

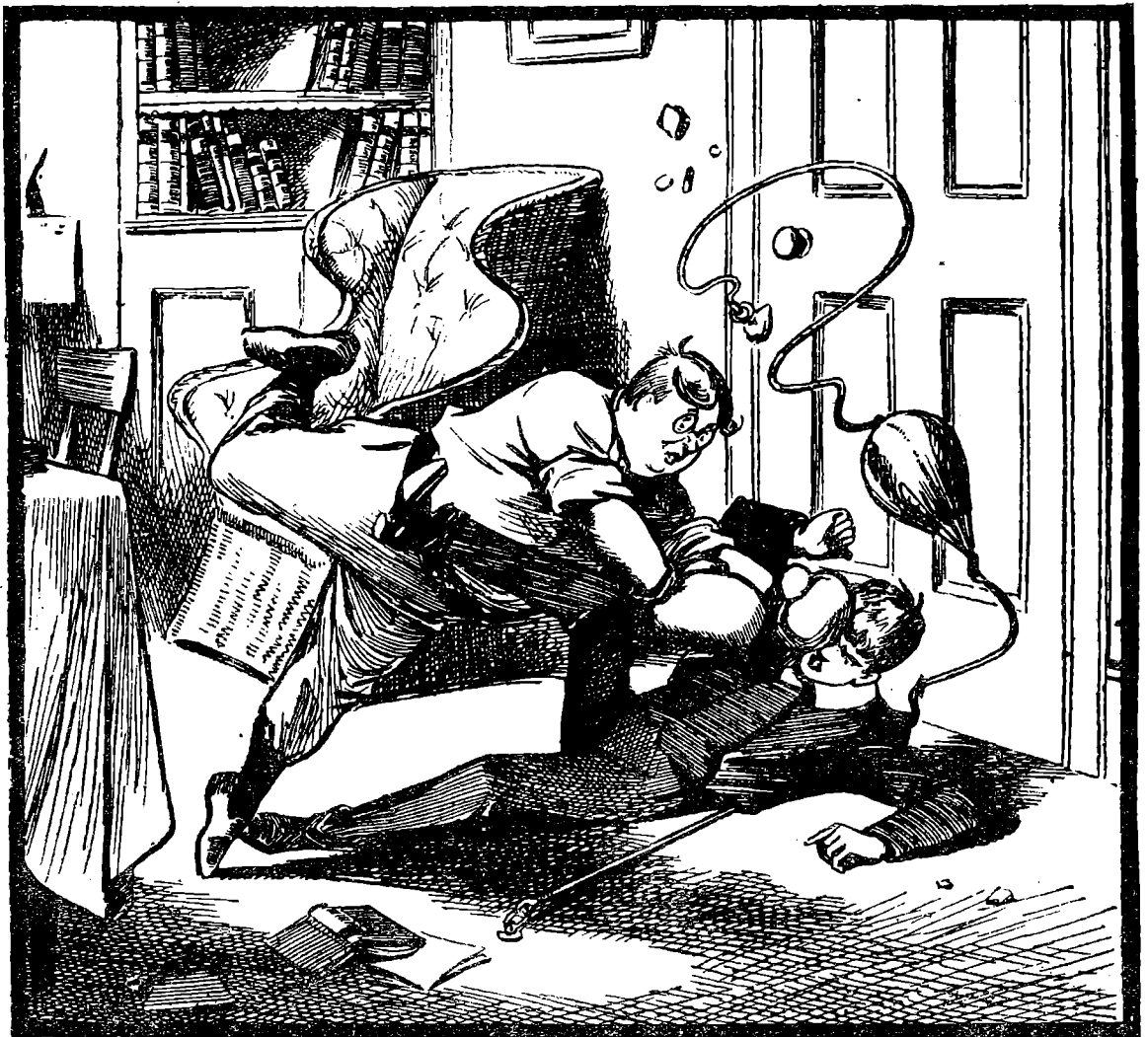
BUNTER THE BOXER!

A Magnificent Long Complete Tale of Billy Bunter appears in this issue.

The Penny Popular

N.
255.

Three Complete Stories of—
HARRY WHARTON & Co.—JIMMY SILVER & Co.—TOM MERRY & Co.



BILLY BUNTER LETS HIMSELF GO!

(An Amusing Incident from the Grand Long Complete Story of Harry Wharton & Co., contained in this Issue.)

BUNTER THE BOXER!

By FRANK RICHARDS.

A Magnificent Long Complete Tale, dealing with the Early Adventures of Harry Wharton & Co. at Greyfriars School.

THE FIRST CHAPTER.

Bunter Punches the Ball.

THUD!
Biff!
Bang!
"Hallo, hallo, hallo!" ejaculated Bob Cherry, of the Remove Form at Greyfriars, as he stopped outside the door of Study No. 1. "What on earth—"

Biff!
Thud!
"My only hat! What's the matter?" muttered Bob, in perplexity. "They can't be fighting among themselves!"

Bob was surprised.
It was some time since he had left Study No. 1, to take up his new quarters in No. 13 with Mark Linley and little Wun Lung, the Chinaman. Since then there had been a friendly rivalry between him and his old study-mates. But Study No. 1 had certainly been a quieter spot since Bob had emigrated to fresh fields and pastures new.

But at the present moment there was as much noise proceeding from Study No. 1 as Bob Cherry had ever made in his most uproarious moments.

Biff!
Thud!
And there was an incessant trampling of feet and gasping of breath.

"They must be fighting. Now, is it Wharton and Nugent, or Nugent and Inky? I'll look in and see for them," thought Bob Cherry generously.

And he threw open the door.
He stood in the doorway, looking into the study in astonishment.

Wharton was not there, neither was Frank Nugent nor Inky. Billy Bunter, in his shirt-sleeves, with the perspiration rolling down his face and dimming his big spectacles, was there—very much there.

He had fastened up a punching-ball on two-hooks, one in the floor and one in the ceiling.

The former was strongly fixed, being screwed into the planks of the floor; but the hook in the ceiling was hardly likely to prove so reliable.

Bunter, with a pair of boxing-gloves on his chubby fists, was pounding away at the punching-ball with great energy.

Every moment or two he gave it a terrific biff, and jumped away to avoid the rebound.

He was panting from his exertions, but sticking to it manfully.

Bob Cherry stared at him blankly.
To see Billy Bunter doing anything like work was a marvel, and this was very much indeed like work.

"Hallo, hallo, hallo!"
Bunter blinked at him through his spectacles.

"Hallo, Cherry! Don't get in the way!"

"I don't mean to!" chuckled Bob Cherry, keeping back just out of reach of the extension of the punching-ball.

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"What's the little game?"
"I'm practising."
"Trying to get your fat down?"
"Certainly not, Cherry! I'm practising boxing."

"Oh, is that boxing?"
"What did you think it was?" asked Bunter sarcastically. "Five finger exercises? Or part-singing?"

"Well, I couldn't guess it was boxing. It doesn't look like it, you know," said Bob. "Are you trying to hit the ball?"

"Of course I am!"
"Good!" said Bob, as Billy made a drive at the punching-ball, missed it with his fist, and banged his nose upon it. "Do that again! This is something new in boxing, and isn't included in National Sporting Club rules."

"Ow!"
"What's the matter now?"
"Ow! I've hurt my nose!"
"Never mind; you might have hurt the punching-ball."

"Oh, really Cherry—"
"Go it, Buntly! I like to see you. You are so splendidly developed physically, that it's a pleasure to watch you."

"Well, I think I'm pretty well developed considering," said Bunter, with a glance downwards at his plump form.
"Yes, rather. You develop sideways, of course; but what of that?"

"Oh, really—"
"You may bring down your weight a ton or two—I mean a stone or two—if you keep this up," said Bob Cherry encouragingly.

"Of course, I can understand that you're jealous of my abilities as a boxer—"
"Of course I am. Go it! Let's see you do that little trick with your nose again."

Bunter deigned no reply.
He adjusted his spectacles on his fat, reddened nose, and slogged at the punching-ball once more.

Biff!

Thud!
"Jolly good!" said Bob Cherry, as the ball flew back and crashed on Bunter's chin before he could escape it. "Ripping!"

"Ow! Yow! Wow!"
Bunter sat down with a crash that shook the study.

"First fall to the punching-ball!" exclaimed Bob Cherry. "Bravo! Now, then, Buntly! Time! Second round!"

"Ow! Yow!"
"One, two, three, four, five, six—"
"Grooch!"

"If you don't get up before I've counted ten, the punching-ball has won," said Bob Cherry warningly. "Seven, eight nine—"

Bunter staggered to his feet.
"Bravo! Go it! Two to one on the punching-ball!"

"Oh, really, Cherry—"
"Stick to it! You're growing thinner already."

Bunter glared through his spectacles. Whenever he had a new wheeze or hobby he took himself very seriously. That a

member of the rival study should take it in this humorous spirit was annoying, to say the least.

"I'm jolly well going to challenge your study, when I'm fit," he said angrily.

"Good! You can box the study all right—it can't hit back anyway," said Bob Cherry, laughing.

"I mean I'm going to challenge you fellows in No. 13—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"
"The fact is, I'm rather short of money," said Bunter, rubbing his chin. "I've thought of this wheeze as a new idea for raising tin. I've always fancied myself as a boxer—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"
"Blessed if I can see anything to cackle at!" said the fat junior peevishly. "I'm a jolly good boxer, and I've a keen eye, you know, and heaps of pluck. I was thinking of challenging a chap for a purse of so much a side—National Sporting Club rules—"

"Why, you horrid young prize-fighting, gambling bouncer?"

"Oh, it's sport, you know!"
"It will be—for the chap who walks over you."

"Oh, really, Cherry—"
"A thousand guineas a side, I suppose," said Bob Cherry. "The fight limited to five hundred rounds."

"Oh, really, Cherry—"
"Ha, ha, ha! Take my advice, Buntly, and box the punching-ball, and don't try a match with anything on two legs. You can hit the ball sometimes."

"Look here—"
"Oh, get on with the practice; I like watching you! It's just like a dancing hippopotamus I saw at a circus once!"

Bunter did not reply to that disrespectful remark.

He threw all his energies into an assault upon the punching-ball, and Bob Cherry watched him with great interest.

Billy was hitting the ball directly towards Bob Cherry, but Bob was a foot or more out of the extreme range of it, so he was in no danger.

At all events, he thought he was in no danger. It had not occurred to him that the hook in the ceiling might be in a rocky condition.

Biff!
The ball flew from the crashing glove.

It bounced back, and Bunter dodged it, and then let out his right again in a terrific drive.

Crash!

Bob Cherry gave a roar.
For that last drive had torn the hook from the ceiling, and punching-ball and hook and Billy Bunter all crashed upon the unfortunate Bob together.

The junior staggered back, with the punching-ball on his chest and Bunter's boxing-glove in his eye.

Bump!

Down went Bob Cherry, and over him sprawled the fat junior, with an impact

that knocked every ounce of breath out of his body.

"Gr-r-r-r-roochoch!"

"Ow! Yow!"

"Gerroff!"

"Oh! Ow! Yow!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Wharton, looking in at the door. "Is that something new in gymnastics, Billy?"

"Yank that lunatic off!" gasped Bob Cherry. "He's choking me!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Wharton dragged the fat junior up. Bunter groped for his glasses, and adjusted them on his fat nose.

Bob Cherry rose breathlessly.

He was gasping, and his left eye was closed. He seemed to be meditating assault and battery upon the fat junior.

"You—you—you fat maniac!" he gasped.

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Wharton. "Has he been using you for a punching-ball?"

"The hook came out!" gurgled Bunter.

"I'm sincerely sorry. It wasn't my fault, of course. These ceilings are made rottenly."

"You fat duffer! You howling ass!"

"Oh, really, Cherry!"

"You—you—you—"

Words failed Bob Cherry. He blinked out of his half-closed eye savagely, and felt it tenderly with his finger.

"This will be black before morning. If it is, there will be a dead porpoise found in this school!"

And Bob Cherry rushed off in search of a beef steak to apply to his damaged eye. Billy Bunter blinked after him.

"Help me fasten this thing up again, Wharton," he said. "I want to put in some more practice this evening. I'm thinking of boxing somebody for a purse of five guineas, and when I've won it I'm going to stand a series of extensive feeds, and ask you fellows. Lend me a hand!"

"I'll lend you a foot if you begin that again in this study!" said Wharton.

"Look at the damage you've done to the ceiling!"

"Of course, that can't be helped!"

"And how am I going to do my prep, with you banging a punch-ball about?"

"Never mind your prep!"

Wharton laughed.

"Go and box in the passage, Billy. Go and box in the box-room. That's the proper place to box, when you come to think of it!"

"Oh, really, Wharton—"

Harry led him gently by the ear to the door, and put him into the passage; then he threw out the punching-ball.

"Oh, really, you know—"

Wharton closed the door. Bunter put his head in the next moment.

"I say, Wharton—"

Harry picked up the poker and rushed to the door. Bunter scuttled down the passage like a frightened rabbit.

Wharton burst into a laugh and settled down to his work uninterrupted now by Billy Bunter. The fat junior wandered disconsolately away with his punching-ball under his arm.

"It's rotten, this jealousy a clever chap always meets with, even among his own personal friends," he murmured.

"I'd go and give Wharton a jolly good licking, only—only I don't think I'm quite up to it yet. When I've had a little bit more practice, won't I make 'em squirm!"

THE SECOND CHAPTER.

Bunter's Scheme.

BILLY BUNTER kept up the boxing idea with his usual obstinacy.

It was of no use pointing out to the fat junior that he was too fat, and that he ate too much over to distinguish himself in the ring. Moreover, he was as blind as a bat without his glasses, and to box in glasses was a decidedly risky proceeding.

But Bunter was not in the habit of

listening to reason. He persisted that he was a born boxer, and that he only wanted a little practice to become a splendid exponent of the manly art. Any opposition in his own study he attributed to jealousy.

Bob Cherry, of No. 13, was inclined to humour him, and see exactly how great an ass he would make of himself.

Since the rivalry had commenced between the two ends of the Remove passage, Bunter had been fired with ambition. Why shouldn't he be the fellow to make No. 1 top study in the Remove?

The idea grew upon him. His mind was quite made up now that he would challenge Bob Cherry to a boxing contest, and stake the supremacy of Study No. 1 on the result.

And with the idea of turning an honest penny, as usual, he wanted a purse made up for him to win.

Argument was wasted on Bunter. The fellows in his study tried, to reason with

said Bunter, with dignity. "Not being in my own study, he wasn't jealous of my abilities. This jealousy of a chap in his own quarters is simply sickening."

"My dear ass—"

"Bob Cherry is quite willing to meet me, I believe, if you chaps backed me up and made a meeting of it. As a matter of fact, Cherry's as jealous as you chaps are."

"Jealous of your good looks, I suppose?" suggested Nugent.

"The looks of the esteemed Bunter are terrific," murmured Hurree Singh.

Billy Bunter smirked into the glass. "Well, you know jolly well what Hazeldene's sister thinks of me."

"Well, she's too polite to say what she thinks about you," said Wharton. "But I can guess. She probably thinks you're a fat, conceited, nasty, slimy toad."

"Oh, really, Wharton—"

"And if you say another word on the subject, I'll squash you."

"This jealousy gets on my nerves," said



"Buzz off!" said Harry Wharton. "A chap's study isn't the place for punching the ball!"

him, but in vain. Bunter was past reasoning with.

"I say, you fellows," he remarked, "you might back up a chap in your own study, you know. You chaps are always saying that No. 1 is top study in the Remove."

"So it is," said Nugent.

"Well, but Cherry and Linley claim that No. 13 is top study; and the best way of putting them in their place is to have a proper meeting, according to proper rules, and knock out their champion with the gloves on."

"Rats!"

"Oh, really, Wharton! I've been practising hard lately, and Temple, of the Upper Fourth, has been giving me some tips. He says he's never seen a boxer like me."

"True enough. I dare say," said Harry, laughing. "He was rotting you, you young ass."

"Of course, he could see my quality,"

Billy Bunter, backing away from Wharton, who was looking dangerous. "I'm not the chap to plume myself on a conquest. I can't help the girls looking at me. They will do it, and I never encourage 'em. There's something about me, I suppose—a sort of distinguished manner—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Blessed if I can see anything to cackle at."

"Look in the glass."

"Oh, really, Nugent, you know perfectly well that Bob Cherry's jealous of me because Marjorie— Ow! Wow! Leggo!"

"I told you I would squash you."

"Ow! Yow! Wow!"

Bunter jerked himself away, and blinked furiously at Wharton.

"I've a jolly good mind to give you a hiding, Wharton."

"Go ahead!"

"I'm sincerely sorry to see all this jealousy. But to come back to the subject

we were speaking of, will you chaps back me up?"

"Oh, ring off, for goodness' sake!"

"Then I shall have to get a backer outside this study," said Billy Bunter. "Carberry's a sporting chap, and he'll back me up. I should think you chaps would like to see a really ripping, first-class boxing contest."

"So we should; but you couldn't box a white rabbit."

"More jealousy! I'll jolly well show you up in the Form, anyway," said Bunter. "I'll let the chaps know how you try to keep me in the shade."

"Hallo, hallo, hallo!"

Bob Cherry looked in. Bunter blinked at him.

"I say, Cherry, we're discussing the idea of a boxing match, you against me—Study No. 1 against No. 13, you know. Wharton thinks it's a good idea."

"Why, I—"

"Only he's jealous of my scoring, and making a show," explained Bunter.

Bob Cherry grinned.

"Too bad!" he said. "I really think Wharton ought to play the game on an occasion like this. Why not back him up, Wharton?"

"Oh, don't be an ass!"

"I think it's a jolly good idea. We could bring the meeting off in the gym, and have a crowd to look on. It's a ripping wheeze."

Harry Wharton laughed. Bob Cherry was a very good boxer, and he was three times as strong as Bunter, and nearly a head taller. A match between them would be utterly absurd. Bob would only have to hit out once to knock the fat junior silly.

But Bunter, blinded by conceit, could not realise anything of the sort. He was anxious to repeat his exploits upon the punching-ball upon the person of Bob Cherry.

Harry knew that Bob's idea was simply to "rot" the fat junior.

But Bunter's importunities and his absurd conceit were getting on Harry's nerves, and he was greatly inclined to let Bob have his way, and let the fat junior make as big a fool of himself as he chose.

"I say, you fellows, Cherry thinks it's a good wheeze," said Bunter persuasively. "You ought to back me up, you know."

"Look here, Bunter, you're a fat, stupid duffer—"

"Oh, really, Wharton—"

"But if you insist upon this boxing match coming off, and won't give us any peace till you get it, we'll arrange it."

"Right you are! That's good enough!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Bob Cherry, going off suddenly like an alarm clock. "Ha, ha, ha!"

"Blessed if I can see anything to cackle at in a business-arrangement like this," said Bunter peevishly. "We can fix up the details of the meeting later. Now we'd better see about making up the purse."

"The what?"

"The purse. Of course, we're not going to box for nothing. That would be a waste of time."

"Well, you're a pretty average specimen of a blackguard," said Bob Cherry. "Do you think we're going to box for money?"

"Oh, really, Cherry, it's always done, you know. It's all very well to talk about sport, but I've always noticed that chaps who talk about sport like to rake in the tin all the same. Besides, I'm short of money."

"Not really!" exclaimed Bob Cherry, with an air of great surprise.

"Yes, really. I'm almost stony, and I want to raise the wind."

"Hasn't your postal-order come?"

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"No; I've been disappointed about that."

"Haven't you had a cheque from the Patriotic Home Work Association?"

"That turned out to be a swindle."

"What about the remittance from the Imperial Fair Trading Co.?"

"H'm! That was another swindle."

"And the big sums you've been getting by sending photographs to the Press?"

"I—I haven't finished any yet."

The juniors were roaring with laughter as Bob went on with his list. Billy Bunter's schemes for raising money were many and various, and they all ended in the same way.

"Then you'd better sell Wharton's bat, or Nugent's knife, or Inky's diamond-ring, or Ogilvy's camera," said Bob Cherry, shaking his head. "You can't raise any money on a boxing match. You see, we should all be expelled for it, for one thing."

"Of course we should keep it dark. Fellows always have to keep things dark when they go in for sport at our age," explained Billy Bunter, with an air of great worldly wisdom. "I knew a chap who used to bet on horses, with a bookmaker, and he had to keep it awfully dark from his pater."

Bob Cherry snorted.

"Well, I hope his pater found him out, and gave him a jolly good hiding, that's all!" he exclaimed, in disgust. "And if ever I catch you doing anything of the sort, I'll take the place of your pater, and give you the licking of your life. And if you say another word about making up a purse for the match, I'll give it you now."

"The purse?"

"No, ass, the licking."

Bunter grunted, and left the study. The Famous Four grinned at one another.

"We'll rot him," said Bob Cherry. "We'll get up a boxing match, and have the whole Remove to see it, and make him look the biggest ass in the universe. That ought to have some effect even on Bunter."

And the Removites agreed that it ought.

THE THIRD CHAPTER.

Billy Bunter Puts Carberry on to a Good Thing.

"WELL, you worm?"

That was Carberry's polite greeting as he came into his study and found William George Eunter there.

Billy Bunter was apparently waiting for him to come in. He was sitting on the table swinging his fat legs. He slid off quickly enough at the sound of a footstep, and blinked a little uneasily at the prefect.

He had come there to put Carberry on to a good thing.

"I—I say, Carberry," said Bunter, watching the bully of the Sixth warily, and prepared to dodge round the table if necessary—"I say, I want to put you on to a good thing, you know."

"What are you jabbering about?"

"Of course, you know it's an open secret among the fags about your smoking, and playing cards for money, and so on," blinked Bunter. "I—oh!"

He dodged round the table just in time. Carberry glared at him across the table.

"You fat, young scoundrel—"

"But I say, Carberry, I—I didn't mean to offend you, you know. I can put you on to a good thing—a way to win twenty guineas."

The prefect stared at him. He was not above making bets on races with a bookmaker in Friardale, but he kept that a dead secret. It would have meant public expulsion from Greyfriars if it had been known.

Some of the fags who took his messages had a pretty clear idea of what went on.

But the cheek of a fag coming to him with a tip nearly took Carberry's breath away. He could not speak for the moment, and Billy Bunter rattled on.

"We're getting up a boxing match in the Remove, with a purse for the winner, you see, and I thought you might like to have a hand in it. Carberry, as you're a sporting chap. It will give the affair a tone to have a prefect in it, and I know you put money on Bill Giles when he was boxing the Kentish Buster at the Bird-in-Hand. We could have a system of sharing out the purse, if you could induce the fellows to put up a decent one."

Carberry almost gasped.

"You're boxing in the Remove—for a purse!" he ejaculated.

"Yes, rather!"

"Who's boxing?"

"I am."

"You! You fat idiot!"

Bunter blinked indignantly.

Carberry's remarks could not be called polite.

"Look here, Carberry, it's a fact. I'm taking up boxing as a science; and Temple, of the Upper Fourth, says I'm a splendid boxer. I know I am, too. I've studied the subject, you see; and there's pretty few things I can't do when I make up my mind. You see, I've got the scientific knowledge, and that's what counts more than brute strength. Cherry has the brute strength, but I have the science. I shall knock him into a cocked hat. You'll see!"

"You're boxing Cherry, of the Remove?"

"Yes, rather!"

"For a purse of money?"

"Yes. I shall refuse to box without a purse. Of course, a chap wants paying for his trouble."

Carberry looked at him in a very curious way. If Harry Wharton & Co. were mixed up, in truth, in a disreputable scheme of this sort, it was his duty as a prefect—to say nothing of other considerations—to expose them, and that Wharton would be expelled, and his followers flogged, was an absolute certainty. But was it true? Carberry found it easy to believe what he wanted to believe.

The fact that the prefect was undoubtedly interested encouraged Bunter. He went on more confidently.

"You see, Carberry, I came to put you on this because it's a good thing. I'm a sporting chap myself. There's no reason why you shouldn't do well out of it. If you don't want to take a hand in getting up the fight, you could make bets on it. I know you and Lucas and Loder and Musgrave and the rest make bets between yourselves, and you could land quite a sum of money. Of course, I should expect a commission for putting you up to the thing."

"Who's in this with you?" asked Carberry abruptly, convinced at last that Billy Bunter, at all events, was in deadly earnest, and was not working off an elaborate hoax upon him.

"Oh, all the fellows, you know! I'm boxing Bob Cherry. Linley backs him up. The fellows in my study are making the arrangements."

"Harry Wharton, I suppose?"

"Yes, Wharton and Nugent and Inky. Most of the Remove will be there, though, to see the match. You ought to see it. Of course, it wouldn't do for a prefect to appear openly in the matter. But you could look on without being seen. Come to think of it, we ought to have it in the open air somewhere, at a distance from the school. It would be safer."

If Carberry had been in the habit of doing his duty as a prefect, he would have felt the insult of being supposed to be prepared to break any rule of the school in this flagrant way.

He did not feel insulted, however. He only felt an inward rejoicing that he had

at last caught Harry Wharton napping. Wharton, of course, would not have the faintest idea that Bunter had told him this.

The safest thing he could do would be to pretend to disbelieve every word of it, and kick Bunter out of his study.

Then it would go on uninterrupted, and at the proper moment he could descend upon the young rascals and catch them in the act. Then, exit Harry Wharton!

Carberry broke into a chuckle at the thought of it.

The chuckle encouraged Billy Bunter. "Do you think it's a good idea, Carberry?"

"Where are you thinking of having the meeting?" asked Carberry, without replying to that question.

"Well, I haven't had time to think about that. But there's the old barn, you know—the place where Nugent disguised himself when we were having a contest with the Boy Scouts at Pegg. That would be a good place. Lots of room, and very secluded. No danger of masters or prefects—ahem!—no danger of anybody coming along."

"And when is it to take place?" "I think Saturday afternoon would be a good time—soon after dinner, you know."

Carberry pointed to the door. Bunter, not understanding what that meant when he was getting along so swimmingly, blinked at him.

"What do you mean, Carberry?" "Get out!"

"Eh?" "Get out!" said Carberry. "I don't believe a word you've been saying. You are trying to hoax me!"

"Oh, really, Carberry—"
"If I believed you, it would be my duty as a prefect to stop you," said Carberry, remembering that what he said might come out later. "But I don't believe a word of it. I am certain that Wharton would never be mixed up in anything of the sort. Now get out of my study!"

"I—I say—"
Carberry picked up a cane. Bunter made a rush for the door, and the prefect was quickly behind him. The cane rang and sang on the fat limbs of the junior as he dodged out of the room, and he went down the passage at express speed.

Carberry flung the cane upon the table and chuckled grimly. "At last!" he muttered. "I think I've really got you at last. Hurry Wharton! We shall see!"

Bunter did not stop running till he reached Study No. 1. He dashed in breathlessly, and collapsed into the arm-chair.

Wharton and Nugent were there, and they stared at him blankly.

"What on earth's the matter, Billy?" "Carberry!" gasped Bunter. "He's gone mad!"

"Is he after you?" "Yes! I don't know! No, I suppose I've roused him!" said Bunter breathlessly.

"I always knew he was a cad and a bullying beast; but I didn't know he was mad! I told him about our boxing-match, and he wouldn't believe a word of it, and kicked me out of his study, and chased me along the passage with the poker!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" "Blessed if I can see anything to chuckle at! He's a dangerous maniac. He made a cut at me with the tongs as I turned the corner—"

"Ha, ha! It was the poker a moment ago!"

"He had the poker in one hand, and the tongs in the other. He might have brained me, if—"

"If you had any brains?" "Oh, really, Nugent! If he had hit me,

I in an. Fortunately, I sprang out of the way, and the poker—"

"Ha, ha! The tongs—"

"I mean the tongs—the tongs crashed upon the wall with a sickening thud!" said Bunter, who never stopped to consider the facts when he began to tell a yarn. "He must have bent them with the crash on the wall. He might have brained me. I went to his study to put him on to a good thing, and this is what I get in return."

"Serve you jolly well right!" "Oh, really, Wharton! If you'd been chased down the passage by a chap with a cricket-stump in his hand you'd—"

"My only hat! Which hand did he have the cricket-stump in?"

"He must have had a third hand!" grinned Nugent. "A handy man altogether. He's like a chap in the American gore-book, who had a revolver in each hand and a bowie-knife in the other. I say, Bunter, have you really been to Carberry's study at all?"

At this question, which implied a far-reaching distrust of his veracity, the fat junior simply snorted. But he said no more about his visit to Carberry. He had no sympathy to expect in Study No. 1.



"Hallo, hallo, hallo!" said Bob Cherry. "What's the little game?"

THE FOURTH CHAPTER.

Billy Bunter Going Strong.

THE Remove heard of the coming boxing-match with great pleasure. If Bunter the boxer proved to be as funny as Bunter the photographer, they were assured of a hearty laugh on Saturday afternoon.

Billy Bunter was taking the matter very seriously. He was the only fellow in the Remove who did.

The match having been decided upon, the details were soon arranged. The old barn in the field was decided upon for the place.

Four o'clock on Saturday afternoon was the time. Nugent and Mark Linley were the seconds, Harry Wharton timekeeper, and Hazeldene referee.

Most of the Remove had determined to come. The barn was a spacious one, and there was plenty of room.

Hazeldene said that he would bring his sister if he could manage it, to see what a splendid boxer Bunter was, and Billy Bunter purred with satisfaction. He was very eager to distinguish himself in the eyes of Marjorie Hazeldene.

The whole Remove was looking forward joyously to the boxing event. Bunter was a distinguished person.

Under the circumstances, he could not be refused permission to have his punching-ball put up in Study No. 1 again.

He explained that he had to train. And a great many fellows looked in to see him training, taking good care to keep out of reach.

Bunter flattered himself that he was in excellent condition, and he prided himself particularly upon his knowledge of the science of the thing.

"What you want is science," he explained to the fellows in Study No. 1.

"You mean it's what you want!" grinned Nugent.

"I've got it!" said Bunter. "I fancy Cherry will find it a bit difficult to get through my guard. Look here!"

Bunter jaunted the boxing-gloves on his fat fists and made a pass at Nugent.

Nugent received a tap on the chest that would not have hurt a fly; but he sat down with a heavy bump.

"Oh! Hold on! I'm done!" he gasped. Bunter blinked round triumphantly.

"There you are, you see," he remarked complacently. "I didn't put much force into that blow; it was the science that did it."

Frank Nugent staggered to his feet. He appeared to be labouring under some suppressed emotion.

"Good!" he said weakly. "If you box like that on Saturday, Bunter, the Remove will have something worth seeing."

"Well, I don't want to brag, you fellows. But what I don't know about boxing isn't worth knowing. But I wanted to show you my guard. Just try—"

Nugent backed away. "No, thank you! I don't want another of those knock-down blows!"

"I won't hurt you," said Bunter patronisingly.

"I'm not going to risk it. You might hit out hard without thinking, and perhaps smash me up."

"Well, I might; I'm awfully strong," said Bunter. "You try, Inky. See if you can get past my guard."

Hurree Janset Ram Singh sparred at the fat junior.

Bunter knocked all his blows aside with perfect ease, perhaps because Hurree Singh allowed him to do so. Then he gave the nabob a slight tap, and the dusky junior went down with a bump that shook the study.

"Oh, the painfulness is terrific!" he gasped.

"Good! It's the science that does it. Will you have a go, Wharton?"

"No, thanks!" said Harry, laughing. "It's quite enough to see you knock out Nugent and Inky."

Bunter peeled off the gloves. He was swelling so much with importance that there really seemed danger that his waistcoat buttons would not stand the strain.

"And now about the purse!" he remarked.

"What purse?" "The purse we're boxing for. How much is it to be?"

"Ass!"

"Do you mean to say that you think I'm going to box for nothing?" demanded Bunter indignantly. "I told you plainly there would have to be a purse. And, look here—not so much of your calling me names. I'm not going to stand it!"

"You're not going to stand it?" murmured Wharton.

"No, I'm not! I'm a jolly good boxer, and I'm not going to stand any nonsense. I could lick any fellow in this study, and don't you forget it! Now, about that purse. I want twenty guineas!"

"Twenty rats!"

"Well, suppose we say five guineas. It could be got up by subscription in the

Form. Well, I don't want to be exacting. I'm thinking of giving a series of these pugilistic exhibitions, and expect to make a steady income from them. Suppose we say a pound?"

A glimmer came into Nugent's eyes. "Would you be satisfied with a pound?" he asked.

"No, not satisfied, but I would put up with it. I never get treated as I ought to be treated, for that matter."

"Well, if a pound would do—"

"Look here—" began Wharton.

"Leave it to me, old chap. I think Bunter ought to have his pound. Why should he box for nothing? Come on, you chaps, and let Buntie have another go at the punching-ball. Give it one for its mother, Buntie!"

"Oh, really, Nugent—"

The three chums left the study. They met Bob Cherry in the passage. From Study No. 1 proceeded a sound of biffing and banging. Bunter the boxer was busy. Harry drew Nugent to a stop in the passage.

"Look here," he said, "what are you driving at? Bunter's not going to have his way in this. We can't have any gambling mixed up in a jape."

"Who's talking about gambling? Bunter wants to box for a pound."

"Well, a sovereign is as bad as fifty pounds for that matter. I say—"

"You're jolly dense. Who's talking about a sovereign?"

"A pound's a sovereign, isn't it?" demanded Wharton, perplexed.

"Not always—a pound of treacle, or a pound of candles, for instance."

The juniors stared at Nugent for a moment, and then burst into a roar of laughter that echoed through the corridor. Nugent chuckled.

"That's the idea," he remarked. "I said a pound—and a pound it shall be. Only it's to be a pound of candles. I'll get them at Mrs. Minbles."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Billy Bunter, little dreaming of the real nature of the purse he was to combat for, slogged away at the punching-ball with might and main.

After knocking it about for a quarter of an hour, he was satisfied. If he knocked Cherry about like that, the champion of Study No. 13 would be very queer afterwards.

On Saturday morning Bunter was swelling with so much importance that Carberry might have noticed something, even if he had not possessed the clue.

The prefect was, however, on the watch all the time. References to the coming match had been made by Removites in his hearing, and he knew that Bunter had not boxed him as far as that was concerned. A boxing-match, of course, there could be no objections to; but a kind of prize-fight for money would bring down upon the juniors all the thunders of the Head's wrath. Carberry was almost sure; he wanted to be quite sure.

"No more of that hoax, I suppose?" he remarked, tapping Bunter on the shoulder that Saturday morning.

The Owl of the Remove blinked at him. "It's not a hoax, Carberry; it's jolly well coming off."

"Rats! Do you mean to tell me you've got a purse to box for?"

"Yes, rather! They're treating me very meanly, only putting up a pound to be fought for, and I believe some of them think that Bob Cherry will get that, and stand treat with it; so they won't lose anything," said Bunter, in an aggrieved tone. "Of course, I shall win it. It's not much, but it's a beginning."

"You young ass! I don't believe a word of it!"

And Carberry walked away. But he was sure now. To go to the barn when the fight was on, and to take an unim-

peachable witness with him—that was Carberry's idea.

The Head would hardly consent to go; but Mr. Quelch, the master of the Remove, could not decline, as the boys of his Form were involved.

Carberry kept his own counsel for the present. But the chatter among the Remove, even in the class-room, was noticed by Mr. Quelch himself, and he guessed that there was something on among the juniors, though he had no suspicion as to what it was.

Hazeldene pedalled off on his bicycle in the direction of Cliff House after dinner, and shortly afterwards hardly a Removite was to be seen on the playing-fields or about the school.

Harry Wharton & Co. went out in a group, Bunter with them; and Nugent carried a parcel which the keen-eyed prefect guessed to contain the requisites for the fight.

With a gleam in his eyes, Carberry went to look for Mr. Quelch. The latter gentleman was in his study, and seemed to be busy; but he laid down his pen as the prefect came in. Carberry's grave face warned him that something serious was coming.

"I trust I am not interrupting you, sir," said Carberry. "I have a very serious matter to mention to you—a matter so serious that I do not care to interfere in it by myself."

"Indeed!" said Mr. Quelch, who did not seem to be duly impressed by this exordium. "May I ask you to state the matter as briefly as possible?"

The prefect bit his lip. "Certainly, sir. It is a disgraceful, an utterly disgraceful and degrading matter, and concerns the boys of your Form," he said spitefully.

The Remove master looked at him sharply.

"In that case, I shall be glad to have it brought to my notice," he said coldly. "But I cannot forget that you have a prejudice against certain boys in my Form, and that you have on previous occasions brought unfounded accusations against Wharton in particular. Does this matter concern Wharton?"

"As it happens, it does."

"I guessed so."

"If you prefer it, I will go to the Head, sir," said Carberry hotly. "If you choose to allow the Remove to mix themselves up in prize-fights—"

Mr. Quelch frowned.

"Tell me at once what you have to tell me, Carberry."

"Harry Wharton and his friends have gone off to a quiet place, where they have arranged a prize-fight between two boys in the Remove," said Carberry. "If it were a common fight, I should interfere as a prefect. I have received information that it is to be a prize-fight—information I discredited at first. When Bunter mentioned the matter in my hearing, I told him plainly that I did not believe Wharton would ever mix himself up in such a matter. I refused to listen to any more. But certain events have happened to-day which bear out his story."

"What events?" asked Mr. Quelch sharply.

"The whole of the Remove have gone

out. They have been whispering mysteriously to one another about something. Bunter has been practising with the punching-ball for a week or more."

"Bunter?"

"He is one of the principals. It looks to me as if he is put up simply to be beaten, in order that the gang—"

"The gang?"

"Wharton and his friends—in order that they may obtain the money."

"Do you affirm that these boys are fighting for money?"

"I have only Bunter's word for it, but he is a principal. He is so lost to all sense of propriety under Wharton's influence, that he imagined I should be willing to pass over the matter, and put money on the fight myself."

"That does not look as if you made yourself respected as a prefect," said Mr. Quelch drily.

"It is not a question of me now, but of Wharton," said Carberry, with a touch of insolence in his manner. "If you wish to protect him—"

"You know perfectly well that I wish to do nothing of the sort, Carberry. If this story is true, he will be expelled from Greyfriars, and I shall be glad to see him go. But I shall not believe it without the most direct proof."

"It is easy enough to obtain proof. I will show you the way to the barn where the prize-fight is going on at this moment."

Mr. Quelch rose from his chair.

"I will come with you," he said quietly.

And master and prefect left Greyfriars together—Mr. Quelch worried and uneasy, and Carberry in a mood of suppressed triumph.

THE FIFTH CHAPTER.

The Great Event.

"KICK off, you chaps!" That was how the Removites put it. They were waiting in the old barn, in a big circle, eager for the combat to commence.

Billy Bunter was in his shirt-sleeves, his braces tied round his fat waist. He looked very businesslike.

So did Bob Cherry, also in his shirt-sleeves, and trying on a pair of boxing-gloves with an air of great seriousness.

So did the seconds. They had basins of water and sponges all ready, and towels over their arms. To judge by the preparations, a prize-fight of a very serious order was about to take place.

"Go it!"

"On the ball!"

Billy Bunter blinked at the audience. He was very pleased by the enthusiasm, but he could not quite understand why most of the fellows were grinning. He concluded that they didn't think that Bob Cherry had the ghost of a chance.

"I'm ready!" he remarked.

Wharton took out his watch.

"Referee's not yet arrived," he said. "The bouncer is bringing some lady visitors to see the combat."

"Never mind the referee, start!"

"Hallo, hallo, hallo! Here he is!"

Hazeldene entered the barn with Marjorie, his sister, and her friend Clara. The two girls were smiling. Bunter was very gratified by their presence, though he was a little surprised that they should come to see so brutal a thing as a prize-fight.

It wasn't like Marjorie. But he reflected that the girls would probably have gone anywhere to have the pleasure of seeing him; and that reflection was quite enough to satisfy Billy Bunter.

"Now we're all here!" said Harry as he raised his cap to the girls. "Shove that bench forward for the ladies, Skinner."

"Right-ho!"

"Gentlemen, this historic match is about to commence. Ladies, you are about to behold a combat in which will be revived, and outdone, the heroism of the Middle-

TO THE BOYS AT THE FRONT!

If you are unable to obtain this publication regularly, please tell any news-vendor to get it from:

Messageries HACHETTE et Cie.,
111, Rue Reaumur,
PARIS.

Agas. William George Bunter is going to tackle Bob Cherry. You can see that Cherry is the bigger of the two, though Bunter perhaps makes up in width what Cherry gains in length."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Hear, hear!"

"Oh, really, Wharton—"

"But look at Bunter and note the wonderful development of his form, and you will see that Cherry has no chance against him. In this combat the heroism is really on the side of Cherry, in undertaking an apparently impossible task. If Cherry is seriously injured, we shall have to subscribe to send him to a convalescent home. But Bunter has promised not to use him too roughly."

"I don't want to hurt him," said Bunter. "I'm simply giving this show as an exhibition of first-class boxing, not because I want to hurt Bob Cherry. My chief incentive is to show what real boxing is really like. As for the pound, I shall stand a feed with that."

There was a general chuckle from the fellows who knew of what the "pound" consisted. A feed upon a pound of tallow candles would not be exactly a treat.

"By the way, I hope that pound hasn't been forgotten," added Bunter a little anxiously. "I haven't seen anything of it so far."

"It's in my bag," said Nugent, pointing to the bag he had brought the boxing-gloves in. "We raised it in Study No. 1, among ourselves, and I changed it for the pound at Mrs. Mimble's."

"Good!"

"Are you ready, gentlemen?"

"What-ho!"

"Then go it!"

The two boxers stepped into the ring and shook hands with great solemnity, and then Bunter stepped back for a moment.

"Of course, it's understood that there's to be no hitting above the chin," he said. "You might break my spectacles, and then you would have to pay for them."

"That's understood."

"All right, then. Not that I suppose you will hit me at all, as my guard is so perfect."

"Go it, Bunter!"

"Roll on him, Porpoise!"

And the combat commenced.

Harry Wharton timed the rounds solemnly. Bob Cherry really seemed to have no chance at all. Bunter had only to touch him and he sat down on the ground.

He was down twice in the first round, though a spectator might have imagined that he had not been struck hard enough to knock over a mouse.

The audience yelled with glee.

Bunter's air as he retired to his second's knee after the round was superb. The fact that the fat junior had not the slightest suspicion that he was being made fun of was the most ludicrous part of the performance.

He really thought he was getting the better of Bob Cherry, who could have wiped him off the earth with one hand in a single round.

"How do you feel, Bunt?" asked Nugent as he received his principal on his knee and fanned him with a cap.

"Right as rain!" said Bunter. "What do you think of my upper-cut?"

"Your which?"

"My upper-cut—the one I knocked Cherry down with last time."

"Oh! Was that an upper-cut?"

"Of course it was! Blessed lot you know about boxing!"

"It was ripping!" said Nugent earnestly. "I never saw an upper-cut like that in my life before!"

"Time!"

Bunter jumped up nimbly. He was greeted by a loud cheer from the crowd. They were thoroughly enjoying themselves.

Bunter pressed the fighting in the second round. He wanted to show the girls what he really could do. Bob Cherry was rather put to it to guard himself without hurting Bunter. He allowed a few light knocks to come home, and fell down each time he was touched.

"My goodness!" said Miss Clara in a whisper. "How funny it is! Fancy Bunter not knowing that he is being made game of!"

Marjorie laughed.

"He is so conceited," she said.

Bunter saw the two girls speaking together, and fluttered. He had no doubt they were admiring his splendid physique and thinking that he looked like a hero of romance.

"Time!"

Bob Cherry was gasping like a locomotive at the end of the second round. Bunter was a little winded. He was naturally short of breath, and he had been dancing round Cherry with unusual activity.

He hit out in a splendid windmill style, and his boxing-gloves clattered all over Bob Cherry's chest.

When Bob was tired of being punched, he simply kept one arm out straight, and Bunter could not get past it. But he let the fat junior land many punches. There was not force enough in them to hurt a sturdy fellow like Bob.

Bump!

He went down at last with a heavy bump, and the girls gave a little shriek—but it was of laughter. For as Bob rolled over on the ground he made a grimace at them, unseen by the fatuous Owl of the Remove.

Then Wharton began to count:

"One, two, three, four, five—"

If Bob Cherry did not rise by the time ten were counted he was beaten, according to the rules of the contest.

He gave a terrific stage groan and did not rise.

"Six, seven, eight, nine—"

Billy Bunter stood in a grand attitude,



Bump! Down went Bob Cherry, and over him sprawled the fat junior with an impact that knocked every ounce of breath out of his body. "Gr-r-r-roooh!"

"Give me something to drink," he said. "I'm dry. Warm work this boxing, you know, when you go in for the real thing."

"It must be," agreed Nugent. "Have some water?"

"Groo! Haven't you got any ginger beer?"

"No, but there's lots of water."

"H'm! I'll get some out of the pound afterwards."

Nugent wondered how he would get ginger beer out of the pound of candies, but he did not say so. He sponged over Bunter's heated face solemnly, and at the call of "Time!" the combatants faced one another again.

Bob Cherry came up to time, but he was staggering as he faced Bunter. He looked—to Bunter—as if he were decidedly groggy. Bob was not a particularly good actor, and only Bunter could not see that he was putting it on.

Bunter fairly sailed into it this time.

Ajax defying the Lightning was a mere nothing to William George Bunter at that moment.

"Out!"

The fateful word rang out, and at the same moment two figures darkened the open doorway of the old barn.

There was a general exclamation: "Mr. Quelch!"

THE SIXTH CHAPTER.

Carberry is Not Pleased!

MR. QUELCH stood surveying the scene. Carberry, looking in beside him, fairly glowered. Stronger proof of the prefect's accusation could hardly be adduced.

There was the ring, the basins of water and the sponges and towels, the two fighters in their shirt-sleeves and boxing-

gloves, Harry Wharton, watch in hand, counting, Bob Cherry extended gasping on the floor, and Bunter standing over him in a victorious attitude!

It looked, at a mere glance, something more than an ordinary junior fight. And if the purse was a fact—And wasn't it? Carberry knew it!

Mr. Quelch's brows grew black as a thundercloud.

"What does all this mean?"

Some of the Removites looked scared. They were not there for any harm, yet the master's anger tied their tongues, and they did not know what to say.

But Harry Wharton was not likely to be troubled like that. A glance at Carberry's exultant face, and he guessed how matters stood, and he could hardly restrain a laugh as he realised the prefect's blunder.

Carberry had over-reached himself this time, as he had done before.

"Wharton, I call upon you, as head boy of the Remove, to explain this."

"Certainly, sir."

"Carberry has brought me here to see, as he alleges, a prize-fight among you juniors for a purse of money."

"A pound, at all events," said Carberry.

"A shilling would be as bad as a hundred pounds," said Mr. Quelch. "I cannot credit, without proof, that any boy in my Form would be so blackguardly. Explain yourself at once, Wharton!"

"Oh, dear!" groaned Bunter. "It's all up! I say, sir—"

"Shut up, Bunter!" whispered Mark Linley.

"I'm not going to. I'm not going to be done. I say, sir, I don't think Wharton ought to be expelled, sir. This is only sport. Anyway, I think I ought to have the pound."

"What pound, Bunter?"

"The pound Cherry and I were fighting for, sir."

"Then it is true, Wharton?"

"Please allow me to explain, sir. Bunter is a silly ass—ahem!—excuse me, sir, but Bunter can't help being a noodle."

"Oh, really, Wharton—"

"If there were a real fight going on here, sir, you would hardly be likely to find Marjorie and Clara here."

Mr. Quelch, noticing the girls for the first time, raised his hat courteously.

"I am sure of that," he said. "Go on."

"The fact is, sir, Bunter's an ass, as I said. He thinks he can box, and he can't box for toffee—I mean he can't box at all. He's been worrying us to get up a boxing-match so that he could show off—"

"Oh, really, Wharton—"

"And he wouldn't give us any peace till we agreed. But as he can't box, and is too blind and silly to be able to take care of himself—"

"Look here—"

"We got up a spoof match, sir, to rot him—ahem!—to make game of him. He's so silly and conceited, sir, that we thought it would be a lesson to him. You must see that Cherry could knock him to pieces with one blow if he liked."

"Well, rather, sir," said Bob Cherry, getting up, all traces of exhaustion suddenly gone.

"Bunter was too conceited and silly to see our fun, sir. He fancies that he has knocked out Cherry, but Cherry was fanning all the time."

"It's not true, sir; I have knocked him out, and I'm going to have the pound. I'm not going to be swindled!" roared Billy Bunter.

"What is this about a pound?" said Mr. Quelch. "Even if the match was only in fun—as I fully believe—you must know that there should be no money concerned in it, Wharton."

"There isn't any, sir."

"Then what—"

"Show Mr. Quelch the pound, Frank!"

Nugent, grinning, opened his bag, and took out a pound box of tallow candles. He passed the box to the Remove master, who took it and opened it, and stared blankly at the candles.

"Why, what does this mean? This is a box of candles."

"A pound of candles, sir."

"A—a—a pound!"

"Yes, sir. Bunter insisted upon boxing for a pound, and that's a pound. It was all a joke, sir."

Carberry's face was a study. Mr. Quelch looked at the candles, and then looked at Carberry and then at Bunter. He tried to remain grave, but he could not—the pound was irresistible.

He smiled, the smile became a broad grin, the grin a laugh; the laugh rose, crescendo, to a roar; and in that roar the whole Remove joined.

The old barn rang with laughter.

"Dear me!" exclaimed Mr. Quelch at last, wiping his eyes. "This is too utterly absurd. Bunter, take your prize. You are perfectly at liberty to compete for a pound of this sort."

Billy Bunter mechanically took the box of candles and stood blinking at them. It was dawning at last, even upon his obtuse mind, that he had been fooled.

Mr. Quelch looked at Carberry again, with an expression that made the prefect's brow blacker than ever.

"I am glad to see that this is only fun, and that Carberry's suspicions were wholly without grounds," he said. "Carberry has acted hastily and foolishly, and has wasted my time for nothing. Good-bye, my boys!"

And Mr. Quelch walked away in one direction, the prefect in another.

Carberry did not say a word. There was nothing for him to say.

He stopped at a distance, safe out of the Remove master's hearing, to say things. But we shall not report what he said.

But as he walked home to Greyfriars, a sadder and wiser prefect, he resolved to be very, very sure before he made another move against Harry Wharton.

The meeting in the barn broke up, the juniors chucking over the affair, and the story was soon common property at Greyfriars. Carberry was chipped over it by his comrades in the Sixth, till he was driven nearly wild.

In the Remove it was regarded as the joke of the season. But there was one fellow who did not look upon it in that light—one who frowned majestically at

every reference to it, and who, for a long time, wore the expression of one who is deeply wronged—and that one, needless to say, was Bunter the Boxer!

THE END.

BETWEEN OURSELVES.

A Weekly Chat between The Editor and His Readers.

FOR NEXT FRIDAY.

The long, complete tale of Harry Wharton & Co. in next Friday's issue, which, by the way, is entitled:

"THE MYSTERY OF THE CRYPT!"

is one that I am sure you will all like. It deals with the arrival of a temporary new Head at Greyfriars. The latter is a peculiar gentleman, and has very funny ways. When he first comes into contact with the Removites he orders Bunter to jump into a ditch. But this is nothing to what he does afterwards. There are numerous humorous incidents in this magnificent tale, and the amazing disclosure at the end will come as a great surprise to you.

The long, complete tale of Tom Merry & Co. in our next issue is entitled:

"HIDDEN TREASURE AT ST. JIM'S!"

Manners is in the crypt, developing films, when all of a sudden he discovers a mysterious parchment. He takes it up to his chums, and they find, to their surprise, that it is a clue to hidden treasure. They immediately decide to keep the affair secret, and to go in quest of the treasure.

Knox, the bully prefect, by a lucky chance, becomes acquainted with the juniors' intentions, and searches for the treasure. Figgins & Co. do not play the part of treasure-seekers, but they have the laugh of Tom Merry & Co. and Knox in the end, as you will learn next Friday.

The tale of Jimmy Silver & Co. in next Friday's number is entitled:

"THE ROOKWOOD HOBBYISTS!"

Jimmy Silver and his chums decide to form a hobby club, and intend to keep their rivals of the Modern side out in the cold. But Tommy Dodd & Co. get hold of the wheeze, and getting first in the field, announce themselves to be the originators of the scheme.

The Fistical Four are, of course, greatly annoyed at discovering the way in which they have been forestalled, and plan to get their revenge on the Moderns. Whether they are successful you will learn when you read this splendid yarn.

Don't forget, my chums, to order your copy of next Friday's issue in advance. It is the only way in, which to avoid disappointment.

YOUR EDITOR.

Next Friday's Grand Long Complete Tale of Harry Wharton & Co.

is entitled:

"THE MYSTERY OF THE CRYPT!"

Please order your copy of the PENNY POPULAR in advance, and hand this number, when finished with, to a non-reader.

A Grand
Long Complete
Story, dealing
with the
Early Adventures
of
Jimmy Silver & Co.

WITH EVIL INTENT!

By
Owen
Conquest

THE FIRST CHAPTER.

Leggett's Cunning Scheme.

JIMMY SILVER and his chums, Lovell, Newcome and Raby, who comprised the Fistical Four at Rookwood School, were seated at tea in the end study.

Tea was always a pleasant meal with the Classical juniors, and their cheerful faces and animated conversation proved that this occasion was no exception to the rule.

"I think we ought to be able to pull off our share of the events this year," said Jimmy Silver briskly.

"I should say so," replied Lovell. "I don't think we've ever been in better form."

"Well, I reckon I'm safe for at least half a dozen first prizes," said Raby confidently.

"If that's your attitude towards the affair," commented Jimmy Silver, "you'll be safe for nothing."

"What do you mean?" queried the junior, in injured tones.

"I mean that it is a dangerous thing to get over confident," replied the leader of the Fistical Four. "Don't underestimate your opponents."

The subject under discussion was the coming Sports Day. It was one of those days when mothers and fathers, brothers and sisters, aunts and cousins were invited to the school to witness the prowess on the sports field of the junior in whom they were particularly interested.

It was a day that the juniors themselves looked forward to for many weeks ahead with eager anticipation.

"We must put in some practice to-morrow afternoon," said Jimmy Silver.

"Those Modern rotters are our chief opponents," said Newcome, "but I don't think we've got much to worry about even from them."

"Don't be too sure," replied Jimmy Silver sagely. "After all, we don't know their real form. We've got to pile in no end if we're going to do Tommy Dodd & Co. in the eye!"

While the Fistical Four were exchanging opinions and expressing views in connection with the forthcoming Sports Day, Leggett, the cad of the Modern Fourth, was sitting in his study with his mind intent on a subject which was very much adverse to the one which was engaging the attention of the Classical chums.

Sports Day meant nothing to Leggett, except that he might be able to arrange a few bets on the results of some of the events. From a sportsman's point of view Leggett had no interest in the affair, for he rarely indulged in any kind of healthy outdoor exercise.

He much preferred playing cards and backing gee-gees.

At this moment Leggett was engaged in working out a complete plan of one of the most cunning schemes that he had ever set his mind upon.

Lack of money was at the bottom of the scheme, as indeed it was in most of his nefarious plans. He was always in debt, and at the present moment he was threatened with serious trouble if he could not settle at least one or two of his financial difficulties.

"If I can only bring this off successfully," he muttered to himself, with an evil grin, "I shall be able to manage nicely."

In his perambulations in the vicinity of the school, Leggett had seen a pretty young girl of about fifteen or sixteen years of age paddling about the river in a small canoe.

On two or three occasions he had seen her land on the smooth glassy slope of a lawn leading to a large mansion on the river bank.

These observations led to the first inklings of his scheme for making some money.

Worked out in detail, his plan came to this. On the following day—the half-holiday at Rookwood—when all the other juniors would be engaged in training for the coming sports, he intended taking out a skiff on the river.

His plan was to wait under the shelter of an overhanging willow, completely hidden from view, for the girl to come along in her canoe, which was a small, frail little thing.

Then, when she was almost on a level with him, he intended to dart out from beneath the branches of the willow as though he had not seen her, and run his skiff straight into the little canoe.

This, without a doubt, would result in upsetting the tiny craft and throwing the girl into the water. Then Leggett would jump in from his skiff and rescue the girl, swimming with her to the bank.

He would assist her to the house, where he concluded she lived or was staying, and then, by appearing to be severely knocked up, would doubtless receive a reward of at least five pounds, he thought, for saving her life.

As the young scoundrel sat in his study turning all this over in his mind, he chuckled from time to time. He could see no obstacles in the way. He felt certain that all the juniors would be practising for the events for which they had entered their names on the sports list.

The only point, he realised, upon which he must exercise great care was to let the girl believe that it was by a pure accident that he had collided with her. He saw no very great difficulty in this, therefore his plan was complete.

He sauntered out into the quad, and from thence to the cricket field, where several juniors were sprinting round in preparation for the sports on the coming Saturday.

He stood for some time watching, when Tommy Dodd and his chums Tommy Cook and Tommy Doyle, of the Modern side, pulled up beside him.

"Hallo, Leggett!" exclaimed Tommy

Dodd cheerfully. "What have you put your name down for?"

"Oh," replied Leggett, "I am not doing much this year, as I have not felt quite up to the mark lately. I have entered for the sack race and one or two things like that."

As a matter of fact, Leggett never did enter for very much, for he was no good whatever at running, his constitution having been undermined by much secret cigarette smoking.

He deemed it advisable, however, to enter for one or two events just for the sake of appearances.

"How is it you haven't entered for some of the running races?" asked Tommy Dodd, who knew quite well the reason.

"That's my business!" snapped Leggett offensively.

"All right, old son, don't worry about it," retorted Tommy Dodd. "Don't think we're upset in any way."

"It's not because I don't think I could win," snapped Leggett, "for I'm quite certain I could beat any of you lot."

"Without a doubt," said Tommy Cook, with a grin.

"Good job for us you haven't entered then, isn't it?" laughed Tommy Dodd, as he and his old chums moved off.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Leggett turned back to the school, and went up to his study.

THE SECOND CHAPTER.

The Scheme in Operation.

THE following afternoon the Fistical Four attired themselves in running shorts in preparation for the training they intended putting in.

"I say," exclaimed Jimmy Silver suddenly. "It would be rather a good idea to do our sprinting along the towing-path this afternoon."

"Yes, rather!" ejaculated Lovell. "It will be cooler down there, and we can lie under the trees to rest when we are tired."

"That's the game," said Jimmy Silver. "It's certain to be pretty well deserted down there to-day, and it'll be better than racing round the quad."

"Rather!"

Accordingly the Classical chums set out for the river bank, where they were soon sprinting up and down in splendid style. There was no doubt that they were in great form this year, and bid fair to carry all before them.

After about half an hour's hard work, Jimmy Silver suggested a rest.

His chums agreed with alacrity, and, finding a cool, shady spot upon the bank overhanging and hidden with trees, they stretched themselves upon the grass with sighs of ease and contentment.

"This is a treat!" exclaimed Newcome. "It's awfully hot to-day."

"True, oh king," said Raby. "I feel

pretty well played out. It would suit me very nicely to stay here till tea-time."

"Aren't you the ass who considered himself safe for half a dozen first prizes?" asked Jimmy Silver drily.

"Oh, rats!" retorted Raby. "What's that got to do with it?"

"Well, if you're done up now, after running for a few minutes, what will you be like on Saturday when you've been through a couple of events?"

"Rats!" snapped Raby drowsily. "I'm going to have a nap."

"I suppose you're going to win all the events in your dreams," commented Jimmy Silver humorously.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The Fistical Four gave themselves up to ease and contentment for about a quarter of an hour, when Lovell suddenly broke the silence.

"I say," he exclaimed, "that's very nice!"

As he spoke he directed the attention of his chums to a little canoe which was drifting slowly down stream, in which was seated a pretty, fair-haired girl.

The juniors were almost completely hidden from view by the overhanging trees as they watched the canoe approaching.

Then, to their surprise, a skiff suddenly darted out from the trees on the opposite bank, and in it was seated Leggett, the cad of the Fourth!

answers to these questions. On the whole, he was very much afraid that Jimmy Silver had witnessed the affair from start to finish.

Meanwhile, the stalwart leader of the Classical chums had deposited his burden upon the bank and clambered out.

He and his chums were relieved to find that the girl had suffered no more serious injury than a soaking, and Jimmy Silver offered to see her to her home.

"Thank you very much," said she; "I am staying quite near here."

"I hope you are not feeling any the worse for the experience," said Jimmy Silver solicitously.

"Not at all," replied the girl, "but it is very annoying. I think he was a very clumsy youth, and it was very ill-mannered of him to take his departure without a word of apology."

"It was, indeed," agreed Jimmy Silver. He did not tell her that he knew the youth, neither did he tell her that he thought the "accident" was intentional.

"Will you tell me your name?" asked the young lady as they reached the grounds of the house where she was staying.

"If you don't mind, I would rather not," replied Jimmy.

He was a modest youth, and was desirous that nothing more should be said about the incident. He was not fond of heroics, and did not want the

"The outsider!"

"Had the girl any idea of that sort?" asked Lovell anxiously.

"No," replied the Classical captain. "She considers it was an accident, though she remarked that she thought the youth was very ill-mannered to make off without apologising. I didn't tell her that I knew who he was and what I thought about the affair."

"What had we better do about it?" asked Lovell.

"Well, I don't like the idea of kicking up a row just before the sports, so I don't think we'd better say anything about it at Rookwood, but just tackle the end ourselves."

"Yes," suggested Newcome, "we'll have to give the rotter a good hiding!"

"Well, we'll see what he's got to say for himself first," remarked Jimmy Silver. "All the same, I shan't believe him if he says it was an accident."

In the meantime, Leggett had returned to Rookwood, and had gone straight up to his study to think over the unexpected collapse of his scheme.

He was at a loss to know what to do. It occurred to him several times to spread a story round the school to the effect that Jimmy Silver had intentionally upset the girl's canoe, and had saved her from a watery grave and then gone with her to her home in the hope of receiving a monetary reward.

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Exclamations of amazement escaped the lips of the Classical chums as they saw the skiff shooting straight for the little canoe.

"Whatever's he playing at?" cried Jimmy Silver.

The answer to that question was soon supplied, for a moment later there was a crash, and Leggett's boat smashed into the canoe.

With a cry the girl disappeared into the water!

In a second Jimmy Silver was upon his feet, and the next second he dived in to the rescue. As he did so Leggett jumped from his skiff and swam towards the girl.

He was not such a good swimmer as Jimmy Silver, however; moreover, he was fully dressed, and the leader of the Fistical Four was clad only in running shorts. Consequently, he reached the girl in a few seconds and was speedily swimming with her to the bank.

Leggett saw that the game was up, and, muttering to himself, he clambered into his boat, dripping wet, and pulled off down stream as hard as he could go.

Mingled with his anger were feelings of considerable uneasiness. Had Jimmy Silver seen through his cunning scheme? Would he believe the collision to have been an accident?

Leggett could not supply satisfactory

girl's father writing to the Head of Rookwood about the part he had played, and thus creating a great deal of fuss about the affair.

"Very, well," said the girl. "I am very grateful to you for what you have done."

"Not at all," replied Jimmy Silver. "I hope you will suffer no ill effects from the accident."

Then, with a bow, the girl took her departure, and Jimmy Silver returned to his chums.

In the shelter of the trees Jimmy removed his wet things and laid them out upon the grass to dry.

"Well," said Lovell, "what do you think of that little business?"

"I think," replied Jimmy Silver, "that Leggett was up to one of his low-down schemes again."

"That's my opinion," agreed Lovell.

"I'm quite certain that he intentionally ran into the canoe," put in Newcome.

"It was as plain as a pikestaff. But what could have been his idea?"

"The rotter!" ejaculated Raby.

"I think I've got an inkling of an idea of what he was up to," said Jimmy Silver quietly.

"Let's have it, then," said Lovell.

"Well, I think his idea was to upset the boat and rescue the girl, and then hang around her guy'nor for a reward."

"My hat!"

Leggett had not seen that the other chums of the Fistical Four, Lovell, Raby and Newcome had also witnessed the whole affair.

On the other hand there was just the possibility, Leggett thought, that Jimmy Silver did not realise that he had purposely steered his skiff into the canoe.

In this case, by spreading such a story, he would only exhibit his own guilt; in the eyes of Jimmy Silver, at least.

After bestowing considerable thought upon the matter, Leggett came to the conclusion that there was no action which he could take that would be likely to improve the situation, so he decided to let events take their course.

The cad of the Fourth was not given to worrying over trifles, but at the same time he felt very uneasy about the whole thing.

However, he argued to himself, he generally managed to get out of his difficulties by judicious use of what he was pleased to call his brain power.

True, he generally succeeded in wriggling out of tight corners, but it was not through brain power; it was because he was as cunning and crafty as it was possible for a junior to be.

Having decided to let the matter drift and await events, Leggett turned his thoughts to other things, deeming it advisable to lie low for the present and remain in his study.

In the meantime, Jimmy Silver & Co.

were making their way back to Rookwood, having finished their practice for the day.

"Did you ask the girl her name?" queried Lovell, who was walking along by Jimmy Silver's side.

"No," replied Jimmy. "She asked for mine, but I told her that I preferred not to give it. You see, I didn't want any fuss made about the affair."

"Does she live at that house on the bank? I've never seen her about here before."

"No; she told me that she was only staying there."

"By the bye, what happened to the canoe?"

"Oh, we pulled it into the bank while you had gone with her to the house. It's got a bit of a dent in one side, and it'll want repairing before it can be used again."

"The beastly cad," snorted Jimmy Silver. "He meant doing the thing properly."

"What do you suggest doing about him?"

"Well, I think we'd better deal with him ourselves because if we report the affair to Bulkeley he might think fit to go to the Head about it, and then everyone would hear of it. For the honour of the school, we don't want a blessed scheme like that to be talked about in connection with Rookwood outside."

"No, you're quite right there. Shall we tackle him as soon as we get back?"

"I don't think so. We'll rout him out and tell him we know all about it, and promise him a good hiding when the Sports are over. We could do it now, but it would be best to avoid trouble until after Saturday."

"Right-ho!"

When the Fistical Four entered the school gates, Leggett, of course, was nowhere to be seen.

"Thought he'd make himself scarce," commented Jimmy Silver. "When we've changed we'll have a look for the rotter."

Some twenty minutes later the four Classical chums entered Leggett's study.

"What do you want?" said the cad of the Fourth, as Jimmy Silver advanced into the room.

"We want a few words with you!" replied the leader of the Fistical Four, meaningly.

"Look sharp, then!" said Leggett, nervously. "I'm busy just now."

"Not so busy as you were an hour or two ago," said Jimmy Silver quietly.

"Oh, rats!" snapped Leggett. "If you've got anything sensible to say, say it and clear out!"

"We'll clear out when we're ready," replied Jimmy Silver emphatically.

"Out with it, then!"

"Rather an extraordinary accident this afternoon, wasn't it?" said Jimmy Silver innocently.

"Mind your own business!" snarled Leggett. "You're always poking your nose in where you're not wanted!"

"It happened that my presence was rather opportune on this occasion. Didn't it strike you that it was rather bad form to clear off without apologising to the young lady for barging into her as you did?"

"Well, when you appeared upon the scene I knew it was no good hanging about any longer, because no one ever gets a look in if you're anywhere about."

"That's a very poor excuse. Suppose I suggested that you collided with the canoe on purpose?"

"If you did it would be a lie," said Leggett, trying to adopt an injured tone.

"As a matter of fact," interposed Lovell, "we witnessed the whole thing from start to finish, and we know that the whole affair was intentional!"

Leggett looked baffled for a moment. He had not supposed that Jimmy Silver's

chums were anywhere about. However, assuming an indifferent attitude, he attempted to face the thing out.

"It may have appeared intentional to you," he replied, "but all the same, it was quite an accident. You're always prepared to put the worst possible construction on my actions."

"That's your own fault!" retorted Jimmy Silver. "It's due to the fact that all your actions have got some caddish motive behind them!"

"Rats! You've wasted enough of my time. Kindly clear out!"

"We will clear out now," said Jimmy. "but we came to tell you that we intend to give you a jolly good hiding for to-day's little business after the sports are over."

"You won't lay a hand on me!" said Leggett boldly.

"We'll see!" retorted Jimmy Silver, as he and his chums left the study.

THE THIRD CHAPTER.
Sports Day.

THE morning of Sports' Day broke clear and bright, and Rookwood was early astir.

An atmosphere of eager anticipation and excitement pervaded the

on inviting them to school functions for he was afraid they would realise how unpopular he was.

In due course the sports commenced. Excitement ran high for a considerable time, for Tommy Dodd & Co., the Modern chums, were keeping about level with the Fistical Four in the matter of points.

In the first half hour, Raby managed to score two successes towards the half-dozen he had prophesied he would gain.

Jimmy Silver won the quarter-mile, just defeating Tommy Dodd by a matter of only two or three yards.

Then came the sack-race. There was a large number of entries for this event, which was looked upon more as a huge joke than anything else.

This was one of the events for which Leggett had entered, just for the sake of appearances, and he lined up with the rest.

He was soon out of it, however, for the competitors had not progressed many yards when the cad of the Fourth rolled over and crawled from the course.

He was one of the first to fall out, but very soon the ranks were considerably thinned out, as various juniors tumbled over, to the accompaniment of roars of laughter from the spectators.



Leggett was soon out of the sack race, for the competitors had not progressed many yards when the cad of the Fourth rolled over and crawled to the side of the course.

whole place as the juniors began to prepare themselves for the reception of their relatives and friends.

A number of visitors arrived by the first train, and the time that elapsed between their arrival and the commencement of the sports was occupied in introductions and tours round the school and its vicinity.

Jimmy Silver and his chums each had visitors to receive, and a little informal reception was held in the end study. They were a merry party, and the time for this pleasant portion of the day's proceedings passed all too quickly, and it was time for the juniors to go and prepare for the sports.

On their way to the dormitory they encountered Leggett slouching along the passage. He gave them an insolent sneer as they passed.

The cad of the Fourth had no visitors to entertain. It was not that he had no relatives or friends; but he was not keen

Half the fellows were now sprawling on back or stomach. Away in front Tommy Dodd, Tommy Cook, Towle, and Laey of the Modern side, and Newcome, Raby, and Hooker of the Classicals, all moving on the jump system, were making good progress.

Then Jimmy Silver, with a yell, fell backwards and turned a somersault, while several juniors and some of his friends at the rails cheered.

As soon as the competitors who were still upon their feet had passed, Jimmy crawled to the side of the course and scrambled up to the rails.

As he did so he gave an exclamation of surprise, for a little way back in the crowd he recognised the face of the girl he had rescued from the river.

At the same time the girl turned quickly to a gentleman who was standing by her side and drew his attention to Jimmy Silver.

It was obvious that she was telling him about the Classical junior's part in the incident of the previous Wednesday, and Jimmy Silver was quite at a loss to know what to do for the moment.

He was quite unprepared for such a situation as this, and he began to struggle out of his sack in order to get away before the girl advanced to speak to him.

He managed to move off from the rails just as the race was finishing, and as he did so he saw Leggett walk away from the crowd on the opposite side of the course. He, too, evidently had seen the girl, and was desirous of making himself scarce.

When the sports were over, Jimmy Silver was just returning to his friends when he saw Hooker running towards him.

"I say, Silver!" cried the Classical junior.

"What's up?" responded Jimmy Silver, swinging round.

"An uncle and cousin of mine over there wish to be introduced to you. I told them that you were fully occupied in entertaining your own friends and relations, but my cousin is most insistent. She says she has met you before."

"Oh!" said Jimmy, who was beginning to have suspicions regarding the cousin.

"Just come over for a minute or two, will you?"

Jimmy Silver walked across the field with Hooker.

"I didn't know you had ever met my cousin," remarked the latter. "She won't say where she saw you."

The two juniors advanced towards a gentleman and a girl who were standing a little apart from a group of people. At once Jimmy Silver recognised the young lady of the river.

"Allow me to introduce you to my friend, Jimmy Silver," said Hooker, addressing the girl. "Silver, my cousin, Miss Dorothy Matthew!"

"How do you do?" exclaimed the girl, with a smile. "I think we have met before."

Jimmy Silver blushed to the roots of his hair, and then he found Hooker was introducing his uncle.

"I have to thank you very sincerely," said Mr. Matthew, "for your courage in rescuing my daughter from the river the other day."

"Oh, it was nothing!" stammered Jimmy Silver, looking very confused.

"Eh? What's this?" exclaimed Hooker. "This is the first I've heard of any rescue from the river."

"Oh, yes," said Hooker's uncle. "Someone collided with Dorothy's canoe on the river the other day, and this plucky young fellow jumped in and rescued her."

"Why didn't you tell us about it?" asked Hooker, turning to Jimmy.

"Well, it was quite a trivial thing, really," replied the leader of the Fistical Four, "and I didn't want it known all over the school."

"I should have written to you had it been possible," continued Mr. Matthew. "However, please accept my very best thanks now."

"And mine," said the girl quietly.

"We are staying here for some time," said Mr. Matthew, "and I hope you will come with my nephew to visit us some time in the near future."

Jimmy Silver said that he would be delighted, and wishing them good-bye, returned to his friends.

The rest of the time passed very quickly, and Jimmy Silver and his chums soon found themselves wishing friends and relations good-bye at the station.

"I hear you've renewed your acquaintance with the young lady of the river incident," said Lovell, as the Fistical Four returned to Rookwood along the towing-path.

"Yes," replied Jimmy Silver; "she turns out to be Hooker's cousin, who is staying down here with her father for some time. I have been invited to go and visit them with Hooker soon."

"Quite a remarkable sequel," said Lovell.

"Yes," responded Jimmy; "meeting her again makes me all the more anxious to get my hands on that young scoundrel Leggett."

"Well, we'll soon deal with him now this business is over," said Lovell.

"I say, you chaps, here he comes!" exclaimed Newcome.

Sure enough Leggett was seen in the distance coming towards them, his nose buried in a paper. No doubt he was looking up the latest betting news.

"Let's get back into these bushes," said Jimmy Silver, "and we'll nobble the young rotter when he comes along."

The four juniors backed into the shelter of the bushes and awaited the arrival of the cad of the Fourth.

Leggett slowly advanced along the towing-path, blissfully unconscious of the fact that four stalwart juniors were waiting to pounce upon him and call him to account for his low-down conduct on the previous Wednesday.

"Ready, now!" said Jimmy Silver, as Leggett approached.

Then, as the cad of the Fourth came level with them, the Fistical Four dashed out with a yell.

Before Leggett could grasp what was happening, he found himself upon his back on the towing-path.

"Got you, you rotter!" ejaculated Jimmy Silver.

"Gerroff, you beasts!" snarled Leggett, struggling and kicking.

"We promised you a jolly good hiding, and now you're going to get it!"

"Bump him, kids! One, two, three!"

"Ow—yow! Ow! Ow! Ow!"

"Now again!"

"Yow! Ow—ow!"

"Now we'll duck him in the river, and then give him another bumping!" said Jimmy Silver. "Come on, kids!"

"Ow! Yow! If you do I'll tell the Head! Leggo!"

"You can tell the Head what you like! We could tell him a nice little story ourselves!"

"Now, you chaps! One, two, three!"

Splash! For a moment Leggett disappeared beneath the surface of the water; then he was hauled up dripping and spluttering.

"You rotters! I'll make you pay for this!"

"Give him another bump, kids!"

"Yarrooh! Ow! Ow! Ow!"

By this time the cad of the Fourth presented a somewhat sorry appearance. The effect upon his clothes of being rolled in the dust after being ducked in the river was most weird. His hair was hanging over his eyes, and his collar was torn.

"Let me go, you beasts!" he yelled.

He struggled and kicked, but it was of no use—he only made his appearance the more appalling.

"Perhaps the next time you barge into anyone on the river you will, at least, stop to apologise!"

"Perhaps I sha'n't!"

"Bump him again!"

"Ow! Ow!"

"I think that will do now," said Jimmy Silver, releasing his hold.

The others followed his example, and in a second Leggett was upon his feet and tearing down the towing-path as fast as his legs would carry him.

"I think that'll be a lesson to him," said Jimmy Silver.

"For the time being," remarked Lovell.

"I expect he'll be up to some other foul scheme before long."

"If we serve him like that every time he'll soon get tired of it, though. Now, I think, we'll get back."

"Well, it's been a very good day," said Raby, in a self-satisfied tone.

"Hear! hear!"

"Leggett, at any rate, will have good cause to remember it," said Jimmy Silver, with a grin, as he and his chums continued on their way down the towing-path towards Rookwood.

THE END.

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THE MASKED ENTERTAINERS!

By
**Martin
Clifford.**

THE FIRST CHAPTER. Cutts' Programme!

S EEN the notice on the board?" Jack Blake of the Fourth asked the question. The Terrible Three were chatting in the Form-room passage when Blake came up.

"No," said Tom Merry, "what is it—cricket notice?"

"Cricket? No. It's Cutts."

"What on earth is Cutts putting up a notice for?" asked Manners, in surprise. "He's not head of anything in the coll—he's not in the eleven, and he hasn't much to do with anything, excepting sneaking cigarettes into the school, and smoking them in his study with the door locked."

"It's a show," explained Blake. "You remember the Masked Trio, as they call themselves, who are performing at the Wayland Theatre?"

"Yes?"

"Well, Cutts has engaged them to give a performance here at the school."

"Oh! I remember he said something of the sort in my study yesterday," remarked Tom Merry, with a nod.

"He's got permission to use the Fifth Form-room for the show," said Blake. "He's going to charge for admission, and the takings are to go to the Fifth Form cricket club, which wants bucking up. After expenses are paid—including Cutts' own expenses, you bet. I know Cutts."

The Terrible Three grinned, and strolled over to the notice-board. They knew Cutts, too. Cutts had more than once had a leading hand in getting up entertainments and things of that kind to assist something or other; and Cutts was generally flush of money afterwards. The "expenses," like charity, covered a multitude of sins.

The notice on the Board was written in Cutts' hand, and ran:

SPECIAL NOTICE!

To-night, at 7.30 precisely, a performance will be given in the Fifth Form room, by the Celebrated Variety Company, known as the Masked Trio, whose recent performances at Wayland Theatre Royal have created such a sensation.

The performance will be a specially attractive one, and the receipts will go to the Fifth Form cricket club, after necessary expenses have been paid.

Pieces of admission: Reserved seats, 2s.; unreserved, 1s. Fags in the Third Form and below, half-price.

Roll up!

Special attractions! Special turns! Gorgeous entertainment below theatre prices! Roll up in your thousands!

Tickets may be had of the Committee, or of Gerald Cutts, of the Fifth, in his study.

BY ORDER!

A crowd of fellows were reading the notice.

"Not a bad idea," said Lumley-Lumley of the Fourth. "I guess it's worth a bobble to see the show, anyway, if it's the same company that was at the Wayland Theatre."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Jolly good idea for us all to go, and rag the entertainment," Herries of the Fourth suggested thoughtfully.

"I've to pay for admission," said Blake. "Too dear at the price."

"That's all right; we'll make Cussy pay for the lot!" said Lowther.

"Weally, Lowthah—"

"We ought to rag the entertainment somehow," Tom Merry remarked thoughtfully. "This is where we make Cutts sit up!"

"Won't be possible," said Manners. "Trust Cutts; he's as deep as a well! He'll have the prefects there—distinguished visitors in free seats—what?"

"Yaas, wathah! Twist Cutts to look out for that!" remarked Arthur Augustus.

"And the show will be a big success, I fancy," remarked Figgins of the Fourth, the great chief of the New House juniors. "Most of the fellows are keen to see the giddy Masked Trio."

"And Cutts will be able to stand himself smokes galore out of the giddy expenses," Kerr remarked.

"Yes, rather!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" laughed Tom Merry. "Nothing funny in that, is there?" said Kerr. "Cutts always does it—it's an open secret! Where's the joke?"

"Eh? Oh, I wasn't laughing at that!"

"What were you laughing at, then, fathead?"

"Cutts."

"But what for?" demanded several voices. "Where's the joke?"

Tom Merry smiled.

"Excuse me," he said; "it's just an idea that came into my head. I'll tell you another time, so excuse me."

"Rats!" said Figgins. "Is it a wheeze?"

"Yes; a sort of a kind of a variety of one."

"Then spout it out! Is it up against Cutts?"

"Yes."

"Then we'll all take a hand," said Figgins. "What's the wheeze?"

"It's a—"

"Yes—what?"

"A School House wheeze!" explained Tom Merry sweetly.

"Look here, you ass—"

"Dogs and New House chaps not admitted!" said Tom Merry. "Sorry, Figg, but I can't tell you! You know what asses you New House chaps are, and you'd muck it up! I'll tell you afterwards, and tell you when to laugh!"

"Why, you—your silly ass—"

"Quite right!" said Blake. "No good letting these New House bounders into a wheeze; they'd only mess it up! Come up to No. 6, and talk it over, Tommy!"

Tom Merry shook his head.

"Sorry, Blake—"

"Nothing to be sorry about!" said Blake briskly. "Come up to Study No. 6, and we'll see if there's anything in it."

"Yaas, wathah!"

Another shake of the head from Tom Merry. He moved strategically towards the door.

"Sorry!" he said. "Can't let Fourth Form kids into it; you'd only mess it up! And, besides, you see—"

"What!" roared Blake and Herries and Digby and Reilly and Lumley, and half a dozen other Fourth-Formers all together. "You cheeky ass—"

"Bump him!" said Figgins.

"Yaas, wathah! I agvee with my friend Figgins! Those Shell bounders are gettin' as cheeky as the Fifth Form wottahs, deah boys! Bump 'em!"

There was a general movement towards the Terrible Three. Tom Merry and Manners and Lowther stepped quickly out into the quadrangle, and the crowd followed them.

On the steps of the School House, Mr. Railton, the Housemaster, was standing, chatting with Mr. Lathom, the master of the Fourth. Tom Merry had observed them.

"Rush the silly bounders!" yelled Figgins. "Rush 'em— Oh!"

He halted suddenly as he nearly cannoned into Mr. Railton.

"Figgins!" said the School House master severely.

"Ahem! Sorry, sir! I—I—"

"Please don't rush about in that reckless manner, Figgins!"

"Yes, sir—I mean, no, sir! Very well, sir!"

The Terrible Three strolled away across the quad, smiling. In the presence of the masters the exasperated juniors could not carry out their intentions.

"Now, what's the wheeze?" demanded Monty Lowther.

"It's first chop—it's ripping—it's gorgeous—if it will work!" he said. "But it will have to be kept awfully secret—just a whisper would mess up the whole thing. It will have to be kept awfully, frightfully, fearfully secret! Come round to the old chapel, and we'll talk it over when those bounders can't spot us!"

And Manners and Lowther, in a state of great curiosity, followed their leader to the old ruined chapel behind the School House, eager to hear the great wheeze.

THE SECOND CHAPTER.

Plotting a Plot.

FATTY WYNN of the Fourth, the Falstaff of the New House, was seated behind a fragment of masonry in the ruined chapel of St. Jim's.

Fatty Wynn was seated upon a block of stone, and upon another block before him reposed a large pie. That pie had been specially cooked by Dame Taggles, and it was a triumph of steak and kidney and flaky crust.

Fatty Wynn was half-way through the pie when he heard the sound of footsteps on the old stones of the ruined chapel.

The fat Fourth-Former started.

He ceased to eat, and remained quiet, and listened. The great masses of masonry behind which he was ensconced concealed him from view, unless one had known that he was there and specially looked for him. The footsteps came very near to his hiding-place, and stopped. Then a voice was heard.

"This will be all right!"

It was Tom Merry's voice.

Fatty Wynn drew a deep breath.

"Right as rain!" came Monty Lowther's voice. "There are none of the New House rotters to listen to us here, so get it off your chest!"

"Don't speak too loud," said Tom Merry cautiously. "It's a ripping wheeze—a real high-roller!—and Figgins would give his ears to know it!"

Fatty Wynn smiled.

"Well, get it off your chest!" said Manners.

"Right! Cutts is going to have the Masked Trio Variety Company here to-night, to give us a show in the Fifth Form-room—"

"So the notice says!"

"We owe Cutts a long account—"

"We do—we do!"

"Well, this is where we score!" said Tom Merry.

"You've said that before," said Lowther. "But you haven't explained how we score. Suppose you get on with the washing?"

"The Masked Entertainers will be coming here this evening," pursued Tom Merry. "Now, this idea flashed into my mind—"

"What idea?"

"I'm coming to that, fathead! Suppose they didn't come—"

"But they will come!"

"Suppose they were prevented somehow—"

"Oh!"

"That would mess up Cutts' entertainment, and he would have to give the money back," said Manners. "I don't think that's much of a wheeze, though."

"That isn't all, duffer. Suppose they didn't come—"

"We've had all that!" murmured Lowther. "Pile it on!"

"Change the record!" suggested Manners.

Tom Merry snorted.

"Shut up, you asses! Suppose somebody else turned up in their places! What price that?"

"Oh! Somebody else—"

"Three somebody else!" explained Tom Merry.

"My hat!"

"They're masked," said Tom Merry. "Cutts, himself, has never seen their faces. If three young geniuses about our size came along masked, and dressed in the same way as pierrots, Cutts couldn't possibly tell the difference!"

"Oh, crikey!"

"My only Uncle Joseph!"

"What do you think of that for a wheeze?" demanded Tom Merry triumphantly. "Instead of the Masked Trio,

it would be the Terrible Three, and we could give such an entertainment that Cutts would go off his head when he saw it, and the fellows would rag him to death. We could sing a song about Cutts, and make jokes about the Fifth Form, and carry on like—like giddy clowns, and mess up the whole bizney, and Cutts would never know it was us until afterwards."

"Great Scott!"

"Oh, great pip!"

And the Terrible Three chuckled together.

There was a pause, filled in by the chuckling of the chums of the shell. Fatty Wynn chuckled, too, but silently.

"Not a whisper, of course!" said Tom Merry. "Not a breathe! This will have to be kept frightfully dark. Of course, Figgins wouldn't give us away, but he'd want to have a hand in the wheeze, and would spoil the show. And that ass Wynn would very likely jaw. He can't keep a secret!"

"Can't I?" murmured Fatty Wynn. "No; he'd blab it all out in the tuck-shop," said Manners. "He'd let on that he'd got a secret, and somebody would fill him up with tuck to get it out of him, and then the whole thing would be kyboshed. Wynn is an ass!"

"Exactly!"

"But it will be hard to keep the Masked Trio away," said Manners thoughtfully. "If they're booked to come here, they'll come, I suppose?"

"Easy as falling off a form, my son," said Tom Merry serenely.

"How, then?"

"Suppose they received a telegram. I know the hotel they're staying at in Wayland. The chaps who come down to the Theatre Royal generally stay there. Suppose they got a telegram from the school telling them that the order was cancelled?"

"My hat!"

"The order would be cancelled, you see—we shall cancel it."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"They wouldn't come after that," said Tom Merry. "But to make all sure, I'd ask for a reply wire—or, better still, I'll get to them on the telephone, if I can. We can use the telephone in the prefects' room, you know, and I can make an excuse to get out of the class-room, and speak on the telephone while the Fifth are in their Form-room this afternoon. They have the telephone at their hotel, and it will be as easy as winking. That will be simpler than the telegraph, too, because there would be some difficulty about the reply wire—they mightn't think the name of Merry the same name as Cutts—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"But we can't let them lose the fee!" said Manners. "They're booked for the evening, you know, and it wouldn't be fair on them to make them lose the money."

"Of course not! It's up to us to pay them their fee, of course. It's worth that, I should think, for such a ripping jape on the Fifth!"

"Depends on how much the fee is," said Lowther cautiously.

"Well, they're only going to give about an hour's entertainment here, and I shouldn't think it would be more than a guinea each. This kind of entertainer doesn't rake in the cash by the barrelful, you know."

"Guinea each!" said Lowther.

"We'll make a subscription among the fellows to raise the cash," said Tom Merry. "We'll take some of them into the wheeze—fellows who can be relied upon to hold their tongues, you know. Besides, we want to make sure of having a crowd of our fellows in the room, in

case of trouble. If the Fifth bowled us out—"

"There would be trouble! Ha, ha, ha!"

"Five bob each from a dozen or so fellows would raise the cash," said Tom Merry. "I think it's jolly well worth it!"

"Yes, rather!"

"Is it agreed, then?"

"What-ho!"

"Then I'll get on the telephone to them this afternoon," said Tom Merry, grinning, "and when it's all serene we'll make our arrangements."

And the Terrible Three, chuckling over the great wheeze, strolled out of the ruins. When they were quite gone, and out of hearing, Fatty Wynn chuckled too.

THE THIRD CHAPTER.

Two Trios.

THE shades of night were falling fast that evening when Tom Merry, Manners, and Lowther came out of the School House with their coats and caps on and walked down to the school gates.

There was time to get out before looking-up, and as they intended to return in the character of masked pierrots, there would be no difficulty in getting in again.

Figgins & Co. of the New House, also with their coats on, came down to the gates at the same time.

"Hallo!" said Figgins. "Going out?"

"Yes," said Tom Merry, rather annoyed by the meeting at that inopportune moment. Not that Figgins & Co. seemed to suspect anything.

"So are we," said Figgins.

"Missing the Fifth-Form show?" asked Monty Lowther.

"Oh, no; we shall come back in time for that!"

"So shall we," said Manners.

"Walking down to Rylcombe?" asked Figgins, in a friendly way. "We'll come with you, if you like."

"Especially if you're going to stop at Mother Murphy's," added Fatty Wynn.

Tom Merry frowned.

"We're not going to stop at Mother Murphy's; and we shall be walking too quickly for you youngsters to keep up with us," he said. "Come on, chaps!"

And the Terrible Three marched off.

"Well, of all the cheek—!" began Kerr.

Figgins chuckled softly.

"All serene!" he said. "We don't want them to watch us, any more than they want us to watch them. I was only pulling Tommy's leg, though he doesn't know it."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"We'll go another way; we don't want to get to Mr. Wiggs' till after they've gone."

And Figgins & Co. chuckled joyously, and set off for the village by a round-about path, which did not bring them into contact with the Terrible Three again.

The chums of the Shell, somewhat surprised and much relieved to get rid of the New House fellows so easily, walked quickly down the lane to Rylcombe.

"Jolly lucky getting away from those bounders like that!" Tom Merry remarked. "I was afraid Figg had spotted something for a minute."

"No danger of that; the secret's all right. None of the fellows we've told would say a word."

"Oh, yes, it's all right."

The chums of the Shell arrived at Mr. Wiggs' little shop. Mr. Wiggs was closed for the day, but he lived over the shop, and he was there ready for the

juniors. He greeted them most benevolently, and he had the costumes and the masks all ready.

Tom Merry looked over them with great satisfaction.

"Ripping!" he exclaimed. "We shall want three cloaks or ulsters, too, Mr. Wiggs, to wear over these things. We'll change here."

"Very good," said Mr. Wiggs. "We can keep our own clothes on under these things," said Manners. "That will be better, in case of a sudden change being necessary; and it will make us look a bit plumper, too. Those chaps were stouter than us."

"Good egg!"

The Terrible Three soon had the pierrot garb on over their Etons.

Then they donned high-heeled shoes, which added to their height, and put on the black silk masks, which very nearly covered their faces. They surveyed themselves in a cheval glass with great satisfaction.

If they had not known that they were themselves, as Lowther remarked, they would certainly have taken themselves for the Masked Trio of Wayland Theatre Royal.

Mr. Wiggs rubbed his hands. "Excellent, young gentlemen—excellent!" he said.

"Do you think we look the part?" grinned Tom Merry.

"To the life, Master Merry!"

"Good! Now we'll put on the cloaks, and you can lend us some soft hats—kind of thing pros. wear, you know, and send for a cab. They'd come in the station-cab anyway," Tom Merry added to his chums.

And soon all was ready.

The Terrible Three, alias the Masked Trio, enveloped in greatcoats over their professional costume, and with soft hats on their boyish heads, took their places in the station-cab, and drove off towards St. Jim's.

Mr. Wiggs watched them go with a smile. Mr. Wiggs knew Tom Merry & Co., and he could easily guess that a jape of some kind was in progress. But that was no business of his; and he knew Tom Merry well enough to be sure that there would be no harm in any jape that he planned, though the fun might be very funny.

Mr. Wiggs returned into his shop and locked the door, and ascended to his living quarters above. A quarter of an hour later he heard a loud ring at the bell, and as it was repeated again and again, he grunted and left his comfortable armchair and descended to see what it was.

Three youths in coats and caps stood before him as he opened the shop door.

"Good-evening, Mr. Wiggs!" said the voice of Figgins.

"Oh, is it you, Master Figgins?"

"Yes, rather!" said Figgins. "Sorry to disturb you in this way, Mr. Wiggs, but it's a most pressing matter."

"Has Master Merry forgotten something?" asked Mr. Wiggs, thinking that perhaps Tom Merry had sent Figgins back for some necessary article overlooked at the shop.

Figgins chuckled. "Yes—he's forgotten us!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Kerr and Fatty Wynn.

Mr. Wiggs looked puzzled. "I don't quite understand—" he began.

"It's all right," said Figgins. "I know you've got plenty of pierrot costumes and masks in stock, for fancy-dress balls and things, haven't you?"

"Yes," said Mr. Wiggs, in wonder. "Well, this is a repeat order; we want the same outfit."

"Dear me!"

Mr. Wiggs stepped back, and the New House juniors followed him into the shop. Mr. Wiggs turned up the gas, and closed the shop door.

"Pierrot costumes?" he asked. "That's it," said Figgins. "And masks?"

"Yes; black silk masks, same as those chaps wore at Wayland Theatre, you know."

"Ah! The same as Tom Merry—" "Exactly the same."

"I have plenty in stock," said Mr. Wiggs. "You can take your choice. I suppose this is some joke that you young gentlemen are playing at the school."

"Just so," grinned Figgins. Figgins & Co. promptly donned the pierrot costumes. They changed their boots for high-heeled shoes, and put on black silk masks, hiding their faces completely from recognition.

"That's all, thank you, Mr. Wiggs! You're a giddy Trojan. Good-night!"

"Good-night, young gentlemen!"

Figgins & Co. left the shop, and Mr. Wiggs smiled and closed the door after them. As in the case of the Terrible Three, it was a none of his business; and as it was a double order for him for hire of costumes, he was not displeased.

THE FOURTH CHAPTER.

The Entertainment.

CUTTS, of the Fifth, glanced into the Form-room soon after seven o'clock.

He wore a satisfied look. The Form-room was a good-sized apartment, and, in addition to the forms used by the Fifth at classes, chairs and other forms had been ranged in order, affording seating accommodation for a large audience.



Cutts & Co. made a sudden rush. Cutts was pretty certain that the epeofers belonged to St. Jim's, and he meant to know for certain. "Take your masks off!" he roared. "Impossible!" exclaimed Tom Merry. "Our noble connections amongst the highest aristocracy of the land would be shocked if they knew that we were doing a variety turn! My uncle, the aged duke, would have a fit!" "And my father, the marquis, would never get over it!" said Monty Lowther.

They borrowed combs and brushes from Mr. Wiggs and parted their hair in the middle, as they had noticed the entertainers at Wayland Theatre did. Mr. Wiggs watched them with a smiling face.

"There, I think that's all right!" said Figgins, surveying himself in the glass which had reflected Tom Merry a short time before. "We want some big coats—shabby greatcoats will do, as we're professionals now—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"And some icky hats," said Kerr—"something squashy!"

"Good!"

Coats and hats were forthcoming, and the New House juniors donned them. "Is that all?" asked Mr. Wiggs.

There was standing room at the back and at the sides of the room for fags, who were admitted at half-price.

Cutts had reason to be satisfied with his audience. The reserved seats were nearly all taken. Half a dozen of them had been given free to prefects, in order to induce those great men to be present in case of a rag.

Cutts suspected the juniors of intending some demonstration or other, but in the presence of Kildare, the captain of the school, and Monteith, the head prefect of the New House, and two or three other prefects, a rag by the juniors would be out of the question.

The Fifth Form had turned up almost to a man. The entertainment was in

aid of the Form cricket club, and the Fifth naturally supported it loyally.

Cutts had been doubtful about the number of juniors who would come, but he was reassured as he saw them crowding in.

Blake & Co., of Study No. 6, came along with a very large party; Kangaroo of the Shell brought a crowd of Shell fellows, and a swarm of fags came in at half-price, and ranged themselves round the walls.

New House juniors, too, came in great force; all Figgins' friends were there, and Piggy's friends in the New House numbered very nearly all the juniors on that side of the school.

Before seven o'clock the room was crowded, and after that the crowd thickened.

"My hat! It will soon be standing room only, that's what I say!" Lefevre remarked, as he glanced over the crowded room.

"We shall clear a few quid over this," Prye remarked.

Cutts nodded.

"Time the performers were here," he said, glancing at his watch.

There was a sound of wheels outside.

"Here they are!" said Jones of the Fifth.

"Stay here, and see that nobody comes in on the nod," said Cutts. "I'll look after the pros."

"Right you are!"

Cutts went out to meet the new arrivals.

Three figures draped in big coats, with masked faces and soft hats, stood in the hall.

Cutts nodded to them.

"Glad you've come!" he remarked.

"We're all ready! My word! Have you been travelling in those masks?"

"Certainly!" said the fat pierrot, who was evidently the leader. "I think you are aware that we have good reasons for keeping our identity secret."

"Our titled relations would not care to know that we gave variety performances," said the tallest of the pierrots—a pierrot about Monty Lowther's height, or a little taller.

Cutts grinned.

"Yes, I know," he said. "Come on! We've got you a dressing-room here, and you can enter the Form-room by the door at the top end, so as to get right on the stage."

"Very good, Mr. Cutts!"

Cutts conducted the trio into the room assigned as a dressing-room. There they removed their heavy coats and hats.

They stood revealed in pierrot costume, their faces still hidden by the masks, and looking almost exactly as the Masked Trio had looked on the stage at the Wayland Theatre Royal.

In a short time a bell rang, and the three pierrots passed through the door on to the stage. They glanced through the eyeholes of their masks at the crowded Form-room.

The room was packed.

A sea of eyes and faces confronted the Masked Trio as they appeared at the upper end of the room, and there was a cheer.

"Here they are! Bravo!"

The Masked Trio bowed.

"Gentlemen!" said the leader of the trio, advancing to the marked-off end of the stage. "We are just going to begin."

"Bravo!"

"We have been asked to give a performance here by our young friend Comic Cutts—"

"Wha-at!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Cutts turned crimson.

The audience roared with laughter.

Whether it was the mistake of the pierrot or his first joke in the performance, it was very successful. The audience shrieked.

"Our friend Comic Cutts has requested—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"My name isn't Comic Cutts, you imbecile!" said Cutts of the Fifth, from the side of the stage. "It's Gerald Cutts, you idiot!"

"Our friend Comic Cutts—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Did you say your name was Comic Cutts, or Chips?" asked the pierrot, turning, with a polite bow, towards the Fifth-Former.

"You—you fathead—"

"Eh?"

"Shut up about me, and get on with the washing!" hissed Cutts. "I'm not paying you three guineas to come here and play the fool! Leave me out of it, and get on with the performance, confound you!"

Cutts' voice was subdued, but a good many of the audience heard what he said, and they yelled again.

"Very well, Mr. Chips—"

"Cutts, you dummy!"

"Excuse me, I mean Cutts you dummy—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"The performance will now begin," said the pierrot chief. "I shall stay with a conjuring trick. If a gentleman in the audience will lend me his handkerchief, I will undertake to make it disappear, and it will then be found down the back of our friend Comic Cutts—"

"Oh, good!"

"Look here—" began Cutts.

"Here's a hanky!" roared Wally of the Third, rushing towards the stage. "Let's see it found down Cutts' back!"

"Ahem! I prefer a handkerchief that has not been used to clean a slate with!" said the pierrot.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Oh, rats!" said Wally.

"Pway accept my handkerchief, my dear sir!" said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, rising, and handing over his elegant cambric.

"Thank you very much, young sir! Of course, you do not mind if this handkerchief is damaged?"

"Weally, you know—"

"It is about to come into close contact with our friend Comic Cutts—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Leave me out of it, you idiot!" howled Cutts. "I tell you I'm not taking part in your rotten, fatheaded performance! Find somebody else!"

The pierrot did not seem to hear. He made mysterious passes in the air with the handkerchief, and finally it disappeared. Everybody in the room had seen it go up the pierrot's sleeve, so there was no very deep mystery about its disappearance.

"Gentlemen, that handkerchief will now be found down the back of Comic Cutts—"

Cutts of the Fifth strode towards the conjurer.

"Look here, you chump," he hissed, "if you don't leave off calling me Comic Cutts there will be a row! Do you understand?"

"Chuck it, Cutts!" murmured Prye. "It's all in the entertainment, you know. They're paid to come here and make jokes."

"Just so!" said Gilmore. "The audience like it like anything. See how they're laughing at you, Cutts old man!"

"They're not going to make jokes about me!" growled Cutts.

"Oh, let him rip!" urged Lefevre. "That's what I say, let him rip! The audience like it, anyway, and that's the object of the entertainment, you know."

Cutts scowled fiercely.

"They're jolly well not going to laugh at me, you silly fathead!"

"Well, they've paid for admission, and—"

"Are you ready, Mr. Cutts?" asked the pierrot.

"Ready for what?" growled Cutts.

"To be searched for the missing handkerchief!"

"I'm jolly well not going to be searched!"

The pierrot turned to the audience with a resigned gesture.

"Ladies and gentlemen, if Comic Cutts refuses to be searched for the handkerchief, it cannot be produced—"

"Bai Joye, I want my handkerchief, you know!"

"Comic Cutts will have to be searched!" shouted Kangaroo.

The three masked pierrots surrounded the exasperated Fifth-Former. Cutts pushed back his cuffs, and doubled his fists. He evidently did not intend to have his jacket and waistcoat and shirt stripped off in public. The juniors were yelling with glee in anticipation.

The Fifth-Form door suddenly opened, and Toby, the page, came in, with a startled face.

"Master Cutts, if you please—"

"Hullo! Clear out!"

"But, Master Cutts—"

"Don't bother now, you young idiot!" roared the ruffled Cutts. "Get out!"

"But three gentlemen want to see you—three gentlemen in masks!" stammered Toby. "They say they've come to give the performance!"

"What?" yelled Cutts.

"They says I'm to tell you the Masked Trio have arrived, sir, and they're sorry they're late, 'cause somebody had taken the back at the station, and they had to walk!" said Toby.

There was a buzz of amazement in the crowded room.

Cutts was dumbfounded.

"There they are!" yelled Redfern of the New House, suddenly.

In the open doorway of the Form-room appeared three figures—one of them very stout—three figures in pierrot costume and black silk masks; and if the doorway had been a looking-glass, it could not have reflected more accurately the three figures on the stage.

There was a shout of astonishment.

"The Masked Trio!"

"Another lot!"

"It's raining entertainers!"

"Gwoat Scott! Poor old Tom Mewwy! Here's the weal party turned up, aftah all!"

THE FIFTH CHAPTER. Bowled Out!

CUTTS of the Fifth looked at the Masked Trio in the doorway and then at the Masked Trio on the stage, and his head seemed to turn round and round.

He was utterly mystified.

The three new-comers advanced into the room gravely.

They looked at the Trio on the stage through the holes in their masks, but the expression on their faces, of course, could not be seen.

On the stage, the Masked Trio—alias the Terrible Three—stood rooted to the floor.

"Bowled out!" murmured Tom Merry. "What a ghastly frost!"

"Done!" groaned Monty Lowther. "You ass, Tom! You said you'd arranged it all on the telephone, and now the real article turns up at the rottenest moment possible!"

"Oh, crumbs," said Manners, "let's cut!"

The three japers backed away towards

the door leading into the adjoining room, which they had used as a dressing-room.

By their movement was at once spotted. There was a shout.

"They're going!"

"They're spoofers!"

"Stop 'em!"

Cutts made a bound to get between the Terrible Three and the exit. It was dawning on him now that he had been japed; and he understood at last the singular way in which the performers had persisted in making fun of him.

Kildare jumped up in his place. Most of the audience were on their feet now, and the room was in a loud buzz.

"You fellows had better explain yourselves," said the captain of St. Jim's. "Who are you?"

"We're the Masked Trio!" replied Tom Merry.

"Then who are those other chaps?"

"We're the Masked Trio," said the tallest of the new-comers.

"My hat! There can't be two sets of them!" said Darrel of the Sixth.

"See that they don't get away!" hissed Cutts to a crowd of Fifth-Formers, who were thronging on the stage to back him up. "We're jolly well going to have this out! We've been spoofed! It's a jape!"

"Looks like 'it," said Prye. "But how—"

now, and you can't keep this up, you know."

"We are ready to begin the performance, Mr. Cutts, as soon as you please!" said the leader of the newly-arrived trio.

"Wait a minute or two," said Cutts.

"We've got to deal with these impostors. They came here representing themselves as you fellows, and took us in!"

"Is it possible?"

"Yes, and we're going to know who they are!"

"Dear me! I suppose that is why the hack has gone from the station. I suppose they must have come here in it?"

"So they did!" exclaimed Prye.

"The spoofers!" yelled Gilmore.

"Have those masks off them!"

"Take 'em off!" shouted Cutts.

"Impossible!" exclaimed Tom Merry.

"Our noble connections among the highest aristocracy of the land would be shocked if they knew that we were doing a variety turn. My uncle, the aged duke, would have a fit!"

"And my father, the marquis, would never get over it!" said Monty Lowther.

"And my brother, the earl, would cut me off with a tanner!" said Manners.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Cutts made a sudden rush. He was pretty certain that the spoofers belonged to St. Jim's, and he meant to know for certain.

The rescuers being thus kept off, Cutts & Co. had it all their own way with the Terrible Three.

The unfortunate japers of the Shell were rolled over on the stage, and the pierrot costumes and the silk masks were torn from them with no gentle hands.

Three juniors in Etons were revealed when the costumes and the masks were gone, and their faces were very well known to all present. There was a shout of recognition.

"Tom Merry!"

"Manners!"

"Lowther!"

"Oh, the spoofers! Ha, ha, ha!"

"Silly asses!" grunted Blake, as he sat down again. "They were too cocksure about it. Now, if I had been working that little jape I should have made sure that the real article wouldn't turn up!"

"Yaas, wathah! I considah—"

"It's rough on poor old Tommy," said Kangaroo, with tears of merriment in his eyes. "I'm sorry for him. Ha, ha, ha! The silly ass! Ha, ha, ha!"

"Tom Merry, Manners, Lowther!" hissed Cutts, as he dragged the rags of the costumes from the much-dishevelled Shell fellows. "You young villains! I'll teach you to be funny at my entertainment! Bump the cads!"

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IN THE "BOYS' FRIEND"?

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"Tom Merry and Manners and Lowther ain't in the audience," said Cutts. "I'd noticed that already. Their friends are all here, but they're not!"

"Oh, gad!"

"Take off those masks!" thundered Cutts.

The three pierrots on the stage drew together.

"Impossible, Comic Cutts—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Don't you call me Comic Cutts again, or I'll squash your face for you!" roared Cutts.

"Take off those masks. We're going to know who you are. I believe you're St. Jim's chaps japing us!"

"Oh, great Scott!" exclaimed Kildare, in amazement. "I shouldn't wonder! You'd better take off those masks, you fellows—"

"Can't be done, Kildare—"

"Hallo!" cried Cutts. "How do you know Kildare's name if you're not St. Jim's fellows?"

The pierrots were silent. It was certainly a slip of the tongue, and Tom Merry had pretty well given himself away.

Kildare burst into a laugh.

"You may as well own up," he exclaimed. "The real fellows are here

"Line up!" roared Tom Merry, forgetting to disguise his voice.

There was a shout.

"That's Tom Merry's voice!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"They're Shell chaps!"

Seven or eight Fifth-Formers rushed at the Masked Trio with Cutts. There was a terrific struggle on the stage for a moment. In the body of the hall Blake & Co. and Kangaroo and a band of Shell fellows jumped up to rush to the rescue.

There would have been a battle-royal if they had succeeded in reaching the stage. But the wisdom of Cutts' arrangements was then apparent. Kildare and the rest of the prefects interposed, and the would-be rescuers were shoved back.

"Weally, Kildare, I must go to the rescue of Tom Mewwy," Arthur Augustus D'Arcy exclaimed, as the captain of St. Jim's pushed him over a form.

Kildare grimaced.

"So it is Tom Merry?" he said.

"Well, I—I mean—ahem!"

"Ha, ha! Stand back, you kids! You're not to go on the stage. Sling them back, you fellows! I'll turn out any fag who doesn't sit down immediately!" shouted Kildare.

"Yes, rather!" said Lefevre. "That's what I say; bump them!"

Kildare strode forward.

"That will do!" he said curtly.

Cutts glared at him.

"Leave us alone, Kildare!"

Kildare's blue eyes glinted.

"You're not going to handle them roughly, Cutts."

"Look here, Kildare—"

"You hear what I say!"

There was a restive movement among the juniors in the audience. They would have chanced the prefects and rushed to the rescue if Cutts & Co. had been allowed to bump their victims. But Kildare's interposition had the desired effect. The juniors knew that the captain of St. Jim's could be trusted not to allow any bullying.

Cutts gritted his teeth.

But there was no gainsaying Kildare, and he reluctantly released his grasp upon Tom Merry.

"They can be turned out," said Kildare. "You'd better buzz off, you young rascals. And the next time you take on somebody's else name and character,

mind that that somebody else doesn't turn up in time to show you up!"

Tom Merry grinned ruefully.

"Blessed if I know how they've turned up!" he said. "I had it all nicely arranged on the telephone, and—"

"Get off the stage!" shouted Cutts.

"Buzz off!" said Kildare. "The performance is overdue."

"Oh, we've had the best part of the performance!" said Darrel, laughing. "Buzz off, you kids!"

And the Terrible Three, extremely breathless and dusty, and almost in fatters, departed. Loud laughter followed them from the Form-room, and the door closed upon them.

THE SIXTH CHAPTER.

The Vanishing Trick.

THE newly-arrived Masked Trio had been silent spectators of the peculiar scene on the stage.

They joined in the laughter, true, but they made no movement to interfere actively, and waited patiently till the stage was clear for them.

Then they took up the place vacated by the late spoofers.

The audience, having laughed themselves husky, settled down into quietness again to see what the genuine performance would be like. But it was generally agreed that there would be nothing quite so funny as the debut—and abrupt exit—of the Terrible Three.

Cutts' face was clearing now. If the "spoof" performance had gone on, he knew that he would have been further japed by the Terrible Three, and the timely arrival of the Masked Trio the Second had saved him from that. And, in fact, there came a smile upon the face of Gerald Cutts as he reflected how completely the Shell fellows' jape had turned out to be a frost.

But the smile vanished as the performance began.

Cutts had not specially demanded it, but he had supposed that the performance at St. Jim's would be the same as that given at Wavland Theatre Royal, only cut a little to compress it into a shorter time.

But the three pierrots seemed to have made great changes in their programme.

The shortest and fastest of the trio was the first to begin operations, while the other two sat upon chairs on the stage and watched him.

The fat pierrot glanced at Cutts.

"I shall require some things, please," he said. "We haven't been able to bring with us all that we need, owing to—to circumstances—"

"Had to walk, you know," explained Figgins. "Couldn't carry a heavy bag."

"Ahem—yes!" said the third pierrot.

"Quite so," said Cutts. "I understand. It's all due to those young scoundrels. What can I get for you?"

"This is a new thing," said the fat pierrot, who was speaking in a deep, guttural voice. "It is called the Steak Pie and Twelve Jam Tarts Trick."

"The—the what?"

"The Steak Pie and Twelve Jam Tarts Trick," replied the pierrot calmly. "I make a steak-pie and twelve jam tarts disappear. Can you get them for me?"

"Well," said Cutts, "I suppose we could get them at Mrs. Taggles', but—but—"

"Then please get them."

"Shall we borrow them, to be returned?"

"No; I am afraid they could not be returned."

"Well, those things cost money, you know."

"Oh, if there is a lack of funds, I will not perform the trick!" said the fat

pierrot, with dignity. "But I should have thought that, after the indignity we have been subjected to—our names borrowed, our appearance imitated—and as we have made no complaint—"

"Dash it all, let 'em have the things they want, Cutts!" whispered Prye. "The blessed audience are getting impatient, too. Must give some kind of a show."

"All right. Cut down to the tuck-shop and get them, then. I suppose a cold pie will do?"

"Certainly," said the pierrot. "I require a steak-and-kidney pie, twelve jam tarts, and knife and fork and plate. And look sharp!"

"Oh, all right!"

Prye disappeared. In the interval of waiting the three pierrots kept up a fire of talk with one another, and the audience grinned. For the talk, strangely enough, had local allusions, and they were mostly to Cutts. The tallest of the pierrots recited a limerick which ran:

"There's a school which is famous for
nuts,

Where the Fifth are regarded as
butts,

They are all off their dot,

But the worst of the lot,

Is the asinine boulder named
Cutts."

Cutts could scarcely believe his ears.

There was a howl of laughter in the Form-room, and the Fifth-Formers did not join in it, but looked decidedly blank.

"What on earth—" muttered Jones.

"This is as bad as the other gang?" said Gilmore. "Better give 'em a hint not to be so funny about us."

"The audience like it!" murmured Lefevre. "That's what I say."

"Oh, dry up!"

Fortunately Prye re-entered just then with the requisites from the tuck-shop. He opened a basket upon the stage, and produced a large pie in a dish, and a dozen jam-tarts wrapped up in tissue-paper.

The fat pierrot's eyes glistened with satisfaction through the holes in his mask as he regarded them.

"That all right?" asked Prye.

"Yes, that will do, thanks."

Prye retired from the stage. The fat pierrot took the knife and fork, and sat down with the pie between his knees, and began to eat it. The audience stared at him blankly. He had undertaken to make the pie disappear, but there was nobody present who couldn't have made it disappear in that way, and many of them would have been very pleased to make the trial.

Cutts & Co. watched the fat pierrot. So did the audience.

In fact, he was the cynosure of all eyes. But he did not seem to be aware of it. All his attention was given to the steak-and-kidney pie.

"My hat!" said Prye at last. "What's the giddy game? Is that what they call an entertainment, Cutts?"

"Chap seems to be entertaining himself," said Lefevre. "I don't know about the audience. That's what I say."

"The silly ass!" growled Cutts restlessly. "If it's part of the game, I don't know about interfering with him. But—"

The audience were grinning, but in rather a puzzled way. They did not know what to make of the fat pierrot and his proceeding any more than Cutts did. Some of them supposed that it was a very deep joke, of which the point would be seen later.

Many of the juniors laughed heartily,

especially New House juniors. The New House fellows, in fact, seemed to think it was a really ripping joke, for reasons best known to themselves.

"By Jove, he's finished all the grub!" said Tom Merry at last. "I wonder what's coming next? We've been waiting long enough."

"Gentlemen," said the tall pierrot, "we shall now proceed to do a dance."

"Hold on!" said Cutts. "Have you finished that trick?"

"Yes; that's finished," said the fat pierrot.

"You said you were going to make those tarts and the pie disappear!" hooted Cutts.

"Well, I've made 'em disappear, haven't I?"

"Why, you—you—"

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

"I've had to pay for that tonny!" roared Cutts.

The fat pierrot nodded.

"Yes," he explained. "That's where the joke comes in."

The audience roared again.

Cutts was speechless; and the three pierrots, leaving him muttering to himself, proceeded with their dance.

Their method of dancing seemed to be to put their hands on their hips, and, standing in that attitude, to bring their boots down with a clatter on the stage.

This lasted for about five minutes, and by the end of that time some of the seniors among the audience retired from the Form-room. They were fed up. Cutts muttered a remonstrance to the Masked Trio.

"Dash it all. Can't you do something a bit more entertaining than that, you fellows?" he said. "Do you call that dancing?"

"It's our style of dancing," said the tall pierrot.

"Well, I call it rotten!"

"Oh, that's your ignorance, you know!"

"What!"

"Cheese it, Cutts!"

"Wha-a-at!"

"Don't interrupt!" said the pierrot severely. "How can I dance when I'm being jawed at by a silly ass?"

"Oh!" gasped Cutts.

Lefevre tapped his friend on the arm. "Better let 'em alone, Cutts," he whispered.

"But look here—"

Stamp—stamp—stamp!

The Masked Trio were still dancing—what they called dancing.

Presently they ceased—not, apparently, for any reason, excepting that they were out of breath. Half the seniors had left the Form-room by that time, tired of the show. But some of them, and nearly all the juniors, remained, determined to get their money's worth as far as they could. But the fellows were beginning to get restive now, and shouting to the performers to buck up.

The tall pierrot bowed to the audience when he ceased stamping.

"Yah!" yelled the juniors in the audience.

"Gentlemen—"

"Poof!"

"Rats!"

"Go and eat coke!"

"Gentlemen," said the pierrot undisturbed, "this is where you cheer."

"Rats!"

"Bosh!"

"Hurrah!" roared Redfern, of the Fourth. "Hip, hip, hurrah!"

"What are you cheering for, you New House duffer?" demanded the Terrible Three, with one voice. "There never was a rottener show!"

"Ha, ha, ha! Hear, hear! Hurrah!" yelled Redfern.

"Gentlemen, I shall now proceed to perform my celebrated conjuring trick with a silk hat. Will any gentleman present lend me a silk hat?"

"Go it, Gussy!"

"That's up to you, D'Arcy!"

"Weally, deah boys—"

"Surely you came in a silk hat, Gussy!" exclaimed Redfern, in a shocked tone.

"Weally, Weddy, I should not be likely to put a silk hat on to walk down a passage into a Form-room!"

"Gentlemen, I require a silk hat! I require a silk hat of the finest quality, belonging to a wearer of really first-class toppers."

D'Arcy rose.

"Then I suppose it's up to me!" he remarked. "I'm the only chap at St. Jim's who answahs to that description."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I fail to see anythin' to laugh at. P'way wait a few minutes, my deah sir, and I will bring you a silk hat."

"Your best one, please!" said the tall pierrot.

D'Arcy hesitated.

"Do you want my Sunday toppah?" he asked.

"Certainly!"

"It will not be damaged?"

"Not unless you damage it yourself."

"Oh, vewy well!"

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy quitted the Form-room, and returned in a few minutes with the silk hat. He walked up to the stage and handed it to the pierrot. The performer made him a sign to step on the stage.

"Pray lend me your assistance," he said.

"Weally, my deah sir—"

"I shall require assistance in performing this feat, and you look like a youth of the greatest intelligence," said the pierrot.

"Yaas, wathah! You are quite wight there!" said D'Arcy.

"Pray hand me the hat!" The pierrot turned it over in his hands. "This is your Sunday silk topper?"

"Yaas!"

"Very good! Now, ladies and gentlemen, I call upon you to watch me very closely, and see whether you observe me change this hat for another."

The audience began to get interested at last. Some of the seniors who had got up to go sat down again. The pierrot certainly did not seem to have much chance of changing the hat for another.

Certainly, he wore baggy clothes in which he might have concealed the ribbons, the white rabbits, the yards of coloured paper, etc., which are the usual conjurer's paraphernalia. But it did not appear possible that he had a silk hat concealed about him—in fact, it seemed impossible.

The conjurer turned his back to the audience, holding the silk hat close to his chest, so that it was hidden from view.

He turned round in another minute, and placed a silk hat on the stage.

"My word!" murmured Blake. "If he's changed it he must have been smart! How could he have had a hat hidden about him?"

"Opera hat, perhaps, closed up," suggested Monty Lowther.

"Then what has he done with Gussy's?"

"True!"

The tall pierrot pointed to the hat.

"Does that look to you like your hat, young sir?" he asked.

Arthur Augustus nodded.

"Yaas; it looks wemarkably like it," he said.

"You would be deceived by the resemblance?"

"Yaas!"

"Good! Now jump on that hat!"

"Wha-at!"

"It is part of the performance," the tall pierrot explained. "Jump on it!"

Arthur Augustus made a jump, and landed on the silk topper.

Crunch!

The topper bore a slight resemblance to a concertina after that, but no resemblance to anything else on earth.

D'Arcy stepped off the wreck.

"That all wight?" he asked.

"Ha, ha, ha!" The three pierrots roared. "Ha, ha, ha! Yes; that all right!"

"Good egg!"

"Gentlemen, you see that wreck of a hat? You would say it was impossible to restore this young gentleman his hat as he handed it to me—"

"I know I should!" said Monty Lowther.

short of the most powerful magic could possibly restore it to its pristine glory.

The hat was handed back to the conjurer.

"Are you satisfied, gentlemen?"

"Yes."

"Are you satisfied, Master D'Arcy?"

"Yaas!"

"You are sure you are satisfied?"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Good! That is fortunate! Gentlemen, now you have examined that hat, would you not say that it is quite impossible to restore it?"

"Yes."

"What-ho!"

"Yes, rather!"

"Well, gentlemen," said the pierrot calmly, "you would be quite right!"

"What!"

"Oh!"

"You would be quite right; it is quite impossible to restore the hat. But as



"Don't speak too loud," said Tom Merry cautiously. "It's a ripping wheeze—a real high roller, and Figgins would give his ears to know it!" Fatty Wynn drew a deep breath and ceased to eat. He was glad that he had been so cautious now.

"Examine the hat, gentlemen," said the pierrot. "Master D'Arcy, pray hand the hat down among the audience!"

"Bai Jove! How do you know my name?" exclaimed D'Arcy, in astonishment.

"Ahem! I— It is written in your hat!"

"But you didn't look in the hat!"

"Am I not a conjurer?" demanded the tall pierrot, with dignity. "Pray do as I have requested!"

"All wight!"

Arthur Augustus handed down the smashed topper. Kildare took it and looked at it, and then Darrel, and then it passed among the juniors.

There was not the slightest doubt that it was a hopeless wreck, and that nothing

Master D'Arcy has stated that he is quite satisfied, it is a matter of no moment. Now, if any gentleman will lend me a gold watch, I will proceed to—

"My hat!"

"Great Scott!"

"Bai Jove! Is—is that my hat?"

The pierrot nodded.

"Yes, that is your hat. Kindly remove it, as the trick is finished! If any gentleman will lend me a gold watch—a valuable one will be necessary, I—"

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Tom Merry.

"I think that's very likely, after what's happened to Gussy's topper!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

D'Arcy stood transfixed.

"That—that is my hat!" he gasped

at last. "You—you wascal! You said that it would not be damaged!"

"Unless you damaged it yourself," corrected the pierrot. "I appeal to the audience if I did not say that!"

"Ha, ha, ha! You did!"
 "Ho's got you there, Gussy!"
 "You damaged it, Adolphus!"
 "Ha, ha, ha!"

Arthur Augustus shook his fist at the conjurer.

"I regard you as a swindlin' wascal!" he yelled, picking up the hat. "You are an impostah, sir—a wank impostah!" And the swell of St. Jim's marched away with the wreck of his silk topper, while the audience yelled with laughter.

THE SEVENTH CHAPTER.

Figgys' Triumph.

GENTLEMEN, I am going to show you the great rope trick. This did not appear in the programme at the Wayland Theatre, and I think it will interest you very much. I shall require five assistants—juniors will not do.

"Ahem!"
 "Not Sixth-Formers," said the conjurer hastily. "Mr. Cutts and his friends will do very well. Members of the Sixth Form would not do, as—as they are too strong for this trick. Boys of the Fifth will do excellently. Mr. Cutts, will you oblige me?"

"That depends on what you want me to do," said Cutts grimly. "You're not going to get me to smash up any of my property!"

"This is quite a different trick; there will be no smashing. Indeed, I think you will very likely want to do some smashing at the conclusion, but I shall not permit it."

"Well, what is it?" asked Cutts.

"Come on the stage—and your friends."

"All of us?" asked Lefevre.

"I require five."

"Well, I suppose it's up to us!" granted Jones. "Come on!"

And the Fifth Form Entertainment Committee came forward. They were looking a little uneasy, and the audience watched with redoubled attention. One of the masked pierrots took a long-rope from his tunic, and began to uncoil it.

"Gentlemen, the rope trick is very simple, but I guarantee that it will bring down the house," said the tall pierrot. "In the first place, the rope is looped round these five young gentlemen—"

"Oh, is it?" said Lefevre. "That's what I say—is it?"

"Hold on!" said Prye.

"I am not going to hurt you," said the conjurer reassuringly, as he looped the rope round the uneasy Fifth-Formers. "As you see, it is not tight."

The rope was passed round the waist of the Fifth-Formers loosely. The pierrot made a slip-knot, and pulled it a little tighter. The five seniors were bunched together, looking very sheepish.

The conjurer made a sign to his companions, and the Masked Trio all laid hold of the rope and pulled it hard. The knot tightened, and the five seniors were roped together tightly.

"You cannot get loose!" asked the conjurer.

"No!" growled Cutts.

"Untie us!" said Gilmore.

The conjurer shook his head.

"No; the trick is not finished yet."

He drew a bag from under his loose tunic, and the other two followed his example. They were paper bags, and they were full of flour.

Cutts eyed the pierrots uneasily.

"What are you going to do with that flour?" he demanded.

"Throw it over you, Master Cutts!"

"What!" yelled Cutts.

There was a yell from the audience.

"My hat! Ha, ha, ha!"

"Don't you dare to throw that over us!" yelled the five seniors together.

"You villain! Stop it! Yow! Oh! Yaroo! Yow, yow!"

Swish, swish, came the flour from the bags, descending in a shower over the unhappy Fifth-Formers.

Cutts & Co. roared and wriggled and yelled, and lost their footing, and rolled in a confused heap on the stage.

Still the flour descended in showers, until the bags were empty. The Fifth-Formers wriggled on the stage, gasping and spluttering, and looking as if there had been a sudden fall of snow. The audience gasped and laughed.

The Masked Trio advanced to the edge of the stage.

"Gentlemen," said the tall pierrot, "I have an announcement to make! Pray lend me your ears!"

"Pile in!" shouted Tom Merry.

"Gentlemen, there is a queer idea in the School House here that the School House is cock-house of St. Jim's. That is a most egregious error. The New House is cock-house of St. Jim's!"

"Wha-haaat!"

"Hear, hear!" yelled Redfern.

"Why—why—"

"What the—"

"It was up to the juniors of this school to bring Cutts down from off his perch," went on the pierrot calmly. "Tom Merry made a mess of it, as I knew he would!"

"You knew I would?" yelled Tom Merry. "Why—what—who—"

"Bai Jove!"

"It's a jape!" yelled Blake excitedly.

"A New House jape! I know his voice now—"

"Gentlemen, the School House kids failed, but we have pulled it off! Gentlemen, I have the honour to bid you good-evening! Show your chivvies, kids!"

The Masked Trio removed their masks.

There was a gasp in the crowded room, and then a yell of amazement.

"Figgins & Co.?"

"Great Scott!" gasped Kildare

"Why, you—you cheeky young rascals

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Redfern. "Who's cock-house at St. Jim's?"

And the New House juniors, who had evidently been in the secret all along, roared:

"New House! New House!"

Tom Merry's face was a study. He understood it all now.

It was not the real Masked Trio who had arrived in time to interrupt his performance. The real Masked Trio were still at Wayland. It was Figgins & Co. of the New House who had come in their guise!

"Collar the rotters!" shrieked Monty Lowther. "Squash 'em! Bump 'em! Slaughter 'em! Jump on 'em!"

"This is where we mizzle!" grinned Figgins.

And the unmasked trio dashed through the door at the upper end of the stage. One minute later a crowd of School House fellows were showing at it; but it was locked on the other side.

Figgins & Co. were gone, and were safe in their own House before the School House could get through the door.

In the wild excitement Cutts & Co. roared for help in vain for some time. They were untied at last, gasping and spluttering, and they crawled away smothered with flour, followed by yells of laughter. There was no doubt that Cutts & Co. of the Fifth had been utterly and hopelessly done.

"Well, my only hat!" Tom Merry exclaimed, as the excited crowd surged out of the Form-room. "I never dreamed of it; Figgys must have got on to the wheeze somehow, and—"

"And spoofed you!" grinned Blake. "Didn't I tell you you'd better leave the wheeze to Study No. 6?"

"Yaas, wathah—"

"Oh, rats!" said Tom Merry. "Let's go over and see Figgys. He's done us brown; but he's done the Fifth browner—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Who's cock-house of St. Jim's?" yelled Redfern.

"We are!" said Tom Merry promptly.

"But Figgys' scored this time, and we own up!"

Figgins & Co. were looking out of their study window when the School House fellows came across the quadrangle. They waved black silk masks at the Terrible Three, and grinned.

Tom Merry laughed.

"It's all right, Figgys," he called out, "we're not on the warpath! Pax, you giddy impostor! You've done the Fifth, and we're going to stand you a feed; so come down, and if Fatty's got any room left after the pie and the tarts—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"What-ho!" said Fatty Wynn at once. "That was only a snack!"

And the School House and New House juniors fraternised most amicably in the tuckshop, while Cutts & Co. were cleaning flour from their clothes and themselves, and vowing vengeance upon the Masked Entertainers.

THE END.

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