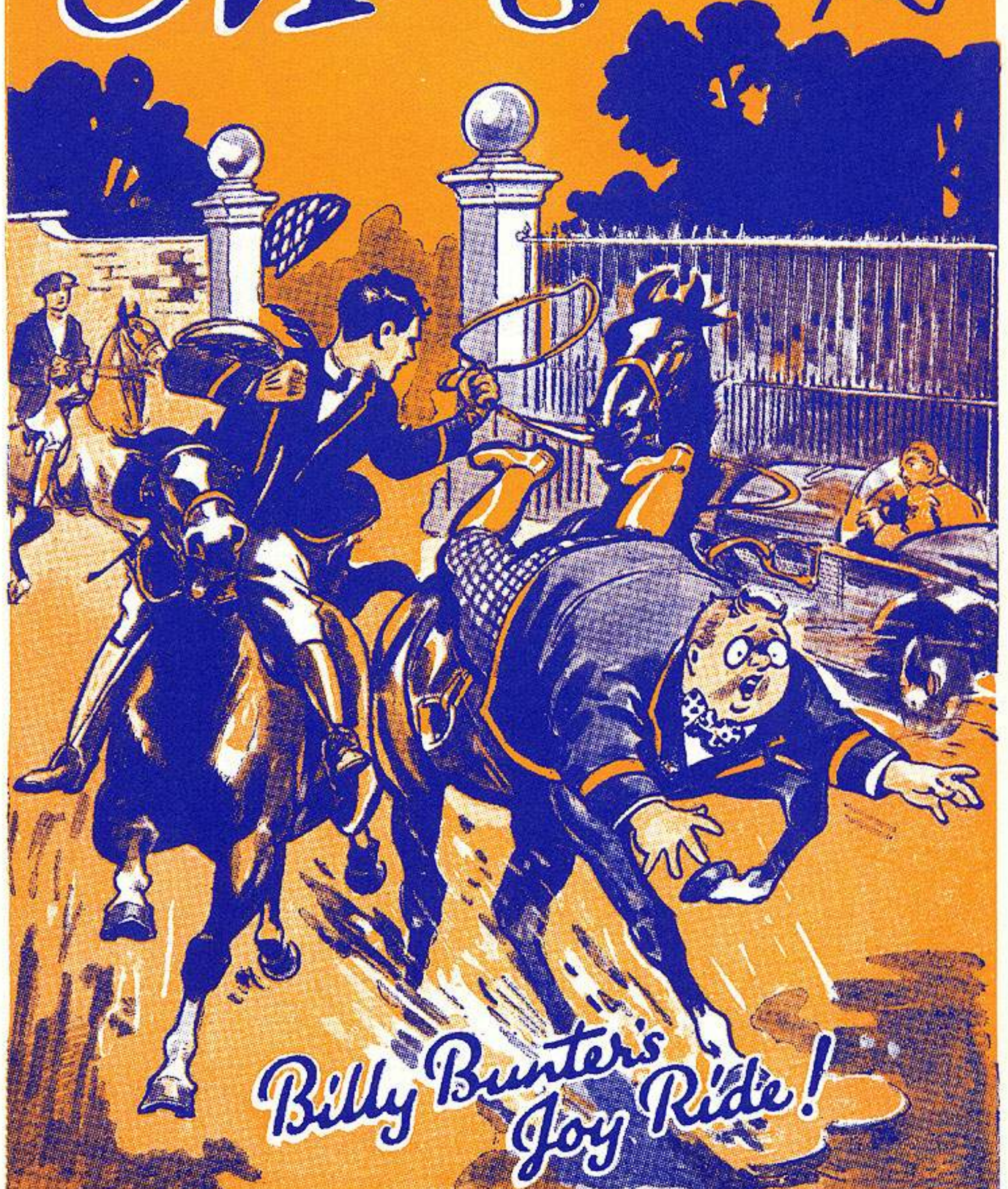


Better Than Ever... The New "HOLIDAY ANNUAL" . . . NOW ON SALE Price 5/-

# The Magnet

2<sup>D</sup>



Billy Bunter's  
Joy Ride!



# COME INTO the OFFICE, BOYS - AND GIRLS!

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

**I**F someone had told you a few years ago that they had seen an animal that was something like a giraffe, but with shorter legs and neck; that it was purplish in colour, with the sides of its face purple, and had black and white stripes on its legs, what would you have said? The chances are that you would have told him to pull the other leg for a change. That is exactly what happened when early explorers told the story of

## THE STRANGEST ANIMAL IN THE WORLD.

People simply wouldn't believe that even in the wilds of Africa such a creature could exist. Yet it does, and its name is the okapi. The first okapi to arrive in this country was sent to the London Zoo recently, and a Hampstead reader has written asking me for more particulars about it. Well, you have its description above, and if ever you care to pay a visit to the London Zoo, you can see this strange animal there. You might be interested to know that, although okapis have existed on this earth for untold numbers of years—probably dating from pre-historic days—one was never captured until 1900. Previous to that, scientists had refused to believe in its existence. The trouble about obtaining a specimen was that the okapi lives in the densest parts of the primeval forests, where few white men have penetrated. Owing to its colouring, the okapi is practically invisible at a distance, when roaming the forests.

I have described the okapi above as being the strangest animal in the world, but there is another which runs it a pretty close second, although specimens have been seen before in this country. This other queer animal is

## THE ORIGINAL "MERMAID,"

and is called the manati (also spelled "manatee"). Although it is an animal it lives in the water, and bears a marked resemblance to a grotesque human being. It has fore limbs with flat "finger nails" upon them, but no hind limbs, its tail ending like that of a fish. It measures from 9 to 13 feet in length, and has as many as twenty pairs of teeth in each jaw. When manatis feed, they push their food towards their mouths with their hands, just as human beings do. They are found in several parts of the world, and prefer shallow water. One can quite imagine how the early travellers' tales of these creatures became garbled, and so the legend of the mermaid arose. But the appearance of the manati is not very flattering to the human race!

A reader, who hails from Banbury, wants to know something about

## THE PETRIFIED FOREST,

which is in Arizona, U.S.A. It is one of the wonders of the world—a vast

forest, turned to stone. Yet these stone trees retain all their woody cells and vessels. The trees became petrified in the course of years. First they were killed by the hot mineral waters of the geysers, then they were gradually permeated by siliceous solutions, thus petrifying them. Portions of petrified tree look like marvellous marble, and small pieces, well polished, are sold to visitors for use as paper-weights, and so on.

The petrified forest of Arizona contains the oldest log bridge in the world. A petrified tree, 111 feet in length, spans a ravine forty feet wide and thirty feet in depth. The tree crashed over the ravine untold numbers of years ago, and then became petrified, thus forming one of the most marvellous sights in this strange old world of ours.

In answer to a number of readers, I am giving here another selection of

## SURNAMES AND THEIR MEANINGS.

**Diprose:** This comes from the French "des prezaux," meaning "the meadows." The original owner was obviously a farmer.

**Darling** is a place-name, and was originally D'Orleans, meaning someone who came from that town.

**Puttock** comes from an Old-English name meaning a hawk or kite.

**Sowden** was originally "Sultan," and was probably given to its first bearer because he played the part of a sultan in an old miracle play.

**Mawson** is derived from "Maud's son," and is a similar name to Maudson, Makins, and Makinson.

**Percy** is a place-name, derived from a small hamlet in France.

**Hill** meant originally, "a dweller on or near the hill."

**Lyndhurst** means a dweller by the linden wood.

**I**CAME across a paragraph the other day, which may interest some of my readers. It just shows what some boys can do nowadays. Climbing, for instance, comes naturally to most boys, but this bit of information concerns

## A TWO-YEAR-OLD STEEPLEJACK!

Believe it or not, chums, but a youngster aged just over two recently climbed a chimney that was one hundred feet high! His name is David Sands, and he lives in Yorkshire. He climbed unaided to the scaffolding at the top of the chimney. But I must mention that his father climbed up behind him, just in case anything went wrong. David, who belongs to a family of steeplejacks, has three elder brothers, all of whom started their climbing careers at the age of two. Arthur, aged seven, has climbed three chimneys; Jack, aged nine, has climbed six; while George, aged eleven, has lost count of the

number he has climbed! For a family record, that takes some beating—what?

I think you've all heard of

## BANBURY CROSS,

and, doubtless, many of you have sampled Banbury cakes—and very nice they are, too! But one of my readers who lives in Banbury, has sent me in another curious little bit of information regarding his home town. In Puritan days, the people of Banbury had the reputation of being even more puritanical than the rest of the country. In fact, one local resident was terribly distressed by the fact that his cat caught and killed a mouse on Sunday. This so annoyed him that he promptly placed the cat on trial, condemned it to death, and hanged it on Monday for killing a mouse on Sunday!

There are many such curious yarns connected with various towns in this country. Perhaps there is one connected with your particular town? If there is, tell it to me when next you write, and I'll pass it on to other MAGNET readers.

Now for a few more

## THINGS YOU'D HARDLY BELIEVE,

which many of my readers have asked me to give:

**Five Million Bunches of Flowers!** This is the number of flowers exported in one season from the Scilly Isles. They would weigh, together, no less than 700 tons!

**A Station Built on Shells!** It has just been discovered that the station at Arras, France, which was rebuilt after the War, was constructed over a British ammunition dump. Two hundred and fifty shells have already been dug up from under it.

**A Fish Weighing 700 Pounds!** This was the weight of a tunny fish caught off Scarborough recently, where tunny-fishing is a regular summer sport. Specimens weighing over 400 pounds are quite usual catches!

**An Animal That Throws Its Inside Away!** When the Sea Cucumber—which, despite its name, is an animal—happens to have anything wrong with its inside, it throws it away—and then waits for it to grow again. A week later its internal workings are again in perfect order!

That will be enough for this week, chums. Next week, as usual, I'll be waiting to have another chat with you, and if any of you have sent in queries which I have not yet answered, look out for them then. Look out, too, for:

## "UNDER FALSE COLOURS!"

By Frank Richards,

another "super-production" of this first-rate boys' author and, incidentally, the opening yarn in a grand new series featuring a remarkable new boy who comes to Greyfriars with a borrowed name and identity! You have learned to expect something out of the ordinary when you get hold of a Frank Richards story, and believe me, you won't be disappointed with next week's yarn. What do you think of "The Flying Submarine"? You'll find thrills of just the right kind in next week's gripping chapters. In addition, there will be another "Greyfriars Herald" supplement detailing the current events at the school, an "Interview" by the Greyfriars Rhymester written around Edward Fry, Temple's second study-mate in the Fourth, and last, but by no means least, a gossipy page of queries and replies by

YOUR EDITOR.

# ON THE TRAIL of TREASURE!

By FRANK RICHARDS



—featuring the popular Chums of Greyfriars, HARRY WHARTON & CO.

## THE FIRST CHAPTER.

### Bunter Up!

**B**LESSED if I see anything to cackle at!" grunted Billy Bunter.

Bunter was the only fellow who couldn't!

The Greyfriars fellows were not exactly cackling, as Bunter expressed it. But they were smiling! There was a chuckle or two.

Bunter could see no cause for merriment! But the other fellows could! They could see Bunter!

In the sunny summer's morning, the holiday party at Portercliffe Hall had come out after breakfast in cheery spirits. They were going for a ride.

There were plenty of horses available in the Portercliffe stables. At that magnificent establishment there was, indeed, almost everything that the heart could desire.

A superb mansion, a stately butler, and a numerous staff of servants, green lawns and shady park-land, horses and cars, grooms and chauffeurs—Lord Portercliffe could not have wanted much more to make him a happy man—if he could have afforded to keep it all up!

Which, however, his lordship could not afford to do; and the superb mansion, with all its appurtenances, was let to Mr. Hiram K. Fish, of New York—for which reason Harry Wharton & Co. were there as the holiday guests of Fisher T. Fish of the Remove.

But if young Lord Portercliffe could not enjoy his possessions, the Greyfriars fellows could—and did! They

came out of the house in a cheery crowd. Handsome horses, saddled and bridled, were held by natty grooms, ready for them. Harry Wharton & Co. could ride—Smith was a very good horseman—and Kipps and Wibley could stick on a horse. But it was rather doubtful whether Billy Bunter could.

Bunter had had disasters, even with a Margate donkey!

It was one of Billy Bunter's happy ways to fancy that he could do a thing better than any other fellow,

**Somewhere, in or under the vast pile of Lord Portercliffe's ancestral mansion, lies a stack of hidden gold worth a million dollars! And Hiram K. Fish and his son, Fisher T. Fish, are after it—like birds after a worm!**

until he actually came to do it! Then, so to speak, he woke up!

Lessons were wasted on Bunter! Experience is said by the proverb to make fools wise! But it had never had that effect on Billy Bunter.

The fat Owl of the Remove blinked over the array of horses through his big spectacles, and selected his mount. The groom looked at Bunter. The horse turned its head round and looked

at him. Neither seemed much impressed.

Bunter put a foot in the stirrup and heaved. His intention was to lift himself with a graceful, bird-like motion, and land lightly in the saddle, showing the other fellows how it should be done.

But his weight and his circumference were both against graceful and bird-like motions. Bunter heaved—and heaved again—and yet again—but he did not rise with a bird-like airiness. He did not rise at all. The attraction of the earth seemed too powerful for him.

Bunter gasped.

The other fellows smiled.

"Go it, Bunter!" said Bob Cherry encouragingly. "Like a ladder?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"An esteemed ladder would be terrifically useful!" remarked Hurree Jamset Ram Singh.

Billy Bunter blinked round at grinning faces, through his big spectacles, with an angry blink. Then he heaved again.

This time he overcame the law of gravitation.

Up went Bunter—not so much like a bird as a sack of coke! His heave landed him on the saddle, but not in the usual attitude for riding. He landed there on his fat waistcoat, sprawling across the surprised horse.

"Ow!" gasped Bunter.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I say, you fellows—ow!"

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

Bunter, sprawling across the horse, THE MAGNET LIBRARY.—No. 1,439.

with his fat little legs kicking wildly in the air, was a sight for gods and men and little fishes!

He was the cynosure of all eyes. Not only the Greyfriars fellows, but many others, regarded the fat Owl with interest. Chandos, the butler, stood in the doorway, with a smile flickering over his usually expressionless plump face. Hiram K. Fish looked out of a window, his lantern-jaws extended in a wide grin. Grooms and footmen gazed at Bunter. He had the spot-light.

"Urrrgh!" gurgled Bunter. "I say, you fellows—urrgh!"

"Well, now Bunter's up, let's get going!" said Johnny Bull. "Is that how you're going to ride, Bunter?"

"Urrgh! Beast! Urrgh!"

"What about tying him on?" suggested Frank Nugent.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The groom holding the horse came to Bunter's aid. But he came in an unfortunate moment for himself.

A fat leg was kicking out wildly. A boot landed on the groom's chin! He gave a yell, staggered back, and sat down, letting go the bridle.

"Oh!" roared the groom, clasping his chin with both hands. "Ow!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" shrieked the juniors. "Ow! I say—help!" yelled Bunter.

The horse, released by the groom, and undoubtedly surprised and startled by the fat object clinging on its back, began to rear and prance. Bunter howled for help.

"Hold him!" gasped Harry Wharton.

He rushed to the horse's head and caught the bridle. The animal was brought to a standstill again with Bunter still clinging to its mane.

"I say, you fellows, can't you give me a hand?" yelled Bunter. "I say, my tummy's hurt on this beastly saddle—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Bob Cherry and Johnny Bull rushed to the rescue. They grasped the fat junior on both sides of the horse. They pulled, they dragged, they shoved, and they heaved! Bunter got a fat leg over at last and plumped into the saddle.

"Oooooogh!" he gasped.

"Oh, my hat! All right now?" gasped Bob.

"Of course I'm all right, you silly ass!" hooted Bunter. "Think I can't ride?"

"The thinkfulness is terrific!" chuckled Hurree Janset Ram Singh.

"Gimme the reins! Gimme the whip! Don't shove at me, you silly dummies—I'm all right! Let go the bridle, Wharton, you ass! What are you hanging on to my gee for, I'd like to know?"

"Look here, you blithering fat-head—" began Harry Wharton.

"Yah!"

Bunter dragged at the reins, and Wharton let go. Now that he was safe in the saddle, with his feet in the stirrups, Bunter's confidence returned. He blinked round at the juniors.

"For goodness' sake get on your gees, and let's start," he said impatiently. "Are you going to be all the morning about it?"

"Keep in the grounds," said Harry. "You won't be safe on the roads, Bunter. Keep inside the gate, and ride in the park."

"Don't be cheeky, Wharton!"

"You howling ass!" roared Wharton.

"I'm going for a trot! If you fellows are afraid to ride on the roads, you can stick in the park! Yah! Have a little pluck! I'm going!"

Bunter gave his mount a smart cut with the whip! The horse jumped and started. Down the long drive of Portercliffe Hall went the fat Owl at a rapid trot. He was heading for the distant gates which were wide open on the Margate road.

The Bouncer chuckled.

"If that fat ass meets a motor-car—" he said.

"Get after him quick!" exclaimed Harry Wharton.

And the other fellows mounted in haste, and rode down the avenue in a bunch after Bunter. Bunter had given his steed another cut, and the trot accelerated to a gallop.

Bumping in his saddle like a sack of coke, Bunter went charging down the avenue and out of the wide gateway on the road.

Harry Wharton, with an anxious face, spurred ahead of his comrades and shouted to the fat Owl.

"Bunter! Stop!"

Billy Bunter did not answer! And he did not stop!

He couldn't!

## THE SECOND CHAPTER.

### Bunter Down!

**H**ONK! Honk!  
Clatter! Clatter!  
"Yaroooh!"

"Oh, my hat!" gasped Harry Wharton.

He shouted wildly:  
"Bunter! Pull in, you fathead! Pull!"

"Help!" yelled Bunter.

By the great, bronzo gates of Portercliffe Hall ran the white high road down to Margate, in the distance, and the sea. There were a good many motors on that road, as a rule, especially in holiday-time.

A small green car, driven by a slim young man, was coming along, at a good rate, as Bunter's horse pranced into the road from the gates.

The klaxon roared, and Bunter jumped in the saddle, and the horse pranced, tossing its head. Bunter dragged wildly on the reins—but not on both together. He dragged on one side, and he dragged on the other side, hardly knowing what he was doing.

Harry Wharton, riding out of the gateway in pursuit, shouted to him, answered only by terrified yelps.

The horse was already out of control, and Bunter's frantic attempts at control only excited it the more. The animal went wildly prancing across the middle of the road as the green car came shooting along. Wharton pulled in his own steed with a gasp of horror. For a terrible moment an accident seemed inevitable.

Bunter, certainly, did nothing to prevent it. He howled and yelped. But the slim young man driving the car, luckily, had his wits about him. He jammed on his brakes and turned the car aside, swerving over the belt of grass by the roadside and banging the bonnet on the park palings of Portercliffe Hall.

"Yaroooh! Help!" yelled Bunter.

Harry Wharton dashed forward and caught the reins from the fat hands.

"Get off!" he yelled.

Bunter did not need telling!

He got off—involuntarily!

Wharton was barely able to keep hold of the excited horse. But he held it, and kept it from bolting. Bunter went out of the saddle like a pip from an orange, and shot into the grass a few yards from the green car.

The car had stopped as it hit the palings. Bunter stopped as he hit Kent.

The other fellows were riding out of the gateway now. But they stopped and dismounted at the sight of the accident. A groom ran out and relieved Wharton of the kicking, trampling horse.

Meanwhile, the slim young man had descended from his car and was standing looking at it with an expression on his rather handsome face that indicated a shortage of temper.

"Begad!" said the slim young man.

He turned from the car and surveyed Bunter.

Bunter was sitting up in the grass, roaring. Bunter's impression was, first, that he was killed; second, that he was seriously injured. It was clear that his lungs, at least, were not damaged, for he was using them with great energy.

"Yaroooh! Help! I say, you fellows! Yooop! I'm hurt! Ow! I've broken my neck! Yarooop!"

"You fat idiot!" roared Wharton. He was relieved to see Bunter safe, and his anxiety turned to wrath. "You howling chump—"

"Beast! I've broken my legs—yaroooh!"

Harry Wharton dismounted, hitched his horse to a paling, and started towards Bunter. His intention was to kick him. But the slim young man from the green car was first in the field.

He bent over Bunter, grasped him by the collar, and jerked him to his feet. The fat junior sagged in his grasp.

"Here! You young ass!" hooted the motorist. "What the dooce are you doing on a horse, in a public road, if you can't ride? What?"

"Yaroooh!"

Shake, shake, shake!

The young man was slim, but he seemed vigorous.

Billy Bunter swung to and fro, spluttering, as he was shaken.

"Oooogh!" he spluttered. "Leggo, you cheeky beast! Ow! If you make my specs fall off—"

"You dangerous young ass!"

"You'll have to pip-pip-pay for them! Yooop! I say, you fellows, draggimoff!" yelled Bunter.

Shake, shake, shake!

"Yoop! Whoop! Wurrgh!" spluttered Bunter. "Beast! Leggo! Yah! Oh!"

Shake, shake!

Harry Wharton & Co. gathered round to look on.

If ever a fellow deserved to be severely shaken, it was Billy Bunter! The chums of the Remove had no objection whatever to the young man shaking Bunter! Rather, they wished him more power to his elbow!

"Go it, sir!" said Bob Cherry cheerily. "Have a good innings while you're about it!"

"Yurrgh! Leggo!"

Shake!

"I say, you fellows—wow! Yow!"

Shake!

"Groooogh!"

The slim young man seemed satisfied at last. Having shaken Bunter till the fat Owl's teeth rattled like castanets, he landed him in the grass again, with a bump!

Bunter sat down hard and heavy, and roared.

Young Lord Portercliffe, the owner of the estate, lived abroad, but Wharton, as he gazed at the young man, guessed that his lordship had come back to his native land.

"Young ass!" snapped the slim young man. "If you're that young duffer's friends you'd better keep him off a horse—or, at least, off the roads!"

"Yaroo!"  
"I hope your car's not much damaged, Lord Portercliffe," said Harry Wharton politely.

The young man gave a start and stared at him.

"How the dooce do you know who I am?" he ejaculated. "I've never seen you before."

Wharton smiled.  
"I've never seen you before, either,"

"Yes, rather!" said Bob.  
"The ratherfulness is terrific!" said Hurreo Janset Ram Singh—a remark that made Lord Portercliffe look at him for a moment.

The green car, fortunately, was not much damaged. It was backed into the road, and his lordship found that it was still a going concern. From seeing him so near his ancestral home, the juniors concluded that he was coming to the Hall, but that, it appeared, was not the case.

"Thanks!" said Lord Portercliffe, and he drove on in the direction of Margate. That happy and salubrious resort, it seemed, was his lordship's destination. He drove past the gates of Portercliffe Hall and disappeared down the road towards the sea.

beastly horn—and you got in my way, Wharton! If you hadn't grabbed at my horse I shouldn't have fallen off—I mean dismounted! I didn't fall off! I'm not the fellow to fall off a horse, I hope!"

"What a hopeful nature!" remarked Bob.

"Look here, you beasts——"  
"Are we going for a ride, or staying here to listen to Bunter doing a jawbone solo?" asked the Bounder sarcastically.

"I'm going for a ride," growled Johnny Bull, and he clambered on his horse.

"I say, you fellows——"  
"You howling ass!" exclaimed Harry Wharton. "You're not getting on a horse again! See? If Lord Portercliffe hadn't been so jolly handy with



Billy Bunter grasped the big botanical volume in both fat hands and brought it down with a terrific crash on Alonzo's head. Crash! "Yooooop!" yelled Alonzo, as his straw hat was smashed over his ears. "Oh, my goodness! Oh, goodness gracious! My dear William—yaroooh!"

he answered. "But I've seen the portraits of your jolly old ancestors in Portercliffe Hall—and you're the image of the Red Earl!"

"Oh!" said the young man. His frowning face broke into a smile. "I see. Are you boys staying at the Hall? I understood from my agents that it was let to an American gentleman."

"Let!" murmured Vernon-Smith, with a wink at the other fellows.

According to Fisher T. Fish, his popper, Hiram K., had bought Portercliffe Hall, lock, stock, and barrel! Evidently, if Mr. Fish had bought the Hall, the owner did not know it!

"We're the American gentleman's guests," explained Harry. "His son is a Greyfriars man, and we're here for the holidays with him. Shall I call one of your chauffeurs to see to the car?"

Lord Portercliffe smiled.  
"The staff are let with the house, I believe," he answered, "and I can handle a car myself. I don't think there's much damage done. You boys can help me get it back to the road, if you like."

THE THIRD CHAPTER.

A Slight Misunderstanding!

"I SAY, you fellows!"  
"You blithering ass!"  
"Where's my gee?" demanded Bunter.

Having discovered that he had not broken his neck, or even his legs, the Owl of the Remove was ready to begin again.

The other fellows were not ready for Bunter to begin.

They had had enough of Bunter's horsemanship! One narrow escape was enough, in the general opinion.

"The groom's taken your horse back to the stables, you fat idiot!" said Bob, "and it's staying there!"

"If you fellows think I can't ride——"

"Fathead!"  
"I can ride better than any fellow here, and chance it!" sneered Bunter. "Jealousy all round, as usual! That road-hog scared my horse with his

his car there would have been an accident——"

"All your fault for getting in a fellow's way! One of you go and fetch my gee," said Bunter. "You shouldn't have let that cheeky groom take it away—so you can go and fetch it! I'll wait here."

"You'll wait here till we come back?" asked Bob Cherry.

"Yes, old chap."  
"Right-ho! Wait for us, then!" said Bob. "Come on, you fellows!"

The riding-party mounted again. Billy Bunter sat down in the grass to wait—apparently, expecting the party to ride in at the gateway and up the avenue to fetch back his horse.

Instead of which, they rode past the gateway and trotted off down the road.

The fat Owl jumped up.

"I say, you fellows!" he bawled.

Bob Cherry glanced back and waved his hand.

"Wait for us, old fat man!" he shouted.

"You're not going for my horse!" yelled Bunter.

"Oh, no! But wait for us, all the same! We shall be back to lunch!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Beasts!" roared Bunter.

He shook a fat fist after the bunch of riders as they disappeared in a cloud of dust.

Evidently nobody was going to fetch Bunter's gee. If he still wanted to witch the world with noble horsemanship he had to fetch that gee himself.

With a frowning fat brow, the Owl of the Remove rolled in at the gateway and up the long avenue to the hall. It was a long, long way up that immense avenue of oaks and beeches, and Billy Bunter was panting and puffing by the time he reached the house.

He did not head for the stables. Perhaps it was dawning even on Bunter's fat brain that there was more excitement than fun in riding among the motor-cars—with such a gift of horsemanship as he possessed.

Alonzo Todd was coming out of the house as Bunter arrived. Alonzo had a large botanical volume under his arm and a beaming smile on his face. Alonzo was seldom seen without either.

"My dear William," he exclaimed, "if you are not going riding, perhaps you would like to come with me! I am going on a very, very enjoyable excursion."

"Oh, good!" said Bunter. "The fact is, I don't care much for riding here; the horses ain't up to our hunters at Bunter Court. Very poor lot of horse-flesh. Going down to Margate?"

"Oh, no! Something very, very much more enjoyable than Margate," said Alonzo.

"I say, you can have a good time at Dreamland, you know," said Bunter. "I'd rather have gone there, only I've been disappointed about a postal order, and I've run out of cash. You lend me a quid—"

"I think it will be much more enjoyable than Dreamland, my dear William," said Alonzo, beaming. "Pray come with me! I shall be very, very glad of your company."

"Picnic?" asked Bunter.

"Much better than a picnic, my dear William! I'm going into the park to find something of very, very great value."

Billy Bunter started, and his eyes gleamed behind his big spectacles.

Alonzo's words, to Bunter's fat mind, had only one meaning—that Alonzo Todd had spotted the "hidden hoard" of Portercliffe.

That hidden hoard was a constant topic of discussion among the schoolboy party at Portercliffe Hall.

Hiram K. Fish had taken Portercliffe Hall for three months, with an option to purchase, in the hope of unearthing that secret store of sovereigns—parked in some unknown spot, or spots, by the late Lord Portercliffe.

It had been a deep, deep secret, and Hiram K. had warned his son, Fisher T., to be very careful indeed not to "spill the beans."

The beans, nevertheless, had been spilled.

For Billy Bunter, tumbling into the hollow oak of Portercliffe, had tumbled into a store of hidden sovereigns—some hundreds of them—evidently a part of the old lord's hoard.

After which it was scarcely possible for the matter to be kept a secret—and everybody at Portercliffe knew what Hiram K. Fish was after.

Bunter had not been able to keep

any of those sovereigns. But ever since the discovery of them he had thought and dreamed of discovering more. More, it was certain, were to be found—if a fellow could only spot them.

"I—I—I say, are you sure, old chap?" exclaimed Bunter, with bated breath.

"In the park, did you say?"

"Yes, my dear William—"

"How far from here?" asked Bunter.

"On the other side of the park, about a mile!"

"Oh lor'!"

"It will be a very pleasant walk, my dear William, and the exercise will do you good," said Alonzo. "You take so very little exercise, and you are so very, very fat—"

"You silly ass!"

"My dear William—"

"I say, let's get off!" said Bunter eagerly. "Don't shout it out for everybody to hear. Old Fish would be after it like a shot; so would young Fish!"

"Do you think they would be interested, my dear William?"

"Eh? Of course they would, fathead—and the servants, too!" said Bunter.

"One of them—the mystery man, the fellows call him—"

"But—"

"Have you told anybody yet?" asked Bunter, with a cautious blink round through his spectacles. He was glad to see that there was nobody within hearing.

"I had not mentioned my discovery to anyone, my dear William, until I spoke to you. I did not think that anyone would be interested—"

"Well, you must be a blithering ass!" said Bunter. "Old Fish would be after it like a shot, you fathead!"

"My dear William, if you think that Mr. Fish would be interested, perhaps I had better ask him to accompany us—"

"You—you blithering chump!" gasped Bunter. "Keep it dark! Come on! Let's get going!"

He grabbed Alonzo's bony arm and fairly dragged him away.

"Very well, my dear William," said Alonzo. "I am very, very pleased to see you so eager. I was not aware that you took such an interest in—"

"Come on!" hissed Bunter.

The walk up the long avenue had tired Bunter. But he did not think of that now. Another walk of a mile through the park would have been dimaying to think of—but for the thought of golden treasure at the end Bunter was all eagerness.

His fat little legs fairly whisked alongside Alonzo's long thin ones. They headed for the park quite rapidly.

Alonzo's kind, simple face wore a very, very pleased expression. He had never found Bunter so keen on a botanical excursion before. None of the fellows seemed fearfully keen on Alonzo's favourite pursuit—least of all Bunter. Now Bunter seemed keener than Alonzo himself.

They hurried by leafy, shady paths through the park.

Billy Bunter panted and puffed, but he kept Alonzo up to a good speed.

"Sure you're going the right way?" he gasped when a half-mile had been covered.

"Certainly, my dear William! I remember the spot exactly," said Alonzo rather breathlessly. "I made a special note of it. You see, I was very, very interested by the discovery—"

"Come on!"

"But we have plenty of time, my dear William. Why this haste?"

"Come on!" hissed Bunter. "Suppose somebody else spotted it? Suppose it was gone when you got there?"

"That would be very, very disagreeable. But I do not think—"

"Come on, you silly ass!"

They hurried on—Alonzo gasping, Bunter puffing and blowing.

Threading shady paths, they arrived at last at a green bank where clusters of ferns grew.

Alonzo halted.

"Is this the place?" gasped Bunter. He mopped a trickle of perspiration from his fat forehead.

"This is the place, my dear William."

Bunter blinked round eagerly through his big spectacles.

"Is it buried?" he asked.

"Buried! Certainly not, my dear William!"

"Mean to say it was sticking out in sight, for anybody to see who happened to come this way!" ejaculated Bunter.

"Certainly," said Alonzo. "Otherwise, I should not have seen it myself."

"Well, where is it?" exclaimed Bunter.

"Here, my dear William!"

Alonzo knelt on the sloping bank, beside a bed of ferns, and opened his large botanical volume. He proceeded to gather ferns, with a careful hand, to place between the leaves of the volume for pressing.

Bunter stared at him.

"You silly ass!" he howled. "Never mind that silly rot now! Where are the sovereigns?"

Alonzo jumped.

"The—the what?" he ejaculated.

"The gold!" gasped Bunter.

"What gold, my dear William?" asked Alonzo, in astonishment.

"Good gracious! I remember the fellows have been talking a great deal about gold being hidden somewhere. Have you any reason to suppose, my dear William, that it is hidden anywhere near this spot?"

The Owl of the Remove gazed at him.

"Isn't that what you found here?" he bawled.

"Eh? No!"

"Then what have we come here for?" shrieked Bunter.

"My dear William, we have come here to gather those very rare specimens of ferns—"

"Wha-a-t?"

"Which are of very, very great value—"

"You—you—you—" gurgled Bunter.

"Not in a commercial sense," explained Alonzo. "But to a botanical collector—"

Bunter stared at him. He glared at him. It was a glare that almost cracked his spectacles.

Alonzo had not spotted the "hidden hoard." He had spotted a bed of ferns, specimens of which he wanted for his botanical collection!

It was for botanical specimens that Bunter had fagged a mile through the park—with a mile to fag back! He glared at the happy Alonzo in unspeakable rage!

"You—you you—" gasped the fat Owl.

"My dear William, perhaps you would like to hold the book while I place these specimens between the leaves? Will you hold it very, very carefully?" asked Alonzo.

Bunter grasped the big botanical volume. He was glad that it was big, and that it was heavy! It served Alonzo's purpose admirably—and now it served Bunter's. He lifted it in both fat hands, and brought it down with a terrific crash on Alonzo's head.

Crash!

"Yooooop!" yelled Alonzo, as his straw hat was smashed over his ears. "Oh, my goodness! Oh, goodness gracious! My dear William—Yaroooh!"

Crash!  
Bunter made another swipe. Alonzo, roaring, rolled over in the grass. The fat Owl hurled the volume at him and tramped away. Alonzo's voice followed him on its top note:

"Whhho-hoo-hoop! Oh dear! Oh, my goodness! Yooop!"

Alonzo sat up dizzily, and rubbed his damaged head. Bunter was gone—and Alonzo was left in a state of great bewilderment. It was quite a little time before Alonzo felt sufficiently recovered to gather up the treasures he had found in Portercliffe Park.

**THE FOURTH CHAPTER.**

**The Haunted Turret!**

"**C**HANDOS!" yapped Fisher T. Fish.

"Sir!" said the Portercliffe butler.

Fishy, on the grand staircase at Portercliffe Hall, looked over the carved oak banisters with a frowning, lean face. Fishy seemed annoyed.

That morning, while Harry Wharton & Co. were gone riding, the Fishes, popper and son, were going to get busy.

Mr. Fish, with his secretary, Bosanney, had gone by the secret door in the picture-gallery to explore once more the hidden passages and vaults under the ancient mansion. Hiram K. Fish and his secretary spent hours every day in those explorations.

Hiram K. was getting impatient.

He had no doubt about the existence of the "hidden hoard" of the late Lord Portercliffe. The discovery of a parcel of some hundreds of sovereigns in the hollow oak on the lawn was a proof of it.

But where was the major part of the hoard? Where was the stack of golden coins which the old lord had hidden away? So far, Hiram K. had failed to track it down.

It was clear that his mysterious rival in the quest, the "mystery man" of Portercliffe, had failed, also, so far! Somewhere in, or under, the vast pile of Lord Portercliffe's ancestral mansion, was a stack of hidden gold, worth a million dollars!

But where? Day after day Hiram K. Fish hunted—with growing impatience, but with determination growing at the same time. Hiram K. guessed, reckoned, and calculated that he sure was going to raise those spondulies!

Fisher T. Fish did not join his popper in the subterranean passages under the old Hall. Fishy was on another trail. He had gone upstairs—and now he came down and yapped at Chandos over the banisters.

"I guess I want to go into the turret-room, Chandos!" yapped Fishy. "And the dog-goned door's locked! What's the door locked for?"

"The turret-room is generally kept locked, sir," answered the butler. "It is the haunted room, as you are aware, sir—"

"Oh, guff!" said Fisher T. Fish. "Get the key, Chandos, and come up and get it open. And don't let the daisies grow under your feet while you're doing it, see?"

Fisher T. Fish jerked up the staircase again with an angry snort. The plump, stately butler of Portercliffe looked after him, gravely and thoughtfully, and then went for the key.

The turret-room was at the top of a flight of stairs, at the end of the corridor where the Greyfriars guests had their rooms. Fisher T. Fish went up to the landing outside the locked door.

Fisher T. had been setting his keen, transatlantic brain to work, and he guessed that he wanted to give the haunted room the once-over.

He waited impatiently for the butler to arrive with the key. Chandos came up in a few minutes, with a key in his plump hand.

He inserted it into the lock and threw the door open.

Fisher T. Fish jerked into the turret-room.

It was a large apartment, with windows giving a wide view over a great extent of country, over the estuary of the Thames, and the sea. The walls were of solid stone blocks; the floor of ancient oak. The apartment was furnished; but the furniture was covered up with dust sheets. The room had a desolate and disused appearance.

Chandos did not seem in a hurry to go. He stood in the doorway of the turret-room, his eyes on Fisher T. Fish. Perhaps he was curious about the American schoolboy's proceedings there.

Fishy threw open the windows to let in the sunlight and fresh air.

"Say, Chandos!" he jerked.

"Sir!" said Chandos.

"I guess this is the room that the old lord used, up to the time he passed in his checks, what?"

"This was Lord Portercliffe's favourite room, sir!" said Chandos airily. "It has not been used since his time, except on the occasion when Master Bunter—"

"Yep!" assented Fishy. "I guess I landed that fat galoot in the haunted room his first night here to give him a scare. I sure popped in with a sheet over my head, to scare him a few—and I'll

say it made me jump a whole lot when I saw the ghost here."

Even in the daylight, and the summer sunshine, Fishy gave an uneasy glance round him at the memory of the spectral figure he had seen in that apartment in the dead of night.

"You believe this here room is haunted, Chandos?" he asked.

The butler coughed.

"I would not say so exactly, sir; but there is certainly a very general belief that the room is haunted by the phantom of the Red Earl, who was killed on this very spot in the reign of Queen Elizabeth."

"The old lord didn't take much stock in the yarn, if this was his favourite room, I guess," said Fisher T. Fish. "And I'll tell a man I'll eat

*(Continued on next page.)*

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all the spooks that show up! I was sure scared a few at the time; but I guess that spook I saw was pretty solid—as solid as you are, Chandos!"

Chandos started a little.

"Master Fish! What—what do you mean?" he ejaculated, with a quick breath.

"Jest what I say, I reckon!" answered Fisher T. Fish. "There's some guy in this shebang, Chandos, who's been playing ghost."

"Oh! I am aware that Mr. Fish thinks so, sir—"

"Surest thing you know!" said Fisher T. Fish. "And I guess you ought to be able to cinch him, Chandos, as he's one of your staff—"

"I cannot believe for one moment, sir—"

"Aw, can it!" said Fishy. "Who'd it be but one of the servants? I guess it can't be anybody else! The popper nearly had him the other night—and I guess he'll get him sooner or later! Yep!"

"I certainly hope so, sir, if any manservant here is venturing to play such impudent and unscrupulous tricks—"

"Ain't it as plain as the nose on your face?" grunted Fisher T. Fish. "That pesky ghost has turned up in the underground passages, trying to scare my popper off! I'll say he nearly got by with it, too, when the popper loosed off his gun at him without hurting him any. But he found out that his cartridges had been changed for blanks—at least, Smithy found it out. Waal, then, you figure that a real ghost would fool around with cartridges? Nope!"

Fisher T. Fish shook a bony forefinger at the butler to emphasise his remarks.

"Nope!" he repeated. "I'll say nope! You chew on this, big boy! Since the popper found out that trick on his cartridges, he's been pesky careful to load up with the genuine stuff! What's the result? He's been down in them passages umpteen times since—and the spectre ain't showed up!"

"Indeed, sir!" said Chandos.

"Not hide nor hair of him!" said Fisher T. Fish impressively. "I guess that spectre knows that there's bullets in popper's gun now, and he don't want to stop any! Nope!"

Fisher T. Fish grinned.

"That mystery guy, who's been playing ghost, keeps tabs on us, I guess," he said. "He knows what goes on! And I guess he won't show up, with a loaded gun around! Not so's you'd notice it! I guess popper would bring him down with a bullet in the leg, and that wouldn't suit his book!"

"Probably not, sir!" assented Chandos.

"Now," went on Fisher T. Fish, "the first time we saw that spook, Chandos, was in this room—the haunted room! Mebbe a real ghost could get through solid stone—but I guess that mystery guy couldn't! I'll say there's a way into this room, Chandos, that don't meet the eye! You get me?"

"Do you think it possible, sir?"

"I guess it's a cinch! And I'll say I'm going to spot it," said Fisher T. Fish emphatically. "I guess it will sure please popper a few if I root it out while he's gone rooting underground."

"I have never heard of anything of the kind, sir—"

"That cuts no ice—you'd never heard of any of the secret passages till they was found, while we was here!" said Fisher T. Fish. "I guess you must be a dumb stiff, Chandos, you here for

twenty years as butler, and knowing nothing about what was under your nose!"

"Such matters, sir, did not come within my province as butler—"

"Waal, I guess I'm going to root out that secret door, if it's here," said Fisher T. Fish. "And I'll bank on it that it is! You can help me if you like, Chandos!"

"I fear, sir, that my duties—" Chandos coughed. "If you will excuse me, sir, my duties—"

"Beat it as soon as you want!" grunted Fisher T. Fish.

"Thank you, sir!"

Chandos stepped out of the turret-room, closed the door, and descended the turret stair.

Fisher T. Fish was left in the haunted room to continue his investigations on his own.

## THE FIFTH CHAPTER.

### Bunter Turns the Key!

**B**ILLY BUNTER rolled into Portercliffe Hall, red and breathless and perspiring, and in a very bad temper.

It was a warm summer's morning, and a walk of two miles had made the fat Owl very warm, very damp, and very sticky, and extremely irritable. His only solace was the remembrance of the hefty smites he had given Alonzo with his own botanical volume.

The fat junior sank down in an arm-chair in the hall and gasped for breath.

He stretched out his fat limbs in a comfortable, if not elegant attitude, and rested. It was cool and shady in the great hall, and Bunter began to feel a little better.

After about a quarter of an hour's rest, he found energy enough to ring for Chandos. A cooling drink and a cake to go down with it, seemed a good idea to Bunter, and in a mansion swarming with servants there was no reason why he should not have what he wanted. Besides, Bunter believed in making servants work! He did not approve of laziness!

It was James who answered the bell. Bunter blinked at him through his big spectacles.

"I rang for Chandos!" he said haughtily. Bunter preferred to be waited on by the stately butler.

"Mr. Chandos has gone to his room, sir," said James. "He has one of his headaches this morning, sir!"

Snort from Bunter!

It was rather a check on the part of a manservant, in Bunter's opinion, to have a headache! Such things should be left to his betters!

Bunter's idea of the limit of a servant's duties was twenty-four hours a day. And he believed in keeping them at it!

"Headache again!" grunted Bunter. "Chandos always seems to have a headache when he's wanted! Too much of it, in my opinion!"

"Indeed, sir!" said James.

"Yes, indeed!" snapped Bunter. "It wouldn't do for me at Bunter Court, I can tell you! I'd sack him!"

"Did you want anything, sir?" asked the footman.

"Yes, I did!" snapped Bunter. "Bring me an iced lemonade and a cake—a plum cake! And look sharp!"

"Very good, sir!"

James retired by the service door with a wooden, expressionless face, which did not reveal his opinion of Master Bunter.

Below stairs, he confided to his friends in that region, that it was 'ard to have to wait on low bounders!

It was, indeed, hard on all the numerous staff of Portercliffe Hall! The only way for young Lord Portercliffe to keep the place up and keep them in employment, was by letting his ancestral home to richer men than himself—and Chandos and his staff were let along with the mansion.

Old Lord Portercliffe had been a rich man. But he had not left so much, in the way of cash, as had been expected. And the death duties on the estate had knocked the young lord's finances into a cocked hat.

He could hardly have found a purchaser for so tremendous an establishment. But he could not afford to live in it.

So there had been a succession of temporary tenants—none of whom had the approval of Chandos and his staff! But of all the lot, the Fish family least won their approval. Below stairs it was agreed nem. con. that Hiram K. and Fisher T. were very near the limit, and that at least one of their guests, Master W. G. Bunter, was far beyond the limit!

Repugnant as it was to a well-trained footman, brought up in the best families, to wait on a person whom he privately regarded as a low bounder, James brought up a tray with the cake and the iced lemonade.

He set it down at Bunter's elbow. "Is there anything more, sir?" asked James with the faintest tincture of sarcasm.

Bunter did not reply for a moment. He took a deep swig at the lemonade and then a bite at a chunk of cake.

Having attended to important matters first, Bunter condescended to reply with his mouth full.

"Have those beasts come in?" he asked.

"If you are alluding to the young gentlemen who have gone riding, sir, they have not yet returned," said James.

"Where's old Fish?"

"Mr. Fish, sir, is, I believe, in the vaults, engaged in some exploration with his secretary, Mr. Bosanney."

"Where's young Fish?"

"I believe Master Fish is in the turret-room, sir! I heard him ask Mr. Chandos for the key."

Bunter grunted, and James retired. The Owl of the Remove was a gregarious animal and, fascinating as his own company was, he was not satisfied with it. When he was not eating or sleeping, Bunter liked to talk.

Any company was better than none. The beasts who had gone riding had not come in, though they might have known that Bunter did not want to be left on his own! Alonzo was still out in the park botanising! Fisher T. Fish was a last resource. His society was neither attractive nor agreeable, but when he had finished the cake and the lemonade, Bunter ascended the stairs and went to look for Fishy.

He grunted and panted up the turret stair and reached the door of the haunted room. The key was in the outside of the lock, where Chandos had left it, after unlocking the door for Fishy.

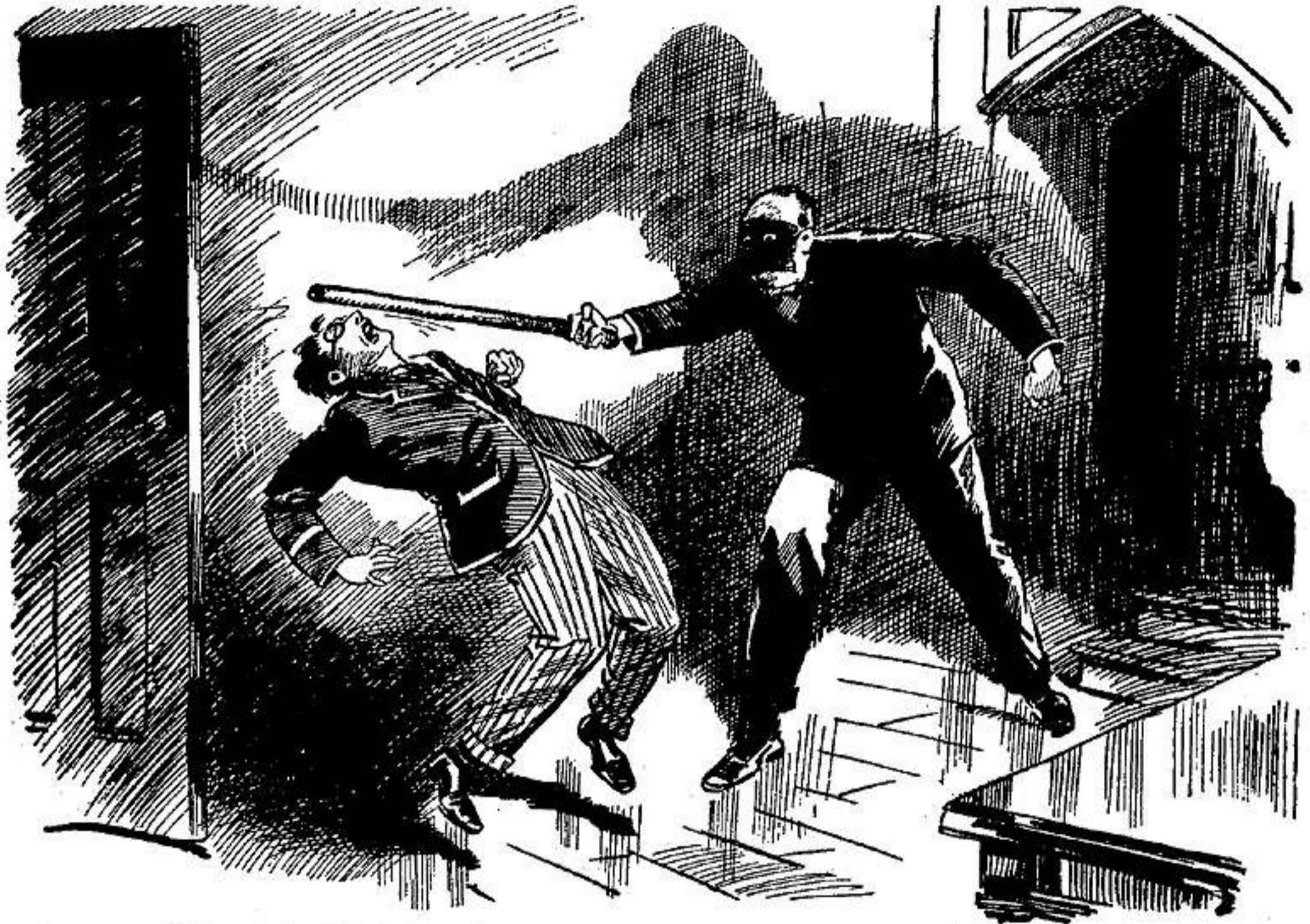
There was a sound of movement in the room.

Fisher T. Fish's nasal voice reached Bunter's fat ears through the door.

"Gee-whiz! I guess the popper will sure sit up and take notice when I put him wise to this!"

Billy Bunter promptly turned the door-handle, opened the door, and





There was a faint sound behind him, and Fisher T. Fish scowled as he turned his head, thinking that it was Bunter. Next moment he gave a wild, startled yell at the glimpse of a masked face. He bounded up—only to fall back again as a crashing blow descended on his head!

blinked in. That excited exclamation made him very curious. Apparently Fishy had made some discovery in the turret-room.

Bunter's thoughts were instantly on the "hidden hoard!"

The fat Owl knew why the Fishes were at Portercliffe Hall! It had been a mystery to him, when Greyfriars broke up for the holidays. But it was no mystery now. Popper and son were after the hoard of the late Lord Portercliffe. And Fishy's excited exclamation, in the turret-room, sounded as if he had made a discovery.

Bunter blinked in eagerly.

Fisher T. Fish was on his hands and knees scanning the oaken floor with his keen, sharp eyes. He glared round at the sight of Bunter in the doorway.

"I say, Fishy, have you found it?" gasped Bunter.

"Beat it, you fat clam!" snapped Fisher T. Fish. "What the great horned toad you come butting in yere for?"

"Oh, really, Fishy——"

"I guess I said beat it!"

Bunter blinked at him, and blinked round the room. There was no sign of discovered treasure, so far as he could see. But it was plain that Fisher T. Fish was excited about something.

"Look here, Fishy! I'll help you, if you like!" said Bunter eagerly. "Halves if we find the hoard, old chap! What?"

"You vamoosing?" snapped Fishy.

"If that's the way you talk to a guest, Fishy——"

Fisher T. Fish came across the turret-room to the door with a glitter in his sharp eyes. Whatever discovery he had made, it was clear that Fishy did not want to confide it to Bunter.

"Git!" he rapped.

"Look here, you beast——"

"Absquatulate!" hooted Fisher T. Fish.

And as Bunter did not absquatulate, Fishy gave him a shove which sent him tottering out of the doorway, across the landing.

Bump!

Bunter sat down.

"Ow! Beast!" roared the fat Owl.

"Ow!"

Slam!

The door of the turret-room closed again.

Billy Bunter staggered to his feet. His eyes gleamed with wrath behind his spectacles.

Fishy's manners and customs, as a host, certainly left something to be desired. But perhaps Bunter, as a guest, was a little trying. Anyhow, Fisher T. Fish had made it clear that the fat junior was not wanted in the turret-room.

"Beast!" hissed Bunter.

He stepped softly towards the door. He did not open it; but he quietly turned the key in the lock. Then, noiselessly, he drew the key out and slipped it into his pocket.

There was a fat grin on Bunter's face as he rolled down the turret stair. Fisher T. Fish was locked in the turret-room, to which there was no other door. Bunter had the key. By the time he got out, Bunter fancied, the beast might be sorry for his beastly bad manners!

With the key in his pocket, Bunter rolled out of the house, to pack himself in a hammock on the lawn till lunch. And the more or less musical sound of Bunter's snore floating over the lawn

told Harry Wharton & Co. where he was, when they came back from their morning ride.

## THE SIXTH CHAPTER.

### Struck Down!

FISHER T. FISH'S eyes were gleaming.

He forgot Bunter's fat existence as soon as he had slammed the door of the turret-room on him.

Dropping on his bony knees, the lean junior resumed giving the old oaken floor the "once-over."

Ever since Chandos had left him, Fishy had been searching the turret-room for a possible secret door. If such a secret was found it would open up a new line of investigation in the search for the old lord's hidden hoard. And the fact that the spectre of the Red Earl had appeared in the turret-room seemed to indicate that there was a secret entrance of some sort.

But Fishy had no luck! The turret-room stood high, and the walls of solid stone were high above the roofs of the other apartments. Outside them was the open air, which discouraged the theory of a secret door in the walls. A large clothes cupboard, and a bathroom, had been partitioned off from the original room, but these also had the open air outside. Fisher T. Fish was driven to the conclusion that if there was a secret entrance at all, it was in the old oak floor.

But if it was there, it was not easy to find. So far as Fishy's keen eyes could discern, the oak floor was solid and immovable.

Although, however, he had failed to spot any trace of a secret trapdoor, the American junior's sharp eyes picked up other traces.

In the deserted and disused room there was, naturally, an accumulation of dust. A broom or a duster had not touched it since the occasion when Billy Bunter had occupied it for one night.

Fishy's skinny fingers grew very grubby as he groped and pressed and squeezed at the old oak planks in the hope of discovering one that would move. Here and there his groping fingers left marks on the dusty oak.

Suddenly it dawned on him that there were similar marks under his eyes which had not been made by his own fingers.

No wonder Fishy ejaculated "Gee-whizz!" at that discovery.

Somebody had been in the turret-room before him! Someone unknown had been engaged on a similar quest.

The mystery man of Portercliffe, of course! It could be nobody else!

Fishy bent over the traces he had discerned on the oak with eager eyes, giving them the once-over, and, in fact, the twice-over and the thrice-over.

His cute transatlantic brain was putting in some hard thinking.

That room had been disused and locked up for years, since the time of old Lord Portercliffe. Only once had it been opened up—on the first night of the holidays when Fishy had had Bunter put in the haunted room with the intention of giving him a scare. And ever since that day it had been locked, shut, and unoccupied.

Whether Chandos had instructions from young Lord Portercliffe, or whether he was acting on his own initiative, it was certain that he kept the turret-room locked, and the key in

his own keeping. Fishy had had proof of that only that morning.

How, then, had the room been entered?

No doubt Chandos kept the key hanging up somewhere, and the mystery man could have got hold of it if he had liked. But Fishy guessed that that guy did not come up to the turret by the stair.

That stair opened from the corridor occupied by the rooms of the Greyfriars fellows—it was only a few yards from Harry Wharton's door. To reach the turret stair the mystery man would have to pass the doors of a number of occupied rooms.

No doubt he might choose that way when the house was empty of guests. But it would be very risky in the present circumstances.

If there was a secret way in, the mystery man would choose that. Twice or thrice the mysterious prowler had been nearly caught, and each time it had been at the secret door in the picture gallery behind the portrait of the Red Earl.

Evidently, when he went on his mysterious explorations he went by that secret door in the picture gallery. Yet there were traces of his presence in the turret-room! If that did not mean that there was access from the secret passages to the turret-room, Fishy guessed that he didn't know what it did mean.

It was as good as proof of a secret entrance to the turret-room. And it was more than that.

Footmarks on the floor would have betrayed a visitor; but Fishy was picking up the marks of groping fingers. Amazing as it was, these traces told their own tale—the mystery man, like Fisher T. Fish, had been searching and

searching on the floor of the turret-room for an opening in the old oak. Many of the secrets of the ancient mansion he knew, but he did not know them all. What else could it mean?

Fishy's heart thumped with excitement.

He crawled over the old oak, searching now, not so much for a secret trap, as for further signs of the previous explorer.

"Great snakes!" he ejaculated suddenly.

He stopped in his crawl and stared at the floor, where the sunlight fell from one of the windows he had opened. Between two of the close-set oak planks of the floor was a gash, evidently made by a tool.

A chisel, or some such instrument, had been pressed in there, or driven in, either to loosen the plank, or to ascertain whether it possibly could be loosened.

"Gee-whizz!" breathed Fishy.

There was no doubt now—no shadow of doubt! The turret-room was the spot selected by the mystery man for his search—the search for the hidden hoard of the old lord. He suspected, or believed, that it was in the turret-room that old Lord Portercliffe had stacked the golden hoard—or part of it! Part, it was known, had been hidden in the hollow tree on the lawn.

Fishy's eyes glistened.

This room had been used by the old lord, in his lifetime. No doubt he, at least, had known its secrets. Was there some hidden cavity under the solid-looking floor, where a golden hoard was concealed?

It looked as if the mystery man thought so.

With beating heart, Fisher T. Fish continued his search. This would be great "noos" for his popper! It was a "line" on the hidden treasure that had brought Hiram K. Fish all the way from New York!

Bosanne, formerly the old lord's secretary, had "put him wise" to it. But all that Bosanne knew was that the old nobleman had hidden away a hundred and fifty thousand sovereigns. He had no idea where. Fishy guessed that he knew more than Bosanne now.

He knew as much as the mystery man—who, evidently, was one of the men-servants who had been there in the old lord's time.

"I guess pop will sure smile a few when I put him wise to this!" Fisher T. Fish chuckled aloud.

A faint sound behind him made him turn his head. He scowled as he turned it, thinking for the moment that it was Bunter again.

But it was not Bunter!

Fishy gave a wild, startled yell at a glimpse of a masked face. He bounded up—only to fall again as a crashing blow descended on his head!

There was a groan—a heavy fall! Then there was deep, deep silence in the turret-room of Portercliffe Hall!

## THE SEVENTH CHAPTER.

### Bunter Thinks it Funny!

**H**IRAM K. Fish frowned, with knitted brows, as he sat down to lunch.

His secretary, Jonas Bosanne, was looking tired and dispirited. Evidently the hunt in the secret passages that morning had been as futile as the numberless hunts and searches already made. Once more Hiram K. and his secretary had rooted through dusty passages, weary staircases, and damp vaults, with nothing to show for it.



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Harry Wharton & Co., on the other hand, were cheery and smiling. They had enjoyed a morning's ride by the sea, and returned in great spirits and with good appetites. Alonzo had come back from the park, fatigued but happy, with wonderful specimens parked in his botanical volume. Billy Bunter had rolled out of his hammock at the sound of the gong for lunch, and his repose in the hammock seemed to have given him as good an appetite as the ride had given the other fellows.

Only one of the party was missing from the lunch-table, and that was Fisher T. Fish.

Mr. Fish did not seem to notice his absence at first. No doubt he was thinking of the task he had in hand at Portercliffe Hall, which was proving longer and more difficult than he had guessed, reckoned, or calculated.

Herbert Vernon-Smith, after a glance at the lean face of the gentleman from New York, winked at the other fellows.

Harry Wharton & Co. affected not to see the wink, but Billy Bunter gave a fat chuckle.

"Any luck this morning, sir?" asked the Bounder blandly.

Grunt from Mr. Fish!

He did not care to discuss the matter of old Lord Portercliffe's hoard with son's schoolfellows. It was extremely irritating to him that they had learned anything about it at all.

That, however, had been unavoidable. Since Billy Bunter had rooted hidden sovereigns out of the Portercliffe oak, the hidden hoard had been a topic all through Portercliffe Hall, above and below stairs. And the hunt for the mystery man had caused endless excitement.

"Not spotted the jolly old mystery man yet, sir?" went on Smithy.

"Nope!" grunted Hiram K. Fish.

The Bounder grinned. It was his belief that he could have helped very considerably in spotting the mystery man. But Mr. Fish had made it clear—very clear—that he had no use for schoolboys horning into the affair.

The juniors told Mr. Fish of their meeting with young Lord Portercliffe that morning. But Hiram K. was not interested in young Lord Portercliffe.

Indeed, he gave a grunt which indicated that the news that the young lord was in the neighbourhood was far from welcome to him.

"I suppose he'll be coming along to look at the old place," remarked Vernon-Smith, with another wink at the juniors.

Snort from Hiram K!

"I guess not," he answered. "I'll say I've got no use for him here! If you young guys have been asking that hombre to horn in you can wash it out."

"We should hardly ask anybody here, sir, without your permission," said Harry Wharton, rather dryly.

"You said it!" agreed Mr. Fish. "Waal, don't!"

The juniors let the subject of Lord Portercliffe drop, like a hot potato.

They were, in fact, thinking rather uncomfortable thoughts on that subject. Billy Bunter, who had his own sources of information, had told them that Mr. Fish had not bought Portercliffe Hall, as Fishy declared, but had only taken it on a tenancy, with option to purchase. They did not attach much importance to the statements of a fellow who derived information from reading other people's letters.

But from the young lord that morning they had heard the same thing, and so there was no doubt of it now. Quite unaware that he was giving away the swank of popper and son, his lordship had mentioned that the house was "let."

Yet, though he was not the owner of

the place—which was certain now—it was equally certain that Hiram K. was in search of the hidden hoard.

That hoard, if it existed, belonged to young Lord Portercliffe. There could be no question of that.

What, then, was Hiram K.'s game?

The Bounder thought he knew. Having an option to buy the place, Hiram K. was going to exercise that option if he found the hoard—in plain language, to buy Lord Portercliffe's house with Lord Portercliffe's own money.

Smithy was rather cynically amused at the idea of such an exceedingly sharp stroke of business. But the other fellows hesitated to believe anything of the kind.

It was, after all, no business of theirs, and if Mr. Fish did discover the hidden hoard he was not likely to tell them that he had done so. But it was rather an uncomfortable subject for reflection.

"Where's Fishy?" asked Bob Cherry, to change the subject.

Mr. Fish glanced along the table.

"Ain't son here?" he asked. He glanced round at Chandos. "Say, Chandos, where's son?"

"Master Fish has not come in to lunch yet, sir," said Chandos. "I cannot say where he is at the moment."

"He, he, he!"

That chuckle came from Billy Bunter. As the key of the turret-room was still in Bunter's pocket he knew where Fisher T. Fish was—where he must be. He could not have got out of the turret-room through a locked door.

"Well, what's the joke, fatty?" asked Bob.

"Oh, nothing!" said Bunter hastily. "I don't know where Fishy is, of course! Haven't the foggiest!"

The juniors looked at him. That Bunter was prevaricating, as usual, was clear. He knew where Fishy was, and was apparently greatly amused by his absence from lunch.

Mr. Fish, however, gave the fat Owl no attention.

After lunch he lighted one of his long, thin cigars and walked away to the library with Bosanney. No doubt they were going to have one more of their endless discussions on the subject of the possible hiding-place of the old lord's hoard. There was nothing alarming in Fisher T. Fish missing lunch. He might have gone down to Margate, or for a drive in one of the Portercliffe cars. Mr. Fish guessed that he would blow in sooner or later, and left it at that.

Billy Bunter grinned as he rolled out. He had intended to keep Fishy shut up in the turret-room till lunch, which would serve him right for his rotten bad manners. He had not anticipated that Fishy would have to miss that meal. That seemed the cream of the joke to Bunter.

It had not occurred to his fat brain that the prisoner of the turret-room would not be able to attract attention to his plight. He had expected to hear that Fishy had been hammering on the door or shouting from the windows. If so, however, it was clear that he had not been heard.

Bob Cherry tapped the fat Owl on the shoulder.

"Where's Fishy?" he asked, when Mr. Fish was out of hearing.

Bunter blinked at him through his big spectacles and grinned.

"How should I know?" he inquired.

"I don't know how you should, but you jolly well do!" answered Bob. "Have you been playing tricks on Fishy, you fat Owl?"

"Oh, really, Cherry—"

"My esteemed and idiotic Bunter," murmured Hurree Jamset Ram Singh,

"the playfulness of ludicrous tricks on an esteemed host is not the proper caper."

"He, he, he!"

"Do you know where he is, Bunter?" asked Harry Wharton, looking at the grinning fat Owl in astonishment. "Has anything happened to him?"

"He, he, he! If a fellow shoves a fellow over, serve him jolly well right if he gets locked in a room and misses lunch!" chuckled Bunter. "Not that I've locked Fishy in a room, you know."

"Oh, my hat!" said Nugent.

"Nothing of the kind!" said Bunter. "In fact, I haven't been near the turret-room this morning. And I only went there to speak to Fishy because you beasts went out and left me on my own. Not that I saw Fishy there," added Bunter cautiously. "He wasn't there, and I never looked him in, and I haven't got the key in my pocket now. He, he, he!"

"Great pip!" said Vernon-Smith, as all the juniors stared blankly at the fat and fatuous Owl.

"He, he, he!"

"Is the fat ass potty?" asked Johnny Bull in wonder. "Fishy can't be locked in the turret-room. He would be howling to be let out."

"He, he, he! I fancy he is!" chortled Bunter. "But nobody's heard him. See? Let him stay there—the beast! He may learn manners. He, he, he!"

"You blithering ass!" said Harry. "If Fishy was hammering and howling in the turret-room I should have heard him when I went up to my room before lunch. And he could shout from the windows, too. He can't be there."

"He, he, he! He jolly well is—unless he's climbed up the chimney, or jumped out of a window!" chuckled Bunter. "Don't you fellows tell him I locked him in, you know. It was only a joke. Besides, I never did it!"

Harry Wharton's face became grave. "Have a little sense, Bunter! The turret-room's rather high up, but it would be quite easy for a fellow to make himself heard—"

"Fishy hasn't!" grinned Bunter.

"What on earth can have happened to Fishy in the turret-room?" said Harry. "I suppose he can't have had an accident there. I—I suppose that sportsman who played ghost wouldn't show up in the daytime. But—"

"Better go and see, I think," said Bob Cherry. "Give me the key, you potty porpoise!"

"I haven't got the key!" said Bunter. "I never locked Fishy in, you see! Besides, I only did it because he shoved me over! The actual fact is that I haven't been near the turret-room. And if you fellows can't take my word, I can only say—Yaroooh! Leggo, you beast! If you kick me again, you rotter—Yaroooop! Here's the key, you beast!"

Bob Cherry took the key; and the Greyfriars fellows, with grave faces, hurried up the stairs.

Fishy, it was clear, had been locked in the turret-room; and by lunch-time at least he must have discovered that he was locked in, and bawled to be let out—if he was able so to do. What could imaginably have happened to him?

Not a sound was heard as the juniors crowded up the turret-stairs. The door above was shut and locked; obviously, if Fishy had been there at all, he was still there. Why was he silent?

Bob Cherry banged on the door.

"Hallo, hallo, hallo!" he shouted.

"You here, Fishy?"

There was no answer.

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"He can't be there!" said Wibley.  
 "Must be, if Bunter locked him in," said Kipps. "But what the dickens—"  
 "Get the door open, Bob!" said Harry.

Bob Cherry pushed the key into the lock and turned it. The door swung wide open.

Bunched in the doorway, the Greyfriars fellows stared into the turret-room, bright in the sunshine that streamed in at the open windows. There was a startled cry from the whole crowd at once:

"Fishy!"

On the floor, in the middle of the room, lay Fisher T. Fish, insensible, white as chalk, with a streak of crimson oozing down his colourless face. For one terrible second the juniors gazed at him in horror. Then Harry Wharton rushed in.

"Call Mr. Fish!" he panted.

And he knelt beside the American junior and raised Fishy's insensible head on his knee.

## THE EIGHTH CHAPTER.

### What Smithy Suspected!

**T**HERE were grave and serious faces that afternoon at Portercliffe Hall. Nobody was feeling much in a mood for holiday-making.

Fisher T. Fish lay in bed—not yet conscious. A doctor from Margate had arrived in response to an urgent telephone-call from Mr. Fish.

Harry Wharton & Co. were anxious for news of him. Fisher T. Fish was hard hit—that was known. He was not in danger—it was not so bad as that. But he had had a severe knock on the head which had stunned him, and he had not yet recovered his senses. By whose hand had he been struck down in the turret-room?

There was an obvious answer to that question. The mystery man of Portercliffe had been at work again! No other hand could have struck the blow!

The strange affair at Portercliffe Hall was taking on a more serious complexion. Hitherto the unknown rascal had been content with playing ghost and seeking to scare the explorers of the old mansion's secrets. That had failed. The "spectre of Portercliffe," the phantom of the Red Earl, had not been seen—since Mr. Fish had discovered the trick played on his cartridges.

The spectre did not care to take the risk of facing real bullets. But, that trickery having failed, it looked as if the mystery man was proceeding to more drastic measures. Spoof spectres could be disregarded, but a blow on the head was a very much more serious matter.

Hiram K. Fish's lean face was grim with suppressed rage that afternoon. His helplessness to lay a hand on the unknown man, even to begin to suspect who the man was, got his goat sorely. Bosanney, the secretary, looked pale and troubled. One glance at his pallid face showed how deeply he was scared.

Until Fishy recovered and was able to speak, nothing definite could be learned of the attack on him.

But, owing to Billy Bunter, one fact at least was quite clear. There was a secret means of access to the turret-room.

Fisher T. Fish had been locked in at the time he was attacked. The door had still been locked when the juniors went up to find him.

That was proof that the assailant had entered the turret-room by some secret

way. And during the afternoon Harry Wharton & Co. spent some hours in the turret, searching for the secret way in and out.

But they had no luck.

The secret door, which they now knew must be there, was too well hidden for discovery. There was no possibility of following the way the unknown dastard had gone after leaving Fisher T. Fish insensible on the turret floor.

"By gum!" said Bob Cherry. "I'd like to get near the rotter—I'd like to handle him for a few minutes!"

The Bounder joined in the search of the turret-room; but after a time he beckoned to Wharton and went out, leaving the other fellows still engaged on the rather hopeless search.

Wharton followed him out on the landing.

On the turret stair Vernon-Smith stopped, with a glance up and down to make sure that there were no other ears to hear.

Wharton looked at him curiously.

"What have you got in your head now, Smithy?" he asked.

"Can't you guess?"

Wharton started a little.

"Chandos?" he asked in a low voice.

"Just that."

"It's impossible, Smithy! Utter rot!" Wharton shook his head decidedly. "A middle-aged, respectable butler committing a rotten, cowardly attack like that—I couldn't believe it!"

"Get down to the facts," said Vernon-Smith coolly. "You know why I began to suspect Chandos. You and I ran into the mystery man in the dark one night, and in the tussle I hit him in the eye; he got away unseen. But what did I tell you at the time?"

Wharton smiled faintly.

"You told me you believed that you had damaged his eye, and that if anyone was seen next day with a damaged eye, it would be the man."

"Exactly! And who was seen next day with a damaged eye?" asked the Bounder.

"Chandos was. But according to what he stated, he knocked his head on the bedpost going to bed and—"

"You think it might be only a coincidence?"

"I think it must have been. I can't imagine—"

"Well," said Vernon-Smith quietly and coolly, "I don't believe anything of the kind. I was knocked into a cocked hat, I admit, when I saw Chandos with that damaged eye the day after I had punched the mystery man. But I knew what it meant—and I know now!"

Wharton was silent. He admitted that if what had happened was a coincidence, it was a remarkable coincidence. But he simply could not believe that Chandos, the stately butler of Portercliffe, was the night-prowler, the trickster who had played ghost—the rascal who had struck down Fishy in the turret-room. It seemed to him incredible.

"You remember I had a wheeze for spotting him," went on the Bounder. "I stayed up one night to watch, but I got that fool Bosanney by mistake; and old Fish cut up rusty and told me to mind my own business—and I did! After that I just washed the matter out of my mind. But now—"

"Well, now—" said Harry.

"Now it's taken a rather more serious turn. So long as the mystery man was only playing ghost and hunting for the hidden hoard that old Fish is after, it mattered little enough to me. But knocking a fellow on the head is a rather more serious matter. He ought to be snaffled!"

"That's right enough!" said Harry, "But—"

"But you can't believe that it was Chandos?"

"Well, no!" said Wharton frankly. "And if it was, there's absolutely no proof, Smithy—you can't bring such an accusation against a man on bare suspicion."

"I know that! I'm not fool enough to shout this out before I know more," said the Bounder testily. "But I'm going to know more! I've told you already that I've found out that Chandos suffers from headaches—and goes to his room to rest every day—another coincidence, of course, though it's pretty clear that a man who prowls at night must get some sleep in the day. Will you take a bet?"

"A bet! What do you mean?"

"I mean that I'll give you ten to one that Chandos was gone to his room with one of his headaches at the time that Fishy was knocked on the head in the turret-room!"

"Oh!" said Harry.

"He would have to get out of sight of the staff, of course, for these stunts!" said the Bounder. "And that yarn about headaches washes well! Look here, come with me!"

Wharton followed the Bounder downstairs.

Billy Bunter was in the hall sprawling in an armchair. Even the fat Owl of the Remove was looking a little serious in the present state of affairs. He was thinking chiefly of tea-time, but he gave a thought or two to the hapless Fishy.

He blinked at the two juniors through his big spectacles as they came down.

"I say, you fellows, how's Fishy?" he asked. "It was all his own fault, you know! If he hadn't turned me out of the turret-room I should have been there when that blighter pitched into him, and I should have protected him! I fancy that rotter wouldn't have handled me as easily as Fishy."

"Fathead!" said Harry.

"Oh, really, Wharton—"

"You came back when we went for the ride this morning, Bunter," said the Bounder. "Did you see Chandos about?"

Harry Wharton smiled faintly. If Bunter had seen Chandos about at the time that Fishy was attacked in the turret-room, it would knock the Bounder's suspicion sky-high. And Wharton thought it very probable that Bunter had.

"Chandos!" repeated Bunter. He frowned. "No! I rang for the beast to bring me some grub, but it was James that came."

Wharton started as the Bounder gave him a quick look.

"I dare say Chandos was busy!" he remarked carelessly.

Snort, from Bunter!

"Busy slacking as usual!" he answered. "Headaches be blowed! The man always seems to have a headache when he's wanted. It wouldn't do for Bunter Court, I can tell you."

Wharton caught his breath. The Bounder was questioning Bunter on the mere chance of picking up some information concerning the whereabouts of the butler that morning. He was getting more than he could have anticipated.

"How do you know that Chandos had one of his headaches at that time, Bunter?" asked Harry.

"I know that James said so!" grunted Bunter. "I jelly well told



Mr. Fish stared blankly as his son flashed his light on the contents of the old oak chest. "Gee-whiz!" he ejaculated. Fisher T. Fish chuckled. "I'll say this is the spook's outfit, pop!" he remarked. "You said it!" agreed Hiram K. The chest was packed with ancient garments—Elizabethan trunk hose, ruff, cloak, sword and other such things.

him there was too much of it in my opinion."

"Was that while Fishy was in the turret-room?"

"Eh? Yes! James told me he was there, and I went up to see him. If he hadn't shoved me out—"

The Bounder gave Wharton a rather grim smile.

"I say, you fellows, what do you want to know about Chandos for?" asked Bunter. "What does a dashed manservant matter to you?"

Wharton and Smithy left the fat Owl.

The Bounder did not speak till they were out of hearing of Bunter. Then he said curtly:

"Well?"

Wharton was silent. The Bounder had been right—one of Chandos' headaches had taken him out of sight at the time of the attack on Fisher T. Fish in the turret-room. It was rather startling confirmation of the Bounder's suspicions.

"Well?" repeated Smithy impatiently.

"Well," said Harry slowly. "It begins to look—" He paused. "But it may be a coincidence—you don't know enough to be sure, Smithy."

"I'm going to know!" said the Bounder grimly.

### THE NINTH CHAPTER.

#### Hiram Knows How!

**F**ISHER T. FISH sat up in bed with a bandaged head, a rather pale face, and a lingering ache in his napper.

It was late in the evening. Downstairs the radio was on in the hall, and

the Greyfriars fellows were gathered there. Strains of music floated up to Fishy's room—unheeded.

Damaged as he was, Fisher T. Fish's lean face was very keen—and so was the lean face of Hiram K., sitting by the bedside. Bosanney, the secretary, was in the room, but he was not sitting down—he was moving about with restless uneasiness. Every now and then Hiram K. gave him a glance of contempt. What had happened that day had shaken Bosanney's nerve—but on Hiram K. it had only had the effect of getting his goat.

Fishy was feeling sore, and he had a big bruise on his head. But he was almost himself again now, and he had told his popper of the discovery he had made in the turret-room. And, as he anticipated, it made Hiram K. "smile a few."

"We got on to it at last!" said Mr. Fish. "We sure got on to it! I'll say we're in line for that doggoned hoard! Yep!"

"I guess so, pop!" assented Fisher T.

"We're sure going to root out the way that guy got into the turret-room," said Mr. Fish, "and we're sure going to root out what he got in for! Say, Bosanney!"

"Yes, Mr. Fish!" muttered the secretary.

"You was secretary to the old lord, and you was here for years with him, before he spotted you spying and fired you!" said Mr. Fish. "You've told me that he generally located in that turret-room."

"It was the room he always used as a study and private apartment,"

said Bosanney. "I often sat with him there, going over his papers."

"And you never spotted any secret place in the room?"

"Never!"

"Waal, I guess I'm going to spot it a few!" said Hiram K. "I'll say it's there, and that mystery guy is wise to it. The pesky old lord seems to have parked the spondulies in different spots—one lot was found in the hollow oak—and I guess another lot is going to be found in the turret-room. Mebbe the whole caboodle this time."

Hiram K.'s sharp eyes gleamed.

"I guess that old lord knew what he was about when he laid up sovereigns at twenty shillings each!" he went on. "He knew that gold would rise when a country went on paper—I guess it was about the best investment he could have made! Every one of them sovereigns is worth over thirty shillings these days! I'll say the old geek knew a thing or two! If he hadn't passed in his checks so sudden, I guess he would have left some hint for the next lord to lay a paw on it, what?"

"Possibly that was his intention," said Bosanney. "But he certainly never did so. Young Lord Portercliffe is ignorant of the existence of the hoard—there is no doubt about that."

Hiram K. grinned.

"And nobody would ever have got wise to it if you hadn't spied on him—and that mystery guy, too!" he remarked. "I guess you and the other guy was both boneheads not to spot what he did with it! But that mystery guy sure has a big suspicion in his

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mind—he thinks it's hidden in the turret-room, and he's been hunting for it there. What?"

"It looks like that!" admitted Bosanne.

"Surest thing you know!" said Mr. Fish emphatically. "And I'll say I might have guessed that much, too! First time the ghost was seen was when the room was fixed up for young Bunter—and it hasn't been used since. I guess the ghost had good reasons for wanting to keep that room empty."

"You said it, pop!" agreed Fisher T.

"But—" muttered Bosanne.

"Spill it!" grunted Mr. Fish. "You losing your nerve?"

"I—I did not anticipate all this," said Bosanne uneasily. "The—the ghost business, of course, matters little—"

"I guess it scared you a few, all the same!" grinned Mr. Fish. "But don't you worry about that ghost none! I guess he won't show up any more, now that he's wise to my gun!"

"No doubt! No doubt! But—" "Shoot!" snapped Hiram K.

"Whoever the man is, he has now taken to desperate measures!" stammered Bosanne. "Your son has been struck down from behind—"

"I guess he won't see me again!" said Fisher T.

"He may get you, or Mr. Fish, or me—any of us!" said Bosanne. "I—I did not realise before that we have so desperate a man to deal with. Every time we have descended into the subterranean passages we have been at his mercy. A blow could be struck—"

"Forget it!" snapped Mr. Fish.

"Think of it, sir!" said Bosanne. "The man played ghost to frighten us away. He failed—and now he has adopted more drastic measures. What is to prevent him from going farther still? Obviously, this attack on your son is intended as a warning—to frighten us off, as the ghost trick failed. Do you think that this desperate villain, whoever he is, will rest content with that? The next blow from behind may be one that will not be recovered from!"

Fisher T. Fish whistled.

Hiram K. snorted.

"I guess I'm wise to that!" he snapped. "I'll say I see the whole game from A to izzard! But he ain't scaring me any!"

"You may please yourself, sir," said Bosanne. "But, so far as I am concerned, I refuse to set foot again in the underground passages. I will not place my life at the mercy of an unknown and desperate man, whose attacks cannot be guarded against."

Another snort from Hiram K.

"I guess if that mystery guy had only you to deal with, Bosanne, he would win the game hands down!" he answered contemptuously. "But I'll

tell a man, I ain't easy scared out of a million dollars! No, sir!"

"But—the danger—" "You want a million dollars to fall into your trousers pocket of their own accord?" sneered Hiram K. "Forget it! We got to beat that guy—and I'll mention that I'm the man to beat him! Jest a few!"

Bosanne gave an impatient shrug of the shoulders.

"You cannot deal with him!" he said. "Even if you discharged every manservant in the house, from the butler to the kitchen-boy—which you cannot do, as they are in young Lord Portercliffe's service—but even if you did, as I say, it would serve no purpose. The mystery man knows all the secrets of the place, and could enter, whenever he chose, from outside, unseen."

"I guess I'm wise to that! But we're going to beat that guy all the same!" said Mr. Fish coolly. "I guess we got to come to a finish, with so much chinwag going on about the hidden hoard! It was going to be kept dark; but the beans was spilled, and that's that! And I hear that young Lord Portercliffe is in the offing, too—and if he got a word of it—"

"Gee-whiz!" murmured Fisher T. "I guess that would put the lid on it, pop!"

"We're getting through!" said Mr. Fish.

"How?" yapped the secretary.

"I guess we can handle the proposition in a way that that mystery guy can't!" said Mr. Fish coolly. "He's one of the menservants—goodness knows which. But all he can do is to search and search—and I'll say that his search ain't buying him much, so far."

"What else can we do?"

"Heaps!" grinned Mr. Fish. "I guess we know where to look now. That mystery guy has put me on to it. He figures that the hoard is hidden somewhere in the turret-room—that's a cinch. I guess he's right. All he can do there is to paw over the place, hunting. But now I know where to look—and I guess I'm looking! Yes, sir. I'm telephoning this here evening to a firm of builders in Margate."

Bosanne stared.

"They're going to send me half a dozen men," continued Mr. Fish. "And that turret-room is going to be pulled into pieces—jest into little bits, if necessary. You needn't tell me that it's Lord Portercliffe's property, and that I ain't got any right to pull his house to pieces. I'm sure going to buy the house when I spot the spondulics. His lordship won't have any kick coming. He wants thirty thousand pounds for the place—cheap at the price, sure! I guess he can have it—out of the hundred and fifty thousand his uncle stacked away—mebbe in that turret! I'll say I'm prepared to pay for all the damage I do—but I'm sure going to do a whole lot."

"Oh!" gasped Bosanne.

"That's the programme!" said Hiram K. Fish. "We ain't rooting about in them underground passages any more. I guess that mystery guy only went that way to get into the turret-room by a secret door—I guess I'm wise to that now! Waal, we're going to begin on the turret-room from inside—and first of all the floor's coming up! Got that?"

"Popper!" said Fisher T. "You're sry!"

"Son!" said Mr. Fish. "I'll mention that, I am!"

"It's a cinch!" said Fisher T. Fish,

his eyes gleaming under the bandages. "I'll tell the world, it's sure a cinch!"

"So you can pull yourself together, Bosanne!" said Mr. Fish. "We ain't going rooting about in dark corners where that guy can get us with a sockdolager on the cabeza, like he has son! Nope! I guess by this time tomorrow we'll know what's hidden in the turret-room, if we have to take it stone from stone and plank from plank! Bank on that!"

"You said it, pop!" said Fisher T.

"Search me!" said Mr. Fish.

And he went down to telephone.

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## THE TENTH CHAPTER. A Day Out!

**B**ANG! Clang! Bang! Clang! Clank! "I say, you fellows, something's up!" squeaked Billy Bunter.

Harry Wharton & Co. did not need Bunter to tell them that.

It was the following morning, and the Portercliffe party were at breakfast when that outbreak of din caught all ears.

The juniors had already been aware that something unusual was "on" that morning. A party of workmen had presented themselves; and a burly foreman had interviewed an astonished Chandos. Some of the fellows had seen the arrival; and they rather wondered why Mr. Fish had sent for a party of builder's men.

Mr. Fish had come in to breakfast. Apparently he was giving the workmen instructions as to what they were to do.

Their work, whatever it was, made a great deal of noise. The din seemed to proceed from upstairs. It sounded as if the house was being knocked to pieces.

Fisher T. Fish was at the breakfast-table—still bandaged, but looking quite merry and bright. He grinned as the banging, clanging, and clanking began.

"What's up, Fishy?" asked Wibley.

"Breaking up the happy home?" asked the Bouncer.

"Aw, jest some alterations the popper thinks necessary!" drawled Fisher T. Fish. "Nothing much!"

Breakfast finished, to an accompaniment of banging and clanging, Mr. Fish came in with his secretary, and they snatched a hurried meal.

After breakfast Mr. Fish addressed son's guests, with a cheery grin on his lean face.

"I guess I fixed up a trip for you to-day!" he remarked. "I been mapping it out a few."

"That's very kind of you, Mr. Fish!" said Wharton, while the other fellows looked inquiringly at the gentleman from New York.

"The kindness is terrific!" remarked Hurree Janset Ram Singh.

"You'll take the big car," went on Mr. Fish, "and give the coast the once-over—Broadstairs, Ramsgate, Pegwell Bay, Sandwich—up and down and round about. Then a call in at Canterbury—I guess you'd like to see the cathedral, and the place where that galoot, Thomas Becket got his— And home by the River Stour, and Ford, and Sturry, and Grove Ferry. You'll be able to get boats on the Stour, if you want. I've told Chandos to pack cats for a picnic—and I guess you'll have a tip-top day."

"Sounds good!" said Harry, with a smile.

"And I guess the car's waiting!"

said Mr. Fish. "I'd say you better not lose a lot of time. Lovely day—glorious weather—and the end of the holidays not far off! Make the most of it, what?"

"Hear, hear!" said Bob.

That excursion, as mapped out by Mr. Fish, certainly did sound attractive.

But the juniors were a little puzzled.

Mr. Fish had looked out a very pleasant trip for them. It was more trouble than he had hitherto taken with his son's guests.

Without being unduly suspicious, some of the fellows wondered a little whether Mr. Fish had any reason for desiring to clear them out of Portercliffe Hall for a whole day—and whether it had any connection with the "alterations" Fishy had mentioned, and for which a gang of workmen had arrived from Margate.

However, it was scarcely possible to argue the matter, even if they had wished to do so—which they did not.

With the exception of Billy Bunter, they were not curious about Mr. Fish's concerns; and a day out in a car, with a picnic added, was quite an attractive idea.

So the party went up to their rooms, to get ready for the trip.

Once upstairs, they were left in no doubt as to the precise location of the "alterations" that were going on. The sound of banging and clanging, clanking and wrenching, came down the narrow stair from the turret-room.

"I say, you fellows, they're in the turret!" said Billy Bunter, blinking up the turret stair through his big spectacles. "I say, let's go and see what they're up to."

But Mr. Bosanney was seated on the turret stair.

He waved Bunter back as the fat junior made a step upwards.

"Please do not come this way!" said Mr. Bosanney.

"Oh, really, you know——" said Bunter.

"Alterations are going on," explained the secretary. "There may be—hem!—danger from falling planks, or something of the kind. Kindly do not come up this staircase."

The Bouncer grinned.

"Mr. Fish's instructions?" he asked.

"Precisely!" said Bosanney.

"What rot!" grunted Bunter.

Rot or not, Bosanney was not to be gainsaid! The juniors went on along the corridor to their rooms.

The Bouncer touched Harry Wharton on the arm.

"What do you think of that?" he asked.

Wharton smiled.

"Something's up, and we're not wanted on the scene, I suppose," he answered. "It looks like it, at any rate. No bizney of ours."

"Looks as if the Fish tribe are on the track of the giddy hoard—or fancy they are!" said Vernon-Smith.

Wharton nodded.

"You remember what young Lord Portercliffe let drop when we saw him yesterday. This house doesn't belong to old Fish, as young Fish made out. If they spot the quids——"

"Chuck it, Smithy!" said Harry quietly. "We've no right to suspect Mr. Fish of intending to bag what belongs to young Lord Portercliffe!"

The Bouncer sneered.

"What does it look like?" he asked.

"Never mind what it looks like. We're here as Fishy's guests, and we've no right to suspect his father of sharp practice. Chuck it!"

The Bouncer laughed mockingly and let the subject drop.

Banging and clanging were still going on merrily when the juniors came down. The big Portercliffe car was waiting on the drive for the party, and picnic baskets were being taken out to it by James and John.

Chandos was on the scene, his plump face very grave.

Wharton glanced rather curiously at him.

He did not, and could not, quite believe that the Bouncer's suspicion of Chandos was well founded. It seemed almost impossible to connect the stately butler, in his mind, with the desperate unknown who was called the "mystery man" by the juniors, for want of any other name to call him by.

But if Smithy was right, and Chandos

was the mystery man, there was no doubt that what was going on in the turret-room must be a startling shock to him. And it was easy to read perturbation in his usually expressionless face. Two or three times, as loud banging came from above, Wharton noticed that Chandos compressed his lips very hard.

The Bouncer gave him a wink as they went out to the car. He had been observing the butler, too.

"Jolly old Chandos doesn't like what's goin' on, I fancy!" murmured the Bouncer. "Think so?"

"Yes, I think so," assented Wharton. "But he may be worried about the damage that's being done. Chandos (Continued on next page.)"

## GREYFRIARS INTERVIEWS

As this week's yarn winds up our popular holiday series I think it's a fitting moment for our clever rhymester to tell you what transpired during his interview with

### FISHER T. FISH,

the American "business-man" of the Remove. Ed.

(1)

I guess and calculate he's cute!  
I reckon he's a keen galoot!  
Say, bo, this guy is sure a "beaut"  
At raking in the dollars!  
I'll tell the universe that he  
Is just as sharp as sharp can be,  
Hats off to Fishy, Fisher T.!  
The brightest of our scholars!

(3)

It's true that Fishy sometimes buys  
Old books and things from other guys,  
But even more I'll say he's wise,  
He never makes an error!  
He'll sell you anything you please  
From cricket bats to cupboard keys;  
The price he asks for one of these  
Would make you scream with terror!

(5)

He's busy, busy all day long,  
Yet though he seems to go so strong  
His Form-work's nearly always  
wrong—  
At that he's most unwilling!  
But though he doesn't care a scrap  
For class-work, he won't take a nap  
Or rest while any single chap  
Has got a single shilling!

(6)

I knocked upon his study door,  
Immediately I heard him roar:  
"Absquatulate! Light out, before  
You get my goat—you'll rue it!"  
At that I called out with a grin;  
"Say, can you lend a chap some tin?"  
And Fishy cried: "Sure! Mosey in!  
I'm just the guy to do it!"

(8)

At that he kinder simmered down,  
And eyed me with a nasty frown.  
I smiled and waited for the "brown,"  
But I did not receive it!  
Said Fishy: "Say, let's get it plain!  
Just spill your story once again!"  
"No fear!" I said. "I've asked in vain!  
Perhaps we'd better leave it!"



(10)  
This question seemed to rile the  
gink.  
He jumped up—why, I cannot  
think—  
And smothered me with writing  
ink—  
The miserable miser!  
I took up Gibbon's "Ancient  
Rome,"  
And crashed it down upon his dome,  
And left him, as I hurried home,  
A sadder Fish, but wiser!



(7)

I smiled and nodded to the pest,  
Who said he kinder sorter guessed  
There'd be a leetle interest,  
Not much—well, hardly any!  
He made me out an I O U,  
And said: "I'll see what I can do!  
How much d'ye think will see you  
through?"  
Said I: "About a penny!"

(9)

"Meanwhile, I've other things to do.  
I've come here for an interview,  
I'd like a little chat with you.  
So kindly start to jabber.  
And first of all, explain to me  
Exactly what it's like to be  
A beastly, horrid, miserly,  
Revolting money-grabber!"

(2)

No coin has Fishy ever spent,  
He lends it—and the money lent  
Bears interest at cent per cent,  
Or else there's "nothin' doin'!"  
The scheme is this—you take a loan  
And pay for it with all you own,  
Until at last you find you've grown  
To be a bankrupt ruin!

(4)

You go to see him when you're "flat,"  
To sell an ancient cricket bat.  
He looks at you and mutters: "Scat!"  
His face is lean and skinny!  
You show him what you want to sell,  
He bids you "twopence" or "farewell,"  
But when he starts to sell it—well,  
"One cricket bat—one guinea!"



must know that the house does not belong to Mr. Fish."

"Yes, he may be worried about their yanking up the floor planks," grinned Smithy. "But I fancy he's more worried about what they may find underneath them."

Wharton made no reply to that.

Fisher T. Fish came out to see the party off. That was their first intimation that Fishy was not accompanying them.

"Aren't you coming, Fishy?" asked Bob Cherry.

Fishy shook his head.

"Nope," he answered. "I guess I got a bit of an ache in my cabeza, after that knock I got yesterday. I tell you it was a sockdolager!"

"My dear fellow," said Alonzo Todd, "I am very sorry to hear that you have a headache, but if you will rub it with Dr. Pooter's Magical Lotion for Bruised Bones—"

"Pack it up!" said Fisher T. Fish.

"I say, you fellows, is the grub in the car?" asked Billy Bunter anxiously. "I say are you sure they've put in enough grub?"

"The grubfulness is terrific, my esteemed fat Bunter!"

"Well, if the grub's all right, every thing's all right!" said Bunter. "But you can't be too careful. I say, you fellows—"

"Have a good time!" said Fisher T. Fish.

The big car rolled away.

Fisher T. Fish stood looking after it with a cheery grin as it rolled down the avenue to the gates. Then he turned and whisked back into the house.

Harry Wharton & Co. were gone, for the day. One of them, at least—the Bouncer—had no doubt what was scheduled to happen while they were safely off the scene. They were not coming back till night, and by that time, Smithy was quite assured, Hiram K. Fish guessed that the hidden hoard would be found, and safe in his lean hands.

That, Vernon-Smith did not doubt, was the programme. Probably the Bouncer was right! But Smithy, with all his keenness, did not dream of what was destined to happen at Portercliffe Hall that day during the absence of the Greyfriars fellows.

## THE ELEVENTH CHAPTER.

### Shots in the Dark!

"**S**ORT of passage, sir!" said Mr. Jones, the foreman.

"Sort of!" smiled Hiram K. Fish.

And Fisher T. grinned.

It was nearly noon, and active work had been going on in the turret-room all the morning. The furniture had been moved out of the room, leaving it empty, and Mr. Jones and his men had banged and clanged for hours. The room had a very dismantled look.

It was not easy work raising the solid old oak planks that had been jammed in their places for hundreds of years. But several of them were up, disclosing the solid stone of the floor underneath.

It was in the large, empty cupboard that the discovery was made of the "sort of passage." The oak floor of the cupboard had been wrenched up. That drastic measure could not fail to reveal the secret hidden there.

Once the floor was up, it was easy to distinguish a section of the old oak detached from the rest, which opened like a trapdoor. Beneath it was a cavity in the solid stone of the floor—and in the cavity a spiral stair, that led downward.

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The secret way into the turret-room had been unearched by Mr. Fish's extremely drastic measures

This, evidently, was the way by which the mystery man entered the turret. It was the way he had come the previous day, emerging into the tall cupboard, thence watching Fisher T. Fish at his investigations, and stepping out, when Fishy's back was turned, to knock him on the head!

"I guess I'm giving that show the once-over," remarked Mr. Fish. "You coming along, Bosanney?"

"I—I think I will remain here, Mr. Fish, and—and superintend the—the work," stammered Bosanney.

Hiram K. snorted.

"Please yourself. You coming, son?"

"I should smile!" answered Fisher T.

Mr. Fish turned on an electric lamp and descended the spiral stair from the turret-room. Fisher T. followed him down.

The narrow stair wound down through the thickness of ancient stone walls. It was dark and stuffy and close.

Out of sight of the workmen in the turret, Hiram K. Fish jerked his gun from his hip pocket, and he guessed, reckoned, and calculated that the guy was not going to get a chance of handing him a sockdolager on the cabeza!

For a long distance the spiral stair wound downwards till it was clearly far below the level of the ground floor of Portercliffe Hall.

Then Mr. Fish stepped from it into a musty, damp, stone-flagged passage. He flashed the electric light round him, with wary eyes. He would not have been surprised to see a dark, mysterious figure start up at any moment, and his gun was ready! But there was no sign, no sound, of the mystery man.

"Say, pop, what's this outfit?" exclaimed Fisher T. Fish suddenly.

He flashed his light on an oak chest that stood in the stone passage, close by the wall.

Mr. Fish lifted the lid.

He did not expect to find any trace of the hidden hoard in that old chest, for, obviously, it was known to the mystery man, who must have passed it whenever he visited the turret-room.

He stared blankly at the contents of the chest.

"Gee-whiz!" he ejaculated.

Fisher T. chuckled.

"I'll say that's the spook's outfit, pop!" he remarked.

"You said it!" agreed Hiram K.

The chest was packed with ancient garments—Elizabethan trunk-hose, ruff, cloak, sword, and other such things.

Fisher T. chuckled as he rooted out a can of phosphorus paint.

Evidently popper and son had discovered the outfit used by the mystery man when he played the part of the phantom of the Red Earl, in Elizabethan garb, glimmering with ghostly phosphorescent light.

"Follow on, son!" said popper. "I guess we're going to spot jest how that guy gets into this hyer rabbit run."

"Search me!" agreed Fisher T.

Hiram K. led the way along the subterranean passage.

He was suddenly stopped by a solid block of stone.

There seemed to be no outlet. But it was evident that an outlet must exist; and Hiram K. searched over the stone with keen eyes and groping hands.

There was a whirring sound; and a great block moved slowly, on some hidden pivot.

Beyond, the narrow, dark passage extended further, seemingly into the very depths of the earth.

"I guess this lets us out!" said Mr. Fish.

He marched on through the stone doorway, holding up the light.

The next moment there was a sudden roar of sound in the silent passage.

Bang!

It was the report of a firearm. There was a crash as the electric lamp was knocked from Mr. Fish's hand and smashed on the floor.

Popper and son were left in sudden, dense darkness.

"Gee-whiz!" yelled Fisher T. Fish, startled almost out of his wits.

"Wake snakes!" gasped Mr. Fish.

Bang, bang, came the reports again.

"Squat!" gasped Hiram K.

They flung themselves down in the darkness. Bullets were whizzing along the narrow passage over them.

Bang, bang!

"Search me!" gasped Fishy, wishing that he had remained in the turret-room with Bosanney. He had not bargained for this.

Hiram K. set his teeth.

Evidently the mystery man was already aware that the secret stair had been discovered in the turret-room. Equally evidently, he had gone by a different way, to lie in wait for the explorers. Now he was ahead of them in the underground passage, blazing away with a revolver.

But Mr. Fish was more enraged than alarmed. He had no doubt that the firing was intended rather to scare than to harm.

The unseen man could have picked him off with ease while he was holding up the light. Instead of doing so, he had shot the lamp out of his hand. The rattling bullets that whizzed along the passage were not intended to hit. Desperate as he undoubtedly was, the mystery man stopped short of bloodshed—at all events, he was trying every other method first of getting rid of his rivals in the quest of the hidden hoard.

"I—I say, pop—" stammered Fisher T. through his chattering teeth.

"Aw, chew on it!" grunted pop. "I guess that guy's only trying to rattle us! I guess he could have got us if he'd wanted—but it's sure bluff! But by the great horned toad, I'll tell a man, he ain't putting the wind up H. K. Fish! Nope, sir—not so's you'd notice it! I'm sure going to give that guy suthin' to chew on!"

The firing died away, leaving a booming of echoes and a smell of gun-powder.

Mr. Fish lifted his own revolver and pulled the trigger.

Bang, bang, bang!

He pumped bullets into the dark passage ahead of him. From the blackness came a startled yell, which sounded as if one of them, at least, had gone close. Echoes came back of pattering, running feet.

Hiram K. gave a grim chuckle.

"I'll mention that it's that guy that's got the wind up, a few!" he remarked.

"You said it, pop!" agreed son.

"You got a torch, son?"

"Yep!"

"Hand it out!"

Hiram K. Fish turned on son's electric torch. Flashing the light ahead, with his revolver ready in his right hand, he tramped on. Hiram K. Fish had plenty of nerve, and his lean face was hard and grim. Fisher T. followed on behind pop.

But there was no further sign of the mystery man. He had failed to scare the explorers; and, as Hiram K. said, it was very probable that he had the wind up himself when Hiram started firing in turn. Evidently he did not choose to run the risk of stopping a bullet, in the narrow, stone passage.

Popper and son reached the end of





Chandos, the butler, groped at something unseen on the wall. There was a low whirring sound, and suddenly, without warning, the oak floor on which Mr. Fish, his son and Bosanne stood, collapsed and shot down like a released trap-door! Three startled cries were blended into one as the three figures shot downward into the black, unknown depths!

the passage at last. It ended where another passage branched off, at the foot of a spiral stair, similar to the one by which they had descended from the turret-room.

"I guess I know where we are now!" said Hiram K., staring round. "I sure been on this spot before! I'll say this is the way out."

He started up the spiral stair, followed by Fisher T. At the top was a small landing, closed in by stone walls. In one spot an iron handle projected from the wall.

Mr. Fish grasped it, and turned; and a section of the wall opened like a door! They stepped out into the picture gallery of Portercliffe Hall. It was the portrait of the Red Earl that formed the door, and this was familiar ground to Hiram K.

He glanced up and down the great picture gallery of Portercliffe. No one was to be seen there.

"I guess he popped out this way!" grunted Mr. Fish.

"I guess he won't matter a bean if we get hold of the pesky old lord's board, pop!" remarked Fisher T.

"You said it, son!" And popper and son walked from the picture gallery to the hall. From above there came the sound of banging and clanging from Mr. Jones and his men, at work in the turret-room. That banging and clanging went on, uninterrupted, till the workmen from Margate knocked off for dinner.

## THE TWELFTH CHAPTER.

### Caught in the Trap!

**C**HANDOS coughed. After lunch, Mr. Fish sat in the hall, in a deep armchair, his long legs stretched out across one another—smoking one of

his long, thin cigars. From where he sat he could hear the banging and wrenching overhead, work having been resumed in the turret-room after the dinner-hour.

Bosanne was in the turret, keeping an eye on the excavations while Mr. Fish took a rest. Fisher T. was with his popper, taking a rest also—every now and then rubbing his bandaged head tenderly.

Chandos' cough made them both glance up.

The plump, massive butler stood before Mr. Fish, respectfully waiting for his attention.

"Shoot!" said Mr. Fish tersely.

"A matter has come to my knowledge, sir, which I think it my duty to communicate to you!" said Chandos.

"Spill it!"

"Since the discovery of the secret door in the picture gallery, sir, and the subsequent discovery of underground passages, which surprised me very much indeed, I have taken the liberty of giving the matter some thought!" said Chandos. "This has led me to make a discovery—"

Mr. Fish sat bolt upright.

He was interested immediately.

"What you spotted?" he barked.

"Shoot!"

Chandos coughed again. His stately leisure was not to be hurried by Mr. Fish's transatlantic pep.

"No doubt you are aware, sir, that from the gun-room, which is on the ground floor, there is a passage which leads to a door on the terrace! It was formerly used, I presume, as a private entrance, but it has been locked up for many years. You have, I think, seen the passage—"

"I guess I've given it the once-over!" said Mr. Fish, with a nod.

There was hardly a foot or an inch of Portercliffe Hall, to which Hiram K.

had not given the "once-over" in his search for a clue to the hidden hoard.

"In view of the recent very surprising discoveries, sir, and of your expressed wish to hear of anything further of the same nature, it occurred to me to examine this passage!" said Chandos. "I trust, sir, that you do not regard this as taking a liberty on my part."

"Get on!" yapped Mr. Fish.

"I found, sir, that a large stone in the passage wall can be set in motion, by pressure applied in a certain spot!" said Chandos.

"Gee-whiz!"

"Beyond this moving stone, sir, there appears to be a room—or rather, perhaps I should say a cellar!" said Chandos. "I have not taken the liberty of exploring it, sir; and so far as I have seen, it appears to contain nothing but an oak chest. As this was locked, I could not ascertain its contents, if any; but its weight was very considerable—it was, in fact, too heavy for me to move, sir, and I am a fairly strong man. I thought, sir, that you would like me to inform you of this discovery."

Mr. Fish breathed hard through his long, thin nose.

Fisher T.'s eyes were gleaming.

Popper and son exchanged a quick look.

An old oak chest, too heavy to be moved, in a hidden cellar behind a secret door! Popper and son figured that they could guess what it contained!

"Search me!" murmured Fisher T.

"You've not mentioned this to the other servants, Chandos?" asked Mr. Fish. He gave a sharp look round the great hall, uneasy lest any other servant might have overheard Chandos' communication.

But there was no one else in the hall.

"No, sir!" said Chandos.

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"I guess you needn't!" said Mr. Fish. "Certainly not, sir."

Mr. Fish rose from his chair.

"I'll say I'm interested in that old oak chest!" he remarked. "Son, you get Bosanney."

Fisher T. Fish scuttled up the stairs to call the secretary. Mr. Fish rubbed his long, thin hands together.

Was he on the trail at last?

It looked like it! He hoped much from the excavations in the turret-room. But an old oak chest, hidden away in a secret cellar, sounded very promising. Hiram K. was extremely keen to get a look into the interior of that hidden oak chest.

Chandos was moving away when Mr. Fish called him back sharply.

"Hold on, you!"

"Sir!" said Chandos.

"I guess I want you to show me that spot!" said Mr. Fish.

"Very good, sir!" said Chandos. "Am I to understand, sir, that you do not wish the attention of the servants to be drawn to this matter?"

Mr. Fish grinned. Certainly he did not want the numerous staff of Lord Portercliffe's mansion to become aware of the fact if he unearthed the old lord's hoard of gold.

"Sure!" he snapped. "I guess I don't want it tooted all over Yurrupe."

"You may rely, sir, upon my discretion," said Chandos. "But in that case, sir, perhaps I had better wait for you in the gun-room."

"You said it!" agreed Mr. Fish. "Git!"

Chandos left the hall.

Bosanney came down the stairs with Fisher T. Fish. He looked a little tired and dusty.

"Nothing has been found so far in the turret-room, Mr. Fish," he said. "Almost half the floor has been taken up, but only stone blocks—"

"I guess I'll have them up, too, if I don't find what I want!" said Hiram K. "But I'll tell you I'm on another line now." In a low voice he told the secretary what he had learned from Chandos.

Bosanney looked dubious.

"In all the years that I was with the late Lord Portercliffe, sir, I do not remember that he went into the gun-room at all," he said. "If he conveyed the hoard, or a part of it there, he must have acted very secretly."

"Waal, I guess he was pretty secret about all he did, as nobody has a line on the hoard!" said Mr. Fish. "Nobody but you and that doggoned mystery guy ever knew that there was a hoard at all."

"That is true!" admitted Bosanney.

"Anyhow, I guess we're sure squinting into this," said Mr. Fish. "I'm sure powerful keen to see what's inside that old chest."

"You bet!" said Fisher T.

"Oh, certainly," agreed Bosanney. "Let us look into it, by all means. Nothing must be neglected."

And popper, son, and secretary proceeded in the direction of the gun-room, which was reached by a corridor from the hall.

In the gun-room, Chandos was waiting.

Popper, son, and secretary entered the room, and Mr. Fish carefully closed the door and turned the key. He did not want to risk any interruption while he was engaged on this investigation.

Chandos watched his action with an expressionless face; though his eyes for a moment gleamed oddly.

"Get going!" said Mr. Fish.

"This way, sir!" said Chandos.

He opened a small door on the farther

side of the room. This gave admittance to a stone-walled passage with oaken floor, deep in darkness. Popper, son, and secretary had all been through that passage before in earlier investigations. They had found nothing there! This time they were going to make a discovery—though they little dreamed what it was!

Hiram K. turned on his electric torch. Bosanney and Fisher T. Fish did the same. They stepped into the passage. Save for the glimmer of light from the gun-room, it was quite dark, having no windows.

"Come on, Chandos!" said Mr. Fish. "I guess I want you to point out the spot!"

"Very good, sir!"

Chandos followed the three into the stone passage.

Fisher T. Fish gave him rather a curious look as he glimpsed his plump face in the light of the torches. Chandos was a trifle pale, and there were beads of perspiration on his plump brow. But he was quite calm.

Half-way down the passage they stopped at a sign from the butler.

"Here is the place, sir!" said Chandos. "If you will feel over the wall, sir, you will find a depression in the stone. Press on that spot, sir, and the stone will open like a door."

Mr. Fish groped over the stone wall, son and secretary watching him. Chandos moved back along the passage to the gun-room.

"Here, hold on, you!" yapped Mr. Fish, over his shoulder. "I guess I ain't found the spot, Chandos! You come here and work the riddle."

To his surprise, there was no answer from Chandos.

The butler had reached the gun-room; and his bulky form almost filled the small doorway. As he stood there he was groping at something unseen on the wall.

There was a low, whirring sound.

"What—" began Mr. Fish.

He never finished the sentence.

Suddenly, without warning, the oak floor under his feet collapsed. The section of the floor, from wall to wall, where the three were standing, shot down like a released trapdoor.

Three startled cries were blended into one as three figures shot downward into black, unknown depths under the passage floor.

A whirring sound—and the trapdoor closed again. The passage presented its former appearance—untenanted now!

Chandos' plump face was a little pale when he left the gun-room and went back slowly to the hall. But he was still quite calm.

## THE THIRTEENTH CHAPTER.

### Startling News!

"I SAY, you fellows!"

"Here we are again!" said Bob Cherry.

"I'm tired!" said Bunter.

Billy Bunter made that remark in an accusing tone. Bunter appeared to have the impression that it was somebody's fault that he was tired after a day out.

The picnic party had returned late in the summer evening. It was close on bed-time when the big car rolled up the avenue at Portercliffe Hall and they crowded out of it.

All the party were a little tired after a long day out. But all except Bunter were merry and bright. They had had a glorious day and enjoyed it all through. But Billy Bunter could not get tired without getting peevish.

"Poor old Bunter!" said Bob. "Too

tired to walk up the steps! I'll help you! Take his other ear, Franky."

"Beast!" hooted Bunter.

Tired as he was, Bunter got up the steps without waiting for assistance.

Chandos let the party in.

They came in in a cheery crowd. They rather expected to see Fisher T. Fish when they came in; but he was not to be seen.

"Fishy's gone to bed, I suppose," said Harry Wharton. "We'd better do the same."

"If you think I'm going to bed without any supper, Wharton—" began Bunter warmly.

"Got room for any?" asked the Bounder sarcastically. "You've been parking grub all day and eating all the way home—"

"Yah!"

"A cold supper is laid in the dining-room, young gentlemen!" said Chandos urbanely.

"Oh, good!" said Bunter.

"Fishy gone to bed?" asked Nugent. Chandos coughed.

"No, sir. Master Fish left with his father, sir—"

"Left!" ejaculated all the juniors together.

"Yes, sir."

Harry Wharton & Co. stared at the Portercliffe butler. This was the very last thing they would have expected to hear on their return to Portercliffe Hall after their day out.

"Is Mr. Fish gone, then?" asked Johnny Bull blankly.

"Yes, sir," said Chandos.

"But why—" ejaculated Wibley.

"Mr. Fish did not acquaint me with his reasons, sir!" said Chandos. "He merely informed me that business suddenly called him away, sir."

"Well, my hat!" said Kipps.

"This is jolly sudden, isn't it?" said Bob.

"The suddenfulness is terrific."

"Master Fish requested me, sir, to express his regret at not being able to say good-bye to you personally," said Chandos. "I understand that it was some very pressing business that called Mr. Fish back to New York—"

"He's gone back to America?" exclaimed Wharton.

"So I understand, sir!"

"And Fishy's gone back with him, with the new term at Greyfriars beginning in a week or two!" said Frank Nugent blankly. "Well, my hat!"

"What on earth—" said Wharton.

He broke off suddenly, as a possible explanation of that sudden departure flashed into his mind.

"Mr. Fish has taken his baggage?" he asked.

"Some suitcases, sir, remain to be sent on," said Chandos. "I have Mr. Fish's address in New York. Mr. Fish and his son and his secretary, sir, took a suitcase each."

"Heavy ones?" asked the Bounder, with a wink at Wharton.

Chandos looked a little surprised.

"As you mention it, sir, they were heavy—very heavy indeed!" he answered. "I noticed it at the time, as I personally helped to carry them to the taxi."

"The taxi!" said Harry. "Mr. Fish did not go in the car, then?"

"No, sir. He had a taxi to the station."

"I say, you fellows, I'm going to have some grub!" said Bunter, and he rolled away to the dining-room, much more interested in supper than in the sudden and startling departure of Mr. Fish.

The other fellows, in a state of great astonishment, went up to their rooms. The Famous Five gathered in Wharton's

room, and the Bounder joined them there. There was a cynical grin on Smithy's face.

"Bit of a facer, what?" he asked.

"Well, rather!" said Harry. "I fancy I can guess, though—"

"Same here!" said Bob.

"The samefulness is terrific!" grinned Hurree Janset Ram Singh.

"As the thing fairly hits you in the eye, it's not difficult to guess," said Vernon-Smith. "They've found the hoard, and bolted with it."

"Looks like it!" admitted Wharton. The Bounder laughed.

"I suppose it turned up under the floor in the turret-room. We all knew—at least, I did—why old Fish fixed up that trip for us to-day: to get us off the scene, because he thought the hoard was going to turn up. It's turned up—and he's cleared off with it, what?"

The Famous Five nodded. It seemed probable enough to them.

"But—but it's pretty thick if that's the case!" said Bob Cherry slowly. "Any gold found in this house belongs to young Lord Portercliffe—a tenant has no right to it—"

"That's why they've cleared with it!" said Smithy.

Wharton compressed his lips.

"We can't be certain of that!" he said. "We ought not to believe—"

The Bounder gave a scoffing laugh.

"What does it look like? Clearing us off while they spotted it—clearing off themselves while we were away, with three heavy suitcases—"

"I know what it looks like!" admitted Wharton. "But—"

He paused. "Well, we know something for certain, and we can't say anything about it, I suppose. But—that young fellow, Lord Portercliffe, seemed a decent sort of chap. It's pretty rotten if he's been robbed—and that's what it amounts to!"

"Business—as understood in New York!" said the Bounder cynically. "You fellows staying on here, now Fishy's bunked?"

"I don't see how we can!" said Harry. "Anyway, the holidays are pretty near the end. I suppose we can't stay on as guests of a fellow who's cleared off and left us. Better pack to-morrow."

"It's one in the eye for the jolly old mystery man, anyhow!" said the Bounder, laughing. "Old Fish has beaten him to it, at any rate."

And the Greyfriars fellows, greatly surprised and considerably perturbed by the unexpected news, went to bed.

## THE FOURTEENTH CHAPTER.

### Dead or Alive?

**H**ARRY WHARTON & CO. came down to breakfast in the morning in a rather perturbed frame of mind.

It was disconcerting for their host to disappear in this abrupt way, leaving them on their own. He had not even left them a note—only a message by word of mouth through the butler. It was far from agreeable—and the suspicions they could not help entertaining as to the motives of popper and son made the whole affair still disagreeable.

Chandos, at breakfast, was in attendance with his usual stately urbanity. But it was easy to discern that, now that the Fishes were gone, the Portercliffe butler took it for granted that the Fishes' guests would also be leaving.

On that, the Greyfriars fellows had already decided. But it was all rather sudden, rather disconcerting, and, in fact, rather annoying. The juniors discussed their plans over breakfast—minus Bunter, who was still in bed and snoring.

Herbert Vernon-Smith had little to say. He seemed to be thinking very deeply. The other fellows talked it over.

"It's a bit rotten," remarked Wibley. "I was fixing it up to wind up the vac with a performance of my play here—but I suppose the theatricals are washed out now! I can't say I like Fishy's manners."

"They were always a bit fishy!" remarked Kipps. "I shall jolly well tell him what I think of him, next term at Greyfriars."

"Looks as if Fishy mayn't join up for the term!" said Bob Cherry. "If he's gone home to the jolly old United States, it doesn't look like it."

"We shan't miss him a fearful lot!" grunted Johnny Bull.

"The missfulness will not be terrific!" assented Hurree Janset Ram Singh.

"Rotten bad manners, anyhow!" said Nugent.

"Still, we have had a very, very agreeable holiday here!" said Alonzo Todd gently. "I have made quite an extensive collection of very, very interesting botanical specimens, and I am assured that my Uncle Benjamin will be delighted to see them. I am, in fact, very, very anxious to show them to Uncle Benjamin, and though I shall regret very, very much leaving you fellows, I shall be very, very glad to see Uncle Benjamin and Aunt Tabitha again."

After breakfast, time-tables were looked out. Alonzo was the first to leave, and Chandos ordered the car to take him to the station. The other fellows said good-bye to him at the door of the car.

Alonzo beamed on them as he shook hands all round—and then all round again.

"It has been a very, very great pleasure to pass a holiday with my dear old school-fellows," he said. "I should have been very, very pleased to give you some instructions in botanical subjects, but you seem to have been so very, very much occupied with other things—"

"The loss is ours!" said Bob Cherry solemnly.

"The lossfulness is terrific."

"But perhaps we shall pass another holiday together, and then there may be opportunities," said Alonzo brightly. "I should be very, very delighted! I am sorry to be leaving you, my dear friends, but how very, very happy I shall be this evening, showing Uncle Benjamin the collection I have made."

And Alonzo rolled off in the car; and waved his hand in cheery

farewell; and dropped his botanical volume from his knees as he did so, and scattered pressed botanical specimens all over the floor of the car. Which kept Alonzo busy, picking them up again, till he got to the station.

Later in the morning, Wibley and Kipps went off together. The Famous Five had not yet quite decided on their plans; only that they were going that day.

Neither had Billy Bunter quite decided. All that Bunter had decided upon was that he was not heading for Bunter Court.

If the Famous Five went off together, Bunter was going with them. If they went separately, Bunter had to decide on which member of the Co. he would bestow his fascinating society.

So, until the chums of the Remove settled exactly what they were going to do, Bunter had to remain in an unsettled state.

Smithy had said no word on the subject.

He loafed about the house that morning with his hands in his pockets and a thoughtful look on his face.

When Chandos, with a deprecatory cough, inquired whether any of the young gentlemen would be staying to lunch, the Bounder answered curtly:

"Yes!"

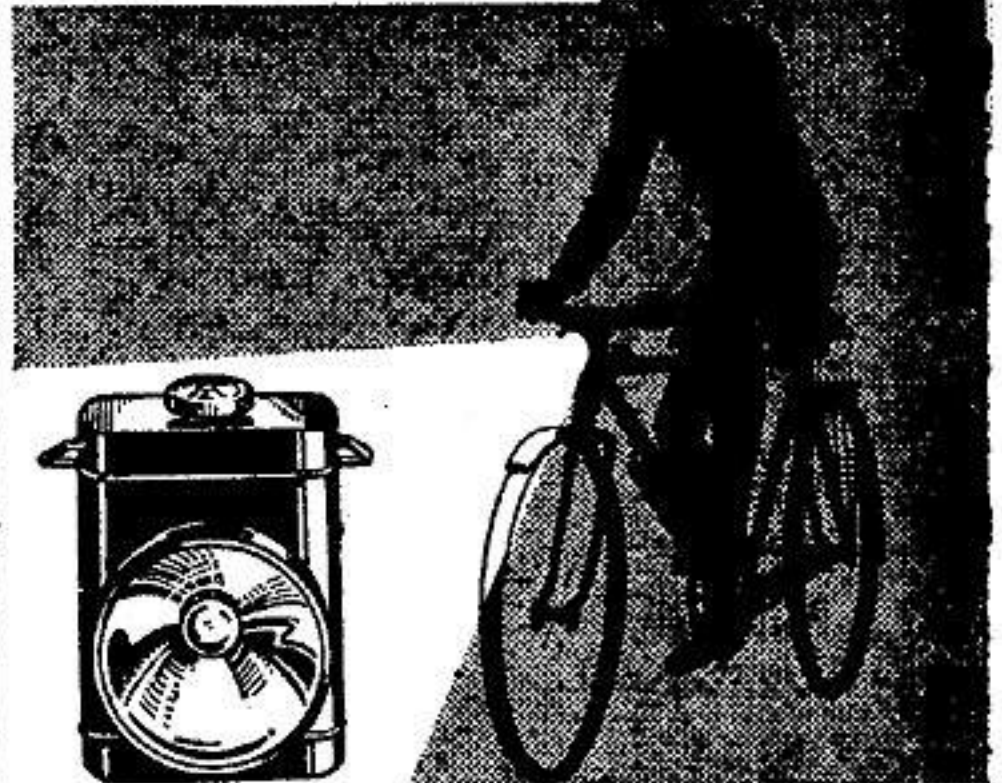
"We were thinking of getting off, Smithy!" said Harry Wharton.

"No good hanging it out!" remarked Johnny Bull. "Fishy's let us down—that's what it comes to—and the sooner we clear, the better!"

"I say, you fellows, I'd ask the lot of you to Bunter Court for the rest of the vacation," remarked Billy Bunter, "but—"

(Continued on next page.)

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"But the butfulness is terrific!" grinned the nabob of Bhanipur.

"You see, the painters are in," explained Bunter, "otherwise—"

"Bow-wow!"

"Oh, really, Cherry—"

"Likewise rats!" said Johnny Bull.

"Still, we needn't break up the party," said Bunter. "Don't you fellows be afraid that I shall let you down, like Fishy. I'm sticking to you!"

"The stickiness is—"

"Preposterous!" grinned Bob Cherry.

"Leave it till after lunch," said the Bounder. "I haven't settled anything yet, and you're not going to leave me here on my own!"

"Right-ho!" agreed the Co.

And Chandos had the pleasure, or otherwise, of presiding at one more meal for the diminished Portercliffe party.

After lunch, Billy Bunter rolled out to a hammock on the lawn for some necessary repose after his gastronomic exertions. Smithy proposed a last walk round the grounds, to which the Famous Five cheerfully assented—though, as a matter of fact, they were rather anxious to get going.

The juniors strolled away from the house, and the Bounder led the way into the park. At a distance from the house he stopped, and stood leaning on an ancient beech.

The Famous Five stopped also. Smithy was rather perplexing them that day.

"Aren't we going for a walk?" asked Bob.

"No!"

"Then what the dickens have we come out for?" asked Johnny Bull, rather testily.

"What's up, Smithy?" asked Harry Wharton, very quietly. "What the thump is it you've got in your head now?"

"We've come here for a jaw!" said Smithy.

"And why not in the house?" grunted Johnny.

"Walls have ears—especially the walls of Portercliffe Hall!" said Vernon-

Smith. "Unless I'm mistaken, this is jolly serious! Last night I thought the same as you fellows—about old Fish and young Fish clearing off! But since—"

"Since—" said Harry.

"I've been thinking!"

"The thankfulness appears to have been terrific!" remarked Hurree Jamset Ram Singh, with a dusky grin. "Is there any ridiculous product?"

"Have they really gone?" said the Bounder abruptly.

The Famous Five stared at him blankly as he asked that startling question.

"The Fishes?" said Bob.

"Yes!"

"Of course they've gone, ass, as they're not here!" said Bob, in wonder. "Are you wandering in your mind, or what?"

"Smithy!" Wharton spoke in a startled tone. "You—you don't think—that anything—that anything can have happened?"

"I do!"

"What rot!" said Johnny Bull, staring. "Are you thinking about that jolly old mystery man?"

"Yes!"

"What could he do?" asked Johnny. "Besides, we know they're gone—Chandos told us he helped carry their bags to a taxi."

"I know that!"

"Well, do you think Chandos dreamed it, or what?" asked Johnny. "Look here, Smithy, what the dickens are you talking about?"

"We've only got it from Chandos that they've gone!" said the Bounder.

"Well, Chandos knows, I suppose!"

"He knows all right—but I fancy he hasn't told us what he knows!" said the Bounder. "I tell you we've got only Chandos' word for it! And—it's queer. We got the impression—I fancy Chandos meant us to get it—that they'd found the hoard and bolted with it! But—"

"Well, they did!" said Johnny.

"Did they?" said the Bounder. "I don't see why they should. My belief was that if old Fish found the hoard,

he meant to exercise his option and buy Portercliffe House. Buying it as it stood, with everything in it, he could have made out, to satisfy his conscience, that he was buying the hoard along with the rest. I suppose he's got a conscience of sorts!"

"Pretty easy-going one, if that would satisfy it!" grunted Johnny Bull.

"Well, yes! Still, that's not so thick as clearing off with the loot packed in suitcases!" said Smithy. "That's fearfully thick!"

"We can't be sure!" said Harry. "He seems to have told Chandos that he was called home on pressing business!"

"Chandos—Chandos!" said Smithy impatiently. "Chandos all the time! I'm going to tell these fellows what I've told you—we've got to think this thing out! The mystery man is Chandos—and Chandos is the mystery man!"

"What?" howled Bob, Johnny, Nugent and Hurree Singh all together in their amazement.

"That's Smithy's belief, you fellows," said Harry. "What do you think of it?"

"Utter rot!" said Johnny Bull.

"Seems bosh to me!" said Nugent.

"The boshfulness seems terrific!"

"Not to say preposterous!" grinned Bob Cherry.

Herbert Vernon-Smith smiled sarcastically and shrugged his shoulders.

"Look at it!" he snapped. "Old Fish sent for a gang of workmen to jerk the turret-room to pieces. They were hard at work yesterday—they're gone now!"

"Naturally, now Mr. Fish is gone!" said Frank.

"Oh, very naturally!" said Smithy.

"But it looks to me as if the mystery man knew they were on the track, and made up his mind to stop the excavations in the turret-room somehow. Well, they're stopped! But he couldn't get rid of Old Fish & Co. without Chandos knowing—and Chandos knows! He's the man!" The Bounder spoke quietly, deliberately. "Old Fish, and young Fish, and Mr. Bosanney haven't left for New York! They're still at Portercliffe Hall—and Chandos knows exactly where—dead or alive!"

## THE FIFTEENTH CHAPTER.

### Putting it to Lord Portercliffe!

"DEAD or alive!" Harry Wharton repeated the words.

His chums gazed blankly at the Bounder. Herbert Vernon-Smith seemed to have taken their breath away.

"You—you think—" faltered Wharton.

"I think we're dealing with a pretty desperate man!" said the Bounder quietly. "He tried every kind of trickery to get his rivals off the scene—and failed! Now he's come down to brass tacks! I was taken in like you fellows when Chandos told us the tale last night! But—I've thought it over inside-out. If I'd never suspected the butler in the first place, of course, I should have taken it all at face value. But—knowing that Chandos was the mystery man—I began to think!"

"But—" stammered Bob.

"Lots of queer things about it, if you only think," said Smithy. "Why should old Fish go in a taxi, with half a dozen cars at his disposal?"

"Blessed if I know! But it seems that he did!"

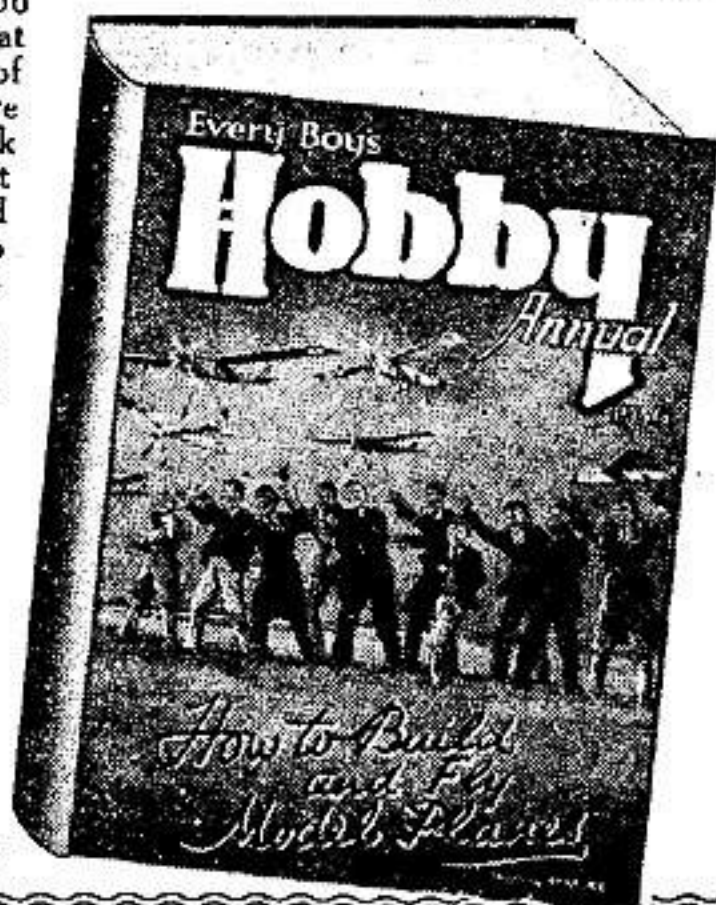
"You mean, we might have learned

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Torches gleamed down into the hidden pit below as the trap-door opened. The light shone on the pale, upturned faces of Mr. Fish, Fisher T. Fish and Bosanne. "Hallo, hallo, hallo! Here they are!" roared Bob Cherry. "Glad to see you all again!" It was a relief to the trio to know that they would soon be helped out of the death pit.

that he had not one of the cars from here," said Harry, "and then—"

"Exactly," Smithy nodded. "And why did Chandos help him carry the bags to the taxi instead of a footman? It's not his job! Because no bags were carried, old bean—and they never went!"

"But—" said Nugent.

"But you can't get it down that Chandos is the mystery man?" asked the Bounder.

"Well, no!"

"Smithy's got a reason for suspecting him," said Harry. "That night Smithy and I ran into him, Smithy punched him in the eye. You remember the morning Chandos had a bunged eye. That was the next morning!"

Bob Cherry whistled.

"But—" he said.

The Co. looked serious enough. But it was plain to see that they were not greatly impressed by Smithy's startling suspicion. They simply could not picture the stately butler in the role of the dark, mysterious, masked mystery man.

"I'm blessed if I know what to think," said Harry Wharton slowly. "But one thing's certain. We can't leave it at this."

"It would suit that villain's book for us all to clear off!" said Smithy. "Alonzo and Kipps and Wib are gone already—you fellows were just getting ready to go—he's counting on a clear field. Well, you can go if you like. I'm not going till I know what has become of Fishy and his popper!"

"You can't imagine that—that—" Bob's voice faltered.

"I can—and do!" said the Bounder coolly. "That mystery sportsman isn't the man to let much stand between him and a fortune, I fancy! Dead or alive—"

"Good heavens!" breathed Wharton.

"Well, it sounds pretty steep!" said Bob. "Blessed if I think you could go to the police with a tale like that, Smithy!"

"I'm not going to the police—yet!" answered Vernon-Smith. "There's one man who has a right to handle affairs here, now that Mr. Fish isn't on the spot—"

"Lord Portercliffe!" exclaimed Wharton.

"That's it! We saw him the day before yesterday going down to Margate in his car! We can get him—"

"How do you know he's still in Margate?"

"Because I've looked at the latest jolly old news of distinguished arrivals in the local paper. He's staying at the Splendide."

"Oh, good!"

"We can get him on the phone!" said Vernon-Smith.

"Phew!" Johnny Bull whistled. "I—I say, he will think us a lot of asses if we spin him a yarn like that!"

"The esteemed Mister Fish would probably not like us to tell him a terrific lot about the hoard!" grinned Hurreo Janset Ram Singh.

"He has a right to know about that," said Harry at once. "Whether Mr. Fish intended to do the right thing by him or not, he has a right to know about money found on his own property."

"That's so," agreed Nugent. "But it's not our place to tell him, without leave from Mr. Fish!"

"Yes, that's true. But—"

"But," cut in the Bounder, "we can't tell him anything without telling him about the hoard. And if, as I believe, old Fish is either murdered or kidnapped by the mystery man—"

"Smithy!" gasped Nugent.

"One of the two!" said the Bounder coolly. "If old Fish is a prisoner somewhere, I fancy he would be glad enough for us to tell anybody anything to save his bacon. If he's dead—"

"For goodness' sake chuck it, Smithy!" gasped Bob. "Look here, we'd better put it up to Lord Portercliffe, and see what he thinks. It's for him to settle, I should say!"

And that was agreed upon; and the Greyfriars fellows walked slowly back to the house.

"Not a syllable for Chandos to hear!" warned the Bounder. "He's as keen as a razor."

"Mum's the word!" agreed Bob.

"Keep him talking in the hall while I use the phone in the library," added Smithy. "There are telephone extensions in this house—and the dear man might listen-in. We don't want him to get on to this."

Chandos was in the hall when the juniors came in. He gave them a faintly inquiring glance, as if respectfully curious to know when they were going.

"Can you get us a time-table, Chandos?" asked Vernon-Smith.

"Certainly, sir! Here is one!" answered the butler.

"Look out the best train for London, will you?"

"Very good, sir!"

Chandos opened the railway time-table as the Bounder passed on into the library and carefully closed the door after him. The butler's eyes, however, did not fix on the time-table. He glanced over the faces of the Famous Five, as if he sensed something unusual in the atmosphere.

Then he looked out the train.  
 "Three-fifteen, Master Wharton!" he said. "Shall I order the car for that time, or will you be taking a taxi?"  
 "The car, I think," said Harry.  
 "We're rather a crowd for a taxi."

"Very good, sir!"  
 Vernon-Smith came back from the library.

"All serene, you fellows," he said casually. "The tide's in, and we can get a last bathe before we go. I suppose we can have the car, Chandos?"

"The best train, sir, is three-fifteen."  
 "Oh, the next one will do!" said the Bounder carelessly. "Tell them to send the car round, Chandos, for a quick run down to Margate."

Chandos hesitated a fraction of a second.

"Very good, sir!"  
 The chums did not speak till they were outside the gates of Portercliffe Hall.

"Well?" said Harry quietly. "I suppose we're not really going down for a bathe, Smithy?"

The Bounder laughed.  
 "Hardly! That was eyewash for Chandos' benefit. I've spoken to Lord Portercliffe on the phone, and he's asked me to come down at once to his hotel. I mentioned the jolly old hoard, and he seemed quite keen to hear some more about it!"

In a quarter of an hour the car stopped at the Hotel Splendide, in Cliftonville. The Greyfriars fellows were shown up at once to Lord Portercliffe's rooms—and for the next half-hour an astonished young nobleman was listening, in great amazement, but with keen interest, to the strange story of the recent happenings at Portercliffe Hall.

## THE SIXTEENTH CHAPTER.

### Quick Work!

"YOUR lordship!" gasped Chandos.

For once the stately butler of Portercliffe Hall seemed to be taken quite aback.

He actually stared at Lord Portercliffe.

The big car had come back from Margate. It brought Smithy and the Famous Five—and Lord Portercliffe! And if the young nobleman had been the ghost of the Red Earl, whom he so strongly resembled, his sudden appearance could hardly have startled the butler more.

"I—I—I was aware that your lordship had returned to England," stammered Chandos; "but—but—but—"

Young Lord Portercliffe gave his butler a pleasant nod and a smile, but a very keen look at the same time.

"These young fellows have called me in, Chandos!" said Lord Portercliffe. "It seems that my tenant, Mr. Fish, has gone—"

"Yes, my lord. He left last evening," said Chandos. "It was somewhat sudden, and Mr. Fish gave me to understand that pressing business called him away."

"Very pressing, I should think, to make him leave so very suddenly," said Lord Portercliffe. "I gather from these boys that he left in a taxi."

"That is so, my lord."

"To take a train at Margate?"

"Precisely!"

"With his son and his secretary?"

"Quite so, my lord."

"Then it's odd—dashed odd!" said Lord Portercliffe. He turned to a short, stout man, with a square jaw, who followed in from the car. "What do you think of that, Inspector Simmons?"

"Very odd indeed, my lord!" said the Margate police-inspector. "I should say that it was excessively odd."

Chandos, with all his self-control, was breathing hard. The Greyfriars fellows had sprung Lord Portercliffe on him all of a sudden—and Lord Portercliffe had brought a police-inspector with him. What did it—what could it mean?

"Very odd indeed, Chandos!" went on the young nobleman, his eyes fixed on the butler. "These boys came and told me they had reason to believe that my tenant here had met with some mischance—"

"Absurd, my lord!" said Chandos.

"I hope so—I hope so," agreed Lord Portercliffe. "But the matter seemed serious enough for me to consult the authorities, and Inspector Simmons was kind enough to take a little trouble about it."

"I have made exhaustive inquiries at the railway station," said Inspector Simmons, "and no parties answering to the descriptions of Mr. Fish, his son, and his secretary are known to have left by train yesterday."

"Indeed, sir," said Chandos calmly. "But in such crowds, at holiday-time, Mr. Simmons—"

"I have made inquiries at every taxi-rank, and no driver recalls being sent for to Portercliffe Hall yesterday," said Inspector Simmons.

"Indeed, sir."

"So, you see, Chandos, the matter will bear looking into," said young Lord Portercliffe. "I believe this place is full of old secret passages and vaults and so on, though I am unacquainted with them personally. I hear that some sportsman, whom these lads call the mystery man, has been playing all kinds of strange pranks. Rather a matter for the police, I think."

"Mr. Fish did not think so, my lord," said Chandos. "And I, of course, was under his orders during his tenancy."

"Oh, of course—of course!" assented his lordship. "But now that Mr. Fish has departed, or disappeared—or whatever he has done—I shall take control, Chandos. It seems very extraordinary to Mr. Simmons and to me that such a party was not observed at the railway station even in a holiday crowd—"

"From the description, very extraordinary," said the inspector. "A tall gentleman with an American accent, a boy with a bandaged head, and a small gentleman in black—"

"You are sure that they left, Chandos, as you told these boys?"

"Naturally, my lord," said Chandos.

The Bounder's mocking eyes noted a bead of perspiration start out on the plump forehead.

"I had better question the servants who saw them go, my lord," said Inspector Simmons. "Your butler will summon them."

"Please do so at once, Chandos," said Lord Portercliffe.

Chandos' breath seemed to fail him for a second.

"It was I, my lord, who carried the bags to the taxi for Mr. Fish," he said.

"It was Mr. Fish's desire to leave very quietly—I presume that he had some reason for doing so—and none of the servants was on the spot."

"Not one?" exclaimed Lord Portercliffe.

"So far as I recall, my lord, none."

Inspector Simmons' square jaw seemed to grow squarer.

"So it boils down to this, Mr. Chandos," he said—"three persons are said to have left this house last evening; nobody but you saw them leave, in a house of more than twenty servants;

no taxi-driver can be found who drove them to the station; and nobody at the station noticed such an unusual party; no outside or inside porter handled baggage for them—"

"What, sir, are you implying?" asked Chandos.

The inspector gave a grunt.

"I am implying nothing; I am making a plain statement that proof must be furnished that these three persons ever left Portercliffe Hall at all," he answered grimly.

"I hardly understand you, sir," said Chandos. "They are certainly not here at present."

"That is what we have to ascertain," said Lord Portercliffe.

Chandos turned to him with great dignity.

"I trust, my lord, that after my long service to you and the late respected lord—your uncle—you do not doubt my good faith," he said.

"Hate to!" said Lord Portercliffe cheerily. "But, dash it all, Chandos, what's a man to believe? You say they left in a taxi yesterday—"

"Certainly, my lord!"

His lordship shrugged his shoulders.

"You adhere to that statement, Chandos?" asked Inspector Simmons.

"Certainly, sir!"

"Very well, it will be put to the test. Lord Portercliffe, with your permission, I shall make a search of the mansion."

"Oh, quite!" said his lordship.

"Chandos, you will give Inspector Simmons every assistance. The keys—"

"Oh, certainly, my lord!"

"And we'll all lend a hand," said the Bounder.

"Yes, rather!" said Bob Cherry.

Chandos, with undiminished dignity, went away to his room for bunches of keys. Harry Wharton & Co. spread about the house, beginning to search. Lord Portercliffe sat down and lighted a cigarette. James and John, Peter and Adolphus, and numerous other men-servants, astonished to learn that a search was to be made for the tenants who were supposed to have left, joined in at his lordship's order. If the Fishes—popper, son and secretary—were still in Portercliffe Hall, there was no doubt that they were going to be discovered—whether the search proved brief or lengthy.

In point of fact, it proved brief.

"Hallo, hallo, hallo!" came Bob Cherry's voice. "This door is locked!" Bob was shaking the door-handle of the gun-room.

"Locked!" Inspector Simmons came up quickly.

"The room is not usually locked, sir," said James; "but Mr. Chandos locked it yesterday—"

"Did he?" said Mr. Simmons.

"Why?"

"I really do not know, sir. Mr. Chandos has the key in his room—"

"Take me to his room at once!" rapped the inspector. "Mr. Chandos is a long time getting those keys."

James led the Margate inspector to the butler's room. The door of that room was locked, too. Mr. Simmons rapped sharply on it, but there was no answer from within.

The inspector breathed hard, sharp suspicion in his eyes.

"Take me round to the window of this room!" he snapped.

"This way, sir."

A minute later Inspector Simmons was looking in at the window of the butler's room. It was open, and the room was empty. Chandos was gone—by way of

(Continued on page 28.)

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### The Chrysanthemum Club!

**T**O all outward appearances, the members of the Chrysanthemum Club were as eminently a respectable body of gentlemen as ever forgathered for a cosy and intimate dinner.

As a matter of fact, they were a dining club. Up till recently it had been their custom to meet once every three months to have dinner in a little hotel off Shaftesbury Avenue. But now they met once a month, and on this particular evening the whole club, numbering sixteen members, was seated at the long dining-table which, as usual, was decorated with bowls of chrysanthemums.

Every member of the club was a successful City man, and if the names of the majority of them did not sound particularly English, that was no reason to suspect the club of any other motive than the promoting of good will and fellowship.

There was, for instance, Piduski, the chairman, seated at the head of the table, his fat face creased in smiles as he recounted the latest quip of the Stock Exchange to his immediate neighbour, Haguar, the steel magnate.

Amongst others present was Lovinsky, the eminent financier; Gomel, the banker; and, to name but one more, Jeletz, a man who imported hides and dairy produce on a vast scale from Northern Europe.

The dinner progressed jovially to its conclusion, and when coffee and liqueurs had been placed before the guests, the waiters, following the usual procedure, withdrew.

There were one or two speeches, perfectly innocent and harmless. Then suddenly every tongue was stilled and every eye riveted with an intense interest upon the chairman, who had risen to his feet, a gorgeous chrysanthemum in his podgy hand.

Slowly and deliberately, and without uttering a word, the chairman plucked a bunch of the golden petals from the bloom and dropped them into a clean silver ashtray on the table in front of him.

Still without speaking, he handed the ashtray to Haguar on his left. The

steel magnate picked up a single petal, crumpled it between the finger and thumb of his right hand, and then passed the tray to his neighbour on the left, who also picked up a petal before handing the tray on to the next man on his left.

There were seventeen petals plucked by Piduski from the bloom, and when the ashtray had circulated round the table, each guest taking a petal, it was left to Haguar to pick up the last.

As he did so, he rose to his feet, his swarthy face grim and set.

"Gentlemen," he said harshly, lifting his glass, "I pledge myself to carry out, even unto death, whatever task may be allotted to me!"

In silence the rest of the company drained their glasses, then, pushing back their chairs, they commenced to

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**"Gentlemen, I pledge myself to carry out, even unto death, whatever task may be allotted to me . . ." HAGUAR, Member of the Chrysanthemum Club.**

---

drift towards the door, en route for the cloak-room, where they had parked their hats and coats.

Only Piduski and Haguar remained in the room.

"You will return at once to your home," said the chairman in a low voice, "and there you will await a visitor, who will call upon you at midnight."

"I understand!" bowed Haguar.

Turning on his heel, Haguar quitted the room, and, getting his hat and coat, passed out into the street and walked to the car-park where he had left his saloon car.

A few minutes later he was speeding through Leicester Square, with its blaze of lights and illuminated signs, en route for his large country house situated on the outskirts of Purley.

He reached it well within the hour,

and, leaving the car to be taken round to the garage by a chauffeur, entered the house, to be met by the butler, who relieved him of his coat and hat.

"I have a visitor calling at midnight, Ivan," he said to the butler, walking into the drawing-room. "You will show him in here."

"Yes, sir," replied the manservant.

Prompt on the stroke of midnight the front door bell rang, and a few moments later the butler ushered into the drawing-room a tall, saturnine man clad in a heavy overcoat and carrying a black felt hat.

"Mr. Haguar?" said the visitor questioningly.

"At your service," replied Haguar, with a curt bow.

Waiting until the manservant had withdrawn, the stranger said:

"There was a meeting of the Chrysanthemum Club to-night. You were the one to draw the petal?"

"That is correct," assented Haguar.

The other stepped nearer.

"You know whence I come," he said in a low voice. "These are your orders. A house named White Gables has been rented by us at Sandwich Bay. You will proceed there tomorrow and take up residence with your butler and another servant whom we have provided. Do you understand?"

"Yes," said Haguar, his dark eyes fixed intently on the stranger.

"Within a stone's throw of White Gables," went on the latter, "is the house of Captain Lawless. You will make yourself known to him by means of this letter of introduction which is signed by Sir Godfrey Carter, of the British Admiralty."

He handed Haguar a sealed envelope.

"This is a forgery, of course?" said Haguar, taking the letter and slipping it into his pocket.

"Yes," admitted his visitor: "but it is an expert one. Sir Godfrey is a friend of Lawless, and there is no reason for Lawless to suspect that Sir Godfrey is not acquainted with you."

"And why am I to make myself known to Lawless?"

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"You will ask him to dine with you," replied the other. "We want him out of the way in order to raid his house. He has a laboratory there containing secrets which we wish to learn."

He paused a moment, then went on:

"As you know, Lawless has invented and built a flying submarine. Where that submarine is at the moment we do not know. It is your business to find out, even if you have to torture him!"

"But why cannot a raiding party break into this house at Sandwich Bay, seize him, and ransack his laboratory?" demanded Hagar.

"Because the man is not a fool," answered the visitor harshly. "He is well prepared against anyone breaking into his house. Just what precautions he has taken we do not know, but we do know that to attempt to force an entry with him on the premises will be to invite abject failure."

"And you are sure you can force an entry when he is off the premises?" questioned Hagar.

"We will, at least, stand an infinitely better chance," replied the other. "There are only two brats of school-boys there besides himself."

"You understand, of course," said Hagar steadily, "that whether or not I learn from Lawless the secret of the submarine's whereabouts, it will be impossible for me to remain any longer in this country. I have no wish to find myself in prison."

"You will leave England that very night," replied the other. "An ocean-going yacht will be waiting offshore for you. Things have been moving swiftly of late, my friend. The country for which we are working will have declared war on Britain within three months from to-night."

### Drugged!

**H**AVING duly taken up residence at Sandwich Bay, Hagar allowed a day to elapse before calling on Captain Lawless.

He had never previously met Lawless, but, being a member of the Chrysanthemum Club, he knew all about the activities of Lawless against the great Baltic power which was on the eve of declaring war on Britain.

The seemingly harmless Chrysanthemum Club was nothing more nor less than a body of men who hated England, and who had pledged themselves to do everything they could to aid the foreign power in the forthcoming struggle.

On the morning following his arrival at White Gables, Hagar strolled along the narrow stretch of coast road to Lawless' house, which stood some three or four hundred yards away.

Lawless, wearing a white overall and rubber gloves, was in his extensively equipped laboratory with Carson and Cribb, the two schoolboys from Abbots-court, who were acting as his assistants, when Mrs. Bodger, his elderly housekeeper, brought him Hagar's card.

"Hagar?" said Lawless inquiringly, looking at the piece of pasteboard. "Show him into the drawing-room, Mrs. Bodger, and tell him I will be with him in a few moments."

Discarding his white linen coat and gloves, Lawless descended to the drawing-room, where Hagar was waiting.

Apologising for his intrusion, Hagar produced the forged letter of introduction purporting to come from Sir Godfrey Carter.

Taking it, Lawless rapidly scanned the penned words, and so perfect was the forgery that he never for one moment doubted the genuineness of them or of Sir Godfrey's signature.

"I am down here for my health," said Hagar, "and must confess that I find it somewhat lonely. I will be delighted if you will dine with me this evening."

"I am afraid this evening is impossible," began Lawless regretfully.

"To-morrow evening, then?" said Hagar quickly.

"Yes, I can manage to-morrow evening," replied Lawless; and, after chatting a few minutes with his visitor, he strolled with him as far as the gate of the large garden which fronted the house.

Lawless was not suspicious of Hagar, for he knew the steel magnate by repute as a successful City man, nor was there anything in the cosy little dinner the following evening to arouse the slightest suspicion.

He found Hagar an excellent host and an entertaining conversationalist. There were times, however, during the course of the meal when Hagar fell strangely silent.

It was after one of these periods that he looked at Lawless and said sadly:

"Is it not terrible to think that within the next few months the world will be plunged once again into war?"

"War?" repeated Lawless, his eyebrows raised in surprise.

"Yes," replied Hagar. "We know in the City that it is coming, although the mutterings of the storm have not yet been heard by the people."

"It is a storm which may never break," said Lawless non-committally.

"You know it will break," returned Hagar. "As certain as night follows day, war is coming!"

Abruptly he changed the subject for a moment.

"This brandy," he said, his fingers curved about the stem of his fragile glass. "I would like your opinion on it!"

"I'm afraid I'm no connoisseur," laughed Lawless, "but it certainly is an excellent brandy."

Strange, he thought, how intently Hagar was watching him. He was beginning to feel unaccountably drowsy, as well. What was wrong with Hagar? The man had risen to his feet and was standing, watching him, a peculiar smile on his lips.

Now he was speaking.

"Yes, it is an excellent brandy, my friend," he purred. "At least, it was until it was drugged. But now it is robbing you of your senses and your strength."

Desperately, Lawless tried to get a grip on himself. Pushing back his chair, he blundered to his feet. But the room was reeling about him, and, as his knees caved in, he crashed heavily to the floor, to lie a limp and inert heap.

"Quick!" rapped Hagar, turning to the butler, who had noiselessly entered the room. "Tie him up! It will not be long before he comes round!"

Leaving the butler to hoist Lawless into a chair and tie him there, Hagar hastened from the room, and, running upstairs to an attic window, he pressed the switch of a powerful electric torch and sent a signal flashing out into the darkness.

Three miles from shore, aboard a big, ocean-going yacht, watching eyes saw the signal. An order was given, and two boats, crammed to the gunwales

with armed men, were lowered into the water and rowed quickly shorewards through the darkness.

Reaching the beach, the men disembarked, and, leaving two of their number in charge of the boats, they moved silently over the sand-dunes, making towards the house of Lawless.

A light was shining through a chink in the curtains of a room on the ground floor, and, passing stealthily in through the gate, the men waited whilst their leader softly approached the window and peered in.

"There's two boys sitting in front of the fire, reading," reported the leader, on rejoining his companions. "We'll ring the bell and rush in the moment the door is open. Remember, there is not a shot to be fired. We want this job done as quietly as possible."

Cautiously he approached the door, his men behind him, and rang the bell. There came a wait of a few moments, then they heard footsteps approaching along the hallway on the other side. The door opened, and the plump form of Mrs. Bodger appeared on the threshold.

At sight of the men, she drew back with a cry of alarm, and made as though to shut the door. But the leader thrust it rudely open, and, striding past her with his men, flung open the door of the drawing-room and rasped:

"Put your hands up!"

### In the Nick of Time!

**A**T sight of the intruder standing there with drawn automatic and backed up by his gang, Carson and Cribb leapt to their feet.

"Where the dickens have you come from?" snapped Carson.

"Never mind that," grated the other. "Put your hands up or I'll drill you!"

Slowly Carson and Cribb elevated their hands, while the leader spoke from the corner of his mouth to a couple of his men.

"Tie and gag 'em!" he ordered.

Obediently the two men moved forward, and, as they did so, Carson whipped into action. He was a hefty youth, and, dropping his hands, he leapt forward, grabbed one of the men round the waist, and crashed with him against the wall by the fireplace.

The fellow, taken completely by surprise, acted as an effective shield for Carson from the gun of the leader.

Finding what, to all intents and purposes, looked like an ordinary bell push, Carson pressed it hard.

Next instant, acting on the snarled commands of their leader, half a dozen men had hurled themselves forward and grabbed the schoolboy.

Seizing his opportunity, Cribb plunged wholeheartedly into the melee, knowing that the leader would not fire in case of wounding his own men. Desperately he and Carson lashed out right and left, but the odds were hopeless, and within a few minutes the two schoolboys were overpowered.

Throughout the house was creeping a thin, yellow fog, invading rooms and staircases. A man standing on guard over the housekeeper in the hall got one sniff of the fog, reeled on his feet, and then crashed to the ground, a limp and huddled heap.

The gas was deadly in its swiftness, and as man after man in the room blundered blindly forward, to finally topple to the floor, Carson whipped out his handkerchief, tied it round his





As Carson and Cribb pushed the door slightly open, they saw Haguar strike a match and bend down to apply the flame to Lawless' bare foot!

mouth and nostrils, and leapt to a cupboard, from which he snatched a couple of gas masks.

He was almost black in the face, through holding his breath, and his heart was pumping furiously and his lungs bursting by the time he had whipped the gas mask over his face.

Cribb was down, lying huddled on the floor, together with the invaders.

Picking him up, Carson bore him in his arms from the room and out into the clean, fresh air of the night.

Laying him on the grass, he returned into the deadly atmosphere of the house, ran swiftly upstairs, and, taking a small phial from a shelf in the laboratory, poured a few drops of the contents into a tumbler of water.

Replacing the phial, he raced downstairs again and out into the garden. Raising Cribb's head, he forced the contents of the tumbler between his lips.

The antidote was a strong one, and after a few moments Cribb's eyes flickered open.

"Where's Mrs. Bodger?" asked Cribb, getting unsteadily to his feet.

"She's passed out, with the rest of 'em, poor thing," replied Carson. "But the gas doesn't kill. It was a marvellous scheme of the skipper's to have a gas release fitted like a bell push in every room."

"Where d'you think these fellows have come from?" demanded Cribb.

"I dunno," replied Carson grimly. "But we'll soon find out."

A sudden thought struck him.

"I say," he exclaimed, coming to an abrupt halt, "don't you think it's dashed queer that these fellows should raid us on the one and only night that Captain Lawless is out?"

"You mean," said Cribb, who was not slow on the uptake, "that he may have been lured away on purpose?"

"That's just what I do mean," responded Carson.

"But Haguar's supposed to be a big noise in the City, isn't he?" protested Cribb.

"I don't care whether he's a big noise or not," replied Carson. "There's one thing I've learned since we've been with the skipper, and that's to trust nobody. Come on, we'll get these fellows tied up; then we'll go along to White Gables and see what's happening. And, what's more, we'll take a gun apiece with us!"

Procuring a clothes-line, Cribb cut it into lengths, while Carson swiftly and adroitly tied the raiders hand and foot.

"Twelve of 'em!" he said, straightening up from tying the last knot. "Not a bad haul, Cribb, old chap!"

Each arming himself with an automatic, the two schoolboys quitted the house and made their way swiftly along the road to White Gables.

There were lights in all the ground floor windows, which were heavily curtained, and, reaching the front door, Carson said softly:

"I don't think we'll trouble to ring. If everything's all right we can easily explain our bursting in by saying that we were in too much of a hurry to see Captain Lawless to bother about ringing."

Quietly turning the handle of the door, he and Cribb, their guns in their hands, stepped into a wide and spacious hallway. From a room on the left, the door of which was standing ajar, came the even voice of Haguar:

"I am quite serious, Captain Lawless. Unless you tell me just exactly where your flying submarine is located I shall be under the painful necessity of applying a lighted match to the bare soles of your feet."

Pushing open the door another inch, Carson peered into the room. Haguar, his back to him, and a box of matches in his hand, was standing looking down at Lawless, who was bound hand and foot to a chair.

"I will give you one more chance, Captain Lawless," went on Haguar, quite oblivious of the presence of the two schoolboys behind him. "Will you tell me where your submarine is?"

"No, I will not!" returned Lawless grimly.

"You are very foolish," murmured Haguar. He struck one of the matches and bent down to apply the flame to Lawless' foot. "I think you are going to find this most painful."

"Do you?" cut in Carson, pushing the door wide open and levelling his automatic. "Then think again, you blackguard! Stick your hands up!"

With a snarl, Haguar wheeled. At sight of the boys, he dropped the lighted match, and his hand snaked to his pocket, to draw the gun which reposed there.

Simultaneously Carson's finger tightened on the trigger of his automatic, and with the crash of the exploding cartridge Haguar spat out an oath and staggered back, clutching at his wounded shoulder.

Attracted by the noise of the shot, the butler and manservant came dashing from the kitchen. But Carson slammed the door in their faces and, turning the key in the lock, kept Haguar covered whilst Cribb picked up a knife from the table and sawed frantically at the bonds of Lawless.

Realising that something had gone radically wrong, the butler and his companion apparently came to the conclusion that discretion was the better part of valour, for when Haguar had been made prisoner, Lawless and the two schoolboys discovered that they had fled from the house.

They were taken by the police on the Sandwich Road, however, after Lawless had phoned through to the police station. Further telephone communication with Deal and Ramsgate resulted in the yacht being captured as she lay waiting for her two boats to return.

As for the raiding party, they were transferred in a lorry to the Marine Barrack, at Deal, to await trial and sentence.

But still the Chrysanthemum Club continued to meet.

(Look out for more big thrills and surprises in next week's chapters of this sensational flying story, chums!)

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## ON THE TRAIL OF TREASURE!

(Continued from page 24.)

the window. The inspector set his lips. "Gone!" he said. "Well, he won't get far! It's pretty clear now!" Inspector Simmons hurried to the telephone. It was not long before he rejoined the crowd that was gathering at the locked door of the gun-room. In a few minutes that door was forced—and the gun-room and the passage beyond rang and echoed to the footsteps and voices of eager searchers.

### THE SEVENTEENTH CHAPTER.

#### Found!

"**H**ARK!" gasped Fisher T. Fish. "Great John James Brown!" exclaimed Hiram K.

"Help!" shrieked Bosanne.

How long they had been there in darkness and despair the hoard-hunters did not know. It seemed like days—weeks—years! Their electric torches were long since exhausted; hours and hours and hours of dense darkness had passed. They had shouted and yelled and howled till their throats were husky and their strength spent. But they had no hope that help would come.

The fall into the hidden pit, through the trapdoor, had shaken them severely, but they were not otherwise hurt.

Now that it was too late, Hiram K. Fish knew the identity of the mystery man of Portercliffe; for it was Chandos who had tricked him to that spot. Chandos who had let fall the trap under his feet—Chandos who had trapped him to his death! The knowledge came too late to be of any use.

It seemed like a dream to Fisher T. Fish when, from the deathly silence, came sounds above—sounds of trampling feet on the trap that covered the pit.

Footsteps were passing above—many footsteps. And, with sudden hope, the three prisoners of the pit shouted and yelled in frantic excitement.

"Help! Help! Help!"

In the house they could not have been heard through thick stone walls; but in the passage overhead, now that there were ears to hear, they could be heard—and they were heard.

"Help! Help!"

"Hallo, hallo, hallo!" faintly, through the thick oak above, came Bob Cherry's roar. "Did you hear that, you fellows? Where—"

"Help!" roared Hiram K. Fish. "This way! Look for a trapdoor! Help!"

Crowding footsteps gathered above. Excited voices buzzed in a chorus. Then came a sound of blows—hammer and chisel! The secret mechanism that worked the trap had not been found; but the trapdoor was discovered, and the searchers were forcing it.

Half a dozen torches gleamed down

into the hidden pit below as the trap opened.

The light gleamed on three pale, ghastly, upturned faces.

"Hallo, hallo, hallo! Here they are!" roared Bob. "Glad to see you again, Mr. Fish!"

"The gladfulness is terrific, esteemed and ridiculous Fish!"

"A ladder!" rapped Inspector Simmons.

Five minutes more, and popper, son and secretary were helped out of the death-pit.

Fisher T. Fish, almost in a state of collapse, was helped away by the Greyfriars fellows. Bosanne, in a state of complete collapse, had to be carried. But Hiram K., hard as nails and tough as hickory, seemed little the worse. His chief feeling was intense wrath.

"Where's Chandos?" he hooted.

"Say, where's that doggoned lobo-wolf, Chandos? I guess I'm going to hand him a few. I'll say I'm going to break him up! I'm sure going to sock that guy! I'll tell a man—"

The Bounder chuckled.

"Chandos has bunked," he said.

"But the police will be after him! Lord Portercliffe, here's Mr. Fish—"

Hiram K. checked the flow of his eloquence.

His lean jaw dropped.

He stared at the young nobleman.

"Lord Portercliffe!" he ejaculated.

Evidently Hiram K. was taken terribly aback at beholding the young lord in the home of his ancestors! He forgot even his narrow escape at the hands of the mystery man, in his dismay at the sight of the legal owner of the hidden hoard of Portercliffe.

"Great John James Brown!" he gasped.

Lord Portercliffe smiled.

"Happy to meet you, Mr. Fish!" he remarked. "You owe your safety to this boy, Vernon-Smith, who seems to have suspected the butler, and who brought me here with a police-inspector to—"

Hiram K. looked at the Bounder. No doubt he was grateful for Smithy's intervention, which had undoubtedly saved his life. But his chief thought, at the moment, was—had the beans been spilled? If young Lord Portercliffe had been told about the hidden hoard, then—

"I must apologise, sir, for my butler's conduct!" said Lord Portercliffe. "I had every confidence in him—he served my uncle before me, and—dash it all, I'd never have dreamed he was such a rogue! If he had come to me and told me of the hidden hoard, I should have seen that he was fairly rewarded, if it was found, of course! But, begad, he wanted the lot! What?"

"The—the—the what—" stammered Hiram K.

"And I gather that you've been searching for it, Mr. Fish!" went on the young lord. "I take that very

kindly, sir. I'd never heard of it—and I can tell you, it would have been a happy surprise to me if you'd found it and handed it over to me, as, of course, you intended to do."

Mr. Fish gazed at him. He could not discern whether his lordship was speaking sarcastically or not. Not that it mattered. The game, clearly, was up—the keen, cute, spry businessman from New York was never going to buy Lord Portercliffe's family seat with Lord Portercliffe's own money!

"Great John James Brown!" said Hiram K. feebly.

Harry Wharton & Co. did not leave Portercliffe Hall that day.

But Hiram K. Fish did.

Now that Lord Portercliffe was "wise" to what was going on, it was obvious that the hoard, if found, had to go where it belonged.

Having failed in that stroke of extremely sharp business, Hiram K.'s only idea was to cut the loss as much as possible. Lord Portercliffe, keen to resume possession of the Hall, and search for the old lord's treasure, let him off the tenancy on the easiest possible terms, and popper, son and secretary departed.

The Famous Five and the Bounder remained as the young lord's guests for the remainder of the holidays.

And Billy Bunter, of course remained with his old pals!

The excavations in the turret-room were resumed—under the eye of Lord Portercliffe! And that the mystery man had been on the right track was proved when the stone floor was taken up and a hidden recess revealed—in which bags of golden sovereigns were stacked.

That discovery would have been made by Hiram K. but for Chandos' desperate act; and no doubt it would have been made by Chandos, in his turn, but for the Bounder's intervention. But all was well that ended well!

Fifty thousand golden sovereigns were stacked under the turret-room. No doubt there were more in other hidden spots, to be found by a more extended search. But that discovery made it possible for young Lord Portercliffe to live in his own house instead of letting it to enterprising Americans!

Which was very satisfactory to the chums of the Remove—and very gratifying to Fisher T. Fish—perhaps!—when they told him about it the next term, at Greyfriars.

THE END.

(Next week's MAGNET will contain another grand long story of Harry Wharton & Co., entitled: "UNDER FALSE COLOURS!"—the opening yarn in a grand new series, introducing a remarkable new boy who comes to Greyfriars with a borrowed name and identity! Avoid disappointment by ordering your copy of the MAGNET in good time, chums!)



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