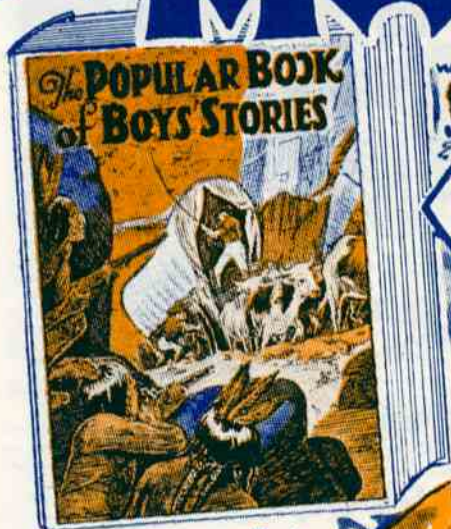


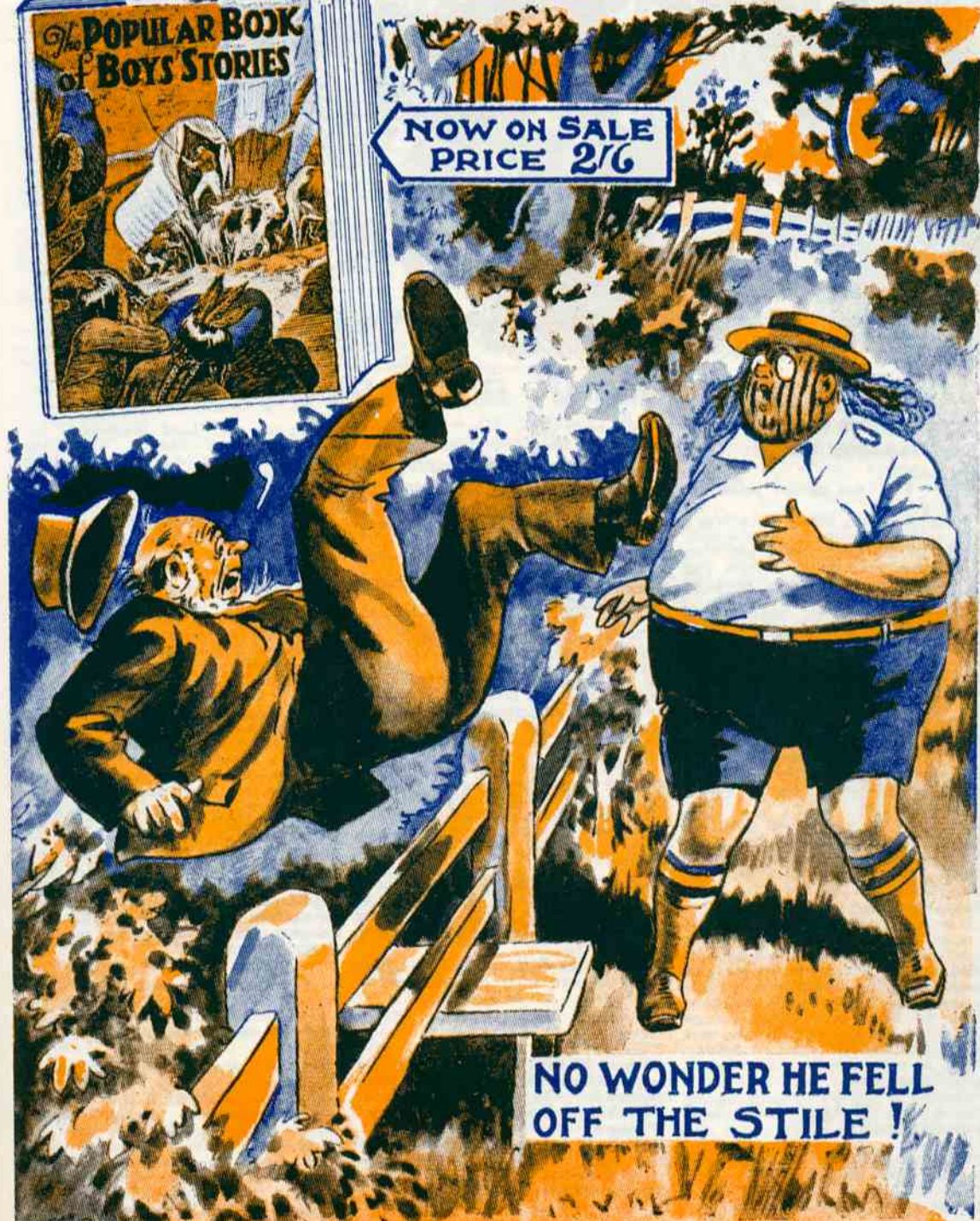
"THE BOUNDER'S CAPTURE!"

Amazing Holiday Adventures of Harry Wharton & Co., the Greyfriars Hikers.

The MAGNET 2^d



**NOW ON SALE
PRICE 2/6**



**NO WONDER HE FELL
OFF THE STILE!**

THE BOUNDER'S CAPTURE!



BY FRANK RICHARDS.

THE FIRST CHAPTER.

The Sleeping Beauty!

"SHAN'T!"

That was neither polite nor elegant.

But Billy Bunter never was a whale on either politeness or elegance. And Bunter was tired. What politeness Billy Bunter had, dropped from him like a cloak when he was tired or hungry. Now he was both.

Harry Wharton & Co. were a little tired also. That lane in the Chilterns, out deep in the chalky hillside, was rather steep. The Greyfriars hikers would have camped a little earlier than usual that afternoon had it been possible. But there was nowhere to camp. The hikers couldn't possibly camp in the middle of the road. And on either side of the rather narrow lane the chalky banks rose steeply ten or twelve feet to the level of the meadows above. Fences ran along the top.

Even Bob Cherry, the most strenuous member of the party, would have been willing to cut it short and camp, had camping been a practical proposition. But it wasn't—and that was that!

But the fact that "that" was "that" made no difference to Billy Bunter. He plumped his fat person down on the grassy chalk bank and refused to take another step. The hikers halted and glared at him. Lord Mauleverer smiled, but the Famous Five glared. Glares having no effect on William George Bunter, they told him what they thought of him. But that had no effect, either.

"Get a move on, you fat frog!" roared Johnny Bull.

"Shan't!"

"Buck up, old bean!" said Lord Mauleverer gently.

"Shan't!"

"Will you get up, you fat frump?" demanded Frank Nugent.

"Shan't!"

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"We can't camp here," said Harry Wharton. "Have a little sense, Bunter! Get on with it!"

"Shan't!"

Bunter's vocabulary, generally extensive, now seemed limited to a single word. But he uttered it quite emphatically.

"The get-onfulness is the proper caper, my esteemed, idiotic Bunter," said Hurree Jamsset Ram Singh. "Make an absurd effort."

"Shan't!"

"If we were going downhill," said Bob Cherry thoughtfully, "we could roll him along like a barrel. But we can't roll him uphill."

"Beast!"

"What about restin' here?" suggested Lord Mauleverer. Mauly was always ready for a rest.

"Well, we've got to find a camp—and goodness knows how long we shall be finding one!" said Harry Wharton. "May see a spot round the next corner. For goodness' sake, stir your stumps, Bunter!"

"Shan't!"

"Well, I'm going on!" said Johnny Bull. "Bunter can sit there as long as he likes. I'm not going to stand here looking at him. He's not pretty to look at!"

And Johnny Bull marched on. Billy Bunter blinked after him through his big spectacles, but he did not stir.

"Coming, Bunter?" asked Frank Nugent.

"Shan't!"

Nugent followed Johnny Bull. Hurree Singh followed Nugent. Bob Cherry followed on. They seemed fed-up.

"Look here, Bunter—" said Harry.

"Shan't!"

"Well, if you want to stick there—stick!" said the captain of the Greyfriars Remove. "You can follow on and find our camp. Come on, Mauly!"

"Yaas, old bean."

Wharton and Lord Mauleverer followed the other hikers. The whole party wound out of sight up the hilly lane. Billy Bunter blinked after them and made a movement to rise. But he sat down again.

"Beasts!" he murmured.

Bunter wanted a rest—a long rest! And he was going to have one. Certainly he did not want the hikers to lose him. But that was not going to happen if Bunter could help it. When he had had a rest—a long rest—he could follow on and find the hikers' camp. He would find the work done, the supper cooked—and nothing for him to do, but to eat, and go to sleep afterwards. That suited Bunter. Bunter had done very little work on that hike; but the other fellows always seemed to expect him to lend a hand, and sometimes kicked him when he didn't. That did not suit Bunter.

Bunter really was tired. After lunch that day the hikers had marched on, without stopping a couple of hours for Bunter to take his usual nap. This sort of thing was what Bunter had to expect from a set of selfish fellows, who never could get it into their heads that William George Bunter was the most important person in the party, and that his comfort ought to have occupied their thoughts night and day, to the exclusion of all lesser matters.

The fat Owl of Greyfriars leaned back on the grassy, chalk bank and rested at his podgy ease. His fat eyelids dropped, his eyes closed behind his big spectacles, his mouth opened, and he slept—and he snored.

Bunter's snore was some snore! It rumbled along the lane. A cow looked over the hedge above, as if in surprise, and—evidently not caring for the musical effects—waddled away again. A farmer's man driving a flock of sheep came down the lane and stared at Bunter and grinned. The sheepdog came up to him and sniffed, evidently curious to discover the cause of that

mysterious rumble. Bunter did not wake. When Billy Bunter slept, he slept! Shepherd and sheep and sheep-dog passed on, leaving Bunter deep in the embrace of Morpheus—qualling, if not surpassing, Rip Van Winkle at his own game.

"Snore!"

Honk!

A car came grinding up the lane. It was a large, handsome Rolls-Royce, with four fellows in it. Had Billy Bunter been awake he would have recognised three of those fellows as Ponsonby, Gadsby, and Monson, of Highcliffe School—the old enemy of the Greyfriars hikers. The fourth fellow he would have recognised as Herbert Vernon-Smith, the Bounder of Greyfriars. He would probably have recognised the car, which belonged to Mr. Vernon-Smith, the millionaire, and sometimes brought him to Greyfriars School to see his son there. But Bunter was fast asleep, and the grinding of the car on the hilly road did not disturb him. He snored on, while the Rolls climbed the hill.

The chauffeur looked at Bunter; the four fellows in the car stared at him and grinned. Ponsonby told the chauffeur to stop.

"That's one of Wharton's crew," said Ponsonby.

"Then that gang are round here somewhere," remarked Gadsby.

"Oh, listen to the band!" chuckled Monson.

"It's Bunter," said Vernon-Smith. "What are you stoppin' for, Pon? You don't want to give Bunter a lift, I suppose?"

"Hardly!" grinned Pon. "The other rotters don't seem to be about. We can dig up a little fun with that fat freak! Last time we saw him we tied up his leg and set him hoppin'. We'll give him the same again."

"Oh, let him alone!" said Smithy.

"Rats!"

Ponsonby stepped from the car. Gadsby and Monson followed him. Herbert Vernon-Smith sat and frowned. Smithy was spending the last few days of the holidays at Gadsby Croft, in the Chilterns, in company with the Highcliffe knuts. He had met the hikers in Berkshire, and had a "row" with them, so he was not feeling specially amiable towards Harry Wharton & Co. But he was a Greyfriars man, and he did not care to see a Greyfriars man ragged by the Highcliffians.

As the grinning trio approached Bunter, Vernon-Smith rose and stepped out of the car.

"Chuck it, Pon!" he said curtly.

"Not askin' you to take a hand, old bean," answered Ponsonby. "Get back in the car and leave us to it."

"Leave him alone."

Pon's eyes glittered. Opposition to his lordly will and pleasure easily roused Ponsonby's anger. And he did not like Smithy—though he had his own reasons for welcoming him to the knutty party at Gadsby Croft.

"Look here, Smithy, mind your own bizney!" he snapped. "We're goin' to tie that fat dummy up and set him hoppin', as we did before."

"You're not!" said the Bounder coolly.

"And who's goin' to stop us?" demanded Pon.

"I am!"

"Here, hold on, Pon!" exclaimed Gadsby hastily. "Don't rag among ourselves, for goodness' sake! Smithy's our guest."

"Yes, give it a miss," said Monson. "What does the fat fool matter, anyhow? Kick him, and let him rip!"

"You're not goin' to kick him!" said Vernon-Smith.

"Well, let him rip, anyhow," said Monson. "Come on, and don't rag."

Snore! That was Billy Bunter's contribution to the discussion. His glimmering spectacles stared straight at the four; but his eyes were tight closed behind them.

Pon set his lips hard. But he did not want a row with Vernon-Smith. Smithy did not care two straws whether he rowed with the Highcliffians or not, and if it had come to trouble, the Bounder would not have hesitated to handle the three of them at once. A reckless fellow like the Bounder had to be treated with tact. Pon would have liked to knock him spinning along the lane. Instead of which he shrugged his shoulders, and forced a smile.

"Oh, all right!" he said. "If Smithy's particular about the fat frog, Smithy's our pal, and we'll give him his head. Look here, the fat slug is fast asleep, and doesn't mean to wake. Let's decorate him a little—if Smithy doesn't object to that," added Pon, with polite sarcasm.

"No harm in a lark," said Smithy. "You can make him look as big an idiot as a Highcliffe fellow, if you like."

Pon & Co. made no rejoinder to that. Smithy had rather a bitter tongue,

"The sleeping beauty, by gad!" said Monson.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Quiet!" murmured Pon. "Leave him asleep. Let him wake up and walk off like that. It will amuse the population."

"No danger of his wakin'," chuckled the Bounder. "Bunter sleeps through thunderstorms. Ha, ha, ha!"

Taking Bunter's straw hat from his head, Pon proceeded to stick sprigs of hawthorn round it under the band. Then he replaced it on Bunter's bullet head. The Owl of the Remove was now adorned with a leaddress rather like that of an Indian chief. The Highcliffians chortled. Bunter's aspect was really calculated to make anybody jump.

Pon & Co. returned to the car, and the chauffeur, grinning, drove on. Smithy and his Highcliffe friends chuckled as they drove away, leaving Bunter still snoring to adorn the landscape.

The car disappeared in the distance, and Bunter was left alone again. A country lad came up the lane, whistling. He caught sight of Bunter, and suddenly ceased to whistle. For a moment he stared at the strange, amazing object in terror, and then took to his heels, and ran as fast as his legs could carry him. Bunter, happily unconscious, snored on.

THE SECOND CHAPTER.

Something Like Luck!

"LOOKS a jolly place," remarked Bob Cherry.

"Fine!" Frank Nugent said. "But—"

"The butfulness," remarked Hurree Jamset Ram Singh, "is terrific."

About a mile from the spot where they had left Bunter, the Greyfriars hikers had come to a halt, and were gazing at a spot that seemed absolutely ideal for camping. There was a little green paddock, surrounded by shady beeches, fenced off from the lane with a gate that was open.

Beyond the paddock a little stream flowed, dividing it from an extensive park—a rippling stream of fresh, clear water, narrow enough to be jumped. Farther off, half-hidden by trees and shrubberies, was a handsome house, with a balcony running round three sides of it, giving wide views of the Chiltern Hills, and the valleys below—miles and miles over the beautiful county of Bucks. It was not a very large establishment, but it was very handsome and well kept, and very attractive to the eye. That shady, green paddock was like a Land of Goshen to the eyes of the tired and dusty hikers.

They paused at the gate in the fence and gazed in. But Harry Wharton shook his head. At such a place they could hardly offer to pay for accommodation, and it seemed rather too much of a cheek to walk up to the mansion and ask for leave to camp in the paddock. But undoubtedly it was a most attractive spot.

The lane they had been following brought them by the rear of the estate; the main entrance was on the other side, facing a road at some distance.

"I don't suppose they want likers camping here," said Harry. "It's too much of a neck to ask. But—"

"Looks ripping!" said Johnny Bull. "The ripfulness is terrific."

"Might be some hospitable johnny

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It was, in theory, the perfect robbery. Guilt would, of a certainty, fall upon the innocent Greyfriars hikers. But the master-mind behind this carefully planned robbery reckoned without the Bounder of Greyfriars!

which often made his Highcliffe friends long to punch him. But punching Smithy was not in Pon's programme.

It was plain that Billy Bunter was not going to wake. He snored on regardless. Pon would have preferred to give him a malicious ragging; but a "lark" was better than nothing, so long as it was up against the Greyfriars hikers. So Pon contented himself with a lark.

In the chalky bank there was a puddle left by a recent shower, where the chalk was softened by the water. Pon dipped a slim forefinger in wet chalk, and drew white lines down Bunter's sleeping countenance.

Gadsby and Monson grinned. The Bounder chuckled. Bunter's fat face was ruddy and red, and the white lines drawn on it gave it a most startling aspect.

But Pon was not finished yet.

"You've got your fountain-pen, Gaddy?" he asked.

"Yes."

"Lend it to me."

Ink extracted from the fountain-pen made black lines down Bunter's face, alternating with the white lines.

From fat forehead to podgy chin Billy Bunter was now decorated in black and white, and the effect was absolutely weird.

He slept on soundly. Much more than the stroking of Pon's slim finger would have been required to waken Billy Bunter.

"There's a picture for you," grinned Ponsonby.

here who'd like to see a party of really nice fellows camping," suggested Bob Cherry.

The hikers grinned. It was possible, but it did not seem probable. Standing by the gate they looked over the place, rather in hope of seeing the proprietor about, and judging by his looks whether he was an "hospitable johnny" or not.

As they stood there, two men came from behind some of the beeches, appearing quite suddenly in sight.

One of them was a rather portly man with a clean-shaven face, quietly and very decently dressed, apparently an upper servant of some sort. Probably he was the butler of the establishment.

The other man was a short, squat fellow with a cast in one eye, shabbily dressed—hardly the sort of fellow with whom the prosperous-looking butler would have been expected to hold communication.

Both of them came towards the gate, and stopped suddenly at the sight of the hikers looking over it.

The squat, shabby man gave them a quick, furtive, sullen, suspicious look and stopped. But the portly man glanced at them carelessly, though with very keen eyes.

"That is all, Watson," said the portly man. "Let me have the hay by ten in the morning. Deliver it at the stables."

The squat man stared for a second as if surprised, then he nodded and touched his hat.

"Yes, Mr. Pawson, sir," he answered. And he shambled down to the gate, the hikers standing aside for him to pass, and came out. With another furtive look at them from the corner of his eye he went along the lane and disappeared.

The portly man whom he had called Mr. Pawson came more slowly down to the gate. Lord Mauleverer looked at him with an approving eye.

"Whoever lives here has a decent butler, you men," he remarked.

"Mauly knows all about butlers," said Bob. "He's got dozens at Mauleverer Towers. Or is it hundreds, Mauly?"

"Shush!" murmured Nugent. "He's going to speak to us. Perhaps he's going to ask us if we'd like to camp here."

"I don't think!" grinned Johnny Bull.

Mr. Pawson came to the gate. He saluted the hikers with a grave civility.

"Excuse me," he said. "I take it that you are hiking?"

"Just that," said Bob.

"I noticed you looking into the paddock. If you are looking for a camping place—" Mr. Pawson paused.

The hikers could not help staring. Nugent had suggested, as a joke, that the portly man might be going to ask them if they would like to camp there, but certainly they had not expected anything of the kind, for a moment. And now he was asking them exactly that.

"We're looking for a camp, certainly," said Harry Wharton. "We should have asked leave to camp here, but it seemed rather a nerve."

"Not at all, sir," said Mr. Pawson, very civilly. "If you would like to camp, this paddock is entirely at your service."

"Well, my hat!" ejaculated Bob. "This is luck!"

"The luckfulness is terrific."

"I am butler in this establishment," went on Mr. Pawson. "As I am left in charge during the general's absence, I have full authority to give you leave.

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You will, of course, undertake to do no damage, and to clear up all litter and so forth."

"Oh, certainly!" said Wharton.

"Please do not wander beyond the limits of the paddock," added Mr. Pawson.

"Certainly not! You're very good," said Harry. He slipped his hand into his pocket, naturally supposing that a "tip" was the next item on the programme. He could not have tipped the general, whoever the general was; but there was no reason why the general's butler should not be tipped.

But Mr. Pawson, smiling very pleasantly, stepped back.

Inclining his head gravely and civilly to the hikers, he retired, and disappeared behind the trees. A minute or two later they sighted him in the distance, following a path up to the mansion. Then he disappeared for good among the shrubberies.

"Well, my hat!" said Bob Cherry. "If this isn't jolly good luck, I'd like to know what jolly good luck is!"

"Hear, hear!"

"Must be a jolly decent man," said Harry. "Of course, he could see that we wanted to camp here—that was plain enough; but it was thumping civil of him to walk over and offer us leave."

"Yaas," said Lord Mauleverer slowly. "I don't know who the jolly old general is, but he's lucky in that jolly old butler, and so are we!" grinned Bob. "Don't you think so, Mauly?" he added. "You were saying a few minutes ago that the johnny who lived here had a decent butler. What are you scowling about?"

"Was I scowlin'?" asked his lordship mildly.

"Dash it all, the man's jolly obliging!" said Bob, rather warmly. "Why don't you like him, Mauly?"

"On close inspection, dear man, I don't like the look in his eye," said Lord Mauleverer.

Johnny Bull gave a grunt.

"Shall we turn down this ripping camp, because Mauly doesn't like the look in the man's eye?" he inquired. "Think the man wants us to camp here, so that he can pinch our rucsacks, or what?"

"No; but—"

"But what, ass?"

"I'd rather walk on, if you fellows would," said Lord Mauleverer.

"Rats!" said five hikers, with one voice. And Hurree Janset Ram Singh added that the ratfulness was terrific.

Lord Mauleverer gracefully yielded the point. And the hikers marched into the paddock and prepared to camp—five of them, at least, extremely glad that Mr. Pawson had been on the spot, and had so kindly and politely given them leave.

Down went the packs and up went the tent. Fresh water was close at hand. The work of the camp went on merrily. The oil stove was lighted, and Bob Cherry proceeded to cook. A savoury odour of fried sausages and chips pervaded the camp in the paddock. The cheery scent of hot coffee mingled with it. And a smiling circle of hikers sat down to supper, every now and then casting a glance at the lane, to hail Billy Bunter when he came lagging along.

THE THIRD CHAPTER.

A Mad Lot!

BILLY BUNTER awoke.

He sat up and yawned.

The sunset was red on the Chilterns. Billy Bunter had no eyes for sunsets. The sky was rich with

crimson and purple and gold, and Bunter did not give it a single blink. Bunter had not woke up to look at sunsets. He had awakened because the inner Bunter was impatient for supper. Bunter had been more tired than hungry when he went to sleep. Now he was more hungry than tired. He was, in fact, ravenous.

How long he had slept Bunter did not know; but he knew that he was frightfully hungry. He picked himself up from the bank and blinked along the lane through his big spectacles.

"Beasts!" he remarked to space.

Like the beasts they were, Harry Wharton & Co. had gone on their way and left him to snore. It was now up to Bunter to find them. He only hoped that supper would be ready when he found them.

Quite unconscious of the fact that Pon & Co. had passed that way, and left him in a highly decorative state, Billy Bunter rolled on up the hilly lane. The poet has remarked that where ignorance is bliss, 'tis folly to be wise. In blissful ignorance of the fact that his aspect was startling enough to frighten horses and scare wayfarers, Billy Bunter plugged up the lane, blinking round for signs of the hikers. There was no doubt that they would camp at the first favourable spot; and Bunter hoped to find them near at hand. Anyhow, it was easy enough to inquire of passers-by if they had seen the hiking party, and to get directions.

An ancient gentleman of agricultural appearance was sitting on a stile, at the top of the high bank, at a little distance. Bunter sighted him and stopped to hail him. The old fellow was stuffing tobacco into a pipe with a horny thumb, too busily engaged to notice the fat junior coming along. But he looked round as Bunter squeaked:

"Hi!"

He looked at Bunter.

What happened next was a surprise to Bunter.

"Have you seen—" he began.

He got no farther. The old fellow on the stile looked at him with amazement and terror in his looks, and made a backward movement, forgetful in his amazement that he was sitting on a stile. He shot over backwards, and Bunter had a view of his heels pointing skyward for a second before they followed the rest of him.

Billy Bunter just blinked.

Unaware that his fat face was striped in black and white, and that a sort of Indian headdress adorned his hat, he had no idea why the sight of him should have produced this extraordinary effect on the agricultural gentleman sitting on the stile.

But it had.

Blinking up at the high fence, he waited for the man to reappear; but the man did not reappear. Bunter heard a sound of running feet. The man was streaking off across the meadows.

"Mad!" said Bunter, in wonder. "Must be mad! Mad as a hatter! Jolly lucky he didn't spring at me!"

Obviously to Bunter the man on the stile was some lunatic. Nothing else could account for his amazing actions, to Bunter.

Glad that the lunatic had not sprung at him, Bunter rolled on, in search of information elsewhere. There were not many people about in that lane in the Chiltern hills, and the Owl of the Remove covered some little distance before he came on an inhabitant. A cyclist had dismounted, and was wheeling a bike, and had his back to Bunter. Bunter approached him to inquire whether he had seen a party of hikers.

"I say—" began Bunter from behind.

The young man glanced round.

"What—" he began.

Then, as he saw Bunter's face, he broke off. For a second he stared at him, spellbound, and then, letting his machine clang to the ground, he jumped away. He waved off Bunter with both hands.

"Keep off!" he shrieked.

"What do you mean?" howled Bunter, blinking at him blankly. "I was going to ask you—"

The young man grabbed the bike. He had been wheeling it uphill when Bunter happened. Now he swung it down-hill, sprawled recklessly over the saddle, and shot away down the slope.

cottage to ask the good dame if a hiking party had passed.

But he had no time to ask that question.

At sight of him the woman gave a shriek, caught up the child in her arms, and darted into the cottage. The door slammed, and Bunter heard the hurried grinding of a bolt.

His little round eyes almost popped through his big round spectacles in his astonishment. He goggled blankly at the bolted door.

"Is she mad, too?" gasped Bunter.

It seemed the only way to account for it. Bunter hurried on his way, anxious to get clear. He was feeling hardly safe, with so many lunatics about! It looked to Bunter as if the local lunatic

other side of the lane, opposite to the paddock. But Bunter, of course, did not know that, and he rolled up to the policeman to inquire.

The police-constable gave a convulsive start at sight of him, and detached himself swiftly from the fence. Swiftly he backed away from Bunter. His eyes were fixed on him watchfully. Probably he would have been glad to depart in a hurry, like the other people who had sighted Bunter. But it was a policeman's duty to secure a wandering lunatic, and duty came first. He had no doubt, of course, that Bunter was a lunatic. He looked the part!

"I say—" began Bunter.

The constable drew a deep, deep breath, loosened his truncheon, in case



Billy Bunter slept on soundly while Ponsonby made black lines down his face with ink extracted from a fountain-pen. Then, taking Bunter's straw hat from his head, Ponsonby stuck sprigs of hawthorn round it under the band and replaced it on the fat junior's bullet head. "I guess he'll amuse the population when he wakes up and walks off," chuckled Ponsonby.

The bike fairly whizzed. In three seconds the cyclist was out of Bunter's astonished sight.

"Oh crumbs!" gasped Bunter. "Is he mad, too?"

Bunter had heard that there was a lunatic asylum somewhere near Aylesbury, in Buckinghamshire. This lane was not many miles from Aylesbury. It occurred to him that a lunatic might have escaped. It did not occur to him that that was exactly what had occurred to the young man with the bike, also.

A fellow who walked about with his face striped black-and-white, and hawthorn sprigs in a circle round his hat, was really likely to impress the public as a lunatic. And people generally have a prejudice against lunatics at close quarters.

Bunter, rather alarmed and much annoyed, plugged on. He came on a cottage standing back from the lane. In the doorway a woman was standing looking out at a little boy playing with a ball. Billy Bunter turned towards the

asylum had opened its gates, and was disgorging its occupants that afternoon, and letting them loose on the countryside.

A few minutes later he came on a weary ploughman homeward plodding his way. But, at the first glimpse of Bunter, the ploughman forgot his weariness, clambered rapidly up the steep bank beside the lane, and disappeared in full flight across the fields.

"Oh lor!" gasped Bunter.

On rolled Bunter, worried and alarmed, and more anxious than ever to get news of the hikers, and to find himself safe in camp. It was with deep relief that he sighted, a little later, a man leaning against a fence-gate, which gave on a mown field, where there was a haystack. The man wore the familiar uniform of a police-constable—and never had Bunter been so glad to see a "bobby." Had Bunter only known it, he was now within a hundred yards of the paddock where the Greyfriars hikers were camped, the hayfield being on the

it should be needed, and, with the courage for which members of the Force are celebrated, stepped firmly towards Bunter.

It was so clear that he was going to seize Bunter that the fat junior jumped back in alarm.

"I say, what are you up to?" he exclaimed. "I was going to ask you to—"

"Yes, yes," said the constable soothingly. "That's all right! You come with me. I'll see you safe, my lad!"

He advanced cautiously. Bunter, equally cautious, backed. If this policeman was as mad as the other people he had met, Bunter was not the fellow to walk into his clutches.

"I'm looking for my friends—" stammered Bunter.

"Yes, yes; they'll be very glad to see you," said the policeman. "I'll take you to them at once."

"You know where they are?" asked Bunter.

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"Certainly. Just walk with me," said the policeman, making another cautious, almost stealthy, step towards Bunter. He was anxious to get a good, sudden grip on him before he could either run or break out into violence.

But Bunter dodged back again, more and more alarmed.

"Look here! Have you seen them pass?" demanded Bunter. "I think they came this way—"

"Yes, yes!" said the policeman, who knew, of course, that lunatics had to be humoured. "They passed only a few minutes ago. I'll take you to your friends at once." The "friends" the policeman was thinking of were the authorities at the lunatic asylum.

"Sure?" asked Bunter doubtfully and suspiciously. He could not understand this policeman at all. The man looked as if he was going to spring at him, and Bunter could hardly doubt that he was as mad as the others. "Look here! Six fellows—"

"Exactly! This way!" said the policeman. He advanced again, and Bunter again backed. Then he made a leap and a sudden grasp.

But Bunter was wary. He sprang aside in time, and the grasp of the law missed him.

That settled the matter for Bunter. It was another madman! With a squeak of terror, Bunter bounded through the gateway into the field, and slammed the gate after him.

"Stop!" roared the constable, rushing after him. The swinging gate caught him as he rushed and knocked him backwards.

Bunter flew! He vanished round the haystack at a speed that was remarkable for his weight. But he knew that the mad policeman was in pursuit, and he knew that he had no chance in a foot race. In these desperate moments Billy

Bunter's fat brain worked at double pressure. He clambered frantically up the haystack to a hiding-place. As it happened, some of the hay had lately been removed, leaving an opening that was not yet covered in. It was a wind-fall for Billy Bunter.

He plunged headlong into the hay, and disappeared from sight. And the Aylesbury policeman, prowling round the haystack in search of him, failed to spot a single sign of the Owl of Greyfriars. And Bunter, hearing his footsteps, palpitated with terror in the hay, in horrified expectation every moment of feeling the clutch of a lunatic.

THE FOURTH CHAPTER.

Only Bunter!

"The western wave was all aflame; the day was well-nigh done,
Almost upon the western wave rested
The broad, bright sun."

BOB CHERRY was spouting poetry. The sunset over the Chilterns called it forth. Bob was the heftiest, the hardiest, and the most energetic fellow in the hiking party. Generally, if he left off talking cricket, it was to begin talking football. But during that hike, Bob had developed hitherto unsuspected poetical proclivities.

Glorious scenery had that effect on him. And the scenery in Bucks was all that a fellow could want. Plenty of people go abroad in search of fine scenery, to Switzerland, to the Tyrol, to the Dolomites, and think the scenery finer, simply because it is bigger. Bob, having the gift of common sense, was satisfied with what he saw in his own country. And the view over the Chilterns, in that gorgeous sunset, beat the "after-glow" of the Alps to a frazzle.

"Where does that come from?" asked Johnny Bull.

"Ancient Mariner," answered Bob. "We've had it in class with Quelch at Greyfriars, fathead! Don't you remember? I remember yards of it. I'll spout some more of it if you like."

"Well, I'd rather you did, than start whistling," said Johnny.

"You blithering ass—"

"Hallo, is that Bunter at last?" said Harry Wharton, as a figure appeared in the lane. "No—it's a bobby! He's coming here!"

All the hikers glanced round towards the gate of the paddock, as the man in uniform opened it. Evidently he was coming into the field, and they wondered what he wanted. They were sitting around in various attitudes of lazy ease after supper, but they rose to their feet as the constable came up to the camp.

He saluted them civilly.

"Hikers?" he asked.

"That's it," answered Harry Wharton.

"We have leave to camp here," he added, with a smile.

"That's all right, sir! There's nobody else at hand, and I should like your assistance in the execution of my duty."

"Oh, my hat!" exclaimed Bob. "We're on, officer! What is it—a motor-bandit, or a smash-and-grab man, or—"

"An escaped lunatic," said the constable.

"Phew!"

"I haven't heard officially of an escape from the asylum," explained the constable. "It hadn't been notified when I came on duty. But there's no doubt about it. Have you laid seen anything of a young fellow going about with his face painted in black-and-white stripes, and hawthorn sprigs stuck in his hat?"

The juniors shook their heads. They had seen no such remarkable character. Certainly, if they had seen a person got up in such a style, they would have taken him for an escaped lunatic.

"Well, he dodged me in the field yonder," said the constable. "I fancy he's hiding in the hay. I want the haystack surrounded while I root him out, or a hundred to one he will dodge and get away. Will you lads help?"

"Certainly!" said Harry at once.

"The helplessness will be terrific, my esteemed and absurd police sahib!" declared Hurree Jamsset Ram Singh—a remark which startled the Bucks constable almost as much as Bunter's decorated face had done.

"We'll all help!" said Bob. "Is he dangerous?"

"Well, you never know with a lunatic," said the constable candidly. "But I fancy any of you could handle him. He looks as mad as a hatter, but not very strong, and he's as fat as a bladder of lard. If you'll come—"

"Yes, rather!"

And the hikers followed the officer from the field. As an officer of the law, the man was entitled to call on the assistance of any member of the public, in the execution of his duty, and the Greyfriars fellows were quite prepared to do their own duty as law-abiding citizens.

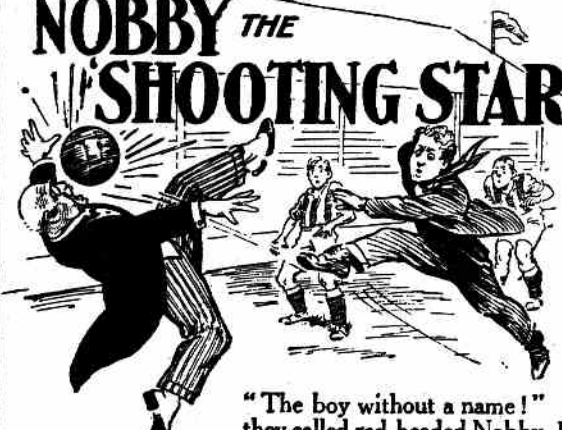
They crossed the lane, and entered the field opposite. At a distance the haystack loomed against the sky.

The constable led the way towards it. There was no sign of the lunatic. If he was hidden there, he was well hidden.

Under the direction of the officer the hikers posted themselves round the stack at various points, to cut off the escape of the lunatic when the game was started, so to speak.

Five of them stood on the watch, while Bob Cherry accompanied the officer in his search of the haystack. He did not want to have to use his truncheon if he

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could help it; but it was quite possible that single-handed he could not hold a lunatic! Bob was quite willing to help.

At the back of the stack, where the hay was broken, they stopped, and the constable scanned it keenly.

"I fancy he climbed up here," he said. "We shall find him hidden in the hay. I dare say he can hear me speaking at this moment."

Billy Bunter shuddered. The words came quite plainly to his fat ears from below.

"Stand here!" added the constable; and, leaving Bob at the foot of the stack, he clambered valiantly up.

Bunter heard him coming, and shivered.

Like the constable, Bunter had no doubt he was dealing with a lunatic. It seemed that the lunatic had other lunatics with him! Bunter was not surprised at that, having come across a mad lot that eventful afternoon!

Up came the constable, clambering, Bob Cherry standing ready to collar the fugitive if he jumped down, and hold him till the constable could come down after him. It was not exactly an attractive task; but Bob did not flinch from it.

Bunter was deeply hidden in a hollow of the haystack, where bales had been taken out. Loose hay covered him. But a foot sticking out of the hay caught the eyes of the constable at once when he reached the spot. Firmly he grasped the ankle that was attached to the foot.

"Yaroooooo!" roared Bunter, electrified by the grasp.

He fairly bounded.

At any other time Billy Bunter certainly never would have dreamed of violent measures against an officer of the law. Such an idea would never have entered his fat brain. But circumstances alter cases! In the belief that he was in the grip of a lunatic, Bunter was fearfully violent.

Bounding up from the hay, the fat junior butted wildly and frantically at the policeman, sending him staggering.

The constable gasped, and sprawled on the hay, nearly rolling down the stack. As he clutched for a hold, Bunter bounded past him and scrambled headlong down.

"Oh crickey!" gasped Bob Cherry, involuntarily jumping back at the sight of a black-and-white striped face, a hawthorn-decorated straw hat, and wild eyes gleaming through flashing spectacles.

Bump! Bunter landed on him as he jumped! Bob went down on his back, with Billy Bunter over him.

He did not recognise Bunter, or dream of recognising him. Bunter's nearest and dearest relative could not have recognised him under Pon's decorations. Neither did the short-sighted Owl of the Remove, in the excitement of the moment, recognise Bob. He did not, in fact, give him a single blink.

Having knocked him over, and knocked the wind out of him, Bunter rolled off, bounded to his feet, and ran for his fat life.

"Look out!" shouted Harry Wharton.

"There he goes!"

"After him!"

"Put it on!"

The fellows on the watch spotted the fleeing fat figure at once, and had a startling glimpse of the black-and-white striped face. They left their posts and tore towards him.

Bunter gave a gurgle of alarm. To his limited vision the hikers were simply figures that started up from nowhere and rushed at him. More lunatics, of course—evidently, to Bunter, there had been escapes on a large scale from Aylesbury

Asylum. He swerved away and ran off in another direction.

They charged after him. Bob Cherry struggled to his feet, gasping, and raced after them. The constable, slithering down the haystack, came speeding in pursuit.

Now that they were right astern of the fat fugitive, the familiarity of his aspect dawned on the hikers. They could not see his face, which was totally unrecognisable, but they could see a fat figure, of which the circumference was really unmistakable.

"Is—is—is that Bunter?" gasped Wharton.

"Looks like him; but—" gasped Nugent.

"Yaroooooo!" came from the fat fugitive, as he caught his foot in a mole-hill, stumbled, and sprawled headlong.

The next moment the Famous Five were upon him. They grasped him on all sides. Bunter struggled frantically.

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"Yooop!" he roared. "Whoop! Leggo! You mad villains, leggo! I won't be murdered! Yarooooooop! Oh crickey! Help! Rescue! Yaroooh!"

And from all the hikers, as they recognised the familiar voice, came a howl!

"Bunter!"

THE FIFTH CHAPTER.

Not a Lunatic!

BILLY BUNTER!"

"Bunter—that potty ass—"

"Bunter—that howling chump—"

"The idiotic Bunter—"

"Oh gad!" gasped Lord Mauleverer, panting up after the Famous Five. "Is it Bunter? Looked to me as if it must be either Bunter or a runaway balloon!"

"Bunter, you howling ass, what's this game?" roared Bob Cherry.

They turned the captured Owl over. He sat and gasped. His hat had fallen off, and Nugent picked it up. His black-and-white striped face stared up at the juniors. They gazed at him.

"I say, you fellows!" Bunter knew the hikers now. "I say, rally round me, you chaps! Stick to me! There's a madman after me!"

"Wha-a-at?"

"A mad policeman!" gasped Bunter. "I've come across a lot of lunatics since you fellows left me. I suppose the asylum's been burned down, or something, and they've all got loose! Lots and lots of them! I thought you were some of them! Oh dear! Oh lor!"

"What have you got yourself up like that for?" shrieked Nugent.

"Eh! I haven't got up—I'm sitting down—"

"You—you—you— Look at your face!"

"How can I look at my face, you silly idiot? What's the matter with my face?" snorted Bunter. "Don't be a silly dummy! I say, you fellows, have you see that mad bobby— Oh, lor', here he comes! Keep him off!" yelled Bunter.

The Owl of the Remove bounded to his feet as the constable came panting up.

"You've got him! Don't let him get away!" gasped the policeman.

"I say, you fellows—"

An official hand was stretched out to grasp Bunter. He dodged frantically behind Bob Cherry.

"Keep him off!" he shrieked.

"Oh crumbs!" gasped Harry Wharton. "It's all right, officer. We know this chap; he's not mad—"

"Not mad? Look at him!"

"Well, he looks frightfully potty, I admit!"

"Whether you know him or not, I must take him in charge, and see him in safety, sir! Now—"

"Keep that madman off!" yelled Bunter.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

It was rather entertaining to see the policeman and Bunter accusing one another of being lunatics.

Bob Cherry grasped Bunter by the shoulder and shook him.

"What have you done this for?" he bawled. "Is it your idea of a lark, or what?"

"Ow! Leggo! If you make my specs fall off, you beast—"

"Can't you see the constable thinks you're an escaped lunatic?" howled Johnny Bull. "Wouldn't anybody think so, to see your face?"

"You leave my face alone, you cheeky beast!" roared Bunter. "What about your own—like a bulldog's!"

"Why, you blithering owl—"

"What have you painted your face like that for, Bunter?" yelled Wharton.

"Eh? My face isn't painted—"

"The poor lunatic doesn't know what he has done," said the officer of the law.

"They're like that! Now, my boy, come quietly—nobody's going to hurt you. You're going to a place where they'll be kind and careful—"

"Keep him off!" yelled Bunter.

Lord Mauleverer, the first to realise that Bunter did not know how he was decorated, drew out his little pocket mirror, and held it up for the Owl of the Remove to see his face.

As he blinked at the reflection, Bunter jumped almost clear of the ground. He was as startled as any of the persons who had taken him for an escaped lunatic.

"Wha-a-a-at's that?" gasped Bunter.

"What—what— Oh crickey! What beast has been painting my face? Oh lor!"

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"Didn't you know?" yelled Johnny Bull.

"How should I know?" raved Bunter. "You howling ass, how could anybody have painted your face like that without you knowing?"

"I—I—I don't know!" stammered Bunter. "Somebody must have done it while I was asleep, I suppose! Oh crikey! I say, lend me your handkerchief to rub it off."

"Can't you use your own?"

"I don't want to make my hanky all mucky!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Blessed if I see anything to cackle at! Look here, will you lend me a hanky or not, you selfish beasts?"

Nobody did, so Bunter had to use his own. He rubbed at his decorated visage. As that visage was damp with perspiration the inky and chalky lines rubbed easily enough into a mingled blotch. The hikers watched him, grinning. The policeman eyed him dubiously. He was beginning to realise that this fat youth, after all, might not be an escaped lunatic, but the victim of an extraordinary practical joke.

"Did you fall asleep after we left you?" asked Harry.

"Yes, you beast! Just like you to leave a pal to have tricks like this played on him!" snorted Bunter. "After all I've done for you, too!"

"But who on earth did it?" exclaimed Nugent. "Some silly ass caught him napping and painted his face! But who the thump—"

"If those Highcliffe cads were anywhere about we could guess easily enough," said Harry Wharton. "But we haven't seen anything of them since we got into Buckinghamshire."

"Some funny ass, anyhow," said Bob Cherry, with a chuckle. "I say, it's all right, officer, really—this chap belongs to our school and he's hiking with us, and some ass has been playing pranks on him while he was snoozing!"

The officer of the law still eyed Bunter suspiciously.

"Well, if you young gentlemen will answer for him—" he said dubiously.

"Yes, rather!"

"The ratherfulness is terrific."

"Very well, then, I'll leave it at that," said the constable, and he marched away, still with a rather doubtful expression on his face.

"Thank goodness that madman's gone!" said Bunter. "I say, you fellows, we'd better be careful to-night—there's a lot of lunatics about! I've come across dozens this afternoon."

"You blithering owl!" said Bob. "Can't you see that everybody you met took you for an escaped lunatic, with your idiotic chivy got up like that?"

"Oh!" gasped Bunter.

"What was anybody to think, you fat fooler?"

"Beast! I say, you fellows, where's the camp? Is supper ready?"

"This way, you fathead!"

Harry Wharton & Co. walked the Owl of the Remove out of the hayfield and into the paddock across the lane.

"I'll sort out your supper while you get a wash," said Bob.

"I don't want a wash," said Bunter. "I shall wash in the morning, so that will be all right."

"Think an extra wash might be fatal!" asked Johnny Bull sarcastically.

"I don't need all the washing you fellows do—I'm not so dirty!"

"Well, you want a wash now, and you're jolly well going to have a wash!" said Johnny, and, taking Bunter by the back of his fat neck, he dipped his features into a bucket of water.

"Urrrrrgh!"

"Soap for Bunter!" said Johnny.

"Gurgh! I don't want any soap!"

"You jolly well do! Here you are! I'll lather it on—"

"Wurrrrrggh!" gurgled Bunter, as Johnny Bull lathered it on, not with a gentle hand.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Beast!" roared Bunter. "Leggo my neck! Keep that soap away! It's gig-gig-going into my nose! Atchoo-choo-choop! Yaroooh!"

"Hand me the scrubbing-brush!" said Johnny Bull. "Anybody got a scrubbing-brush?"

"Yaroooh! I won't be scrubbed! Whoooop!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Fortunately for Bunter, no scrubbing-brush was available. But he had a wash—a good wash—which every fellow, but Bunter, was convinced that he badly needed. Soap smothered him till he washed it off in the bucket, and then he towelled himself dry, glaring at the grinning hikers the while like a demon in a pantomime. Then, at long last, Bunter got to his supper. And as the hikers had thoughtfully left him enough for four or five hungry fellows Billy Bunter was almost satisfied by the time he had finished.

THE SIXTH CHAPTER.

Quite a Surprise!

HERBERT VERNON-SMITH strolled out of the french windows to the balcony, with his hands in his trousers' pockets.

Outside it was still daylight, the sunset glowing on the park and gardens and shrubberies of Gadsby Croft. Within, the lights were on, shaded electric light gleaming on white shirt-fronts and diamond studs. There were five fellows in the room Smithy stepped out from—Ponsonby, Gadsby, Monson, Drury, and Vavasour—all of the Fourth Form at Highcliffe School. This was Gadsby's little party, in which the Bounder was included, certainly not because the Highcliffians liked him. Standing on the dusky balcony, the Bounder, who was in evening clothes like the Highcliffe fellows, glanced back into the room he had left, and his sarcastic lip curled.

It was a richly appointed room. General Gadsby, the absent owner of the Croft, was a wealthy man. In a deep leather chair Ponsonby sat, with one elegantly trousered leg crossed over the other, a cigarette between his finger and thumb. Gadsby and Monson leaned on either side of the mantelpiece in elegant attitudes. Drury was dealing himself hands from a pack of cards, deeply immersed in that peculiar occupation. Vavasour was a

yawning, while his friends talked horses, and the odds on the same. And the Bounder, looking in on them, sneered—at them and himself.

"Goin' out, Smithy?" called Pon.

"Just a stroll before dinner," answered the Bounder through the open french window.

"I'll come along if you like."

Herbert Vernon-Smith seemed afflicted with sudden deafness, for he moved away, apparently not hearing. He went down the steps into the gardens, taking a cigarette from his case and then throwing it away with an irritable gesture. He had enough of that with Pon & Co. With his hands thrust deep into his pockets he walked along one path after another in the extensive shrubberies, in an unusually thoughtful mood.

The sight of a tent, glimmering in the last rays of the sunset, in a little paddock, rather surprised him. He walked on towards it and jumped over the little tinkling brook into the paddock. He could hear a murmur of voices, but the tent hid the campers from his sight. But already a suspicion was in his mind. He remembered the meeting with Bunter, which showed that the hiking party from Greyfriars were somewhere in the vicinity. He grinned at the thought of Harry Wharton & Co. camping in a paddock belonging to Gadsby Croft, with their old enemies of Highcliffe hardly a hundred yards away.

Coming round the tent, he came on the hikers.

Billy Bunter had just finished his supper and was leaning back against a pack, with an expression of happy satisfaction on his unusually clean face. The other fellows sat round, chatting before turning in. Very soon after dark was bed-time for the hikers. But it was not dark yet, and there they were, and Smithy caught their cheerful voices as he came up, his footsteps making no sound on the soft grass.

"Had enough, Bunter?" Bob Cherry asked.

"Well, not enough," said Billy Bunter. "If you've got a cake or something—"

"I haven't a cake," said Bob gravely.

"But I've got something, and you're welcome to that if you'd like to eat it."

"This way!" said Bunter promptly.

"Here you are!"

Bob tossed over a boot he had taken off. It dropped on Bunter's fat knees, and the Owl of the Remove gave a yelp.

"Ow! What's that? You silly ass, wharrer you mean?"

"It's something!" said Bob cheerily. "You said a cake or something."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Beast!" hooted Bunter.

Vernon-Smith looked on, only a few yards away, the hikers not noticing his presence for the moment. Billy Bunter, with a vengeful blink, grasped the boot and swung it into the air.

"You can have it back, blow you!" he snorted. And with all the force of his fat arm Bunter hurled the boot at Bob—missing him by a good yard.

But every bullet, it is said, has its billet! The boot, whizzing by a yard from Bob, crashed on a white shirtfront; and Herbert Vernon-Smith, taken by surprise, sat down with a bump and a gasp.


"Hallo, hallo, hallo!" exclaimed Bob, jumping up. "Who—Oh! Smithy!"

"The esteemed and idiotic Bounder!" exclaimed Hurree Jamset Ram Singh.

Vernon-Smith scrambled to his feet. His face was dark with anger. On his previously spotless shirtfront there was a big patch of discoloration from the impact of the boot.

"You clumsy idiot!" roared the

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Billy Bunter was deeply hidden in a hollow of the haystack, where hales had been taken out. Loose hay covered him, but a foot sticking out of the hay caught the eyes of the constable at once, when he reached the spot. Firmly he grasped the ankle that was attached to the foot. "Yaroooooh!" roared Bunter, electrified by the grasp.

Bounder, making a stride towards Bunter.

Harry Wharton hastily interposed. "Hold on, Smithy! Bunter didn't mean it for you—he never knew you were there, any more than we did! Where the dickens have you suddenly blown in from?"

"I say, you fellows, collar him!" squeaked Billy Bunter. "Give him a jolly good ragging! You know he cut down our tent, to get that Highcliffe cad Pon away, and one of you trod on my tummy when you were crawling out—"

"Shut up, Bunter!" said Nugent.

Twice the hikers had come in contact with the Bounder towards the end of the hike, and each time there had been hostilities. But they did not want to remember grudges. Very soon they would be returning to Greyfriars School, where they were on more or less friendly terms with Smithy. They were wondering, too, at seeing Smithy there in the paddock in evening clothes.

The Bounder eyed them rather sourly. He did not like being bowled over by a whizzing boot; and he did not want to go back to the Highcliffe knuts with a soiled shirtfront. And he was in an irritated temper, anyway.

"I say, you fellows—"

"Kick Bunter, somebody!" said Bob. "Beast!"

"Dropped in for supper, Smithy?" asked Nugent amicably. "We've had ours, but we'll sort one out—"

"I dine in ten minutes," said the Bounder.

"And you've got your war-paint on, already, and that fathead Bunter's mucked it," said Bob. "Sorry, old bean!"

"But what brought you this way,

Smithy?" asked Wharton, "Are you staying anywhere near here?"

"At the house yonder."

"What a jolly old coincidence! The butler gave us leave to camp here," said Harry. "It seems that he's in charge while the general's away—I don't know who the general is, but the butler's a knut."

"You don't know the name of the house, then?" asked the Bounder, with a sour grin.

"No. Never seen it before. Of course, we had no idea that you were staying there," said Harry. He smiled. "If you don't want your friends at the house to know that you know a party of dusty hikers, you needn't mention it, and we won't."

"Oh, don't be a silly ass!" grunted the Bounder. "You haven't been up to the house, then?"

"We came by the lane yonder—the house is on the road," said Harry.

The Bounder laughed. He was greatly amused by the fact that Gaddy's butler had given the hikers leave to camp there. Evidently Gaddy did not know! Smithy wondered what Pon & Co. would say—and do—if they knew!

The hikers looked at him.

"What's the jolly old joke?" asked Bob, a little gruffly.

"You are!" answered Vernon-Smith. "Did you tip Pawson?"

"He didn't seem to want tipping."

"Blessed if I catch on, then; he's not a man to do anythin' for nothin', from what I've seen of him."

"Yaas," remarked Lord Mauleverer, with a nod. "That was how he struck me. He was frightfully obligin', though."

"Oh, he's an obligin' man, when it suits him," said the Bounder satirically.

"I fancy he's featherin' his nest while the general's away. He lends Gaddy money, and I don't think he loses on it."

The hikers jumped.

"Gaddy!" they repeated, with one voice.

"Gadsby, of Highcliffe—you know him."

"Great pip!" ejaculated Bob. "You don't mean to say— Oh, my hat! What the thump place is this, then?"

"Gadsby Croft."

"Gadsby Croft!" repeated Harry Wharton blankly. "Then—"

"Gaddy's place, where Gaddy is hearin' the chimes at midnight while his pater's away!" said the Bounder. "And Pon & Co. are up at the house—I've just left them. What a happy surprise for them to meet you fellows here!"

And the Bounder chuckled; while the hikers stared at him in dismay.

THE SEVENTH CHAPTER.

Monson Asks For It!

"I SAY, you fellows—"

"Oh, ring off, Bunter!"

"Beast! I say—"

"Give us a rest!"

"I say!" roared Bunter, his very spectacles gleaming with wrath. "I say, if those Highcliffe cads are here, I jolly well know who it was painted my face this afternoon! I jolly well know—"

Vernon-Smith chuckled. "Did you fellows find the sleeping beauty?" he asked. "He was a pretty picture when Pon had finished with him."

"So you saw Pon at it, Smithy?" asked Harry Wharton quietly. "You might

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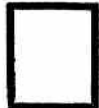
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THE BOUNDER'S CAPTURE!

(Continued from page 9.)

have chipped in, when a Highcliffe cad was ragging a Greyfriars man—especially a duffer like Bunter—

"Oh, really, Wharton—"
 "If I hadn't been there, the fat chump would have got something worse than chalk and ink on his chivvy," said the Bounder. "And the grunting grampus snored through it all—ha, ha! He looks as if he's had a wash since—a good thing for him! He would have had to have at least one wash before going back to school!"

The hikers grinned at that remark; and Billy Bunter favoured the Bounder with a ferocious blink.

"You beast!" roared Bunter. "I never knew my face was painted, and a lot of people took me for an escaped lunatic—"

"Ha, ha, ha!" yelled the Bounder. "And a bobby wanted to run me in, and cart me off to the asylum!" howled Bunter indignantly.

"Ha, ha, ha!" shrieked Smithy. "I say, you fellows, collar him and let's rag him!" hooted Bunter. "Let's jolly well chalk and ink his face, and see how he likes it."

"Fathead!"
 "You're welcome to try it on, if you like!" jeered the Bounder, with a defiant stare round at the hikers.

"Well, I fancy we could manage it, all of us together," said Johnny Bull sarcastically. "What a man you are for asking for trouble, Smithy."

"Looks to me as if you're the men asking for trouble, camping in Gaddy's place!" sneered Vernon-Smith. "Like me to tell him you're here?"

"You can tell him as soon as you like," answered Harry Wharton at once. "I wish we'd never seen the place, or that we'd taken Mauly's tip and moved on."

"I say, you fellows, we're not moving on to-night! Gaddy can go and eat coke, if he doesn't like it!" said Billy Bunter. "That man Pawson said he was in charge of the place, and he needn't ask Gaddy."

"Of course, the butler never knew anything about us, or our rows with Gaddy's crew!" said Bob. "It was jolly good-natured of him to offer us a camp here—but I wish we hadn't."

"Like his cheek, I think, to let a dusty gang of hikers into his master's place!" said Vernon-Smith. "Can't imagine why he did it! Last thing I should have expected him to do, unless you handed out a jolly big tip. I'll bet he never mentioned it to Master Reginald."

"Who the dickens is Master Reginald?" grunted Johnny Bull.

"Oh, that's Gaddy—Master Reginald to the butler! Master Reginald will jump when I tell him."

"Tell him, and make him jump, then," said Harry. "Do you think we want it kept dark that we're here, you ass?"

"If it isn't, you'll be turned off pretty soon," sneered Smithy.

"We shan't wait to be turned off," answered the captain of the Greyfriars Remove disdainfully. "We're going, now we know."

"Yes, rather!" agreed Nugent.

"The ratherfulness is terrific."

"I say, you fellows—"

"Shut up, Bunter!"

"I'm not going on to-night!" roared Bunter. "What does Gaddy matter? Blow Gaddy! Gaddy can go and eat coke!"

"Kick him!"

"Beast!"

"Smithy!" came a calling voice in the

shrubberies. "I say, Smithy!" It was Monson's voice. "Where the dickens are you, Smithy? Dinner's just goin' to be served! Smithy!"

"Here!" called back the Bounder. Monson came up and stared blankly at the hikers' camp.

"That crew here!" he exclaimed.

"Not so much of your 'crew'!" growled Johnny Bull, with a glare at the Highcliffe fellow. "Keep a civil tongue in your head, Monson, if you don't want it punched."

"What the dickens do you mean by camping here?" demanded Monson. "You're trespassin' here!"

"The butler gave us leave—in fact, invited us to camp here," said Harry.

"Like his dashed cheek! Gaddy will tell him off pretty soon, when he knows! Just clear off!" said Monson.

"Does the place happen to belong to you?" inquired Johnny.

"We don't want any Greyfriars riff-raff here!" said Monson, apparently forgetful of the fact that Smithy was a Greyfriars man. "Get out or you'll be chucked, and I'll lend a hand with the chucking, too."

"I've told you to keep a civil tongue in your head!" said Johnny Bull grimly. "If you can't—"

"Hold on, Johnny!" said Wharton hastily. "You can tell Gadsby that we're going, Monson."

"And I'll tell him to see whether there's anythin' missin' when you go," said Monson. "I know what these gangs of scrubby hikers are like."

"That does it!" said Johnny Bull. And he made a rush at Monson, who, too late, was sorry he had spoken.

Monson dodged back, but he did not escape. In a moment his head was in chancery.

Thump! Thump! Thump!
 "Go it!" yelled Bunter, in great delight. "Punch him! I say, you fellows, give Smithy some, too."

But the other hikers rushed at Johnny Bull, and dragged him away from the howling Highcliffian. Monson staggered away, clapping his nose, which streamed red and spotted his gleaming shirt-front with crimson.

"Better hook it!" snorted Johnny Bull. "Or do you feel up to lending a hand in the chucking-out?"

Monson did not answer that question. He shook his fist at the hikers, and hurried away through the dusky shrubberies. Vernon-Smith, laughing, followed. And Harry Wharton & Co. were left wishing that they had never seen that sleek, polite butler who had so politely invited them to camp in that attractive little paddock.

THE EIGHTH CHAPTER.

To Go or Not to Go.

PONSONBY stared. Vavasour and Drury and Gadsby stared. Pawson, the butler, forgetful of his sleek, suave sedateness, stared, too.

Dinner was about to be served at Gadsby Croft. The dining-room was bright with lights, the silver gleaming on the mahogany. Pawson, portly and sleek, was ready, with two humbler retainers in the background. The soup was delayed, however, till Monson came back with Smithy.

Now they came back—Monson coming in with his hand to his nose, and crimson trickling between his fingers, the Bounder following with a sardonic grin on his face. Monson's white shirt was sadly ruffled and crumpled, his tie was under one ear, his handsome dinner

jacket split, and his nose, obviously, was damaged.

And Pon & Co. stared at him, and Pawson stared at him, and the two footmen in the background stared also.

"What the dooce—" ejaculated Ponsonby.

"Run your nose against somethin'?" asked Drury. "Looks like it."

"Absolutely!" said Vavasour.

"Those Greyfriars cads—" spluttered Monson. "That hikin' crew— Oh gad! Wow! Look at my nose! Ow!"

"Monson ran his fist against something hard," said the Bounder gravely. "It was a Greyfriars man's fist."

Pon gave him an evil look.

"That crew about here?" asked Drury.

"Camped in your paddock, Gaddy!" gasped Monson.

Gadsby jumped.

"Camped here—not on this estate?" he howled. "That crew camped at Gadsby Croft! Rot!"

"I tell you they're camped there, the whole gang of them!" hooted Monson. "And I ordered them off, and that brute Bull hammered me, and Smithy stood lookin' on and grinnin'."

"Monson asked for it, really," drawled the Bounder. "He hinted that things might be missin' when the hikers went. He rather forgot the distinction between Greyfriars and Highcliffe."

"You cheeky cad—" yelled Monson.

"Hold on!" exclaimed Gadsby hastily. "No rows here! Look here, Smithy, you'd better not be so funny! As for those cads, I'll turn them off fast enough! Pawson—"

Quite a peculiar expression had come over Pawson's sleek, smooth face as he heard Monson's startling tale. But in a moment he was again the sleek, sedate Pawson. He came towards Master Reginald, with portly deference, the extensive bald spot on his sleek head reflecting the electric light.

"Yes, Master Reginald. I am sorry this has happened," said Pawson. "I regret to say that I gave the boys leave to camp in the paddock."

"The dooce you did!" exclaimed Gadsby, in angry astonishment.

"They impressed me, sir, as a very respectable and well-behaved set of lads," said Pawson, "and I was unaware, of course, that you and your friends, sir, had any acquaintance with them."

"Look here, you jolly well know that my father wouldn't allow hikers to camp on his land!" exclaimed Gadsby. "You know that, Pawson."

"General Gadsby has been kind enough to leave his mansion in my charge during his absence, sir," said Pawson. "He has every faith in my ability to fulfil that trust, sir," said Pawson. "If I have taken a liberty, I regret it very deeply."

"Well, you jolly well have!" said Gadsby bluntly. "And the best thing you can do now is to see that the servants turn that crew off the place immediately."

Pawson coughed.

"May I speak to you in private for a moment, sir?" he asked.

"What the thump for?" said Gadsby testily. "Oh, all right!" he added hastily; and at a sign from him his friends moved away.

Pon & Co. were not wholly surprised; they were aware that Pawson was a power in the house during his master's absence.

"You will excuse me, sir," murmured Pawson. "But having given leave to

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those boys to camp, it would be painful to me, personally, to have my permission rescinded."

"What utter rot!" grunted Gadsby.

"It would lower me, sir, in the esteem of the other servants, if my directions were countermanded by my master's son," said Pawson. "I hope, sir, that you will allow this matter to pass and permit the hikers to remain where they are till the morning. It is very late for them to take the road again, and I will see that they leave very early."

Gadsby stared at him.

"What the thump do you care, one way or the other?" he demanded. "You don't know anything of that crew."

"Nothing at all, sir; and I deeply regret having displeased you," said Pawson. "But I hope, sir, that you will make this little concession to a faithful servant, who desires only to oblige you in every possible way."

Gadsby bit his lip.

Sleek and humble and deferential as Pawson's manner was, there was the faintest hint of the iron hand in the velvet glove. Without Pawson's concurrence, it would have been impossible for Gaddy and his friends to "play the goat," as they were doing at Gadsby Croft, in the absence of the general. And Pawson had carried his obliging complaisance so far as to lend Gaddy various sums of money, which Gaddy would have found it very difficult to repay in a hurry.

The fact was that Gaddy could not have ventured to quarrel with his father's butler—rather a peculiar position for Gaddy to be in, and which he owed to his own reckless rascality.

He bit his lip hard! He knew that he had to give in, if Pawson made a point of it. And evidently Pawson was making a point of it.

"But those rotters don't matter a

bean to you, Pawson!" said the Highcliffe fellow, weakly. "Look what they've done to Monson!"

"I regret such an incident very deeply, sir!" said Pawson, "I can hardly venture to ask you to grant me such a favour! But I sincerely hope that you will not refuse it, sir."

Gadsby grunted. "You can have your way, I suppose," he said, "let the rotters stay till the morning! I don't care."

"I am very grateful, sir," said Pawson, humbly. "Possibly you will give me permission to go and tell them so, sir! John and Albert will attend you while I am gone."

"Do as you jolly well like!" snapped Gadsby, and he turned his back on the butler.

Monson's nose having been doctored, as far as possible, the dinner-party at Gadsby Croft sat down to their soup—served by John and Albert, without the impressive presence of the portly Pawson. Monson was in a very bad temper—the Bounder had a rather irritating grin on his face—and the others were annoyed and sulky. But Pon & Co., aware of Gaddy's reasons for not wanting trouble with the butler, had to make the best of it.

THE NINTH CHAPTER.

Cake for Bunter!

"HALLO, hallo, hallo!" "The jolly old butler!" "Orders to quit, I suppose," said Harry Wharton, as the portly Pawson came up to the hikers' camp. "Gadsby needn't have taken that trouble."

Pawson found the hikers discussing breaking camp and taking the road, Billy Bunter keeping up a continuous, but unregarded stream of objections.

"Excuse me, young gentlemen," said the Gadsby Croft butler.

"All serene," said Bob. "It turns out that this place belongs to a Highcliffe man we're on bad terms with. We're clearing."

"I have a message from Master Reginald Gadsby, sir! He hopes that you will not think of going till the morning," said Pawson. "I was, of course, unaware of any disagreement, or even acquaintance, when I gave you leave to camp here. I trust that you will allow it to make no difference."

"Oh!" said the hikers, in surprise. Lord Mauleverer's eyes were very keenly on the butler's sleek face. Mauly was trying to make the man out—unsuccessfully.

"Mean to say that Gadsby has sent you to ask us to stay here for the night?" exclaimed Bob.

"Yes, sir! He is not only willing, but anxious, that you should receive no inhospitality," said Pawson. "He

has sent me specially to tell you so, and I trust, sir, that you will not disturb yourself in any way."

"Well, my hat!"

The hikers looked at one another. Tired from a long day's march, they had no desire whatever to take the road again after dark.

"Dash it all, that's jolly civil," said Nugent. "After all, it can't hurt Gaddy if we camp here."

"Monson didn't seem pleased!" grunted Johnny Bull.

"Well, it's not Monson's place—it's Gaddy's. Gaddy's the most decent of that lot, anyhow," said Bob.

"That's not saying much!"

"Oh, chuck it, old man—it's pretty civil of him to send us a message like that, after you punched his pal's nose, too."

"The civility is terrific!" remarked Hurree Jamsat Ram Singh. "The obligefulness to the esteemed and absurd Gaddy is also great."

"I trust, young gentlemen, that you will not think of breaking camp," said Pawson, "Master Reginald would be very much hurt, if—"

"That's all right," said Harry Wharton, "tell Gadsby that we're much obliged to him, and that we're sorry there was any trouble."

"I will gladly tell him so, sir!"

And Pawson faded out of the picture.

The hikers sat down again. Billy Bunter was already rolling into the tent, to turn in. There was no doubt that the tired hikers were glad not to have to march again that night. And they were feeling rather compunctious, too. They had been going to shake the dust of Gadsby Croft scornfully from their feet, because Gaddy was a Highcliffe man—and Gaddy, on the other hand, had sent them a civil message asking them to stay where they were, heedless of old grudges. It made the Famous Five feel that they had acted rather ungraciously, which was uncomfortable. Any decent fellow would have acted as Gaddy had now done—and they had not given Gaddy credit for that amount of decency. Only Lord Mauleverer had a perplexed and thoughtful expression on his face. He was puzzled, and worried by the puzzle.

"Decent of Gaddy," said Bob. "As I said, he's the best of the bunch."

"And as I said, that's not saying much!" grunted Johnny Bull.

"Well, he's acted very civilly, at least, considering all the rows we've had with Pon & Co.," said Harry, rather sharply.

"I don't say he hasn't!" admitted Johnny. "Looks as if he isn't such a rotter as a fellow supposed."

"It's queer!" said Lord Mauleverer, speaking at last.

"What's queer?" asked Bob. "Queer that that butler—wallah should want us to camp here."

"Does he?" asked Bob, with a stare. "Yaas."

"Oh, don't be an ass, Mauly! As if he could care a brass farthing whether we camped here or not. Why should he?"

"I don't know why he should—but he does," answered Lord Mauleverer, quietly. "He asked us to camp here, in the first place—a very unexpected sort of thing. Now he's made Gadsby back him up."

"How the thump could a butler make him do anything of the sort?" demanded Bob. "Dreaming, or what?"

"That sportsman has some sort of a pull in the house, while his master's away," answered Mauleverer calmly.

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"You want a wash, and you're jolly well going to have a wash!" said Johnny Bull. He took Bunter by the back of his fat neck and dipped his features into a bucket of water. "Urrrigh!" "Now for some soap!" said Johnny. "I'll lather it on for you!" "Wurrrggggh!" gurgled Bunter, as Johnny Bull lathered it on, not with a gentle hand.

"Otherwise, Gaddy & Co. would be turnin' us off already. Pawson's wangled thiz."

"Rot!" said Bob. "Gaddy's been civil, that's all. Why the thump should the butler barge in?"

"I'd like to know!" said Mauleverer. "I say, you fellows—" came a fat voice from the tent.

"Oh, go to sleep, Bunter!" "I say, perhaps Pon's made Gaddy let us stop, because he's after Bob's Holiday Annual, and wants to pinch it in the night!" suggested Bunter.

"Oh, my hat!" exclaimed Bob. That idea had not occurred to the hikers. All through the holidays, Pon had hunted the hikers for that copy of the Holiday Annual, which he believed to contain a secret message from one crook to another. But they had given Pon such a severe lesson, that they did not believe he would barge in after that celebrated volume again.

"Think that's it, Mauly?" asked Frank Nugent.

Lord Mauleverer shook his head. "No! It's not Pon this time—it's Pawson! Pon knew nothin' about us bein' here, when Pawson asked us to camp."

"Offered to let us camp, you mean." "Put it as you like!"

"Mauly, old man, you're talking out of the back of your neck," said Bob. "Pon may have worked it, to look for another chance to pinch that jolly old Annual—but the butler can't care a penny bun whether we stay or go. What on earth do you think the man's motive could be, you ass?"

"Can't guess." "Well, what about turning in?" asked Johnny Bull, with a yawn.

"You wouldn't rather break camp and march?" asked Mauleverer.

"Beast!" came a howl from the tent.

"No jolly fear!" said Harry. "Dash it all, Mauly, it would be rotten, after Gaddy's been so civil. We can't chuck his civility back in his face, even if he is a Highcliffe man."

"Oh, all right," agreed Lord Mauleverer. "Any old thing. Let's turn in, then—I'm jolly tired, for one."

"Blessed if I make you out, Mauly," said Nugent. "It's not like you to be suspicious; but you seem to have a terrific down on that jolly old butler."

"Yaas." "Well, you're an ass, old chap!" "I've heard that one before!" said Lord Mauleverer, gravely.

"I say, you fellows—" "Shut up, Bunter!"

"Look here, stop jawing!" hooted Bunter, indignantly. "You know jolly well that I want to go to sleep! Well, then, shut up, see?"

"Wouldn't care for a cake, before you go to sleep, old fat man?" called out Bob Cherry.

Bunter promptly sat up in his blankets.

"Yes, rather! I didn't know you had cake! Hiding it from a fellow, yah! I'll jolly well have some of that cake, Bob Cherry."

"You can have it all, if you like," answered Bob. "The fact is, I think you need it more than we do."

"What the thump—" began Nugent; and then he broke off, and grinned, as Bob drew a large cake of brown soap from his rucksack. There was no doubt that Billy Bunter needed that "cake" more than the other fellows did; no doubt, either, that he was welcome to it all.

"Of course I do," answered Bunter from within the tent; "I never had enough supper, as you know! I've never really had enough since we

started on this hike! Gimme that cake!"

"Come out and fetch it, old fat bean! Don't be lazy!"

"Oh, really, Cherry! I think you might hand it in to a fellow! I'm lying—"

"You generally are!"

"Beast! I mean, I'm lying down. Look here, can't you bring that cake into the tent, you slacker?"

"Anybody care for cake?" asked Bob in a loud voice.

That question, reaching Bunter's fat ears, brought him out of his blankets with a bound! Bunter wanted that cake!

His fat figure emerged from the opening of the tent. He blinked round, and came across to Bob.

"Where's that cake?" he asked.

"Perhaps you'd better leave it till the morning," suggested Bob. "You'll really want it in the morning."

"I want it now!" roared Bunter.

"Where is it?"

"Going to eat it?"

"Yes, of course, you ass! What the thump else should I do with a cake? Will you hand it over?" demanded Bunter.

"Oh, all right! Stand round, you men, and watch Bunter eat this cake!" said Bob, and he handed the cake of brown soap over to the fat Owl of the Remove.

Bunter blinked at it in his fat paw.

"You—you idiot! What's this?" he gasped.

"The cake!"

"It's soap!" yelled Bunter.

"Didn't you know I meant a cake of soap?" asked Bob innocently.

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(Continued from page 13.)

Billy Bunter glared at him. His infuriated glare might almost have cracked his spectacles.

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared the hikers. The expression on Billy Bunter's fat face was really entertaining.

"You—you—you—" gasped Bunter.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Beast!" roared Bunter.

And he hurled the cake of soap into the grass and rolled back to the tent. And the hikers, chuckling, followed him, to turn in.

THE TENTH CHAPTER.

A Knutty Party!

"**A**NYTHING more, sir?" asked Pawson.

"Nothin'. You can cut!" said Gadsby.

The portly Pawson "cut."

As he went out of the door his glance lingered for a second on the group of elegant, well-dressed fellows. But what Pawson thought of Pon & Co. was not expressed in his sleek face. The door closed softly behind him, and Pawson vanished with his silent tread.

It was rather a late hour. Pawson had been looking after the wants of the schoolboy party at the Croft in a manner that was very agreeable to them, but which would hardly have had his master's approval had General Gadsby been at home. It hardly occurred to Pon & Co. that the man must be a rogue and a rascal to betray his master's trust as he was doing. They found Pawson a very accommodating fellow, and that was all they thought about it.

There were cigarettes and cigars on the table—though the knutty Highcliffians were rather careful not to touch the cigars. They wanted to be knutty and doggish; but they did not want internal convulsions. There was champagne on the sideboard, and it had already been flowing. Ponsonby was shuffling cards at the table, eager to get going.

There had been billiards after dinner, with fivers on the game, and the Bounder of Greyfriars, the richest fellow there, had been rather expected to disgorge fivers. Instead of which, he had played with the skill almost of a professional, and beaten the Highcliffians one after another. Smithy was skilled in a good many things it would have been better for him to know nothing of.

The Bounder was under no delusion as to why he was there. The Highcliffe knuts did not like him—and he despised them! He was there because he was rich, to be rooked. Pon & Co. had more money than was good for them, but they spent it recklessly, and were always in need of more. Smithy was to supply what they needed.

The blackguardly kink in the Bounder made him like such society, and such occupations, from time to time—especially in the holidays when masters and prefects were far away. His millionaire father's careless indulgence was partly the cause. After a few days

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at Gadsby Croft, however, Smithy was tiring of it; and, as a matter of fact, so were Pon & Co. It amused Smithy's sardonic nature to play the young rascals at their own game and beat them at it; but Pon & Co. did not find it amusing at all. Pon & Co. were not "out" to lose money to a fellow they regarded as a "dashed outsider"—but that was what they had been doing. And their thin veneer of politeness to their Greyfriars guest was growing thinner.

"Frightfully useful man, that butler of yours, Gaddy!" remarked Monson, when the door had closed after Pawson.

"Absolutely!" said Vavasour.

"Yes, useful sort of beast," said Gadsby. "I owe him a lot of money. Blessed if I know what I should do without Pawson. A man can rely on him not to tell the governor things."

"I suppose your pater would cut up a bit rusty if he knew the kind of party you were givin' here," grinned Drury.

Gadsby laughed.

"Yes, just a few! Pawson's a good sport, though—I dare say he's been young himself once, though he doesn't look it. He's never cheeky, either—as a lot of servants would be in his place."

"He jolly well made you let that hiking gang stay!" grunted Monson.

"Well, I gave in on that—he's frightfully particular to keep up his standin' in the servants' hall. What do the rotters matter, anyhow?" said Gadsby carelessly. "I don't care whether they stay or not."

"I do!" growled Ponsonby, and Monson nodded a scowling assent.

"Oh, rot! You've asked for all the trouble you've got from them, Pon—getting after them to bag something that belongs to one of them," said Gadsby. "Leave 'em alone and they don't bite!"

"I say, though," remarked Monson, "Smithy could help in that, if he liked. If there's anythin' in it—"

"In what?" asked Vernon-Smith, who was lighting a cigarette. He began to be interested in the talk.

"Pon thinks that a Holiday Annual that that ruffian Cherry has got with him is worth fifty quids!" said Monson.

The Bounder stared.

"What utter rot!" he said.

"Nothin' of the kind," said Ponsonby. "I happen to know that a message was put in that book—a secret message—when it wasn't in Cherry's hands. He's too fatheaded to spot it, but I know I could. And it's a clue to the stuff the smash-and-grab raider got from old Lazarus' shop at Courtfield last term, and there's fifty pounds' reward offered for finding it."

"Sounds steep to me," said Vernon-Smith.

"Well, it's a fact, all the same." Ponsonby looked at the Bounder narrowly. "Look here, Smithy, you're more or less friendly with those cads! I've tried a dozen times to get that book, and failed—and I don't want any more scuffin' with the brutes."

"I imagine not, after the way I found you when I got you away from them a few days ago!" grinned the Bounder.

Pon's eyes gleamed. He was not in the least grateful for the service the Bounder had rendered him, and he disliked to be reminded of it. But he went on smoothly.

"You could manage it, Smithy, if you liked! Of course, you'd have your whack in the reward if we bagged it. We can all do with some spare cash."

"What do you want me to do?" asked Smithy, with a very curious look at the dandy of Highcliffe.

"Well, you could drop in on them in—"

"In a friendly way?" asked Smithy.

"That's it; and—"

"And keep my eye open for what you want?"

"Exactly!" assented Ponsonby.

"And jump at a chance of snoopin' it—"

"You got me!" said Pon eagerly. "They'd never be on their guard against anythin' of the kind; you could manage it as easy as fallin' off a form. Don't you think so?"

"I know I could."

"You'll do it?"

"No," said the Bounder quietly, "I won't do it."

"And why not?" demanded Pon warmly.

"Because I'm not a Highcliffe man, I suppose," answered the Bounder, with cool insult. "If I were, I might play a rotten, sneaking, treacherous trick! Not bein' a Highcliffe man, it doesn't seem good enough."

Silence followed that answer. Pon's eyes burned at the Bounder, but he did not speak. The other fellows exchanged glances, and Monson shrugged his shoulders. Gadsby coloured. The answer was not precisely polite from a guest in the house, though certainly it was precisely what Pon deserved. It was all Ponsonby could do to restrain himself from flinging the pack of cards in Herbert Vernon Smith's face. But he had not done with the Bounder yet.

"Look here, are we playin' poker?" asked Drury, after a very awkward pause. "If we are, let's get goin'."

"Cut for deal," said Ponsonby curtly.

The six young rascals gathered round the table. Mutual offences were dismissed when the cards got going. The Bounder, whose skill in card games was no credit to him, was well aware that he could play the heads off Pon & Co. at poker, or any other game. He was sardonically amused by the idea of that set of knuts setting out to rook him at a game that he had at his finger-tips.

But the smile died off his face as the game proceeded.

Instead of beating the Highcliffians, as he calmly expected, he was not even holding his own.

After a time a very unpleasant glitter came into Vernon-Smith's eyes. In nearly every round he had a good hand, but not quite good enough to take the pot. The Bounder was an observant fellow—not to say a suspicious fellow—and his suspicions were keenly awakened now. It was getting clear to him that Pon & Co., having failed to win his money by fair means, were resorting to foul.

He noted that when Vavasour or Gadsby dealt the cards he had his usual luck—at least, as good as the others. When Ponsonby or Monson or Drury dealt he had a good hand—good enough to inspire reckless betting, but not quite good enough to beat the dealer.

Having noted that much, the Bounder was aware that the three were acting in concert to rook him. Gadsby and Vavasour were left out of that peculiar game—Gaddy because he was too decent, Vavasour because he was too stupid to join in such proceedings.

Smithy gave no sign of his discovery. If possible, it intensified the contempt in which he already held the Highcliffians; and added to his feeling of being fed-up with the dingy crowd. But he gave no sign. At that game, or at any other, he could beat Pon & Co.

Ponsonby's deal came round again. The Bounder, apparently occupied in lighting a cigarette, watched him covertly. But if Pon was assisting Fortune by "ways that are dark," his manoeuvres were very skilful, and not

to be detected. Five cards were dealt to each player, and, though he had been able to detect nothing, Smithy was perfectly well aware that Pon had dealt himself a winning hand. And as the deal finished Vernon-Smith gave a sudden, dramatic start, pointed to the window, and shouted:

"Look out! The hikers! Great gad! Look!"

"What?" yelled Ponsonby.

The whole party leaped to their feet, staring at the window. As their backs turned to him Vernon-Smith, with a swift, almost lightning-like movement, picked up Pon's hand of cards and placed his own hand in its place; then he stepped after the others, who were stepping towards the french window with amazed faces.

Ponsonby threw the window wide open. There was no one on the dusky balcony without.

"Nobody here!" he snapped. "What the thump did you mean, Smithy?"

"I fancied I saw Bob Cherry's face."

"Silly ass!"

"Fizz gettin' into your head, old bean," grinned Gadsby.

"Absolutely!" said Vavasour.

"My mistake," drawled Vernon-Smith, and he lounged back to his seat at the card-table. Pon & Co. followed him, and the cards were taken up—without the slightest suspicion on Pon's part that the hand he had dealt himself was now in the Bounder's possession, and that the hand he had dealt the Bounder was now his own.

Smithy smiled grimly. If Pon was playing fair it did not matter which hand of cards he had; if he was playing foul he was playing for his destined victim to win. And the peculiar nature of the Bounder found that very amusing.

THE ELEVENTH CHAPTER.

Rooking a Rook!

PONSONBY gave a little start as he glanced at his cards, and the Bounder, noting it, smiled. Pon, when he turned up the cards, did not see what he had expected to see. He had—or believed that he had—dealt himself a royal flush, ace high—a hand impossible to beat at poker.

Pon had been practising the gentle art of dealing from the bottom of the pack, and hitherto he had got away with it successfully. But this time it seemed that he had made some error. For, instead of the ace, king, queen, knave, and ten of hearts, he beheld the king, queen, knave, ten, and nine of spades—also a royal flush, but only king high, and precisely the hand he had intended to deal to the Bounder.

He could not help that little start—which confirmed Smithy's suspicions, if they had needed confirming. The hand was one on which most poker-players would have betted very high, since there was only one that could beat it. It had been planned to induce the Bounder to plunge. And somehow Pon had got it himself!

Still, it was a very strong hand. It did not occur to Pon for a moment that, having the hand intended for Smithy, Smithy had got the hand intended for himself. Such a thing could scarcely have happened by chance; and as yet Pon had no suspicion that the "face at the window" had been a trick to draw off his attention while the cool-headed Bounder changed the cards.

And Smithy's play did not look as if he had much in the way of cards. He did not "draw" any to the hand; but he seemed dissatisfied with it, giving a

grunt as he scanned it, and he put into the pool the lowest stake allowed in the game. When Gadsby "raised" him, the Bounder, when his turn came round again, contented himself with keeping level, and even then seemed to hesitate whether to risk his ten-shilling note.

The cool, unscrupulous Bounder was, in point of fact, playing a part to lead Pon on—and Pon was led on! Satisfied that Smithy had a weaker hand than his own, Pon raised the stakes every time, so that at every round the Bounder had to put a higher sum in the pool.

Vavasour soon "passed," the stakes getting too high for him. Gadsby was the next to drop out—Pawson apparently not having lent him enough money to keep on to this tune. Monson and Drury stayed in, these two young rascals being hand-in-glove with Pon to share the plunder. But one after another they quitted, leaving the game between Ponsonby and Smithy.

Pon, with a vaunting look, dropped a five-pound note into the pool. His look was intended to provoke the Bounder into playing up—and it seemed to have that effect, for, after some hesitation, Smithy followed his example. Pon dropped in another five. Then Vernon-Smith, with calm deliberation, detached a ten-pound note from several others in

STEP IN AND WIN A WALLET LIKE

R. Simmons, of Poppy Road,
Parkfield, Princes Risborough,
Bucks, who sent in the following
GREYFRIARS LIMERICK.

Said Temple to Dabney and Fry:
"To fight Bob Cherry I'll try."
But sad to relate,
To lose was his fate.
All he won was a bonny black eye!

You think out the limerick, and
I'll supply the wallet.—Ed.

his notecase and tossed it carelessly on the heap of money.

"Oh gad!" murmured Monson, looking on; and Drury's eyes snapped. Pon drew a deep breath.

A sudden qualm smote him. Was it possible, after all, that the Bounder had a hand to beat a royal flush king high? Had his hesitation, his dissatisfaction, been a pretence to draw the dandy of Highcliffe on? Was Pon going to be shorn, instead of being the shearer? The mocking glimmer in Smithy's eyes seemed to tell him so.

"I shall have to put in paper," muttered Pon; he was at the end of his cash.

"Why not?" said the Bounder indifferently.

"Lend me your fountain-pen, Gaddy."

Pon scribbled an I O U for ten pounds, dropped it on the Bounder's tenner, and, having covered the stake, and so being entitled to a show of cards, demanded the same.

The Bounder flicked his hand carelessly up.

Pon stared at the five cards.

Ace, king, queen, knave, and ten of hearts! A royal flush ace high, beating his own strong hand by a single point! Stranger of all—most disconcerting of all—it was the very hand he had "wangled" for himself!

He hardly breathed for some moments.

"How's that?" drawled the Bounder carelessly.

Pon threw down his cards with a muttered word.

"Oh great gad!" said Monson, staring at the cards and then at Ponsonby. The game was not going according to programme.

Carelessly the Bounder stretched out his hand to the pot. He had won it—and in it nearly all the money of the Highcliffe knuts, as well as Pon's I O U. Quite unintentionally Pon had helped him.

"Go in on?" asked Smithy, with a yawn.

Pon sat with a white face. He knew that somehow he had been tricked, where he intended to trick—though how, he did not know. His feelings towards the mocking Bounder were bitter and savage. The fellow had turned the tables on him in some mysterious way, and was laughing in his sleeve. Pon clenched his hands till the knuckles showed white.

"Well, that's what I call luck, Smithy," said the unsuspecting Gaddy. "You've done us brown."

"Absolutely!" said Vavasour.

"I'm often lucky," drawled the Bounder. "But Pon certainly dealt me an uncommonly good hand! Couldn't have done me better if he'd wanted me to scoop the pot."

Pon's eyes burned.

He rose unsteadily from the table. His savage temper was getting out of control now, as his face showed; and Gadsby looked anxious. He moved towards Pon, and touched him on the arm.

"Easy does it, old bean," he murmured. "Don't get ratty over the luck of the cards! It's not done."

"You fool!"

"Look here—"

"I'm fed-up with that Greyfriars cad," said Ponsonby thickly. "I've wanted to tell him all the time what I think of him. Now I'll show him."

"Look here—" protested Gaddy feebly.

Pon shoved him roughly aside. There was a glass at his elbow, half-full of the champagne which the reckless young rascal had been sipping. He caught it suddenly by the stem, and flung the contents full at the Bounder's face. Pon, in his rage, had thrown manners and self-control to the winds.

But Smithy was watching him like a cat, and he was not taken by surprise. As Pon flung the wine, the Bounder jerked Vavasour in front of him—and the fluid dashed in Vavasour's face instead of Smithy's.

"Yurrrgh!" spluttered the surprised Vavasour. "Gurrrh! What the dooce—what! Woocoooh!"

"You rotter, Pon!" shouted Gadsby.

"Wurrrrrgh! Grooogh!" from Vavasour.

The Bounder laughed loudly.

"Pon seems to have lost his temper," he remarked. "I'll take a stroll, while you fellows calm him down! I don't want to have to push your pal's face through the back of his head under your roof, Gaddy."

And the Bounder strolled through the french windows to the balcony and went down into the dusky gardens, laughing.

THE TWELFTH CHAPTER.

Prowlers of the Night!

THE cool night wind from the Chilterns blew in the Bounder's heated face as he strolled in the dusk of the shrubberies in the shade of rustling branches. He was hatless, and in evening-clothes; but the night was mild, and the fresh air was

a pleasant change after the atmosphere of the card-room.

Smithy had intended only a short stroll in the gardens; but the beauty and stillness of the night had a calming effect on him, and tempted him farther. Stars glimmered from fleecy clouds in a sky of the darkest blue. He drew in deep breaths of the fresh air; less and less inclined every moment to return to the atmosphere of cigarette-smoke and the sight of glistening cards, fevered faces and greedy eyes.

Half-unconsciously his footsteps led him in the direction of the hikers' camp. He knew that all would be sleeping there. The hikers had been sleeping healthy sleep, while that feverish game was going on in the card-room at Gadsby Croft. Smithy was well aware that, if he had shown as much sense as the hikers, he would have been asleep, too—he was far too keen to be blind to his own folly. From a distance he caught sight of the hikers' tent, glimmering faintly in the starlight, and he dropped into a slower walk.

His face was dissatisfied and thoughtful. He had walked off laughing after his scene in the card-room. But he had been thinking since. Pon had been tricking him—and he had tricked Pon in return, and got the best of it, and it had amused him highly. But with cooler reflection came the feeling that the whole thing was utterly rotten, and that he could not leave the matter where it was. Easy enough to throw Pon's money back—he was inclined to throw it in his face! He did not want it, anyhow—he had plenty of his own. If Smithy gambled, it was not, like Pon & Co., from greed, but merely for the excitement. Now, in the cool night air, under the shining stars, he was wishing that he had never come there at all; never had anything to do with the Highcliffe knuts, making fools of themselves while the eye of authority was not on them.

That thought brought another to his mind—Pawson! Smithy had been puzzled about Pawson! Why was the butler giving Gaddy his head in this way, in his master's absence? His master had left him in control, trusting him; and this was how he was keeping the trust. With no elders in the house, it was up to Pawson to see that a certain decorous limit was observed; and General Gadsby trusted him to that extent, and placed authority in his hands. Smithy wondered what Pawson's game was. He had no doubt that the man was feathering his nest somehow. Probably he made a good thing out of Gaddy, in one way and another. But there was more than that in it.

Smithy had a feeling that he was sick of the whole crew. He reached the hikers' camp; and had the chums of the Remove been still awake, he would have been glad to see them. Bob Cherry's boisterous high spirits, Murree Singh's smiling, dusky face, Nugent's good-nature, even Billy Bunter's fat fatuousness would have been a welcome change after Pon & Co. But they were all fast asleep in the tent, and he did not think of awakening them. Besides, as he reflected, he was on, or very nearly on, fighting terms with these fellows. With his usual arrogant recklessness he had "rowed" with them on Pon's account! He sneered at himself as he thought of that! Pon was hardly worth it!

He sat down on a log. He grinned at the sound of Billy Bunter's snore rumbling from the tent.

Sitting in the shadow of the tent, thinking, he started suddenly as a chime

came from somewhere in the distance. It was midnight!

From the direction of the lane there came a faint creak of a gate that opened. He started again.

A short, squat figure appeared in the starlight at a distance. It was crossing the paddock from the lane.

Smithy stared at it.

For a moment or two he suspected that it was some tramp who had spied out the hikers' camp, and was prowling round to pilfer. But the squat figure passed at a distance, without even glancing towards the camp.

It disappeared under the beech-trees at the end of the paddock.

"What the thump—" murmured the Bounder, rising from the log and staring after the vanished figure.

The man was apparently heading for the distant mansion; where, at that hour, only Pon & Co. were up and awake. It was not some servant coming in late by way of the paddock and the grounds. Smithy had had only a glimpse of him in the starlight, but he had made out a stealthy, shabby figure—obviously not that of a man-servant. If that stealthy figure at midnight was on a pilfering errand, the hikers' camp was not the object—but the mansion of General Gadsby.

The Bounder stood some moments in thought.

He was fed-up with Pon & Co.—sick of the place; and he had been thinking of making up his quarrel with the Famous Five, sending his car home and joining the hikers for the rest of the vacation—if they made him welcome. He had no doubt that they would; they were not the fellows to keep up grudges.

Still, sick as he was of Gadsby Croft, he was a guest there; and if a thief in the night was sneaking into the place, it was up to him to intervene.

He realised that, and after a few moments he moved away from the tent and followed the way the squat figure had gone, buttoning his dinner-jacket to hide the gleaming white shirtfront that caught the gleam of the stars. If the man was a midnight thief, he would be wary; and Smithy did not want the adventure to end with a knock on the head for himself.

Taking care that his footsteps made no sound on the grass, he reached the beech-trees at the end of the paddock. Beyond the trees he expected to catch sight of the figure again in the starlight.

But as he came up to the beeches, a murmur of voices caught his ears, and he stopped. The man had stopped under the trees—where he had met another man—that was clear.

Two voices were speaking, in low tones, alternately. One of them was husky; the other silky, and the latter, though he could not distinguish the words, seemed vaguely familiar to Smithy's ears.

Quietly the Bounder stepped into the black shadow of the trees and approached the spot where the speakers stood.

He stopped again, only a few yards from two dim figures that stood in shadows—one squat, the other portly. Dim as it was, that portly figure seemed familiar to his eyes.

"Them hikers—" It was the husky voice.

"The hikers are there because they will come in useful, Bates!" came the silky voice; and the Bounder barely repressed a jump as he realised that it was Pawson, the butler of Gadsby Croft, who was speaking.

"I don't see it," muttered the husky voice. "They saw me when they came

up this afternoon. You came out here to meet me because it was farthest from the house, and then them hikers—"

"They are not likely even to remember your existence," answered Pawson. "I suppose you know why I called you Watson, and spoke about delivering hay at the stables in their hearing?"

"Yes, I know; but they saw me," mumbled the squat man. "Safer to have ordered them off; they'd be far enough away by this time. And you let them camp on this very spot—"

"Do you think I had no reason?"

"Well, I don't see the reason!" grunted Bates sulkily. "We don't want witnesses about, with what's going on."

"Those hikers came along just in time to make themselves useful!" said Pawson calmly. "And very fortunately for Master Reginald's guests!" He laughed in a soft, feline way that made Smithy shiver as he heard.

"Ow do you mean, then?"

"You are a fool, Bates! When a robbery is committed, a thief has to be found. With a gang of hikers camped within a stone's throw of the house, the police will not have far to look."

Herbert Vernon-Smith stood very still!

THE THIRTEENTH CHAPTER.

An Unmitigated Rascal!

THERE was a brief silence in the shadow under the beeches. It was broken by a husky chuckle from the squat man.

"My eye, you are a deep one, Mr. Pawson! I'll say that!"

"I think," said Pawson smoothly, "that I know my way about, Bates! As soon as the robbery is discovered it will be my duty, as butler, to call in the police and give them every possible assistance."

"My eye!" murmured Bates. "I 'ope you won't take it so far as to mention my name." He chuckled again.

Pawson laughed softly, but his catlike merriment lasted only a moment. His silky voice went on:

"I've had my eye on this coup for some time, Bates. It could only be brought off in the general's absence. Even then it is necessary to be very careful. I cannot afford to be suspected, and I have no desire to lose my place here. The general is an old fool, and his son a precious young blackguard, and between the two I make a fairly good thing out of it."

"I fancy you do!" murmured Bates.

"The general's elder son was here until a few days ago. While he was here nothing could be done. I'm taking no risks. I was very glad to learn that Master Reginald was asking some school friends here, being well aware of the kind of fellows they were."

"You never meant—" Bates almost gasped.

"I did," answered Pawson coolly. "As I said, after a robbery a thief must be found to satisfy the police—a very zealous and dutiful body of men. Master Reginald has, of course, shown his friends the Agra goblet, which his father brought back from India long ago. I have the keys, and have opened the cabinet in which it is kept to show it to them. When the goblet is missing to-morrow morning, Bates, the cabinet will not have been opened with a key. It will have been broken open clumsily, and evidently by an amateur hand. There will be nothing to indicate that a man with a key had anything to do with it."

"I get you!" murmured Bates.

"The goblet, I believe, cost the general a tidy sum when he got it in



"Beast!" snorted Bunter. "You can have the boot back, blow you!" With all the force of his fat arm, the Owl of the Remove hurled the boot at Bob Cherry. Crash! "Oh! Yoooop!" The flying missile, however, found a billet on the white shirtfront of Herbert Vernon-Smith, and there was a bump and a gasp.

India long ago," said Pawson. "It is very old, and very valuable as a curio. I fear that it will lose such value when it is disposed of. What is worth three thousand pounds to a collector will not bring in more than a third of that sum, broken up for the metal and the stones. But a thousand pounds is a useful sum, Bates."

"I believe you!" said the squat man.

"At the present price of gold the metal alone is worth some hundreds," went on Pawson, "and I have, of course, examined it a good many times, and satisfied myself that the rubies with which it is decorated are genuine, and can be sold singly at a good price. I have a friend in the pawnbroking line who will see to that, when you have taken the goblet to a certain address in London."

"Easy!" said Bates.

"Easy; but not so easy to cover one's tracks," said Pawson. "I have considered that matter very carefully. All Master Reginald's friends are gambling young blackguards, and gamblers are frequently in debt, and often rather reckless in their methods of getting out of it. What more likely than that one of them should steal the goblet, being pressed for money, especially if a matchbox belonging to him happened to be left on the spot?"

"My eye!"

"I thought first of Master Vernon-Smith, one of the young scoundrels here," went on Pawson, and the hidden Bounder, in the darkness, smiled a very grim smile. "He is a millionaire's son, and the others have him here to relieve him of the trouble of looking after his wealth."

"A mug?" said Bates.

"Very far indeed from that," said

Pawson. "Instead of losing his money he has scored all along the line—a very deep young rascal. The others loathe him, and I expect some rowdy disturbance every day. Certainly they would not be unwilling to believe him guilty if the robbery happened to be laid to his door. Some of them would rejoice in it. But—"

"No go?" asked Bates.

"As you say, N.G.," said Pawson. "I am rather afraid of that young fellow. He is altogether too keen to play tricks on. But that is not all. There must be a motive, and this boy, Vernon-Smith, has plenty of money; he is not pressed for it like the others. So, after due consideration, I washed out Master Vernon-Smith, and decided on Master Ponsonby."

The Bounder grinned in the darkness.

"Master Ponsonby," went on Pawson, with a venomous note in his silky voice, "is as thorough-going a young blackguard as any I have ever seen. How he has escaped being expelled from his school, and even sent to chokey, I cannot make out; he must be very wary. He is reckless, unscrupulous, ruthless, and utterly insolent. He takes a pleasure in displaying his insolence to persons who are not in a position to answer him back."

"You don't like that young covey!" chuckled Bates.

"I do not," said Pawson, "and I should be glad to repay his insolence, in a perfectly safe manner, of course. This morning, Bates, it was settled that Master Ponsonby was to be the man. He is excellent for the purpose—an utter young rascal, a gambler, in debt and in need of money, as I have easily ascertained, capable of almost anything. And I had already secured a silver

matchbox, with his initials on it, to leave by the broken cabinet."

"But—" said Bates.

"But," said Pawson, "satisfactory as the scheme was, so far as the circumstances allowed, I was glad to change it for a better. As soon as the hikers appeared I washed out Master Ponsonby."

"Stroke of luck for him!" murmured Bates.

"Not for his sake, you understand—entirely for my own," said Pawson. "In this matter safety first is the game."

"You bet!" agreed Bates.

"That is why the hikers are camped in the paddock. Do you begin to see now?" asked Pawson.

"I think so!" chuckled Bates.

"I had the whole thing out and dried, and should have chanced it, with Master Ponsonby to play the principal part," said Pawson calmly. "But there was one weakness—a robbery under his friends' roof is, in point of fact, outside even Master Ponsonby's limit, though he is not a particular young gentleman. That could not be helped till the hikers so kindly turned up to make all absolutely safe for me. Master Ponsonby, therefore, disappears from the picture, and the hikers take his place."

"I get you!" said Bates.

"It is not uncommon," said Pawson, "for articles to be missing where hikers have passed. There are, of course, hikers and hikers. But any hiker will answer my purpose. What more plausible than that, camped in the place, they prowled round looking for something to pilfer? The police have had to deal with many such cases. By a stroke of unexpected good fortune it happens that Master Reginald and his guests have met these hikers, and quarrelled

with them, so when the accusation is made the whole party will jump at it like a dog at a bone, and back it up."

"Real luck!" said Bates.

"Indeed, I fully expect the suggestion that they have done it to be made by Master Ponsonby," said Pawson. "It is the thought that would occur at once to him. Anyhow, muddy footmarks will be found by the window of the general's study, which will be forced; tracks will be picked up, leading towards the hikers' camp. You will see to that, Bates."

"Leave it to me."

"The Agra goblet," said Pawson, "will not be found; but some articles of smaller value will be found, concealed in the hikers' baggage."

"It's a bit thick!" muttered Bates.

"I am not here to listen to you talking like a fool, Bates."

"All right, sir, I'm on. Leave it at that."

"These hikers," said Pawson, "leave very early in the morning. A couple of Indian gold mohurs, taken from the same cabinet, will be found in their baggage when they are followed and searched."

Bates grunted. Dishonest rascal as he was, he seemed to find something repugnant in the cold, cool, calm villainy of the dastardly wretch who was speaking so deliberately. But he said nothing.

"I've told you the whole thing now," said Pawson. "Do you see any weakness in it?"

"Only it's too thick," muttered Bates.

"Talk sense!"

"Well, you got it out and dried," said Bates. "I can't see that there's any hole in it anywhere."

"So it seems to me; but two heads are better than one," said Pawson. "If you can lay your finger on any weak spot, point it out."

"Safe as houses," said Bates. "There ain't nothing in it to hurt you, Mr. Pawson, if your conscience don't."

Pawson laughed.

"I fear, my good Bates, that I am in too deep to worry about that," he said. "I have lost heavily on all the horses I have backed through the summer, and I am nearly at the end of my tether. There is a deficit in my accounts, Bates, which will cause me very serious trouble, if it is not made up before the general returns. It's neck or nothing with me now. And it has always been my habit to consider myself first."

"I believe you," grunted Bates. "Well, now you've made it clear, Mr. Pawson, it's high time we got on with it. It's past midnight."

"It is not time yet, Bates. Those young rascals are not gone to bed yet. They keep it up very late. The House must be sleeping before the Agra goblet disappeared from the cabinet in the general's study."

"I got to wait, then?"

"An hour, at least," said Pawson. "Wait here, and, as soon as it is safe, I will rejoin you, and guide you to the study window. I must see my young master and his honoured guests to bed first." There was an indescribable tone of mockery in the sleek voice. "Wait!"

The portly figure disappeared in the shadows. Bates, leaning on a tree, waited. Smithy heard his muttering voice after Pawson had gone.

"The 'ound! I've 'arf a mind to chuck it and let him down! The rotten dog!"

But the man remained leaning on the tree, waiting. And the Bounder silently backed out of the beeches.

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THE FOURTEENTH CHAPTER.

A Tip in Time!

"HALLO, hallo, hallo!"

"Who the thump——"

"Is it Pon? Collar him!"

Six hikers started out of blankets and slumber. One, Billy Bunter, snored on regardless.

It was dark in the tent—very dark. All the hikers had been fast asleep; but fast asleep as they were they were not to be caught napping, if a visitor attempted a stealthy entrance. The suggestion that Gaddy had given leave for the hikers to remain, in order that Pon might make a surreptitious attempt on the Holiday Annual, lingered in their minds. And though the tent flap had been left open for air, Bob Cherry had tied a cord across the opening, a few inches from the ground. It was quite invisible in the dark, and, any fellow stepping in stealthily, was fairly certain to catch his foot in it and stumble.

And so a fellow did; catching his foot, stumbling, sprawling, and landing with a breathless gasp on the hikers.

"Ow!" he spluttered, as he landed. "Ooogh! Gad! Ow!"

Six hikers rose as one man. Six pairs of hands groped for the intruder, and fastened on him all over.

"Got him!" gasped Bob.

"Bagged him!" panted Johnny Bull.

"The bagfulness is terrific!" chuckled Hurree Jamsat Ram Singh. "I have hold of his esteemed and ridiculous ears."

"Sit on him!"

"Pin the rotter!"

"Get a light, somebody!"

"Ow! Groogh! Oogh!" came in gasping accents from under the hikers: "Leggo! Hang you! You fools and rotters, let me go!"

"That's not Pon's toot," said Harry Wharton, as he groped for his electric torch. "Keep him safe, though."

"What-ho!"

"More like Smithy's voice——"

"You dummies!" hissed the voice in the dark. "You dolts——"

"That's Smithy!" chuckled Bob. "I know his toot, and his choice language. Squat on him!"

Wharton found the torch and turned it on. Light glimmered on the Bounder's furious face as he lay gasping and struggling in the grasp of many hands. He glared up savagely at the captain of the Greyfriars Remove.

"You fool!" he snarled.

"Thanks!" said Wharton dryly. "Better a fool than a rotter, Vernon-Smith. What are you doing here at this time of night, sneaking in like a thief?"

"Not much need to ask that," snorted Johnny Bull. "Pon's put him up to this. He's after that blessed Holiday Annual!"

"Oh, my hat!" exclaimed Bob. "Is that it?"

Harry Wharton shook his head. It certainly seemed the most plausible explanation, but he could not believe it.

"That's not it, you fellows," he said. "Smithy's not the man for that."

"Then what does he want here?" snapped Johnny Bull. "He was creeping in like a cat in the dark, and he would never have woke us, if Bob hadn't fixed up the cord ready for this very thing."

"Fool!" said the Bounder scornfully.

"You can call me any names you like, so long as you're held," said Johnny Bull stolidly. "I'll ask you to say it over again when you're loose."

"Will you rotters let me go?" hissed the Bounder.

"No," said Harry coolly. "Before you're let go, you'll explain why you were creeping in here like a cat."

"Fool! Or rather, I'm the fool!" said the Bounder, with savage bitterness. "I might have left you to take your gruel, and I was a fool not to. By gad, if you don't take your paws off me at once, I will leave you to it!"

Wharton looked at him curiously. Then he took a box of matches to light the lantern hung on the tent pole.

"Stop that!" snapped the Bounder.

"Eh—why?"

"The light might be seen."

"And what would that matter?"

"Oh, do as you like!" sneered the Bounder. "Don't mind me! I came as a friend—and you've never needed one more—and you've treated me as an enemy. I chuck it from now on."

Harry Wharton quietly put down the match-box. He shut off the electric torch. Only a glimmer of starlight came now through the opening of the tent. Bunter snored on.

"Let him go!" said Harry.

"Look here——" snorted Johnny Bull.

"Let him go! He says he came as a friend!"

"You believe him?" growled Johnny Bull. "Last time he dropped in on us at night he cut the tent down over our heads, and helped that cad Ponsonby to get away. And you believe him?"

"Yes, I believe him," said Harry. "Let him go, you men."

The Bounder was released, and he staggered to his feet, gasping. His eyes were gleaming.

"Look here, Smithy," said Wharton, in the same quiet tone, "if you came as a friend, we're sorry we handled you—but we were half-expecting Pon, and you've taken his side against us—so if you're a sensible chap, you can't blame us. And I can't make out why you crept in like a cat, instead of calling out to let us know you were coming."

The Bounder breathed hard and deep. His temper was violent, and he was always quick to take offence. But he calmed down. In the circumstances, it was scarcely possible for the hikers to have received him other than as they had done, and he realised it.

"Give it a name, my esteemed Smithy," murmured the Nabob of Bhanipur. "If this is an absurd friendly visit, the regretfulness is terrific that I yankfully grabbed your ridiculous ears."

The Bounder grinned.

"All serene!" he said. "But don't yell! The man's only as far off as the beeches at the end of the field."

"What man?" asked all the hikers.

"The man who's coming here to plant two or three things in your baggage, so that you can be accused of the robbery that's going to take place to-night at Gaddy's house," answered the Bounder.

The hikers blinked at him in the dusk. They did not speak. Smithy's amazing answer seemed to have taken their breath away.

"That's why I was coming in quietly," said Smithy. "Lot of good, as it turns out—when you had a cord ready to trip a fellow up. Look here! I've no time to give you the whole yarn—and you can dashed well believe me or not as you like!"

"It wants some believing!" remarked Johnny Bull dryly.

Herbert Vernon-Smith set his lips.

"That does it!" he said. "I'll cut—and you can believe that I came here to pull your leg if you choose. And if

you put up a paw to hold me I'll tackle the whole crew of you!"

"Hold on, Smithy! Johnny, old man, chuck it!" exclaimed Wharton hastily. "Smithy's not the man to talk out of his hat! He's found something out—goodness knows what—"

"No offence, old man, if you're serious!" said Johnny amicably. "But you'll own up that it sounds a bit steep, as a reasonable chap, Smithy."

"Very likely." The Bounder calmed again. "Take it as you like, then! There's goin' to be a robbery yonder to-night—I've just heard them plannin' it—and some things are to be landed on you fellows to make out that the stuff came this way—"

"Good heavens!" breathed Wharton. "Some gold coins—Indian coins—will be planted in your things if the man can manage it without giving an alarm. He would hardly try to get into the tent—might grope under the canvas and feel for a rucksack or a bag—anyhow, that's the game. He will have them on him when he comes, and some sort of a valuable Hindoo pot that he's making off with—the Agra goblet, Pawson called it—"

"Pawson!"

"The jolly old butler's in the game."

"So that's why!" said Lord Mauleverer very quietly.

"Good heavens!" repeated Wharton. "Can any man be such a villain?"

"I fancy that man Pawson's been through some things before he bamboozled a fatheaded old military man into takin' him on as a butler," sneered

Smithy. "From what he said he was tryin' round for a scapegoat—he thought of me first, and then Pon—and then you fellows blew in and he decided to let you have the benefit of it."

"Gaddy's butler!" breathed Bob. "Mauly knew he had a game on, and we never thought—"

"Keep awake and nab the man when he comes," said Smithy. "Get him, and you'll get all he's going to take from the house—Hindoo pot and all—and he will be landed with the goods on him. Mind, if you let him get away Pawson will try hard to land this on you without the evidence he's planned to leave here. You'd better get him."

"We'll get him all right," said Bob. "Leave that to us! Smithy, old chap, you're a real white man, and I wish we hadn't collared you. But when you tumble head first on a fellow in the middle of the night—"

"That's all right! Chew on what I've told you! I've got to cut! See you later!"

The Bounder left the tent with that. He left the Greyfriars hikers throbbing with excitement. There was no more sleep for the hikers that night. Strange as the Bounder's story was, they knew that it was true—he was not the fellow to make mistakes. And it bore out Mauly's distrust of the sleek, smooth Pawson, though Mauly certainly had never dreamed of anything like this miserable villainy. In low, whispering tones the hikers laid their plans, ready for the prowler when he came. Uninterrupted, sound asleep all the time, Billy Bunter snored on.

THE FIFTEENTH CHAPTER.

Something Like A Shindy!

PONSONBY took the cigarette from his mouth and fixed his eyes on Herbert Vernon-Smith as the latter came sauntering in at the french windows.

Gadsby and Drury and Monson and Vavasour were playing bridge, Pon looking on sulkily and smoking. He gave the Bounder a deadly look. If Smithy was fed-up with Pon & Co. there was no doubt that Pon & Co. were equally fed-up with Smithy. He had not served the purpose for which he had been asked to the Croft—quite the reverse. He, hardly concealed his scorn for the bad company he found himself in. Pon had told Gaddy that if Smithy did not go he—Pon—would go; and Gaddy shrugged his shoulders and left it to him. So the Bounder, after his visit to the hikers' camp, walked back to a row—which was not entirely unexpected on his side.

He lounged in. Pawson was in the room, hovering about, doubtless as a hint to the festive young gentlemen that it was time to retire at nearly one in the morning. Pawson had his own reasons for wanting them to retire for the night. Smithy gave the butler a covert, but very keen and curious glance. It seemed almost impossible to believe that that sleek, soft-footed, deferential man was the same he had heard unfolding a scheme of utter villainy under the dark beeches. Smithy wondered sardonically what Pon & Co. would have

(Continued on next page.)

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thought had they known what he knew. Not that he had any intention of telling them—yet! They would have laughed such a story to scorn. There was no proof—nothing but a talk overheard in the dark. The Bouncer's plans for that night were laid, as well as Pawson's, and he fancied that he was going to win.

Pawson took no heed of him. He hovered near Master Reginald, moving an ashtray and coughing deferentially. Gadsby yawned. He was sleepy, as the others were. He looked round rather uneasily as the Bouncer entered. He did not want a row under his father's roof. But he was too much under Pon's influence to have much of a will of his own.

"Here's that Greyfriars cad again!" said Ponsonby, very distinctly. Pon's manners, when he was vicious-tempered, were really shocking. And his temper now was utterly vicious. He wanted a quarrel, and he was determined to have one. And Smithy was not the fellow to be asked twice.

"Still worryin' over it, old bean?" he asked lightly. "What the thump did you expect? Did you fancy I was an innocent gull to be cheated at cards with my eyes open?"

Ponsonby leaped to his feet.

"What's that?" he panted.

Monson and Drury, forgetting bridge, exchanged a startled glance. The Bouncer, apparently, knew more than they had supposed. Gadsby and Vavasour, who were not in the secret, stared.

"What the dickens do you mean, Smithy?" exclaimed Gadsby hotly. "Are you accusin' anybody here of cheatin'?"

"Quite! Pon!" said the Bouncer coolly. "Monson and Drury had a hand in it. They left you out, Gaddy—rather a compliment to you!"

"You dare accuse me—" said Ponsonby thickly.

The Bouncer laughed contemptuously.

"Don't you remember the face at the window?" he asked mockingly. "That was a dodge to make you turn your back while I snaffled the winnin' hand you dealt yourself, and left you the one you'd dealt me to lose."

Ponsonby's face was white. He understood now what had puzzled and mystified him.

Gadsby stared from one to the other. "Pon! You couldn't—you wouldn't—under my father's roof," stammered Gadsby.

"It's a lie!" panted Ponsonby.

"It's true, and I fancy Gaddy knows it as well as I do! Look at his face!" said the Bouncer. "I've been doin' some arithmetic while I've been walkin' in the jolly old starlight, and worked out exactly how much I've won from you men. And here it is!"

Vernon-Smith drew a handful of money from the pocket of his dinner-jacket—silver and currency notes, and bank notes. It was a large sum. He crumpled it in his hand and flung it full into Ponsonby's face.

"Better shot than yours, Pon," he said, as the dandy of Highcliffe staggered back, with a gasping cry.

All the Highcliffians were on their feet now. Pawson stood aghast. Pon recovered himself, and with a howl of rage, hurled himself headlong at Vernon-Smith.

The Bouncer met him coolly, grimly, with left and right.

Pon's first fierce blow reached the Bouncer, marking his face. Then Smithy's knuckles came home, right and

left, and the dandy of Highcliffe went spinning.

He crashed into the bridge-table, and table, cards, and money, cigarettes and ashtrays, went whirling on the floor. Ponsonby dropped among the wreckage.

"You rotten ruffian!" roared Monson, and he leaped at the Bouncer, with Drury at his heels. Gadsby stood rooted to the floor, Vavasour staring in vacant astonishment.

The Bouncer laughed. His reckless, lawless nature enjoyed a shindy. The Highcliffians had started it, but he was only too willing to go on with it. Monson and Drury came at him together, and he handled them with masterly hands. They backed away from his vigorous onslaught.

"Back up, Gaddy!" yelled Monson, as he staggered under a drive that made his nose spurt red, for the second time.

"Stop it!" panted Gaddy. "There's a limit—chuck it, I tell you! I won't have it! Pawson, stop them!"

"Gentlemen—gentlemen!" cried Pawson.

Monson went down with a crash. The next moment Drury fell across him, under a drive that almost lifted him off his feet.

"Any more?" drawled the Bouncer.

"You dashed hooligan!" stuttered Gadsby. "I'm sorry I asked you here—get out! Get out of my house first thing in the mornin'! If it wasn't the middle of the night, by Jove, I'd kick you out now, Vernon-Smith."

"I shan't impose on your pressin' hospitality many hours longer, Gaddy!" said the Bouncer, laughing. "Good-night all, and merry dreams!"

He went to the door, and walked coolly out of the room. Ponsonby staggered to his feet. Monson and Drury sat up, panting.

"Kick him out!" hissed Ponsonby. "Middle of the night or not, kick him out! If you're afraid of him, call the servants."

"There's been enough dashed rowin'!" said Gadsby sourly. "It was your idea to ask him here, Pon—I never wanted him! Leave him alone!" "Gentlemen—" murmured Pawson. "Hold your tongue!" rapped Ponsonby savagely. "Look here, Gaddy I—"

"Oh, don't be a fool!" snapped Gaddy. "Do you want a battle royal in the middle of the night? The fellow's goin' in the mornin'. There's been more than enough of this, I can tell you!"

"Yes, better chuck it!" said Monson. "I rather wonder he hasn't called his chauffeur and his car, and gone. I'd have expected him to. But if he chooses to stick where he's not wanted, let him rip—till mornin'!"

And Pon, on second thoughts, gave a sulky assent. He was rather surprised himself that the Bouncer of Greyfriars had not walked out of the house on the spot. But Herbert Vernon-Smith had his own reasons for that. He had gone to his room, but not to bed.

THE SIXTEENTH CHAPTER.

Trapped!

SNORE!
That was the only sound that broke the silence of the shadowy paddock, where the hikers' camp lay.

Billy Bunter's snore rumbled from the tent, continuous, uninterrupted.

The fat junior's wild adventures that day had tired him—and Bunter was always good at sleeping, anyhow. He had not opened his eyes since turning

in, and now he was still going strong, and, for once, the chums of the Remove were glad to hear that unmelodious snore rumble on. For it gave an impression of slumber to anyone approaching the tent in the paddock, and made it less likely that the man they expected would take the alarm.

And they were very keen to "get" that man when he came. They had had plenty of time to get ready for him—and they were ready. Mauleverer and Frank Nugent were inside the tent, Bob Cherry lay under cover of a shadowy bush a few yards off, Johnny Bull was behind a tree near at hand, Hurree Jamset Ram Singh lay in a hollow of the grass, and Harry Wharton was in the blackness under the beeches at the end of the paddock—the way the rascal was fairly certain to come, if he came at all, as that was the direction from the house.

With all those precautions taken, and six keen fellows sharply on the watch, it was not likely that the squat man would escape. And they waited patiently, and watched like cats. And without cessation the snore of Bunter in the tent rumbled on, audible at quite a distance.

It was Wharton, in the beeches, who had the first hint of the rogue's coming. It was half-past one in the morning when he heard a rustling sound in the trees. He saw nothing, but he knew that someone had passed him in the darkness, going towards the paddock.

With his heart beating fast, he looked out of the trees, and glimpsed a slinking, stealthy, squat figure in the starlight. He knew it as that of the man with a cast in his eye, who had been with Pawson when the hikers first arrived. The slinking figure moved on towards the camp, and Wharton, watching, saw it darkly and dimly against the tent.

He smiled grimly. The man was at the tent—doubtless reassured by the snoring from within—and fairly in the trap!

Bates stood for some moments, listening, by the canvas. He heard no movement in the tent—nothing but Bunter's snore. Stooping at last, he groped under the canvas, feeling with cautious fingers for something within—a bag, a rucksack, anything in which the gold mohurs from the general's cabinet could be concealed, to be carried off unconsciously by the hikers when they broke camp.

And as he stooped, groping, Hurree Singh rose silently, and, with a spring like that of the tiger of his native land, leaped on his back.

One gasping, gurgling cry escaped Bates, as he was crushed to the grass under the weight of the Indian junior.

"Back upfully, my esteemed chums!" yelled Hurree Jamset Ram Singh.

But he did not need to call. Bob Cherry was on the spot in two bounds, and grasping the man who wriggled under the dusky nabob. Johnny Bull was a second later. Mauly and Nugent came bolting out of the tent, and Harry Wharton running from the beeches.

Bates, struggling wildly, grasped on all sides, had not the remotest chance of getting loose.

He had been fairly trapped, and caught like a rat—a human rat, as he was!

His arms and legs were grasped and held; and an arm round his neck half throttled him. Wriggling and gurgling, he stared in terror at the schoolboys—whom he had supposed to be fast asleep in their blankets, and who were only too plainly very wide awake!

"We've got the cur!" said Johnny



"I've worked out exactly how much I have won from you men," said Vernon-Smith. "And here it is!" The Bounder of Greyfriars drew a handful of money from his pocket and flung it full into Ponsonby's face. "Better shot than yours, Pon!" said Smithy, as the dandy of Highlife staggered back with a gasping cry.

Bull. "Got that cord, Franky? Tie it round his fins!"

"Here you are!"

"Oh, my eye!" gasped Bates. "Oh crimes! This is a fair cop!"

"Just a few!" grinned Bob Cherry.

"The fewfulness is terrifico, my esteemed sneak-thief!"

"Go easy, gents!" pleaded Bates. "I own up I was looking for something to pinch in the tent; but I ain't got nothing, and—"

"You own up to that, do you, you miserable rotter?" said Harry Wharton contemptuously. "Well, we happen to know better. You weren't trying to pinch from the tent, you cur, but to plant stolen goods there."

Bates gave a convulsive start. It had not occurred to him that the hikers knew his game. How they knew was a mystery to him.

"You crawling reptile," said Johnny Bull, "we know all about it! You've got the stolen goods on you, you rascal, and you're going to be handed over to the police with them in your pockets!"

"I—I ain't—"

"Oh, shut up!" said Wharton, in disgust. "No good telling lies when we know you've got General Gadsby's Indian goblet in your pocket, as well as some coins you were going to plant in our bags."

"Crimes!" gasped Bates. "How do you know?"

"A little bird told us!" chuckled Bob Cherry. "Keep your paws together, my man, while I tie them. If you wriggle again I shall tweak your nose—just like that—"

"Whooh!" gurgled Bates.

"The game's up, you worm!" said Nugent. "You're going to Aylesbury Police Station, and Pawson's going with you!"

"Crimes!" repeated Bates blankly. With his hands bound tightly behind his back, the squat man was jerked to his feet. Bob Cherry on one side, Johnny Bull on the other, held him fast. He was getting no chance to bolt. Like an unmusical accompaniment Billy Bunter's snore rumbled on from the tent.

"Are we going to search the brute?" asked Nugent.

Wharton shook his head. "That's for the police! We don't want to touch stolen stuff! Bring him along to the house!"

Leaving Bunter still snoring in the tent, the hikers marched the captured rascal across the paddock, through the beeches, and into the gardens of Gadsby Croft.

They followed the paths round to the front of the house. All the windows were dark, the house shut up and silent. They marched up the drive to the main entrance, and led the prisoner up to the door. Harry Wharton lifted the big brass knocker, and gave a thundering knock that echoed through Gadsby Croft from end to end.

Lord Mauleverer chuckled softly. "If Pawson opens the door, I rather fancy he will be surprised!" he remarked.

And the hikers chuckled, too. Wharton lifted the knocker again. Bang, bang!

Herbert Vernon-Smith, the Bounder of Greyfriars. Fully dressed, the Bounder was seated at his window, and in the starlight he watched the hikers coming up the drive, with their prisoner in their midst. And the Bounder grinned. He left his window and went to his door and out on to the landing, as the crash of the knocker awoke the echoes.

Other doors were opening, and lights flashing on. Surprised and startled voices were heard. Every occupant of the house was awake, startled by that crashing summons at the door at two in the morning. Looking over the banisters, the Bounder saw Pawson appear in the hall below. A footman had flashed on the light there, and in the electric light, Smithy saw the startled apprehension in the butler's sleek face.

Pawson certainly had not the remotest idea of what had happened—and of what was about to happen. But such a disturbance so soon after the robbery he had carried out with his confederate, could not fail to make him uneasy and apprehensive. With a grin on his face, Smithy ran along to Gadsby's room. He looked in, turned on the light, and found Gadsby half out of bed. Gadsby blinked at him.

"What's that thunderin' row?" he exclaimed.

"Somethin's up, I fancy!" drawled the Bounder. "You'd better come down, Gaddy! You'll be wanted."

"I'm comin'!" growled Gaddy; and he threw on a dressing-gown over his pyjamas, put his feet into slippers, and followed the Bounder down.

Servants were gathering in the hall below. Pawson was at the door now, but he seemed to hesitate to open it. A vague but chilling alarm was creeping

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THE SEVENTEENTH CHAPTER.

Startling!

BANG! The crash of the knocker boomed through the house. It awakened every sleeper within. There was one who was not sleeping—

over him. Gadsby, irritated and annoyed, snapped at the butler:

"Open the door, Pawson! Why the dooce don't you open it?"

"Very well, Master Reginald!" said Pawson, a husky note in his usual smooth and silky voice.

And the door was opened. Vernon-Smith moved a little forward, to keep near the butler. Smithy's eyes were not likely to leave Pawson—and his hands were ready!

As the door swung wide, the light shone out on a surprising group. Harry Wharton & Co. stood there, with the squat man in their grasp. Gadsby stared at them in angry astonishment.

"You!" he hooted. "You ruffianly rotters! How dare you kick up this row at my door at two in the mornin'! By gad, I'll have you turfed off the place!"

Pawson did not speak. He hardly looked at the Greymfriars fellows. His eyes, almost starting from their sockets, were fixed wildly on the squat man. His portly knees knocked together.

"Gadsby—" began Harry Wharton, stepping forward.

"Don't you dare to come in 'here!" roared Gadsby. "I'll have you run in for this!"

"You fool! There's been a robbery in your house, and we've got the thief!"

"Wha-a-at?"

"Gammon!" sneered Ponsonby.

"Tryin' to pull your leg, Gaddy!"

said Drury.

"Absolutely!"

"A—a robbery!" stammered Gadsby. "What do you mean, Wharton? There's been nothing that I know of. Have you heard anything, Pawson?"

Pawson did not speak. He could not. The ghastly pallor in his portly face drew many eyes on him, and some of the servants exchanged curious glances.

"Anybody know anything about it?" snapped Gadsby, staring round.

"I do!" drawled Vernon-Smith.

"You? What the dooce—"

"Look in your father's study, Gaddy! I fancy you'll find the cabinet broken open, and the Agra goblet and some gold coins gone."

Gadsby jumped.

"Look in the study, Pawson!" he gasped.

Pawson did not stir. He was rooted to the polished floor.

But Gadsby, without waiting for an answer, ran along to the room mentioned, entered and flashed on the light. A few seconds later he dashed out again, his face white as chalk.

"It's gone!" he stuttered.

"Gone?" repeated Ponsonby.

"The window's open—the cabinet smashed—the Agra goblet gone! Oh gad, the pater will be wild about this! It's worth three thousand!" gasped Gadsby.

"Don't worry, old bean," said the Bouncer, "that johnny has got it on him."

"How do you know?" sneered Ponsonby.

"Because, while I was strollin' in your elegant grounds, Gaddy, I heard him fixin' it up with Pawson. That's why I stayed on, after you were so jolly polite—to see it through," drawled Smithy.

"Pawson?"

"Yes; the butler's at the bottom of it. Ain't you, Pawson?" said Smithy, with an agreeable smile to the butler of Gadsby Croft.

Pawson's portly knees sagged.

"If the man's got it on him, we can jolly soon see! I don't believe a word of it, for one!" sneered Ponsonby.

"Seein' is believin', dear man!" said

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Lord Mauleverer. "Turp out his pockets, some of you! I'd rather not touch him. But you Highcliffe men ain't very particular what you touch, are you?"

"Pawson?" repeated Gadsby, like a fellow in a dream.

"Yes, Pawson!" came in bitter, venomous tones from Bates. "The game's up, and you got me with the stuff on me. But I ain't going to the stone jug alone—not me! Pawson got me into this, and he can come along with me!"

"Search him!" muttered Gadsby. "Here, John—Albert, take hold of that brute and turn out his pockets!"

The two footmen grasped the bound rascal. From an inner pocket of his shabby coat two Indian gold coins were turned out, glimmering in the light. From another pocket a curiously wrought golden goblet, gleaming with a circle of rubies, was drawn.

Gadsby panted:

"That's it—that—"

"What price that?" grinned Bob Cherry. "Don't you feel rather pleased that we camped in your paddock, Gaddy?"

"The pleasuredness ought to be terrific, my esteemed and ridiculous Gaddy!" remarked the Nabob of Bhanipur.

Gaddy took the Agra goblet in a shaking hand. Pon & Co. were silent now. They could not disbelieve the evidence of their eyes. And Pon, too, was startled to his very soul by what the captured rascal had told him. Even Pon was beginning to feel glad that the Greymfriars hikers had been on the spot.

Pawson, leaning against the open door, was trying to pull himself together. He was a man of cold-hearted cunning, not of courage nor determination. But he was desperate now, as his wretched scheming fell like a house of cards round him, and he saw in prospect the prison gates opening. All eyes—but one pair—were fixed on the golden, ruby-studded goblet in Gaddy's hand, and Pawson, with a sudden movement, made a bound for the open doorway. Hatless, half-dressed, as he was, flight was his only resource—and it could not be too swift!

And that desperate leap would have carried him through the doorway, and given him at least a chance of escape, but for the watchful Bouncer. But the Bouncer was close at hand, watching him in readiness for that very act.

As Pawson leaped, the Bouncer leaped. His fist, clenched like iron, caught Pawson under the ear.

The impetus of his leap carried the butler through the doorway—but he went headlong, under the Bouncer's blow, and rolled helplessly on the stone steps without.

"Look out!" yelled Bob Cherry.

"Collar him!"

Pawson had no time to get on his feet. The hikers rushed at him and grasped him, two or three servants adding their grasp, and some of the Highcliffians. In many hands, Pawson was dragged back into the lighted hall.

If a doubt had lingered in Gadsby's mind it could hardly linger now. Still with the golden goblet in his hand, he glared at the panting butler.

"You villain!" he said. "You rotter! You—"

"Stick him in a room, lock him up, and telephone for the police," said Monson.

"Yes, rather! Gad, and that's the man my father trusted!" muttered Gadsby.

Pawson panted.

"Master Reginald—"

"Don't speak to me, you cur!"

"Let me go—"

"Stick him in the wine-cellar, and turn the key," said Gadsby, "and the other brute along with him! By gad, he makes me sick!"

"And who are you?" snarled Pawson.

"A gambling young scoundrel, like all your friends here. A set of disgraceful young blackguards—"

"Shut him up!" said Ponsonby.

And the Highcliffe fellows bundled Pawson down to the cellar, and Bates after him, to be locked in there till the police came for them.

The hikers were going, when Gadsby called to them.

"Hold on, you Greymfriars men." Gaddy coloured awkwardly.

"I say, you'll be wanted to give evidence about this—you'd better not clear in the morning. I'm no end obliged to you for getting my father's property back—and you're more than welcome to camp here as long as you like."

"Right-ho!" said Harry Wharton.

"Room for one more in your tent?" asked the Bouncer.

"Eh? What?" Wharton looked at him. "Do you mean—"

"My friends here are tired of me," said the Bouncer gravely. "Not so tired as I am of them. I've never been so fed-up in my life! If you can make room for a fellow—"

"You can stay if you like, Smithy," said Gadsby sulkily.

"I don't like!" answered the Bouncer. "If you fellows don't want me, I'll call my chauffeur, and go in the car. But if you're keen on improvin' society, I'll hike with you to the end of the hois."

"More than welcome," said Harry. "You've done us a jolly good turn to-night, Smithy—and, anyway, we'd be glad to have you."

"Hear, hear!"

"The gladfulness will be terrific!"

"Done, then!" said Vernon-Smith, and he left the house with the hikers, and packed into the tent with them for the remainder of the night. And Billy Bunter, snoring on undisturbed till morning, fairly jumped when, at last, he awakened, and found the Bouncer there.

Harry Wharton & Co. did not march so soon as they had intended. They were wanted in connection with the robbery at Gadsby Croft, as the fellows who had caught the thief with the "goods" on him. But they found it quite agreeable at the camp in the paddock.

Gaddy made it a point to be very civil, and Pon & Co. carefully kept their distance—Gaddy telling them very plainly that there was to be no more trouble while the hikers remained.

When the hike was resumed at last, the Bouncer went with the hikers—and anyone who had seen Smithy marching with the chums of the Remove, burned brown by the sun, a chery schoolboy enjoying life, would hardly have recognised him as the young scapegrace who had been "playing the goat" with Pon & Co. at Gadsby Croft. The only thing Smithy regretted was that the holidays were so near the end, and that he hadn't hiked sooner.

But everything comes to an end—holidays and hikes—and, after all, as Bob Cherry pointed out, there was the football, when they got back to Greymfriars.

THE END.

(Billy Bunter and the chums of Greymfriars meet with heaps more exciting adventures next week in "THE SECRET OF THE HOLIDAY ANNUAL!" Be sure and read this topping yarn, chums; you'll enjoy every line of it.)

AN AMAZING YARN OF THRILLING ADVENTURE IN THE AFRICAN JUNGLE!

UMZUGAAN THE MIGHTY!

By
ROLAND HUNTER.

Umzugaan, a mighty man of valour, has sworn that within six moons he will avenge the death of his father, Umzugaan the Elder, whose death has been brought about by the evil powers of Masasi, the witch-doctor. BUT THE FIRST MOON HAS PASSED WITHOUT SUCCESS!

The White Prospector I

THE day was drawing towards evening, and here and there the thickets of the African forest were beginning to reveal signs of the teeming life they concealed, although, for the most part, the deathly stillness of the tropical noon still hung over the steaming swamps.

Umzugaan, the young Zulu, trudged steadily along the half-overgrown trail, following the faint tracks of Masasi, the devil-man, and the huge black lion that walked by his side. The stirring of life in the thickets did not disturb him, but suddenly he heard other sounds.

There was a savage snarling and the cracking of boughs and twigs as some wild cat pounced on its prey. Umzugaan waited for the shrill scream of a bush deer, or the screech of a terrified monkey. It never came. Instead, a human voice aroused the echoes with a cry of mingled rage and pain.

"Help! You—brute!"

There was the sound of a shot, but the bullet tore its way through the treetops overhead. Then came the pandemonium of battle as man and beast floundered wildly on the ground.

Umzugaan grasped his spears and ran forward, forcing his way through the entangling creepers until he came out into a small clearing, where he halted, nostrils quivering, brows drawn down over his flashing eyes.

He saw before him a white man lying crushed and mauled under the paws of a huge lion. The brute raised its shaggy head, glared at the intruder, and drew back its slaving jaws in a snarl of anger.

Umzugaan knew the animal was too close for him to use his throwing spear. He dropped that weapon and gripped a short stabbing spear. There was apprehension in his heart, for this was no ordinary lion. It was the black lion—the grim pet and companion of Masasi, the witch-doctor.

This same black lion had killed Umzugaan's father, and for that reason young Umzugaan had sworn to kill the brute and its master, Masasi, together with all who plotted the death of Umzugaan the Elder, the headman of the Kledorp Kraal.

As young Umzugaan was not yet of the warrior class, and not yet entitled to wear the ring of rhinoceros hair on his head, he could not come and go as he pleased. But because of his vow of vengeance he had been granted leave of absence from the huts for six moons. One moon had already passed, and Masasi and the black lion were still alive.

It was a desperate venture for young Umzugaan, and it was more than likely that the wily witch-doctor would kill him, or have him killed, before he could accomplish his object. But here was the black lion before him, and no sign of Masasi.



Both the lion and the stricken white man were watching him. Umzugaan stood like a black statue, the stabbing spear held ready for the stroke. Then slowly he advanced, his eyes focused on the eyes of the lion.

In a flash the black lion leapt from its victim. It was what Umzugaan wanted—to get the brute off the white man. And in that moment Umzugaan charged forward. The lion was taken unawares, and it rose up on its haunches, striking out savagely with its huge fore paws.

Umzugaan's spear pierced the breast of the huge animal, but not deeply. One paw came down with terrific force, and the haft of the weapon was snapped in twain like a rotten carrot. The force bowled Umzugaan over on his side, and as he rolled there on the ground the lion pounced on him.

By that time the Zulu had whipped out his knife from the belt of his kaross. But it was a puny weapon to use against an enormous wild beast. One huge paw was already planted on Umzugaan's shoulder, and the hot, slaving muzzle of the lion was close to the Zulu's face.

Umzugaan struck frantically, and the knife was buried to the hilt in the lion's breast. But again he missed the vital spot, being handicapped by the way he was pinned to the ground.

The lion set back its head and roared wildly. Umzugaan knew what that meant. It was the challenge of the hunter who has made the kill. The next stroke of those fore paws would mean death for Umzugaan, and he knew it.

But the white man, half dead though he was, had not been idle. He had rolled over and over until he reached his scanty belongings, and with one feeble hand he reached out towards a strange box, adorned with strange switches and knobs. He touched one.

There was a click, a roaring, and then a voice sounded in the clearing.

"Hallo, everybody! Cape Town calling!"

The lion leapt round with a snarl, its tail swaying to and fro. Umzugaan saw the white man lying there, having collapsed from loss of blood. Yet the voice still went on and on, stopped for a moment, to be followed a second later by the crash of a brass band.

The lion's tail suddenly drooped. Then from far away sounded a whistle that brought Umzugaan to his feet. He dived for his throwing spear. Before his hand reached the weapon, however, the lion had bounded away into the thickets and was lost to view.

The young Zulu turned to follow, but sank to his knees. He was weak and dizzy. By the time he recovered, the lion was far away, and it was hopeless to follow. Either the strange voice in the box, or the crashing music, had scared him. And the whistle with which Masasi always recalled his grim pet to his side had sounded in time to save Umzugaan.

The Zulu went over to the white man and raised his head. Then he heard the faint whisper:

"Water!"

Umzugaan gazed about him. There was no water for miles, as far as he knew. The white man's flask was already empty, and the black on his lips and the yellow of his eyes told that he had been in the grip of black water fever before the black lion had come upon him. His days—his moments—were already numbered.

Umzugaan, however, knew more of the wild than the white man. He went to the trees and cut a length from the stem of a thick creeper as thick round as his arm. It was notched like bamboo, and he cut it in two places, each below a

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joint, so that it formed a long gourd. The interior of the stem was hollow and filled with sweet, luscious sap. He took it, held it to the white man's lips, so that he drank.

It was the wisdom of the wild. To drink from the pools in the forest meant fever and death. The sap of the creeper was pure.

The white man opened his eyes and gazed up at Umzugaan.

"A Zulu!" he murmured weakly. "Nearly two hundred miles from your own country. But—hold me up—I'm dying. You risked your life for me—only—too late! I—I'm dying!"

"Thy voice, which is in the box, saved me from the black lion of Masasi, Baas," said Umzugaan. "The lion was too close to me. Could I have used the throwing-spear first, then charged, he would not have struck me down. But for thy voice, I, even Umzugaan the Mighty, would be dead!"

There was a faint smile on the face of the dying man. He managed to reach out one feeble, shaking hand, and switched off the wireless set.

"Not—not my voice," he said, almost in a whisper. "Not—not that you'd understand. I came—out here—exploring—prospecting. I shall leave my bones here. Bury me—that's all I ask. And when I'm gone, all—all my things, here—you take them. They're yours—because—because—Hold me! I—"

With one last effort the dying man half-rose to a sitting position, then his head slumped forward on his chest. He was dead.

"So be it!" said Umzugaan gravely, gently lowering the dead man's head to the grass. "When the spirits call we must go!"

He dug a deep hole with his spear and reverently buried the white man, who would never return home.

After attending to his own hurts, Umzugaan examined the white man's goods. He found guns, revolver, ammunition. But he had no need for these. He preferred his spears, one of which was now useless, for the lion

had broken it. The Zulu also found tinned foods. At least, he found the tins, and cast them away. There was food enough for him in the forest. All he took was a clasp-knife, a hatchet, and a blanket, to keep the dews of night from his naked body when he slept. He was about to follow the trail of the black lion again when he remembered the strange box.

Kneeling before it, he fingered the knob he had seen the white man touch. It turned, and at once came the roar of the music, to be followed by a moment's silence, followed yet again by a man's voice. He spoke English, which Umzugaan only understood when spoken very slowly and carefully.

The Zulu's eyes rolled, and he bowed his head.

"It is magic!" he said. "The magic that turned the lion away from me when I was helpless. Behold, I will take the box which speaks and sings! Masasi, the witch-doctor, fights with magic. So shall Umzugaan the Mighty!"

Binding the box with tough creepers to his broad back, Umzugaan left the clearing on the trail of Masasi and the black lion.

The Magic Fluid!

THE sun was sinking in the west, and it would soon be dusk, when the forest became alive with hungry beasts, hunting for food. But that fact would not have stayed Umzugaan on his trail of vengeance. He halted in the next clearing and pitched his rough camp, rather faint from loss of blood, and the wounds left by the lion's claws were paining him.

It would not be wise to face Masasi and the black lion in that enfeebled condition.

The sun sank lower and lower. It would not be long before it plunged below the skyline and left the forest in utter darkness. Umzugaan was uneasy, and kept sniffing the air. He

could smell lion—for his sense of smell was as keen as that of a dog. He could also smell man; and what man would be mingling his scent with that of a lion, save Masasi, the devil man?

Suddenly he heard a scuffle in the thickets opposite him, and he sat there, waiting, quivering with suspense, one hand resting on the haft of his throwing-spear, the other on the white man's clasp-knife.

Then the bushes parted, and the shaggy head of the black lion appeared; its fangs bared as it growled menacingly. The next moment Masasi, the witch-doctor, stepped out of the shadow, naked, except for a loin cloth and a girdle of monkeys' tails, his body smeared with soot and ochre, with two white rings around his beady eyes, to show all men that he could kill or bewitch with a glance.

Umzugaan said not a word, but remained where he was, half-sitting, half-crouching, waiting for what was to happen.

Masasi spoke, in the Zulu tongue, with a strange, shrill voice.

"Art thou in love with death, O Umzugaan, the son of Umzugaan," he said, "that thou walkest on the trail of a witch-doctor?"

Umzugaan did not move, nor was there any fear in his steady eyes.

"I am ready," he said. "Raise thy hand, O Masasi! Where is thy magic, that thou must fight with lions to aid thee? I spit at thee, devil man! For I have magic greater than thine. Raise thy hand, O Masasi, and harken to the magic that fights for me!"

Masasi scowled darkly. If he lost his reputation as a worker of magic a thousand natives would be ready to kill him, for he ruled and lived by fear, and no man loved him.

"So be it!" he said hoarsely. "Thou must die! I raise my hand!"

He lifted his skinny hand from the lion's mane, and in that second the black brute leapt forward a couple of yards and pounced for the spring. Umzugaan's hand moved to the strange box and turned the knob. The Zulu expected to hear a voice and the crashing of music; but instead, he heard a new sound—a woman singing.

The music floated through the dim aisles of the forest, rising and falling. Masasi quivered and trembled. He had never heard anything like it before. The lion was nervous and undecided, and its tail drooped to the ground and its head turned this way and that, as if seeking the cause of the strange noises.

The singing ended at last, however, and there was a sudden silence. Masasi uncovered his ears and rose to his feet. The lion looked around the clearing with renewed courage, and Umzugaan was apprehensive.

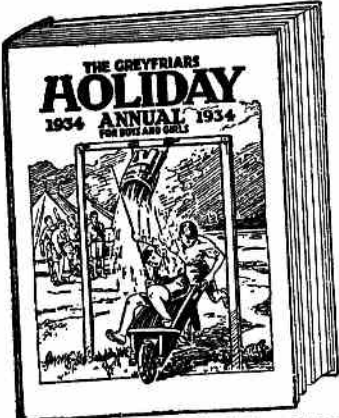
"Thy magic has ceased!" snored Masasi. "Now shalt thou taste the magic of the black lion!"

As he spoke he struck the lion sharply on the flanks, and the brute crouched again for the spring.

Umzugaan touched a knob, thinking he had to do that to ask aid of the saving voice in the strange box. But he touched the wrong knob, and only increased the volume, until the set oscillated violently.

There was a grating moan and a piercing shriek, so utterly unexpected that even Umzugaan started to his feet, spear in hand. Scared by the shriek, however, the lion turned and charged madly through the thickets.

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For a moment Masasi stood irresolute, aghast at the sight of his grim pet.

Accordingly Umzugaan sprang forward, knife in hand.

"Umzugaan, the son of Umzugaan!" he cried, yelling his battle challenge.

But Masasi snatched a small gourd from his belt and waved it before him. A fine powder struck Umzugaan's face and entered his eyes, smarting and bringing tears, so thick and fast that he could scarcely see. He managed, however, to grab the kilt of monkeys' tails as Masasi turned to run, and hung on like grim death, hoping the pain in his eyes would cease.

Masasi was no fighter. He left that to his black lion. He cut the thong of the kilt, and it came away sharply in Umzugaan's hand—so sharply, in fact, that the young Zulu recoiled backwards, tripped over a tree-root, and fell heavily on his back.

Water was still streaming from his eyes, which pained him terribly. But he saw that Masasi had halted, and had another gourd in his hand. He was spilling something on the grass, and there was a pungent smell in the air.

Umzugaan arose and charged forward, despite the fact that the powder had half-blinded him. Masasi turned and ran for his life. The young Zulu made to follow, then halted. The grass was stinging his bare feet, and he could not understand it. This was the magic that had made the reputation of Masasi.

That moment's hesitation was his undoing, for Masasi noticed it. Pausing long enough to pick up a stone, the witch-doctor hurled it with all his might.

The stone crashed on Umzugaan's temple, and the young Zulu sank slowly, his knees crumpling under him as his senses momentarily left him.

Masasi could have returned and driven a knife into the Zulu's heart, but he didn't. He ran from the spot, madly, frantically, whistling for his black lion to join him.

When, three minutes later, Umzugaan came to himself, neither Masasi, nor his black lion were in sight or hearing. But far away was heard the baying of hyenas, and the air of the clearing was heavy with a cloying scent entirely new to Umzugaan.

Umzugaan examined his feet. He had half-expected them to be so badly burnt as to make walking impossible. But they weren't injured. They were simply saturated with the cloying liquid, and reeking with a sickly stench.

But the baying of the hyenas was coming nearer and nearer, and dimly Umzugaan began to understand. The scent of the magic fluid Masasi had flung down was attracting a pack of ravenous hyenas.

That was why Masasi had fled instead of remaining to slay. This cloying scent would be picked up by all the hyenas for miles around, and they would follow it to the ends of the earth, unless it could be crossed by water.

The only thing to do was to rid himself from the magic, evil-smelling fluid which Masasi had scattered, before the hyenas came.

A Narrow Escape!

UMZUGAAN was still a trifle weak from his hurts, but he struck camp there and then, lashing the magic box to his back after he had silenced it, without quite knowing how he did it.

Then he set out for the river.

He leapt the grass where the magic fluid still lay, knowing that every foot-

step left a trail of scent for the howling pack of hyenas to follow.

Already they were crashing through the thickets. He could hear them, and at times, on either side of the trail, he caught glimpses of their ugly, skulking forms, flitting from bush to bush, too cowardly to attack singly, waiting for the whole pack to come up with the quarry.

Umzugaan increased his pace, weak though he was from loss of blood. His knife and spear were always ready, but he knew he could never hope to fight the whole pack.

He reached the verge of the forest, and came out on sloping ground covered with prickly scrub in dense clumps. But the sun plunged below the trees, and there came darkness. He had to trust to scent alone then to guide him to the river.

Still suffering from the effects of the powder Masasi had flung in his face, he blundered badly several times in the thorn thickets, until he almost stumbled on a skulking hyena.

The hump-shouldered brute sprang, with a snarl; but Umzugaan drove his spear home to the animal's heart, and withdrew it again. The scent of blood went up, and a dozen of the pack came out of the darkness as the moon slowly rose in the east.

Umzugaan set his back against a tree and fought wildly, too busy to touch the knob of the magic box on his back.

With knife and spear he fought until half a dozen hyenas fell dead around him, and their companions fell on the

helpless carcasses, tearing them to bits. Taking advantage of the fact, Umzugaan left them to their ghastly meal, knowing they would not follow until it had ended, and ran frantically down the slope. The moon slid out from behind a low bank of clouds and glittered on the river.

He reached the brink, with a big hyena snapping at his heels. He swung around, and with one blow of his spear transfixed the hump-shouldered hyena, then plunged into the river.

There was no need to swim, as the stream was comparatively shallow. The magic box was still on Umzugaan's back, and, although he did not know it, water would have destroyed the magic. But the water only rose to his waist as he waded across. The hyenas might have followed, but they paused on the brink.

As Umzugaan crawled up the shelving bank on the opposite side of the river, a dozen men came from the shadows—tall, sturdy, naked savages. A club crashed on his head, and he slumped down unconscious, while Masasi, the devil man, thrust his way through the warriors and gloated over his fallen foe.

"What of thy magic now, O Umzugaan?" he cried shrilly.

The box was taken from Umzugaan's back, and a warrior staggered up to the village with it, while half a dozen others carried the unconscious form of the Zulu, now tied hand and foot.

Masasi had fled to this village with
(Continued on next page.)

"COME INTO THE OFFICE, BOYS!"

Always glad to hear from you, chums, so drop me a line to the following address: The Editor, The "Magnet" Library, The Amalgamated Press, Ltd., The Fleetway House, Farringdon Street, London, E.C.4. A stamped, addressed envelope will ensure a reply.

I'VE told you a few "things you'd hardly believe" in these chats of mine, but here is something that wants a bit of swallowing—literally! One of my Leicester readers has heard about

PEOPLE WHO EAT SNAKES

—and rattlesnakes at that! He wants to know if it is true. Certainly it is, and some people look upon rattlesnakes as a great delicacy. In fact, in America, it is possible to purchase "Tinned Rattlesnake." A firm in Florida makes quite a speciality of it. But anyone who buys tinned snake, expecting it to look something like an elongated sausage or an eel, will be disappointed, and will actually find a rich pinky-yellow substance which gives no indication of the reptile as it was before being canned.

Space being limited this week I've only room now for a few

RAPID-FIRE REPLIES.

Is Dick Russell or Harry Wharton the second-best boxer in the Remove? (John Daykin. No address given). There's not much to choose between them. You can't classify a boxer, and expect him to "stay put." Dick might win one match, and then be outfought in another by Harry. The same applies to your query about the best swimmer and batsman. There wouldn't be much sport in a school if everyone knew who was going to be the

winner before any particular contest started.

What is Greek Fire? (F. G., of Hounslow). A secret compound, supposed to have consisted of naphtha, sulphur and nitre. It was often used in mediæval warfare, and was squirted through long copper tubes, in the same manner as the flammenwerfer was used by the Germans in the Great War.

What is a "Sea-Needle"? (Jack Haynes, of Brighton). A long, slender fish of about two to three feet in length, which is found round our coasts in summer. It has a very long sharp snout, and is also known as the Garfish or Sea-Pike.

How far can a Flying-Fish Fly? (H. K., of Sunderland). Actually a flying-fish glides, it does not fly. It gets its initial velocity by a rush through the water, and can pass through the air for a considerable distance—sometimes as much as 200 yards.

So far, so good! Now I must tell you what is in store for you next week.

"THE SECRET OF THE HOLIDAY ANNUAL!"

By Frank Richards,

is certainly one of the best school yarns featuring the chums of Greyfriars you have ever had the opportunity of reading. Don't ask me—as many readers do—how it is that Frank Richards manages to turn out such tip-top yarns week after week. He just does, and that's that!

You'll be thrilled, too, by next week's amazing adventure yarn of Umzugaan the Mighty. Then there'll be another "Greyfriars Herald," and also answers to several readers' queries which I have had to hold over this week.

By the way, you haven't forgotten that the "Greyfriars Holiday Annual" and the "Popular Book of Boys' Stories" are now on sale, have you? I thought not! If you haven't reserved your copy at your newsagents yet—well, jump to it! They're going like hot cakes!

YOUR EDITOR.

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his lion, having crossed the river to escape the hyenas which he knew would follow the scent of his magic fluid. He had heard the baying pack, and had waited to see what would happen, skulking by the river bank with the Kikuyu warriors, who were too afraid of his magic powers not to do his bidding. He had seen that Umzugaan had escaped the hyenas, and had made sure that he would not escape the Kikuyus. And, what was more, he meant to make sure that this time Umzugaan should die, for Masasi realised that he was not safe while Umzugaan lived.

But to kill a man while he lay senseless was not Masasi's way. He wanted Umzugaan to know that he had failed. He wanted to torment and jeer at his beaten enemy, so he waited for Umzugaan to recover his senses.

Half an hour later Umzugaan came to himself, to find that he was lashed to a post in the centre of a village. The warriors were dancing about him, the drums were throbbing, and Masasi was squatting on his haunches with the magic box beside him, an evil, looting grin on his face.

At length he rose to his feet, whipped a knife from his belt, and walked up to where Umzugaan was lashed to the post. He flourished the knife threateningly.

"It will be so easy, O Umzugaan," he said. "It will be done soon. Then thou wilt not trouble me again. Thy magic cannot help thee now!"

Umzugaan looked Masasi full in the eyes without flinching.

"My magic is greater than thine, O Masasi!" he retorted. "Turn the knob, O Man of Evil, and the spirits within the box will curse thee. But thy courage faileth thee. For all thy magical powers, thou dare not touch the magic box."

Every one of the Kikuyu warriors heard what Umzugaan said, and they waited with bated breath to see what would happen, while Masasi danced and screeched with rage. He was afraid of the magic he could not understand. But he dared not refuse the challenge to touch it. If he did, he would lose his power and influence over the Kikuyus.

"How can a spirit in a box curse me?" he cried, furious with rage. "I will let it out and see what sort of spirit it is."

He grasped a spear, raised it aloft, and then brought it down with terrific force on the box. The set crumpled, wires and valves fell out on the ground, and there was silence.

"I have slain the spirit of Umzugaan!" cried Masasi, in triumph.

"And I will slay thee in return!" roared Umzugaan; and, with a terrific wrench, he snapped the cords that hold him to the post, and dashed forward.

Masasi retreated hastily, calling on the Kikuyus to protect him. Immediately Umzugaan picked up a valve that lay on the ground. He didn't know what it was, and he didn't care.

"Here is my magic—the magic of strength and courage!" he shouted, hurling the valve at Masasi.

The missile hit the hard ground at Masasi's feet. It exploded with a loud report and seemed to vanish from sight, while the splintered glass stung the witch-doctor's bare legs and sent him howling in retreat, while the Kikuyus covered their eyes with their hands and set up a whining chant to protect their village from evil.

Umzugaan knew he could not slay Masasi in the village of the Kikuyus and escape with his own life, but if he got away now he might catch Masasi alone later on. He took one look round, snatched spears from the nearest trembling warrior, and then ran through the open gateway of the stockade and away towards the dense forest to the north, where he found refuge for the night.

The following day, Umzugaan picked up the trail of Masasi again, where he had left the Kikuyu village with his lion. Two moons had come and gone, and now Umzugaan had but four moons in which to accomplish his object, and he set out with renewed vigour, more convinced than ever that his strength and courage could defeat the magic of Masasi.

THE END.

(Don't miss next week's yarn telling of the further thrilling and amazing adventures of Umzugaan the Mighty. You'll find it in next Saturday's MAGNET.)

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A Perfect Reproduction of a Full-size Table. Leather-covered Pockets, Rubber Cushions, Adjustable Rubber-covered Feet to ensure a Perfect Level Surface. Complete with Two Cues, Three Turned, Hally guaranteed Unbreakable Mahogany-finished Marking Board, Spinal Levers, Rules, and Chalk. Send for Complete List.

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INCREASED my own height to 6ft. 3ins.!! T. H., age 16, 10 1/2 to 6ft. T. P., age 21, from 5ft. 5 to 6ft. 10 1/2. J. P., age 20, 5ins. in 18 days! A. G., age 19, 5ins. in 6 weeks!

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PLAYGOERS' SUPPLIES

Now that the theatrical season is here again, playgoers are requested to note that Uncle Skinner has renewed his supplies of playgoing equipment. Smart evening dresses for hire at cut rates. Ample stocks of ripe tomatoes, eggs (guaranteed afloat) and banana skins always available. Lowest prices!—UNCLE SKINNER, Study No. 11, Remove.



DRESS REFORMER SHOCKS SCHOOL!

Smith Minor in Limelight

Smith minor has always been one of those fellows who are born to blush unseem and waste their fragrance on the desert air. Smith minor has always shunned the glare of publicity. Smith minor has never had a taste for the bizarre, the eccentric or the unorthodox.

But last term Smith minor unexpectedly soared with meteoric speed into the ranks of the people who are talked about!

What he did to reach his dizzy eminence may not sound very exciting to the uninitiated. But we of Greyfriars feel that it was an act of heroism which demands that we inscribe his name on the scroll of fame in letters of burning gold—or words to that effect!

On the Thursday afternoon before the hols, the Remove indulged in one of those orgies of ostentation known as a Form Walk. Now a Form walk, as everybody ought to know, demands the full ceremonial kit of starched linen collar, well-brushed topser and spotters fingers, SLITHE MINOR NO HAT, AN OPEN-NECKED SHIRT, AND HIKING BOOTS!

Strong men blanched and fellows who knew not the meaning of fear knooed at the knees at that amazing sight.

When Mr. Quelch came on the scene, his face twisted up in a kind of spasms and his eyes closed to shut out the horrifying spectacle.

BLINDFOLD FOOTER MATCH Sensational New Star Arrives

In order to raise a collection for the Countess Cottage Hospital, the Fifth played the Shell last season in a match which is without parallel in Greyfriars records. Both sides were blindfold throughout the match!

As a display of footer prowess, this unusual match had not been expected to produce anything in the way of new talent. But it's the unexpected that always happens. Right from the kick-off, as a matter of fact, it was obvious that a new star had appeared in the footer firmament. And the name of the new star was Horace Coker!

As is well-known, the only success that has so far attended Coker on Big Side is a reputation as a mirth-maker. Spectators have been known to collapse in the worst stages of hysterics after watching Coker play footer for five minutes, and it was probably for this reason that Bindwell included him in his team for the blindfold match.

But the amazing sequel was that Coker played brilliantly throughout the match. Coker has always complained that ordinary methods of play are not suited to his particular style and now we appreciate what he means—his style needs handkerchiefs round the eyes of all the players!

Coker has never previously been known to possess a sense of direction. His speciality, in fact, has usually been kicking the ball into his own goal. Deprived of the use of his organs of vision, however, Coker showed that his sense of direction was marvellous! In the first half he kicked three goals for the Fifth, and in the second half four! Can you beat it!

The Fifth won by 9-3, so it's pretty obvious that Coker's efforts did the trick. He's since demanded a permanent place in the regular Fifth Eleven and Bindwell feels inclined to try him out against the Highlife Second Eleven. We're willing to wager ten to one in doughnuts that any goal he scores in the Highlife match will be against his own side!

"The Transformation Was Amazing!" SEZ FISHER

Autumn days are slack days, my masters, a geological museum is a giddy life of industry compared with the Remove passage on an "off" day. Can it be that something is missing from the lives of these fellows who ought to display the animation of electric cells and only succeed in displaying the anti-motion of a wet rag or a damp squib? Well, it's possible, isn't it? Let's tell you a little story.

After morning school on the first Tuesday of term last autumn the Remove passage was a manoeuvre. Wharton and Nugent lolled outside Sturdy No. 1, looking like a couple of moulting owls. Vernon-Smith hardly raised his jaundiced face from the ground, as he ploughed his weary way to his study. Bolsover and Dupont were the epitome of listless ness, as they leaned over the banisters. Bunter looked like a drying frog. Hurras Singh looked like a blot on the landscape. Hazleford and Squiff and Bunter looked like a group of futuristic statues as they whispered haphazardly and hopelessly to each other in a corner.

But ten minutes later—boy, what a difference! Wharton and Nugent were chattering and exclaiming like a couple of wild monkeys. Vernon-Smith, bright of eye and mischievous of countenance, was marching along with firm youthful step and head held high. Bolsover and Dupont were sliding down the banisters with the joyous abandon of children.

Bunter looked like a baby young elephant. Inky looked like a professional step-dancer, having a haman's holiday. Hazleford and Squiff and Bunter looked like a couple of fellows who had just won a wind-up ticket in the Vernon-Smith lottery. In this all true? you ask.

Well, Fisher T. Rid seemed to be a little wiser. He had recently bought a somewhat artificial smacking apparatus, and you see, and this was the first time he had used it. He was a fair and reasonable description of the amazing transformation his group of futuristic statues had undergone. Perhaps Fisher's hypothesis is not!

AS OTHERS SEE THEM What I Think of William Stott By David Morgan

What do I think of him, indeed! Well, he is not the kind of fellow that earns the admiration of a genuine Welshman, look you! Stott might possibly be all right if it were not for his leader, it were not for his leader, Skimmer. Stott might possibly be all right if it were not for his other pal, Snoop. But more probably Stott would still be all wrong, anyway!

Stott was the general question, as Lonzy halted at last by the sea waves.

"I fail to comprehend, my good fellows," said Lonzy.

"Why the Madame Pavlova stuff, old bean?" asked Skimmer. "Bit early to start Christmas as a fairy in Wibley's Christmas pantomime, isn't it?"

"Ah!" beamed Lonzy. "Now I understand. You are wondering why I was effectuating rhythmic movements in the course of my pedestrian activities. Well, my dear fellows, that is easily explained. I am acting under doctor's orders!"

"You're what?"

"I am doing it on the instructions of a medical consultant."

"Mean to say any doctor has been idiot enough to order you to do a dancing turn all the way to Pegg? Howled Ogilvy."

"The after-effects of my recent bad cold, my dear Ogilvy!" was Lonzy's bland retort. "Dr. Pillsbury told me that it would be in my best interests to have a trip to Pegg every half-holiday. So I have taken him at his word and tripped all the way!"

Gentlemen, claps and fellows, there's no getting away from the fact that Lonzy Todd is absolutely unique!



ARE YOU A HE-MAN?

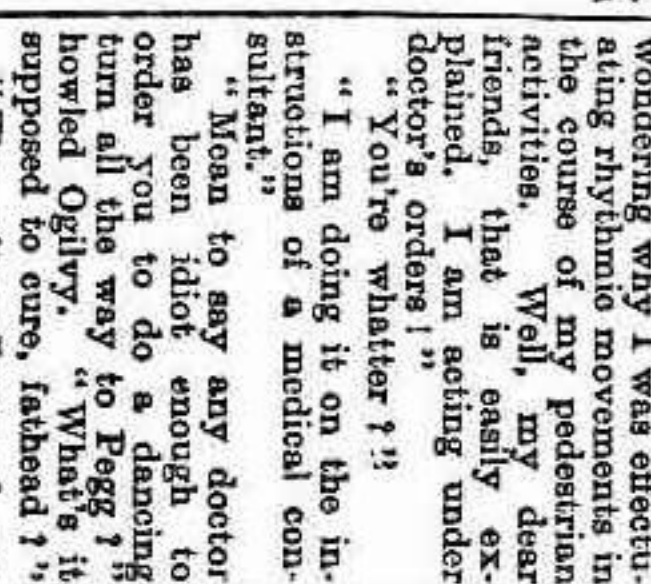
We believe in classifying everything, and in our opinion it's high time somebody got out a He-Man Quotient for everybody in the Remove. Then we'd know where we all stood!

What is a He-Man? Briefly, one who can do the following:

1. Get Gosling to carry several heavy trunks up to the box-room and reward him with a bright "Thank you!"
2. Laugh aloud on seeing Quelch trip over the Form-room mat.
3. Ask Wingate for a place in the First Eleven.
4. Eat the college pudding they give us for dinner every Thursday.
5. Borrow five bob from Fishy FREE OF INTEREST.
6. Tell Wibley he can't act for toffee.
7. Carry on an intelligent and intelligible conversation with Dutton.
8. Get Manleverer to have a run round the quad before breakfast.

We challenge any Removeite to prove that his He-Man Quotient is more than 50 per cent. judged on the basis of these tests.

Impossible, of course! The fact is, we're living in degenerate times. No wonder retired colonels go purple in the face and write to the papers about us!



LONZY'S LATEST

Dear Editor.—As one who has ever favoured grammatical transparency and opposed inhuman illogicality and incommunicability, I feel it incumbent on me to exercise my capacity in the composition of an affirmation of my disaffection from the terminological usages of those who exhibit the intellectual propensity for giving their masters the name of "Beak." This monosyllabic substantivity, in my estimation, is indicative exclusively of the enormous profligance of birds and cannot consequently be intelligibly applied to the magisterial pedagogues appearing to this scholastic edifice.

Yours truly,
ALONZO TODD.

DICKY NUGENT'S WEEKLY WISDOM

Last week, the roof of the porter's lodge sprang a leak, and fairly soaked old Gosling! Yet nobody ever believed me when I said he had a tile loose somewhere!

The Reason Why

By way of a change, Lord Manleverer has decided to take a vigorous interest in things next term. We suppose he feels ashamed of himself when he looks back on his bygone "daze"!



Tom Dutton is a voracious reader of fiction, and claims he gets through 300,000 words a week! "Quodlibet" wishes he would devote as much attention to school books!



Horace Coker started smoking a pipe—not because he liked it, but because he thought it looked manly. A severe talk from Mr. Frost dissuaded him, however!



Showing the Famous Fire by a picture to sell in Pegg Bay, W. G. Bunter learnt too far over the fence, and considered the well-run water a bit grateful for his assistance!



Micky Desmond won a prize at a County exhibition for stamp collecting. Micky's dream is to get hold of a real "and," and Bob Chancy carried off the honours, beating Tom Merry in the final. Well done, Bob!

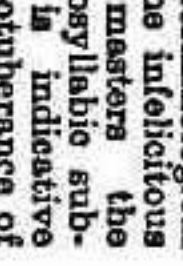
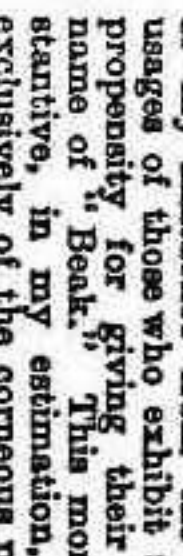


In a boxing competition open to juniors from Greyfriars, High at Brooklands, certainly Smithy and Bob Chancy carried off the honours, beating Tom Merry in the final. Well done, Bob!



Herbert Vernon-Smith overthrew an ambition to drive a racing car at Brooklands. Certainly Smithy and Bob Chancy carried off the honours, beating Tom Merry in the final. Well done, Bob!

WOULD YOU BELIEVE IT?



THE NEW Greyfriars Herald

EXTRA GOOD EDITION

EDITED BY HARRY WHARTON.

October 14th, 1933.

No. 54 (New Series).

LOOK SAVAGE!

Handsome men look slightly savage. To look savage and earn the admiration of the fair sex as well as the respect of your own, you can't do better than cultivate a pair of split ears. These can be obtained free of charge when the Fifth start singing practice next term. Every note from Coker guaranteed to be an "ear-splitting" shriek!