"

When John Atheling gave an order that way, there was no more to be said. Dan and Buck went below.

"We'll wait till this infernal gale dies down," said Buck to Dan, "and then we will try again to convince him. We're not going to let five thousand

pounds lie in a sandhill for want of takin' it out!"

As the Seal thrashed her way to open sea, and left the grim island behind, the two chums made up their minds to return and unearth the treasure, whatever danger stood in the way.

Hour after hour passed as the Grey Seal made her way north-westward, and the gale, like many summer storms, blew itself out as quickly as it had arisen. The trawler, having won good sea-room, hove-to under small canvas for the rest of the night. By daybreak the wind had almost ceased.

When the opportunity presented itself, the boys once again tackled the skipper about the treasure.

Atheling, however, could not be induced to take any interest in the matter.

Buck and Dan were beside themselves with helplessness and impatience.

"When we're ashore again I'll have you overhauled by a doctor, Dan," said Atheling. "That head o' yours ain't right yet. All this time you don't know who you be, or where you come from. An' now you've got this mad idea in your bonnet, an' persuaded this cub o' mine to believe in it, too."

"But it's all true, captain, every word of it," said Dan, almost weeping with vexation. "The Squadron killed THE MAGNET LIBRARY.—No. 1,457."

Jan Osterling, and the money's there. Why did the gunboat come out after them if it isn't true?"

"Don't tell me!" said Atheling. "She was after them for some fish-poachin' game they're wanted for!" As a matter of fact, this was a good shot of Atheling's, for the gunboat had orders from Cuxhaven, and knew nothing of the raid on the island. "You've made a smart trawlerman since we've had you, Dan. There ain't a better or pluckier one on the Dogger. But there's places in your figurehead that ain't quite caulked."

"But won't you go and see, dad?" pleaded Buck. "The Vulture's spiked in the gateway for anyone to see. Why, Dan's showed you the plan Jan Osterling gave him before he died."

"A bit o' parchment with some scribbling on it!" grunted Atheling. And then he showed signs of being aroused. "Clear out o' here, both o' you, with your cock-an'-bull story, or I'll start you with a rope's-end!"

Buck pulled Dan's sleeves, and they went out.

"It's enough to make a chap mutiny," growled Dan, when they were alone.

"Don't worry about it," said Buck. "We ain't beat yet. We'll bring him round sooner or later, but it's got to be done tactfully. Let's think out a plan."

"Suppose we paddle off in the boat to do a bit of hooking and talk it over? I've got a notion."

That evening the two chums launched the boat and pulled about a mile away from the Seal.

The day had been hot and close, and there was a mutter of thunder in the air.

Laying the long-line took some time, but when it was done Dan delivered himself.

"We took some topping hauls of fish to-day," he said. "We'll work those long-lines all night, an' if we do as well three or four days running we'll have a rare load. Prices are still big at Amsterdam and Rotterdam. If we get enough fish, the skipper'll run in there. Then, if he still don't believe, we'll take French leave and go to Baltrum ourselves after the treasure."

"That's it," said Buck. "Dad'll be savage about it, but he'll cool down when we turn up with the five thousand pounds. An' then—Hallo!"

Buck broke off suddenly with that exclamation, turned, and stared ahead.

Dan uttered an exclamation and followed his gaze.

Drifting along, about half a mile away, came a large, unkempt-looking trawler. There were no signs of life on her deck. Her sails were slatting and banging as she rolled in the swell. The peak of the mainsail was dropped, ropes and halliards were swinging about loose, and it was plain she had no living hand to control her. She rolled along helplessly, coming to the wind, and then falling off again.

As the boys watched attentively, wondering what it might mean, a flash of lightning showed her plainly against the clouds behind.

"A derelict!" said Buck, running out his oars. "Great Scott, it's the Wasp!"

"Deserted," cried Dan, "or I'm a Dutchman! Her boat's gone! What does it mean? By Jove, I know! The gunboat caught her an' arrested the crew—I'll bet my wages on it! They tried to tow her, but the rope broke in the storm, an' they took the crew an' abandoned her."

"That's about the size of it!" cried Buck. "Anyway, she's derelict. We'll

board her an' salve her. No, we'll run her back to Baltrum an' snaffle the treasure, by George!"

"Come on!" cried Dan. Another flicker of lightning lit the abandoned craft. The thunder growled threateningly, and big drops of rain began to fall.

Making the painter fast to the shrouds, the boys leaped aboard the craft. The decks of the smack looked forlorn and deserted.

"She seems down by the head," remarked Dan, stepping forward. "Shouldn't wonder if there's some water in her. She's—Ah!"

Swiftly as the strike of a snake a slip-noose shot out of the darkness and settled around him. In an instant it was pulled tight, pinning his arms to his sides. A jerk at the rope brought him down heavily, only to find that Buck was in the same plight.

"So, ma beauty," said a hissing voice close in his ear, "ye've walked into the trap!"

Bending over Dan was the lanky figure and mean, cruel features of Foxey Backhouse, a grin of triumph playing round his pale lips.

Again the lightning glared. Before it died Dan caught sight of a trio of sharp topsails in the distance. It was a trap indeed. The Wasp, leaving the remainder of her crew with the Squadron, had left Foxey and his companion to manœuvre her, in the condition of a derelict, close to the boys. They knew the bait would be taken, and the trick was well carried out.

"The Seal's seen us!" cried Buck. "She's after us!"

"Ay, it's true," said the man who was bending over him.

An oath escaped him as he glanced at the trawler.

Atheling, who had been watching through his night-glasses, scenting something wrong, had headed the Seal straight for the sham derelict.

"Put ye knife intil him, Foxey, an' mak' sure!"

"Na! Hold your hand!" cried Foxey, springing to the helm. "Leave the cubs an' trim sail! They're tae be taken alive tae the skipper! That's Rebow's orders! They're tae be knifed if there's any chance o' their getting free, but no' otherwise!"

"We've nothin' but ourselves to blame!" muttered Buck bitterly.

Dan did not answer. With a thrill of hope he felt the slip-noose give. The tempest swept down upon the vessel with a rush of wind and a patter of heavy rain, giving the two men all the work they could handle.

"Hold yourself ready, Buck!" whispered Dan. "I can get my right arm free!"

Buck said nothing, but quivered with expectation.

A fierce shouting came from the Seal astern, but ahead, the Squadron vessels were rushing down at full speed towards the quarry.

Dan's pistol was aboard the Seal, but he had his knife. His right arm was free at last. He waited till the flickering lightning left the sea in gloom, and then leapt forward to the mast.

One slash with his knife severed the peak halliard, and the gaff came down with a run. Another slash sent the jib tearing from its hold and clapping over the bows like a winged seagull. The smack was crippled. A vivid flash showed the ruin those two slashes had wrought.

Before Dan could turn, however,

Foxy was upon him. A lurch sent the boy, still half-bound, into the scuppers, and the knife was torn from his grasp. Dan had fallen upon his free arm and for a moment was utterly helpless.

With a scream of rage, Foxey stood over him, his hand grasping his long French knife. The steel gleamed as he threw his arm upwards for the fatal blow, and Dan shut his eyes.

But even as the cold steel glinted, the sky split open with a crash that shook the crippled smack from stem to stern. A blinding chain of white-hot flame seemed to leap from the riven clouds on to the point of the murderous blade as Foxey raised it.

Then followed a splutter of molten metal, and a seared, blackened object that a second before had been a man rolled heavily into the scuppers and lay there silently.

The End of Foxey Backhouse!

AFTER the fearful glare and the crash came a silence and a darkness that weighed upon the eyes and covered all things.

Then a low moan sounded from the scuppers, followed by the roar and hiss of the rainstorm.

"Dan—Dan," cried Buck, "where are you?"

There was no answer. The black water washed against the sides of the vessel, and the rain drummed on the deck.

Again the lightning shimmered, farther away this time, and lit up the craft.

Buck saw his comrade lying in the scuppers, white and still.

Close to him, rolling gently from side to side with the swaying of the vessel, was a blackened, shrivelled object twisted into a kind of knot. A smell of burnt cloth arose from it, for a serge coat that it wore was smouldering, till the thresh of the rain put it out.

A fused, melted steel blade lay beside, and a shower of molten drops had burnt into the deck-planks as though a leaden bullet had been melted in a ladle and scattered around.

It was the end of Foxey Backhouse! He had raised the knife aloft to deal the blow that was to end the hunt of the Black Squadron after Dogger Dan, and the lightning had struck him through the very weapon itself and hurled him into the pit in the fraction of a second.

"Dan's dead!" groaned Buck, tugging furiously at the bonds that held him. "The lightning has killed them both!"

He was flaying his wrists till the blood ran, and with perseverance he soon freed himself.

As he flung the rope from him the second Squadron man, who had lain dazed and stunned since the deadly flash, struggled to his feet. Seizing a stretcher, Buck rushed at the ruffian and dealt him a blow that sent the man on his back into the scuppers once more.

"Lie there till I tell you to rise!" said Buck grimly. "There's another change o' skippers on this craft!"

He turned to Dan anxiously. The boy opened his eyes and looked round in a stunned, helpless way.

"Thank Heaven you're alive, Dan!" said Buck. "Are you hurt much?"

"I don't know," said Dan. "I feel as if I'd been hit with a steam-hammer. No," he continued, struggling up, "I b'lieve I'm all right."

He felt himself carefully, and Buck rejoiced. The lightning flash—that strange, unaccountable power that can slay a crowd of living creatures at one blow, or pick one out of a crowd and leave the rest unhurt—had stricken the destroyer, but saved the victim.

By good fortune Foxey Backhouse had not been in contact with any part of Dan when he raised the knife, the flash had leaped through him and then through the iron bolts of the smack to her keel, passing away into the deep sea.

"Is that Foxey?" said Dan, looking at the shrivelled bundle, with a shudder. "Poor brute!"

"Thank your stars for that flash!" returned Buck. "It saved you! To work now! The fleet's closing on us!"

In the dazed silence following the stroke they had forgotten the existence of the enemy, whose vessels were racing up with the storm. Two of them were yet a long way off, but the other was almost upon them, racing at full speed.

"That's the Narwhal," cried Buck—"the fastest they've got left in the Black Squadron. Rebow'll be aboard her; but here's the Seal close up to us. Get hold o' those jib-halliards an' run the jib up again!"

"But what can we do?" said Dan, obeying. "She's got rifles."

Atheling was bringing the Grey Seal up rapidly, and a great shouting arose from the decks of the Narwhal.

"I'll show you!" said Buck, running up the peak again, so that the big red mainsail showed its full surface to the wind. "It's risky, but we've got ourselves an' the Seal into this mess, an' we've got to get out of it. They don't know on the Narwhal that we're in command here. They think we're prisoners!" Then he turned to the man in the scuppers. "Lie down, you!" he cried.

Buck rapidly ran the fall of the mainsheet round the body of the ruffian, and bound him tight with a couple of half-hitches. There was no time to do more. The jib-halliard that he had cut during the chase had not pulled right out of the block, and he sprang aloft and got hold of it.

In the whistling squall it was all the boys could do to set the jib again.

"Ahoy!" came a hail from the Seal, as she raced up. "Buck! Dan! Are ye alive yet?"

"Ay, an' kicking!" cried Buck. "Up your helm, Dan! Get her round!"

"It's more than ye deserve!" hailed Atheling. "Heave her to, an' jump aboard as we run past ye. It's your only chance. Here's the Narwhal close on to us!"

Buck hailed the Seal.

"Don't do that, dad; there isn't time! They'll cut you down while we're gettin' aboard. We're goin' for them. Run past when we hit 'em, and stand by to pick us up!"

"Obey orders, ye whelps!" roared Atheling, in reply.

"It's a rope's-ending anyway," said Dan, "if we're not shot! The skipper's got his monkey up!"

"I reckon this is our command," said Buck. "I ain't sailed a vessel o' my own before, bar the old Adder, an' I'm going to run her till she busts. We must risk ourselves to cripple the Narwhal. We've walked into the trap, an' we must pay the piper!"

Buck was afraid the fast-arriving Narwhal would open fire on the Seal at close quarters if something were not done to cripple her.

All unwarily, the Narwhal came sousing along at her best pace. She was to windward, and had naturally heard

nothing of the hails that passed between the Seal and the Wasp.

"Lie low!" ordered Buck. "Turn up the collar of your jumper, an' shove your sou'-wester over your eyes. They won't recognise us, then. Ah, dash the lightning! It's been a good friend to us, but another flash like that will give us away!"

The storm was at its height, but the flashes were playing some distance to leeward, and lighting up sea and sky like noonday, leaving a jagged seam imprinted on the eyeballs as it subsided into darkness again.

The Grey Seal rushed past, veered round, and came up again, Atheling savage with rage at the disobedience of his "cubs."

"Wasp ahoy!" screamed Jake Rebow, as the Narwhal came within hailing distance. "Jack! Foxey! What are ye about? Rin her up head tae wind, ye fules, an' we'll jump aboard as we pass!"

The Wasp's crew, save the two who had been left aboard her to trap the boys, were on the Narwhal, Rebow among them.

"Ease her up a bit, Dan," said Buck, helping to handle the kicking tiller.

Up towards each other ran the two vessels, the Seal close behind. A few scattered shots were fired at the Seal from the Narwhal, but without effect. The latter's crew were too busy getting ready to board the Wasp.

Short-handed as the Wasp was, it was essential to put more men on her before the two vessels could tackle the Seal together, and it would be touch-and-go, as they knew, jumping aboard her in the dark.

"Ready?" whispered Buck.

"Ay, ready!" answered Dan, his hands tightened on the tiller.

"Up wi' her!" cried Rebow to the Wasp. "Now's your time!"

"Now!" cried Buck fiercely, and the boys forced the tiller hard down.

A roar arose from the Narwhal as the Wasp, swooping round, crashed full into Rebow's vessel, striking her in the bows, and tearing the forestay right out of her.

Down came the Narwhal's mast with a crash!

A Queer Capture!

"GET your guns going!" shrieked Rebow to his men.

Out over the Wasp's bulwarks plunged the boys, headlong into the inky water. It was their only chance. The sudden shock of the collision had thrown most of the Narwhal's crew off their feet, and the boys were overboard before aim could be taken.

The water roaring in their ears, Buck and Dan shot to the surface and struck out strongly, shouting lustily to let the Seal know where they were.

Atheling was ready, and on the lookout.

"They're givin' us the slip!" screamed Rebow. "Plug them while they're in the water!"

Plut! Tut-tut-tut!

Bullets spattered around the two boys. They dived like dabchicks, swam under water as far as they could, and shot up again alongside the Seal.

Atheling luffing his vessel, had let her tremble in the eye of the wind before paying off on the other tack long enough to take the boys aboard. In a moment strong hands seized Dan and Buck, and they were on the deck of the old Seal once more.

"Smartly with those jib-sheets!" cried Atheling. "Pay her off, and away!"

The two Squadron smacks were too hard pressed to fire. A gaping hole had been cut in the Narwhal's bow above the water-line, and it was all her crew could do to keep her afloat.

The smacks, locked together, were pounding each other with a force that threatened to send both of them to the bottom out of hand, and the crews were struggling for dear life to get them apart.

A last random shot and a volley of curses followed the Seal as she raced along into the smother and the darkness.

The other Squadron vessels were urgently hailed as they came up, and put off at once to render aid to the injured vessels.

Dismasted, helpless, the Narwhal rocked upon the waters.

"Bring the cubs here!" ordered Atheling, as the Seal rushed to the southward. "Now, my lads, what have you to say?"

Buck told his father the whole story.

A rope's-ending was the least the boys hoped for. But when the tale was finished, the captain stood silent at his helm for a full minute before he spoke.

"Ye did right," he said at last. "I ought to be taking the hide off both of ye with a piece o' tarred hemp this moment. But ye've saved your skins. Ye were running your own ship."

"We've never questioned orders aboard here, under you, dad," said Buck.

"I reckon not," said Atheling, a twinkle in the corner of one eye—"not when I'm handy to look after ye. It was a smart trap o' Rebow's, an' an older man than either o' ye might ha' fallen into it. But I don't know what to do wi' you cubs. Just so sure as ye go out on your own, somethin' o' this sort happens. I'll have to separate ye, an' put one out under Long John for a spell!"

The boys went below, feeling somewhat floored. Such a threat was sobering.

"Still, it's a good night's work," said Dan, as he settled down in his bunk. "D'you reckon the Narwhal's sunk?"

"They may save her," returned Buck. "They're good at that sort o' work. But we've taken the edge off the Blacks. It was fine while it lasted. What worries me is that we ain't any nearer the treasure. Dad don't believe in it any the more, an' after this last shindy we'll be kept at the fishin' day and night for a spell."

Buck was right. The Seal was kept trawling diligently for four days, all hands working at breaking strain day and night by watches. The soles were "on," and there was lost time to be made up.

The boys were refused all boat leave, and though, as a rule, they gloried in the fishing, they were chafing incessantly at being unable to make for the hidden hoard on Baltrum Island.

One idea dominated them without ceasing—the treasure. It seemed written on every fish they caught, and between the hiss of wet trawl-ropes they heard the voice of the lost island calling them.

Atheling refused to hear anything about it, and threatened a rope's-ending if it were mentioned again. He thought it purely an idle fancy of Dan's unbalanced mind, and that Buck had heard so much about it from his chum that he believed it, too.

The two chums did not confide their knowledge to the rest of the crew, knowing that Skipper Atheling's

decision was final, and that they would only be laughed at.

They obtained leave to go hand-lining in the boat once or twice after the trawling slackened a little, and talked over many a plan for bringing their disbelieving skipper to reason. But nothing turned up for a week.

Finally, they went off in the boat with the hand-lines after cod, and Buck expressed his intention of getting away, if possible, to follow the search.

"Wha't—desert?" asked Dan anxiously.

"Not quite that," replied Buck, grinning. "But dad would soon sing another tune if we came back with that five thousand, an'—"

"Hallo!" broke in Dan. "What's that?"

He looked away over the swells, where a large, pale-green mass, like a curiously coloured sankbank, lay above the water.

"What on earth is it?" he queried. "There are no banks out here, surely?"

"By gosh!" said Buck. "That's a dead whale! It's been hit by a steamer or something. Let's have a look at it."

"Is it any good?" asked Dan, as they pulled up to the carcass.

"It ain't a sperm whale," replied Buck. "They're worth tons o' money, and we don't get 'em about here. This is a killer, an' he'd be worth maybe twenty pounds if he was in order. But he's a dead'un, an' has been so some time, no doubt. I wonder the dogfish an' gulls ain't pulled him to pieces."

The boat touched the creature. The part of it above water was about twenty feet long, and how much there was below the water-line could only be guessed.

"Rum-looking beast!" said Dan, staring at the great jelly-like mass. "Why, there's room for a picnic on his back! It must have been a pretty smart knock that killed him. I thought whales were dark-coloured."

"They go like this when they're dead," said Buck. "Pity; he'd be worth something if he were alive."

"Let's board him, just for fun," said Dan.

Before Buck could object, Dan had stepped out on to the great flat back.

The sea was calm as a pond, and there was hardly any ground-swell.

Dan walked up and down the whale's back with a rolling gait, while Buck grinned. Suddenly Dan's face changed, and Buck shouted anxiously:

"Look out! He's moving!"

"Great Scott!" exclaimed Dan.

The big green mass gave a heave under him, and he ran back towards the boat hurriedly.

But he did not reach the boat. The whole of the creature sank under him

like a stone, and vanished, leaving him struggling in the water.

"Ha, ha, ha!" laughed Buck, rowing up and hauling his friend out, spluttering and coughing. "Got a free bath that time, didn't you?"

"The brute's alive, after all," said Dan, as he got aboard.

The whale's back broke the surface once more, and rested motionless, not more than fifty yards away.

"He's mighty sick, or he'd ha' gone right away. If we could get him, an' scoop in twenty pounds!"

"How are you going to do it?" grunted Dan. "You want harpoons an' a whale-boat, an' all sorts of gear."

"For a sperm-whale, in the pride o' his sweet young life, you do," agreed Buck, rapidly untying a big coil of anchor-line that lay in the bows. "But this gentleman ain't feelin' very fit, an' we might get the better of him."

"There's the boathook, with a sharp spike point, an' the hook below it. That'll serve as a barb if we can drive it in over the bend o' the hook, an' it ought to hold. There's plenty of thin line. We'll have a shot at it, anyway. The Seal can come up an' tow him off, but we'll bag him to our own cheek."

They fixed up the gear busily. Dan cut a deep notch in the boathook handle, and fastened the line on securely. The affair made a rough but very passable harpoon.

When it was ready, Buck sculled the dinghy gently and quietly up to the motionless creature. Dan, poised in the bows, kept the line all clear, and took careful aim. Throwing was impossible—the only chance was to drive the boathook in with both hands at close quarters. The whale, being off colour, was not scared away.

When he was right over the monster, Dan raised his ready-made harpoon and drove it into the great soft mass with all his force. It sank in half-way up the handle, through the blubber.

There was a flap and a jerk that nearly upset the boat. Down went the whale, and the line began to whistle out over the stern-head. When it ran out, there came a jerk that nearly snapped the cord and upset the boys in a heap on the floorboards. But the boat gave to the pull, and began to tear along through the water at a frantic rate.

"Don't get up—you'll capsize her!" cried Buck. "Sit on the floor, as far aft as you can get, an' keep her nose up!"

"This would beat a torpedo-boat on steaming trial!" said Dan. "The harpoon's holding."

(Dan and Buck are booked for something new in sea trips this time, what? Be sure you read next week's exciting chapters of this powerful adventure yarn, chums.)

THE BOY WHO WOULDN'T MAKE FRIENDS!

(Continued from page 24.)

There, Frank spoke to his chum in a low voice.

"That chap did something at his last school, and got booted out, Harry!"

He spoke with conviction.

Harry Wharton nodded.

"Looks like it!" he muttered.

"And Hacker's got him in here—his uncle! That accounts—"

"For a lot of things," said Harry. "But I'm dashed if I understand how that fat ass, Bunter, knows anything about him."

"He does!"

"Yes, he does! But mum's the word. Frank—the fellow seems to be a sulky tick, but—"

Frank Nugent laughed.

"If Bunter knows anything about him, it will be all over the school!" he said. "Trust Bunter!"

"I suppose so!" assented Wharton.

It was about a quarter of an hour later that Billy Bunter rolled into the Rag. Apparently, he had stayed in the study for a talk with the fellow he knew. There was a fat smirk on his face as he rolled in, as if something entertained Bunter.

"Hallo, hallo, hallo!" roared Bob Cherry. "Bagged the new kid, Bunter?"

"Oh, really, Cherry—"

"Haven't you found Wilmot yet, old fat man?" grinned Johnny Bull.

"Oh, yes, I've seen the chap!" answered Bunter carelessly. "He's not the fellow I know, after all."

"Not the fellow you know, Bunter?" exclaimed Harry Wharton.

Bunter gave him a blink.

"No! As it turns out, I've never seen him before!" he answered breezily. "Not the same chap at all! Quite another chap, you know!"

"Oh, my hat!" murmured Nugent.

His eyes met Wharton's. But neither of them spoke. If the new fellow had a secret, and Bunter, contrary to his usual custom, was going to keep it for him, they certainly had no desire to barge in and spill the beans.

But they rather wondered how long Bunter was likely to keep it. If Eric Wilmot, with a secret to keep, was relying on the discretion of the most talkative ass at Greyfriars, he was leaning upon a very rotten reed.

THE END.

(Be sure you read the second yarn in this grand new series featuring Eric Wilmot. It's entitled: "THE OUTSIDER!" and you'll vote it a real good 'un!)

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