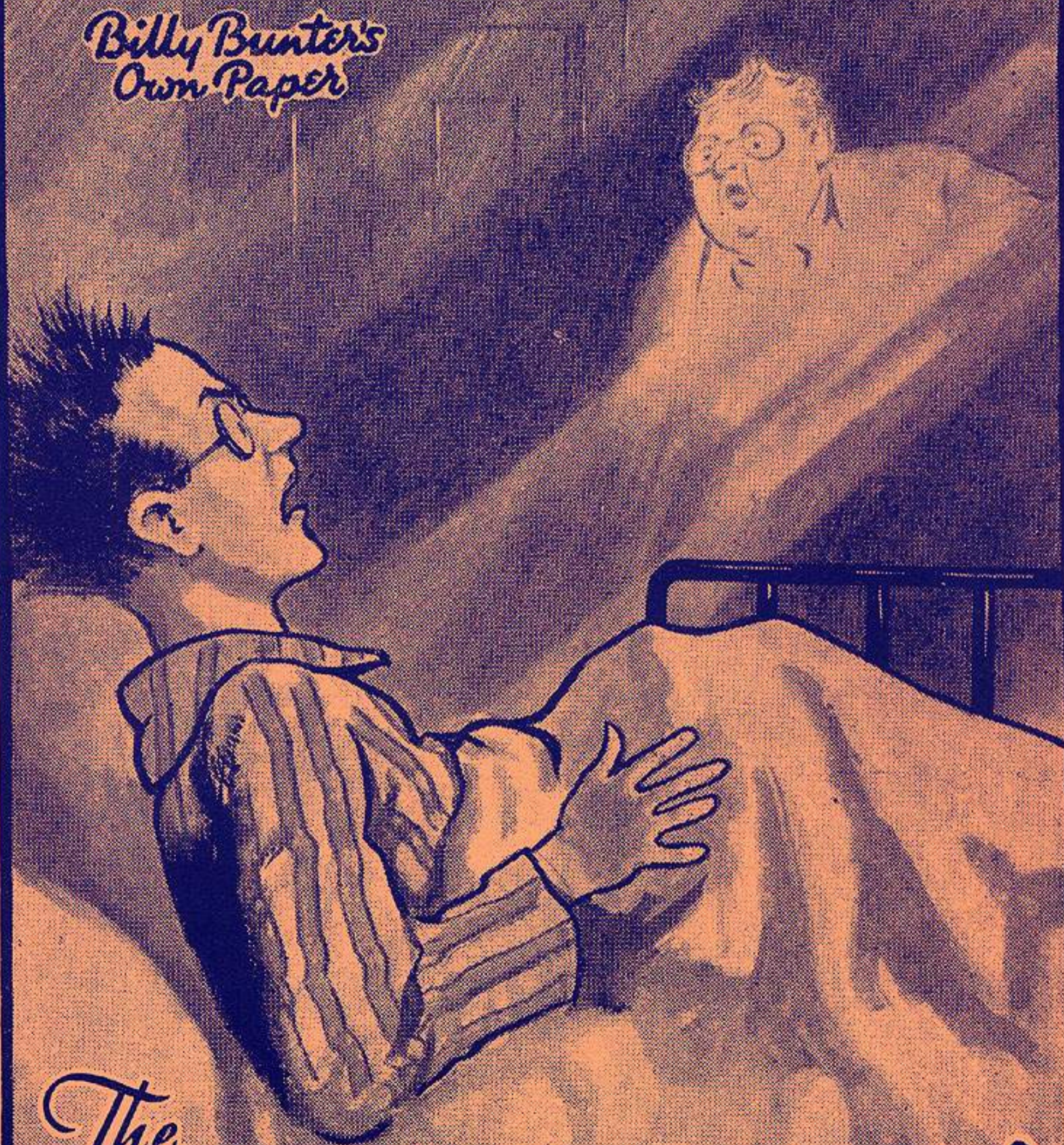


“Harry Wharton’s Secret!” Great School and Detective Adventure Yarn.

# The Magnet <sup>2<sup>D</sup></sup>

Billy Bunter's  
Own Paper



The  
**GHOST of BILLY BUNTER!**



THIS WEEK BY  
**GEORGE TUBB,**  
 Captain of the Third Form.

**A**BOUT time they gave a Third Form man a chance. Look here, I'm not going to fill up this page with drivel. The Ed says: "Write something sensible about your home or school life or hobbies." Well, I nacherally write sense—every Third Form man does. But I prefer fiction to fact, and I therefore propose to write a few smashing stories.

Mind, I don't mean to be an author when I leave school. I'm going to injine-drive the Skotch Express. But I could be an author if I wanted, because I am particukularly gitted with brains, and anyone with an ounce of sense can write stories. There's nothing in it.

Unfortunately the Ed won't let me fill up this ishew of the MAGNET with my stories, and as I can't cram them all into a single page, I shall have to make serials of them, and kontinue them when my turn to write this page comes round again. These yarns are full of the orthentic language and local colour, and maggazine editors who would like to publish them are rekwested to send applications, accompanied by cheques, to G. Tubb, Esq., Captain, Third Form, Greyfriars School, Kent, England.

These stories are copyright by G. Tubb in all civilised countries and also America. Any rotter who tries to lit them does so at his own perill.

The charakters in these stories are all fiktitious, and bear no reference to any living person.

(Now read on.)

## THE BAD MAN OF GRISLY GULCH!

A Supperb Story of the Wild and Woolly West—Begin here:

"Reach for the sky, sucker! I kinda guess you'll lay off'n your hardware ef you ain't houin' ter a skinful o' lead. I sure allow that Bad Bill Buggins don't aim to speak twice to any hombre round these parts."

Tenderfoot Tex raised his hands and fixed a gittering eye on the bad man who had stopped his cayuse in the Grisly Gulch pass. Bad Bill Buggins was covered with guns and pimples, and skowled all over his ugly dial. He had just returned to his lair in Grisly Gulch after shooting up a cupple of sherriffs and rifing the local post office savings bank, and his jeans were stuffed with stolen dollars. His gang was lurking round the corner, waiting for their leader's signal to make mincemeat of Tex.

"You can't get away with this here," hissed Tex, as the bad man relieved him of his shooting-irons. "I am on my way to Cactus City in answer to an advertisement in the paper for a new sherriff."

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Bad Bill. "Say, that's swell! I guess that noos has sure saved your life, pard—for an hour or two."

"How come?" demanded Tex. Bad Bill Buggins roared. "Why, gee, it's a liddle habit o' mine to shoot up the sherriff in that thar city, just as soon as he's appinted. You go right along and git that job, son—and look for me about sundown. I'll be seeln' youse! Ha, ha, ha!"

Tex squared his jaw, shrugged his sholders, curled his lip, and raised his tengallon hat.

"I'll be waiting fer you, Bad Bill Buggins," he said coldly. "And bring

those dollars with you, 'cawse I aim to hand 'em back to the guys what they belong to. S'-long, pard!"

With a quick movement, he slapped a right hook into Bad Bill's grinning pan, and leaving the desperado sprawling on the trail, he set spurs to his bronco and hit the horizon with a dull thud. The gang sped him on his way with quarts of hot lead, but though boullets wizzed round him like hail, Tex never lost his nerve. He muttered a skornful smile.

"You wait a bit, you bulldozers!" said he. Cactus City greeted him with enthusiasm. When they heard that a new tenderfoot had arrived to try his luck at being sherriff, the citizens and cowpunchers turned out to cheer him.

"What shall we put on y'r tomb, sherriff?" asked Red Morgan, the rancher. "We jen'ally fixes that up first, in case o' accidents. He's now at rest, way down in the West, is the usual."

"I guess you gotta ask Bad Bill Buggins that," retorted Tex crisply. "I sure am layin' fer that hombre. Ef he horns in this city to-night, he'll soon horn out, feet-first. Yep!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared a well-known voice, like a foggorn in distress—and Bad Bill Buggins appeared at the door of the Shrieking Shrimp Saloon. "Waal, sherriff, here we are! I guess we're ready to squar' our liddle account."

And, gun in hand, Bad Bill sawntered across the plaza towards him.

(On no account miss the next instalment of this thrilling story, if it ever appears; but judging by the number of men who have still got to take their turn at writing this page, it won't be for at least two years.)

## THE BAD BARON OF CASTLE CARBUNCLE!

A Magnificent Yarn of the Middle Ages, by the pen of a genius.

"Hold, thou caitiff! Odd swounds, I'll split thee to the brisket in a trice. By my halidom, I'll have thy gore by the gallon!"

Sir Launcelotte de Legge reined in his palfrey—as a mailclad warrior, in deepest amour, galloped from the forest, lance in hand. The newcomer was the dreaded

baron Bokoe of Castle Carbuncle, who killed churls by the thousand, and was so formidable that no man dared face him in the tourney.

"Grammercy!" exclaimed Sir Launcelotte coldly. "I am not afraid of thee, thou big stiff! I will split thee like a partridge!"

"Sayest thou!" scoffed the baron. "Who are thou that darest intrude on the domain of the Bad Baron? Thou shalt be hanged to the postern gate, thou saucy knave!"

"I am Sir Launcelotte de Legge, and I am the new Sherriff of Sherwood Forest, as thou shalt find to thy cost."

"In good sooth, thou hast split a bibful!" roared the baron. "Why, beshrew me, it is the custom of the Bokoes to cleave open each sherriff like a split sausage. I shall wait upon thee at sundown, thou scurvy malapert!"

(Editor's note: This story seems familiar. Where have I heard it before?)

"I will hie me hence," retorted the sherriff skornfully, "and I shall be waiting for ye at the castle keep."

"I'faith, an' thou't not wait long!" That night, Sir Launcelotte stood as still as a statoo on the castle keep. No sound broke the silence save the hoot of an owl, the neighing of the palfrey, and the roaring of the Bad Baron Bokoe.

"Where are thou, knave?" came the roar. "I wish to break a lance on thy caitiff carcass. Odds fish, my steel shall drink thy life in two shakes of a nannygoat's rudder."

Sir Launcelotte smiled grimly. The great battle was about to commence.

(What will be the sequel to this thrilling situation? See next instalment, if there ever is one.)

## NICK the HIGHWAYMAN!

Grand Yarn of the Nights of the Open Road

"Your money or your life!"

Dick Dauntless pulled up short and panted. He was running along the Dover Road as the shades of evening were about to fall. Suddenly a sinister nigger in a black mask leaped out at him, and a pistol was pointed at his snoot. The youngster knew at once that this was Hick the Highwayman.

"Faith, I've no money," he laughed breathlessly. "I am going to town to get a job, and can't even raise enough cash for a coachfare."

Hick snarled fiercely. "What job?" he hissed.

"Ods life, Master Hick, 'tis like this here. I was the best runner at my school, so I'm going to join the Bow Street Runners as Captain."

"Sayest thou so?" chuckled Hick. "By my faith, 'tis glad I am to hear it. I always shoot the Captain of the Bow Street Runners—"

(Editor's note: That will do, Tubby! I propose to let my readers guess the rest. They're quite clever at it.)



## GEORGE TUBB

THIRD FORM

The self-styled captain of the Third is a burly youth, good-natured, full of vim, untidy, and a typical fag. He is not weighed down with too many brains, and has no objection whatever to being a bit grimy. Ink stains and mud spots are not terribly rare on his face and collar, while his barbed-wire hair does not seem to have been brushed since his first day at school. It pleases Skinner to pretend that Tubby has to be bathed by force and violence, but the truth is he has as many baths as anyone else. His trouble is that the effects don't last so long; in an hour his ink-and-mud trade-marks have appeared again. Tubby plays football and cricket very well for a fag, and is tremendously keen on outdoor games. In general, he is a decent enough youngster, with plenty of noise, but no vice.

(Cartoon by H SKINNER)

George Tubb

**THE SCHOOLBOY DETECTIVE!** Late of Greyfriars and now the right-hand man of Ferrers Locke, the famous crime-investigator, Jack Drake returns to his old school—under a new name and guise—to track down the mysterious prowler who for weeks past has been haunting the school!

# HARRY WHARTON'S SECRET!

By  
**FRANK  
RICHARDS**



A bright beam of light shone full on Harry Wharton's face and a hand grasped his shoulder as he lay, handcuffed, on the landing. "Wharton! You fool, what are you doing here?"

## THE FIRST CHAPTER.

### Returned Without Thanks!

**B**ILLY BUNTER jumped! He jumped almost clear of the ground, clapping a fat hand to a fat head, from which the cap had been suddenly knocked.

It was enough to make any fellow jump.

It was so utterly unexpected.

Nobody was at hand. Bunter was quite alone. He was leaning on the wall, under the windows of the Remove studies high over his head. Bunter always leaned if there was anything at hand upon which to lean.

With his hands in his pockets and a meditative expression on his fat brow, Billy Bunter was gazing across the quadrangle through his big spectacles when it happened.

Bunter was thinking out a problem. That problem was—which Remove fellow to touch for a small loan to tide him over till his postal order came. It was nearly tea-time, and tea was an important item in Billy Bunter's scheme of things.

But he forgot all about that unsolved problem when something suddenly banged on his head, knocking off his cap, and leaving a pain in its place.

"Ow!" roared Bunter. "Beast!"

He rubbed his head and blinked round him, wrathful and astonished. Nobody was anywhere near him. The nearest fellow was James Duck, the new boy in the Remove, and he was a dozen yards away, and certainly could not have given the Owl of the Remove that sudden and unexpected bang on the

napper. There were other fellows in sight, but they were farther off.

Some of them were looking towards Bunter and grinning, as if amused by the incident.

Bunter was not amused. He was annoyed and exasperated. He was also considerably puzzled.

But as he blinked to and fro through his big spectacles he discerned an object that had fallen at his feet.

Bunter was not quick on the uptake, but he could guess that this object had fallen on his head from above.

He grabbed it up and stared at it. It

**Enthralling Schoolboy Adventure Yarn, Starring JACK DRAKE, the Boy 'Tee., and HARRY WHARTON & CO., of GREYFRIARS.**

was a small wooden box, shut and fastened by a catch.

What it contained, or whether it contained anything, Bunter did not know; neither did he care. He knew that it had banged on his head, and about that he cared very much indeed. With the box clutched in a fat hand, he glared up at the high windows overhead.

"That beast Smithy!" hissed Bunter.

He was standing directly beneath the window of Study No. 4 in the Remove passage—the study that belonged to Herbert Vernon-Smith, the Bounder of

Greyfriars. That window was open. Nobody was to be seen there. But what had happened was perfectly clear—that beast Smithy had dropped that box on his head from the open window and then popped back. If that was the sort of thing that Smithy considered a lark, Bunter did not agree with him. It did not seem in the least like a lark to William George Bunter.

"Beast!" hissed Bunter.

It had been quite a hard knock. He had quite a pain in his fat head, and he gripped the box in his hand and started for the door of the House.

The window was too high up for the fat Owl to hurl the box back whence it came. But he was going to hurl it back, and he was going to the door of Study No. 4 for that purpose.

With wrath in his fat face, Bunter rolled into the House and panted up the stairs. Generally Bunter did stairs to slow motion, having a lot of weight to carry up. Now he almost flew. Gurgling for breath, he arrived on the Remove landing, where five fellows stared at him, astonished to see the fat Owl emulating the hare instead of the tortoise.

"Hallo, hallo, hallo!" exclaimed Bob Cherry. "Loder after you, Bunter?"

"That beast Smithy—" gasped Bunter.

"Smithy," repeated Harry Wharton. "Smithy's in his study."

"I know! The beast!" Bunter, like the deep and dark blue ocean in the poem, rolled on.

"My esteemed Bunter—" exclaimed Hurree Jamsset Ram Singh.

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"Hold on!" called out Frank Nugent.

"Quelch——" began Johnny Bull.

Billy Bunter careered on, unheeding. He fairly rushed into the Remove passage from the landing, leaving the Famous Five staring. Bunter had a pain in his napper, and Bunter wanted vengeance, and he wanted it at once.

Gasping, he arrived at Study No. 4. The door stood wide open.

Bunter blinked in—a vengeful blink! Herbert Vernon-Smith was full in his view, standing with his back to the open window. Bunter did not at the moment observe another figure in the study.

His eyes and his spectacles, fixed on the Bounder, and up went his fat hand, with the little wooden box in it.

"Bunter!" shouted Harry Wharton from the landing, in warning.

"Stop that!" hooted Bob Cherry.

But Bunter, if he heard, did not heed. The fat hand swung, and the box flew. Bunter, at such exploits, was what the Remove fellows sometimes called cack-handed; but at such a short range even Bunter could not miss. That wooden box flew across the study, and landed with a crash, on Herbert Vernon-Smith's chin.

Bang!

"Oh!" roared Smithy, staggering back in surprise.

Plonk! The box dropped at his feet. "There!" gasped Bunter. "There, you beast! There's your box back, you swab! Chucking it at a fellow's head, you silly fathead! I jolly well came up to chuck it back at you, you beast, and——"

"Bunter!"

"Oh!" gasped Billy Bunter, at the sound of that deep and unexpected voice. He blinked round with popping eyes.

Then he observed the second figure in the study. It was that of Mr. Quelch, the master of the Remove.

The Bounder spluttered and clasped his chin.

Mr. Quelch gazed at Bunter with a thunderous gaze.

"Bunter," he repeated, "how dare you!"

"Oh!" gasped Bunter. "Oh crikey!"

— — —

## THE SECOND CHAPTER.

### Bad Luck For The Bounder I

**M**R. QUELCH gave Billy Bunter his grimmest glare.

Billy Bunter blinked back at him in surprise and dismay.

He had not had the faintest idea that Quelch was in Smithy's study. Quelch did not often come up to the studies, and why he was there now Bunter had no idea. The Famous Five, who knew, had tried to warn him as he flew across the landing, as he realised now, too late.

Really, no fellow could have guessed that a beak was in the study. It was simply amazing that Smithy had played that trick of chucking a box down at Bunter's head with his Form-master in the offing.

But there was Quelch, glaring at Bunter with the petrifying glare of a Gorgon.

Smithy, still rubbing his chin, and with an expression of rage and alarm mixed in his face, neatly kicked the box out of sight under a chair while Quelch's petrifying gaze was fixed on the Owl of the Remove. The Remove master did not, at the moment, observe the action. He was giving the fat Owl his fixed attention.

"Bunter!" Quelch's voice was like

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the roll of thunder. "I repeat, how dare you!"

"I—I—I didn't, sir!" gasped Bunter.

"What? Under my very eyes you hurled a missile at Vernon-Smith's head—it struck him!" thundered Mr. Quelch.

"What do you mean by this, Bunter?"

"I—I—I——" stuttered Bunter.

Mr. Quelch had a cane under his arm. He slipped it down into his hand.

"Bunter, bend over that chair! I shall cane you for this."

"I—I—I never!" gasped Bunter.

"I—I mean, I—I was only chucking the box back at—at Smithy, sir. What did he want to chuck it at me for?"

"What? What do you mean, Bunter? Vernon-Smith did nothing of the kind. You have only just arrived here. What do you mean?"

"Look here, you tell him, Smithy, you beast!" howled Bunter. "I ain't going to be whopped because you chucked that box at my head from your window, and I came up and chucked it back!"

"From the window?" repeated Mr. Quelch, starting.

Vernon-Smith set his lips hard. Harry Wharton & Co., who had come up the passage from the landing, exchanged glances.

"Smithy's for it now!" murmured Bob Cherry.

There was not much doubt about that. The Famous Five could guess how the matter stood, though the fat and obtuse Owl, so far, couldn't.

Mr. Quelch turned to the Bounder. There was a dangerous glint in his gimlet eyes.

"Vernon-Smith!"

"Yes, sir!" breathed the Bounder.

"Did you drop something from the window?"

No answer.

Quelch glanced at the gasping fat Owl again.

"How long ago did this happen, Bunter?"

"About a minute or two, sir! Look here, Smithy, you own up!" spluttered Bunter. "You jolly well know you dropped that box on my head, and that I only came up to chuck it back at you. What are you afraid of, you silly ass? You won't get whopped for larking with a fellow in the quad."

The Bounder gave him a deadly look. Even yet it had not dawned on Bunter's fat brain that there was anything more than a lark in the matter. But he was soon to learn that there was.

"Vernon-Smith!" The gimlet eyes glinted at the Bounder again. "I came here, as I have told you, because I had certain reasons to suppose that you had cigarettes in this study. I noticed that you were close to the open window as I entered. I did not then attach any importance to that circumstance. But it appears, Vernon-Smith, that you dropped something from the window, and that it fell on Bunter, who chanced to be below."

"Oh!" gasped Bunter.

Even Bunter began to understand, at long last.

"I require to know," continued Mr. Quelch, in a grinding voice, "what it was that you dropped from the window, Vernon-Smith. I have very little doubt that it was something you desired to keep from your Form-master's eyes."

The gimlet eyes scanned the floor.

"Where is the missile? I do not see it. Have you put it out of sight, Vernon-Smith, while my back was turned for a moment? I command you, Vernon-Smith, to hand it over to me this instant."

Herbert Vernon-Smith, in savage

silence, rooted out the wooden box from under the chair and handed it to his Form-master.

"Is this the article that dropped on you in the quadrangle, Bunter?"

Bunter blinked at it.

"Oh! Yes! No!" he stuttered.

Even Bunter could realise now that that little box contained the supply of smokes which the bad hat of the Remove kept in his study.

Smithy had presence of mind, and was a fellow for prompt action—as he needed to be when he set up to be a black sheep in a Form that had a Form-master like Henry Samuel Quelch!

Quelch had been fairly at his door when the Bounder had grabbed that box of cigarettes and dropped it from the open window—his only resource in the circumstances. He had had no time to think—neither could he have guessed that a fat Owl was leaning on the wall below that window. That was simply a spot of bad luck.

"This box fell on you from this window, Bunter?" demanded Mr. Quelch.

"Yes—I mean, no—that is, I—I—I— Oh crikey!" gasped Bunter.

The realisation that he had given Smithy away was dismaying to Bunter. Really, he did not want to give any fellow away—Bunter was no sneak! Worse than that was the horrid anticipation of what Smithy might do when Quelch was through with him. Smithy was not a man to be given away with impunity.

"Give me a plain answer, Bunter!" rapped Mr. Quelch.

"I—I—I—I mean to say, I—I thought it came from Smithy's window, as—as—as I knew it did, sir!" stammered Bunter. "But—but I don't feel sure now. I—I—I think it must have come from some other window, sir! I never knew there were smokes in it or I wouldn't have——"

"That will do, Bunter!"

Bunter gasped into silence. Mr. Quelch, with a grim brow, slipped back the catch on the box and opened the lid. The interior was packed with cigarettes. There were at least thirty or forty. Evidently, the black sheep of the Remove kept himself well supplied.

"Poor old Smithy!" murmured Frank Nugent.

Johnny Bull grunted. Johnny's opinion was that if a fellow was a smoky swab he could take what was coming to him.

Grimmer and grimmer grew Quelch's brow as he gazed at the cigarettes. His look, as he turned to Smithy, made even the iron-nerved Bounder quail.

"So this is what I find here?" said Mr. Quelch, in a voice that resembled the filing of a saw. "But for an accident, Vernon-Smith, you would have succeeded in deceiving me. Fortunately, the truth has transpired, and I shall now deal with you as you deserve, Vernon-Smith."

The Bounder made no reply. His face was hard and sullen. He was for it, and he had plenty of nerve to face the music. Nearly—very nearly—he had escaped; but for Bunter, Quelch's visit to Study No. 4 would have drawn blank. But luck had been against him; and the Bounder was ready to take his gruel with cool hardihood.

Mr. Quelch pointed to a chair with the cane.

"Bend over that chair, Vernon-Smith!"

Silently, the Bounder bent over. The cane rose and fell, swiping. The fellows in the passage heard what sounded like a succession of pistol-shots.

Quelch often had a heavy hand, but



Crocker strolled to the study window and raised his bowler hat, with mocking politeness, to Dr. Locke. "Glad to hear I'm going on my travels?" he asked. "Undoubtedly!" answered the Greyfriars Head coldly. "I shall be very glad!"

it was heavier than usual on this occasion. Not only had the bad hat of his Form been caught out, but he had very nearly tricked his Form-master into departing with the belief that there was nothing amiss in Study No. 4. That, naturally, evoked Quelch's wrath and added to the emphasis of the swipes.

Savage and silent, Vernon-Smith went through it—a full six. Then Mr. Quelch tucked the cane under his arm, and Smithy rose with a white and set face.

"I trust," rumbled Mr. Quelch, "that this will be a warning to you, Vernon-Smith! I warn you that you are in danger of being sent to your headmaster for a flogging! Take care!"

With that, Mr. Quelch left the study and rustled away down the passage, the box of cigarettes in his hand. Vernon-Smith stood breathing hard, his face pale, his teeth set. Pride would not allow him to utter a sound under the swiping; but it had not been easy to keep silent.

When Mr. Quelch was gone, Smithy's eyes turned on Bunter with a deadly look in them. The fat Owl blinked at him uneasily.

"I—I say, Smithy, you needn't be shirty, you know!" mumbled Bunter. "I never knew there were smokes in the box—I thought you were larking—"

Bunter, as Smithy made a movement towards him, did not stop to finish. He made a rapid backward hop into the passage.

"I say, you fellows, keep him off!" he squeaked, in alarm.

The Bounder, with a furious face, followed him.

Harry Wharton & Co. promptly interposed.

"Hold on, Smithy!" said Harry quietly. "Bunter never meant any harm—"

"You've only got yourself to blame!" granted Johnny Bull.

"Let me pass, you fools!" said the Bounder thickly. "I tell you, let me pass—"

"I say, you fellows—"

"Cut, you fat ass!" snapped Bob Cherry.

The Famous Five blocked the Bounder's way out of the study. Billy Bunter gave the white, furious face a terrified blink and shot away down the passage like a scared fat rabbit. He had arrived in the Remove passage at unusual speed. At still more unusual speed did he depart therefrom!

The Bounder, breathing hard, stopped back into the study and slammed the door in the faces of the Famous Five.

### THE THIRD CHAPTER.

#### The Sportsman Looks In!

**D**R. LOCKE, the headmaster of Greyfriars, laid down his pen, rose from his writing-table, and stepped to his study window.

A buzz of voices from the quadrangle, floating into his study, drew his attention, and he glanced from the window to see what was on.

The kind, benevolent face of the Greyfriars headmaster quite lost its benevolent expression as he looked.

Dozens of fellows in the quad were staring at a man who had sauntered—or, rather, swaggered—in at the gates and was coming towards the House.

The Head knew him, only too well.

Twenty years ago he had expelled Randolph Crocker, of the Sixth Form, from Greyfriars School. He had never expected to see him again. Certainly he had hoped never to do so.

But he had, of late, seen much of him, and heard more. Every day that old bog of Greyfriars was talked of in the

school, and his name was bandied up and down the countryside.

Deep and dark grew the headmaster's frown as he fixed his eyes on the swaggering figure. How a man who had been expelled for dishonesty could have the nerve and impudence to turn up again at his old school was beyond the Head's understanding. But not only had Randolph Crocker done so, but for weeks he had haunted the vicinity of Greyfriars, living—or, rather, camping—at the hut on the Abbot's Spinney, at the corner of Friardale Lane.

With that Dr. Locke could not interfere. He had to tolerate it. But he could, and did, intervene when Crocker had the neck to intrude within the precincts of Greyfriars. And now, with a deep frown, he threw open his window to bid the impudent rascal begone. A dozen voices reached his ears as the window opened.

"I say, you fellows, it's that man Crocker!"

"Hallo, hallo, hallo! Let's barge him out!"

"Cheeky cad!"

"What a neck!"

"Barge him!"

"Here comes Wingate!"

Wingate of the Sixth, the captain of Greyfriars, spotted the impudent rascal and cut across to intercept him.

Crocker came to a halt as the big Sixth Form man blocked his way.

"Stop!" rapped Wingate. "Get out! You're not wanted here, Crocker! You know that! Get out, sharp!"

Crocker, with impudent coolness, gave him a nod and a grin. He removed the cigarette that was sticking out of a hard mouth, half-hidden by the thick, ragged moustache, and blew out a cloud of smoke, ~~into~~ it in the face of the Greyfriars captain.

"Keep your wool on, kid!" he drawled.

"Do you want to be thrown out?" snapped Wingate.

"Think you could do it?" grinned the old boy.

"I'll try, at any rate," said Wingate grimly. "And if I want any help, there's plenty here."

"I'll lend a hand!" growled Coker of the Fifth. "More than ready."

"And so say all of us!" grinned Bob Cherry.

"Bag him!" exclaimed Hobson of the Shell.

"Boot him!" roared Johnny Bull.

"Don't you think you'd better go, Mr. Crocker?" asked Wingate, waving back the crowd as it surged round Crocker. "You can go on your feet, or your neck, just as you choose; but you're going."

The Head leaned from his window.

"Remove that man at once, Wingate!" he called.

"Yes, sir; certainly."

"Hold on!" Crocker made a pacific gesture. "I've called this time to say good-bye to my old headmaster! I'm sure he will be glad to say good-bye to me! Don't you think so?"

"Oh!" said Wingate, pausing.

Some of the Greyfriars fellows grinned.

Whether Dr. Locke would be glad to say good-bye to the rascal or not there was no doubt that he would be glad to see the last of him.

"Just a word of farewell to the dear old Head, and the dear old school, and the dear associates of innocent youth!" drawled Crocker.

Wingate glanced round towards the headmaster's window.

"The man says—" he began.

"I heard him, Wingate! Let him come here! He may not be admitted to the House! Crocker, if you are speaking the truth, you may come to this window."

"Thanks, dear old headmaster!" drawled Crocker.

And, his way no longer barred, he strolled to the study window, watched by a hundred pairs of eyes. He raised his bowler hat with mocking politeness to the headmaster, who looked down on him with an unrelaxing frown.

"Glad to hear I'm going on my travels?" he asked.

"Undoubtedly!" answered Dr. Locke coldly. "You were a disgrace to your school, when you were here many years ago; you have returned to disgrace it again. I shall be very glad if you go."

"I guessed that one!" agreed Crocker. "I don't mind telling you, my dear old Head, that I've done precious little business since I set up as a cobbler at the corner of the lane. I expected to do a good deal in the way of mending boots and shoes for the fellows here—"

"You expected nothing of the kind!" rapped Dr. Locke. "You are too idle and shiftless to carry on your pretended trade. If that is all you have to say—"

"My only consolation," continued Crocker, "has been to live within sight of my dear old school and get an occasional squint at my dear old headmaster."

"Go!" said the Head.

Crocker made a gesture towards the staring crowd of Greyfriars fellows.

"A word in private—" he said.

The Head hesitated a moment. Then he signed to the crowd of fellows to go, and they dispersed. From a distance,

however, they still had their eyes on Sportsman Crocker. Several other Sixth Form prefects—Walker and Gwynne and Sykes—had joined Wingate—and they were ready to come up and collar Mr. Crocker at a sign from the Head.

"Be brief!" said Dr. Locke. He was only anxious for that peculiar and disagreeable interview to terminate.

Crocker leaned negligently on the broad stone window-sill, cigarette between finger and thumb. He grinned up at the Head.

"You'd like me to clear?" he asked.

"You know it."

"I've guessed harder ones!" agreed Crocker, with a nod. "Well, the cobbling business seems slack, and the horses and dogs have let me down; and all I want is a spot of dough to set me going."

"Of what?" ejaculated the Head.

"Just dough!"

"I do not understand you!" said Dr. Locke coldly. Dr. Locke knew many languages; but there were certain phrases with which he was unacquainted. "If you mean that, after pretending to be a cobbler, you mean to pretend to be a baker—"

"A baker?" repeated Crocker, staring.

"Dough, I believe, is used only by bakers!" said Dr. Locke. "If that is your intention, you will certainly receive no assistance from me."

Crocker stared and burst into a laugh.

"Ha, ha, ha!" he roared. "Oh, suffering cats! Ha, ha, ha!"

"What do you mean?" exclaimed the Head angrily. "How dare you burst out laughing in that manner! I—"

"Excuse me," gurgled Crocker, "you don't quite get my meaning, dear old revered headmaster. I know as much about baking as I do about cobbling—which is about as much as you know about anything except Latin and Greek. I'm not going to set up as a baker—Ha, ha, ha!"

"Then for what purpose do you require dough?" snapped the Head.

"Spondulics!" explained Crocker. "Rhino! Tin! Brass! The needful! The ready! Get me now? You won't find those words in the Latin dictionary or the Greek lexicon, but you have heard some of them! Money makes the mare go! Cash!"

"Oh!" ejaculated Dr. Locke. "I understand you!"

"Gratters!" said Crocker. "There's not much a schoolmaster understands as a rule! But you get me now! I'm ready to go on my travels! Fifty pounds will see me on the road! What about it?"

"You dare to ask me—"

"Worth your while, old bean!" said Crocker persuasively. "You'd like to shift me out of my palatial residence at the corner of the lane. You can't do it! I know you've got in touch with Pilkins, the estate-agent—but I've got my agreement, signed and witnessed. You can't move me on! Isn't it worth a spot of dough to see my back?"

"And what guarantee," said the Head icily, "shall I have that you would really cease this disgraceful persecution?"

"Isn't an old boy's word good enough for you?"

Dr. Locke's lip curled contemptuously. Whether he might or might not have given the rascal what he demanded to be rid of him, he was not likely to trust to the word of Sportsman Crocker.

"So that is what you had to say to me?" he said. "Say no more! Go!"

"Nothing doing?" asked Crocker.

"Go!"



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The Sportsman gave him an evil look. Probably he had counted on success from the Head's well-known desire to see the last of him. Though whether he would have kept the compact was another matter. Randolph Crocker, once of the Greyfriars Sixth, was a rascal all through.

"That's your last word?" he asked.

"Yes; go!"

The Sportsman made a sudden movement. The distant gazers gave a general jump of horror as he suddenly grasped up at the headmaster.

Once the impudent rascal had pulled Mr. Quelch's nose, when the Remove master had ordered him off. It was almost inconceivable that the most outrageous ruffian could contemplate pulling the nose of the majestic Head! Yet, inconceivable as it was, that was exactly what Randolph Crocker was going to do—and would have done had not a backward movement of the majestic countenance saved the majestic nose from his clutch.

"Bless my soul!" gasped the Head.

"Collar him!" yelled Bob Cherry.

There was an instant rush. In hardly more than a moment the Greyfriars crowd swarmed round Crocker and over him. His arms and legs flew into the air as he was grasped by innumerable hands.

"Bless my soul!" repeated the Head faintly. He shut the window.

There was a roar in the quad. Every fellow wanted to get hold of Randolph Crocker—they struggled for a grasp at him. There was not room on the Sportsman for half the clutching hands. But every hand that could clutch, clutched—and the Sportsman, yelling, went whirling back to the gates.

He left the gateway, whizzing! He howled as he crashed. Wingate waved the excited crowd back and followed him into the road. He did not speak—he kicked; and kicked again, and yet again, till the Sportsman scrambled up and fled.

It was a dusty, dismal, and dilapidated Sportsman who almost crawled back to the hut on the spinney.

## THE FOURTH CHAPTER.

### Bunter Up Against It!

"I SAY, you fellows! Seen Smithy?"

Billy Bunter asked that question anxiously.

Bunter was, in fact, anxious.

It was tea-time—past tea-time, really. Every other fellow in the quad was talking about Randolph Crocker, and thinking about him—but Billy Bunter was thinking of something much more urgent—tea! Other fellows, in a moment of excitement, might forget tea! Not Bunter!

"Smithy?" repeated Bob Cherry. "Bother Smithy!"

"But, I say, have you seen him? Is he shirty?" asked the anxious Owl.

The Famous Five grinned at that question. As it was only half an hour since Smithy had had six of the best, the probability was that he was shirty—very shirty!

"You see, I want to go in to tea!" explained Bunter plaintively. "Mauly's expecting me to tea. He was going to ask me to tea, only he forgot. But I can't go up to the Remove if that beast Smithy is watching for me, ready to pounce on me like a tiger."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Blessed if I see anything to cackle at!" hooted Bunter. "What is there to cackle at in a fellow being kept

away from a spread, I'd like to know."

"Well, if your luck's out, Mauleverer's is in!" grinned Bob. "Mauly won't weep briny tears if you don't turn up to tea."

"Oh, really, Cherry——"

"What did you give Smithy away for, you fat ass?" said Frank Nugent. "You can't expect him to like getting toco from Quelch."

"I didn't!" howled Bunter indignantly. "How was I to know that there was a beak in his study and cigarettes in that box? I thought the beast was larking, chucking it out on my head. If I'd known there was a beak in his box—I mean, in his study——"

"Bunter!" James Duck, the new boy in the Remove, came up and blinked at the fat Owl through his steel-rimmed glasses. "Do you want to see Smithy?"

"Eh? No! No fear!" gasped Bunter.

"I think he wants to see you!" said the new junior. "He is asking fellows if they've seen you——"

"Oh crikey!"

"I thought he looked rather annoyed about something" bleated Duck. "Indeed, he looked very cross when he came down from his study. He seems very anxious to see you."

"Oh lor'!"

"Better hunt cover, old fat bean!" said Bob. "Smithy will get over it in time—better give him time."

"I say, you fellows, don't go away!" howled Bunter. "I say——"

But the Famous Five were going. Tea called them, though not so urgently as it called Bunter, and they went into the House.

James Duck ambled away to the gates, where he stood looking out into the road.

Billy Bunter stood blinking towards the House.

Gladly he would have followed the Famous Five in. But he dared not, after Duck's warning that Smithy was looking for him. He had thought of creeping past Study No. 4 on tiptoe and getting safe to Study No. 12—where Lord Mauleverer had a spread. But that, evidently, would not work, if Smithy had come down and was looking for him.

It was a sad and distressing situation for the hapless fat Owl.

If he delayed much longer, tea would be over in Mauly's study. It would be over in all the Remove studies, and so the poor dog would have none. Tea in Hall would be the only resource—but even from that last resource of the stony Bunter was cut off, if the vengeful Bunder was rooting through the House after him.

"Beast!" groaned Bunter.

He did not approach the House. He rolled away to the gates and joined James Duck there. The new junior gave him a glance through the steel-rimmed glasses—a mild glance. Everything about James Duck was mild, if not meek. He was considered, in the Remove, the biggest ass that had ever struck Greyfriars—even exceeding William George Bunter in the asinine line.

Billy Bunter blinked at him hopefully. Cut off from the House, Bunter had to have his tea! A fellow who was reputed to be an absolute ass, and the biggest duffer that ever was, was really the kind of fellow that Bunter wanted to meet at such a distressing moment.

"I say, Duck, old chap," said

Bunter, "like to come along to the bun-shop in Courtfield for tea?"

"That would be very nice, Bunter!" bleated Duck.

"Lots of time before lock-up, if we take the bus both ways," said Bunter. "I'll stand the spread, of course."

"How very kind of you, Bunter!" said Duck.

"The only difficulty is," pursued Bunter, "that I've been disappointed about a postal order."

"That is very sad!" remarked Duck.

"I have heard that you have had many such disappointments, Bunter! Believe me, I sympathise very much."

Billy Bunter gave him a suspicious blink. That sounded, to his fat ears, as if the new fellow was pulling his leg! But Duck's face was simple and innocent.

"It's coming to-morrow morning!" said Bunter.

"That will be very nice."

"But—temporarily, of course, I'm rather short of tin. I suppose you could let me have the ten bob and take the postal order when it comes. There's no doubt about it, of course—it's from one of my titled relations. And I'll stand tea at the bun-shop, see?"

Bunter blinked eagerly at Duck's simple face. This was an easy and quite agreeable way out of the difficulty—if it worked!

"I should be so glad——" murmured Duck.

"That's all right—shell out, old chap, and we'll——"

"But my Uncle Percy——"

"Blow your Uncle Percy!" said Bunter irritably. "I mean, never mind your Uncle Percy now! If you've got the ten bob——"

"But my Uncle Percy——"

"Look here, that beast Smithy may be after me any minute. I mean, I want to show you the bun-shop at Courtfield, as you're new here—ripping place! Come on!"

"But my Uncle Percy says neither a borrower nor a lender be!" Duck bleated on regardless. "You remember what Shakespeare says on that subject, Bunter——"

"Oh, blow Shakespeare!" howled Bunter.

"But he was such a very great poet, and what he says is so very, very wise!" urged Duck. "He says——"

"Look here——"

"Neither a borrower nor a lender be, for loan oft loses both itself and friend, and borrowing dulls the edge of husbandry!" quoted Duck.

"Beast!"

The fat Owl glared at James Duck. Whether it was the advice of his Uncle Percy, or the wisdom of Shakespeare, that influenced Duck—or some other reason—it seemed that Bunter was not going to extract ten bob from him.

But the next moment Bunter forgot the ten bob and the bun-shop, and even tea, as he spotted a red and wrathful face bearing down on him.

"Oh crikey!" gasped Bunter.

The Bunder came down to the gates at a rapid run! He had spotted the fat Owl there, and his look showed plainly what Bunter had to expect—something quite as painful as Smithy's six or rather more so.

"I—I—I say, keep off, you beast!" hooted Bunter. "I say——"

Smithy shot at him like an arrow from a bow. In sheer desperation Billy Bunter made a sudden grab at James Duck, and, taking him by sur-

priso, hurled him in Smithy's way. They crashed.

"Oh!" gasped Duck.

"Ooogh!" spluttered Smithy.

Vernon-Smith went over backwards, and Duck sprawled over him as he sprawled. Billy Bunter did not wait to see them sort themselves out. He flew out of gates and headed down Friardale Lane, like a runaway steam-engine.

The Bounder was left yelling.

"Gerroff! You fool, I'll punch you! Gerroff!"

Duck scrambled up in a sitting position on Vernon-Smith's chest. He seemed in rather a dizzy state, after the crash, as was only to be expected of a fathead like Duck of the Remove. He did not seem to realise that he was pinning Smithy down on his back as he sat on him. But he did pin him down, and the enraged Bounder struggled in vain to pitch him off.

"You idiot! You dummy! You goat! Gerroff!" raved Smithy. "Will you lemme gerrup, you born idiot!"

Duck gave him a blink.

"Oh dear!" he bleated. "I—I think I fell over—"

"Get off!" shrieked the Bounder.

"Did you run into me?"

"Lemme gerrup—"

"I think you must have run into me, and I—I think Bunter pushed me," bleated Duck. "I am quite breathless— Yaroooh!"

He gave a howl as the Bounder's fist lashed into his ribs. Then he got off, and Herbert Vernon-Smith scrambled breathlessly to his feet.

"You silly chump!" he roared.

"Oh, my goodness!" said Duck.

"You—you—you—" gasped the Bounder.

But he stayed no longer to tell the duffer of the Remove what he thought of him. He shot out of gates in pursuit of Bunter.

James Duck dusted his trousers and blinked after him through the steel-rimmed glasses with a grin. It did not occur to the Bounder that the fathead of the Remove had been deliberately delaying him to give the fleeing fat Owl a start. He did not suppose that the dud of the Remove had sense enough for that, or for anything else. But there was more in James Duck than met the eye, and he grinned as the angry Bounder rushed after Bunter—now a good way ahead and going strong.

## THE FIFTH CHAPTER

### Bunter Butts In!

**B**ILLY BUNTER stopped at a gate, leaned on it, and pumped in breath.

Breath was always rather short with Bunter.

It was the gate in the fence of the Abbot's Spinney on which the panting fat Owl leaned, though for a moment he did not notice it; he just wanted something to lean on while he panted and pumped.

It was the sight of Randolph Crocker that apprised him of the fact. He had forgotten the Sportsman, but he was reminded of him now. Leaning on the gate, the muddy path that led up to the hut was in front of him—and on that path was the Sportsman, just arriving at his door. The Sportsman had got away from Wingate's boot at a good speed; but he had soon slowed down, being in no condition for a foot-race after his handling in the Greyfriars

quad. Now he had just got home—almost crawling.

Bunter saw him, but gave him no heed. Crocker went into the hut, slammed the door savagely after him, and disappeared.

The fat Owl leaned and gasped and panted and pumped.

Having recovered a spot of wind, he blinked back in the direction of the school gates, then he gave a startled squoak.

Somebody had shot out of the gateway like a pip from an orange. At the distance the short-sighted Owl could not recognise the Bounder, but he knew that it was he. That beast was still after him!

Bunter detached himself from the gate and made a step, but he paused. Bunter was not of much use in a foot-race with Smithy.

He darted back, dodged in and shut the gate, and squatted behind the adjoining fence.

There he crouched and palpitated, hoping that the Bounder would pass without suspecting that he was there.

It was quite a likely chance. The Abbot's Spinney, since Randolph Crocker had set up his residence there, was strictly out of bounds—and Bunter was not, as a rule, a fellow to take risks in breaking bounds. Squatted behind the fence, he listened, with his fat ears on the strain, to the patter of running feet.

To his immense relief, that pattering passed along the fence and down the lane. Smithy had not guessed that he was there.

Bunter grinned.

All he had to do now was to wait till the beast had got to a safe distance, and then walk back to the school, leaving the Bounder still hunting for him up and down Friardale Lane; and there was still time to be a guest—albeit, an uninvited one—at the spread in Lord Mauleverer's study.

But alas for Bunter! The sound of a calling voice reached him beyond the trees in Friardale Lane.

"Seen Bunter, Skinner?"

"No."

"Hasn't he passed you?"

"Haven't seen him."

"Beast!" hissed Bunter.

Skinner of the Remove evidently was coming up the lane. As he had not seen Bunter, the Bounder knew that the fat Owl had not fled onwards towards the village. Smithy would be coming back.

"Help me root the fat sweep out, Skinner! He's dodged into these trees, I think."

"Any old thing, Smithy!"

Billy Bunter quaked. Smithy seemed to think that he had dodged into the thickets by the lane farther on. But he was trying back, and it would not be long before he was back at the gate of the spinney, and then— Then it was all up with the hunted Owl.

Bunter blinked round him. He cast a longing blink at the door of the hut that lay back from the road. That was a safe cover if that beast Crocker let him in.

Then quite a bright idea flashed into Bunter's podgy brain.

That sweep Crocker made out that he was a cobbler; he had a sign up over the fence announcing the fact. He pretended that he wanted boots and shoes to mend. Everybody knew that it was gammon, and only done to annoy the headmaster of Greyfriars. But a fellow had a right to ignore that if he liked.

A fellow could walk into a cobbler's and talk boots and shoes if he liked; a fellow could spin out a talk about boots

and shoes till a beast who was hunting him had cleared off.

It was really quite a bright idea. Bunter was prepared to go even to the length of having a shoe repaired while he waited to keep clear of the Bounder. It was true that it would have to be done on tick, but Crocker would not know that till the end of the transaction.

With that bright idea in his fat mind, Bunter shot up the path to the hut. Hardly stopping to tap, the fat junior grabbed at the door-handle, turned it, and barged on, to push in as the door opened.

Unluckily, the door did not open.

Bang!

"Wow!" howled Bunter.

He had taken it for granted that the door was on the latch. It was hardly more than ten minutes since Randolph Crocker had gone in; so, obviously, he was at home, and there was no reason why he should lock his front door, that Bunter could imagine.

But the door was locked, all the same, and Bunter's fat little nose tapped on it—hard!

"Ow! Beast!" gasped Bunter. He rubbed his nose; then he knocked on the door and called: "I say, let me in! I say, Mr. Crocker, let me in, will you? I want some shoes mended!"

There was no answer, and no sound from within.

Billy Bunter drew back a fat fist to bang on the door, but he did not bang. He remembered that a bang might reach the ears of the Bounder, rooting for him along the lane.

Crocker, it seemed, was not in the front room, or he would have heard; but there was another door at the back, and Bunter scuttled round to it.

On the back door he thumped. It was fastened within.

Thump, thump, thump!

But the back door did not open any more than the front door, neither was there any reply from the hut.

In dread of the Bounder hearing him from the lane, Billy Bunter ceased to thump. He blinked fiercely at the door. For the time he was screened from view behind the hut; but Vernon-Smith could not be far away now, and when he guessed that Bunter had taken refuge in the spinney, out of bounds would not stop him. Almost any minute he might come cutting round the hut, looking for Bunter. Bunter had to get into that hut!

The beast inside heard him—must have heard him. Yet, though the beast made out that he was a cobbler, he did not take the trouble to open his door to a customer.

There were only two rooms in the wooden hut that had been built on the site of the ancient stone cell in the spinney; Crocker had to be in one or the other as he was in the hut.

Bunter moved along to the back window; he tapped on the glass. The man within could not fail to hear him and answer.

But there was no answer. Either Crocker did not hear, or he did not choose to answer. The window was covered by a thick blind, and Bunter could not see into the interior; but he had no doubt, of course, that Crocker was there.

"Oh, the beast!" groaned Bunter.

His bright idea seemed rather a fizzle if the beast refused to let a customer in. That was puzzling; for the old boy was well known to establish any contact he could with Greyfriars boys in furtherance of his malicious scheme of persecuting his old headmaster. Why he was





In sheer desperation Billy Bunter made a grab at James Duck and hurled him in Vernon-Smith's way. The two crashed. "Oh!" gasped Duck. "Oooogh!" spluttered Smithy. Bunter did not wait to see them sort themselves out. He flew out of the gates like a runaway steam-engine.

not now acting in his usual way Bunter did not understand.

A distant voice floated over the spinney.

"He's gone in here! He must have!" "Oh crikey!" gasped Bunter. The avenger was at the gate! Only the hut hid Bunter from his eyes.

The fat Owl tapped on the window again. As there was no reply, he tapped harder—and there was a loud crack as the pane went. Fragments of glass dropped into the room, clattering noisily on the stone flags that formed the floor.

Bunter fully expected to see an angry face glare from the window.

He was prepared to offer to pay for the broken pane—to offer or promise anything—to get inside before Smithy came round the hut. But, to his amazement, there was still no sound from within. The Sportsman, who had not heeded knocking at the door, or tapping at the window, did not heed the clatter of broken glass falling on the old stone flags.

"I say!" squeaked Bunter. On the principle that a fellow might as well be hung for a sheep as a lamb, he barged a fat elbow at the broken pane and sent a fresh shower of glass clattering within, and, putting a fat hand through, grabbed the blind and jerked it aside. "I say, Mr. Crocker—"

Bunter could see into the room now. But he blinked in, in vain, for Randolph Crocker. The back room of the hut was empty.

"Oh crikey!" gasped Bunter.

There was a door between the two rooms, shut. Had Crocker gone back into the front room and shut the door after him? That seemed the only explanation to Bunter, though it was surprising that he had not heard the man move within. The old stone flags were not boarded over, and covered neither

with carpet nor linoleum, and Bunter would have expected to hear the man walking about if he did walk about.

But Crocker was not to be seen. And from the front of the hut came sounds of the Bounder. He was coming—evidently wise to it by this time that Bunter had dodged into the spinney.

The fat Owl cast a desperate blink round him.

There was no cover at hand. Long ago the ancient spinney had been stripped of its trees. In dread of seeing the Bounder coming round the corner, the fat Owl reached through the opening in the window, grabbed the catch, and jerked it back. The next moment he had the window open and was scrambling in.

Bunter was not much of a climber. But the thought of Herbert Vernon-Smith close at hand behind him gave him almost the activity of a chimpanzee. He was in at that window in a twinkling, dropping inside, jamming it shut, and jamming back the catch. Then, letting the blind fall back in place, he crouched under the window and listened, with thumping heart, to the footsteps that came round the corner at the back of the hut.

## THE SIXTH CHAPTER.

### The Man Who Vanished!

**H**ERBERT VERNON-SMITH tramped round the hut with a grim brow and a glinting eye.

In the hour or so that had passed since Quelch had laid it on in Study No. 4, the Bounder of Greyfriars had neither recovered from the effects of the whopping, nor recovered his temper. He was feeling painful, indeed anguished twinges, and his temper was the worst ever.

He wanted Bunter, and he wanted him badly. He was going to punch Bunter as if Bunter had been a fat punch-ball. His chum, Tom Redwing, was waiting tea for him in Study No. 4, but Smithy did not give a thought to that. Neither did he give a thought to bounds, as he rooted round Crocker's hut after Bunter. The reckless bad hat of the Remove was not much given to thinking of consequences when his temper led him astray.

He was sure that the fat Owl was there—he had searched back along the lazo without finding him, and reached the spinney; he did not doubt that Bunter had dodged in there, and he went in after him—the more prudent Skinner waiting outside the gate.

Smithy fully expected to see Bunter hidden behind the hut when he came round the corner. Two minutes earlier he would have seen him. Now he did not.

He scowled into empty space.

Whether Crocker was at home Smithy did not know or care. He gave him no thought at all. If the man came out and ordered him off, Smithy was ready to snap defiance at him. He was after Bunter, and did not care a straw about Crocker, and whether he liked it or not.

But Bunter was not to be seen, and if Smithy noticed that a window was broken, he certainly did not think of guessing what it indicated.

At a distance from the hut in the rear were a few remaining trees, with which the spinney had once been thickly clothed. The Bounder cut towards them at a run, suspecting that Bunter had taken cover there.

"Ooooh!" gasped Bunter, as he heard the sound of receding footsteps.

He rose to his feet, drew aside a corner of the blind, and peered cautiously.

ously out. He had a back view of the Bouncer disappearing among the trees. "Beast!" breathed the fat Owl.

He did not need telling what Smithy was up to. And he could guess that, when the Bouncer had searched the trees for him in vain he would come back past the hut; it was his only way back to the lane. There was no venturing out for Bunter yet!

But he was safe—except from possibility of trouble with Crocker, for having entered his dwelling so unceremoniously. Leaving the window, Bunter blinked round him, more and more surprised that Randolph Crocker had not put in an appearance.

Unless he was stone deaf he must know that someone had entered his hut. But there was no sign from him.

The back room was a kitchen, with an oil-cooking stove and a swinging paraffin lamp; neither gas nor electric light being available on that spot. But it seemed to be a bed-room also, for there was a camp-bed at one end of the room, and a few articles of furniture. That old boy of Greyfriars was camping in very rough and primitive quarters.

The floor was bare; great, square blocks of ancient stone, many centuries old. Mr. Pilkins, of Courtfield, when he had put up that hut to let to hikers in the summer days, had not gone to any unnecessary expense. It was, in fact, a building of the very cheapest construction.

Here and there, remnants of the ancient stone walls had been built in; but the greater part of the building was of wood—it was one of those ready-made huts that are delivered in sections for erection. Of the old abbot's cell that had once stood there, little more than the stone-flagged floor remained.

Crocker certainly was not in the back room with Bunter—so the fat Owl, puzzled as he was, could only conclude that he was in the other—and he went to the communicating door and tapped on it softly, lest the Bouncer should be in the offing again.

"I say, Mr. Crocker!" he squeaked uneasily.

There was no answer and no sound. Bunter turned the door-handle, but the door did not open. It was locked; the key in the lock—and the fat Owl almost fell down in astonishment as he saw it.

Crocker could not have gone back into the front room and locked the door after him, leaving the key on the bed-room side.

That, of course, was impossible.

"Oh crikey!" gasped Bunter.

He blinked round him again. Crocker assuredly must have been in the back room to lock that middle door. He could not have left it by that door, for the front room. It seemed impossible that he could have left by the back door on the field without Bunter having seen something of him.

But that, the astonished fat Owl could only conclude, was what he must have done. He blinked round at the back door—and his eyes fairly goggled behind his spectacles. The back door was bolted.

Bunter staggered against the wall in his stupefaction.

He could hardly believe either his eyes or his spectacles.

Crocker had been in that room, or he could not have locked one door and shot the bolts on the other. But with one door locked and the other bolted, he could not have got out of it. And he was not there.

He was not there, that was certain. Bunter cast a dizzy blink round him, as if fancying that he might have over-

looked him there. But he certainly was not there.

Had he, for some utterly unaccountable reason, left his own dwelling by the window? Bunter knew that he hadn't. The catch had been fastened inside the window—Bunter had had to reach through the broken pane and unfasten it to get in. It was quite a simple, common catch; but nobody could have fastened it from outside the shut window.

"Oh crikey!" gurgled Bunter.

It was so strange, so weird a mystery that the fat Owl felt his plump flesh almost creep.

Where was Crocker?

He had been in that room. He could not have got out of that room. And he was not in that room. Bunter was alone in that room.

With a vague idea that the man might have fallen down in a fit perhaps behind something out of sight, the fat junior moved at last about the room, blinking into corners, under the table, and even under the bed.

Nobody was there.

Bunter was alone. Yet, unless Crocker could pass through a keyhole, he simply had to be there. But he was not there.

There was something eerie, uncanny, in the disappearance of the man who had been, and who ought still to have been in that room. Billy Bunter felt a thrill of fear at his fat heart.

He rolled back to the window. The sooner he was out of that room of strange mystery, the better Billy Bunter was going to like it.

But as he moved the blind and peered out he spotted the Bouncer—coming back from the trees with so savage an expression on his face that the fat Owl dropped the blind back at once. The mysterious room was getting on his fat nerves—but it was not so bad as an encounter with Herbert Vernon-Smith at close quarters.

He heard the Bouncer tramp past the hut, back to the lane. From the direction of the gate he heard Skinner call:

"Cave!"

The Bouncer quickened his steps. Bunter pulled the blind aside again. Smithy had passed the corner, and was out of sight. Bunter quickly had the window open, clambered out, and jammed the window shut after him. Smithy evidently had given it up as a bad job, and was going. The fat Owl crept to the corner of the hut and blinked cautiously round.

"Oh scissors!" he murmured.

Nothing was to be seen of Skinner. But at the gate stood a bony figure with sharp eyes fixed on Herbert Vernon-Smith.

"The Acid Drop!" breathed Bunter; and he popped his head back.

It was Mr. Hacker, the master of the Shell—and Smithy was fairly spotted out of bounds! Bunter heard the sharp voice:

"Vernon-Smith!"

"Well?" growled the Bouncer; which was not a respectful way to answer any master.

"You are out of bounds, Vernon-Smith."

"No need to tell me that, sir! I happen to know."

"What! You are impertinent, Vernon-Smith! I shall report this to your Form-master!"

"No need to tell me that, either!" retorted the Bouncer coolly.

"Go back to the school at once!" hooted Mr. Hacker.

"You're not my Form-master, sir! You can report me to Quelch, if you like—but you can't give me orders!"

"Vernon-Smith!" gasped Mr. Hacker. "Upon my word! I shall report your insolence to Mr. Quelch as well as your transgression."

"Please yourself!"

Billy Bunter, behind the corner, grinned. Smithy was the man to give the meddling Acid Drop what he asked for!

Bunter listened for more. But there was no more. Hacker, apparently, had gone on his way, leaving Vernon-Smith to go back to the school at his leisure. A minute later, Bunter heard the gate open and shut. Smithy was gone—little dreaming how near his quarry was all the time. And the astute fat Owl gave both Smithy and Hacker plenty of time to get clear before he ventured to depart in his turn!

## THE SEVENTH CHAPTER.

### In The Dark!

"BLESS my soul!" murmured Dr. Locke.

He gazed into darkness. The spring dusk had fallen.

It was still light in the quad; but in Head's corridor it was dark; and the electric light, of course, should have been on. It was Trotter's duty to see to that; but either the House page had forgotten his duty, for once, or else someone had since turned off the light.

Turning off the light in a corridor was a lark sometimes indulged in by unthinking fags. But it was hardly believable that the most unthinking fag would venture to turn off the light in Head's corridor.

However it certainly was off. That old corridor, one of the most ancient parts of the building, with its oak-panelled walls black with age, was as dark as the inside of a hat.

There was a switch at the corner where it joined Masters' Passage; but that was at some little distance. Nearer at hand was the green baize door that led to the Head's private house. Dr. Locke knew, of course, every inch of that old corridor, which his feet had trodden for more than a quarter of a century. So, though he blinked into the darkness in surprise, with a spot of annoyance, he stepped out of his study into the darkness and went along in the dark.

To reach the green baize door that was his objective he had to pass an alcove in the old wall. In that alcove was a settee on which members of the staff sometimes sat while waiting to see the Head. There was also a bulb, which should have been lighted; but which, like the other, was out.

But as he passed that alcove in the dark it certainly did not occur to the headmaster of Greyfriars that there was danger in the offing.

He had not forgotten the prowler of Greyfriars, the mysterious night-walker whose strange activities had excited the school for weeks and who had never yet been discovered, although Ferrers Locke had sent his boy assistant, Jack Drake, to the school specially to root out. Much had been expected of Drake, trained by the famous Baker Street detective; but, so far, the schoolboy detective had not got his man.

So far from having forgotten the prowler, Dr. Locke had been thinking of him in his study; debating in his mind whether the prowler was, as Drake believed, an outsider, or whether he was some Greyfriars senior who had gone to the bad, like Randolph Crocker so many years ago.

But, though the mystery man was actually in his thoughts at the moment,

Dr. Locke never dreamed that he might be at hand.

So far the prowler had prowled only at night, after the whole school had gone to bed, prowling in the deep dark hours after midnight. It did not occur to the Head that, with the lights off, that dim old corridor was as dark as midnight could have made it, and that the prowler might prowl earlier than was his wont.

He could not have imagined any reason why the mysterious rascal should have done so.

But as he passed that alcove, black with darkness, his gown rustling as he passed, there was a sudden movement in the dark.

In the same moment a sudden grip was laid on the headmaster.

It was a powerful grip. Dr. Locke, silver-haired as he was, was no weakling; but in that powerful grasp he crumpled up helplessly.

In utter amazement he collapsed in the grasping hands. It seemed to him more like some horrid dream than reality. More amazed than alarmed, he could scarcely believe that this was happening.

Something was banged down over his head. What it was the Head did not know. It was hard, and it scraped his nose as it was banged down, and its rim rested on his shoulders. But for his confusion of mind he might have guessed that it was a wastepaper-basket.

It was not a very large basket! It fitted Dr. Locke's head fairly closely, and jammed rather tight.

"Oh!" came a splutter from inside it.

Dizzy with amazement and horror, the Head began to struggle. But the powerful grasp on him took no heed of his resistance.

His hands were dragged behind him, his slender wrists held in the grip of a single hand. There was a tearing and rending sound. Then the Head felt something whipped round his wrists and knotted. Dimly he realised that his scholastic gown had been rent to furnish bonds for his hands.

He could see nothing! Even had it been light, he could have seen nothing, with the wastepaper-basket jammed over his face.

Inside the basket he gasped wildly.

He heard a sound of hurried breathing close at hand. That was all he could hear of his assailant.

Suddenly he realised that he was alone!

That mysterious assailant, unseen, almost unheard, had gone—vanishing in darkness and silence.

Dr. Locke tottered. He collided with the wall and leaned on it, gasping for breath under his strange mask.

"Urrrgh!" came from the interior of the wastepaper-basket. "Urrrgh! Bless my soul! Wurrgh!"

He pulled himself together a little at last. He collected his scattered wits! Leaning on the wall, he tried to call for help. His voice came gasping and muffled through the thickness of the basket. It was doubtful whether he would be heard. Few came to Head's corridor unless bidden there.

Detaching himself from the wall, the headmaster tottered along the corridor.

With his hands tied behind him, he could not grope his way. He bumped into one wall, then into the other.

Then, at last, a glimmer of light came dimly through the basket. He had emerged from the dark corridor, into Masters' Passago, where there was a light.

"Help!" gasped the Head. "Oh! Help!"

Muffled, his gasping voice came from the interior of the basket.

"Help! Oh! Help!"

THE EIGHTH CHAPTER.

A Warning For Smithy!

"VERNON-SMITH!"

Mr. Quelch's voice was stern and his brow was grim.

"Yes, sir!" muttered the Bounder sullenly.

He was standing before Mr. Quelch in the Remove master's study. He had been called into that study immediately he reached the school. The Acid Drop had lost no time in reporting him to his Form-master.

"I am informed, Vernon-Smith, that you have been out of school bounds and in a spot that is specially forbidden by the headmaster to all Greyfriars boys!" said Mr. Quelch sternly.

The Bounder scowled and stood silent. Smithy was not very particular about the truth in dealing with a beak; but it was no use denying it.

"I must deal very severely with this, Vernon-Smith!" said the Remove master. "To a thoughtless boy of a better character than your own I might be lenient. But you—"

"I've done no harm!" muttered Smithy.

He knew what was in Mr. Quelch's mind. There had been rumours—more than rumours—of reckless fellows getting mixed up with that disreputable old boy, Randolph Crocker. Sporting transactions were suspected—or more than suspected.

One Remove boy—James Duck—had been given a heavy imput and detention for visiting Crocker, and this, in spite of the fact that James Duck was in reality Jack Drake, Ferrers Locke's assistant, who was at the school to track down the secret prowler.

The Bounder's reputation was far from good. Mr. Quelch had no doubt why he had gone to the hut on the spinney.

But, for once, the bat hat of the Remove was guiltless. Smithy disliked and despised that disreputable old boy as much as any other fellow, and he had no dealings of any kind with the Sportsman.

"I've done no harm!" he repeated. "I never saw Crocker, and never went there to see him. I never thought of him."

Mr. Quelch's lip curled.

"You will hardly expect me to

believe that statement, Vernon-Smith," he answered coldly. "You had better say no more."

"It's the truth, sir."

"Say no more! I have no choice but to send you to your headmaster," said Mr. Quelch. "I have caned you once to-day, Vernon-Smith, for having cigarettes in your study. Within an hour of your punishment you have been seen out of school bounds, at the residence of a bad character. I have no doubt that Dr. Locke will administer a flogging, if he does not take still more severe measures."

"I never went into the hut, sir—and never saw Crocker—"

"That will do!"

"I can tell you why I went, sir!" said the Bounder. He certainly did not want to tell his Form-master that he had been in vengeful pursuit of the fat Owl on account of that six in his study. But anything was better than being sent up to the Head. Fellows who were sent up to the Head had the danger of expulsion looming in the offing.

Mr. Quelch interrupted him sharply.

"I cannot take your word, Vernon-Smith! You are too well-known to be unscrupulous in such matters. I am perfectly well aware that you would not hesitate to deceive me."

(Continued on next page.)



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smithy bit his lip. There were certain drawbacks to his system of dealing with books. But he made another attempt.

"Bunter knows, sir, if you care to ask him."

"Bunter?" repeated Mr. Quelch. "What has Bunter to do with it, Vernon-Smith?"

"I was after him, sir."

"After him?" said Mr. Quelch blankly.

"I was going to rag him for giving me away in my study this afternoon," said the Bounder desperately. "He scuttled out of gates, and dodged me in Friardale Lane, and I thought he had dodged into the spinney, as I could not find him. I went after him. That is all."

"Upon my word!" said Mr. Quelch.

"Skinner knows—he was helping me look for Bunter! Duck knows—he saw me cut after him! That's the truth, sir!"

Mr. Quelch's brow was like thunder. He could see that this was the truth, but it made him angrier than before. Plainly it was the truth, when it was only necessary for the Remove master to refer to Bunter, Duck, or Skinner for confirmation or otherwise.

"Vernon-Smith! You dare to tell me that you intended to rag, as you call it, the Remove boy who, quite by accident, caused the discovery of your delinquency to-day. You do not, it appears, lay the blame upon your own bad conduct."

The Bounder did not answer that. What he had admitted was enough to make Quelch extremely angry; but it was not a matter for sending him to the Head. He could see that he had escaped that.

"I hardly know what to say to you!" continued Mr. Quelch. "Had I not already caned you, and only a short time ago, I should now cane you most severely, Vernon-Smith. I accept your statement, though I shall certainly inquire into its truth. But—"

"You'll find it's true, sir!" muttered Smithy.

"No doubt! For what you have confessed, Vernon-Smith, you will take an imposition of a whole book of Virgil. You will be detained for extra French on both half-holidays this week."

Smithy breathed hard. It was better than being sent up to the Head; but it was a heavy punishment. Only in exceptional cases were fellows given such an impot as a book. And detention on Wednesday and Saturday meant cutting the football. Smithy, with all his faults, was a keen footballer, and a valued man in the Remove eleven. Still, it was better than going to the Head!

"And mark this," went on Quelch, "I shall keep this matter under observation, Vernon-Smith. I shall, if necessary, question Bunter. If I find that you have laid a finger on Bunter—if I find that you have given him any trouble whatever—I shall take you to your headmaster and request him not to flog you, but to expel you from the school. Unless you desire to leave Greyfriars, Vernon-Smith, you will keep your revengeful and arrogant temper in check!"

Smithy did not speak.

"Now leave my study!" rapped Mr. Quelch.

And the Bounder, in sullen silence, left it.

As he stepped from the doorway, a strange figure tottered into the passage from the corridor corner, a little farther

up. It uttered strange sounds as it tottered.

Vernon-Smith fairly jumped.

"Oh gad!" he gasped. "What—"

He stared blankly at the strange figure with the wastepaper-basket jammed down over its head and its hands tied behind in the tail of the gown! That it was a master he could see, but he did not realise at the moment that it was the headmaster.

"Oh scissors!" gasped Smithy.

Mr. Quelch stared across the study at him in the doorway.

"Vernon-Smith! I have told you to go! What—"

Smithy turned a grinning face round to him. Then, as the mumbling, muffled voice called for help from the interior of the basket, the truth dawned on him and his grin faded suddenly away.

Had it been Hacker or Prout it would have amused Smithy, but even the reckless Bounder respected his headmaster and was really horrified as he realised that this was Dr. Locke.

"The Head!" he gasped.

And, without answering Mr. Quelch, he shot towards the strange figure to render first-aid!

Mr. Quelch, staring, crossed the study to the door. Then, at the sight of the startling form, he almost fell down.

"What—what—who—!" he stuttered.

"Help! Pray assist me! Help!" came muffled from the inverted wastepaper-basket.

"Dr. Locke!" gasped Mr. Quelch.

And he rushed after Smithy to the rescue of the Head.

## THE NINTH CHAPTER.

### Unprecedented!

"HALLO, hallo, hallo!"

"Who is it?"

"What is it?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Is it the Acid Drop?"

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

It was close on lock-up, and fellows were coming into the House when the news spread that something was on in Masters' Passage.

Prout, the master of the Fifth, was seen running—and it was seldom that the portly Prout was seen in quick motion. Monsieur Charpentier, at the corner of Masters' Passage, was gesticulating with hands and arms, and almost with his legs, in his excitement, and ejaculating "Ciel! Ciel! Ciel!" Other amazed voices were heard, exclaiming and ejaculating.

Masters' Passage was a sacred spot, where it was unheard-of for a crowd to gather. But a crowd gathered there, almost in the twinkling of an eye.

Harry Wharton & Co., and about fifty other fellows, crowded and crammed, staring at the strange scene. Wingate and Gwynne and other prefects waved the excited juniors back.

But they could all see what was on. A tottering figure stood full in view, with a wastepaper-basket jammed over its head. Vernon-Smith was grappling with the knots round the wrists behind that strange figure—Mr. Quelch was endeavouring to get the wastepaper-basket off. Hacker was there, helping him, and rather getting in the way—Mr. Capper and Mr. Wiggins were looking on, with distended eyes. From Mossoo, waving excited hands, came incessantly, "Ciel! Mon Dieu! Ciel!"

It was not easy to rescue the Head! That wastepaper-basket fitted close and tight; it scraped on the Head's majestic nose as Quelch strove to extract it,

Muffled, gurgling sounds came from within.

"Who is it?" gasped Harry Wharton. "Tain't Hacker!" exclaimed Hobson of the Shell. "There's the Acid Drop—with Quelch."

"But who—"

"The Head!" came a thrilling whisper from somebody.

"The Head!" was repeated in horrified accents; and the sound of chuckling died away at once. If the victim of this amazing outrage was the Head, no fellow had any inclination to chuckle.

"The Head!" said Harry Wharton, almost dazedly. "Who'd dare—"

"It can't be the Head!" gasped Nugent.

"It jolly well is!" breathed Bob Cherry. "But who—and how—what mad ass can have been playing pranks with the Big Beak?"

"Goodness gracious! Is something the matter?" bleated a mild voice, as James Duck came pushing through the crowd.

"Don't barge!"

"Gerrout!"

"It's the Head!"

"But who can have done this?" stammered Bob Cherry. "It's the Head all right! But who—"

"The jolly old prowler again!" said Skinner. Skinner was the first to guess. "Bet you it's the prowler!"

"The awful rotter!" breathed Harry Wharton.

"The prowler—earlier than usual!" said Skinner. "Daylight raid by the jolly old prowler, my beloved 'earers. He got Quelch, and Hacker once—now he's got the Head!"

"The prowler!" passed from one fellow to another. As soon as the prowler was mentioned, they had no doubts. It was the unknown mystery man of Greyfriars who had done this! Never before had he prowled, excepting by night. For the first time, he had prowled at an early hour. But nobody doubted that it was the prowler!

"Look!" breathed Coker of the Fifth.

The wastepaper-basket came off at last. The Head was revealed—his face crimson. Smithy, finding that he could not deal with the knots, used his pocket-knife, and the headmaster's hands came free.

Dr. Locke passed a hand over his forehead. He blinked dizzily. He tottered, and Mr. Quelch's strong arm supported him.

"My dear sir!" gasped Mr. Quelch. "My dear sir!" He supported the Head with one hand—with the other he gestured to Vernon-Smith to go, and the Bounder joined the buzzing crowd down the passage.

"Oh!" gasped the Head. "Ah!"

"Who has done this?" boomed Prout. Prout was purple with indignation. "Who can have—who would dare—"

"Who—" gasped Mr. Hacker.

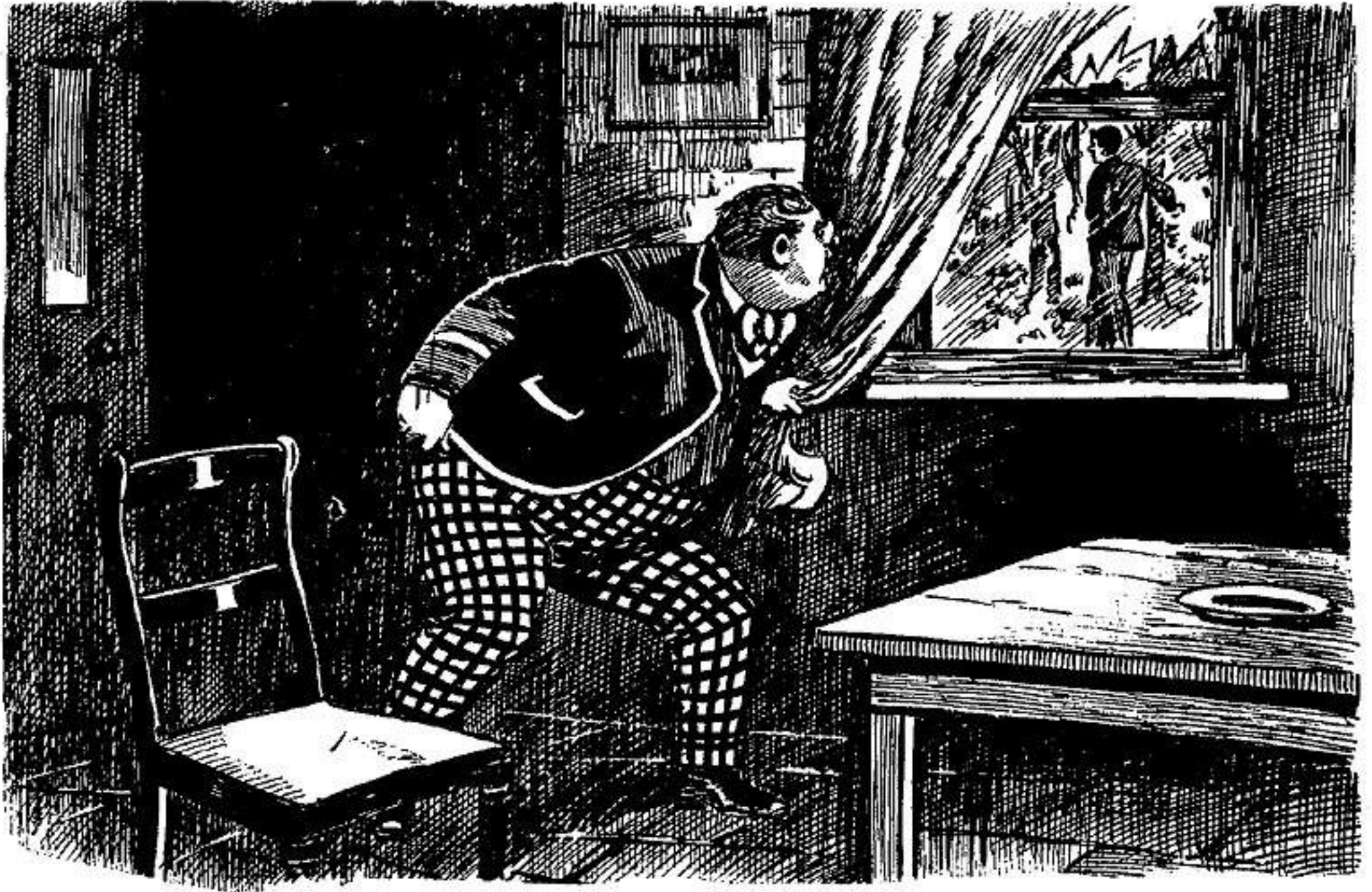
"Unprecedented!" boomed Prout. "Unparalleled."

"Mon Dieu! Mais cela—cela— Mon Dieu!"

"I was seized." The Head was calming himself. "The lights had been turned off, and I was seized in the dark—undoubtedly by the unknown person who is called the prowler. Mr. Quelch, kindly assist me to my house."

Leaning rather heavily on Mr. Quelch's arm the Head moved slowly away.

Lights had been switched on in the corridor; already Wingate and several other prefects were hunting for some sign of the assailant, but without much



Billy Bunter drew aside a corner of the blind and peered cautiously out. He had a back view of Vernon-Smith disappearing among the trees. "Beast!" breathed the fat Removeite. He did not need telling that the Bounder was searching for him.

hope of finding any. Dr. Locke disappeared from the stare of innumerable eyes.

Mr. Quelch opened the green baize door in the corridor and passed through with the Head, and it closed behind them. Dr. Locke, in a very agitated state, was led away to his house by the sympathetic Remove master.

The Greyfriars crowd were left buzzing.

"Unheard of!" boomed Prout! "Unprecedented!" Prout waved plump hands at the buzzing crowd. "What are all these boys doing here? This is no place for a crowd! Go away! Disperse at once!"

The bell was ringing for call-over. The crowd dispersed in a state of excitement that could not have been expressed in words—though they were trying to express it in innumerable words.

It was, as Prout declared, unprecedented. The secret prowler had prowled and pilfered, and in the course of his prowlings and pilferings he had handled a prefect and a master. But that he would ever venture to lay disrespectful hands on the Head, no one had ever dreamed. They could hardly believe it now that it had happened.

In Hall, there was a ceaseless buzz of voices. Quelch did not appear there, apparently remaining with the agitated headmaster. Mr. Hacker took the roll. The prefects in vain called for silence; Hacker's voice could hardly be heard through the buzz that continually went on.

It was at the last moment, before the doors were shut, that a fat figure squeezed in and joined the ranks of the Remove just in time. Billy Bunter blinked uneasily at the Bounder as he joined up.

He had left it till the last minute to dodge that beast, but he had serious ap-

prehensions of what might happen to him after roll.

To his surprise, and his relief, the Bounder took no notice of him. He did not even give him a scowl.

The hopeful fat Owl hoped that Smithy had got over his tantrums by this time. With a book on hand, and two detentions, it was unlikely that Smithy would get over his tantrums in a hurry! But he was mindful of Mr. Quelch's grim warning, and the fat Owl was safe from the punches and thumps Smithy had had in store for him.

"I say, you fellows, is anything on?" whispered Bunter, as he realised that he was in the midst of an atmosphere of thrilling excitement.

Bunter, for once, had missed the news!

While the whole school thrilled with it, from the head of the Sixth down to the smallest and inkiest fag in the Second, Billy Bunter was blissfully unaware that anything out of the usual had occurred!

It was probably the first time on record that William George Bunter was the last man to hear the news!

"What's up?" breathed Bunter.

"Haven't you heard, fathead?"

"No! What—"

"The Head's been ragged—"

"Wha-a-t?"

"Bonneted with a wastepaper-

basket—"

"Oh crikey!"

"By the prowler—"

"Oh!"

Billy Bunter glared at the Bounder. He had missed this—seen nothing of it! It was the most thrilling sensation that had ever thrilled Greyfriars School, and through that beast Smithy, Bunter had missed it all! Billy Bunter would have given a whole bag of jam tarts just then to boot the Bounder from one end of Hall to the other!

## THE TENTH CHAPTER.

### Ticked Off!

JAMES DUCK, the following morning, tapped on Mr. Quelch's study door, opened the same, and looked in—over his steel-rimmed glasses.

Mr. Quelch looked back at him grimly.

He did not bid the new junior enter. Apparently he did not want him to enter.

Regardless of what his Form-master might or might not want, James Duck stepped into the study and shut the door after him.

"Well?" rapped Mr. Quelch. "Why have you come here, Drake? I have not sent for you."

The schoolboy detective compressed his lips. Ferrers Locke's assistant was at Greyfriars School to deal with the mysterious case of the secret prowler. Quelch seemed rather to have forgotten that circumstance.

"I expected to be sent for before this, sir!" he answered quietly.

"I fail to see why."

Drake looked at him.

Outside, in the bright spring sunshine, Harry Wharton & Co. were punting a footer till the bell for class. The window was open, and they glimpsed James Duck in the study, in passing.

"That ass is for it again!" Bob Cherry remarked. "I wonder what the silly duffer's done this time?"

And the Famous Five all felt a spot of sympathy for the duffer of the Remove, nothing doubting that it was for some fatheaded blunder or other that that ass Duck was on the carpet!

James Duck, otherwise Jack Drake, did not glance at the juniors as they passed momentarily in sight. His eyes—which looked keen enough when the

(Continued on page 16.)

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## HARRY WHARTON'S SECRET!



(Continued from page 13.)

steel-rimmed glasses no longer hid them—were fixed on Quelch's cold, grim face. There was a brief silence in the study.

"Did you say you fail to see why, sir?" he asked at last.

"I did!" said Mr. Quelch.

"You have hardly forgotten, sir, that I am here as a detective—that it was by your advice that the Head asked Mr. Locke to send me here—and that Mr. Locke consented to do so, though he required my assistance in the search he is now making for the escaped convict, Rupert Crook." Drake's voice was quiet, but it was very distinct.

"I have forgotten nothing!" said Mr. Quelch. "But if it is the fact that you would be of assistance to Mr. Locke in his search for the man Crook, I would suggest that there is no reason why he should lack that assistance any longer."

Drake drew a deep breath.

"That means that you have lost faith in me, sir?"

"Precisely!" said Mr. Quelch.

"May I ask why?"

"Certainly." Quelch's voice was grim, with a touch of sarcasm. "You have now been here some weeks, Drake, and you have discovered nothing—but a series of mare's nests! You actually came in contact with the prowler one night—but he escaped. You gave him a blow of which you fancied that he would bear the mark—and as no such mark was traced on any face in the school the next day, you deduced, as I think you would call it, that the prowler came from outside the school—"

"There is no doubt about that, sir!"

"There is more than doubt about it now, Drake. Your tracing the currency notes taken from my study outside the school certainly gave colour to it. But now—"

"Now, sir, that the headmaster has been attacked by the rascal I expected to be called into consultation at once. Instead of that, I have heard nothing from you, and so I have come here—"

"And I repeat that I fail to see why," said Mr. Quelch. "I did not intend to send for you, as it is clear now that it is of no use, Drake. Will you maintain that the prowler is some man outside the school, after what happened in the Head's corridor last evening?"

"Yes, sir!"

"You maintain," said Mr. Quelch, raising his voice a little, "that in the daylight—for at the time it was still daylight out of doors, though dark within—in the daylight a stranger entered the school unseen, penetrated to the House, lurked and waited there, and afterwards escaped unseen—though even then it was not yet quite dark and many boys were out of the House?"

Drake did not speak.

"If you maintain that, Drake, you can only do so, I think, from obstinacy," said Mr. Quelch. "It is now unmistakably clear that the

prowler, so called, is an occupant of this building, as was supposed from the first."

"Very far from it, sir," said Drake quietly.

Mr. Quelch made an irritated gesture. "The Head and I," he said, "were led by your positive statement to believe that you had made a discovery—a valuable discovery, for it was an immense relief to believe that the dastard was not a Greyfriars boy. You were in error—what has now occurred proves clearly that you were in error."

"I do not think so, sir."

"Do you doubt that the attack on the headmaster was the work of the person called the prowler?" exclaimed Mr. Quelch.

"No, sir; I do not doubt that."

"You do not suggest that it was a schoolboy prank, as in the case of Mr. Hacker a few days ago?" said Mr. Quelch sarcastically.

"Impossible, sir."

"Quite! I am glad you can see that, at least! Now, Drake, it is clear to me you have been, all this time, on a false scent—"

Drake interrupted the Remove master without ceremony. As a schoolboy in the Remove he would have hesitated to do so, as Ferrers Locke's assistant, at Greyfriars on professional business, he did not hesitate.

"You are mistaken, sir."

"What?" exclaimed Mr. Quelch.

"Mistaken, sir!" said Drake calmly. Quelch's eyes glinted. They strayed in the direction of the cane on his table. He remembered in time that he was speaking to a detective, not to a schoolboy! But that did not make him less annoyed.

"You have been on a false scent, Drake. It is sheer obstinacy not to admit it. The mere fact that the prowler has, for once, appeared earlier than usual, instead of prowling late at night, is proof of it. Obviously his intention, on this occasion, was to make that rascally and ruffianly attack upon the headmaster. Dr. Locke goes to his own house at night, and at night, therefore, he is safe from the prowler, if he belongs to this school. But if he were an outsider, as you fancy, he could enter the Head's private house as easily as he can enter the School House."

Drake did not answer that.

Indeed, to Quelch it seemed unanswerable.

"The prowler took risks—unusual risks—in appearing at an early hour, while it was yet light out of doors and in some parts of the House," he said. "Obviously it was because he planned to attack the Head from some feeling of malice, and the Head is not here at night."

"I have no doubt of that, sir. But if—"

"The prowler," said Mr. Quelch with grim emphasis, "is a Greyfriars senior, as yet unknown! You have been utterly in error, Drake. Of that I am now convinced. Believing that your efforts here are useless, I see no reason for discussing the matter with you—or, indeed, for you remaining here any greater length of time."

Drake set his lips, very hard.

"This latest outrage," continued Mr. Quelch, "is the climax. This cannot continue, Drake. Either the police must be asked to assist, or a private detective—older and more experienced—must be called in. That matter is now under consideration."

"Will you give me the details, sir, of what occurred?" asked Drake through his set lips.

"I see no purpose in that, Drake. However, I will tell you. The prowler—

some Greyfriars senior, as I have said—turned off the lights in the corridor on which the Head's study opens, and waited in the dark. No one knows who he was, but, plainly, only someone belonging to Greyfriars could have approached the spot without being specially noticed."

Drake stood silent.

"The wretch appears to have waited in the alcove, near the door that leads to the Head's private house," went on Mr. Quelch. "Dr. Locke was suddenly seized as he passed—and that is all that is known."

"It is not all that may be surmised, sir, at all events! May I be given leave from class—"

"No! I see no purpose in it."

"I am here to investigate, sir—"

"I have said that I regard your investigations as futile, Drake, leading only to misapprehensions, errors, and wild surmises. So long as you are here, in the Remove, you will attend Forms like other Remove boys. In your leisure hours," added Mr. Quelch, "you may make all the investigations you desire."

"This is hardly treating me quite fairly, sir," said Ferrers Locke's assistant, colouring under Quelch's sarcasm.

"I do not agree! You have had every opportunity, and nothing has come of it. If you choose to remain, I shall not send you away, but I cannot affect to believe that your efforts here are of any use. Please leave my study."

Jack Drake opened his lips; but he shut them again. He left the Remove master's study without another word, and heard Mr. Quelch grunt expressively as he closed the door.

## THE ELEVENTH CHAPTER.

### Bunter The Bold!

"CHEEKY cad!" said Billy Bunter.

And—as the poet has put it—all the world wondered!

After class, in the Rag, there were a good many Remove fellows gathered; many of them discussing the startling event of the previous day; others more interested in matters that more nearly concerned themselves.

Among the latter were Harry Wharton & Co., who were chiefly interested in the fact that they were playing the Shell at football on Wednesday afternoon, and that Herbert Vernon-Smith had to be left out of the team.

The Bounder was savage in mood, bitterly incensed, and resentful, and Harry Wharton was intensely irritated and annoyed.

Smithy was a man who knew his value, and was rather given to putting on a spot of swank in consequence. That was quite enough for a football skipper to tolerate. Really, it was intolerable for the fellow to have to cut a game in which he was wanted to play, for no reason but the reckless indulgence of an arrogant temper.

"You fathead!" the captain of the Remove was saying, when Billy Bunter rolled into the Rag. "You crass ass! You had to get detained!"

"Think I asked for detention?" snarled the Bounder.

"Yes, I do!" snapped Wharton. "You wouldn't get it if you didn't ask for it! Are you going to ask me to believe that Quelch has given you detentions for nothing?"

"It was that fat fool Bunter's fault!" And it was then that Billy Bunter weighed in. To the general amazement, Bunter rolled up to the angry

and irritated Bounder, fixed his big spectacles on him with a scornful blink, and called him a cheeky cad!

Vernon-Smith made a movement of rage—but he checked himself. He had to keep his temper with Bunter now, whatever might have been the case the day before. He did not want to be walked off to the Head to be sacked!

"Worm!" continued Bunter, blinking defiance. "Rat!"

"You fat fool——" breathed Smithy.

"Don't be cheeky, Smithy!"

"I—I—I——" gasped the Bounder.

"Hold your cheeky tongue!" Bunter admonished.

To the amazement of all the Rag, the Bounder held it! His face was almost convulsed with fury. But he stood silent.

The Famous Five looked at him and at Bunter. Other Remove fellows looked from one to the other, and from the other to the one. Temple, Dabney & Co., of the Fourth, who were in the Rag, gave attention. Billy Bunter, so to speak, had the house!

It was really astonishing—indeed, stupefying!

All that day Bunter had been carefully and sedulously avoiding the Bounder. Carefully as he had kept out of his way, he had been expecting Smithy to hunt for him, and had been greatly relieved that Smithy hadn't. Now, however, all his dread seemed to have departed.

The Bounder was at the moment in a distinctly savage temper. Bunter might have been expected to give him a wider berth than ever.

Instead of which, the fat and fatuous Owl marched up to him as bold as brass and called him names!

Really, it seemed time for the skies to fall! And the most amazing thing was that the Bounder kept his hands off the fat junior who thus hurled defiance before a crowd of fellows. Only too clearly, Smithy was in a mood to punch somebody. Yet he did not punch Bunter!

"Hallo, hallo, hallo!" ejaculated Bob Cherry. "Gone batchy, Bunter?"

"Oh, really, Cherry——"

"The batchfulness must be terrific!" said Hurree Janset Ram Singh. "You are asking to be slain slaughterfully, my esteemed idiotic Bunter!"

"Oh, really, Inky! Think I'm afraid of Smithy!" sneered Bunter disdainfully. "You may be! I'd pull his ear as soon as look at him!"

"Oh crikey!" ejaculated Skinner, in wonder. "Mad as a hatter!"

"Cheeky cad!" repeated Bunter. "That's what you are, Smithy, a cheeky cad! Chasing a fellow like a mad dog because Quelch gave you six for having your filthy smokes in the study! Well, you try it on again, that's all! Just try it on!"

Every fellow in the Rag expected to see Herbert Vernon-Smith hurl himself at the fat Owl like a thunderbolt. But Smithy did not stir. His face was crimson with fury, but he did not stir.

"Funky—what?" sneered Bunter.

And still the Bounder did not stir.

"Well, this beats Banagher!" said Bob Cherry. "Reddy, old man, have you been teaching Smithy to keep his temper?"

Tom Redwing only stared. The previous day he had counselled his hot-headed chum to leave Bunter alone, and had received only an angry snarl for answer. Teaching Smithy to keep his temper was a task far beyond Reddy's powers. Redwing understood this scene no more than any other fellow in the Rag.

Bunter grinned victoriously.

Whatever was the mysterious cause of the fat Owl's sudden and strange recklessness, evidently his fear of the Bounder was gone. Bunter was full of beans!

"I say, you fellows," went on the fat Owl, "you saw that cheeky cad get after me yesterday—because Quelch gave him six for his putrid smoking! Chasing a fellow all over the shop! I had to dodge into Crocker's place to keep clear of him—Hacker nearly spotted me there when he spotted Smithy! Hunting a fellow all over the shop—that's the sort of cheeky cad he is! I'm jolly glad the Acid Drop spotted him—he, he, he!"

"So that's why you've got detentions, Vernon-Smith?" exclaimed the captain of the Remove angrily. "Asking for it, as usual!"

"Go and eat coke!" snarled Smithy.

"That's why," grinned Bunter, "and serve him jolly well right! Do you hear that, Smithy, you cad? Serve you jolly well right!"

The Bounder's eyes burned.

"Next time," pursued the cheery Owl, "I won't keep clear of you, Smithy! Next time I'll smack your cheeky head! Got that?"

"You fat, footling idiot——"

"Shut up!" interrupted Bunter. "I don't want any cheek from you, Herbert Vernon-Smith! I've no use for your tantrums, I can tell you!"

"We're dreaming this!" said Bob Cherry.

"You can give Redwing your cheeky jaw!" sneered Bunter. "He will stand it—I won't! I'd smack your head as soon as look at you! See?"

"Why don't you smash him up, Smithy?" asked the wondering Skinner.

"Find out!" grunted the Bounder.

"He, he, he! Let him lay a finger on me!" chuckled Bunter. "He jolly well don't dare! He, he, he!"

Really, it looked as if the Bounder did not dare! Anyhow, he did not lay a finger on the grinning Owl. Obviously, he was simply yearning to boot Bunter all round the Rag. But he did not.

Slowly, he turned away and, with a crimson face, walked out of the Rag. Every eye followed him, till he was gone. Then every eye turned, with one accord, on Bunter. The juniors gazed at him in wonder.

Bunter grinned complacently.

"Just as well for him he's cleared off!" he remarked. "I had a jolly good mind to smack his head!"

"What on earth," asked Bob Cherry, "has come over that fat frog? What's come over Smithy?"

"He, he, he!"

"Goodness knows!" said Harry Wharton, mystified. "Where have you picked up all this cheek all of a sudden, Bunter?"

"Oh, really, Wharton! Think I'm afraid of a cad like Smithy?" asked Bunter contemptuously.

"Yes, rather!"

"Yah! I'll jolly well show him whether I'm afraid of him or not!" declared Bunter. "There's fellows in this Form afraid of Smithy's rotten temper. I'm not one of them, I can tell you! Lot I care for his temper!"

"You seemed to care just a spot yesterday!" grinned Bob Cherry. "We had to hold Smithy while you bolted!"

"And the boldfulness was terrific!"

"Well, I'll jolly well show him!" said Bunter. "I'll show the cad whether I'm afraid of him or not! I never was afraid of anybody, if you come to that!"

"Not even Tubb of the Third, when he chased you up to the Remove?" asked Frank Nugent.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Well, I ain't afraid of a swanking cad like Smithy! I'll show him! I've got pluck!" said Bunter. "All a fellow needs to do is to stand up to a shirty brute like Smithy and tell him off! It simply needs a little pluck! Well, I've got a little pluck!"

"You have!" agreed Bob. "Very little, in fact!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Yah! You've heard me tell Smithy where he gets off!" said Bunter. "He's got off—he, he, he! Let him get after me again, that's all! I'll show him! Mind, Quelch hasn't said anything!" added Bunter cautiously.

"Quelch!"

"Not a word!" said Bunter. "Quelch hasn't interfered in this matter at all. He never spoke to me about it after class!"

"Oh!" yelled Bob Cherry. "That accounts for the milk in the coconut! What did Quelch say, Bunt?"

"Nothing! Not a word! Never mentioned it! He didn't say a word about it when he called me back after class. In fact, he never called me back after class. So far as I know, Quelch knows nothing about it. He never said that he had warned Smithy to leave me alone."

"Oh!"

"Nothing like it!" said Bunter. "If you fellows think he asked me whether Smithy had been after me, you're quite mistaken. He never said that he was going to see that Vernon-Smith didn't pay me out!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Quelch knows nothing about it. I'm not the fellow to hide behind a beak, I hope!" said Bunter, with dignity. "The fact is, that Smithy's afraid of me!"

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

"You can cackle!" said Bunter. "You'll see! Smithy will jolly well be taken to the Head if he lays a finger on me, I know that! I mean, I should punch him in the eye if he had the cheek to lay a finger on me! Right in the eye! I'd give him a pair of black eyes, like Loder got from the prowler! That's what he's afraid of! Did you fellows notice him trembling?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Blessed if I see anything to cackle at! You wait a bit! If he comes back into the Rag I'll smack his head as soon as he comes in!" declared Bunter valiantly.

At which the juniors yelled.

Fortunately, Smithy did not come back into the Rag! But it was probably as fortunate for Bunter as for Smithy!

## THE TWELFTH CHAPTER.

### Doubting Thomases!

"QUEER, ain't it?"

"Frightfully queer!"

"The queerfulness is terrific!"

"Queerer still, if it was true!"

James Duck, as he came to Study No. 1, heard those remarks from within.

The new junior looked his usual shy and sheepish self, but his face was not quite so cheery as usual. Mr. Quelch's words, that morning, lingered in the schoolboy detective's mind not pleasantly.

Harry Wharton & Co. were already at tea in the study, and the table was graced and adorned by the fat figure of William George Bunter. Five faces

wore broad smiles—Bunter's was jummy and serious.

"I say, you fellows, it's true!" said Bunter, with his mouth full. "It's fearfully queer, but it's quite true!"

"Sounds true!" said Bob. "Hallo, hallo, hallo, Ducky! You're late! Roll Bunter over, and take his chair!"

"Oh, really, Cherry—"

"This box will do for me, thanks!" said Duck, in his mild way, and he drew a box to the table, and sat down to tea.

"You've missed Bunter's latest!" said Bob, with a chuckle. "But the fat old bean will sing it over again, if you want to laugh!"

"I tell you it's true!" hooted Bunter. "Now, how can it be?" asked Bob Cherry in an argumentative tone. "It came from you, old fat man. So how can it be true?"

"Beast!" Bunter blinked round the table. "Any more jam?"

"No, you cormorant; you've had the lot!"

"Well, you fellows know I like jam! I think you might get in a spot of jam when you ask a fellow to tea—"

"Nobody asked you, sir, she said!" sang Bob.

"Well, I can fill up on cake, I suppose—"

"Buck up, Ducky, if you want any cake! It won't last long!"

"I say, you fellows—" Billy Bunter filled his capacious mouth to capacity and spoke in rather muffled tones through a barrage of cake. "I say, it's true. I can't make it out—grooogh!—but it's—grooogh!—true. That man Crocker just vanished like a—Groooooogh!"

"Like a what?"

"Oogh! Like a spectre! How he got out of that room I don't know. But he did! You see, he wasn't there, so he must have!"

James Duck turned his steel-rimmed glasses on Bunter.

Jack Drake was deeply interested in anything that concerned Crocker, the man he suspected of being the secret prowler of Greyfriars.

"Crocker?" he asked. "That man at the spinney?"

"You know all about him, Ducky," grinned Bob. "Quelch gave you a detention for going to see him, and we liked you back when you went there last Saturday. Silly asses mustn't keep bad company."

"But what about Crocker?" asked Duck.

"He seems to have performed a wonderful vanishing trick, if Bunter's got it right," said Harry Wharton, laughing. "Of course he hasn't!"

"I tell you he did!" hooted Bunter. "If you go and look at the hut you'll see that the back window's broken—where I got in, to keep clear of that beast Smithy. Think I'm stuffing you?"

"No; I think you're trying to."

"Have you ever known me tell a lie?" demanded Bunter indignantly.

"Oh crikey!"

"Fan me!"

"Help!"

"Oh, really, you fellows, it's a bit thick to doubt a pal's word like this! I know it's queer, but it did happen!"

"I don't think!"

"I tell you," hooted Bunter, "I saw him go into the hut; so I thought he was there, of course. As he didn't seem to be in the front room I went round to the back. He wasn't there, either. And I tell you the back door was bolted on the inside, and the middle door was locked, with the key on my side. So how did he get out?"

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"That's an easy one!" grinned Bob. "He didn't! You were in a blue funk, old fat man, and fancied it all."

"I didn't!" howled Bunter. "I looked all over the shop. The middle door was locked, and there was the key staring me in the face. The back door was bolted, and there was the bolt. The window was fastened on the inside when I busted it. He must have been in the room to fasten both doors and the window. But how did he get out after fastening the lot?"

"Echo answers that the howfulness is terrific!" chuckled Hurree Jamsset Ram Singh.

"Perhaps he got up the chimney!" suggested Bob. "Sort of thing he might do—perhaps!"

"He couldn't!" answered Bunter. "It's too small for a man to get into. Besides, why should he? I can tell you it beat me hollow."

Bunter gobbled cake, and the Famous Five laughed. They did not, of course, believe a word of it.

Even when Bunter related what was possible he did not always find believers. Now he was relating what was impossible. So it was no wonder that five doubting Thomases chuckled at his statements.

For once, as it happened, strange as his story was, Bunter was telling the truth. But no Remove fellows could be expected to guess that one.

"That sounds very extraordinary, Bunter!" bleated James Duck.

"A bit too extraordinary!" chuckled Bob. "That man Crocker may be able to disappear into space like a Boojum, but I'd rather see him do it before I quite believed it."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Of course, he couldn't have disappeared into space," admitted Bunter. "But where was he? He was there, you know, but he wasn't there. Ain't that queer?"

"Oh, fearfully!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Never heard of anything queerer," said Johnny Bull. "When a fellow's there he's generally there, or thereabouts. What are you telling us this rot for, Bunter?"

"Oh, really, Bull—"

"Come on," said Bob, rising from the table; "still time for a spot with the footer. Coming, Ducky?"

"I haven't finished tea yet."

Harry Wharton & Co. went out of the study, leaving James Duck to finish his tea, with Billy Bunter for company. They did not guess that it was rather Bunter's company than the unfinished tea that kept James Duck there. For once in a way, there was a fellow keen and eager to hear what the fat Owl had to relate.

"Beasts!" remarked Bunter, as the Famous Five went. "Making out a fellow's spoofing! I say, Duck, it really happened, you know. Toddy laughed, just like those beasts, when I told him yesterday. But it did really happen."

"It seems very curious indeed, Bunter," said Duck, blinking at him. "I should like to hear all about it. It is really very interesting."

Bunter needed less encouragement than that to wag his podgy chin. Between gobbles at the cake he related at length his strange adventure of the previous afternoon.

James Duck listened with a really flattering interest. Every now and then he bleated a question, evidently quite interested in the strange tale.

"And that's how I came to miss seeing the Big Beak with the wastepaper-basket on his nut," said Bunter. "All through that cad Smithy! You see, that

prowler got the Head while I was coming back afterwards. I had to wait for that beast to get clear. But, I say, ain't it queer about Crocker?"

"Indeed it is," murmured Duck. "Very queer indeed, Bunter!"

"And nobody believes it," said Bunter. "They all think I made it up. Me, you know—as if I'm the fellow to make anything up!"

The last crumb of cake being gone, and Bunter having finished the few lumps of sugar that remained in the sugar-basin, the fat Owl rose to depart.

James Duck looked deeply thoughtful when he had rolled out of Study No. 1. His eyes gleamed over his steel-rimmed glasses.

Of all the fellows who had heard Bunter's remarkable story, James Duck was the only fellow that believed it. And he believed it without a doubt, because it let in a new and unexpected light on what had puzzled and baffled him.

That Randolph Crocker was the prowler of Greyfriars he knew; but how Crocker penetrated into a locked and bolted house at night without leaving a trace he did not know. But a light was glimmering into his mind now—if Randolph Crocker really had disappeared from a room of which all the exits were fastened inside.

Obviously, if it had happened, there was some secret way out of that room, though that fact had not dawned on the fat and obtuse intellect of Billy Bunter. And where did that secret way lead?

To Greyfriars School?

## THE THIRTEENTH CHAPTER.

### Who Goes Down?

"WHO'S going?"

"Nobody!"

Herbert Vernon-Smith asked the question after lights-out in the Remove dormitory.

Harry Wharton answered it curtly. Wingate of the Sixth had seen lights-out for the Remove and left the juniors to repose. But the Removes, so far, were not reposing. Even Billy Bunter's snore had not yet begun to rumble.

"Nobody like the idea of a dormitory spread?" inquired the Bounder from his bed.

"Yes, rather!" came promptly from Bunter's.

"Rot!" said Harry Wharton. "Nobody's going to leave the dormitory after lights-out! Who wants to be suspected of being the prowler?"

"Oh, that's all right!" said Smithy. "Everybody knows that the prowler ain't in the Remove; he's a senior."

"Well, I suppose he must be a senior from the way he's handled prefects and masters. All the same, any fellow prowling out of his dorm would get asked a lot of questions."

"That's why I'm not goin'!" yawned the Bounder. "Loder of the Sixth still has it fixed in his silly head that I'm the man. I'm not takin' any risks till that jolly old prowler has been snaffled."

"Nor any other fellow!" said Johnny Bull. "I'd like a dorm spread as much as anybody, but it's not good enough."

"I say, you fellows—" came a fat squeak from the darkness.

"Hallo, hallo, hallo! Bunter going to volunteer?" asked Bob.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Nummo! But, I say, what about you going, Bob?"

"Nothing about me going, old fat man! Less than nothing, if possible."

"What about you, Nugent?"





"The Head!" gasped Vernon-Smith, hurrying towards the strange figure to render first-aid. Mr. Quelch stood spellbound. "What—what—who——" he stuttered. "Help! Pray assist me! Help!" came Dr. Locke's muffled voice from the inverted wastepaper-basket.

"Fathead!"

"I say, Bull, old chap, you've got lots of pluck!" said Bunter. "Yorkshire chaps always have plenty of pluck. You go."

"I'll watch it!" grunted Johnny Bull.

"Toddy, old fellow—will you go?"

"I'll sit up and wait while you go, old fat bean."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I say, Squiff—you ain't asleep. Field, you beast—I say, being an Australian chap, you've got tons of nerve. You've got nerve enough to go down to Smithy's study, Squiff."

"Lots!" agreed Sampson Quincy Ifley Field, with a chuckle. "But I'm sort of staying in bed, all the same."

"I say, Browney——"

"Shut up, ass, and go to sleep!" said Tom Brown.

"Mauly, old man——"

"Give us a rest!" sighed Lord Mauleverer. "You talk too much in the daytime, Bunter! Don't talk o' nights as well."

"Yah! I say, Hazel——"

"Ass!"

"Wibley——"

"Fathead!"

"Well, of all the rotten fanks!" said Billy Bunter in disgust. "Here's Smithy offering to stand us all a splendid spread, and nobody has nerve enough to slip down and get the tuck from his study. I'd go myself, only—it's so jolly cold——"

"Cold feet?" asked Skinner.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Beast! I've a jolly good mind to go!" said Bunter. "If we wait a bit, there won't be any beaks or pro's about. I say, Smithy, what have you got in your study? Is there a cake?"

"Yes. A jolly big one!" answered the Bounder.

"Any jam tarts?"

"Three dozen."

"Oh crikey! Any cream puffs?"

"Lots!"

"I say, you fellows, I think one of you might slip down to Smithy's study and snoop that tuck!" exclaimed Bunter. "I think it's up to you, Wharton, as captain of the Form, and head boy, and all that."

"I don't think Quelch expects his head boy to go down at night smuggling tuck!" answered Harry, laughing.

"Blow Quelch! I say, they'd never suspect you of being the prowler, you know, even if they copped you!" urged Bunter. "Besides, you wouldn't be copped. And think of it—cake, and jam tarts and cream puffs! Just think of it!"

Bunter's mouth, evidently, was watering for that spread! It sounded very attractive to many other fellows; but no fellow had the least idea of going down to smuggle it up to the dormitory. Even the Bounder himself, reckless as he was, did not seem to care to break dormitory bounds; and no other fellow was likely to take the risk of being caught prowling at night—and possibly suspected of being the prowler.

"Shut up, ass, and go to sleep!" advised Peter Todd. "What the dickens did you want to tell us about it for, Smithy? You jolly well know that nobody would go down for it."

"Go yourself, Smithy!" suggested Skinner.

"Oh rats!" said the Bounder. "Wash it out, and forget all about it. It's too jolly risky for me, and if nobody else cares for the risk, wash it out."

"I say, you fellows, I really think——"

"Shut up, Bunter!"

"Look here, I'll jolly well go!"

exclaimed Bunter, sitting up in bed. "Even if I was copped, they wouldn't think I was the prowler——"

"Ha, ha, ha!" came a ripple along the beds.

Bunter, really, was in no danger in that direction. The most suspicious person at Greyfriars was not likely to suspect the fat and fatuous Owl, in any circumstances whatever, of being the hefty prowler who had handled Leder of the Sixth, and the master of the Remove, and bonneted the Head!

Really, so far as that went, it was safest for Bunter to go. He was absolutely above the possibility of suspicion of being the mystery man who had performed such strenuous exploits.

"Blessed if I see anything to cackle at!" yapped Bunter. "I've got pluck, if you fellows haven't! I'll jolly well go!"

"You jolly well won't!" said the captain of the Remove.

"Oh, really, Wharton——"

"Nobody's going out of this dormitory!" said Harry. "You roll out of that bed, fathead, and I'll roll you back and give you a spot of bolster!"

"Beast!" howled Bunter.

"Go to sleep, old fat ass, and dream about it!" said Bob Cherry.

"Yah!"

Billy Bunter did not go to sleep. With a vision of almost unlimited tuck dancing before his eyes, even sleep did not attract him. Eating came before sleeping, in Bunter's list of the joys of life.

"I say, Smithy!" he whispered.

"Well?" grunted the Bounder.

"I say, it won't be safe to go down before ten—might be pro's about. If I drop off, call me at ten, and I'll go."

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"If Smithy calls you at ten, Bunter, I'll turn out with a bolster for both of you!" called out Harry Wharton.

"Beast!" roared Bunter.

Vernon-Smith made no answer. The Remove fellows settled down to sleep—with the unaccustomed exception of Billy Bunter. Bunter remained awake for at least ten minutes, his fat thoughts dwelling on that delightful stack of tuck in the Bounder's study. Then Bunter nodded off, and his snore at length awakened the echoes as was its wont.

Once asleep, Bunter was not likely to wake!

Neither would he have done so, but for a jerk at his fat head at a much later hour. He came out of slumber with a jump.

"Ooogh!" he gasped. "Who—what?"

"Quiet, you ass!"

"Is that you, Smithy, you beast?"

"You asked me to wake you at ten."

"Oh!" Bunter sat up. "Is it ten?"

"Past!" said Vernon-Smith; which was certainly true, for it was nearly twelve.

"I—I say, it's k-k-kik-cold!" stammered Bunter. "I say, what about you going, Smithy?"

"Rats!"

The Bounder went back to his bed.

Billy Bunter sat and blinked in the darkness. He did not want to leave his warm bed—but having awakened, he was, of course, hungry. He thought of the tuck in Smithy's study cupboard with longing and yearning.

After all, it was safe enough. Nobody went near the Remove studies at night; and even in the unlikely event of being copped, Bunter could never have been suspected of being the prowler, as other fellows might have been.

He hesitated—but the lure of the tuck was too strong. There was a special advantage in being the fellow who went down for the tuck—it was a case of first come first served. When Bunter carried that supply of tuck up to the dormitory he was certain to carry as much inside as outside!

He rolled out of bed at last.

The Bounder grinned, a sour grin, as he heard the fat Owl dressing in the dark. He chuckled softly as he heard the dormitory door open and shut.

Bunter had gone down—and it was Smithy's idea that by the time he reached Study No. 4 in the Remove, he would realise that there were, so to speak, more ways of killing a cat than choking it with cream!

Smithy, with a book to write out, barred from football for the week, and checked in the Rag before all the fellows, could not give Bunter a single punching or booting—with Quelch's warning in his mind. For which reason the vengeful Bounder had baited a trap for the fat Owl into which Billy Bunter was now unsuspectingly barging!

## THE FOURTEENTH CHAPTER.

### Booby-Trap For Bunter!

**B**ILLY BUNTER blinked and groped.

The deep darkness and the deep silence rather puzzled and flustered the fat Owl.

Certainly he did not want to be spotted, so the darker and more silent the House was, the safer it was for him. But darkness and silence were not, in themselves, grateful or comforting. Also, Bunter had not expected it—under the impression that it was not much past ten!

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Unexpectedly, the school was as dark and as silent as at midnight—which fact, though unsuspected by Bunter, was accounted for by the circumstance that it actually was midnight!

Not a gleam of light came from anywhere, save a glimmer of stars from high windows. But it did not occur to Bunter's fat brain that it was much later than he had supposed.

Had he guessed that it was midnight, no lure of tuck would have drawn him from the dormitory. At that late hour there was the possibility of the mysterious prowler being on the prowl; and not for a mountain of cake, or a lorry-load of jam tarts, would Bunter have risked an encounter with the prowler.

Puzzled and flustered, but lured on by the enticing thought of the tuck in Smithy's study, Bunter blinked and groped on. He groped over the dormitory landing to the stairs that led down to the study passages, and groped down the banisters of the staircase.

The window over the Remove landing gave him a glimmer of light. He groped into the Remove passage.

It was dark there, very dark; and he groped and counted doors, to arrive at Study No. 4.

He arrived at it at last. His groping fat hand found the study door ajar—it was, indeed, nearly a foot open.

Bunter pushed it farther open, stepping in.

What happened next, he hardly knew. Life is full of surprises, and Bunter had had surprises in his time, but never, probably, had he experienced such a startling surprise as now.

Something, he did not know what, crashed down on his head. Something else, still he did not know what, smothered him from head to foot, choked and almost blinded him.

"Oooogh!" gurgled Bunter.

He staggered in the doorway. He gurgled, gasped, and guggled. Had there been ears at hand, certainly those sounds of revelry by night would have betrayed Bunter.

But the junior studies were too far from all sleeping-quarters for the gurgling and guggling of the fat Owl to be heard.

Tottering in the darkness, he gurgled and spluttered, dizzily wondering what on earth could have happened.

It seemed to be some sort of powder that had smothered him. Some of it had gone into his mouth, and he knew the taste—it was flour! How a cargo of flour could have landed on him suddenly in Smithy's doorway was for some time an utter mystery to Billy Bunter.

But his fat brain cleared a little after several minutes of spluttering and gasping, dabbing and clawing.

He understood! It had seemed, at first, as if that mass of flour had fallen from the ceiling like manna from the sky on the ancient Israelites. But it dawned on Bunter's fat brain that it had fallen from the top of the study door!

It further dawned on him why that door had been left ajar! Still further it dawned on him that that booby-trap was the reason why Smithy had talked about a spread in the dormitory!

Bunter leaned on the door-post, gasped and sneezed and gurgled, and breathed flour and fury.

"Beast!" he gurgled. "Beast! Cad! Swab! Rotter! Oh crikey! Pulling a fellow's leg! Oh! Beast!"

That unspeakable beast Smithy had known perfectly well that no Remove fellow would go down for that spread—except Bunter! Only Bunter was ass enough. Had any other fellow unexpectedly volunteered, Smithy would

have stopped him. That booby-trap was for Bunter to walk into—and Bunter had walked into it! That was why Smithy had called him after he had gone to sleep!

"Ooogh! Beast! Groogh!" gurgled Bunter.

Really, Bunter would have done well to remember the ancient warning, Timeo Danaos—to fear the Greeks when they came with gifts in their hands!

But the thought of a dormitory spread had, naturally, banished all other thoughts from his fat mind.

Now he had got it!

But he rolled into the study at last. He stumbled over a basket, and ploughed through a sea of scattered flour, grunting and gasping. He shut the door and turned on the light. Then he jumped at the sight of himself in the glass, and squeaked.

"Oh!"

For a moment he almost fancied that he was seeing a ghost in Smithy's study!

He was white as the driven snow from head to foot! Flour covered him like a garment. His spectacles glimmered from a mask of flour. He was smothered, or rather caked, with flour.

"Beast!" groaned Bunter.

He shook, and shook, and shook, scattering clouds of flour. It was some spot of comfort to know that he was scattering it all over Smithy's study! But it was no use trying to shake off all the flour. He remained spectre-like when he ceased to shake.

Few fellows, after such an experience and in such a state, would have given much thought to tuck! But Billy Bunter's ruling passion was tuck, and he had not forgotten it.

Smithy, beast as he was, was not the fellow to tell whoppers—except to beaks! The tuck was there! Bunter had no doubt about that!

And he vengefully resolved that he would not take a spot of it up to the dormitory after this! He would sit in Smithy's study and cram in all he had room for—which was quite a lot—and park the rest in a safe spot in his own study! That would be one way of paying the beast out!

With that vengeful intention, Bunter rolled across to the study cupboard. And then, as the poet remarks, a change came o'er the spirit of his dream!

No doubt the tuck was there! Smithy could be relied on to that extent! But the cupboard door was locked! The key was gone! Bunter had no more chance of laying his fat hands on that tuck than if he had remained in bed in the Remove dormitory!

It was a crushing blow!

Bunter groaned aloud.

"Oh dear! Oh crikey! Beast!"

He blinked—a floury blink—at the cupboard door! Almost was he tempted to take the poker, and hack his way through! He groaned—and groaned again! And as he turned dismally away from the locked cupboard he had another shock! His blink fell on the clock on the mantelpiece! It indicated a quarter past twelve! Bunter gazed at it in horror!

He had wondered why all was so dark and silent just after ten! It wasn't just after ten—it was just after twelve!

"Oh jiminy!" gasped Bunter.

He almost forgot the tuck and the flour in his dismay and horror! It was past midnight; and he was down there alone, every other soul in the House fast asleep and, for all he knew, the prowler prowling!

"Beast!" groaned Bunter.

There was only one thought in his fat mind now—to get back to the Remove

dormitory just as fast as he possibly could. He turned off the light, opened the door, and ploughed through flour again. He groped along to the Remove landing, groped up the staircase to the dormitory landing above—leaving a train of flour spotted about.

He reached the upper landing. But he did not roll across it. For as his floury figure—which he had forgotten was white and ghost-like in the gloom—emerged on the landing, there came a startled, gasping voice from the darkness.

"What -- good gad! What -- what -- is that?"

## THE FIFTEENTH CHAPTER.

### Bunter The Ghost!

**B**UNTER stood stock still.

He stood frozen.

He was too terrified to stir.

That sudden, startled exclamation from the darkness of the wide landing almost froze the blood in his veins.

Someone was there—someone he could not see; though that someone, evidently, could see him!

He did not need telling who it was! It rushed instantly into his scared mind that it was the prowler! It sounded to his frightened ears like a man's voice. Certainly it was not any voice with which he was familiar.

With popping eyes behind his big spectacles, he stood rooted to the landing, the most thoroughly frightened Owl that ever was!

Dimly he made out a glimmer, and knew that it was the glimmer of staring eyes! The unseen one was staring at him, probably as startled, perhaps scared, as Bunter himself; though it did not occur to Bunter that, clothed in white from head to foot, he looked like a ghost in the darkness.

But only for a matter of seconds did those startled, staring eyes gleam and glitter like a rat's in the dark.

They vanished, and there was a sound of running feet.

Someone, unseen, was running along the landing to the other staircase on the other side.

Bunter realised it. He could see nothing, but he could hear! The pattering footsteps died away down the main staircase.

Bunter stood where he was, gasping faintly. But in the silence that followed, he realised that his way was clear; and suddenly he bolted and shot up the passage to the Remove dormitory.

He was not thinking of caution now. He did not care if he awakened the whole House. He cared for only one thing—to get to a safe distance from that unseen, lurking figure in the dark.

The door of the Remove dormitory flew open as if a bomb had hit it. The fat Owl rushed in, spluttering and squeaking.

"I say, you fellows, help! I say, keep him off! I say— Oh crikey!"

He rushed for his bed, stumbled over a chair, kicked it flying, and rolled over, roaring.

"You howling ass!" It was the Bounder's voice. "Do you want to wake the House?"

"Yaroooh!"

"What the thump—" Harry Wharton started up in bed. Every fellow in the dormitory was awakened. "What the—"

"What's that?" exclaimed Bob Cherry.

"Only Bunter," chuckled the Bounder. "He's been out, and he seems to want everybody to know he's come home."

"Bunter—"

"What—"

"Wake snakes!" came a startled howl from Fisher T. Fish, as Bunter scrambled to his feet and loomed white in the gloom. "Say, is that a ghost? Wake snakes!"

"I say, you fellows—"

"Is that some mad ass playing ghost?" exclaimed Harry Wharton. "Who—"

"I say—oh crikey!—I say, keep him off! He's after me!" howled Bunter.

James Duck, the first out of bed, turned on a flash-lamp. In its light the floury fat Owl was revealed. Plenty of fellows had been giving the ghostly figure startled looks, but as the floury fat junior was revealed there was a ripple of laughter up and down the dormitory.

"Is that Bunter?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Been to the baker's?"

"You're looking pale, Bunter!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Vernon-Smith hastily shut across to the door and shut it. Smithy did not want masters and prefects brought on the scene.

"I say, you fellows, turn on the light!" squeaked Bunter. "I say, get hold of something; that villain's after me!"

"What villain, you howling ass?"

"The prowler!" gasped Bunter. "It must have been the prowler. I nearly ran into him on the landing. Oh crikey! He—he nearly had me! I—I think he—he came after me. Oh dear!"

"Fathead!"

"Oh, really, Wharton—"

"Did you get scared in the dark, you fat fozzler?" chuckled the Bounder.

"I rather thought you would!"

"Beast!" groaned Bunter.

"How the thump did you pick up that flour?" demanded Bob Cherry.

"Where on earth have you been?"

"Oh dear! I've been to Smithy's study," groaned Bunter, "and the beast had fixed up a booby-trap—"

"Oh, my hat!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"The beast meant me to walk into it, and I—I—I did!" groaned the fat Owl.

"I'm all floury! Look at me!"

The Remove fellows looked at him. Bunter really was worth looking at. They chuckled and chortled as they looked. Even the mild Duck was grinning as he kept the light on the floury Owl.

"You look a picture!" chortled Skinner. "Did you find anything in Smithy's study except flour?"

"The beast had locked up the cupboard!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Blessed if I see anything to cackle at! Oh lor'! Look at me!" moaned Bunter. "Just look at me!"

"Look here, Smithy, that was a rotten trick to play on a fool like Bunter!" exclaimed the captain of the Remove angrily.

"Think so?" yawned Smithy. "Worse than giving me away to Quelch and getting me six from the old goat?"

"I didn't, you beast!" groaned Bunter. "I say, you fellows, Smithy has done this because Quelch won't let him pitch into me! I've a jolly good mind to go to Quelch about it—"

"And tell him you went out of dormitory bounds at midnight!" grinned the Bounder. "Oh, do!"

"Beast!" hissed Bunter. He realised that Smithy had him there. Smithy had pulled his fat leg, but it was Bunter who had broken rules right and left. It really was not a matter that he wanted to mention to Quelch.

"Rotten trick Smithy!" said Lord Maulverer.

"Thanks!" jawled the Bounder. "If a fellow gives me away, and then hides behind a beak, he can take what's coming to him. I generally manage to get my own back, one way or another."

"It came wallop down on my head!" moaned Bunter.

"It's too thick, Smithy!" muttered Tom Redwing.

"Bunter's head? I agree."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You'd better get a wash and a brush-up and go to bed, old fat floury bean," said Peter Todd. "And next time you're going after tuck at night—don't!"

"I thought it was only ten," groaned Bunter. "That beast Smithy said so when he woke me."

"I didn't. I said it was past ten. So it was!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I wouldn't have gone if I'd known," mumbled the fat Owl. "I should have known I might run into the prowler. I say, you fellows, hadn't you better lock the door? Suppose he comes here—"

"After your rolled-gold watch?" asked Skinner. "Or do you think he knows that you're expecting a postal order?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Beast! He came after Mauly's notecase once. He might have been after it again when I butted into him on the landing."

"Did you really butt into anybody, Bunter?" asked James Duck, his eyes very curiously on the fat floury face in the light of the flash-lamp.

"Owl! Yes! Oh dear!"

"Rot!" said Johnny Bull. "A funk like you would fancy anything in the dark."

"Beast! I tell you he was there. He called out something when he saw me. Now I come to think of it, he was scared."

"He couldn't have seen your features in the dark," said Skinner. "Why should he be scared?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Well, he jolly well was scared, and chance it!" said Bunter.

Safe in the dormitory, the fat Owl was recovering from his fright, and it was dawning upon his fat mind that the prowler had been as frightened as himself. Only that could account for the pattering of footsteps in retreat that the fat Owl had heard.

"He ran away—"

"Pile it on!" said Bob Cherry.

"He jolly well did!"

"I can see him doing it!" chuckled Skinner. "That prowler punched Loder of the Sixth, and mopped up Quelch, and he ran away from you—I don't think!"

"Well, he did—just bolted," said Bunter. "I hardly noticed it at the time, being—being a bit startled—"

"Being in a blue funk, you mean, don't you?"

"No, you beast, I don't! I jolly well know that he was there, and that he was scared and cut off down the stairs!" hooted Bunter.

"Oh gad!" ejaculated Lord Maulverer. "Did he take Bunter for a ghost in the dark? He must have looked it."

"Oh!" exclaimed Harry Wharton. "I suppose he would have been startled if he was there at all."

"He was!" hooted Bunter. "I jolly well frightened him off! I say, you fellows, who's going to brush all this flour off my clobber?"

"Don't all speak at once, you men!" said Skinner.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Nobody, it seemed, was going to brush all that flour off Bunter's clobber. He threw off that clobber, floury as it was, and plunged into bed.

James Duck shut off the light of the flash-lamp and went back towards his own bed. But James Duck did not turn in. James Duck dressed as quickly as he could in the dark, put on a pair of rubber shoes, and trod quietly to the door.

If the prowler was abroad that night it was a night for Ferrers Locke's assistant to be abroad also.

Careful as he was, the slight sound of the opening and shutting door could not fail to reach some ears, when all were wakeful.

"Who's that?" called out Harry Wharton.

Without replying, Jack Drake shut the dormitory door and hurried away down the dark passage to the landing where Bunter had spotted the prowler, and where the prowler had spotted Bunter, and taken him, as it seemed, for some flitting spectre of midnight.

## THE SIXTEENTH CHAPTER.

### Handcuffed!

**H**ARRY WHARTON had been about to turn in again, but he did not do so. He knew that some fellow had left the dormitory, though, in the dark, he could not see what fellow it was.

"Show that light again, Duck, will you?" he called out.

No reply from James Duck.

"What's up?" asked Bob Cherry. His head was already on his pillow.

"Somebody went out of the dorm. Duck! That fathead can't be asleep again already! Duck!"

"Hallo, hallo, hallo! Ducky! Ducky! Duck!" called out Bob Cherry. "Show a glim, Ducky! You've got a flash-lamp!"

But there was still no answer from Duck.

"Can't be Duck that's gone, surely!" exclaimed Nugent.

There was a chuckle from Skinner.

"Night the prowler came here, Duck got scared, and bolted out of the dorm!" he said. "Has he got another scare?"

"That's rot!" said Harry. "If it's Duck, he hasn't got a scare this time! But, by gum, I shouldn't wonder if it was Duck! Anybody got a match?"

"Smithy has, you bet!" chortled Skinner. "What's the good of a cigarette without a match?"

"Here you are!" said Vernon-Smith. He sat up, reached for a matchbox in a pocket, and struck a match.

Harry Wharton took it from his fingers and ran quickly towards James Duck's bed. It was, as he suspected, empty.

The match went out.

"That blithering idiot is gone!" he said. "By gum! I'll walk him back by his silly neck! Even Smithy doesn't break bounds at this time of night! But Duck is idiot enough for anything."

"You don't think—" exclaimed Bob.

"I don't think—I know!" growled the captain of the Remove. He was bundling hurriedly into trousers and jacket and slippers. "We booted him back when he went to see that rotter Crocker in the day-time—and what does it look like?"

"The silly ass!" said Nugent.

"The howling idiot!" said Johnny Bull.

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"The terrific fathead!" ejaculated Hurree Jamset Ram Singh.

"Oh, the blitherer!" said Bob Cherry.

The Famous Five had little doubt, if any! They knew of James Duck's visits to Crocker, at the hut on the spinney; they knew that he had had a racing list in the study, the same having been unearthed by Billy Bunter; and the only conclusion to which they could possibly come was that the dud and fathead of the Form had fallen into bad hands.

For which reason they had, a few days ago, snaffed him at the spinney, and chased him back to the school—as a friendly warning to keep to the straight and narrow path!

Instead of which, it now seemed the fathead was breaking out at night—the sort of thing that was dangerous for a fellow like the Bounder, and sure to be disastrous for an utter ass like Duck!

"If that chump has gone out of bounds, you'll be too late to catch him, if you're fool enough to go after him!" said Vernon-Smith.

"Fancy the Goose playing the giddy ox!" chortled Skinner. "Can't be anything else, if he's gone! By gum! Crocker must make a good thing out of that born idiot if he's got hold of him!"

Harry Wharton did not speak. He hurried on a few clothes, and ran to the door. He was quite determined to catch the fathead of the Form, and walk him back to the dormitory.

He closed the door quietly, and hurried down the dark passage.

Duck had a good start, and Wharton had no doubt that he was heading for the Remove box-room, from the window of which it was easy to descend by way of the leads. That was the way Smithy went when he risked such reckless excursions, and there was no doubt that Duck had heard of it.

Neither did Wharton think that he would be too late! That benighted ass, Duck, was not likely to be rapid in his movements—and more likely than not to stumble over something in the dark; indeed, Wharton would not have been surprised to hear him tumbling down the stairs!

James Duck had given the Remove the impression of being the biggest ass ever; and no fellow, so far, suspected that he was anything else. Still less that it was precisely that impression that he desired to give, for good reasons of his own.

To let such an utter duffer land in serious trouble, led thereinto by an unscrupulous rascal like Crocker, was not Wharton's idea at all. Bad hats like Smithy could take care of themselves, or take what came to them; but a blithering idiot like Duck wanted looking after—and the captain of his Form was going to look after him—perhaps with a rather heavy hand.

He was, in fact, going to collar him, walk him back to the dormitory with a grip on the back of his neck, and then give him six with a slipper, as another warning not to imitate the ways of the Bounder.

He reached the dormitory landing, and there he slowed down and moved more cautiously.

From that landing there was a passage leading to the masters' rooms; and he did not want to risk awakening Quelch, or Hacker, or Prout.

Quietly he stepped across the extensive landing towards the stairs.

Suddenly he stopped, his heart beating with a sudden jump. There was a faint sound near him in the darkness.

He had forgotten, in his haste in get-

ting after James Duck, Bunter's story of the prowler on the landing. But he remembered it now, as he heard that faint, stealthy sound.

He stood quite still in the dense darkness, listening.

If what Bunter had stated was correct, the prowler had been there, and had been startled into flight by the sudden sight of a ghostly figure in the dark. But if that was the case, it was not likely to take him long to recover from such a fright; and it was quite likely that he had returned. It was not a pleasant thought, as Wharton remembered that Loder of the Sixth, grappling with the prowler, had been knocked out and left with two black eyes!

He listened intently, with beating heart.

Someone was there!

It could not be Duck—he had been gone more than five minutes, and less than one would have been enough for him to pass the landing and go down the staircase. Who was it?

Only the prowler, if it was anyone—and a sound of suppressed breathing, close at hand, showed that someone was there.

It seemed to Wharton that a darker shadow loomed in the darkness, and instinctively he threw out his hands to ward off an assailant.

The next instant a sudden grip was on him. Almost before he knew what was happening, he was grasped, and he went heavily to the floor. As he struggled, blindly, nothing doubting now that he was in the grip of the Greyfriars prowler, his wrists were seized and dragged together—he felt a cold contact of metal, and there was a sudden click!

His assailant rose, breathing hard, but still with a grasp on him—as Harry Wharton, dizzy with amazement, sprawled on the landing, with handcuffs locked on his wrists.

## THE SEVENTEENTH CHAPTER.

### A Mutual Escape!

**A** BRIGHT beam of light shot from the dark.

It was the sudden gleam of a flash-lamp, shining full on Harry Wharton's face, blinding and dazzling him with its glare.

One hand grasped his shoulder as he lay, handcuffed, on the landing; the other held the flash-lamp as his captor bent over him.

Wharton could not see him—he could see nothing but that blinding light. But from behind the light came an exclamation, in tones of stupefied astonishment.

"Wharton! You fool, what are you doing here?"

Harry Wharton dragged himself up as the grasp fell from his shoulder.

His captor, evidently, had made a mistake in the dark—taking him for someone else. It was not the prowler who had seized him. He knew that now. Who it was, he guessed, though it seemed so strangely and wildly improbable that he could not believe it. The angry voice came again:

"You! You mad fool, you!"

There was deep and intense anger in that voice.

But Wharton was angry, too—as angry as amazed.

"Is that Duck?" He panted out the words. "It can't be! But—it's you, Duck!"

"Oh, you fool! What are you doing here?"

Wharton calmed himself a little. His



Mr. Prout halted by the settee, flashing the light round him. The two juniors, hardly a yard from him, crouched, suppressing their breathing. "I am certain I heard something," muttered the Fifth Form master. "If I could only get within reach with this golf club!"

brain was almost spinning with amazement. Handcuffs were on his wrists—and it was James Duck, the duffer of the Remove, the fathead of the Form, who had fastened them there—with a swift deftness that revealed that it was not the first time that he had handled such things.

How could it be Duck—that fool, that ass, that chump, Duck, who had done this! But it was—Wharton knew that it was!

"You're Duck!"—he panted.

"Fool!"

"You cheeky dummy! Take these things off me! How dare you put them on? How did you have such things? Are you mad?"

"Fool!" repeated the voice. "Fool! What are you doing here? Why couldn't you keep clear? Did you want to be taken for the prowler, you fool?"

Wharton started.

"The prowler! You idiot, did you take me for the prowler?"

"What else—lurking here in the dark, you dummy?"

"Oh!" gasped Harry. "I took you for him when I heard you—"

"Why are you here?"

"Can't you guess, you dummy? I found you'd left the dormitory, and followed you to fetch you back. I thought you were going out—"

"You idiot!"

"What was I to think?" snapped Wharton. "We stopped you going to that rascal Crocker's place in the daytime, so I thought—" He broke off. "Take these things off me! Do you hear?"

The light shut off. In the dark, Wharton felt a groping at his wrists, and the grip of the cold metal was gone.

His hands were free again. He stood panting, amazed, angry, bewildered.

Duck, the fool of the school, had

handcuffed him, taking him in the dark for the Greyfriars prowler. Duck had not, as he had naturally supposed, crossed the landing, and gone down the stairs. He had waited there in the dark—waiting and watching. Like Wharton, he had guessed that the mystery man might return. It was not to break bounds and visit the hut on the spinney that Duck had left the dormitory—it was to hunt for the prowler of Greyfriars. In utter bewilderment, Wharton understood that now.

Not only to hunt for the mystery man, but with handcuffs ready to snap on him, if caught. Handcuffs, in the possession of a schoolboy, and that schoolboy the fathead of the Remove! It was too bewildering for understanding.

"You've got to explain this, Duck." Wharton found his voice. "You've got to explain what this means."

He heard a deep breath in the darkness.

Jack Drake realised, only too clearly, that he had to explain—that that mistake in the dark had knocked sky-high the game he had played successfully for weeks—of concealing his identity, and his object at Greyfriars, under the outward semblance of James Duck, the duffer of the Remove.

Wharton peered at him in the gloom. He knew that it was Duck, incredible as it seemed. But the fellow who had gripped him and handcuffed him so swiftly, so deftly, was a very different fellow from the Duck he had known. Even his voice was different—quite unlike the mild bleat of the dud of the Form. Bewildered as he was, Wharton quite understood that there was, that there must be, something behind this—that James Duck, whatever he was, was not what he had hitherto appeared to be.

"You hear me, Duck? What—"

"Quiet, old man!" Jack Drake's voice came calmly now.

That brief spasm of anger, in his surprise and disappointment, was gone.

"Why?" snapped Wharton.

"The prowler may not be far away."

"You mean that you're after him?" Wharton dropped his voice.

"Hadn't you guessed that?"

"Yes. But I can't understand. That night the prowler came to our dorm. weeks ago, you were scared, and ran out of the dorm. And now—"

Wharton broke off as he heard a soft laugh.

"Oh!" he gasped. "I—I see now. You mean that you were after him that time, when we all thought you'd lost your head and scuttled—"

"Sort of," murmured Drake.

"I see. But I don't understand. You've got to explain this. What business is it of yours to hunt for him? What the dickens do you mean by having handcuffs about you like a policeman or a detective? What have you taken us all in for? You're not the fool you've made yourself out to be. I can see that now."

"Quiet! I want you to keep this dark, Wharton. I'm sorry I collared you as I did. But what was I to think, except that I'd got my man at last?"

"Your man? What bizney is it of yours?"

Drake did not answer that.

"Come back to the dorm now," went on Harry.

"Fathead! I've told you I'm after the prowler," muttered Drake. "He was scared by seeing that fat ass, white as a ghost, in the dark. But that's not likely to keep him away—not for long. If there's no alarm, ten to one

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he will come back, and if he does, I got him."

"You're coming back to the dorm."

"I tell you—"

"You're not telling me; I'm telling you!" said Harry Wharton coolly. "I came after you, because I thought you were a silly fool going out of bounds. I was going to run you back to the dorm by your neck. Now I find you're a silly fool, meddling in what doesn't concern you, I'm going to run you back to the dorm just the same."

"You're not, you silly ass!" breathed Drake.

"I jolly well am!" Wharton made a movement towards the dim shadow in the dark. "And in the dorm you're jolly well going to explain what this game is, and what you're doing with handcuffs like a policeman!"

Drake breathed hard. He made no movement of resistance as the captain of the Remove grasped his arm.

"Quiet!" he muttered. "Wharton, listen!"

"I'll listen in the dorm, you cheeky ass!"

"Listen now!" breathed the schoolboy detective. "I can trust you with a secret. I've got to, anyhow. Listen! I'm here for the prowler."

"I know that."

"I mean, I'm at Greyfriars for the prowler. That's why I came. I was sent for by the Head and Quelch. Now do you understand?"

Wharton's grasp dropped from the schoolboy detective's arm.

"What? Rubbish! What—"

"Do you remember Jack Drake, who used to be in the Remove, and joined Ferrers Locke?"

"Eh? Yes, what—"

"I'm Drake."

## THE EIGHTEENTH CHAPTER.

### A Secret To Keep!

**H**ARRY WHARTON stood dumb. He was too astonished to speak.

He stood like a fellow in a dream while the low whisper ran on in his ear.

"Keep it dark, old man! It will spoil everything, if it should get out that a detective is here hunting for the prowler. You understand that?"

Wharton did not speak. He could not.

He was trying to grasp it. That James Duck, the duffer of the Form, was not what he had appeared to be—he already knew. But that Duck, the moon-faced booby, with his owlish look in his steel-rimmed glasses, was Jack Drake, the fellow he had known as well as he knew Frank Nugent or Bob Cherry, was altogether too astounding.

He gave a gasp; but he did not speak. Drake's faint whisper died away. In the silence came a sound, and the schoolboy detective tensed at once.

"Quiet!" he breathed. "You're in this now with me, Wharton. Quiet!"

From the silence came the sound of a footstep. But it was not a stealthy footstep. It was a heavy tread—almost an elephantine one. A light glimmered from the distance—the passage that led to the masters' rooms.

Drake set his lips.

For a second he had thought and hoped that it was the prowler again. But he knew now what it was. One of the masters had been awakened by the sound of the brief struggle on the landing. More likely he had been awake, and so the noise had reached him. Anyhow, one of the masters was up now, and coming to investigate.

The elephantine tread revealed which master it was. Only Prout, or an escaped elephant, could have trodden so heavily.

Drake gripped the arm of the captain of the Remove.

"Quiet! If that old ass spots us—"

Harry Wharton pulled himself together with a jerk. Detective or not, or all the more if he was a detective, James Duck did not want to be caught out of his dormitory at night. Neither did the captain of the Remove. Breaking dormitory bounds after midnight was a very serious matter.

"Cut for the dorm," whispered Harry. Drake's grip tightened on his arm.

"He's got a light! No chance! Cover!"

The light carried by Mr. Prout was already gleaming out on the dark landing.

"But—"

"Quiet!"

Jack Drake acted with the quick decision natural to Ferrers Locke's assistant, though far from expected in James Duck.

By the balustrade of the wide landing was a settee, and in an instant he drew Wharton behind the settee, between it and the banisters.

He crouched there, dragging the captain of the Remove down by his side.

They were only in time. Hardly a moment later the light gleamed on the spot where they had been standing.

It would have picked them up without fail had they cut for the dormitory passage. Now they were out of sight—for the moment, at least, safe.

Prout's heavy tread came on.

He had an electric torch in his hand, and he circled the light over the long landing. Obviously Prout was suspicious. Prout had heard something, and he had, of course, thought of the prowler at once. Prout was the man to tackle the prowler, if he had a spot of a chance. Prout was a plucky man. Years had increased his circumference without diminishing his spirit.

He halted by the end of the settee, flashing the light round him. The two juniors, hardly a yard from him, crouched, suppressing their breathing. Prout's voice came in the silence.

"I heard something. I am assured that I heard something. No one appears to be here; but I am certain that I heard something. By gad, if I could get within reach of that prowling scoundrel with this golf club!"

The two juniors hardly breathed.

Prout was keen to get going with the golf club clutched in his portly hand. They were far from anxious for him to get going with it!

Round and round the light circled. Prout shot the beam down into the deep, dark well of the staircase. He spotted nothing on the stairs. The prowler, if the prowler yet lingered in the House, was not likely to continue to linger, now that a master was up with a light.

If he had not been scared away by the ghost of Billy Bunter there was little doubt that he would be scared off by Prout and a light, and would postpone his intended pilferings for a later and safer occasion. Nothing unusual was to be seen on the stairs; and Prout circled the light round the landing again.

That he would be satisfied when he saw nothing, and would return to his room, was what the cornered juniors hoped.

But Prout was not satisfied. His fruity voice was heard again.

"Someone was up—at this hour! Of that I am assured! If that scoundrel is about—"

The light circled again.

Harry Wharton gave up hope of avoiding discovery now. Prout's plump brain did not work quickly; but, as he was assured that someone was, or had been, on that landing, it was fairly certain that he would flash the light behind the settee, to ascertain whether the unseen one had dodged out of sight there.

And he was so close at hand that there was not the remotest chance of dodging away undiscovered.

Wharton waited for the circling light to gleam on him and reveal—not, certainly, the suspected prowler, but two

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Remove fellows out of their dormitory long after midnight.

He felt his companion move.

Wharton did not stir, but Drake, who was nearer to Prout, moved swiftly and silently.

Prout had his back to the balustrade as he stood at the end of the long settee. Any second he might revolve on his portly axis, and flash the light round; Drake had to take the chance of that as he rose silently behind the Fifth Form master.

Then Prout had the surprise of his life.

An unseen hand, reaching from behind him, gave his portly arm a sudden sharp rap—sending the torch spinning from his hand, to crash on the landing.

That crash sounded almost like thunder in the deep silence.

Instant darkness followed; and a gasping howl from Prout.

"What—who—scoundrel!"

Prout whirled round. He grasped in the dark, and his plump fingers closed on a dodging shoulder.

"Rascal!" gasped Prout. "I have you! Scoundrel!"

Prout had no doubt that he had the prowler! It was rather fortunate for Prout, perhaps, that that was an error. The ruffian who had knocked out Loder of the Sixth, and blacked his eyes, would hardly have hesitated to knock out the master of the Fifth; and Prout, though full of pluck, was altogether too plump and time-worn for hand-to-hand warfare!

Very luckily for Prout it was not the prowler! No hefty jolt came from the darkness to up-end Prout.

But the unseen figure in his grasp wriggled like an eel, and Prout's portly leg was suddenly hooked.

Prout sat down.

He shook the landing, and almost shook Greyfriars School as he sat. Prout's weight landed with a heavy, resounding bump on the floor. His grasp on the unseen one was lost. He sat and gasped.

"Ooogh! Goodness gracious! Wooh! Scoundrel—groogh!"

Harry Wharton felt a sudden grip on his shoulder. He followed Drake's lead in the darkness.

They cut across the landing; behind them, the breathless Fifth Form master spluttering and booming.

"Ooogh! Scoundrel! Help! Quelch! Hfacker—Lascelles—Wiggins—Capper—grooogh! Help! The prowler—he is here! Help—ooogh!"

Two swift figures reached the door of the Remove dormitory, while Prout still boomed. They slipped in silently and shut the door, and the boom was shut off in the distance.

Drake chuckled softly. At that moment he was a schoolboy, not a detective!

"All serene!" he whispered.

"Prout will wake the whole House!" gasped Harry.

"Let him! Better not let him wake us! Turn in, quick!"

James Duck cut along to his bed. Most of the Remove had gone to sleep again; but a drowsy voice came from Bob Cherry:

"Hallo, hallo, hallo! That Wharton? Got the silly chump?"

"Oh, yes! Quiet! The beaks are up!"

"You've got him back?" asked Nugent.

"Yes; quiet!"

Harry Wharton turned into bed.

Vague sounds from the distance told that Prout had called up other members of the staff, and that a search was going on. It was not likely to extend

to the Remove dormitory, however, so that all was right.

But it was long before Harry Wharton closed his eyes.

He was thinking of the strange and startling discovery of that night—that Jack Drake, the boy detective, once of the Remove, had returned to his old Form at Greyfriars; and no one had known him there! James Duck, the moon-faced duffer of the Remove, was Jack Drake, the assistant of Ferrers Locke, the famous detective! Fellows had wondered why the Head had made no move to root out the mystery-man. Evidently, now, he had made a move—and this was it!

There was a detective in the school, rooting after the prowler! And it was Jack Drake, whom Wharton knew well, and would never have dreamed that he would not know again, at once, if he saw him! The captain of the Remove had a secret to keep now.

He slept at last; and did not reopen his eyes till the rising-bell was clanging in the morning.

He remembered, the moment he woke, and sat up and rubbed his sleepy eyes. He glanced along towards Duck's bed.

"Dear me!" James Duck was bleating. "Where did I put my trousers? I wonder where I put my trousers! Has anybody seen my trousers?"

There was a laugh in the dormitory as the new junior, blinking through his steel-rimmed glasses, looked for his trousers—and found them right under his nose!

Wharton could only stare.

James Duck was James Duck again, the dud and duffer and fathead!

Wharton almost wondered whether he had dreamed the happenings of the night.

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## THE NINETEENTH CHAPTER.

### Some Detective!

"QUELCHY!" murmured Bob Cherry.

Mr. Quelch was standing at the head of the staircase when the Remove came along to go down.

Spring sunshine was streaming in at the windows, but its brightness was not reflected in the face of the Remove master. That face was grim.

"Good-morning, sir!" said some of the Removites, wondering why Quelch was there! He seemed to be waiting for his Form to come from their dormitory.

"Good-morning!" said Mr. Quelch frostily. He beckoned to James Duck. "You will remain here for a few minutes."

"Yes, sir!" bleated Duck meekly.

The rest of the Form went down. Duck was told to stay behind, and they wondered, from that, whether Quelch knew that he had been out of the dormitory over-night. In which case, they supposed that he was booked for a row.

"Poor old Ducky!" murmured Bob Cherry. "He always seems to be asking for it! Jevver see such an ass?"

"Hardly ever!" said Johnny Bull.

"But if they've spotted him, they may have spotted you, Harry!" said Frank Nugent uneasily. "Quelch doesn't seem to want you, though."

"I don't think they know anything about Remove men being out!" answered Harry. He was pretty sure of that.

"Then what does Quelch want Ducky for?"

Wharton did not answer. Now that he knew Duck's secret, he wondered whether it was as a detective that Jack

Drake was told to stay behind. He glanced back at him as he went down; but in the sheepish face, with its bushy eyebrows and steel-rimmed glasses, he could see no trace of the Jack Drake he had known.

"That esteemed ass always seems to be in a row!" remarked Murree Jansen Ram Singh.

"I say, you fellows, if Quelch fancies that I went out of the dorm last night, I want you fellows to stand by me!" said Billy Bunter anxiously. "They may have seen flour about, or something! I say, of course you'll all tell Quelch that I never even got out of bed last night, if he asks you! I'll do the same for you, you know, any time."

"You fat fibbing frog—"

"Oh, really, Cherry! You know what Quelch is—he won't take my word!" said Bunter. "Why, I don't know; but I know he won't. If he asks you—"

"Fathead!"

"Beast!"

Quelch's eye, however, did not turn on Bunter. That was just as well for the fat Owl; for though he had shaken and banged his clothes very industriously that morning, there were still floury traces lingering. Quelch's attention was fixed on the one member of his Form whom only Harry Wharton, in the Remove, knew to be other than what he seemed.

Drake waited. But his Form-master did not immediately speak. Other fellows were going down, as well as the Remove; and Mr. Quelch waited till the last had gone before he addressed Drake.

Then, at length, he spoke, in icy tones.

"There was an incident again last night, Drake."

"Indeed, sir!" murmured Drake. He had no intention of confiding to Mr. Quelch what he knew of that incident.

"Mr. Prout was awakened, and came from his room," continued the Remove master. "On this landing he was attacked—though fortunately no injury was done! The prowler has been here again—though, thanks to Mr. Prout, he was prevented from carrying out his nefarious intentions."

Drake did not reply to that. He was aware that it was thanks to Billy Bunter and his ghost-like aspect in his garment of flour that the prowler had been interrupted in his prowling. But that was not an item to be reported to Mr. Quelch!

"The rascal, as usual, disappeared unseen and undiscovered!" resumed Mr. Quelch—not, of course, suspecting for a moment that there had been two rascals concerned, and that one of them was now standing before him, gazing at him over James Duck's glasses.

"Indeed, sir!"

"Yes, indeed!" snapped Mr. Quelch. "And if you desire to make any investigations, Drake, pray proceed to do so."

Drake coloured at the sharp sarcasm in Quelch's voice. Only too clearly, the Remove master had lost faith in Ferrers Locke's assistant, from whom he had hoped so much.

"I shall be very glad," added Mr. Quelch, in the same tone, "to see the result, if any!"

"You have no further faith in me, I fear, sir!" said Drake.

"Very little, I acknowledge!" said Mr. Quelch. "Very little, if any, Drake!"

Drake bit his lip. Then a faint grin dawned on his face—vanishing instantly, however, as Mr. Quelch looked at him very sharply.

Quelch's sarcasm was not very pleasant to the ears of the schoolboy

detective. He was tempted to give Quelch a Roland for his Oliver, so to speak.

"If Ferrers Locke were here," went on Mr. Quelch, "I have no doubt that he would be able to discover some clue. That is a detective's business. If you can do so, Drake, I shall be very glad."

"Very well, sir!" said Drake quietly. He had made up his mind, by that time, to pull Quelch's majestic leg in return for his sarcasm.

He moved about the extensive landing for a few minutes, glancing to and fro and peering behind the settee at the balustrade.

Mr. Quelch watched him with sarcasm, intensifying in his expressive expression.

"Well?" he rapped.

"Shall I tell you what happened here last night, sir?" asked Drake demurely.

Mr. Quelch stared at him.

"You obviously cannot do anything of the kind, Drake!" he answered. "Beyond what I have told you, you know nothing."

"Indeed, sir! If you do not care to hear—"

"Oh, proceed!" said Mr. Quelch.

"Last night," said Jack Drake calmly, "one of the masters—you have told me it was Mr. Prout—came out of his room with a light—"

"With a light?" repeated Mr. Quelch. "Yes, certainly Mr. Prout had a light—an electric torch. If that is a deduction, Drake, it was a very easy thing to deduce."

"He stopped by the end of this settee—" continued Drake.

Mr. Quelch started.

Drake, certainly, could have guessed that Prout had a light. But he could not have guessed that the Fifth Form master had stopped at the end of that settee. That could not possibly be guesswork! That was knowledge. Prout had told the other masters what had happened. He certainly had not said a word in Drake's hearing.

"Indeed!" exclaimed Mr. Quelch, rather blankly. "Do you think so, Drake?"

"I do not think—I know!" answered Drake calmly. "Mr. Prout stood on this spot, at the end of the settee—this end—and flashed the light to and fro about the landing."

"That is certainly correct, from what Mr. Prout has told me!" admitted Mr. Quelch, very much puzzled.

"Someone—who must have been hidden behind the settee—rose behind him and struck the light from his hand!" added Drake.

Quelch fairly jumped.

That was exactly what had happened, from Prout's tale. But how the assistant of Ferrers Locke had deduced it was a mystery to Quelch.

"Mr. Prout was left in the dark," continued Drake with cheerful calmness, "but he grappled with his assailant."

"Drake!"

"Is not that correct, sir?"

"It is quite correct!" admitted Mr. Quelch blankly. "But I fail to see—"

Mr. Quelch stared round him in search of the signs, or clues, that had led the schoolboy detective to this remarkably correct conclusion. Quelch, keen-eyed as he was, could detect no such signs or clues! The landing told him nothing, whatever it told Jack Drake—perhaps!

"Mr. Prout was then overturned by his assailant," continued Drake. "I think," he added, with a very thoughtful look, "that his leg was hooked! On

that point I will not speak positively, but—"

"This is amazing!" Quelch fairly gasped. "It is perfectly true, from what Mr. Prout has said, that his leg was hooked from under him, and he fell—"

"In falling, sir, he lost his hold on the unseen person he had grasped," said Drake. "That person escaped."

"This is precisely what Mr. Prout has told me," said the Remove master. "I hardly understand this, Drake."

"It is perfectly clear to me, sir!" said Drake, with a face as serious as that of a stone image. "What I know further, sir, I must—for the present, at least—keep to myself! That is all, sir."

And Jack Drake went down the stairs—leaving Mr. Quelch gazing after him with an expression of astonishment on his face at which Drake contrived not to grin till the bend of the staircase hid him from the Remove master's sight!

— — —

## THE TWENTIETH CHAPTER.

### For One Occasion Only!

HARRY WHARTON glanced at James Duck quite a number of times in Form that morning.

Every time he glanced at him he felt more and more puzzled.

James Duck was, he had said, Jack Drake! But, even now that he knew, the captain of the Remove seemed hardly able to get it down, as it were.

The fellow was utterly unlike Drake in looks, in ways, in speech, in everything. Not a suspicion, hitherto, had crossed Wharton's mind, or any other. Was it true?

He felt that it was, and must be; yet he doubted. Duck, it was certain, was not what he seemed to be; yet it was not easy to believe that he was a fellow to whom he seemed to bear no resemblance.

Other fellows in the Remove, as in other Forms, were rather excited on the subject of the reappearance of the prowler. But Wharton hardly gave that mysterious person's latest exploit a thought. His thoughts continually returned to the strange secret he had learned—rather to the detriment of his lessons that morning.

There was another matter on the mind of the captain of the Remove—rather an urgent matter, too. Vernon-Smith was under detention that afternoon, and his place had to be filled in the Remove eleven for the match with Hobson & Co., of the Shell.

In a match with the Shell the Remove had to put their best foot foremost, as it were, and the loss of the Bounder was a heavy loss. But even that did not occupy Wharton's mind so much as that strange discovery of the night.

After class that morning he left his friends and looked for the new junior. James Duck was mooning in the quad, in his usual sheepish way, looking like anything but a keen young detective, the right-hand man of so famous a crime-investigator as Ferrers Locke. Wharton could not help doubting all the more, as he looked at the sheepish face.

"Look here, Duck!" he said abruptly. Then suddenly, as he uttered the name, it struck him. "Oh, Duck—Drake! Is that why you called yourself Duck?"

The new junior grinned.

"Yes—and to keep the same initials—things are marked, you know," he answered. "You're keeping it dark, of course?"

"Yes—if I'm sure! But—" Wharton stared at him, hard. "You're darker in complexion than Drake was."

"Quite!"

"Your hair's longer," said Harry. "Drake never had those bushy eyebrows—"

"That's why I have!" grinned Duck.

"Oh! He never wore glasses—"

"That's why I do."

"Oh! He never bleated like a silly sheep—"

Drake chuckled.

"Look here, old man, I've given it to you straight!" he said. "I had to tell you—and it's up to you to say nothing about it. Are you still doubting whether I'm me or not?"

"Well, it's jolly queer!" said Harry slowly. "I can't make you out! You're not what you've made yourself out to be! I know that! But—Drake was as keen as a razor, and you—well, you know what all the Form think of you. Drake was a first-class footballer—and you fumble worse than Bunter. I suppose you're trying to make yourself seem different—if you're Drake—but if—"

Drake's eyes danced, behind Duck's steel-rimmed glasses.

"Like me to prove it?" he asked.

"Well—yes!"

"You're hard up for a man this afternoon—that ass Smithy having got himself detained—"

"Never mind that now—"

"But I do mind!" grinned James Duck. "Jack Drake might drop in at Greyfriars this afternoon to see his old pals—"

"What?"

"James Duck will disappear for the afternoon. Jack Drake will drop in on a visit. If he does, how would you like to put him in Smithy's place?"

"Oh!" gasped Wharton.

"You've just said that I was a first-class footballer!" grinned James Duck. "I've kept up the game, of course. I should do you credit. And—by gum, I'd be glad of a game! I've had to steer clear, as James Duck—but I'd be jolly glad to put in—for one occasion only—as Jack Drake! What?"

"Oh!" gasped Wharton again.

"I'll tell you this much," went on the schoolboy detective quietly, "I've got my eye on the man I want—it's only a matter of getting him pinned down."

"Oh!" came a third gasp from Wharton.

"Until I get him, I've got to keep up this Duck game. But—even if he was on the spot—he wouldn't get wise to anything from an old Greyfriars man dropping in for the afternoon. Even if he saw me, which isn't likely—considering who and where he is—he could guess nothing from it, as Jack Drake will be gone again immediately after the game."

Wharton stared at him.

"If you mean it—if you're really Drake—"

"Doubting Thomas!" grinned Drake. "Look here, I suppose you can believe your own eyes. If you see Jack Drake walk into the changing-room this afternoon, will that settle it?"

"Of course! But—"

"Then don't fill Smithy's place—that is, of course, if you'd like Jack Drake in the team, like old times—"

"I'd jump at it!" said Harry. "Drake was always as good a man as Smithy—it would be a regular windfall! But—"

"Jump at it then, instead of keeping on butting like a billy-goat!" chuckled Jack Drake. "I've not had a lot of practice the last few weeks, but I can tell you I'm in form—and simply pining for a game. Leave the place



open till your old pal Drake walks in? What?"

"But—" stammered Harry.

"Cut out the buts! Is it a go?"

Wharton paused a long moment.

"Yes!" he said at last.

"Good man!"

"But—"

"Mum's the word—here's Smithy!"

Herbert Vernon-Smith came up with a scowl on his face. He was feeling keenly his exclusion from the football match that afternoon, and he was deprived even of the consolation of booting Bunter.

"What are you going to do about inside-right?" he asked, taking no notice of Duck. "I've got to stand out, but Redwing's a good man—" Smithy evidently wanted to put in a word for his pal.

Harry Wharton shook his head.

"Good; but a good many better," he answered. "We've got to beat the Shell if we can, Smithy."

"Who, then?" grunted the Bounder.

"I've just heard that an old pal of Wharton's is visiting the school this afternoon, Smithy," bleated James Duck. "Wharton's going to play him. Isn't that so, Wharton?"

"Oh, yes! I think—"

"Fellow named Drake," said the new junior, blinking at Vernon-Smith. "Ever heard of him? He left before I came."

"He left long before you blew in, ass!" said Vernon-Smith. "I'd be glad to see him again—he was a decent sort of chap. Is he coming, Wharton?"

"I—I think so—"

"Well, he's a good man, if you want one!" said the Bounder. "If he turns up you can't do better. If not Redwing's the man you want."

"Drake's coming!" said Harry. He had made up his mind about that at last. "I think I can rely on Drake."

"Hallo, hallo, hallo! What's that about Drake?" Bob Cherry came up.

"That chap who used to be here—what about him?"

"He—he will be here this afternoon—" stammered Harry.

"Oh, ripping! First I've heard of it. I say, if he's in time, what about shoving him in Smithy's place?" exclaimed Bob.

"That's the idea!"

"Good egg! Ducky, don't you miss this game!" said Bob Cherry. "That chap Drake is worth watching at football. He used to be a first-class man, at any rate. By Jove, I'll tell the fellows Drake will be here—everybody will be jolly glad to see him."

The news was not long in spreading that Jack Drake, formerly of the Remove, was to be at his old school that afternoon, and that Harry Wharton was going to give him Vernon-Smith's vacant place in the Remove eleven.

Quite a number of fellows were looking forward to seeing Jack Drake again. Among them was Billy Bunter, who sagely considered that, after so long an absence, Jack Drake might be good to touch for a small loan, which Bunter needed rather badly, as his postal order had not yet arrived.

After dinner, Billy Bunter adorned the gateway with the fattest figure at Greyfriars, to keep his eyes, not to mention his spectacles, on the watch for Drake's arrival.

But, in the circumstances, Billy Bunter was likely to watch, like Sister Anne, in vain!

THE TWENTY-FIRST CHAPTER.

No Chance For Bunter!

"HALLO, hallo, hallo!"

"Old Drake!"

"Trot in, old bean!"

The footballers were in the changing-room. It was almost time to go down to the field, and they were ready; but Harry Wharton's new recruit had not yet arrived.

Smithy—the most disgruntled fellow ever—had gone in to detention. But plenty of other fellows were on the spot, all keen and eager to fill the vacant place; and as the minutes passed, Harry Wharton was more and more doubtful. Then, suddenly, an athletic youthful figure walked in—and he stared blankly at Jack Drake, and there was a shout of welcome.

The Remove fellows gathered round Drake—Wharton stared at him.

This was Drake, whom he knew well enough, with his clear complexion, his keen eyes—and no glasses over them—his alert manner, his well-marked, but not in the least bushy, eyebrows—a fellow who did not resemble James Duck in the very least.

Wharton could only stare. Was it the same fellow? It was, and must be—yet—Then he noticed one circumstance—Drake's hair was a little longer than usual—as Duck's had been. That one detail the schoolboy detective had not changed, as he had to become James Duck again after the football match.

"Time to change—Wharton says you're playing for us this afternoon, Drake," said Bob Cherry.

"Yes, rather!" said Drake—his cheery voice nothing like James Duck's sheepish bleat. "Jolly glad to—somebody lend me some clobber?"

Harry Wharton found his voice.

"Here you are, Drake—"

"Duck's clobber," said Bob. "Duck won't want them—"

"Who's Duck?" asked Jack Drake.

"New fellow, since your time—silliest ass ever!" said Bob. "You can borrow his things—he seems to have left them out all ready, by gum—silly sort of ass, always leaving things about, or losing them—"

Harry Wharton laughed.

"Pack into them, Drake—you're inside-right!"

"What-ho!"

(Continued on next page.)

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.

"SO Gerald Loder has lost his prefecture at last!" writes Clem Foster, of Basingstoke. Yes, Clem, he sure has! But this is not the first time the black sheep of the Sixth has been "reduced to the ranks," as it were. No doubt something will happen soon that will bring about his reinstatement—he's as crafty as they make 'em, you must remember.

MORE OVERSEAS PALS WIN PRIZES.

Here's the result of our October Footer-Stamps Competition:

PRIZES OF TEN SHILLINGS EACH have been awarded to the following two competitors with the highest totals of "goals" scored:

Fong Ying Tuck, P.O. Box 82, Kuala Lumpur, Malaya.

R. Wood, 94, Queen Street, Port Elizabeth, S. Africa.

PRIZES OF FIVE SHILLINGS EACH have been awarded to the following twenty competitors whose totals of "goals" ranged from 157 down to 59.

Stan H. Beyers, P.O. Box 1132,

- Johannesburg, Transvaal, S. Africa;
- Bion Dury, I, Jalan Iskandar, Greentown, Ipoh, Perak, F.M.S.;
- W. H. Hunneybun, 473, Promc Road, University P.O. Rangoon, Burma;
- Howard Hunter, 146, De Villiers Street, Kenilworth, Johannesburg, S. Africa;
- A. W. Husband, P.O. Box 387, Salisbury, S. Rhodesia;
- M. M. Ibrahim, 18, Battery Road, Singapore, S.S.;
- David Khaw, c/o Soon Bee Chan, Batu Pahat, Johore, Malaya;
- Chew Kok Kheng, 64, Kelawei Road, Penang, S.S.;
- Tan Meng Kiat, 227-a, Upp. Serangoon Road, Somapah Estate, Singapore, S.S.;
- L. D. Lerner, Woodlands Hotel, Main Road, Sea Point, Cape Town, S. Africa;
- V. Moffat, c/o R. Moffat, Mail Branch, G.P.O., Brisbane, Queensland, Australia;
- Ralph Muller, 29, Madeleine Road, Durban, S. Africa;
- Archie Rodwell, 24, Roos Street, Cape Town, S. Africa;
- Walter Schulte, Church Street, Ladybrand, O.F.S., S. Africa;
- Teo Tong Seng, 137, Moulmein Road, Singapore, S.S.;
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- Victor S. Sherrin, 3, Reis Street, S. Brisbane, S.2, Queensland, Australia;
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Transvaal, S Africa; Tan Yeow Wha, 269, Charlton Road, Singapore, S.S.

Well, I suppose you are all anxious to know something about next week's programme—what? Topping the bill is:

"GUILTY GOLD!"

Frank Richards' splendid yarn of Harry Wharton & Co. It tells of a certain sportsman at Greyfriars who lands himself in debt with Randolph Crocker, the unscrupulous, shifty rascal who has been causing so much trouble at the school of late. Crocker—as no doubt you will gather—is the last man in the world to be "done" by a schoolboy. How the Greyfriars sportsman is to get the money to settle up with Crocker, and thus stop the worthless fellow's tongue from wagging, is a problem until— But there, you'll learn all about it in next Saturday's grand story. Who is the boxing champion of the Greyfriars Remove? This and many other sporting questions will be answered in our next issue of the "Greyfriars Herald," in which will be found other interesting and newsy articles. Potter and Greene have collaborated to produce some really good "stuff" for our opening feature—"My Page." But what of Coker, their studymate?—you will ask. Wait and see! Have you ordered your copy of the MAGNET for next week yet? If not, why not?

YOUR EDITOR.

THE MAGNET LIBRARY.—No. 1,622.

Jack Drake packed into James Duck's football outfit.

He did not seem in the least tired after a journey, which was not surprising, as his journey had only been from the distance of the Remove studies. He went out with the Remove footballers merry and bright—giving the captain of the Remove a cheery wink as he went.

"I say, you fellows." A fat figure rolled up. "I say, that chap Drake ain't come—he won't be in time for the footer after all. I've been waiting for him at the gate, and he ain't come."

"Ha, ha, ha!" "Blessed if I see anything to cackle at!" hooted Bunter. "I tell you the chap ain't come. He can't have walked by under my nose, without my seeing him, I suppose, so—"

"Looks as if he did!" chuckled Bob Cherry. "He's here, fathead! Hallo, hallo, hallo, Drake! Remember this old porpoise?"

"Fat as ever, Bunter!" said Jack Drake, glancing at the astonished Owl of the Remove. "Fatter, if anything!"

"Oh crikey! I never saw you come in, Drake!" gasped Bunter. "I say, how did you get in without my seeing you?"

"And you so eagle-eyed?" remarked Drake.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I say, old chap, as you're here, there's something I wanted to say to you!"

But Billy Bunter had no chance of saying what he wanted to say to Jack Drake. That cheery youth marched off with the footballers, leaving the fat Owl of the Remove blinking.

Among the crowd of fellows who gathered to watch the Soccer match, James Duck was not to be seen. But nobody noticed that the duffer of the Remove was not present. Nobody cared whether he was present or not, or gave him or his absence a thought. And nobody certainly dreamed of suspecting that he was on the football field, lining up with the Remove—and looking like anybody but James Duck!

Moreover, attention was soon centred on Wharton's new inside-right! That new recruit—Jack Drake, once of the Remove—was in great form. Even the Bounder, had he been present, would have admitted that his place was well-filled.

Hobson & Co., of the Shell, derived no advantage from the Bounder having been left out. Rather they found their task a harder one.

The first goal came to Harry Wharton, from a pass from inside-right—the second came to Jack Drake. And at half-time the Shell had only one to show against the two.

But Hobby and his merry men were good stuff, and after the interval they attacked hard and fast, and Squiff was beaten in the Remove goal, and the score was equal. And equal it remained for a long time—both goals having many narrow escapes—till fellows began looking at their watches, or up at the clock tower, wondering if it was going to be a draw.

It was in the last five minutes that the Remove came down like wolves on the fold, and Harry Wharton sent the ball in—only to be fisted out again—and to go in again from the foot of Jack Drake—whizzing past the Shell custodian's ear like a bullet and landing in the net.

Then there was a roar.

"Goal!"

"Good old Drake!"

"Goal! Goal!"

"Bravo, Drake! Goal!"

**J**ACK DRAKE had told his old friends that he would have to leave immediately after the football match.

But they had not expected him to leave so suddenly as he actually did!

In the changing-room, after the game, he was the first to get changed, and with the remark that he would go up to the studies, he left.

It was not long afterwards that the Famous Five came tramping up to Study No. 1 in the Remove—four

members of the Co. expecting to find Jack Drake there, and one hardly knowing what to expect.

They did not find Jack Drake there! They found James Duck there—with his steel-rimmed glasses perched against his bushy eyebrows, blinking at them as they came in.

"Hallo, hallo, hallo! Drake! Where's Drake?" Bob Cherry stared round. "Seen Drake, Duck? Seen a chap here—"

"Oh, yes!" bleated Duck. "Did you say Drake, or Blake?"

"I said Drake, fathead!"

"Has he been here?" asked Nugent; while Harry Wharton stared at James Duck rather blankly.

"Oh, yes! I have a message for you!" bleated Duck. "Blake—I mean Drake—was sorry he could not stop another minute—I was to tell you he was very sorry—but, for some reason, there was not a minute to spare. But was his name Drake or Blake?"

"Fathead!"

"I say, you fellows!" A fat face and a large pair of spectacles looked in. "I say, is Drake here? I had something I wanted to say to him—something rather special!"

"He's gone, old fat man! Too late to ask him to cash your postal order for you!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Gone!" repeated Bunter. "I never saw him go! I never saw him come, either! I say, you fellows, it's jolly queer how that chap Drake pops in and out without a fellow seeing him! I may be able to catch him at the gate, though. I've got something rather special to say to him!"

Billy Bunter rolled hastily away. But he had no luck. He did not catch Jack Drake at the gates, and that something special was never uttered.

THE END.

(The next yarn in this splendid series: "GUILTY GOLD!" is better than ever. Watch out for it in next Saturday's MAGNET, chums!)

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