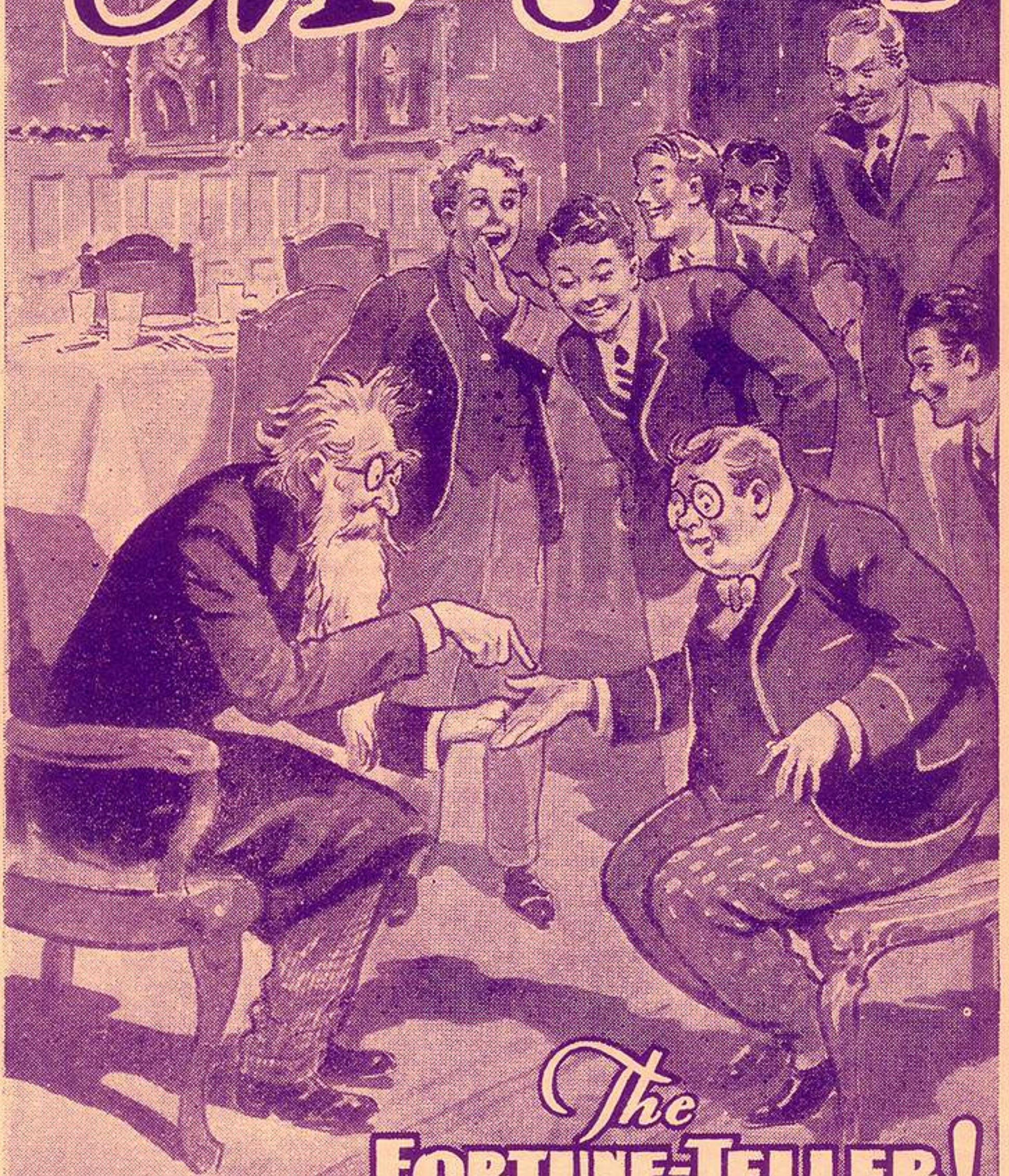


**THE
MAGNET**

Better Than Ever—The "HOLIDAY ANNUAL"—Got Yours Yet?

The Magnet ^{2^p}



The
FORTUNE-TELLER!

WHERE IS MR. QUELCH, THE MISSING GREYFRIARS FORM-MASTER? AND WHAT IS THE MYSTERY OF THE HAUNTED MOAT HOUSE? HARRY WHARTON & CO. ARE FAIRLY BAFFLED, AND SO IS THEIR OLD SCHOOL CHUM, JACK DRAKE—

The BOY from BAKER STREET!



By
**FRANK
RICHARDS**

As Jack Drake made a grab at the thick coat, the hooded man turned and struck out savagely. The boy detective reeled back from the heavy blow!

AN UNEXPECTED CHRISTMAS VISITOR!

"**D**RAKE'S late!" said Harry Wharton.

"And dinner's early!" remarked Bob Cherry.

"What about waiting till old Drake blows in?" asked Frank Nugent.

Billy Bunter jumped.

Harry Wharton & Co. of the Greyfriars Remove stood at the open doorway of Wharton Lodge, looking out into the snow.

Billy Bunter, who did not like open doors in December, or snow at any time, had parked his fat person in an armchair before the crackling log-fire in the hall.

It was Christmas Day—a snowy Christmas. A world of white lay outside. The Surrey lanes were deep in snow; hedges and trees gleamed with frost. Snowflakes whirled and tossed on the wind.

The chums of the Greyfriars Remove were looking down the snow-banked drive—for an expected guest.

Jack Drake, once of the Remove at Greyfriars, was booked to eat his Christmas dinner with his old school-

fellows. But dinner on Christmas Day was early—and Drake had not yet blown in.

Harry Wharton and Bob Cherry, Frank Nugent and Johnny Bull and Hurree Janset Ram Singh were all anxious to see their old pal. They were—amazing as it seemed to Billy Bunter—thinking more about Jack Drake than about dinner—though it was a Christmas dinner.

Bunter had seen the turkey—a noble bird. He had seen the Christmas pudding—a magnificent pudding! He had seen the mince pies—and, in fact, sampled them. They were as good as any heart—even Bunter's heart—could desire. The Owl of the Remove, as he sat before the leaping fire, saw pictures in the blaze—pictures of turkey, of Christmas pudding, and of mince pies!

Counting the minutes till dinner, the fat Owl was enjoying the pleasures of anticipation.

But Bunter jumped at Frank Nugent's suggestion that dinner should wait for Jack Drake. He bounded to his feet, stared round over the high back of the chair, and squeaked in alarm:

"I say, you fellows——"

Bob Cherry glanced round.

"Hallo, hallo, hallo, old fat man! Ain't you asleep?"

"No!" hooted Bunter.

"But you're not eating!" said Bob.

"What?"

"You're always one or the other! Forgotten that it's holiday-time, or what?"

"Yah! Look here, we're not going to wait dinner for Drake!" exclaimed Billy Bunter warmly. "Has Nugent gone mad?"

"Oh, my hat!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Blessed if I see anything to cackle at! Have you fellows forgotten it's Christmas Day? We can't wait dinner! Blow Drake! Bother Drake! Bless Drake! Why, he may be hours late, in this weather. I expect he's had to walk from the station. May have been a railway accident in all this snow, and he may never get here at all——"

"What?" yelled the Famous Five.

"Well, you never know!" said Bunter, blinking at them through his big spectacles. "Suppose the train was derailed in the snow?"

"Shut up, you fat ass!" hooted Johnny Bull.

"Nice lot of fools you'd look, waiting dinner, if Drake has been carted off to a hospital, or something!" exclaimed Billy Bunter.

The Famous Five of Greyfriars gazed at the fat Owl.

"Or he may have been run over on the Wimford road!" continued Bunter. "If there's any cars out in this snow, they're pretty certain to skid. Or suppose he's tipped into a snow-drift and can't get out again? Fancy waiting dinner, if something like that's happened!"

"I suppose we mustn't slaughter Bunter on Christmas Day!" said Bob Cherry thoughtfully.

"The better the day, the better the deed!" suggested Johnny Bull. "Let's slaughter him!"

"The slaughterfulness, in the esteemed circumstances, is the proper caper!" agreed Hurree Jamset Ram Singh.

"Oh, really, you fellows——"
"Hallo, hallo, hallo! Here comes somebody!" exclaimed Bob Cherry; and the Famous Five turned their attention again to the world of white outside the open doorway, and the fat Owl was left to blink in unregarded indignation.

"Not Drake!" said Harry Wharton.

"Who the dickens——"
"Looks a bit like Father Christmas!"

"Poor old bean!"
Five pairs of eyes fixed curiously on the figure that came up the drive, shuffling through the snow.

It bore no resemblance to the visitor that Harry Wharton & Co. were expecting.

Jack Drake was a fellow of their own age. It was not very long since he had been a schoolboy like themselves, and had left Greyfriars School to enter the service of Ferrers Locke, the famous detective, as his assistant.

The Famous Five were specially keen to meet Drake again, not only on account of old friendship, but also because his chief, Ferrers Locke, was engaged on the search for their Form-master, Mr. Quelch, who had mysteriously disappeared shortly before the school broke up for the holidays. They hoped that Drake might have some news for them of their missing Form-master.

At the sight of somebody ploughing up the drive through the snow, they naturally expected to see Drake. No other visitor was expected at Wharton Lodge that day.

They stared at the approaching figure.

It was that of a man bent with years, with a beard as white as the snow about him, and a big bushy moustache, and heavy eyebrows, as white as his beard.

He carried a bag in one hand and a stick in the other, with which he prodded the snow as he advanced, to assist his faltering footsteps.

Who he was, and what he was, the schoolboys had no idea; but they had sympathetic hearts, and their sympathy went out to the poor old chap, plodding slowly and feebly through the snow.

"Some poor old bean down on his luck!" said Bob.

"Looks as if he could do with a Christmas dinner!" remarked Nugent.

"And he's jolly well going to have one, if he wants one!" said Harry Wharton. "I'll speak to my uncle."

Billy Bunter rolled across to the open doorway. He blinked at the approaching figure, and giggled.

"Oh crikey! What an old sketch!" he remarked.

"Shut up, ass—he'll hear you!" grunted Johnny Bull.

"Eh? What does it matter if he does?" asked Bunter. "I say, Wharton, you shouldn't let beggars come to the front door. Call out to him to go round to the back."

"Shut up!"
The old fellow came toddling on. He did not look quite like a beggar, though his flapping old coat certainly looked as if he was in hard luck. But whatever he was, Harry Wharton & Co. were prepared to give him kind words on Christmas Day. He reached the doorway at last, and touched his battered old hat to the juniors.

"Merry Christmas, young gentlemen!" he said, in a wheezy, cracked voice.

"Same to you, and hundreds of them!" said Bob Cherry affably.

**Thrill-Packed School and
Detective Adventure Yarn,
introducing HARRY
WHARTON & CO., of
GREYFRIARS, and JACK
DRAKE, Ferrers Locke's
clever boy assistant.**

"Come in and warm yourself by the fire!" said Harry.

"Your uncle will rag you, if you let that old sketch in here!" said Billy Bunter warmly.

"I think I know my uncle better than you do, Bunter—and if you don't shut up, I'll boot you!" said the captain of the Greyfriars Remove. "Come in, sir!"

"Sir!" sniggered Bunter.
"Sir" was an expression of respect to venerable age.

Harry Wharton, heedless of the aristocratic prejudices of the fat Owl, took the tottering old man's arm and led him into the hall.

The old man took off his hat, revealing a mop of white hair, white as his beard! How old he was, the juniors could not have guessed—but they would have put it down at seventy-five, at least. At seventy-five, any man, rich or poor, was entitled to the respect of youth, as the Famous Five realised, if William George Bunter did not.

Taking off his hat, the old man handed it to Bunter.

Bunter blinked at it through his big spectacles, in astonishment, and did not accept it.

"Wharrer you mean?" he ejaculated.

"Dear me! Have I made a mis-

take?" wheezed the old gentleman.

"Are you not the butler's boy?"
"The—the—the butler's boy!"

stuttered Bunter. "Why, you cheeky old ass——"
Bob Cherry, chuckling, took the hat. The venerable one stooped and warmed his hands at the glowing fire. Billy Bunter gave him a glare that almost cracked his spectacles.

Harry Wharton gave a last glance down the snowy drive. But Jack Drake was not in sight; and he closed the door, and the Famous Five gathered round that unexpected visitor at the fire.

THE LEG-PULLER!

COLONEL WHARTON came into the hall and started a little at the sight of the white-haired, white-bearded figure at the fire. He glanced very curiously at the venerable man.

"Who is this, Harry?" he asked.
Wharton coloured a little. He had followed a kind impulse in asking that shabby old man in to warm himself at the fire; and he hoped that his uncle would not disapprove.

"I—I don't know!" he stammered.
"I—I thought he looked rather cold——"

The old colonel stared at him for a moment, and then looked at the white-haired man again.

Billy Bunter gave a fat chuckle.
"I say, you fellows, perhaps it's the Old Man from Seringapatam!" he suggested.

"What?" exclaimed the colonel.
"Here comes an old man from Seringapatam——" chanted the humorous fat Owl.

"Silence, you stupid boy!" said Colonel Wharton, frowning. "My good man, please warm yourself at the fire, and I will see that a dinner is provided for you."

"Thank you, sir!" wheezed the white-bearded one. "Perhaps, sir, in return for their kindness the young gentlemen will permit me to tell their fortunes."

"What?" grunted the colonel. He very nearly said "Nonsense!"—having no use for fortune-telling or fortune-tellers. But he refrained—it was Christmas, and the old fellow looked very old and worn. "Um! Hem! If the boys like to amuse themselves——"

"Gammon!" said Billy Bunter. "As if anybody could tell fortunes!"
"Be silent, please!" snapped the colonel.

Colonel Wharton was, as a matter of fact, of Bunter's opinion. But he frowned the fat Owl into silence.

The white-bearded man blinked at Bunter, under his thick, white eyebrows that almost hid his eyes.

"I think I could surprise you, by telling your fortune, young sir," he wheezed. "If you will show me the palm of your hand——"

"He can't do that!" said Bob Cherry.

"Why couldn't I?" demanded Bunter.

"It couldn't be seen without a wash!"

"You silly chump!" roared Bunter. He rolled nearer the venerable fortune-teller, and held out a fat paw. "There you are! Bet you you can't tell me anything! It's all gammon! Perhaps you can tell me my name from my palm!" added Bunter, with a contemptuous sniff.

The old man bent over the fat palm, and scanned it intently.

Harry Wharton & Co. watched him curiously. They did not, of course, believe in fortune-telling, and they did not expect, most certainly, to hear the old man tell Bunter his name from the palm of his hand.

"Grunter!" said the old one, after a long survey of the grubby fat paw.

"Oh, my hat! Jolly near it!" grinned Bob Cherry.

"The nearfulness is terrific!"

"No—Bunter!" went on the old one. "Is not your name Bunter, sir?"

"Oh crikey!" gasped the fat Owl.

He blinked at the venerable one with his little round eyes almost bulging through his big, round spectacles. The man was an utter stranger to him. How did he know his name?

"I read here," wheezed on the old gentleman, "many things. You live in a great house—a vast mansion, with many servants—"

Billy Bunter's fat face cleared.

"That's right!" he said. "He's got that right, you fellows."

"Has he?" grinned Bob.

"I see here," resumed the fortune-teller, "a vast mansion—a stately butler—a groom of the chambers, and an immense number of liveried servants. I see motor-cars—a Rolls-Royce—a Mercedes—several others, with liveried chauffeurs. I see wealth in unlimited quantities."

Billy Bunter almost purred.

Bunter liked this. It was not, perhaps, quite correct. But Bunter lapped it up like milk!

"All this," continued the old man, "exists"—he paused a moment—"entirely in your imagination, young sir—"

"What?" howled Bunter.

"Ha, ha, ha!" yelled the Famous Five, and even the bronzed old colonel grinned at that unexpected termination of what the fortune-teller was reading in Bunter's fat palm.

The fat Owl snatched his paw away, with a snort of angry disdain.

"Had enough, Bunter?" chuckled Bob Cherry. "The old bean's pretty good at it, isn't he?"

"Yah!" snorted Bunter.

Harry Wharton & Co. looked at the white-bearded old fellow with keener interest. In point of fact, he had hit the right nail on the head with regard to Bunter, whether it was accident or by occult powers. There was no doubt that Bunter Court and its magnificence existed entirely in the fat Owl's fertile imagination.

"One of you young gentlemen—" wheezed the ancient fortune-teller.

"Here goes!" said Harry Wharton, with a smile, and he held out a hand for inspection.

The eyes under the thick white eyebrows—which were very keen—fixed

on the palm of the captain of the Greyfriars Remove.

"I read here"—he wheezed—"yes, I read—you are a schoolboy—you are captain of your Form at school."

"Oh gum!" ejaculated Bob Cherry, while the other fellows stared.

How on earth that old bean knew that Harry Wharton was captain of the Remove at Greyfriars School was beyond their guessing.

"That's right!" said Harry. "Though I'm blessed if I see how you know—unless there's something in palm-reading. Anything else?"

"Your name is—let me see—Wharton—the same name as the military gentleman standing here, who is your uncle—is that correct?"

"Quite," said Harry, in utter wonder.

Colonel Wharton stepped a little nearer, his eyes fixed intently on the fortune-teller. He was as astonished as the juniors, for the moment. But he scanned the venerable face with scrutinising eyes, something like suspicion dawning in his own. But he said nothing.

"Go it!" said Bob Cherry, breathlessly interested by this time. "Tell us some more!"

"Yes, rather!" said Johnny Bull. "This is getting quite uncanny! It beats the ghost of the moat house!"

"Can you tell me anything more?" asked Harry.

"I think so! Let me see! I see the shadow of a mystery here—there has been some strange, unaccountable happening. A disappearance."

"Oh crumbs!" exclaimed Nugent.

The old man, his head bent over Wharton's outstretched palm, went on, mumbling in his beard.

"A friend—no—a relative—no—ah! I have it now! Your schoolmaster! Your schoolmaster has strangely disappeared. What else do I see? Yes! He has been kidnapped!"

"Can you beat it?" gasped Bob Cherry.

Harry Wharton stood dumb with astonishment. Even had he believed in palm-reading, which he certainly did not, he would not have expected a palmist to read such things in his palm. But the old man's words obviously referred to Mr. Quelch, the master of the Remove, who had been kidnapped and had disappeared from all knowledge.

"This beats Banagher!" said Frank Nugent.

"The beatfulness is terrific!" declared Hurree Jamsset Ram Singh, his dark eyes fixed in wonder on the venerable face.

"I say, tell us where Quelch is!" exclaimed Bob. "If you can read all that in Wharton's palm, have a shot at the rest!"

"That is beyond my powers, sir!" wheezed the old man. "I can only tell you that there is a good chance of the missing man being discovered, as he is being sought after by—let me see—a famous detective."

"Oh, scissors!" said Bob.

"Anything else?" gasped Wharton.

"Yes, yes! You are expecting a visitor to-day—a former school-fellow. He is late. His name is—let me see—Duck—no, Drake! He is connected with the famous detective

who is searching for your missing schoolmaster!"

The juniors fairly gasped. Billy Bunter goggled through his spectacles. The old colonel still stood silent, scanning the venerable face; but his lips were twitching now in a smile.

"Go on!" gasped Bob Cherry. "Tell us why Drake's late, if you know all about it. That too much for you?"

"Not at all, young sir!" wheezed the old fortune-teller. "Master Drake now follows a very serious occupation—he is a detective like his master; but he has not forgotten schoolboy days, and schoolboy larks! He is late because he has planned a practical joke on his friends here."

"Oh! Has he?" grinned Bob. "Then we'll jolly well be ready for old Drake, and he won't get by with it!"

"But look here, it's all rot!" exclaimed Johnny Bull. "All that can't be read in a fellow's palm!"

"The old bean seems to be reading it there!" said Nugent. "He's been right about a lot of things!"

"Yes, but—"

"What sort of a jape is Drake pulling off?" asked Bob.

He almost believed in palm-reading, by this time!

"Let me see—yes, I see it all! Master Drake will enter the building without anyone here being aware that he has come—"

"Will he, by Jove?" said Harry Wharton.

"Yes, yes! Suddenly he will be standing in your midst, and no one will know how he came!" said the fortune-teller.

"Well," said Johnny Bull, "if old Drake gets by with that one I pass it up to him!"

"Blessed if I see how he's going to do it!" said Nugent.

Colonel Wharton coughed.

"Perhaps I can make a suggestion," he said. "Young Drake, from what I have heard, is an adept pupil of Ferrers Locke, the famous detective. He has learned from his master a remarkable skill in disguise. Is not that so?"

"That's so, uncle," said Harry; "but—"

"And so," said the colonel, stepping quickly towards the venerable fortune-teller, "look!"

To the amazement of the school-boys, he suddenly grasped the venerable one's long white beard. To their further astonishment, that beard came off in his grasp—accompanied by the bushy white moustache, the shaggy white eyebrows, and the mop of venerable white hair! A face was revealed that looked anything but seventy-five years old!

Harry Wharton & Co. gazed at that unexpected face for a moment in sheer stupefaction.

Then there was a yell:

"Drake!"

A MERRY CHRISTMAS!

JACK DRAKE grinned. His cheery, handsome face and close-cropped, dark hair were revealed without disguise, now

that that venerable crop was gone. Colonel Wharton stood with the white hair in his hand, laughing. The old military gentleman could enjoy a joke; and no doubt he was pleased, also, at having penetrated the disguise which had completely baffled the fellows who knew Jack Drake as well as they knew one another.

"Drake!" gasped Bob.

"Did-dod-dud-Drake!" stuttered Johnny Bull.

"I say, you fellows, it's that ass Drake pulling our legs!" squeaked Billy Bunter.

"The esteemed and ridiculous Drake——"

"Drake, you ass!" gasped Harry Wharton. "You took us all in——"

"All except Colonel Wharton!" said Drake, laughing. "I hope, sir, you will excuse this little joke—just a Christmas lark, sir! But I'm dashed if I know how you spotted me!"

"There were one or two suspicious circumstances," said the colonel, smiling. "You knew altogether too much for a fortune-teller, my boy! But it was very well done—very well done indeed!"

"Nothing in it!" said Billy Bunter, shaking his head. "I could do it on the back of my neck! I should have spotted you in another minute, Drake!"

"You are a young ass, Bunter!" said Colonel Wharton gruffly. He threw down the disguise on a table and shook hands with Drake. "I am very glad to see you, my boy! Harry will take you to your room. Dinner will be served in ten minutes."

The colonel walked out of the hall, Billy Bunter casting an indignant blink after him.

"I say, you fellows, what is the old fossil shirty about?" he asked.

"The who?" ejaculated Harry Wharton.

"I mean your uncle——"

"If you mean my uncle, you fat ass, you'd better say my uncle!" said Harry. "Don't keep on asking me to kick you on Christmas Day!"

"Oh, really, Wharton——"

Jack Drake threw off the voluminous old tattered coat and kicked off the roomy old boots. His own garb was underneath.

The Famous Five surrounded him, all shaking his hands, or clapping his shoulders, together. There was no doubt that they were all glad to see their old comrade of Greyfriars again.

"You don't mind my pulling your leg, old beans?" asked Drake, smiling.

"Not at all, fathead!" said Bob.

"You never pulled my leg!" grunted Billy Bunter. "I jolly well had you tabbed from the start! I was just playing up, that's all! I jolly well knew you all the time!"

"Ass!" said Johnny Bull.

"Nothing at all in it!" said Bunter. "Think I couldn't do it—better than Drake, too? Rats!"

Jack Drake laughed.

"Same old Bunter!" he said.

"There's something I wanted to ask you, Bunter——"

"Something about detective

work?" asked Bunter. "Go ahead! I don't mind helping you!"

"Oh, my hat! No. I was going to ask you whether your postal order's come yet——"

"What?"

"The one you were expecting when I was at Greyfriars!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" yelled the Famous Five.

"Look here——" roared Bunter.

"Come on, Drake, old man!" said Harry Wharton, laughing. "We'll see you to your room. But how the dickens did you get into those things—you haven't travelled here got up as the Old Man from Seringapatam, I suppose?"

Jack Drake chuckled.

"No; I stopped at the hut in the park as I came to fix up that outfit," he answered. He opened his bag and slipped the disguise into it. "It was too bad to pull your leg—but I never could resist a jape! Thanks awfully for your kind hospitality to a venerable old fortune-teller!"

"You spoofing ass—come on!"

The Famous Five marched Jack Drake off up the staircase.

Billy Bunter, left in the hall, snorted.

The chums of the Remove did not in the least mind that leg-pulling episode; in fact, they enjoyed the joke, and they greatly admired Jack Drake's skill in disguise and in playing a part. Billy Bunter didn't!

Billy Bunter's idea was that the fellows were making altogether too much fuss of Drake; they never, for some reason unknown to Bunter, thought of making such a fuss of him! And he was incomparably a nicer fellow than Drake—Bunter knew that, though it was hidden from others!

As for Drake's skill in disguise, Bunter sniffed at the idea! He had not exactly spotted Drake, but he had—he was sure—been just going to when the colonel did! It was one of Bunter's happy ways to fancy that he could do anything and everything quite as well as any other fellow—or rather better! Had Bunter been playing that part the old colonel would never have spotted him—Bunter was sure of that!

So what was all the fuss about? Nothing! And as all the fuss was about nothing, Bunter expressed his feelings by a contemptuous snort!

But the boom of a gong caused the frown to fade from Billy Bunter's fat face, like the clouds clearing off before the effulgence of the noonday sun!

The gong meant dinner—and dinner meant turkey, Christmas pudding, mince pies, and all sorts of other agreeable things! Vast as was Billy Bunter's storage space, he was going to fill it to capacity!

Bunter smiled!

Harry Wharton & Co. came trooping down the stairs in a cheery crowd. They marched Jack Drake into the dining-room, Billy Bunter rolling on behind. There Aunt Amy gave Drake a pleasant greeting, and under shaded lights a happy party sat down to an excellent dinner.

Wells, the butler, and his assistants hovered efficiently, and Billy Bunter, at least, gave them plenty to do.

Before dinner Billy Bunter had been rather disgruntled. But there was a great difference between before taking and after taking.

The turkey was a dream! It was, in fact, a dream from which Billy Bunter was unwilling to wake up! But Christmas pudding followed—and the Christmas pudding was another dream—a really ecstatic one!

That pudding was so delicious that Bunter had hardly room for a dozen mince pies. But he did his best!

It was against Bunter's principles to leave anything uneaten on a table if he could help it! On this occasion he couldn't help it! A fellow could only do his best—and that Bunter did!

When they pulled crackers after dinner Bunter had barely energy enough left to pull! But he adorned his fat head with a paper helmet, and his fat face beamed under it almost beatifically. But when at last he stirred, the fat Owl leaned for support on the back of a chair.

"I say, you fellows!" he squeaked.

"Tired?" asked Jack Drake sympathetically. Really, Bunter's exertions might have made a strong man tired.

"I say, you might give a chap a hand!" breathed Bunter. He breathed with difficulty. "I—I feel—I—I mean to say, I—I—I feel rather sort of—if you know what I mean——"

"Quite!" said Harry, laughing. "All hands on deck!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Kind hands piloted the stuffed Owl out into the hall, where he sank into a deep armchair before the fire. A few minutes later, a sound was heard, as if the German raiders had paid a Christmas visit, and had been greeted with heavy gunfire. But it was not so bad as that—it was only Billy Bunter snoring!

SHIRTY!

"ASK Drake what he thinks!" grinned Johnny Bull.

"Oh rats!" grunted Bob Cherry with an expressive snort.

Jack Drake glanced round at the two of them, rather in surprise.

It was Boxing Day, and the Famous Five and their old school-fellow were taking a ramble in the frozen park. The snow had ceased to fall, but the earth was thickly carpeted with white, in which their footsteps left deep prints as they tramped cheerily in the keen wintry wind.

Drake was walking with Harry Wharton, and they were talking on the subject of Mr. Quelch, the kidnapped Remove master. But Drake had no news to give on that subject. He knew no more than Wharton—that Ferrers Locke had taken up the case of the kidnapped schoolmaster—but whether any clue had yet been found to the vanished man he did not know.

But they ceased to discuss Mr.

Quelch as Bob Cherry's rather annoyed grunt reached them.

Bob's face was a little flushed.

"Ask Drake what?" inquired Ferrers Locke's assistant, glancing from one to the other.

"Oh, nothing!" grunted Bob. "Only Johnny talking out of the back of his neck—as usual!"

"Now, don't get shirty, old man!" admonished Johnny Bull.

"Who's getting shirty?" roared Bob.

"Ain't you?"

"Well, a burbling ass is enough to make any fellow shirty!" said Bob Cherry. "Why can't you leave off burbling for a change?"

"Speech is silvery, my esteemed Johnny!" remarked Hurrec Jamset Ram Singh. "But silence is the bird in hand that goes longest to the bush, as the English proverb remarks!"

"Oh, all right!" said Johnny. "But I'd like Drake to hear Bob's ghost story, and tell us what he thinks of it!"

"A ghost story!" repeated Drake. "Anybody been seeing ghosts?"

"Bob has," grinned Johnny, "or thinks he has, at least!"

Bob's eyes glinted.

"I've told you fellows what happened at the moat house the other night," he said. "I don't believe it was a ghost—that's rot! But I can't make it out—and you can't, either! And I'm not going to jaw about it!"

With which Bob Cherry quickened his pace and tramped on ahead of the party, with his hands driven deep into his overcoat pockets and a knitted brow.

Hurrec Jamset Ram Singh cut quickly after him and rejoined him.

Jack Drake's face was quite grave.

"You fellows aren't ragging, surely?" he asked. "I thought this was a lute with never a rift in it!"

"Johnny's rather an ass!" explained Nugent.

"Why not spin Drake the yarn and see what he thinks?" said Johnny Bull. "Being a giddy detective, he may be able to make out the jolly old mystery—if any!"

"Not a bad idea," said Harry Wharton. "Drake might like a squint at the haunted house. It's a ripping morning for a walk, and it's only half a mile from here, Drake!"

"A haunted house!" said Drake. "What could be better at Christmas-time? I'm on to this! Spin the yarn! What place is it?"

"An old moat house, in chancery now," explained Wharton. "Nobody has lived there for donkey's years, and people generally steer clear of it on account of its reputation. There was a jolly old miser once who seems to have come to a sticky end on account of his buried hoard—and ever since, he goes round at night with a ghostly lantern, shaking a spectral bunch of keys, looking for that jolly old hoard!"

"Oh gum!" said Drake. "What a tale!"

"People have seen the ghostly light and heard the rattling of the phantom keys!" said Harry, with a smile.

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"Especially when they were coming home late at night from the Red Cow or the Black Bull?" asked Drake.

Harry Wharton laughed.

"Yes, probably! But Bunter took shelter in the place out of a snow-storm, and saw the light and heard the keys!"

"He would!" agreed Jack Drake. "Bunter's the sort of funky ass to see or hear anything!"

"Only——" said Harry, "Bob thinks so, too!"

"Bob does?" asked Drake blankly. "That's a horse of quite another colour! What makes Bob think so?"

"Well, he went into the moat house to look round," said Harry. "Inky and I were with him, but he went in alone."

"Why?" asked Drake.

"Well, as it happened, Mr. Lamb turned up on the spot and Inky and I were speaking to him—while Bob rooted about the moat house," explained Harry.

"Who's Mr. Lamb?"

"Oh, I forgot—of course, you don't know the Pet Lamb!" said Harry. "He's the art master of Greyfriars—a harmless little ass! He came in old Woosey's place—Woosey was there in your time. Well, Quelch being away, and Lamb being a sort of handy man, he took the Remove as Form-master, in Quelch's absence, so we saw a lot of him!"

"I see," assented Drake. "And what was Mr. Lamb doing around the haunted house?"

"He wasn't at the moat house—at a little distance, minding a van, as he told us, while the van man went to Wimford for grub. He's a good-natured little ass—rather a weedy specimen—and being tired from a walk, the van man let him sit and rest in the van," explained Harry. "Spotting him there, we had a chat with him, while Bob rooted over the moat house."

"And he saw——"

"Nothing. But he heard, he told us, the sound of the ghostly keys rattling!" said Harry, smiling.

"Over his head!" grinned Johnny Bull. "Phantom sound sort of floating around in the atmosphere!"

Frank Nugent laughed. But Drake did not laugh; his face was very keen and curious.

"Is that the lot?" he asked.

"Not at all," said Harry ruefully. "Next act was, that fathead Johnny chipped Bob about it, and Bob cleared off on his own, by night, to the moat house, just to show that he didn't funk it!"

"Well, that was plucky enough!" said Drake. "Lots of fellows wouldn't have liked it, ghost or no ghost. Did anything happen?"

"Yes. He found footprints in the snow, leading down steps into a sort of underground passage that led nowhere!"

"Ghost's, you know!" grinned Johnny. "Even Bob doesn't think it likely that a man would go there in a snowstorm, just to walk down some steps that led nowhere and come up again. But if it was a ghost, that's all right—ghosts will do any old thing!"

"Anything more?" asked Drake.

"You bet!" said Johnny, still grinning. "Bob dropped his light, groped around in the dark, stumbled over something, and knocked his head. He thinks that some mysterious johnny banged him on the head and stunned him!"

"Nobody was seen?"

"Only the man who found him and picked him up," said Harry. "Bob's quite certain that he touched somebody in the dark, and that that somebody knocked him on the head and stunned him. But——"

"But——" murmured Nugent.

"From what you've said, it sounds as if some sportsman is hanging about the place playing ghost!" said Drake. "Mightn't Bob have run into that sportsman and got a crack on the nut?"

"Well, yes. But—but why should anybody play ghost there? It's a lonely spot—half a mile from here. Hardly a soul goes near the place in the winter. A man would be in want of something to do, I should think, if he hung about such a place to scare people who might not come by for a week at a time!"

"That's not likely, of course," said Drake. "But—— Bunter's a silly ass, and Bob isn't! If Bob says he heard the phantom keys, he heard them!"

"The wind!" said Nugent. "You see, the place is a roofless ruin, with ivy growing all over it—and the wind plays tricks in such places in the winter!"

Drake shook his head.

"If Bob fancied that, he never fancied the footprints or the crack on the nut!" he said. "Somebody was there!"

"You don't think Bob tumbled over in the dark and knocked his head—and fancied the rest?" asked Harry dubiously.

"He might have, of course. But he——" Drake shook his head again. "If anybody had a motive for frightening people away from the place, that would be more likely."

"But nobody could have!" said Nugent.

"My dear chap, it's all moonshine!" said Johnny Bull. "A fellow gets a bit nervy alone in the dark in a place said to be haunted. There's the whole thing in a nutshell—that's sense!"

"You see, Bob fancied that that giddy ghostly clink floated around in the air over his poor old head!" said Nugent. "It wants some believing. We all went there the next day, while poor old Bob was resting his nut—but there was nothing doing—no ghosts around."

"The sportsman might not risk it with a crowd on the spot," said Drake. "But, look here, I'm fearfully interested in that ghostly bunch of keys rattling over a fellow's napper. Let's trot across to the place and give it the once-over!"

"Bob, old man!" Harry Wharton called to the two juniors ahead on the path in the park. "Inky! We're going to the moat house. Coming?"

Bob looked round.

"No!" he answered curtly. "I'm

going on the lake. Come and get your skates, Inky!"

"Bob's got his back up," said Johnny Bull. "I don't see why—he can't expect fellows to believe ghost stories. Phantom bunches of keys floating around in the air—bow-wow! But old Bob's shirty about it!"

"Well, let's go!" said Drake. "I'm really curious—I'd like to spot the ghost, if he's at home!"

And the juniors left the park by a gate on the Wimford road, and walked down to Redgate Lane, where the old moat house lay; while Bob Cherry and Hurrec Jamset Ram

Not once in a week did anyone chance by the moat house in the depth of winter. The idea of some unknown person hanging about there all the time, to play ghost and scare such extremely rare visitors, seemed absurd to them.

It was, in fact, unthinkable—unless some person had some particular motive for scaring away visitors to the moat house. And who could, and why?

So it was rather a surprise to find Ferrers Locke's assistant taking the matter so seriously. Judging by Drake's look, he was taking a view

up from it at the group of schoolboys in the lane. There was a far from agreeable expression on the sharp, rat-like face of the man in the van.

Drake eyed him very keenly and curiously.

"You told me this was a fearfully lonely spot!" he remarked. "Has that sportsman been here long?"

"He was camped here before we came home for the holidays," answered Harry. He smiled. "He's not the ghost merchant, Drake! When Bob heard the ghostly keys on his first visit we were speaking to that man at a distance from the



The white-haired figure in the armchair took a large bite at the jam tart and chewed happily—for one split second! Then he emitted a fearful yell that awoke the echoes of Wharton Lodge.
"Yurrrroooogh!"

Singh, on their skates, disported themselves on the frozen lake. And if Bob Cherry was shirty, he soon forgot it, and looked as merry and bright as ever as he whizzed on the glistening ice.

JACK DRAKE INVESTIGATES!

JACK DRAKE'S face was quietly keen as he stopped at the gap in the old wall in Redgate Lane and surveyed the ruined moat house.

Wharton and Nugent were rather puzzled—Johnny Bull amused. None of the three could swallow the amazing story Bob had told of his visit to the haunted house. Bob, of course, believed what he said; but his comrades could not help putting down a great deal of it to an excited fancy in the darkness and solitude.

quite different from that of the Co. Possibly the keen mind of the boy detective, trained under a master like Ferrers Locke, judged more accurately than the more careless minds of the schoolboys. Anyhow, it was clear that Drake was very keen to look into this.

The boy from Baker Street gazed at the roofless old moat house, its windowless and doorless apertures, its shattered old walls crowned with ridges of snow—and the old moat, choked with rubble buried in snow, that surrounded it.

Then he glanced to the right of the old building, where a caravan stood, banked over its wheels with snow.

The caravan door was open, and on the step sat a man in a woollen pull-over and muffler, smoking a pipe, reading a newspaper—and glancing

place, down the lane. He couldn't have been playing ghost."

"He's alone here?"

"Oh, yes! I've never seen a soul else about here, except Mr. Lamb that day when we ran into him."

"Might be in touch with another of his own kidney, all the same!" said Drake. "If he lives on the spot, he ought to know something about the moat house and what happens there. I see the man's on the telephone—he's a fixture here."

"Looks like it! He's the man who picked Bob up the night he got that crack on the head!" said Harry. "He carried him into his van till he came round, and looked after him."

"Very kind of him!" said Drake. "He doesn't look a kind man."

"Well, Bob would have frozen,
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otherwise, lying in the snow—even a tough guy like that chap wouldn't stand for that, I suppose," said Harry. "And he got a tip from Bob for helping him."

Drake nodded.

"Well, let's push on!" he said. "As there's four of us, I don't suppose we shall have any phantom antics going on—too risky with a crowd. What one didn't spot, another would!"

The four juniors tramped across the snow to the moat.

The man sitting on the van watched them over his newspaper with sharp, watchful, rat-like eyes. But he made no movement, though it was quite easy to see that he did not like their presence. He did not disguise that fact at all.

They scrambled over the snowy rubble in the moat, and crossed the old courtyard to the dismantled doorway of the ruined mansion. Within, the snow was almost as thick as without.

Drake's keen eyes scanned the white carpet. But there were no footprints to be seen in the snow. He gave a nod, as if in answer to an unspoken thought.

Wharton and Nugent exchanged a smiling glance.

"Cough it up, Mister Detective!" said Frank.

"What?" asked Drake, laughing.

"The latest deduction! Think we can't see that you've got something in your Baker Street nut?"

"I was just thinking that it snowed till dawn," said Drake.

"What about that?"

"No footprints to be seen! So if anybody roots about here, he roots about at night. Since dawn he would have left tracks."

Johnny Bull chuckled.

"But Bunter's visit, and Bob's first visit, were in the daylight, and they both heard the spook keys!" he said.

"Quite!" assented Drake. "In the daylight they were seen coming, and the ghost gave them special attention. But when he's here on business, his ghostship rambles about after dark and before daylight."

"Are you going to tell us that you swallow Bob's yarn?"

"Whole!" said Drake.

"Oh, my hat!"

They moved on across the roofless old hall to the steps under the arched doorway at the back that led downwards.

"Bob went down here, from what he told us," said Harry. "We've been down since—nothing but an old passage, almost blocked up with masonry that rolled down when the building fell to pieces. Going down?"

"Yes, rather!"

"We ought to have brought a light!" said Frank.

Drake smiled, and took a flash-lamp from his pocket.

Nugent chuckled.

"I forgot—these jolly old detectives are always ready for business!" he said. "Lead, friendly light!"

Jack Drake led the way down the steps, the three juniors following him. Dark as a pit, the place looked gloomy and unattractive enough. A

good deal of snow had tumbled down the steps, and they had to tread warily.

At the foot they stood in an arched passage, with walls of solid stone blocks: part of the massive foundations of the ancient moat house. They had to move carefully along the passage, for it was blocked with masses of masonry of all sizes; one mass, which stood close to the old stone wall, being so huge and heavy that only a very powerful man could have shifted it. Those heavy masses must have rolled down the steps when the old walls collapsed more than a century ago.

Drake flashed the light round the dark passage, buried in gloom. There was nothing to be seen, but chilly stone, reeking damp, and shattered masonry; and they returned at last to the upper regions.

There, they stood in the old hall again, and three of them, with smiling faces, regarded the fourth inquiringly. So far they had seen and heard nothing to substantiate Bob Cherry's strange story; and the three juniors waited for Drake to speak—wondering whether he might possibly have spotted something that had escaped them.

Drake stood looking about him, upward. He scanned the snowy tops of the broken walls, open to the sky. All the upper floors of the building were long since gone.

Johnny Bull winked at Wharton and Nugent.

"Nobody was sitting up there, ringing the changes on the jolly old keys, Drake!" he remarked. "Bob would have spotted him."

"But he heard the sound overhead!" said Drake.

"He fancied so!" grinned Johnny. "Jolly old spook floating about on the winter wind, what?"

"There's a thumping lot of rubbish about here, and a lot of ivy grown over it," remarked Drake. "Lots of cover, if a fellow wanted it."

"Not up above, where Bob heard the keys clanging!" said Johnny. "Must have been a ghost—only ghosts can float about in the atmosphere."

Drake smiled.

"Well, let's look for a bit of string!" he said.

Three juniors jumped, as if moved by the same spring. They blinked at the boy from Baker Street.

"A—a whatter?" gasped Nugent.

"A bit of string!" said Johnny Bull dazedly.

"Drake, old man, are you trying to pull our leg, or what?" exclaimed Harry Wharton. "What the thump do you mean by a bit of string?"

"Exactly what I say—a bit of string!" answered Drake. "My idea is that if we root about here long enough we shall find a bit of string. You fellows stick here and leave it to me."

Drake moved away among the masses of frosty masonry that cumbered the old hall, leaving the three blinking.

"Is he potty?" asked Johnny Bull.

"Hardly!" said Harry. "But—"

"Well, if he means anything, don't ask me what he means!" grunted

Johnny. "Sounds like bats in the belfry to me!"

Lost in wonder, the three school-boys stood where they were and watched Ferrers Locke's assistant appearing and reappearing among the masses of rubbish and rubble in the wide old hall. Five minutes—ten minutes—a quarter of an hour—passed, and still Drake did not return to them, and they waited in growing wonder, half-suspicious, remembering his leg-pulling proclivities, that he was pulling their leg.

But suddenly a call came from Drake.

"This way, you fellows!"

They ran to him. He was standing, almost hidden from sight, between a high mass of broken masonry and the highest remnant of the shattered wall. Over the wall, crusted with snow, grew a vast mass of tough old ivy. Drake had thrust his hand into the ivy and, to the utter amazement of the juniors, he drew out a thin cord.

They gazed at it, stupefied.

How the cord came there they could not begin to guess. Why Drake attached any importance to it, they could guess still less.

"That's the bit of string!" grinned Drake. "I fancied I should spot it if I looked—after what you told me Bob heard—"

"But what—what—?" stuttered Wharton.

"Listen!"

Drake jerked at the string. And suddenly, in the frozen silence of the old moat house, was heard a strange, uncanny sound!

Clink, clink, clink!

It was the clinking of the ghostly keys!

DRAKE'S DISCOVERY!

"OH!" gasped Harry Wharton. Frank Nugent caught his breath.

"What?" he stuttered.

Clink, clink, clink!

Johnny Bull stood staring up at the high top of the wall, with an extraordinary expression on his face.

Over the heads of the juniors, as if borne on the wailing wind, sounded the cerie clink, clink of iron—of heavy old keys in a bunch clinking together! What Bob Cherry had heard, his chums now heard—though with Drake pulling the cord like a bell-rope, they understood what Bob had not known or suspected.

The top of that old wall was thirty or forty feet up. Great masses of ivy clustered on it, and amid those masses of frosty ivy, hidden from sight, it was plain that a bunch of iron keys hung—bunched loosely together, so that they would clink when the cord was jerked.

Someone, at some time, had clambered up on that high wall and fastened the hidden keys there—leaving the cord trailing down in the ivy, hidden from sight. To produce the uncanny clinking that seemed to float ghost-like on the wind, it was only necessary to jerk the string.

"Oh!" gasped Wharton again.

"An easy one—what?" grinned Drake.

"We never guessed—Bob never did—" muttered Nugent.

"Oh gum!" said Johnny Bull. Johnny's face was growing redder and redder. This was the imaginary sound, floating on the wind, about which he had chipped Bob. Now he had heard it himself! It was rather disconcerting for Johnny!

"Pretty cute!" said Drake. He pushed the cord back out of sight into the thin ivy. "No need for the ghost-man to carry the bunch of keys about with him—and risk having them spotted, if somebody got suspicious! Just a jerk on that string—keeping doggo in that dark corner.

nut—it wasn't fancy!" stammered Nugent.

"He did!" agreed Drake. "He ran into the man in the dark and grabbed him, and the man knocked him out—before old Bob had a chance of finding out who he was! He didn't want to be known, naturally!"

"Oh gum!" repeated Johnny Bull. His face was crimson now. "I—I say, let's get back! I—I want to speak to Bob."

"Let's!" agreed Drake.

"Are you going to leave that where it is?" asked Nugent. "Why not lug it down and put an end to the rotten trick?"

Drake shook his head.

"No fear!" he said quietly. "We're not going to let that sportsman

this desolate place? What sort of thing could possibly be going on?"

"That's a riddle—as yet. I don't get it, or begin to get it!" answered Drake frankly. "I shouldn't wonder if that sportsman at the caravan could tell us—but he's not likely to! He can't be enjoying life in such a place as this—he's got some reason for sticking there!"

"Well, he camps on a place like this without paying rent or rates," said Harry. "People sometimes live in caravans for that reason."

"Oh, quite—but they don't generally pick such a spot as this—especially in the winter. And he's the man who picked Bob up after he was knocked on the head, you've told me," added Drake. "How did he

DEAR SIRs,—I guess you gotta do something about this. Yesterday I was in Courtfield and bought a Christmas card at your store, which set me back two cents—a penny in your coin. When I got it back here I found it marked in plain pencil— $\frac{1}{2}$ d. So I reckon you owe me $\frac{1}{2}$ d., and I'll mention I want it by return, together with $1\frac{1}{2}$ d. for the stamp on this letter, making 2d. in all.—Yours, F. T. FISH.

Dear Sir,—We are in receipt of your favour of yesterday's date, but regret we have no knowledge of the transaction to which you refer. If you will be good enough to return the card in question, the matter shall be investigated at once.—Yours faithfully, CHUNKLEY'S STORES.

Dear Sirs,—What the heck! You figure to cinch the card as well as the cent? Forget it. That card stays right here. And I'll mention it's $3\frac{1}{2}$ d. you owe me now—two letters and a $\frac{1}{2}$ d. swindled. Get a move on, you ginks.—Yours, F. T. FISH.

Dear Sir,—In reply to your favour of yesterday, we must repeat that we cannot entertain any claim for a refund unless the goods in question are produced for our inspection. Perhaps you would care to call on us with the card?—Yours faithfully, CHUNKLEY'S STORES.

Fishy's Christmas Card!

(Letters exchanged between Fisher T. Fish, of Greyfriars, and Chunkley's Stores, Courtfield.)

Dear Sirs,—I guess I ain't spending 8d. bus fare just to tote a pesky card along for you to peek at. Here's the ornery card, and I reckon I want it back pronto by return, with a remittance for 5d. Get busy, big boy.—Yours, F. T. FISH.

Dear Sir,—We are in receipt of your further communication, enclosing Christmas card, which is undoubtedly one of our halfpenny stock; but we cannot entertain your claim for a refund unless you produce the receipted bill for the over-payment. Perhaps you will let us have this, when the matter can be referred to our Accounts Department for adjustment.—Yours faithfully, CHUNKLEY'S STORES.

Dear Sirs,—Carry me home to die! Don't any of you understand business in this pesky island? Here's the bill—what about my 6 $\frac{1}{2}$ d.? Start moving, will you?—Yours, F. T. FISH.

Dear Sir,—We have to thank you for the bill you sent us in your last letter, but we note this is for the sum of 3d. Were there more articles purchased at the time? Awaiting the favour of your esteemed remarks.—Yours faith-

fully, CHUNKLEY'S STORES.

Dear Sirs,—Does this get my goat? What the Sam Smith do you guys figure you're playing at?

D'you want me to shake the greenbacks outa Chunkley's trousers pockets? The extra 2d. was for two 1d. cards—genuine ones. Musta been a mistake. Now will you part up my 8d.?—Yours, F. T. FISH.

Dear Sir,—We are obliged to you for your explanation of the additional payment, but in order to proceed with the claim it is necessary for us to inspect the other two cards. May we ask you to let us have these in due course, when the matter can be adjusted.—Yours faithfully, CHUNKLEY'S STORES.

Dear Sirs,—You ornery boneheads! You slabsided ginks! Here's the pesky cards. Now stop snootering and whack out my 9 $\frac{1}{2}$ d.—F. T. FISH.

Dear Sir,—We have now investigated this matter and decided to allow your claim. We have, therefore, much pleasure in enclosing (per stamp) the sum of one halfpenny, and shall be glad if you will sign and return the attached receipt without delay. The additional 9d. postage we cannot refund, as we do not admit liability in this respect.—Yours faithfully, CHUNKLEY'S STORES.

(Utter collapse of Fisher T. Fish.)

And no end of a ghostly effect, floating over a fellow's head!"

"Oh!" said Wharton again.

"When there's half a gale of wind, I dare say it shakes that bush of ivy and clicks the keys without anybody being here at all to touch the string!" went on Drake. "But when a visitor is seen arriving, the ghost-man lurks round and gives a jerk if necessary—see?"

Harry Wharton drew a deep breath.

"That rotten trickery settles it!" he said. "There is some man playing ghost here—but what the dickens for?"

"Not for fun!" said Drake. "It's far from funny to hang round this frozen place in December!"

"Then—then—as it's certain that somebody hangs about here playing ghost, Bob did get that crack on the

know we've spotted his game. We're going to find out what his game is—you can bet that it's something that won't bear the light!"

"But what—?" said Harry blankly.

"Ask me another!" smiled Drake. "I can't begin to imagine—at present. I don't think Ferrers Locke could answer that question yet! But we've got this clear—somebody unknown wants to keep everybody and anybody from nosing into this old ruin. I dare say dozens of people who have looked about the place have been scared off. Only one possible reason—there's something going on here that people are not wanted to find out!"

"But—that makes it more mysterious than ever!" said Nugent. "How could anything be going on in

know Bob was there at all, on a dark night, at a distance?"

"He heard him cry out when he got the knock—" answered Harry. "At least, he said so."

"Perhaps—or he may have been on the spot and picked poor old Bob up after knocking him on the nut!" said Drake.

"Oh!" gasped Nugent.

"He couldn't leave him to freeze—even if he was brute enough, he didn't want the place to become the talk of the county. I'm not saying he's the man—but he will bear watching, as the man on the spot," said Drake. "Keep mum about this, you fellows. I suppose you can see that, whatever is going on here, it must be law-breaking of some sort—no need to keep it so jolly secret otherwise!"

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We're going into this—at least, I am!"

"The Detective's Christmas Case!" grinned Nugent. "Fancy dropping on a case like this on a Christmas holiday!"

"We're jolly well going to find out what it all means, that's a cert!" said Harry Wharton. "Mum's the word at present, if you think so, Drake!"

"Yes, rather!" said Drake emphatically.

They left the moat house and tramped back to the lane.

The rat-faced man on the step of the caravan watched them furtively over his newspaper as they went, the unpleasant expression still on his face.

The man looked—as he undoubtedly was—wary and suspicious. But certainly he could not have suspected that one of the four fellows who tramped away up the lane was a detective and not a schoolboy on holiday like the others. If he was, indeed, at the bottom of the mystery of the moat house, he remained unaware that he now had to deal with a detective, and of the discovery that detective had made in the haunted house.

Harry Wharton & Co. walked back to Wharton Lodge in a rather excited frame of mind—their thoughts running on the strange mystery of the desolate old ruin. They went in by the gate on the park and found Bob Cherry and Hurree Janset Ram Singh taking off their skates by the frozen lake.

Bob gave them a slightly grim look as they came up.

Johnny Bull marched up to him with a pink face.

"Sorry, old man!" he said.

"Eh! What?"

"I thought you were a silly ass!" explained Johnny. "It turns out that I was! That's all!"

Bob blinked at him. But he smiled as the juniors explained the discovery that had been made at the moat house. There was no trace of shirtiness in the Greyfriars party as they walked back in a cheery bunch to Wharton Lodge for lunch.

FERRERS LOCKE AT GREYFRIARS!

WILLIAM GOSLING, the ancient porter of Greyfriars School, grunted as the bell tinkled in his lodge.

Gosling was taking his ease in his lodge at the school gates. When Gosling looked forth on the world he looked forth with a contented eye. In term-time, Gosling was often a disgruntled man—often he eyed youthful crowds with a sour eye. For Gosling's opinion of boys, which he often stated to Mr. Mible, the gardener, was that all boys ought to be drowned.

But in vacation-time, smiles dawned on Gosling's crusty face.

Greyfriars boys were scattered to the four corners of the kingdom. Cheery voices did not break in on Gosling's happy repose. Snowballs did not catch him in the back of the neck. No cheeky youth asked him for historical information relating to the time of George the First—pretending to believe that Gosling dated from that period.

When all the Greyfriars fellows were away, it was really just as good as if they were drowned.

The boys were away. The masters were away. Only the Head and his family were still in residence in the Head's house—and they did not worry Gosling. Only Fisher T. Fish remained of the Remove—Fishy passed his holidays at the school, New York being rather too far off for a trip; and even if it had been nearer, Fishy

had no taste for submarines. And Gosling frowned Fisher T. Fish off grimly when Fishy made any attempt to bestow his light and genial conversation on the old school porter.

When the bell tinkled in his lodge, Gosling was enjoying life in a comfortable chair before a cosy fire with a pipe in his ancient teeth and a glass of something warm at his elbow. Gosling had enjoyed his Christmas—no boys being about—and he was still enjoying the happy prospect of days and days ahead with no boys on the horizon.

But he grunted as the bell rang. He heaved himself out of the comfortable chair, and laid down his pipe, grunted again, and went to the door. He stared at the young man who stood there.

Gosling had never—so far as he knew—seen that young man before. He was rather tall and of athletic build, somewhat lean in figure, exact age a little difficult to guess—but of a slightly foreign cast, Gosling thought. His complexion was olive and his eyebrows thick and bushy and dark, his hair, what could be seen of it under a chauffeur's cap, jet black.

"Ho!" said Gosling. By the man's garb he guessed who he was. "You're the noo shover!"

"The new chauffeur, certainly!" said the lean man, with a nod. "I had Dr. Locke's instructions to call to-day—"

"I been told!" grunted Gosling. "I got to take you to the 'Ead as soon as you come. Name of Robinson, I 'ear?"

"John Robinson!" said the new chauffeur.

Gosling eyed him. He did not think that the good old British name of Robinson went very well with that black hair and olive complexion.

Certainly, so far as Gosling knew, the dark-complexioned chauffeur was a complete stranger to him. A week or two ago, Gosling had touched his ancient hat very respectfully to Ferrers Locke, the famous detective, when he visited the school—not so much because he was a celebrity, but because he was a relative of the headmaster, which was a much greater distinction in Gosling's eyes. But it did not occur to William Gosling that he was looking on the same man now—Gosling did not dream of it. In fact, in all the county of Kent, there was hardly a man more unlike the famous detective in looks than the new chauffeur was.

"Well, you come alonger me, and I'll take you to the 'Ead, Robinson!" said Gosling; and he put on his coat and issued forth from his lodge.

"Thank you, Mr. Gosling!"

The mister rather pleased old Gosling. It showed that this young man had a proper respect for his seniors. Gosling's face was almost amiable as he led the new chauffeur away to the House.

A junior who was kicking the snow about in the quad for want of something better to do cut across to intercept them.

Fisher T. Fish—unlike Gosling—longed for the day when the tramp of feet and the buzz of voices would be

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88 CARDS IN FULL COLOURS

heard in the old quad again. Solitude and silence did not suit Fishy—by his own choice his bony chin would never have been still. Fishy was not losing this chance of unloosing some of the conversation bottled up within him.

"Say, bo!" greeted Fishy. "You the noo chauffeur, what?"

"Yes, sir!" answered John Robinson.

"Other guy went yesterday," said Fishy. "His name was Williams. What do you call yourself when you're at home?"

"John Robinson, sir!"

"I'm sure glad to see you around, Robinson."

"You are very kind, sir!" said John Robinson.

"Aw, forget it!" said Fisher T. Fish. "I'll say I'm the only piece left over on the counter, and I'm sure glad to see a yooman face and hear a yooman voice! I guess I'll drop in at the garage a few, Robinson, and chew the rag a piece now and then!"

"I do not think, sir, that the headmaster would care for Greyfriars boys to talk to the chauffeur in the garage!" said John Robinson, shaking his head. "Thank you all the same, sir, for your intended kindness."

He followed Gosling into the House, leaving Fisher T. Fish grunting.

During the vacation, it seemed to Fishy that he had either to talk or scream sometimes. Even a chauffeur was a windfall to Fishy. But it looked as if Fishy's chinwag was no more desired in the chauffeur's garage than in the porter's lodge.

Gosling tapped at the door of the Head's study.

"Robinson, sir!" said Gosling.

"The noo shover, sir!"

"Step in, Robinson!" said Dr. Locke.

Robinson stepped in, and Gosling shut the door and departed.

Dr. Locke rose to his feet and stood looking at the trim, neat, athletic, lean man in chauffeur's garb with a puzzled and slightly startled expression on his face.

"I—I— You are Robinson?" he asked slowly.

"Yes, sir!" said John Robinson, in a rather wooden, but respectful voice.

"I—I fear there must be some—some mistake!" said the Head, gazing at him. "I hardly think you are the person I—I expected to see!"

The new chauffeur smiled.

"Now that we are alone, sir," he said, in quite a different voice, "I may venture to drop disguise for a moment! But on future occasions, sir, it will be judicious for me to play my part to life; and for you to forget that I am anyone but John Robinson, chauffeur."

Dr. Locke started.

"My dear Ferrers!" he exclaimed. "I know your voice now—but—but I have to confess that I do not know your face."

"It would not be much use my playing the part of your chauffeur, sir, if you did!" said Ferrers Locke, smiling.

"No—no—I suppose not!" agreed

the Head. "Pray sit down, Ferrers—"

"Not at all, sir! We must keep strictly to business!" said the Baker Street detective. "I am your chauffeur now—merely that, and nothing more! You will find me, I hope, a good and faithful servant—"

"Ferrers!"

"And you must fall into the habit, sir, of treating me exactly as that!" said Ferrers Locke. "We have to deal with a cunning and wary man, sir, who may take advantage of any false move."

"I hardly see that, Ferrers!" said Dr. Locke. "We know that my old friend and valued colleague Mr. Quelch was kidnapped, because he had seen the face of the cracksman called Slim Jim with the mask off. You believe that this crook, in private life, keeps up respectable appearances and leads his double life unsuspected! No doubt that is the case. But—"

"But what, sir?"

"But the man, in whatever character he may appear in private life, is surely not likely to see you here!" said the Head. "That he is working this neighbourhood is no doubt a fact; and he might possibly re-visit the school in his professional capacity—to call it that! But in his outward character, he is surely not likely to be seen here!"

"I am not so sure of that, sir!" said Ferrers Locke. "In fact, I have little doubt that he has visited this school—in his unsuspected character."

"My dear Ferrers! Why do you think so?" exclaimed the Head.

"You must remember, sir, that Mr. Quelch was kidnapped the day after he saw the cracksman's face unmasked. He saw it late at night, at a distance from here—the following afternoon he was kidnapped! How had the cracksman, in so short a time, traced the man who had seen his face so unexpectedly? He can only have seen Mr. Quelch about the school that day, and recognised him as the man who could identify him. That implies that he came in, or near, Greyfriars that day."

"Bless my soul!" said Dr. Locke. "Then if Mr. Quelch had seen him—"

"He would have known him and denounced him," said Ferrers Locke. "But no doubt Slim Jim took the best of care that Mr. Quelch did not see him."

"Bless my soul!" said the Head again. "The man was, perhaps, lurking about the school—spying out the place, perhaps—"

"Or calling as a visitor, or perhaps delivering goods from a tradesman—who knows?" said Ferrers Locke. "All we know of Slim Jim is that he is utterly unknown—except in his professional garb with a mask on his face. That he had occasion to come to the school that day I think admits of no doubt—perhaps for the first time, as Mr. Quelch had never seen him before that night at Popper Court. But as he has undoubtedly been here once, he may be here again—and for that reason, sir, we must

take care to make no false move that would put him on his guard that a detective is now on the scene."

"I see—I quite see! And so—"

"And so," said Ferrers Locke, smiling, "I will now go and take possession of my quarters over the garage; and from this moment, sir, I am your chauffeur, John Robinson, and nothing more—to remain so until Slim Jim, the cracksman, is traced, and through him, the man he has kidnapped."

A few minutes later, John Robinson was being shown over his quarters at the garage by "Mr." Gosling—who had quite taken a liking to that well-mannered young man who was so respectful to his elders.

BILLY BUNTER IN DISGUISE!

BILLY BUNTER grinned. "I'll jolly well show 'em!" he remarked to space.

It was a few days after Christmas. Jack Drake was staying on at Wharton Lodge till the New Year—and perhaps longer, if he had not by that time penetrated the mysterious secret of the moat house.

His chief was not in need of him at the time. Eighty miles or so away, at Greyfriars School, John Robinson was taking up his duties as the Head's new chauffeur, while Drake was on his Christmas holiday.

Drake was on holiday; but he was not sorry that something in the nature of a case had turned up in Surrey. He was extremely keen to discover why some unknown person was playing ghost at the lonely moat house—and the Famous Five shared his keenness to the full. That something was going on, which would bear looking into, seemed clear to them all.

The schoolboys, just now, were out in the frosty weather; and Billy Bunter, having breakfasted at eleven in the morning, found himself left on his own. This rather annoyed Bunter—who had an idea in his fat head that nothing ought to begin till he was on the scene—and turning out early in holiday-time was not, of course, to be thought of.

Bunter was in Jack Drake's room now. He was grinning all over his fat face. If fellows were such beasts, fellows deserved to have their legs pulled—and Bunter was going to pull the general leg—hard!

He had a suitcase open, and was examining the contents—pawing them over with his fat paws, and blinking at them through his big spectacles.

He sorted over the disguise in which the playful Drake had arrived at Wharton Lodge on Christmas Day—the white wig and beard and eyebrows. And he grinned.

If Drake had taken the fellows in with such a device, could not Bunter—who was ever so much cleverer than Drake?

Of course he could!

He had told them he could do it on the back of his neck! They had not

believed him. He was going to show them—jolly well show them!

Standing before a tall glass, the fat Owl proceeded to put on the disguise. His aspect when he got it on was rather remarkable.

His own hair disappeared under the white wig, his fat chin under the white beard, his extensive mouth under the bushy white moustache, and his spectacles glimmered under the thick white eyebrows. But those venerable adjuncts did not quite agree with his fat cheeks, which were ruddier than the cherry, and, up to the neck, he was still a fat schoolboy.

At this stage of the proceedings, however, there was a cough at the door, and Wells, the butler, looked in.

Wells had been surprised—or perhaps not surprised—to hear somebody in Drake's room, while Drake was out with Harry Wharton & Co. Wells had a good deal of knowledge of Bunter's manners and customs—of which he did not approve in the very least. Now he was looking in to give Master Bunter a hint that a guest at Wharton Lodge was not expected to root over the quarters of another guest.

But Wells jumped at the sight of the strange figure that blinked round at him from the glass.

Glancing at the upper end of Bunter, he might have taken him for a man of seventy-five, for a moment. Glancing at the rest of him, Wells discerned, of course, that he was William George Bunter. But he was quite startled, for a moment, and he stared at Bunter blankly.

Bunter blinked at him! He was going to take the fellows in, when they came back, in this disguise, and pull their leg, as Drake had done. He had no doubt that he could do this sort of thing better than Drake. Still, it was just as well to put it to the test; so he decided to try the effect on Wells—trying it on the dog, as it were!

"Ah! Hum! Is that you, Wells?" squeaked Bunter. "You did not know that I was here, I presume, Wells?"

"I heard you moving, sir!" said Wells, recovering himself. "Master Drake would not be pleased, sir, if he knew—"

"He does not expect me here to-day!" said Bunter. "He does not know yet that I have arrived at Wharton Lodge, Wells."

"Eh?" ejaculated Wells.

"Perhaps I had better tell you who I am," added Bunter.

"Wha-a-t?"

"My name is Locke—"

"L-L-L-Locke!"

"You have heard of Ferrers Locke, Wells?"

"Fif-Fuf-Ferrers Locke!" stuttered Wells.

"I am his uncle—"

"His—his—his uncle!" babbled Wells.

"Exactly!" said Bunter, blinking at him. "My nephew, Ferrers Locke, told me that Drake was staying here, and as I desired to make his acquaintance, I ran down to see him. I am seventy-five years old, Wells."

Wells gazed at him.

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He gazed blankly.

He could see that Billy Bunter was trying on the disguise he had taken from Drake's suitcase. But that Bunter supposed that he was unrecognisable in that disguise did not occur to Wells. So Wells was astonished—and a little alarmed! It seemed to him that the fat Owl of Greyfriars was wandering in his mind.

"When Drake comes in tell him that Ferrers Locke's uncle is here, and wishes to see him!" continued Bunter.

"Good gracious!" gasped Wells. He stood, with his hand on the door-handle, gazing at Bunter.

Bunter was obviously Bunter, with a collection of white hair plastered over the top story. But it dawned on Wells, at length, that the fat junior supposed that he was disguised, and was playing a practical joke. Wells gave a gurgle.

"I will wait for him in Wharton's den," went on Bunter. "I expect they'll come up there when they come in, Wells. Mind you tell Drake that Ferrers Locke's uncle is waiting for him, Wells."

"Oh!" gasped Wells. "Yes, sir! Oh!"

"Perhaps you had better show me the way to Wharton's den, though," added Bunter, remembering that he was playing the part of a stranger in Wharton Lodge. "I don't know where it is, of course, this being my first visit to the house. In fact, I have never heard of it—"

"Oh!" gasped Wells.

"I am quite a stranger here, of course," said Bunter, blinking at him. "I suppose you are the butler?"

"Oh, yes, sir! I—I—I am the butler!" gurgled Wells.

"Quite!" said Bunter. "Of course, never having seen you before, I did not feel sure. You had better tell me what your name is, Wells!"

Wells did not tell Bunter what his name was! He tottered away down the passage, apparently in a state of convulsion.

Billy Bunter blinked at the doorway in surprise. He did not understand why Wells tottered away, emitting strange gurgles as he went.

"O.K.!" murmured the happy fat Owl, turning back to the glass. "I fancy I took him in all right! This sort of thing is easy enough—it only needs a spot of brains. If Ferrers Locke could see me now, I fancy Drake's job wouldn't last long—Locke would want me!"

Bunter surveyed his reflection in the glass with great satisfaction. Having taken Wells in so successfully, he had no doubt of success with the juniors when they came in.

Still, to make assurance doubly

sure, as it were, he packed on a large coat, to conceal his clothes. The fellows might know his clothes, perhaps—it did not occur to him that they might know his figure!

In that big coat the fat Owl's ample proportions disappeared from sight. This gave the finishing touch to his masterly disguise. Quite satisfied now, the fat Owl rolled out of Drake's room and rolled along to Harry Wharton's sitting-room, at the end of the passage.

In that apartment, he ensconced himself in an armchair before the fire, and waited cheerily for the fellows to come in—to pull their legs by playing the part of Ferrers Locke's aged



The chauffeur caught hold of Fishy by one of his legs. "Say, you bonehead," roared the American junior.

uncle and to jolly well show them that he could do this sort of thing miles better than Jack Drake.

NOT TAKEN IN!

"HALLO, hallo, hallo!" "Anything up?"

Six cheery fellows came in, ruddy and bright from a tramp in the frosty air. And all six gazed at Wells, in the hall, in surprised inquiry.

Wells, as a rule, was as impassive as a graven image. Sometimes he permitted himself a discreet smile. Merriment, even at Yuletide, he did not permit himself. So his aspect now was quite surprising. Wells' plump, smooth face was creased with suppressed mirth; and he seemed quite

unable to preserve his accustomed gravity. It seemed as if something had happened to Wells.

"Excuse me, sir!" gurgled Wells. "I have to tell you—ha, ha!—I mean, pray excuse me—I have been told to inform Master Drake that Mr. Ferrers Locke's uncle has arrived."

"Ferrers Locke's uncle!" repeated Jack Drake. "I've never heard of him. Is he here now?"

"The—the gentleman who requested me to tell you so, sir, is now waiting in Master Harry's sitting-room!" said Wells. "I think, perhaps, sir, you had better see him. Oh dear!" Wells gurgled.

Greatly surprised, the juniors

ment, they reached the door of Harry Wharton's den, which stood open. They looked in.

Six fellows jumped, as if moved by six springs at the same time, as they beheld the remarkable figure in the armchair by the fire. Six fellows gasped all at once.

"Oh crikey!" gurgled Bob Cherry.

"Oh gum!" moaned Johnny Bull.

They understood now what had been the matter with Wells—as they gazed at Billy Bunter, got up in an assortment of artificial hair!

Bunter was going to take them in, and pull their leg, as Jack Drake had done on Christmas Day! They saw it all now!

Bob Cherry chuckled.

"Play up!" he whispered.

"Let him get on with it!"

And, suppressing their emotions as well as they could, the juniors entered the den.

The white-haired figure in the armchair rose.

The Famous Five, on the verge of hysterics, gazed at him in silence. Jack Drake stepped towards him with a grave face.

"Mr. Locke?" he asked.

Billy Bunter grinned. Evidently the butler had told Drake whom to expect, and he had no suspicion.

"Yes, that's it, Drake!" he answered cheerfully. "Ferrers Locke's uncle, you know. You've never met me before, I think?"

"I have certainly never met Mr. Ferrers Locke's uncle!" assented Drake. "I am very happy to make your acquaintance, sir. How did you know me, Mr. Locke, when I came in?"

Bunter started.

"Oh, I didn't!" he ejaculated. "Of course, never having met you before, I—I couldn't! Is your name Drake?"

"Oh, my hat! I mean, yes, my name's Drake! These chaps are the fellows I was with at school when I was a Greyfriars man!" said Drake. "Shall I introduce them?"

"Please do! I am very happy to meet your friends, Drake!" said the white-haired Owl. "I say, you fellows, how do you do?"

"Oh crikey!" gasped Bob Cherry.

It was not easy for the Famous Five to keep serious. But they contrived to go through their presentation to Mr. Locke with grave faces. How the egregious fat Owl could possibly suppose that they did not know him was a mystery to them. But evidently he did suppose so.

"You'd like to meet Bunter, too!" went on Drake. "Call Bunter, Bob! I expect he's in his room asleep, as it's not a meal-time."

"Oh, really, Drake—"

"Did you speak, Mr. Locke?"

"Oh! No! I—I mean, I—I fancy Bunter isn't in his room!" stammered

the fat Owl. In his present disguised state, Billy Bunter did not want to be looked for. "I mean to say, I've met Bunter—you mean that good-looking chap in glasses?"

"Oh, no! You can't have met Bunter—frightfully ugly chap," said Drake. "If you've met a good-looking chap, it can't have been Bunter."

"Beast!"

"What!"

"I—I mean, I—I've met him—don't call him now—the fact is, he told me he doesn't want to be disturbed," stammered Bunter. "He's lying—"

"He's generally lying!" remarked Bob Cherry.

"Yah! I—I—I mean, he's lying down!"

"Down or up, he's pretty certain to be lying!" said Johnny Bull. "He really can't do anything else. I'll go and call him—"

"He—he's gone out!" gasped Bunter. "No good calling him—he's gone out! I—I saw him go—an hour ago! As he's gone out, I shan't be able to see him! Never mind!"

"Better go and look for him," suggested Harry Wharton. "He wouldn't like to miss seeing you, sir."

"No! It—it's no use. The fact is, he's gone off a long way—he's gone to the moat house!" said the fat Owl. "You can't go all that way after him."

"Oh! You've heard about the moat house, Mr. Locke?"

"Eh? Oh, no! Being a stranger here, you know, I've never heard of it. What is it?"

"Oh crikey!"

"Perhaps Mr. Locke would like a spot of refreshment after his journey?" suggested Bob Cherry. "I don't know whether you feel too old for a jam tart, sir."

"No fear!" said the venerable Owl promptly. "If there's jam tarts going, you jolly well trot them out. I—I mean, the fact is, I'm rather hungry after my—my journey! The—the trains are slow, you know."

"I'll be back in a tick!" said Bob.

He hurried out of the den, and contrived not to gurgle till he had shut the door.

Billy Bunter sat down in the armchair again. He grinned cheerily through his assortment of hair! He was getting by with this—just as he knew he would! It was fearfully amusing to think of the faces of the Famous Five when, at length, he jerked off his disguise and revealed himself as Billy Bunter.

"Have you seen Mr. Ferrers Locke lately, sir?" asked Drake.

"Oh, yes! This morning!" said Bunter cheerily. "I called on him in Baker Street, you know. He saw me off in my train at the London end."

Drake grinned. He was aware that Ferrers Locke was at Greyfriars School, in Kent. Ferrers Locke's "uncle," it seemed, was not!

"Won't you take your coat off, sir?" asked Harry Wharton.

"Oh! No! Not at present!" said Bunter hastily.

"Isn't it rather warm before the fire?"

"Yes; but—I mean no! Oh, no, it's rather cold! I haven't any reason



rather long ears and jerked him out of the car. "you figure that you can pull a guy's year?"

looked at the butler. They had never heard of Ferrers Locke's uncle; but if the old gentleman had arrived at Wharton Lodge, they were prepared to greet him with Yuletide hospitality. But they saw no reason whatever for these queer manifestations on the part of the Wharton Lodge butler.

"Has Colonel Wharton seen him?" asked Drake.

"Yes, sir—or perhaps I should say no sir!" gasped Wells. "If you will go up and see the—the gentleman, sir, you will—will understand, I have no doubt."

"Come on, you fellows!" said Harry Wharton.

And the schoolboys ascended the stairs—leaving Wells in the hall, struggling with a gurgle.

In a state of considerable astonish-

for keeping this coat on, except that it's rather cold!" said Bunter astutely. "I'm keeping it on because it's fearfully cold—not for any other reason. No reason why you shouldn't see my clobber, is there?"

"Oh crumbs!"

"I'll keep it on till the gong goes for lunch," said Bunter. "Then I fancy I shall surprise you fellows—I mean, you boys. Let me see, you're Wharton, aren't you?"

He blinked at Nugent!

This was a master-stroke, to show what a stranger he was at Wharton Lodge!

"Oh, no!" gasped Frank. "I'm Nugent!"

"Oh, yes, yes, of course! As I've only just met you, I'd forgotten for a moment! And you're Ugly Jampot Bang Wallop—is that the name?" asked Bunter, blinking at the Nabob of Bhanipur.

"Hurree Jamset Ram Singh!" said the nabob gravely.

"Weird sort of name, ain't it?" said Ferrers Locke's uncle. "Niggers have awfully funny names, haven't they? And funny faces, too!"

"Oh, my esteemed hat!"

"I've heard of you all, of course," said the disguised fat Owl. "I should know Bob Cherry anywhere by his feet! He, he, he! And you by your complexion, Inky! Day & Martin, what?"

The juniors gazed at Bunter. Having taken them in so completely, the fat Owl was going to take advantage of his identity as Ferrers Locke's uncle to put in a few pleasant personal remarks.

"And what would you know me by?" asked Johnny Bull in a deep voice.

Bunter blinked at him.

"Oh! You're Bullock, ain't you?"

"I'm Bull!"

"Bull or Bullock, it's much the same, ain't it? Oh, yes, I should know you—from what I've heard! Fellow a bit like a hippopotamus! He, he, he! I say, Drake——"

"Yes, Mr. Locke!" said Drake gravely.

"I'm afraid your governor isn't very satisfied with you," said Bunter, shaking his head.

"Not?" asked Drake.

"No! He said 'The silly young idiot fancies himself as a detective, but if he does, he's got another guess coming!' Those were his very words!"

"Oh!" gasped Drake.

"And he said—if you don't mind my mentioning it, Wharton——"

"Not at all!" said Harry. "Carry on, Mr. Locke!"

"Well, he said that that young ass Drake was staying for Christmas with a rather stuck-up young fat-head named Wharton. You don't mind my telling you what Locke said?"

"Oh, no!" gasped Harry.

"But I say, you fellows, Bob's a long time getting that tart——"

The door opened, and Bob Cherry came in, carrying a tray. On the tray was a plate. On the plate was

a section of jam tart, fairly loaded with jam.

A wedge of jam tart, thick with jam, was hardly the provender that a venerable gentleman of seventy-five would have yearned for. But Billy Bunter's eyes glistened through his big spectacles at the sight of it. It was only a quarter of an hour to lunch; but Bunter was not afraid of spoiling his lunch. Bunter had plenty of cargo space available.

"Oh, good!" he ejaculated.

The other fellows looked at Bob. They could not help suspecting that he had had ulterior motives in going down for that jam tart and bringing it up with his own hands.

The disguised Owl, however, was only thinking of the jam! He beamed at it.

"Like it, sir?" asked Bob.

"What-ho! I—I mean a little refreshment will be very acceptable after my—my journey!"

Mr. Locke took the tray on his knees. He picked up the big wedge of jam tart by the corner. Quite a large portion of it disappeared into his capacious mouth, and he chewed happily—for one split second! Then there was a fearful yell that awoke the echoes of Wharton Lodge.

"Yurrooogh!" roared Bunter.

"Don't you like it, Mr. Locke?" asked Bob.

"Yoo-hoop! Atchooh! Beast! Grooooooch! Wharrer you mean by giving me jam tart with mustard in it?" shrieked Bunter. "Ow! Oh! Ooogh! Grooogh! Oooch! Wooooch!"

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

Ferrers Locke's uncle bounded out of the armchair. He roared, and spluttered, and clutched at a large mouth that was packed with jam—and mustard! The white beard and moustache came off in his clutch. He roared and yelled.

"Ooogh! Atchooh—ooh! Woogh! Ooooooch!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Ow! Beasts! Wow! Ooogh!" raved Bunter. "Wow! Aytishoo! Ooogh! You rotters! You jolly well knew——"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"My dear Mr. Locke——" exclaimed Drake.

"Wow! Ooogh! Yurrgh! Beasts!" roared Bunter. "I tell you that——"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You jolly well knew I was—— Yurrgh! You knew all the time I was—— Gurrgh! I can jolly well see that now and I—— Woooogh! Oooooogh! You jolly well knew—— Ooooooh!"

"Did we know?" gasped Bob.

"Did we have just a faint suspish?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"The same whiskers that Drake had on, you know!" sobbed Bob Cherry. "And he fancied we didn't know!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Ow! Ooogh! Beasts!" roared Bunter.

He rushed out of the den in search of cold water to wash out his mouth. He left six fellows behind him howling with laughter.

A CHAUFFEUR'S JOB!

"ROBINSON!"

"Sir!"

Ferrers Locke, in the rooms over the garage at Greyfriars School, stood with the receiver in his hand.

Black-haired, olive-complexioned John Robinson had been a couple of days at Greyfriars now. He had settled down into his place as chauffeur to the headmaster.

The few inhabitants of Greyfriars in vacation-time had all seen the new chauffeur and, in spite of his slightly foreign look, they liked the quiet and pleasant-spoken young man. But they found him a little reserved—"stand-offish," as Gosling described it to Mr. Mible.

Old Gosling and Mr. Mible and others would willingly have dropped into his quarters to smoke a pipe and have a chat. But Mr. Robinson, pleasant as he was, seemed to have no use for company or chats. He was very pleasant and polite when he met any other member of the establishment; but he never asked anyone into his rooms over the garage, and the door on the stair was always kept locked when he was not there.

He looked after the car and he looked after the garage in a very satisfactory way. He was an excellent driver. Stand-offish as he was in some ways, he was liked—he was pleasant obliging, and inoffensive.

Often he was seen—in the day-time—about the garage yard—and at night-time, it was to be supposed, he was asleep in the comfortable bedroom over the garage—if he let himself out quietly at night no one at Greyfriars was aware of the fact, and no one who had met him outside would have recognised him as either John Robinson or Ferrers Locke.

If Slim Jim the cracksman was still working that district, as Locke had no doubt that he was, there was a keen eye open for the mysterious crook when he got busy again.

In the meantime, Locke was studying the vicinity, picking up local knowledge and news—and waiting.

If Slim Jim followed what was known to be his invariable custom, he would strike again, and yet again and again, before he abandoned that neighbourhood. From which Locke had surmised that the man of mystery, in his outward character, was probably a man who took up a post of some kind for a fixed period in each district that he had marked out for plunder—coming there openly to take up the post, and leaving when his term of engagement expired, unsuspected. But what kind of a post he took, if it was so, and what he was like, the Baker Street detective had yet to discover.

In the meantime, Locke was John Robinson, chauffeur, and as such the Head treated him, even when he spoke on the telephone to the garage. Locke had insisted that he should not depart from that rule by a hairs-breadth, and the Head acquiesced.

So now, as Dr. Locke's voice came through, any other ear that had caught a word of the conversation would never have detected that the

speaker and listener were anything but schoolmaster and chauffeur.

"The car will be required this afternoon, Robinson!" came the voice from Dr. Locke's study.

"Very good, sir!"

"A Mr. Lamb—a master of this school—is coming here for a few days during the holidays!" went on Dr. Locke. "I desire the car to meet his train at Courtfield Station—the four o'clock train."

"Very good, sir; thank you, sir!"

Locke hung up the receiver. He smiled faintly. There had been a certain hesitation in the headmaster's voice—he was not yet used to giving orders to that very unusual new chauffeur, and did not quite like doing so. But he had played up. No one was likely to overhear words spoken on the telephone; but Locke was not the man to leave anything to chance—especially in dealing with so cunning a crook as Slim Jim.

The detective-chauffeur went down to get the car ready. A bony youth with a sharp nose and very sharp eyes was in the garage yard. Locke breathed rather hard at the sight of Fisher T. Fish. If he did not want Gosling's company, or Mr. Mible's, or Trotter's, in his quarters, he certainly did not want that of the sharp, inquisitive Fishy.

"Say, you taking the auto out, bo?" asked Fisher T. Fish. Fishy, unaware that he was the most fearsome of bores, guessed and reckoned that a chauffeur would feel rather honoured by notice from a Public school man—especially such an attractive specimen as Fisher Tarleton Fish.

"The what, sir?" asked John Robinson.

"The auto! I guess you call it a car yere!" said Fisher T. Fish.

"I am taking out the car, sir! Will you oblige me by not coming into the garage yard, sir? I am afraid that my employer may object."

"I should worry!" said Fisher T. Fish. "I guess the old goob ain't keeping tabs on this here garage, Robinson. Where you heading?"

"I am going to the station, sir, to meet a visitor."

"Then I guess you can give me a run in the auto!" said Fisher T. Fish. "Who's the visitor?"

"Mr. Lamb, sir!"

"Aw! The Pet Lamb!" said Fisher T. Fish. "Horning in here in the holidays, is he? Hard up, I guess, that guy—saving money on it, I calculate! I'll say that bonehead won't mind me taking a run in the car with him—I'm telling you, he's a soft boob—the big boob from Boobsville! You'd snicker the way we rag that guy in the Remove, Robinson."

"Indeed, sir!"

"I'm telling you!" said Fisher T. Fish. "We sure do make him hop around a few, and then some! Not that he hasn't got a temper, when it's riz! But generally you can play with that lamb all you want. I'll step in!"

John Robinson knew more of Mr. Lamb than Fishy supposed—Ferrals Locke having met him at the school weeks ago. He was aware that the Pet Lamb had a temper, having seen

him whopping Billy Bunter on one occasion.

From Mr. Lamb's usual mild and docile look, however, it was probable that he would submit patiently to Fishy barging into the car—if the Head's new chauffeur allowed Fishy to do so. But the Head's new chauffeur had had enough of Fishy.

That self-possessed youth stepped cheerfully into the car and sat down. John Robinson gazed at him.

"I am afraid, sir, that I cannot

Christmas Greetings

(From the Editor):

The words, "A Merry
Christmas!"
How frequently they're spoken.
Like promises, they're sometimes
meant,
But very often broken.

Three words! And very cheap
to print.
You read the same words
yearly.
Read them again—they come
from one
Who writes them most sin-
cerely.

Your EDITOR.

(From Frank Richards):

Sometimes I think a tale I write
May make some reader's
Christmas bright.
And "fill one home with glee."
If any tale of mine has brought
My readers happiness, the
thought
Brings far more joy to me.

With sincere wishes for a right
royal time this Christmas.

FRANK RICHARDS.

(From the Office-Boy):

When I asked the boss for a
Christmas Box
He gave me one—on the car!
So I wishes to all, but the
Edditor,
Merry Christmas and Happy
Noo Year!

allow you to sit in the car!" he said. "I have no such instructions."

"O.K.!" said Fishy. "I'm coming! You'll see that the Pet Lamb won't say anything—he sure is a meek little guy!"

"Please step out of the car, sir."

"Guess again!" said Fisher T. Fish.

Fishy was going to have a run in that car! Having planted his bony person in it, Fishy guessed that the new chauffeur, whether he liked it or not, would have to take it. After all, he was a Greyfriars man, and this Robinson guy was only a doggoned chauffeur!

"Please step out, sir!" said John Robinson.

"I'll mention that I'm waiting for you to start up!" said Fisher T. Fish pleasantly.

"Will you please step out?"

"Not so's you notice it!" drawled

Fisher T. Fish. "I guess—Yaroooop!"

Fisher T. Fish broke off, with a sudden anguished howl, as a finger and thumb, that felt like a steel vice, closed on a rather long ear!

Fisher T. Fish got out of that car quite suddenly. His long ear was jerked out, and Fisher T. Fish had to go along with it.

"Say!" roared the indignant Fishy, rubbing his ear, and glaring at the new chauffeur. "Say, you bonehead, you figure that you can pull a guy's year?"

"Yes, sir!"

"You gol-darned, slab-sided, pesky, pic-faced mugwump!" roared Fisher T. Fish.

"Thank you, sir!" said John Robinson. "Is that all, sir?"

"Aw! Go and chop chips!" snorted Fisher T. Fish, and he stalked away, still rubbing his ear.

John Robinson smiled faintly, got into the driving-seat, and toolled the car out on the road.

There was plenty of snow on the Courtfield road. But John Robinson was a good driver.

Prompt to time, he was waiting outside Courtfield Station, standing like a statue beside the car, when a rather slight gentleman in gold-rimmed glasses came out, blinking about him in a sort of owlish way.

The Head's new chauffeur touched his cap.

"Mr. Lamb, sir?" he asked.

"Yes, yes!" The art master of Greyfriars blinked at him. "Is that Dr. Locke's car? You are not the same chauffeur that I have seen before—what—what?"

"I am the new chauffeur, sir—Robinson, sir! Please let me take your suitcase, sir! Thank you, sir!"

John Robinson opened the door of the car.

Mr. Lamb, blinking about him in his owlish way, crossed the slushy pavement, and stepped in.

John Robinson drove away down Courtfield High Street.

Tap, tap! came on the glass.

The chauffeur glanced round.

"Please do not drive quite so fast!" squeaked the Pet Lamb. "The road is very slippery, and I am a little nervous. There is no hurry—no hurry at all, my good man. I was in a motor accident once, and it was a dreadful experience—very dreadful indeed!"

"Very good, sir!"

The car drove on more slowly, and the Pet Lamb leaned back with a satisfied expression on his docile face.

Ferrals Locke, as he drove to Greyfriars, did not wonder that that lamb-like little gentleman was unmercifully ragged in the Remove, in term time. Apart from that, he gave the Pet Lamb no thought at all—though the time was to come when he was going to give him a very great deal of thought indeed.

FIERCE FOR FISHY!

FISHER T. FISH sat in a comfortable high-backed arm-chair, before a bright, cosy fire, and warmed his bony legs thereat.

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The firelight danced and played in the study. It was warm and comfortable and cosy—and Fisher T. Fish was feeling rather good.

True, he had no right to ensconce himself in Mr. Lamb's armchair, in Mr. Lamb's study, and toast his bony legs at Mr. Lamb's fire. But that did not worry Fisher T. Fish. Fishy had neck enough for anything. Besides, it was practicable to check the Pet Lamb to any extent.

Not that Fishy meant any harm. Fishy's chief desire was to hear his own voice, which he felt was getting rusty from disuse. The Head's car was gone to the station to fetch Mr. Lamb, who was going to pass a part of the vacation at the school, as it appeared. Fishy was going to greet him when he came in and tell him he was glad to see him, and hoped that Mr. Lamb would ask him to tea with him—not so much for the sake of tea, as for the sake of chewing the rag, as he would have expressed it.

The Lamb's was not the company that Fishy would have selected, given a wide range of choice. But any company was better than none—it was a case of any port in a storm.

That day Fishy had been ruthlessly shooed away from Gosling's lodge. Mrs. Mimble, at the tuckshop, had allowed him to talk for three or four minutes—but what were three or four minutes to Fishy?

Mrs. Kebble, the house-dame, had let him have his dinner with her, and Fishy had talked all the time—telling Mrs. Kebble what a vastly superior country the Yew-nited States was to all other countries, what a mouldy, bonc-headed spot Great Britain was, how infinitely better everything was done on the other side of the Atlantic, and so on—and, for some reason unknown to Fishy, Mrs. Kebble did not want any more of his entrancing conversation after dinner.

Then that all-fired guy, Robinson, had pulled his car, instead of taking him for a drive in the car—the car of a free American citizen! Since then, Fisher T. Fish had uttered hardly a word. He had tracked down Mr. Mimble, clearing snow away; but the gardener had immediately gone into a shed and shut the door—almost as if he did not like Fishy's company.

In these circumstances, Fishy was glad that Mr. Lamb was coming to the school for a day or two. He was soft enough for Fishy to be able to land on him for tea, whether he liked it or not—the probability being on the not. Fishy was going to have a chance to talk again—and he would rather have talked to a stone image than not talked at all.

So here was Fishy in Mr. Lamb's study, which had been prepared for his occupation, and was very nice and warm and cosy. When Mr. Lamb came in, Fishy was going to be as agreeable as he knew how—concealing his opinion that Lamb was a bonc-head, a goob, a goof, and the Big Boob from Boobsville. Lamb was his last resource.

Fishy guessed and reckoned that Mr. Lamb was putting in a few days at the school to save money. Art masters were not generally well

off—though Fishy calculated that Lamb had been getting something extra for taking the Remove until break-up while Quelch was away. Fishy had quite nerve enough to ask Mr. Lamb whether it was so! His interest was deep in all questions involving money.

Sitting there, in an unusually cheery mood, Fishy heard the sound of the car stopping at the House.

But Mr. Lamb did not come immediately to the study. No doubt he was going to see the Head first. Probably Dr. Locke would ask him to dinner—but most likely the Lamb would tea in his study, and Fishy was going to tea along with him, if the Lamb would put up with it.

Fisher T. Fish waited contentedly, cheered by the prospect of chewing the rag, even if it was only with a bonc-head like the Pet Lamb.

The door opened, and there was a footstep. To Fisher T. Fish's surprise, as the door closed again, there was a click of a key in the lock.

Fishy sat in astonishment.

Why Mr. Lamb should lock his study door, as soon as he was inside the study, Fisher T. Fish could not guess or calculate.

It was quite surprising.

He realised that, as the high back of the armchair concealed him from view, from the direction of the door, Mr. Lamb did not know that he was there—naturally not expecting a Remove fellow to be waiting for him in his study—probably unaware that Fisher T. Fish was staying at the school over the holidays at all.

Fishy realised that the sooner he showed up, the better. The Lamb might be annoyed at finding that he had locked himself in the study with a fellow he did not know was there. Fishy did not want to annoy the little gentleman who was to ask him to tea.

He rose to his feet and looked across the high back of the armchair.

There was Mr. Lamb—but Fishy had only a side view of him. After locking the door, Mr. Lamb had turned to a desk that stood at the side of the room and unlocked it.

As he was not looking towards Fishy, he did not see him, though the bony junior was now in full view, had the Pet Lamb glanced round.

Mr. Lamb still had his overcoat on. He was thrusting his right hand into an inner pocket of the coat, and, as Fishy looked at him, he drew a leather case out of that pocket—apparently to stow it away in the desk.

Fisher T. Fish coughed.

In the peculiar circumstances, he felt that that was the most judicious way of apprising Mr. Lamb of his presence.

The effect of that cough on Mr. Lamb, apprising him suddenly that someone was in the study, was quite startling.

He uttered a muffled exclamation, and spun round with lightning swiftness, the leather case slipping from

his hand and falling to the floor with a sudden clang!

It seemed that that leather case contained metallic articles of some kind. It was quite a loud metallic clang—such a clang as might have been made by the fall of a bag of steel tools!

"Say, it's O.K., sir!" gasped Fisher T. Fish, quite startled by the shock he had evidently given the Pet Lamb. "I guess I never meant to make you jump, sir!"

"What are you doing here?" roared Mr. Lamb.

Fisher T. Fish jumped, in his turn. This was not the accustomed bleat of the Pet Lamb—it was more like the bellow of an angry bull!

"I—I—I guess I reckoned I'd wait here for you, sir, and—and—and see you, when you came in, sir!" stammered Fisher T. Fish, quite confounded by the angry glare from Mr. Lamb. "I'll say I'm glad to see you at the school again, sir! I'll sure pick up your little grip, sir."

Fisher T. Fish stepped forward and stooped to pick up the leather case to restore it to Mr. Lamb.

Smack!

"Gee-whiz!" yelled Fisher T. Fish, as that resounding smack landed on his ear and sent him staggering across the study.

Possibly Mr. Lamb did not want him to touch that leather case. Or perhaps he was only annoyed with Fishy. At all events, he put plenty of beef into that smack. It landed with a force that showed that Mr. Lamb was a stronger man than he looked.

Fishy yelled, staggered, stumbled over, and sprawled. He sat up on the study carpet, almost gibbering with rage and astonishment.

"Say, what you giving a guy?" he stuttered. "What you getting your mad up for? What the John James Brown—"

Mr. Lamb unlocked the study door and threw it open. Then he stooped over Fisher T. Fish and grabbed him by the collar.

With a single swing of his arm, and a strength of which no Remove man would have deemed the Pet Lamb capable, he spun the gasping, gurgling Fishy out into the passage.

Fishy, a second time, sprawled. He sprawled and roared.

Slam!

The door closed on him.

Fisher T. Fish picked himself up quite dizzily. He rubbed a burning ear, and rubbed several sharp, bony places that had hit the floor. Then, in bewildered surprise and speechless wrath, Fisher T. Fish tottered away down the passage.

"The goob!" breathed Fishy. "The pesky hoodlum! The all-fired, gold-darned, pie-faced scallawag! Carry me home to die! I'll say this is fierce—sure fierce! I'll tell a man, this is fierce!"

Fishy was not thinking now of touching Mr. Lamb for a tea! He was not thinking of chewing the rag with Mr. Lamb! He was only thinking of getting a safe distance from Mr. Lamb—and keeping it!

So long as Mr. Lamb remained at the school during the vacation, the keenest desire to chew the rag was not going to draw Fishy anywhere near Mr. Lamb again! Untamed broncos would not have dragged him into Mr. Lamb's study any more. Which, though Fishy did not reckon, calculate, or guess it, was perhaps what Mr. Lamb wanted.

THE SHADOWED MAN!

FERRERS LOCKE breathed quickly.

The darkness was deep, all the deeper because of the black-out.

The few occupants of Greyfriars School were probably in bed.

John Robinson, the new chauffeur, was wide awake—though, at the moment, eyes that had been able to see him in the darkness would not have recognised him as John Robinson.

The garage gates opened on the lane that ran by the side of the school buildings. There was a smaller gate in the wall, and it was by this that the detective had let himself out. He stood, for some moments, still in the deep gloom. It was little likely that there would be any passer in that unfrequented lane at such an hour of the night—but Locke did not want to risk the remotest chance of anyone seeing him leave the school. He stood silent by the wall, hidden in blackness, making no move till he was assured that the coast was clear.

In such a spot, at such an hour, few would have deemed such a precaution necessary. But the Baker Street detective never neglected a precaution, whether it seemed necessary or not—caution was second nature to him.

And he was glad of it a few moments later, as a soft and stealthy footfall came through the dark.

Someone was coming down the lane, passing the garage gates, heading for the road to which it led, a score of yards away. But for Locke's caution, the unseen wayfarer might have run into him.

Blotted in the darkness, he waited for the man to pass.

That lane ended in a field-path, at a distance, across the snowy meadows to Woodend. Some very belated man was coming from Woodend, it seemed—and for any man to tramp miles across snow-covered fields at half-past eleven at night was so very singular that Locke was rather interested in him.

The kitchen garden had a gate on that lane, but it was hardly to be supposed that Mr. Mimble was going out at that hour. Had it been term time, Locke might have suspected that some bad hat of Greyfriars was breaking out at night. But the bad hats of Greyfriars, if any, were far from the school in holiday-time. So it seemed impossible that the late-comer had come out of Greyfriars.

A shadowy figure loomed past the roughly clad man with a straggling beard, shaggy eyebrows, and a spotted muffler round his neck—a man who was as unlike Ferrers Locke as he was unlike John Robinson. But he did not see Locke.

Dimly as Locke discerned it in the gloom, he made out that it was a rather bulky figure—the bulk, perhaps, being due to a thick, heavy greatcoat. A soft hat was pulled low over the forehead.

The shadowy figure passed on towards the road.

Ferrers Locke stepped out from the blackness of the wall and followed.

That was the direction he had intended to take. Many a long hour, in the dark nights, the Baker Street detective had spent in patient search, with the hope, faint as it was, that he might fall upon the track of Slim Jim—at his work.

Locke had a list of every place within a wide radius that might be supposed to be worth a cracksman's while. Often, in the dark hours, he haunted a likely spot. Now, however, he decided to keep an eye on that shadowy figure that had so unexpectedly appeared from nowhere.

He smiled at the thought that he might, thus early in his quest, have fallen on the trail of the cracksman he was hunting—it was not impossible. If Slim Jim's lair was at Woodend, he might very probably cross the wide fields, when setting out, in order to avoid all possible contacts. And it was as likely to be at Woodend as anywhere else, so far as Locke's present knowledge extended.

At the corner of the lane the dark figure in the heavy coat paused a moment to glance to and fro. Locke observed the action, dark as it was. Then the man walked swiftly in the direction of Courtfield.

Locke shadowed him.

It was easy enough—the black-out making it easier. Not a road-lamp glimmered in the darkness—hardly a star in the sky. Faint as were the footfalls of the man he was following, Locke's keen ear picked them up—he could hear when he could not see. His own footsteps made no sound.

Twice, thrice, he knew, rather than saw, that the man ahead paused and looked round. But if he did, he saw nothing of Ferrers Locke.

Had he seen Locke, he would have seen a

The man walked quickly, springingly, and it came into Locke's mind that there was an unusual absence of fatigue, if he had indeed walked all those miles from Woodend across the fields. Possibly, after all, he had merely made a detour round the school from some nearer place. In any case, it was certain that he would bear watching—and Locke intended to watch him, so long as he was abroad in the dark night. And—though he smiled at the thought—some sort of feeling seemed to tell him that that shadow of the night was the man he wanted. At all events, Ferrers Locke was going to know.

The road ran over the common—and for half a mile or more those faint footfalls guided the Baker Street detective. Obviously the man, cautious as he plainly was, did not know that he was followed.

The footfalls suddenly ceased. The man had turned from the road on to a footpath across the common. It was less easy to follow now, for there was snow on the path that deadened footsteps.

But faint shuffling sounds of boots in snow, occasionally the rustle of a branch as the heavy coat brushed against a bush, guided the shadower. Locke did not lose his man.

(Continued on next page.)

Fun for the Winter Evenings!

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A THRILLING CARD GAME THAT IS DIFFERENT!

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The man ahead at length emerged into the road on the farther side of the common.

Ferrers Locke had a glimpse of a shadow that crossed the road and stopped in the blackness under a park fence.

Silence followed.

Locke waited, silent and still in the winter night. The shadowed man had not gone in either direction, up or down the road. He had stopped under that park fence on the other side—silent, unseen.

Ferrers Locke breathed hard.

He had made himself well acquainted with the neighbourhood that was to be his hunting-ground. He knew that that park fence enclosed the grounds of Sutton Manor—one of the wealthy mansions on his list as possible cribs for Slim Jim to crack.

Was that shadowy figure Slim Jim? Had he climbed the park fence while Locke watched and waited on the other side of the road? The deep silence made him doubt whether the man was still there. It was certain now, at all events, that the man, whoever he was, was a suspicious character—his actions left no doubt on that point.

Locke made up his mind at length. Swiftly, but without a sound, he crept across the dark road to the high fence on the other side. There was no sound, no movement—no one was there! The mysterious wayfarer of the night had vanished as if from existence!

But a few moments later the Baker Street detective knew. In the palings of the high fence there was a gap where two or three of the old palings had fallen away. It was a gap large enough for a man to squeeze through. That was the way the man had gone.

Locke's eyes glinted.

The man, whoever he was—whatever his game was—had gone through that gap into the grounds of Sutton Manor. It was ten to one—a hundred to one—that he was a thief of the night—whether Slim Jim or some other lawless marauder. Yet it was possible that he was some man belonging to Sir James Sutton's numerous establishment, who had been out late and taken a short cut in by the gap in the park fence.

It was not likely. But it was possible!

Locke stood a long moment by the gap in the fence. Then he put head and shoulders through and strained his eyes in the gloom.

Crash!

It came suddenly—too suddenly for even the keen Baker Street detective to know that it was coming. A fist that seemed as hard as iron, and with a strong man's strength behind it, struck—and Ferrers Locke, half stunned by the sudden crash on his temple, staggered back and fell in the road.

A dark figure leaped from the gap, cut like lightning across the road, and disappeared in the deep shadows of Courtfield Common.

Locke scrambled to his knees, his head reeling, and then to his feet.

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He leaned on the park fence, panting.

For a moment the sound of running feet came back from the blackness of the common, and then there was silence.

The Baker Street detective pressed his hand to his head.

The man was gone—swallowed by the black winter's night—gone—and Locke leaned on the fence with spinning head—knowing in that bitter moment that it was a cracksman that he had trailed—that he had prevented a robbery at Sutton Manor—but that he had lost Slim Jim!

NOT A WORD TO BUNTER!

"ALL right!" said Billy Bunter. Bunter's tone, which was fearfully sarcastic and sardonic, implied that in point of fact it was far from all right!

It was, indeed, all wrong!

Billy Bunter was wrathful. He was indignant. He was deeply irritated. He had not been treated with the distinction due to such a guest ever since he had arrived at Wharton Lodge. But now the lid was on.

The grub was good—Bunter admitted that! And, generally speaking, if the grub was all right, everything was all right! Eating, sleeping, and talking were Bunter's three great joys in life, and of these eating naturally came first—primus inter pares, so to speak.

Nevertheless, Bunter was annoyed. The failure of that little scheme for pulling the legs of the Greyfriars party—and more especially the dose of mustard that had almost made Ferrers Locke's uncle jump out of his fat skin—exasperated Bunter.

Now, a day or two later, Jack Drake and the Famous Five were discussing something or other in Wharton's den, and as Bunter put a fat face in at the door, Johnny Bull fairly barked at him:

"Hook it!"

"Yes, hook it, Bunter!" said Bob Cherry.

"Roll off, thou fat and footling Bunter—roll!" said Frank Nugent, in playful parody of Byronic verse.

"Shut the door!" said Jack Drake. "Cut down and ask Wells for something to eat, old chap!"

Bunter blinked at them. Harry Wharton did not speak—being Bunter's host. But the other fellows addressed him just as they might have done in the Remove passage at Greyfriars School.

They were apparently discussing something that they did not want to discuss with Bunter—and they shooed him off like an intrusive chicken!

Really, it was not gratifying. It was true that Bunter, ensconced in the den, would take over all the talking and snort with indignation if the fellows strolled off elsewhere to find other occupations. It was probable that he would turn on the radio if the other fellows didn't want it, or insist upon it being turned off if they did want it. He would squeak to some other fellow to chuck a log

on the fire, or to touch the bell to bring a servant up the stairs to do so—never thinking of stirring his own podgy stumps. It was a fact that Bunter stretched the privileges of a guest to the very limit—right up to breaking-point.

Still, no fellow could like being shooed off like a chicken.

Billy Bunter gave the group of juniors a stare of concentrated scorn, and said, in tones of the most sardonic sarcasm:

"All right!"

Then he banged the door and departed.

A moment later another bang was heard up the passage—the bang of Bunter's own door. That implied that Billy Bunter had retired to his room—like Achilles to his tent—in a state of sulking.

But, as a matter of fact, Bunter hadn't.

Having banged his door to give that incorrect impression, Billy Bunter opened it again quietly and stepped out on tiptoe.

On tiptoe, he went down the passage and opened with great caution the door of Wharton's bed-room which adjoined the den.

From that bed-room to the sitting-room adjoining was a communicating door, which was shut. But doors had keyholes, and Bunter was a keyhole expert.

Grinning sardonically, the fat Owl applied a podgy ear to that keyhole—and everything uttered in the den came plainly to that fat ear.

Bunter was curious to know what the party were discussing, which he was not to hear. Probably, he suspected, some jape upon his fat self, which—forewarned being forearmed—he would be able to nip in the bud, having heard what the beasts were saying.

"Bless the fat ass!" Harry Wharton was speaking—that was how he talked about a guest, Bunter reflected bitterly. "If he hears a word of this it will be all over the shop!"

"Bunter's all right!" said Bob Cherry. "I expect he's got something to eat in his room! If he has, he's happy!"

"And if he hasn't, he can go to sleep again!" grunted Johnny Bull. "Bother him, anyway! Get on with it, Drake!"

"We've agreed that we're going to find out what's going on at the moat house!" It was Jack Drake's voice now. "Something's up there, and it will bear looking into. But it's no good going in the daylight—we've tried that, and nothing came of it."

"Only what you found out about those phantom keys!" said Bob. "That was something, old bean."

"Yes—that proves that somebody is playing ghost!" said Drake. "Even Bunter wouldn't have been scared if he had known that that ghostly sound came from a bunch of keys fixed up in the ivy and set clinking by pulling a string."

Billy Bunter gave a start as he heard that!

Since his ghostly experience at the moat house before Christmas the fat



Bunter gazed spellbound as the hooded man opened the oak door. Next moment, from the vault beyond, came a voice: "You again, you iniquitous rascal! How long am I to remain in this dreary place?" It was the voice of Mr. Quelch, the missing Form-master!

Owl had given the haunted ruin a wide berth. The other fellows had visited the place more than once—Bunter never! Bunter did not believe in ghosts—but he preferred to keep them at a safe distance whether they existed or not!

Now he grinned!

That simple explanation of the ghostly sound that had terrified him abolished the terrors of the moat house at once.

So they had found this out, had they—and never mentioned it to Bunter? Well, he jolly well knew now!

"Whoever fixed that up," went on Drake, "is playing ghost to scare people away from the place! Why? Something's up—and we're going to know what! You fellows haven't said anything about it, of course—"

"Not a word!" said Harry.

"If it got out that we had spotted that trick, of course, the sweep would be put on his guard! Bunter—"

"We haven't told Bunter, fathead! Might as well tell the wide world!"

"Beast!" breathed Bunter.

"That fat chump can't keep his mouth shut," said Drake. "And he might be ass enough to butt into the place to see the thing for himself and, of course, he would be seen at it! We've got a wary man to deal with, and we can't be too careful."

"Bunter doesn't know anything about it at all!" said Frank Nugent;

a remark that made the fat Owl, on the other side of the keyhole, grin.

"So far, we've got rather an advantage," went on Drake. "We know the rascal's game—and he doesn't know that we know it! But what he's playing that weird game for, we don't know—yet—"

"But we're going to!" said Bob.

"Exactly! I've got a strong suspicion, of course, of that sportsman in the caravan, as he's the man on the spot. But whether he's the goods or not, the trickster keeps an eye on the place, and in the daylight we can be seen going there. It's night or nothing."

"That's so!" agreed Harry Wharton. "Let's make an expedition after dark to-night, then!"

"Only—" said Drake.

"Only what?"

The boy from Baker Street laughed. "I'm a detective," he said. "A

detective has to be prepared to rough it and be as patient as a Red Indian ambushing an enemy. You fellows are on holiday and having a good time. It may mean hours of hanging about in the cold, waiting for something that mayn't turn up—rather a test of endurance. If you'd rather leave it to me—"

"Fathead!" said the Famous Five, with one voice.

"I'm used to the work, you know! And you—"

"If you mean that we should be in the way and you'd rather we stood

out, put it plain!" said Bob. "Otherwise, we're on."

"I don't mean that at all! I only mean that you may have a fearfully tiresome and uncomfortable time, perhaps for nothing in the end."

"That's all right, ass! We're coming."

"Yes, rather!"

"That's settled, then!" said Jack Drake. "If you get fed up you can leave it to me, anyhow. Now, judging by what happened to Bob, the ghost man haunts the place in the evening—he doesn't leave it till midnight like most ghosts. Whatever his game is, he's up to it after dark—but not very late! From which I deduce, my beloved 'earers, that all he wants is to carry on after dark and get off to bed at bed-time, like anybody else."

"But what the merry thump," said Bob, "can any man, in his senses, be up to after dark in that frozen ruin?"

"No good asking me that!" said Drake. "Something—that's all I can say. As Bob found footprints in the snow leading down into that underground passage it looks as if his business, whatever it is, lies in that quarter."

"But there's nothing in that old passage except masonry that rolled down when the building collapsed!" said Bob.

"So far as we know!" said Drake. "We've certainly found nothing—but
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a man doesn't creep down there after dark and play ghost to keep strangers away without a reason."

"That's pretty certain!" said Harry Wharton. "Some sort of a law-breaker hiding plunder or something of that sort."

"I own up I'm beaten as yet!" said Drake. "But if we get there early after dark and stick in cover in that passage and wait—we shall see what happens, if anything does."

"Good egg!" said Johnny Bull. "And if we draw blank to-night, we'll try again—and again and again till we spot something."

"That's the idea!" said Drake. "So if you fellows like the idea, we'll walk out after tea! Not a word for Bunter to hear—we can't be too careful!"

"Not a giddy syllable!" Billy Bunter grinned. He withdrew that fat ear from the keyhole and retired on tiptoe from Wharton's bed-room. He grinned as he tiptoed back to his own room and closed the door—silently this time! Bunter, to whom those beasts weren't going to say anything, was in full possession of the whole thing—and Bunter's fat brain was working! Those beasts were going to discover that William George Bunter was not to be disregarded—not with impunity! Bunter was on this! Bunter knew what he was going to do—he jolly well knew!

And Bunter chuckled a fat chuckle, though if he could have foreseen what was to come of the big idea that had germinated in his fat brain Bunter

would probably have dropped that big idea like a hot potato!

MYSTERIOUS!

"I SAY, you fellows!"

"Oh!" said Bob.

After tea, the Famous Five and Jack Drake had gathered in the hall.

The early December darkness had closed in and it was time to get ready for the expedition to the moat house.

In order to draw no attention to that expedition, the juniors had settled that they were going out by the steps from the balcony under the window of Wharton's den. That was easy enough—they often went out and came in that way. But, in view of the necessity for keeping their plans dark, they rather hoped that Billy Bunter would be somehow occupied at the time.

Even Bunter could not be expected to be eating, just after tea—and though he napped after lunch, one nap a day generally sufficed him, so he could not be expected to be sleeping. It was most likely that his eyes and spectacles would be on the party, that he would be inquisitive, and that he would want to know.

So when he rolled into the hall, in coat and cap, with a scarf tucked round his fat neck, the juniors regarded him with interest.

If Bunter was going out on his own, nothing could have suited them better. It was extremely unusual for Bunter to walk abroad in the black-

out; but it looked as if that was his intention on this particular evening, which was rather a stroke of luck.

"You fellows sticking round the fire frowsting?" asked Bunter agreeably. "I'm going out!"

"Stout lad!" said Bob Cherry approvingly.

"The stoutfulness is terrific!"

"I've borrowed your flashlight, Wharton! You don't mind?"

Harry Wharton laughed.

"How much difference would it make if I did?" he inquired.

"Oh, really, Wharton! If you don't want to lend a fellow a flashlight, when he's going to walk to Wimford in the black-out—"

"My dear old barrel, take it, and welcome!" said the captain of the Remove. "You'll need it—but don't flash it up to the sky all the way or you'll have an air raid warden jumping on the back of your neck!"

"Anything on at Wimford?" asked Bob Cherry, eyeing the fat Owl rather curiously. Really, it was a fortunate coincidence that Billy Bunter had decided to walk to Wimford on the same evening that the party had planned to make that secret visit to the moat house.

"Oh, yes!" said Bunter carelessly. "The cinema's open, you know. You fellows like to come?"

"Um! Not this time, old fat man!" said Bob. "You'd better keep to the road, or you'll lose your way in the dark. Don't try the short cuts!"

"I'll watch it!" said the fat Owl cheerfully. "It's a bit shorter round by that old moat house, but there's too much snow about and it's too jolly dark. After all, it's not much more than a mile by the road. What's a mile to me?"

The Famous Five looked at Billy Bunter.

There was a lurking grin on his fat face. And it was unusual, not to say unprecedented, for Bunter to walk a mile in the black-out—with a mile to follow home again. Really, it looked as if the fatuous fat Owl was up to something—though what, was not apparent.

"Look here, old fat man," said Harry, "it's rather a tough walk to Wimford for you in this weather. I'll ask my uncle if the car can go, shall I?"

"Eh? Oh, no! Certainly not!"

"Not!" echoed Harry.

"Think I can't walk it?" sniffed Bunter. "I'm not a slacker like you chaps, I hope! The fact is, I'm looking forward to the walk—I'm pretty keen on exercise and fresh air, as you fellows know."

"Ye gods!" ejaculated Bob Cherry.

"What on earth," said Nugent, "is that fat chump up to?"

"Oh, really, Nugent—"

The Famous Five could not help feeling puzzled. That Bunter should prefer to walk instead of taking the car to Wimford was not only improbable—it was impossible. Bunter would rather have been pushed along in a wheelbarrow than have walked.

Obviously, he was not going to Wimford. It was not the cinema that drew him forth. He was up to something, and that pretended walk to

The Mystery of Wharton Lodge

Tuck galore has been mysteriously disappearing from the larder at Wharton Lodge where Harry Wharton & Co. are staying for the Christmas Holidays. Who the mysterious midnight marauder is has got the chums of Greyfriars guessing. Read all about it in this sensational book-length story of Christmas adventure, starring Harry Wharton & Co. and Billy Bunter of Greyfriars fame. It's a real feast of thrills!

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Wimford was camouflage. That was as clear as the sun at noonday! But what he was up to was a mystery.

Bunter blinked at the staring faces through his big spectacles.

"I say, you fellows, I'm really going to Wimford!" he said. "I'm not pulling your leg, you know!"

"Oh crikey! Not!" gasped Bob.

"Not at all, old chap! I'm going to the cinema at Wimford—it's not just cabbageage!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Blessed if I see anything to cackle at! I dare say you fellows wouldn't care to walk a mile and a half in the black-out—but it's nothing to me! I ain't a slacker like you chaps, I hope! I'm going!"

And Bunter, with a sniff, went!

The juniors saw him off from the doorway.

With his flashlamp glimmering on the frosty earth, the fat Owl faded away down the drive.

Harry Wharton shut the door and gave his comrades a puzzled look.

"I suppose he won't go far!" he remarked, "but I'm blessed if I know what he's gone out at all for!"

"Can't be going to explore the jolly old moat house!" chuckled Bob Cherry.

Harry Wharton laughed.

"He funks going near the moat house in the day-time, let alone after dark," he answered. "The fat ass had the fright of his life there! He's up to something—but I'm blessed if I know what!"

"Solve the mystery, Mr. Detective!" said Bob. "A pupil of Ferrers Locke ought to be able to spot this!"

Jack Drake grinned. He was as much mystified as the other fellows by Billy Bunter's mysterious proceedings.

"I give it up!" he said. "The fat chump's up to something—but goodness knows what! We may as well give him time to get clear before we start. Lucky that he's out of the way!"

"Yes, that's luck!" agreed Bob.

And the juniors remained chatting by the fire for some time before they went up to get ready to depart themselves. Whatever Bunter was so mysteriously up to, they rather expected him to get fed-up with the cold wind and the darkness and to come rolling in again. But he did not come rolling in, and at length they went up to their rooms, where they put on boots, and overcoats, and scarves, and then gathered in Harry Wharton's den.

They left that apartment by the french window on the balcony, turning off the light, and descending the steps to the terrace. It was as black as a hat out of doors, early as it was in the evening. No snow had fallen for some days, but there was still plenty about, and it was bitterly cold.

Cheerfully, regardless of cold and dark and winter wind, the Greyfriars party tramped out and set their faces in the direction of the haunted moat house. And not one of the party suspected for a moment that a fat figure, half an hour ago, had rolled ahead of them that very way!

The haunted house was the very last spot in Surrey that they would have

suspected Billy Bunter of visiting after dark, but if they could only have guessed it, that was the fat Owl's destination, and he had arrived there by the time they left Wharton Lodge!

WHAT BUNTER SAW!

BILLY BUNTER paused.

There was a grin on his fat face as he tramped down Redgate Lane towards the moat house. But that grin died away as he stood at the gap in the crumbled wall and blinked towards the ruin.

It was so dark, so solitary, so desolate, that Billy Bunter almost repented him of the big idea that his fat intellect had evolved for the discomfiture of the Famous Five.

He was not afraid of ghosts now—not now that he knew of Jack Drake's discovery in the ruin. Bunter was not fearfully courageous—but even Bunter was not afraid of an old bunch of keys tied up in an ivy bush and pulled by a string. Now that he knew the truth, he grinned at the idea of that ghostly clinking having an effect on him.

Still, he did not like darkness or solitude or wailing winds in snowy old ruins. He stood at the gap and blinked.

At a little distance from the moat house he caught a tiny glimmer of light in the gloom. It came from an ill-fitted curtain at the caravan window. It showed that the rat-faced man was at home, and, little as Bunter liked that rough character, or wished to meet him, the knowledge that he was there rather relieved the solitude.

The fat junior paused, but he made up his mind. His terror of ghosts was gone and, after all, the other fellows would be along early in the evening. He pushed across to the moat and scrambled over it, every now and then turning on a glimmer of light to see his way. From the moat he plugged on into the old courtyard and crossed it to the shattered doorway, and rolled into the old, roofless hall.

A thaw had melted the snow on the old flagstones, but it was freezing again now and they were very slippery. The fat Owl trod with care.

He reached the steps under the arched doorway at the end of the old hall, and cast the light down them.

According to what he had heard from the juniors during his keyhole exploit, they believed that somebody played ghost at the moat house, and that, for some mysterious reason, the ghost-player descended those steps into the dank, dismal old passage below.

It seemed improbable to Bunter, who could imagine no reason why any man in his right mind should go down into such a dismal place at night.

But they were going down when they came, and Bunter was going to be there ahead of them. Now he listened intently before he descended—for though he did not believe that the ghost-player was there, or ever went there, he wanted to be sure.

There was no sound and, holding

his light before him, the fat Owl trod cautiously down the stone stair.

Cautious as he was, his foot slipped on a patch of frozen snow, and he sat down suddenly on the steps and did the rest, in a sitting position, in one!

Bump!

"Wow!" gasped Bunter, as he landed at the bottom.

He sat and gasped for breath.

But the icy stone was rather too chilly for a resting-place, and he very quickly scrambled to his feet.

Holding up the light, he blinked along the underground passage. So far as he could make out, it led nowhere. Perhaps it had been used as a cellar or a hide-out in ancient days. Bunter could see nothing but stone walls, arched low roof, and great masses of masonry piled about that had crashed down the steps probably a century ago.

He picked his way among them, blinking round for a good spot to find cover.

He stopped at one great block that stood close to the stone wall. It was quite large enough to screen him. But he shook his head and pushed on along the passage. There were several more masses, though smaller, farther on, and the fat Owl went as far as the last of them before he finally came to a halt.

Behind that mass of old stones, still connected by the ancient cement, the Owl of the Remove ensconced himself. He sat down on a large stone and shut off his light.

He would have preferred to keep the light on—he had no taste for the dark! But a light would have betrayed his presence at once, when Harry Wharton & Co. arrived. He had to wait in the dark.

Anyhow, he would not have to wait very long. He knew that they were coming. And he grinned in the dark as he thought of the reception he was going to give them!

They had discovered the trickery of the ghostly keys, hidden in the ivy at the top of one of the old walls, above ground. But what would they think when they heard the ghostly clinking in that underground passage?

Bunter grinned at the idea.

He was going to frighten them out of their very skins—Bunter was!

He had collected all the keys he could lay his fat paws on, and tied them in a bunch, now in his overcoat pocket. When the juniors descended into that dismal recess there was going to be a ghostly clinking from the dark!

Bunter pictured the exclamations of alarm and terror, as the juniors bolted frantically up the steps again to get away from the ghost!

When that happened he was going to follow them up—laughing! The laugh would be on Bunter's side with a vengeance! This would serve the beasts right for leaving him out of the secret and making out that he was funky of the haunted house! They deserved this, and more—and this was what Bunter was going to give them!

And for the rest of the Christmas holidays he was going to rub it in—

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Bunter was! Indeed, he was not going to let it end there! Next term, at Greyfriars, he would tell all the Remove how the Famous Five had scuttled like mad when he rattled a bunch of keys in the dark! They were not going to hear the end of it in a hurry!

Comforted by that cheery prospect, the fat Owl waited contentedly for the sound of footsteps on the stone stairs and the gleam of a light.

As it turned out, he had not so long to wait as he had expected. He had not been a quarter of an hour in his hiding-place when there was a sound of shuffling footsteps on the stone steps at the end of the underground passage.

Blinking out from his cover, the fat Owl spotted a gleam of light descending.

He grinned, and groped in his pocket for the bunch of keys, all ready! As soon as they were at the bottom of the steps, he was going to begin. Then they would go racing up again, spluttering with terror—at least, Bunter had no doubt that they would.

But a moment or two later the fat Owl gave a gasp, and his podgy hand released the keys in his pocket, without rattling them.

His eyes, and his spectacles, fixed in amazement and alarm on the figure that descended the steps.

It was a single figure that came down—not a party! And that single figure was not one of the juniors.

Bunter, hugging cover, blinked at it in amazed consternation.

It was the figure of a powerful man; but what he was like Bunter had no chance of seeing, for a long coat covered him from neck to feet, and over his head was a hood, secured round his neck under the chin, revealing nothing of his face but two eyes that glinted from the eye-slits.

Bunter made no sound! From behind the mass of masonry, he blinked in terror at that strange figure.

The juniors had not yet arrived—that strange and terrifying figure had arrived! Who he was, what he was, the fat Owl could not begin to guess—but he felt a chill of fear as he blinked at the hooded man.

The hooded figure with the light came along the passage.

Bunter's fat heart almost died in his breast. He was not thinking of playing ghost now. He was only thinking of keeping out of sight of that strange hooded man. But if the man came to the end of the underground passage, he could not fail to see Bunter.

But he did not come so far. He stopped at the great block of masonry that stood close to the wall.

He placed the light on the floor; and, to Bunter's amazement, grasped the huge block with both hands.

Strong and muscular, as he evidently was, he had to exert himself to move it.

Slowly, it rolled aside.

He picked up the light again. And then Billy Bunter, with bulging eyes behind his big spectacles, saw what

had been revealed by the removal of the huge block.

There was an arched doorway in the wall, hardly more than four feet high.

The stone mass had completely concealed it from sight. Now it was plainly revealed in the light in the hooded man's hand.

Spellbound, Billy Bunter watched.

In that doorway was an oak door! He saw the hooded man insert a key in a lock, and heard it turn. The oak door was thrown open, and the hooded man shut off his light.

To Bunter's amazement, a glow of light came through the doorway from the other side, now that the door was open!

Ducking his head, the hooded man stepped in. And from the vault beyond, where there was a light, came a voice; that hidden vault was occupied.

"You scoundrel! You again, you iniquitous rascal! How long am I to remain in this dreary place, you conscienceless villain?"

Billy Bunter wondered whether he was dreaming.

For he knew the angry, bitter voice that came from someone unseen in the hidden vault as the hooded man entered.

Well, indeed, Bunter knew that voice—for it was the voice of his missing Form-master, Mr. Quelch!

BUNTER, TOO!

"OH!" gasped Billy Bunter.

He could not help it! Dizzy with amazement, he blinked at the glimmering low doorway in the old stone wall.

There was a vault beyond that doorway! None of the explorers of the old moat house had dreamed of its existence, the low arched doorway having been completely concealed by the block of stone. It was not by chance, as it appeared, that that huge mass rested against the wall; it had been rolled there intentionally, to conceal the door of the vault.

And in that buried vault was a prisoner—and that prisoner was the schoolmaster who had been kidnapped weeks ago, eighty or ninety miles away, near Greyfriars School!

In that vault, by a Surrey lane, was the man who had disappeared in Kent—the man of whom Ferrers Locke, the celebrated detective, was in search! What Ferrers Locke had failed to discover was now known to Billy Bunter by the strangest of chances. It was this—this!—that was the hidden secret of the haunted moat house.

"Oh crikey!" breathed Bunter.

No one knew, or could guess, what had become of the kidnapped Form-master. It was surmised that he had been taken to a distance, as a car had been used—that was all! In some secret den, he was hidden from all knowledge—and it was here that he was hidden!

Utter amazement held Bunter spellbound for a minute or two! But the danger of his position rushed into his fat mind.

The hooded man, whoever he was, was a kidnapper—he was the gaoler of

the kidnapped Remove master, in this solitary, dreary place. Bunter had only to get away and Mr. Quelch was saved—his kidnapper probably taken by the police! But if the man found him there—

Bunter trembled.

It must have been this hooded man into whom Bob Cherry had run that dark night when he had been struck down senseless. Billy Bunter no longer believed, as he had done hitherto, that Bob had taken a tumble and knocked his head! He knew now what must have happened. And he could guess what would happen to him if the hooded man spotted him there.

Bob had discovered nothing—he had only run into the ruffian in the dark. But Bunter had discovered the whole secret—the rascal's liberty was at his mercy—if he got away!

Shuddering, the fat Owl realised that he never would get away if the glinting eyes from the slits in the hood once fell on him. The terror in his fat heart chilled him like the touch of a hand of ice.

Trembling, the fat Owl rose to his feet. How long the hooded man would remain in the vault, he had no means of guessing. Quite probably he had only gone there to take the prisoner food, and would emerge in a few minutes. If only he shut the door—

Bunter's eyes fixed in anguish on the low opening from which the glimmer came.

He dared not pass the door while it was open. The hooded man might look out—he might step out! The fact that he did not shut the door seemed to indicate that his stay in the vault would be brief. And the door did not shut!

Bunter ducked into cover again.

He dared not take the chance. He had to wait where he was till the man came out and was gone.

His fat heart beat in great thumps as he crouched behind the stone.

How long he waited, Bunter did not know. It seemed an age, but probably it was only a matter of moments. Then he heard footsteps.

He heard a door shut. There was a grind of a key in a lock. The hooded man had come out of the hidden vault.

Shuddering, the frightened fat Owl crouched close behind his cover, pulling his overcoat close about him, lest some portion should show beyond the edge of the stone that hid him.

Clink!

He had forgotten the bunch of keys in his overcoat pocket. That sound as they clinked together was faint—but to Bunter's startled ears it sounded almost like thunder!

He suppressed a squeak of terror and thrust a fat hand into the pocket to hold the keys and keep them still.

Clink, clink!

That was the result of his hurried action.

He heard a sharp, quick-drawn breath.

The man had heard!

That sound in such a spot must have startled him, perhaps with a ghostly fear. If so, the effect did not last long. For a long, agonised

moment there was stillness; then came a rapid tramp of feet, and in a moment more the light was flashing on the huddled, terrified Owl, and the eyes from the slits in the hood were glinting down at him.

"Oh!" gasped Bunter.

It was a gasp of utter terror.

Of the face hidden by the hood he could see nothing—but he could see the rage and fury in the eyes from the slits. The kidnapper, whoever he was, saw himself discovered—by that crouching, trembling fat school-boy.

Bunter did not stir.

He could not have escaped. He would have been grasped at once had he tried to run. But he could not—his fat limbs seemed paralysed.

The hooded man stood silent—looking at him. A muttering voice, husky with rage, came from under the hood.

"You saw——"

But he broke off—he knew that Bunter must have seen. The door in the wall could not have escaped him.

"Fool!" The man seemed to be spitting with rage. "Fool! Why are you here? You are the fat fool that was here before—that I frightened away—and now—now——"

He broke off again.

Stooping, he grasped the fat Owl by the shoulder with a grip so hard and savage that it brought a squeak of pain from Bunter. He jerked him to his feet and swung him rather than led him along the passage to the door of the hidden vault.

Bunter could not speak. He could only gasp with terror. The hooded man did not speak again.

With his left hand, still grasping Bunter with his right, he unlocked the low door and threw it open.

The glow of dim light came again. Bunter glimpsed the interior of the vault—an oil-lamp burning on a bench—Mr. Quelch, pale and worn, with a book in his hand—starting to his feet and turning his eyes on the doorway.

It was only a moment's glimpse. The next, Bunter went spinning headlong through the doorway, sprawling along the flagged floor of the vault and rolling at the feet of his astonished Form-master.

Slam!

The door shut. The key ground in the lock again.

Billy Bunter, dazed and dizzy, sat up.

From outside came the sound of a heavy thud. He knew what that meant. The big stone had been rolled back into place, concealing the door of the vault. The hooded man was gone—leaving his secret safe. There were two prisoners now, instead of one, in the hidden vault under the haunted moat house—and the secret of the kidnapped schoolmaster's fate was hidden as deep as ever.

A NARROW ESCAPE!

"HALLO, hallo, hallo!" breathed Bob Cherry. "Quiet!" whispered Jack Drake.

Six fellows, hardly visible to one another in the dark, had scrambled across the choked moat and stood in the shattered doorway of the moat house.

Dark as it was, they did not turn on a light. If they were to have any luck in their intended vigil, it was necessary to keep their presence secret.

But it was not easy to grope their way in the deep gloom, and they paused at the entrance of the old hall to look about them. And as they stared into the darkness, there came a gleam of light from the direction of the stone steps at the back of the hall.

They stood still, silent, catching their breath.

Shuffling footsteps on the frozen old flagstones came nearer. The light, turned towards the ground,

did not fall on them even when it was quite near.

Suddenly it stopped—within six or eight feet. It flashed up and beamed on the breathless group of school-boys. The ghost-player of the moat house had discovered their presence.

The next instant it was shut off. But, in the same moment, Jack Drake's light blazed on, flaring full on the figure now close at hand.

In amazement, the Greyfriars fellows stared at it—the figure of a powerful man, in a long, belted coat, head and face hidden by a hood.

From the eye-slits of the hood two startled eyes glinted and flashed in the sudden blaze of light.

It was only for a split second; then the hooded man was running. With a sudden rush he dashed away across

(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.

YOU'LL be reading this little chat of mine a day or so before the greatest festive season of the year—Christmas—so let me again take the opportunity of passing along from my staff and myself all the very best of good wishes for

A MERRY CHRISTMAS AND A HAPPY AND PROSPEROUS NEW YEAR!

As usual, you have not been forgotten by Mr. Frank Richards, the world's greatest schoolboy author, who has been writing consistently good stories for the MAGNET for over thirty years! "The Best Christmas Ever!" is the sincere wish he asks me to convey to each and every one of you.

Another few days, and we shall be heralding the new year of 1940. Let's earnestly hope it will be a better and brighter year than 1939! May the war clouds lift and leave us once more in peace and happiness!

This is the time when everybody is thinking of making a list of New Year resolutions. Have you made any yet? I've made one—and you can rely on me to keep it. I have resolved to keep up the present high standard of school stories which has made the MAGNET the prime favourite it is to-day, and to make it even better, if that is possible.

Let me suggest a resolution to my vast circle of friends the world over. Resolve to make sure of obtaining your copy of the MAGNET every week by giving a standing order to your news-agent at the very earliest opportunity. You won't regret it!

At this time of the year there is a big variety of Annuals on sale, and it is very often difficult to choose between them unless you know the quality of the contents. That's where I can help you. Choose wisely and choose

well by getting a copy of the "Holiday Annual." It's a value-for-money Annual that you can't better anywhere. If you know of an aunt or uncle or brother or sister who is intending to buy you a book, tell them to make it the "Holiday Annual." Therein you will be able to read all about Billy Bunter, and the merry pranks of all the cheery Greyfriars, St. Jim's, and Rookwood schoolboys. There are lots of other interesting features, too. Don't miss your copy this year. It only costs five bob, chums, and what a return you get for your money!

Maybe I ought to mention here, too, that there are three topping numbers of the "Schoolboys' Own Library" on sale this month. You should make a point of sampling one, if not all, of them!

Thrill follows thrill in quick succession in our present grand series of Greyfriars yarns. First Mr. Quelch, the master of the Remove, mysteriously disappeared, now Billy Bunter has vanished! But Ferrers Locke, who has taken up the case, is patient. The Baker Street detective knows that only by tracking down "Slim Jim" can he hope to discover the Greyfriars master whom the cracksman has captured, and Ferrers Locke, ably assisted by his clever boy assistant, Jack Drake, does not intend to give up the trail till he has got his man! For the latest news in this thrilling hunt read:

"THE HOODED MAN!"
By Frank Richards,

in next week's spanking fine issue of the MAGNET. It's a yarn that will gain your interest from the very first line to the last. Don't delay, order your copy to-day.

Here's wishing you happy reading and a right royal Christmas.

YOUR EDITOR.

the old hall, winding among the masses of masonry in the dark.

"After him!" hissed Drake.

He dashed in pursuit.

The Famous Five rushed after him, each of them flashing on a light as he ran.

Winding among the masonry, jumping, leaping, scrambling, he went, panting, the pursuing lights and footsteps close behind him.

Jack Drake, with a desperate bound, reached him, and grabbed at the thick coat. He caught hold, and the hooded man, turning, struck savagely, and he reeled back from a heavy blow.

The next moment, the hooded man was running again, the juniors could hear his panting breath, as he exerted himself to the uttermost. He was heading for one of the dark, yawning apertures in the old walls, where a window once had been. He had reached it when Bob Cherry, speeding ahead of his comrades, reached him and grasped at him.

Had he held him for but a moment or two, the whole crowd would have been upon him. But, with a strength that was twice or thrice as great as Bob's own, the hooded man wrenched himself free and flung himself headlong from the aperture in the wall.

Bob, panting, heard the crash and a panting grunt, as he landed on the earth outside.

The next moment Bob was scrambling out. But the hooded man had picked himself up again, and was running. Bob landed on the earth, and, one after the other, his comrades scrambled out after him.

But the fugitive, running desperately, had vanished round a corner of the ruined building. They dashed after him, but the flash-lamps failed to pick up the running figure.

"Rotten luck!" gasped Bob, breathlessly.

"This way!" said Drake.

He turned and led the way round the old building; heading, to the surprise of his friends, towards the caravan parked at a little distance from the moat house.

"It's not that jolly old caravanner, old bean," said Bob. "He's headed for the giddy open spaces—not for that van."

"If it was the caravanner, he would not be likely to head for the van with us at his heels!" answered Drake.

"Oh, I suppose not!" admitted Bob. "But—"

"If the man in the van is at home, that settles that!" said Drake. "If he isn't we can put two and two together!"

"Right as rain, old bean!"

The juniors, breathless, arrived at the van. There was no gleam of light to be seen from it.

Drake mounted the step and knocked at the door.

No reply came from within. He knocked, and knocked again; and then tried the door. It was locked!

"Not at home?" said Harry Wharton, as the boy from Baker Street stepped down.

"No!" said Drake quietly.

"Then it looks—"

"It does!"

"Might be gone anywhere, you know," said Johnny Bull. "Might be gone to the pictures, like Bunter."

Jack Drake smiled.

"He might be!" he agreed. "But it's rather a coincidence that he happens to be out just at this time. I've a strong suspicion that he's cutting across the fields with a hood over his face. We're going to know more about him—later. He's done us this time."

"No good watching now," said Nugent.

"Hardly! The game's up for to-night. But we've found out something, at any rate—we've seen him—"

"The man who gave me that crack on the nut!" said Bob.

"No doubt about that—the man who plays ghost in the moat house, with his face hidden!" said Drake.

"But what on earth can his game be?" said Harry Wharton.

"Why—"

"That's what we're going to find out, before we're much older!" answered Jack Drake. "Nothing doing to-night—let's get back!"

The Greyfriars party tramped back to Wharton Lodge—puzzled more than ever. What they had seen only mystified them—they could not begin to guess what strange secret lay behind the mystery of the moat house. But what the strange secret was Jack Drake was going to discover—and Harry Wharton & Co. did not doubt that the boy from Baker Street would be successful.

"Bunter come in, Wells?" asked Bob Cherry, when the Greyfriars party had got in, and stood warming themselves before the fire in the hall at Wharton Lodge.

"No, sir!" answered Wells.

"He will be in in an hour at the latest!" said Johnny Bull.

"Eh? How do you know?"

"Because it's supper in an hour."

And the juniors chuckled.

But, to the general surprise, Billy Bunter was not in to supper. It was going to be an unexpectedly long time before Harry Wharton & Co. saw the fat Owl of the Remove again.

THE END.

(Next week's yarn dealing with the further thrilling holiday adventures of Harry Wharton & Co. is entitled: "THE HOODED MAN!" and is undoubtedly the best in the series. Make sure of next Saturday's MAGNET, chums, by ordering it from your newsagent to-day!)

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