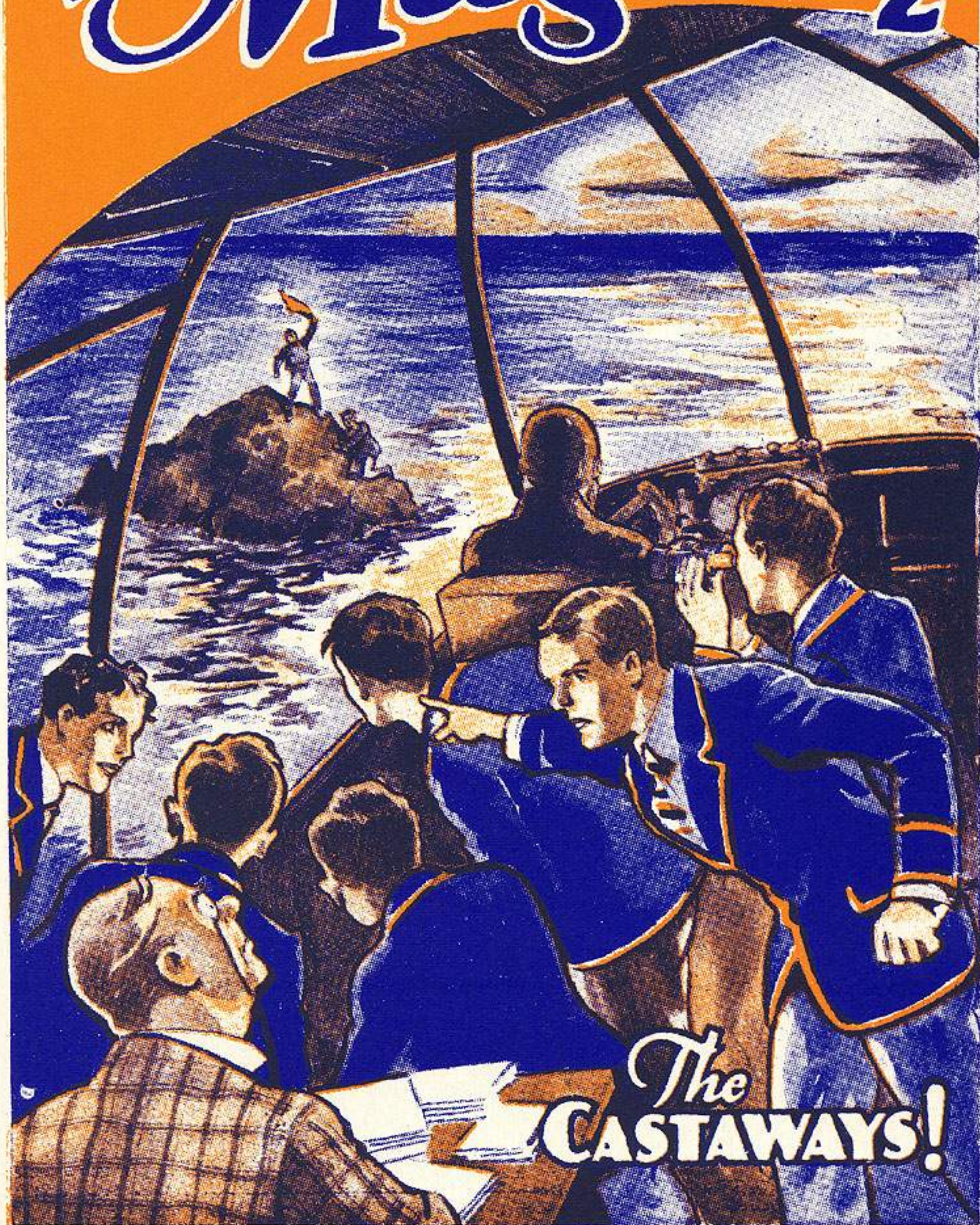


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The Magnet ^{2^D}



The
CASTAWAYS!

ANOTHER ADVENTURE-THRILLER BY THE PRINCE OF SCHOOLBOY AUTHORS—

MUTINY on the FIREFLY!

By FRANK RICHARDS



Featuring HARRY WHARTON & CO., the World-Famous Chums of Greyfriars.

THE FIRST CHAPTER.

Bunter Puts it in French!

"**H**OW—" began Billy Bunter. He paused. Harry Wharton & Co. glanced round at the fat Owl of the Greyfriars Remove.

Billy Bunter had been silent for five minutes, which was rather a record for Bunter. A wrinkle in his fat brow, and a sly gleam in his little round eyes behind his big round spectacles, indicated that he was thinking, which was also rather unusual.

"How—" recommenced Bunter.

Again he paused.

"Go it!" said Harry Wharton, with a smile. "How what?"

"How which?" inquired Bob Cherry.

"How—" repeated Bunter.

Then there was another pause.

"The howfulness is terrific!" remarked Hurree Jamset Ram Singh.

"How do you say 'come here' in French?" Billy Bunter got it out at last. "Mind," he went on hastily, "I'm not thinking of calling out to that boatman to come here. Nothing of the kind. In fact, I haven't noticed him prowling round the yacht at all, and I'm certainly not thinking of going ashore on my own. I just want to know, you know."

The Famous Five of the Greyfriars Remove sat up in their deckchairs and took notice.

It was golden sunset in the sunny south. The yacht Firefly lay at anchor in the bay of Villefranche. Shoreward, the Maritime Alps, capped with snow, loomed against a sky of deepest blue. White-walled villas peeped out among the olive groves, and a gigantic hotel jutted like a fortress.

Harry Wharton & Co. were sitting

THE MAGNET LIBRARY.—No. 1,509.

in deckchairs. Billy Bunter was standing, contrary to his usual custom, which was to sit down, if there was anything at hand to be sat upon. He had been blinking over the rail, shoreward, till he turned to speak to the chums of the Remove.

The Christmas cruise of the Greyfriars party was drawing towards its end. The new term at Greyfriars School was not far off now. The Co. had been talking of it, when Billy Bunter interrupted. Now they gave the Owl of the Remove their attention.

A shore boat was pulling at a little distance from the anchored yacht. The boatman, no doubt, was looking out for custom, if anybody on the Firefly wanted to be taken to the beach. He was eating onions as he pulled, every now and then resting on his oars, to help himself from a bunch that lay on a thwart. Chewing onions, and pulling slowly, he glided by the yacht's quarter, within hail.

"Can't some of you tell me?" yapped Bunter. "You always make out that you speak French better than I do."

"You howling ass—" began Johnny Bull.

"You blithering bloater—" said Frank Nugent.

"Look here, you frabjous ass!" said Harry Wharton. "You're not going ashore on your own! If we catch you heading for Monte Carlo, we'll tip you up, and roll you back like a barrel!"

"Beast!"

The look of scorn and indignation that Billy Bunter bestowed on the Famous Five was so intense that it might almost have cracked his spectacles.

Monte Carlo, the gamblers' mecca, was near at hand—just round the corner, in fact. To Billy Bunter, it seemed a sheer waste of a golden oppor-

tunity, not to scoop in a small fortune at the green tables, while he was on the spot. That he could do it, the fat Owl had no doubt. He had heard of people who had broken the bank at Monte Carlo, and did not know that those exploits happened in the publicity department.

What anybody else could do, Bunter could do, and do better. And those cheeky beasts had the neck to bar him off from opening the purse of Fortunatus.

"You—you—you set of noodles!" said Bunter, with withering contempt. "You—you mob of ninecompoops!"

"Go it, old fat bean!" said Bob Cherry encouragingly. "Take it out in jaw, if you like!"

"You weak-kneed lot of soft spoonies!" hooted Bunter.

"Hear, hear! Getting eloquent, ain't he?" said Bob cheerily.

"I'm sorry I came on this cruise with you!" snorted Bunter.

"The sorrowfulness of our esteemed selves is also preposterous!" remarked Hurree Jamset Ram Singh, with a nod of his dusky head.

"Rotten treatment all round!" said Bunter bitterly. "Compton of the Fifth asked us on this cruise, and I gave up a lot of other engagements to come. I turned down Lord Manleverer and Toddy, and a dozen other fellows. You fellows know how I'm rushed with invitations at break-up—"

"Oh, my hat!"

"And now he's captured me as a guest—how does he treat me?" pursued Bunter. "I tell him I want a boat ashore, and he tells me I'd better not go without my friends. I tell Captain Compton I want a boat, and he just looks at a fellow as if a fellow wasn't there."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I tell the mate," hooted Bunter—"and what does Swain do? Snorts at a fellow like—like a grampus. And now a shore boat comes along—"

Billy Bunter paused.

He realised that he was on the point of giving his intentions away—being happily unaware that he had given them away already.

"I say, you fellows, don't be beasts!" he urged. "I'm not thinking of going ashore. I haven't the remotest idea of running up to Monte Carlo, and trying my luck at roulette. I haven't borrowed any money from Compton of the Fifth to do it with; and he only lent me five hundred francs, anyhow, and that won't go very far, unless I begin winning right at the start. I'm not going to call out to that boatman to take me ashore, you know."

"You're not," agreed Harry Wharton.

"I'm simply interested in the French language," explained Bunter. "I don't think a fellow ought to waste all his time, even on holiday. I'm not a slacker like you chaps. Monsieur Charpentier will expect us to have improved our French a bit, coming to the Riviera for the vac, and I—I don't want to disappoint him. I say, you fellows, what's the French for 'come here'?"

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

Billy Bunter's deep duplicity seemed to strike them as entertaining.

"Blessed if I see anything to chuckle at!" grinned Bunter. "I'm asking you a question about French. I'm not going to say 'come here' to anybody, you know. I just want to know. I'd go and ask Rawlings, but I don't like that beastly steward. I say, you fellows, you might tell a chap—if you know! I dare say you don't," added Bunter, with a sneer.

The Famous Five chuckled.

Billy Bunter was a past-master at forgetting anything he had ever learned; but it seemed remarkable that even Bunter did not remember enough of Mossoo's instructions at Greyfriars, to be able to say "venez ici!"

Evidently the fat Owl's fat brain was a beautiful blank on the subject.

He blinked round at the boatman.

Still chewing succulent onions, the man was gliding past. Soon he would be out of earshot.

"I say, you fellows, cough it up!" exclaimed Bunter anxiously. "Mind, I'm not going to call to that boatman! But suppose I was going to, what should I call out to him?"

"Well, that depends on circumstances," said Bob Cherry. "I don't mind telling you what you'd better call out to him, Bunter, if you like."

"You silly ass, Bob!" growled Johnny Bull. "Chuck it!"

"My dear chap, Bunter says that he's simply interested in the matter as French. He's not really going to call to that sportsman in the boat?" said Bob. "You're not doubting Bunter's word, surely?"

"Oh crikey!"

"I say, be quick, Cherry!" exclaimed Bunter, with an anxious blink at the passing boat. "What shall I call out to him? I—I mean, if—if I was going to call at all, you know! Tell me what to say!"

"You'd better call out, 'Allez-vous-en, coquin!'" said Bob gravely.

"Oh, all right!" gasped Bunter.

And he rolled along the rail to get as near as he could to the passing boat, to hail the batelier therein.

The Famous Five gurgled. They rose from the deckchairs to look on. They could not help thinking that the boatman's face would be worth watching if

Bunter shouted: "Get out, rascal!" at him in French.

"Oh crumbs!" gasped Nugent. "Is even Bunter idiot enough—"

"Listen!" chuckled Bob.

Leaning over the rail, waving a fat hand, Billy Bunter shouted to the man in the boat.

"Allez-vous-en, coquin!"

Bunter's shout reached the batelier. It reached every ear on the Firefly, also. Captain Compton was standing on the bridge, talking to Swain, the mate, and Valentine Compton, of the Fifth Form at Greyfriars. All three of them turned to stare blankly at Bunter. Mr. Ferguson, the engineer, and five or six of the crew, who were on deck, also stared. Rawlings, the steward, put his head out of the companion to stare. Bunter had the house!

Hardest of all stared the man in the boat. As Bunter waved, he steered in with an oar, closer to the yacht. But as he caught Bunter's hail the expression that came over his swarthy face was quite startling.

"Comment?" he gasped.

"Come here!" squeaked Bunter. "I mean, allez-vous-en, coquin! Understandez-vous? Je want to go ashore in votre boat! Gottez vous that? Allez-vous-en, coquin! I say, you fellows, what is he looking waxy about?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

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**With the prison gates looming large ahead, Captain Compton, smuggler, gun-runner and lawless adventurer, decides to take his nephew's advice and steer the straight and narrow course. But the skipper of the "Firefly" reckons without his crew, who are determined to gain their ends!**

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"Quoi!" stuttered the boatman. "Comment cela, drole? Moi coquin! Et pourquoi, gros cochon?"

"Je ne understandy pas!" said Bunter in his own French. "Can't you comprong? Allez-vous-en, coquin! I say, you fellows, what's the matter with the chap? He must want a passenger, I suppose, as he's prowling round the ship. The silly fool doesn't seem to understand his own language."

"I think he does, from his looks!" gasped Harry Wharton.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Hearez-vous?" hooted Bunter. "Allez-vous-en, coquin! Well, he seems excited about something, but he's coming, anyhow, so that's all right."

The boatman was coming—but it was not all right! His dusky face was red with rage, and his black eyes glittered. It was enough to annoy any boatman looking for custom to be called a rascal and told to get out. Clearly, that French batelier did not like it. With a twist of his oars he brought the boat closer to the yacht, laid in his oars, and grabbed up the largest onion from his bunch.

Whiz!

Smack!

"Yaroooh!" roared Billy Bunter, as the large, fat onion crashed on his fat little nose. "Oh crikey! I say, is he mad? Oh crumbs!"

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

"I say— Yarooop!" raved Bunter

as another onion caught him, this time on a fat ear. "I say— Ooooooh!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Nom d'un nom!" roared the angry man in the boat. "Vous m'insultez, n'est-ce pas? Alors, cela pour vous—et ca—et ca—et ca—"

With every "ca" an onion whizzed. Billy Bunter did not understand the French. But he understood the onions! They rained on him right and left, amid shrieks of laughter from the Greyfriars fellows. The French batelier was standing up to it, his boat rocking wildly under him; but his aim was good, and Bunter got onion after onion.

"Ow! Help! He's mad! Oh crikey! Yow-ow-woop!" spluttered Bunter. "I say, you fellows— Yarooooooh!"

Bunter dodged and ran, and bolted down the companion. He had quite given up the idea of getting a lift in that shore-boat! Wild horses would not have dragged him into that boat!

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

"Nom d'un nom d'un chien!" yelled the batelier. "Ce gros cochon—v'la, gros cochon—cochon—cochon!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Then, as Bunter had disappeared, or perhaps because he had exhausted his supply of onions, the batelier sat down to his oars and rowed away, leaving Billy Bunter gasping and gurgling in the saloon and the Famous Five yelling like hyenas on deck.

THE SECOND CHAPTER.

What the Bounder Knew!

HERBERT VERNON-SMITH, the Bounder of Greyfriars, stepped out of the Hotel Gloria, at Villefranche, and glanced round along the palms that nodded on the long balcony, overlooking the hillside, the shore, and the bay. It was morning—a bright and sunny morning.

Looking down from the big hotel on the olive-clad hillside, Smithy could see the Firefly riding at anchor in the bay, with five or six other craft.

The distance was great, but in the clear air he could pick up moving figures on the deck of the yacht and catch a gleam from a pair of big spectacles flashing back the rays of the sun.

His father, Mr. Samuel Vernon-Smith, was seated on the balcony in a long chair, looking at "Le Petit Journal" while he waited for his car to come round.

The plump millionaire glanced up, with a smile, as his son joined him, and laid down the French newspaper.

"You're going to fetch your friends off the yacht, Herbert?" he asked.

"Yes we've fixed up some tennis here for the morning," answered Smithy.

"You are going over to Monte?"

"Yes," answered Mr. Vernon-Smith. His glance at his son's face grew sharper. "What's the trouble, Herbert?" he asked.

"Nothing." The Bounder grinned. "I haven't been following the parental example and barging into the casinos, dad."

"Keep clear of them," said the millionaire. "And don't be a young ass, Herbert! Your father isn't fool enough to throw away good money on green tables. I go up to Monte Carlo with my friends, here, but I shall not play roulette or trente-et-quarante until I get into my second childhood, by Jove! The game's worth watching, as a study in human nature, that's all! I was glad to see your friends from Greyfriars, Herbert—a decent set of lads, THE MAGNET LIBRARY.—No. 1,509.

not likely to lead you into mischief, like that Highcliffe crew you had out here once."

The Bounder nodded, a thoughtful look on his face. His father's keen look grew more penetrating.

"What's on your mind?" he rapped. "I can see there's something. If you've been getting into mischief, Herbert—"

"Couldn't, with those chaps," said the Bounder, laughing. "Wharton and his mob would turn me down like a shot if I tried to walk them into a casino."

"Good! Then what is it?"

"You've seen that chap, Compton, on the yacht?" said the Bounder slowly. "The chap who fished me out of the water when I was blown out to sea the other day. He saved my life, father."

"I know he did," said Mr. Vernon-Smith. "I was very glad to make his acquaintance, Herbert—a splendid lad. I'd like to see more of him."

"You like him, father?"

"Very much!" said Mr. Vernon-Smith. "From what you've told me he must have risked his life, and very nearly lost it, getting you out of the Mediterranean. A plucky lad, by Jove."

"You've been on the yacht," said the Bounder abruptly. "What do you think of the whole turn-out, father?"

Mr. Vernon-Smith did not reply immediately to that question. A slightly grim expression came over his face.

"Judging by appearances," he said at last. "Captain Compton is a man of wealth and leisure, running an expensive yacht for amusement. His nephew, Valentine Compton, belongs to your school, and you've told me that he is very popular there. His uncle is wealthy enough, and indulgent enough, to let him bring a crowd of schoolboys on a cruise in the holidays. I'm glad they're here, to keep you company. No harm in your visiting them on the yacht."

"But if they asked me to join in the cruise—" grinned the Bounder.

"In that case, make some quite polite excuse, and don't!" jerked the millionaire abruptly.

"Which means that you're not judging that turnout by appearances, father. Tell me what you think of them."

"I can speak to you frankly, Herbert, as you know how to keep your mouth shut," said Mr. Vernon-Smith slowly. "I don't quite get it, Herbert! Appearances are all right, but I'm a man accustomed to looking under appearances. Captain Compton is not what he looks—a wealthy yachtsman. He's got something up his sleeve—I don't know what. His mate, Swain, is a ruffian, who barely knows how to keep a civil tongue in his head. The steward, Rawlings, is a sleek, sly, cunning rogue, if ever I saw one. The whole crew are fishy—I can't quite make out how—but that's that! That's the opinion I formed after my visit to the yacht, Herbert."

"You've got it!" said Smithy. "They could hardly pull the wool over your eyes, I suppose. You've spotted that they're up to something."

"I think so. Keep clear of the craft, except for dropping in to see your friends. I can't quite understand Wharton and his friends being there. Their people must have been—well, unobservant."

"That's easily explained," said the Bounder. "Compton of the Fifth asked them on the cruise; and anybody seeing Compton can see that he's straight as a die. His uncle's an old Greyfriars man. And everybody isn't quite so keen as you are, father. Even you don't know what's going on on that packet!"

THE MAGNET LIBRARY.—No. 1,509.

"Do you?" snapped the millionaire.

The Bounder did not answer that question. His glance turned on the yacht again, riding at anchor on the sunlit bay. Toy-like in the distance, he picked out a handsome face, and an athletic figure, on the bridge—Valentine Compton, of the Greyfriars Fifth.

"Well?" rapped Mr. Vernon-Smith sharply.

"Compton's a splendid chap, father, and he saved my life the other day," said Smithy slowly.

"I know. But facts are facts, Herbert. Whatever is going on on that yacht the boy knows. He must be in it, whatever it is. Under his uncle's influence. I've no doubt—but there it is."

"We owe him something, father."

"If there's anything I could do for that lad after he saved my son's life, I should set no limit to it," said Mr. Vernon-Smith.

"He's mixed up in something. He's heading for trouble—bad trouble. I believe he'd like to get clear, but he sticks to his uncle; he's fond of him, and he's dependant on him. The man's a bit of a hard nut to crack; but he's stood by Compton since he was a kid, and Compton's standing by him. That's how I've figured it out," said Smithy. "That's the only way to account for such a chap being mixed up in shady things. If the uncle could be hooked out of it, the nephew would be glad to be hooked out. I've been thinking, father—"

"Well?"

"If you offered Captain Compton the command of one of your ships—say, the new steamer you've had built for the East India trade—"

"A man of doubtful character?" almost yapped Mr. Vernon-Smith.

"His nephew would be glad to sail with him, with a chance of getting a captain's ticket himself some day. He was born for the sea. It would be a splendid chance for him."

"No doubt," said Mr. Vernon-Smith dryly. "But the man who commands the Eastern Queen when she goes down the Mersey will have to be a man of unblemished character, above suspicion. Think of something else, Herbert."

A waiter appeared on the balcony.

"My car's waiting," said the millionaire. He rose from his chair. "I shall see you at lunch, Herbert."

The stout millionaire nodded to his son and followed the garcon. Herbert Vernon-Smith stood for long minutes, staring down at the blue sea and the yacht.

It was not much like the Bounder of Greyfriars to give much thought to others; but he had always liked and admired Compton of the Fifth, and the Fifth Former had gone within an ace of death to rescue him from the stormy sea. In all Greyfriars School only the Bounder had known Compton's secret—that he was a smuggler and one of a smuggling crew.

Smithy had kept that secret. But he knew better than Compton and his associates that it could not be always kept. If Compton went back to Greyfriars for the new term and carried on the smuggling game there as before, the crash would come; he felt it in his very bones.

Already the attention of the police had been drawn to the vicinity of the school. Carne of the Sixth suspected Compton of something, though he did not know exactly what, and watched him like a cat. And Compton himself was not fitted by Nature to play a game requiring caution and cunning, neither was it a part of his character.

The thought of an official hand falling on that splendid fellow's shoulder, of that handsome head being brought low in shame and disgrace, troubled the Bounder deeply.

He shrugged his shoulders at last and left the hotel and walked down the hill to take a boat out to the yacht.

THE THIRD CHAPTER.

Snatched!

"I SAY, you fellows, I'm ready!" Billy Bunter rolled on deck, with a tennis racket under his fat arm.

Bunter was not always ready when the other fellows were ready; but perhaps he had a suspicion that the beasts might go off in Smithy's boat and leave him on the Firefly if he was not on the spot, so here was Bunter—spotless in borrowed flannels and nearly bursting out of them—with a racket under his arm. He joined the Famous Five, who were standing by the rail, watching a boat pull out from the beach with Vernon-Smith sitting in the stern.

"Hallo, hallo, hallo! Where did you dig up that racket?" asked Bob Cherry. "Smithy's going to fix us up with rackets; we never brought any on this cruise."

"Oh, I packed a racket!" said Bunter airily. "I thought very likely I should get some tennis out here, you know."

The Famous Five looked at Bunter. That fat and fatuous youth was, as usual, travelling light on the holiday cruise. He had stepped on board the Firefly at Dover with very little more than he stood up in. He had depended on his old pals for what he might want on the voyage, and had helped himself with a liberal hand. When the party had put in a few days with Smithy at the Hotel Gloria ashore he had favoured Smithy in the same way.

That a fellow who had not packed even a spare pair of socks should have packed a tennis racket was really surprising, if true—and nothing had been seen of it before that morning.

"Is that Compton's—and have you snaffled it?" asked Johnny Bull.

"Oh, really, Bull—"

"Well, whose is it?" demanded Bob Cherry.

"Mine!" hooted Bunter. "If you think I've borrowed a tennis racket from the steward you're jolly well mistaken! Besides, he offered to lend it to me."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Blessed if I can see anything to cackle at!" said Bunter crossly. "Cackle, cackle, cackle whenever a fellow opens his mouth! You fellows can borrow rackets of Smithy if you like! I'm not a fellow to go round borrowing things. I hope; I'm taking my own racket."

"That jolly old steward seems to have everything a chap wants," grinned Bob. "He lent Bunter an overcoat to go ashore at Marseilles; now he's lent him a racket. They got the right kind of steward for a trip with Bunter! He will be cashing Bunter's postal order next!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The boat from the shore hooked on, and Smithy came up the ladder. Harry Wharton & Co. greeted him cheerily. They had been very glad to fall in with Smithy on their holiday cruise; and the Bounder, on his side, seemed equally pleased.

"Ready, old bean," said Bob. "You'll have to fix us up with rackets; but Bunter's got his own, which he

brought out specially from England—and borrowed of the steward this morning."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Smithy gave a little start.

"You borrowed that racket of the steward, Bunter?" he asked.

"No, I jolly well didn't!" answered Bunter. "It's my own—I mean one of my own! I haven't seen Rawlings since brekker, and he never asked me if I'd like a racket as we were going ashore to play tennis. I say, you fellows, let's get going."

Smithy's glance lingered for a moment curiously on the racket under Billy Bunter's fat arm.

"You fellows tumble in," he said. "I've got to speak to Compton; the pater wants him to come up to lunch."

"Right-ho!"

Harry Wharton & Co. went down to

have, my father hasn't. Look here, you'll come?"

"Yes," Compton nodded, "I'll come up to lunch. Thanks!"

"Right-ho, then!"

And Smithy ran across and dropped into the boat after the other fellows. As the boatmen pushed off from the yacht Rawlings came up and looked over the rail; his eyes were on Billy Bunter—as the Bounder noted, with a covert grin on his face.

Harry Wharton noted that grin and the direction of the Bounder's look, and glanced back at Rawlings; he compressed his lips a little.

The boat pulled to the shore, and the Greyfriars party landed. The Bounder drew Harry Wharton a little aside as they walked up to the promenade.

"Spot anything?" he grinned.

Wharton looked at him.

But how the dickens could anything be hidden in a tennis racket? Don't be an ass!"

"Hollow handle—something in a tube—what? My dear man, smugglers are up to all kinds of tricks—and Rawlings is about as deep a card as you'd dig up anywhere outside chokey."

"Oh, rot!" said Harry, uneasily.

The Bounder laughed.

"Rot or not, I'll give you ten to one in doughnuts that somebody snatches that racket off Bunter, now we're ashore!" he said. "And I'll tell you this, too—I'm going to see that it's not snatched! Keep an eye open, old bean!"

"I can't believe——"

"Seeing is believing!" grinned the Bounder. "We've got a half-mile walk—and I'll bet Bunter won't carry that racket half the distance."



Onions rained on Bunter right and left, amid shrieks of laughter from the Greyfriars fellows. The French boatman was standing up to it, his boat rocking wildly under him, but his aim was good, and Bunter got onion after onion. "Ow! Help!

He's mad! Oh crikey! Yow-ow-woop!" he spluttered. "I say, you fellows—— Yaroooh!"

the waiting boat, followed by the fat Owl. Smithy went along to speak to Compton of the Fifth, who gave him a nod and a smile.

"Like to come up for some tennis, Compton?" asked the Bounder. "We're far enough from Greyfriars for you to forget that you're in the Fifth and I'm in the Remove," he added, with a grin.

Valentine Compton laughed.

"Thanks," he said "but I think my uncle wants me this morning."

"Well, look here, come up to lunch," said Vernon-Smith. "It's a special invitation from the pater, and he will be disappointed if you don't come."

Compton hesitated.

"He thinks no end of you," added Smithy.

"That's very kind of him," said the Fifth Former, smiling. "I don't quite see why he should, as he never met me till a few days ago."

"You've forgotten fishing me out of the sea?" asked Smithy. "Well, if you

"What do you mean, Smithy?" he asked quietly.

"You've told me how Rawlings lent that fat fool an overcoat when he was going ashore at Marseilles," answered the Bounder, with a cynical grin; "and I told you that there was contraband of some kind hidden in the lining."

"I know you did, but——"

"Now he's lent him a tennis racket. Not the sort of thing you'd expect a steward to have on tap."

"Might be two or three old rackets of Compton's on board."

"Oh, quite!" drawled the Bounder. "Well, you know that they got that overcoat off Bunter ashore at Marseilles. What's the bettin' that somebody doesn't try to get that tennis racket off him?"

Harry Wharton's brows knitted.

"I—I think you may have been right about that coat, Smithy," he said slowly.

"I—I'm afraid there's not much doubt about what Rawlings is.

Harry Wharton made no reply to that. It had been driven into his mind that the Bounder's suspicion was well founded, that the Firefly was a smuggling craft. He had doubted—he had tried not to believe—but what he had seen in the Channel, in the Bay of Biscay, and at Marseilles, had had a cumulative effect—and he could doubt no longer. He only hoped that his friends would not make the same discovery, before that cruise came to an end.

That Compton of the Fifth would think, or dream, of making use of the Greyfriars juniors in a smuggling enterprise, he knew was impossible. Neither did he think that the captain was capable of such trickery. But Rawlings, he knew only too well, was capable of that, and worse. He was feeling very uneasy in his mind, now, as the party walked up from the shore.

Bunter, as usual, lagged behind.

THE MAGNET LIBRARY.—No. 1,509.

Generally, he lagged unregarded. Now the Bounder dropped back, to keep an eye on him. Wharton slowed down, to keep pace with Vernon-Smith.

At a curve of the road, where it wound up the olive-clad hillside, a dusky-complexioned man in a black Italian felt hat lounged under the trees, smoking a cigarette.

His dark eyes turned on the party of schoolboys. But for the Bounder's words, Wharton would not have noticed that circumstance, or the man at all.

Now he noticed that the dusky Italian fixed his eyes on Bunter, as he came rolling along with the tennis racket under his arm.

As Bunter came abreast of the spot where the swarthy man was standing, without even seeing him there, the man made a sudden spring forward.

In an instant he had snatched the racket from Bunter and started to run by a shady path through the trees.

So sudden was the action that, so far as the Famous Five were concerned, the man would have got clear, and vanished from sight, with his plunder, with no danger of capture, and little possibility of pursuit.

But the Bounder was on the watch. Even as the swarthy man snatched and ran, Smithy leaped at him, and his clenched fist shot out, catching the Italian behind the ear.

The man gave a startled yell, and spun over, crashing on the ground. Smithy snatched the racket from his hand.

"Hallo, hallo, hallo! What——" gasped Bob Cherry.

"I say, you fellows——"

"What the thump——" exclaimed Johnny Bull.

The whole party stopped. The

Italian, bounding to his feet, darted away into the trees and disappeared. Vernon-Smith, grinning, waved the racket after him, in mockery, as he fled.

THE FOURTH CHAPTER.

The Way Out!

"MUM-MUM-MY racket!" stammered Billy Bunter.

"Here you are, old fat bean!" grinned the Bounder.

He handed the tennis racket back to the fat Owl of the Remove. Billy Bunter tucked it under his podgy arm again.

The Greyfriars fellows stood staring. The Italian, running like a hare, had vanished in the trees. Vernon-Smith chuckled.

"I say, you fellows, he—he—he snatched my racket!" gasped Billy Bunter. "I say, he jolly well ought to be run in!"

"He's gone!" said Frank Nugent.

"The gonefulness is terrific!" said Hurree Jamset Ram Singh. "But what the absurd dickens——"

"What the thump did the man want to snatch a tennis racket for?" asked Bob Cherry, in blank astonishment. "Must be off his rocker, I should think."

"Well, it's a jolly good racket!" said Billy Bunter. "I always have the very best, you know!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared the Bounder.

"Oh, cackle!" snorted Bunter. "I suppose the rotter must have noticed that it was a jolly good racket, to try to snatch it like that!"

"Blessed if I understand it!" said

Bob. "I suppose a snatcher could sell it for a few francs, if he got away with it—but—well, it's weird."

"Oh, don't be an ass!" grunted Bunter. "I gave four guineas for this racket. That chap jolly well knew it was a valuable one. I'm jolly glad that brute never got away with it! Rawlings might have expected me to pay for it, if he had."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Look after it, old fat bean," said the Bounder. "I shouldn't wonder if we see that dago again before we get to the Gloria."

"My dear chap," said Bob, "he's not likely to try again. What the dickens can he want an old tennis racket for?"

"Well, he might!" grinned the Bounder.

"Bosh!" said Johnny Bull.

It seemed extremely unlikely to the juniors that the thief would make another attempt on that racket. They were quite puzzled by the fact that he had taken the trouble to make one attempt, for so trifling a prize.

But the Bounder had his own ideas about that. He dropped behind Bunter as they went up the hill, and Wharton dropped behind with him. The Bounder grinned at the captain of the Remove.

"Got it clear now?" he asked.

"Well, I suppose there's no doubt now!" admitted Wharton slowly. "That dago was on the watch for Bunter and his racket and he would have got away with it quite easily but for you. He's a confederate of Rawlings."

"Just that!" grinned Smithy. "And the jolly old steward will be shirty when he hears the result. Keep an eye open for the dago!"

"But what can be packed in so small a space?" asked Harry. "And—and if it's so small a thing, why couldn't Rawlings take it ashore in his own pocket?"

"Safety first is the good man's motto, I fancy!" chuckled Smithy. "Bet you there are a good many eyes on that yacht and its crew, and Rawlings wouldn't like to be nailed with the goods on him, if some jolly old sergeant-de-ville suddenly clapped him on the shoulder. Five years in a French prison would rather cramp his style."

Wharton set his lips.

"What an awful rascal! If you are right, Smithy—and I suppose you are—Bunter's got some contraband goods at this very moment—goodness knows what—and if they were spotted on——"

"It would come out that the fat fool was a dupe, of course," said Vernon-Smith. "But I fancy he wouldn't get away from the French police in time to join up at Greyfriars for the next term. Or you, either!"

Harry Wharton started violently.

"Smithy!" he exclaimed.

"Well, look at it!" said the Bounder. "It's smuggling—you know that! Back home they smuggle from France to England—here they're smuggling into France! The French Customs are pretty fierce on that subject—much more than they are in our country. If a sergeant-de-ville spotted what's hidden in the hollow handle of the racket, the whole party would be taken up—and wouldn't get loose again in a hurry."

Wharton's face was quite pale.

It sounded too terrible to be true; yet he knew, with a very little reflection, that it was true.

No doubt, after inquiry, it would come out that the schoolboys were



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innocent in the matter. But the inquiry would be long and tedious, and while it lasted they would be detained by the French police.

The bare thought of such a thing was appalling.

"And I'm in it!" grinned the Bounder. "They'd yank me in as a possible confederate. You're a dangerous acquaintance, old bean."

Wharton frowned.

"You can cut the danger as quick as you like!" he said curtly.

"Don't get shirty, old man," said the Bounder coolly. "I'm telling you the facts, and if you've got the sense of a bunny rabbit, you'll act on my tip. Compton isn't in this, of course. I believe he'd smash in that greasy scoundrel's face, if he knew. That doesn't alter the fact!"

"No," said Harry, with a deep breath, "it doesn't!"

"I wondered," said the Bounder quietly, "why Compton was allowed to take a party of Greyfriars fellows for a cruise on a smuggling packet. I know now! He meant you well and straight; but the others had their own game to play. A schoolboy party is a good camouflage to bar off suspicion—and jolly useful to sneak specially dangerous things ashore. Might be cocaine that's packed in that racket—any sort of forbidden drug."

"Smithy!" exclaimed Wharton, in horror.

"And while you're on that packet you're in danger of getting mixed up in it, if it comes out!" said Smithy. "Wharton, do be a sensible chap, and take my advice—for once! If your people know what I've told you—and what you can see for yourself now is true—would they let you stay there?"

"I suppose not!"

"You're ashore now," went on the Bounder. "You stayed a few days with me at the Gloria—you can stay a few more? Get me? Join up with me, for the rest of the hols—I'll be glad to have you, and my father will be gladder still—he likes me to be in your improvin' society!" Smithy chuckled. "Your people will be satisfied, if you're with my father. You can make some decent excuse to Compton, and send for your things. Look here, old man, I never take good advice—but I can hand it out! Don't go back on that packet."

Harry Wharton was silent.

He knew that the Bounder was right. At Marseilles he had thought of ending the cruise, but he had shrunk from explaining to the other fellows what he suspected.

But it was not a matter of suspicion now, it was a certainty, and as certain as anything could be.

"You're awfully good, Smithy," he said at last. "If you're willing to put us up for a week—"

"Willing, and glad!"

"And your father—"

"I can answer for him. To put it plain, Wharton, he has his suspicions of that outfit, and is a bit uneasy at you fellows being on board. He will jump at the chance of seeing you clear."

"We'll fix it up, Smithy—and thanks! But—but no need to tell the other fellows—about Compton! Keep that dark!"

"You bet!" agreed the Bounder.

"Hallo, hallo, hallo!" roared Bob Cherry. "Look! There's that dago sportsman again!"

The party came to a halt on the winding road. From the trees by the wayside, a dark face and a pair of glittering black eyes looked out.

"I say, you fellows, keep him off!" squeaked Billy Bunter.

"We'll jolly well collar him!" exclaimed Bob, and he led a rush in the direction of the peering dark face.

It vanished instantly, and there was a rustle in the wood as the Italian fled. He was gone almost in the twinkling of an eye.

"Nothing doing!" grinned the Bounder.

"The man must be potty!" said Bob in wonder. "I suppose he was after that dashed old racket again—it was the same man!"

"I say, you fellows, it's a jolly valuable racket! I gave five guineas for it, you know—I mean six."

"Fathead!"

The Greyfriars fellows resumed their way and arrived at the Hotel Gloria without having seen anything more of the Italian. Into the precincts of the hotel he was hardly likely to follow them, and the racket was safe under Billy Bunter's fat arm as he rolled in.

THE FIFTH CHAPTER.

Billy Bunter Plays Tennis!

HARRY WHARTON & CO. sauntered out to the tennis court.

Like everything else at the magnificent Hotel Gloria, it was first-class. Three members of the famous Co. looked very merry and bright, as if

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they had not a care in the world—as, at that moment, they hadn't! Harry Wharton was looking thoughtful—and there was a slight shade on the dusky brow of Hurree Jamset Ram Singh, as if he also had food for thought. Harry Wharton was thinking of the racket under Bunter's arm and the Bounder's suspicion concerning it. If Smithy was right—as he could have little doubt—the sooner that secret consignment of contraband goods was disposed of, the better. Nothing would have induced him to let it fall into the hands of Rawlings' confederate, but obviously it had to be got rid of.

What it could be, to pack into so small a space, he could not imagine; unless, as Smithy hinted, Rawlings had a hand in the secret drug traffic. That thought was so repugnant that he tried to keep it out of his mind. It was too dismaying to think of Valentine Compton mixed up with a rascal wicked enough, and unscrupulous enough, to deal in such things.

"Not a bad court!" remarked Billy Bunter, blinking over it through his big spectacles. "Not like ours at Bunter Court, of course—but not bad! Look here, you fellows, I want a good game—perhaps I'd better take on two of you."

Whereat the fellows smiled. Billy Bunter played tennis about as well as he played cricket or football, or any other game. His style at tennis was to barge about like a mad elephant, miss every stroke, and squeak "Fault" at regular intervals like a minute gun!

"That fat ass had better sit down and watch!" said Vernon-Smith.

"If that's how you're going to talk to a guest, Smithy, perhaps I'd better be getting back to the yacht!" said Bunter with dignity.

"Nobody's stopping you!" said the Bounder.

"Hem!" murmured Bob Cherry. "You come on my side, Bunter, old bean! Don't brain me with that racket if you can help it."

"Well, you're a pretty rotten player, Cherry!" was Bunter's grateful answer. "Still, I can do the work for two; all right."

It was like the cheery, good-natured Bob to take the fat Owl on his hands. Smithy had no intention of taking him as a partner, and in fact declined to play with Bunter on the court at all. Smithy wanted the Famous Five—he did not want Bunter; a fact that the fat Owl was able to perceive without the aid of his big spectacles. Smithy was prepared to tolerate the fat Owl civilly, but he was not prepared to exercise the same patience as the Famous Five with the irritating Owl.

"I'll keep your score!" he said. "You sit it out with me, Wharton."

"All right!"

Smithy and the captain of the Remove sat down at a seat on one side of the court. Hurree Jamset Ram Singh posted himself on the other side to field the balls when required. Johnny Bull and Nugent went on to play Bob and Bunter.

There was grin on the Bounder's face.

"When that fat fool's through, we must get that racket off him somehow," he said. "There's a lake in the gardens here, the other side of those palms—and that's a safe spot to drop it in, what?"

"That's a good idea!" agreed Harry.

"You feel sure—"

"Don't you?"

"Well, yes!" admitted Wharton, after a brief pause. "But feeling sure isn't exactly proof. I hate to think of Compton—" He paused again.

"Wash all that out!" said Vernon-Smith quietly. "No need to tell the other fellows—they will follow your lead, if you make a point of it. Goodness knows I don't want to give Compton away, after what he did for me. I hate the thought of his going back to Greyfriars and carrying on that game—"

"I can't believe—"

"Oh, rats! I'll tell you something I've never told you before, then!" grunted the Bounder. "I spotted Compton at the smuggling game at Greyfriars! I put paid to it. Those packets of smuggled goods that reached the police, anonymously, went through my hands—and I got them off Compton without his knowing."

"Oh!" gasped Harry.

"Now you know!" said Vernon-Smith.

"I couldn't give the chap away, and I couldn't let it go on—and that was the best thing I could think of. But—it can't go on again next term. Dashed if I know what a fellow ought to do. Mind you, Compton's one of the best—he's in this rotten game, through his uncle—he's being made use of by that gang. I can guess that he jibs, sometimes, too—but he feels that he can't let his uncle down—and, if you come to that, I don't quite see how he can. I've been trying to think out ways for my father to pull him through—the pater would do anything for him, since he fished me out of the Mediterranean! But I can't get it clear—yet."

"Service!" roared Johnny Bull.

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The ball whizzed over the net. It dropped and rose easily for Bunter who was taking the service. Bunter swiped, and missed it by a yard.

Bob Cherry ran behind the fat Owl, got the ball, and sent it whizzing back. Billy Bunter gave him a glare.

"Keep in your own court!" he bawled. "I don't like poaching! See?"

"You fat ass!" hooted Bob.

"Yah! Call that tennis!"

"Look out, idiot!"

Frank Nugent sent the ball back. It passed over Bunter's head, and he made a mighty swipe, missing again. The force of that swipe carried Bunter forward, and he pitched on his hands and knees.

As he landed, Bob volleyed the ball, sending it back. Bunter sat up and roared.

"Ow! Wow! Yow!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" yelled the Bounder. "This is worth watching! Do that again, Bunter."

"Beast! Ow!"

Billy Bunter packed his racket under his arm and rubbed his fat paws.

Bob Cherry played a single game while he was thus occupied. For some minutes he held his own against Johnny and Frank, till the latter dropped the ball just over the net, and Bob arrived too late.

"Fifteen—love!" grinned the Bounder.

"You ought to have had that, Cherry!" hooted Bunter. "Call that tennis! Think you're playing hop-scotch? Yah!"

Bob Cherry, with great self-control, refrained from laying his racket round William George Bunter.

"Service!" chortled Johnny Bull.

The ball came over to Bob, and he sent it back. Again Nugent dropped it just over the net, in Bunter's court, and just within the sideline. This time Bunter was on it. He rushed and swiped.

Crash!

Crack!

Bunter's racket did not go within a yard of the tennis ball. It crashed on the post from which the net was stretched. Bunter had succeeded in hitting something—if it was only a post!

The result was rather unexpected. The racket flew into two pieces with the crash, and the fat Owl was left with the handle in his fat hand, blinking at it.

"Oh crikey!" gasped Bunter.

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

"I—I say, you fellows, Rawlings will want to be paid for that racket!" gasped Bunter. "It's smashed in halves!"

"Fancy Rawlings wanting to be paid for a racket that Bunter brought from Bunter Court!" chortled Bob.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I—I say, you fellows—look!" gasped Bunter. "I—I say, look at it! The—the thing's hollow; there's something inside it. I say, that's why it broke, because it was hollow! I say——"

Bunter blinked at the broken racket, his eyes nearly staring through his spectacles with astonishment.

Vernon-Smith rushed on the court and grabbed it from his hand. Now that the handle was broken off short, it was easy to see that it was hollow, and from the snapped end of the hollow handle something was exuding—something that was wrapped in a rubber tube.

"I—I—I say!" gasped the astounded Owl. "I say, fancy a tennis racket having a hollow handle! I say——"

"Take my racket, fathead, and carry on!" snapped the Bounder.

He thrust his racket into the Owl's fat hand, and walked off the court with the broken one.

"Service!" roared Johnny Bull.

"Thirty—love!" called out the Bounder. "Keep the score, Inky—I'm going for a walk round with Wharton!"

"Right-ho, my esteemed Smithy!"

And the tennis-players were left to it.

THE SIXTH CHAPTER.

Proof!

HERBERT VERNON-SMITH laughed as he walked away with the captain of the Remove.

Wharton did not laugh. His face was pale and tense.

They disappeared through the palms, taking the direction of the ornamental lake at a little distance, and avoiding other walkers in the extensive grounds of the Hotel Gloria.

"Pretty clear now—what?" asked the Bounder.

Harry Wharton nodded.

"Rawlings never meant that racket to be used in tennis, of course," grinned Vernon-Smith. "With the handle hollowed out, it might have cracked hitting the ball—if Bunter had hit it! That jolly old racket was intended to fall into the clutches of the Italian Johnny who was waiting for it on shore. What do you think's packed in that rubber tube?"

"I—I don't know!"

"Want to look?"

"No. For goodness' sake get rid of it as quickly as you can!" breathed Harry Wharton. "Oh, the rotter—the rascal—to make use of that fat fool!" He clenched his hands. "Anyhow, it's proof positive now!"

Vernon-Smith stopped on the edge of the lake. He drew the rubber tubing from its place of concealment in the hollow handle. The tube was closed at both ends; none of its contents had escaped. The Bounder stood with it in his hand for a moment.

"Quick, for goodness' sake!" muttered Harry.

"More haste, less speed!" said Smithy. "We don't want it to turn up again, do we?"

He wrenched at the rubber tube, and tore it apart; then, crumpling it with its contents, he flung it into the middle of the lake.

It sank out of sight immediately; and Wharton drew a deep breath of relief. Then the Bounder stamped the hollow handle out of shape, and threw it into the water. They walked on, round the lake. The Bounder seemed to be cynically amused; but Harry Wharton's heart was beating rather unpleasantly.

"You won't go back on that packet—now?" asked Smithy.

Harry Wharton shook his head.

"No!" he answered. "Never! I don't know what I can say to the other chaps; but we're done with that cruise!"

"But you Inky knows something already," said Vernon-Smith. "He's no fool! Compton's coming up to lunch here; you can tell him I want you to finish the hols with me, and make your excuses."

"Yes, we've got to steer clear!" said Harry, with a deep breath. "I—I—I wish old Compton could steer clear of it, too. He's too decent a chap to be mixed up in such a rotten game."

He was silent, in troubled thought, as they walked back to the tennis court. To set foot on the Firefly again was impossible, knowing what he knew. Billy Bunter had been made use of by the rascally steward; and the other fellows were in the same danger.

Billy Bunter had finished tennis when they returned to the court. He was on the court, and Hurree Janset Ram

sitting on the seat, fanning a fat brow with his hat, and the four members of the Co. were playing.

"Beat them hollow, old fat man?" asked Vernon-Smith.

"Well, I should have, but that racket you lent me was a rotten one, Smithy, and Cherry let me down all the time!" explained Bunter. "Bull and Nugent won the set owing to that. I say, what have you done with my racket?"

"Chucked it away."

"Well, it's rather a cheek to chuck a fellow's racket away," said Bunter warmly. "I gave seven guineas for that racket."

"Don't be a silly ass!" said the Bounder.

"Look here!" hooted Bunter. "Rawlings will want that racket back—I mean, I gave eight guineas for it——"

"Rawlings won't bother about it, Bunter," said Harry Wharton. "And you're not going to see Rawlings again, either. Smithy's asked us to finish the hols with him, and we're not going back to the yacht."

Billy Bunter blinked at him.

"I'm going back!" he said. "You fellows can suit yourselves! You're jolly well not ordering me about, Harry Wharton! Go and eat coke!"

"Look here, you fat ass——"

"Rats!" retorted Bunter independently. "I don't like Smithy's manners, if you want to know. I'm not changing Compton for Smithy! No fear!"

"Please yourself!" said the Bounder, shrugging his shoulders.

"I mean to!" yapped Bunter.

Harry Wharton sat silent. He had no doubt that his own friends would follow his lead, though they might be puzzled. But Billy Bunter was his own master. He looked at the Bounder, who shrugged his shoulders again.

Smithy was willing to let Bunter stay, but he was not prepared to ask for what he did not want.

"Look here, Bunter, you'd better stick to us, if we stay!" said Harry, at last.

"Shan't!" answered Bunter cheerfully.

The set finished, and the fellows came off the court. Bob Cherry and Nugent and Johnny Bull strolled away towards the lake, but Hurree Janset Ram Singh joined the fellows on the garden seat.

What the other three thought of the incident of the broken racket, or whether they thought about it at all, Wharton did not know. But he was fairly certain that the keen-eyed nabob had missed nothing.

"I say, Inky, Wharton's talking about staying here with Smithy, and not going back to the yacht at all!" squeaked Bunter.

The Nabob of Bhanipur gave his chum a quick glance. Wharton coloured a little, and Hurree Singh smiled.

"That is a wheezy good idea, my esteemed Bunter!" he remarked. "If the absurd hospitality of the idiotic Smithy is so extensive and preposterous, the delightfulness of humble self will be enormous."

"Inky knows!" said the Bounder, laughing.

"The knowfulness is terrific!" said Hurree Janset Ram Singh. "But while speech is golden, silence is the cracked pitcher that goes longest to the well, and saves a stitch in time."

"What the thump are you fellows talking about?" demanded Bunter.

"Find out!" snapped the Bounder.

"Play a singles, Wharton?"

"Yes, rather!"

"I say, you fellows——"

But Wharton and the Bounder went



Before Rawlings had time to draw his weapon, Compton's grip was on him. Bulky as the steward was, he was flung over the ship's rail by the Greyfriars Fifth Former. There was a yell as Rawlings went hurtling seawards. "That much for Rawlings!" said Compton, fiercely.

Singh strolled round to the other side of the same, and Billy Bunter was left to waste his sweetness on the desert air. The party gathered again to go in to lunch.

"They've got a jolly old plane here!" said Bob Cherry, as the juniors walked up through the gardens. "I've been looking at it—jolly old passenger plane, like the one we had a trip in once in the holidays."

"Yes, there's a private aerodrome here," said the Bouncer. "They run trips for the hotel guests—out over the Mediterranean as far as Corsica and Sardinia."

"Who wouldn't be a jolly old millionaire?" grinned Bob.

"I say, you fellows, we might have a trip in the plane!" suggested Billy Bunter. "I'd be glad to stand the exes if you fellows would like to come."

"Hallo, hallo, hallo! Has your postal order followed you out here and arrived at last, old fat man?"

"Oh, really, Cherry—"

"You couldn't do it out of the five hundred francs you snaffled from Compton!" chuckled Bob.

"If that's how you thank a chap for offering to stand you an expensive trip in an aeroplane, Bob Cherry—"

"My dear old porpoise, I'll reserve my thanks till I see you walk into the hotel bureau and take the tickets!" said Bob. "Then—"

"Then the thankfulness will be terrific," said Hurree Jamset Ram Singh.

"And not till then!" grunted Johnny Bull. "So shut up, fathead!"

"Beast!" snorted Bunter.

And they went into the Gloria, where they found Compton of the Fifth with Mr. Vernon-Smith, and joined them for lunch.

THE SEVENTH CHAPTER.

The Fat in the Fire!

SWEET strains of music from a hidden orchestra accompanied the steady champing of the jaws of William George Bunter at lunch. Waiters innumerable brought innumerable dishes, and every one of them was sampled extensively by the happy fat Owl. Billy Bunter beamed with contentment, and began to think that it might not be a bad idea, after all, to accept Smithy's invitation and change the yacht for the Gloria.

It was true that on the yacht the grub was good and ample, but at the Hotel Gloria it was magnificent and unlimited. And Bunter, of course, considered that question, like every other, wholly and solely from the point of view of "grub." Bunter's cheery maxim was that if the grub was all right, everything was all right; and there was no doubt that at the Gloria the grub was all right! The amount of it that Billy Bunter wrapped himself round made even the well-trained waiters stare.

Bunter's jaws were too busy for talking; which was a relief to the other fellows, especially to Harry Wharton, who did not want the incident of the broken racket to be mentioned before Compton or Mr. Vernon-Smith.

Compton, of course, would know at once what it meant, and he suspected that the keen-witted millionaire might guess.

Mr. Vernon-Smith talked a good deal to Valentine Compton. It was plain that he liked him, that he was grateful to him for what he had done for Smithy—and it was not hard to guess that he was curious about him.

An experienced man of affairs like Mr. Samuel Vernon-Smith had not failed to spot that there was something

unusual, to say the least, about the Firefly, and he had, in fact, the whole ship's company "ticked off" in his mind. But Compton was a surprising exception to the rest.

A much less keen man than Mr. Vernon-Smith would have seen that he was frank, open, and as straight as a die. So he was, in the millionaire's mind, oddly out of place among his associates.

Loyalty in a bad cause seemed the only way of accounting for it. Had Mr. Vernon-Smith been acquainted with poetry—which he was not—he might have thought of the verse "his honour rooted in dishonour stood." The same idea occurred to Mr. Vernon-Smith—in prose.

Towards the end of lunch, Billy Bunter, having parked sufficient food-stuffs to last any other fellow a week or two, slowed down, and began to talk. Eating, of course, came first, but talking ranked second in Billy Bunter's estimation of the joys of life.

"I say, Compton, if you're staying up here this afternoon we might get some tennis—what?" said Bunter, blinking at him across the flower-decked table. "These chaps can't play for toffee."

Compton smiled.

"Didn't you get a good game this morning?" he asked.

"Rotten!" said Bunter. "You see, Bob was my partner, and he plays like a rhinoceros—don't you, old chap?"

"Fathead!" said Bob.

"And then that rotten racket—"

went on Bunter. "Everything is rotten except Bunter's tennis!" explained Harry Wharton, hastily interrupting. "Bunter's tennis would make Bunny Austin sit up and take notice."

"Well, I think I could teach him a few things!" said Bunter. "But, of course, a chap wants a good racket. That one that Rawlings lent me—"

"You mean the one you gave three, four, five, six, and seven guineas for?" asked Bob Cherry.

"Oh! Yes! I—I mean my racket—you see, Compton—"

"Rawlings lent you a racket?" asked Compton. The smile had suddenly died off his handsome face.

Harry Wharton sat silent. The fat was in the fire now!

"That man Rawlings is a corker," said Bob. "He produces everything you want, like a jolly old conjurer."

"I fancy he will get tired of lending things to Bunter, though," said Johnny Bull. "Bunter lost the coat Rawlings lent him at Marseilles—"

"I didn't!" hooted Bunter. "It was pinched!"

"And he's smashed the racket Rawlings lent him—"

"How could I help it, fathcad, when the handle was hollow?" demanded Bunter. "Who ever heard of a tennis racket with a hollow handle?"

Harry Wharton hardly dared to look at Compton. But he knew that the Fifth Former's face had become quite pale.

Mr. Vernon-Smith stared at Bunter. "What nonsense are you talking?" he asked.

"Tain't nonsense," said Bunter. "The rotten thing had a hollow handle, and it smashed at a knock—just a tap! There was something inside the handle, too—but I don't know what it was, as Smithy grabbed it away from me and chucked it away before I could get a look at it."

Compton's glance shot at Herbert Vernon-Smith. The Bounder kept his eyes on his plate, toying with purple grapes. Without looking up, he felt the Fifth Form man's piercing eyes on him, and knew that Compton knew that he knew.

"Rotten thing," went on Bunter. "It let me down, you see, Compton, or I should have beaten those duds easily enough. The Italian johnny might as well have had it after all, as it turned out."

"What Italian?" asked Compton in a low voice.

"Oh, you never knew, of course! An Italian johnny snatched that racket after we came ashore, but Smithy spotted him and got it back," said Bunter.

"Oh!" breathed Compton.

"A man snatched a tennis racket from you?" exclaimed Mr. Vernon-Smith.

"Yes, rather, and he jolly well followed us up the hill to the hotel, too, looking for another chance!" said Bunter. "Didn't he, you fellows?"

"He jolly well did!" agreed Bob Cherry.

"What nonsense!" said Mr. Vernon-Smith, staring.

"Well, I know it sounds rather weird," admitted Bob. "But it really did happen, sir! The chap wanted Rawlings' racket—goodness knows why."

"What's become of it?" asked Compton in a casual tone.

"That ass Smithy chucked it away without letting me see it again," said Bunter. "I told him it was a cheek. I shall have to pay Rawlings for it, of course."

"You threw it away, Vernon-Smith?"

"I chucked it into the lake, Compton! It was really no use after Bunter had performed with it," said the Bounder carelessly.

"That wasn't for you to decide," said Bunter warmly. "Rawlings might have got it mended. Now I shall have to pay for a new racket. He will expect to be paid for it."

"My dear chap, Rawlings knows you too well by this time to expect you to pay for anything!" said Johnny Bull.

"Yah!" retorted Bunter.

Mr. Vernon-Smith rose from the table, and his guests followed his example.

As the party went out on the balcony Valentine Compton touched the Bounder on the arm, and Smithy rather reluctantly lagged behind.

Compton's face was pale, but there was a faint smile on it.

"It was you—at Greyfriars!" he said quietly.

Smithy was silent for a moment.

He knew what that question meant. At Greyfriars the schoolboy smuggler had been defeated, more than once, by a hidden hand, and he had never dreamed of looking for that hand in the Remove. But he guessed now.

"Yes!" said Vernon-Smith at last.

"You knew—all the time?" Compton's tone was still casual.

"Nearly all the time."

"And you said—nothing?"

"Only to Wharton."

"Wharton!" Compton started. "He never knew—"

"He never believed it," said Smithy.

"But now—"

"Yes, he does now."

"I suppose so!" Compton breathed hard and deep. "The others—"

"Inky's got it pretty clear—he's rather keen, you know. The others haven't the foggiest, and never will have."

"Thanks for that, at least!" said Compton.

He nodded to Vernon-Smith, and sauntered out on the balcony. He dropped into a chair beside Mr. Vernon-Smith, who was lighting his after-lunch cigar. Bunter had already settled down in a deep chair for a nap, and the Famous Five had gone down into the gardens. Smithy, with a clouded face, followed them.

"I shall have to be getting back to the Firefly, Mr. Vernon-Smith," remarked Compton. "May I ask you a favour before I go?"

"Name it!" said Mr. Vernon-Smith genially. "You're only to ask, my boy."

"You've been kind enough to make rather a fuss about that little thing the other day," said Compton smiling.

"Well, that encourages me to ask you a favour, sir. Owing to—certain circumstances it's rather awkward for me to finish the cruise with the schoolboys, as I had planned. As your son is a Greyfriars boy, and seems very friendly with them, and as I understand that you are here till near the end of the holidays—"

He paused, looking at Mr. Vernon-Smith.

"I understand. I will take charge of the party with pleasure, if that is what you wish," said the millionaire. "Herbert will be delighted, I know."

"It would relieve my mind a good deal, sir," said Compton. "I could not leave them here, of course, in a foreign country, and I am not quite master of my own movements; but in your charge, if you consent—"

"Gladly!" said Mr. Vernon-Smith. "And I will add this, my dear boy. I should be still more glad if you would stay also, and trust your future to my hands."

Compton smiled as he rose from his chair.

"That is really kind, sir, but my lot is cast in with my uncle's. Nothing would induce me to part with him. Thank you very much!"

Mr. Vernon-Smith grunted.

"I will speak plainly!" he rapped. "You might be in better hands, Compton."

"My uncle has been my friend and protector from childhood, sir, since I lost my father. I should be rather a cur if I turned him down. Good-bye, sir. It is not likely that I shall see you again."

"I shall make it a point to see you at Greyfriars when I come to see my son next term."

"It is very unlikely, as matters turn out, that I shall go back to Greyfriars for the new term, sir. Good-bye!"

Valentine Compton shook hands with the millionaire and left the balcony.

Mr. Vernon-Smith's glance followed him thoughtfully and rather grimly, as he went. A few minutes later he had a glimpse of the Fifth Former on the road, striding rapidly down the hill towards the sea, and the expression he glimpsed on Valentine Compton's face made the millionaire give quite a start.

THE EIGHTH CHAPTER.

Coming to Blows!

CAPTAIN COMPTON knitted his brow as he looked over the rail at a boat coming off from the shore.

Swain, at his side, grunted.

"What's wrong with the boy now?"

The captain did not answer. His brows puckered anxiously as he watched his nephew's face in the approaching boat.

The boatmen were pulling hard, evidently urged to speed by the pale-faced, frowning fellow who sat in the stern. The look on Valentine Compton's face made the captain deeply uneasy, and it brought a surly scowl to the brow of the mate.

"Airs and graces!" grunted Swain. He rubbed his cheek-bone, where there was a mark that had been left by a clenched fist more than a week ago. "By hokey, if the boy thinks he's master of this craft—"

"Hold your tongue, you fool!" snapped the captain.

"Not at your order, Jim Compton!" growled Swain savagely. "I'm telling you he laid hands on me at Marseilles. Let him try it on again—"

"The boy could handle you like an infant, burly brute as you are!" said the captain contemptuously. "Don't talk like a fool, Swain!"

The mate gritted his teeth under his ragged moustache. There was a step on deck, and Rawlings came up in his shore-going clothes. He joined the captain and the mate, glancing from one to the other.

"What's the trouble?" he snapped.

Swain jerked a stubby thumb towards the approaching boat. Rawlings glanced at the pale, set face of the Greyfriars senior in it, and set his lips.

"More trouble from him?" he said. "I can tell you, Jim, I'm getting fed-up with a schoolboy running this packet."

"What have you done?" asked Captain Compton bitterly. "You played a foul trick at Marseilles and angered the boy. What have you done now, you treacherous hound?"

"Better language, please!" said the steward, in a tone of menace.

"You dog!" said the captain. "I'm as sick of you as the boy is! Fool that I was ever to consort with such a crew—and to drag the boy into it!! What have you done this time? I can see in his face that you have played some dirty trick again."

"Nothing that he knows of, at any rate!" said Rawlings. "He can hardly have run into Pietro. I gave the dago orders to steer clear of him."

"And what of Pietro?" asked Captain Compton, with smouldering eyes. "Valentine made it a condition that there should be no more smuggling while the schoolboys were here."

"Let him make all the conditions he pleases!" sneered Rawlings. "I'm not in this game for my health, Jim Compton! If I'm going to play steward to a mob of schoolboy passengers, I'm going to make use of them."

"Then that is it—the same as at Marseilles?"

"That is it—the same as at Marseilles!" mimicked Rawlings. "That fat fool, Bunter, has come in useful a second time, and he has carried a packet of the stuff to Pietro without knowing it. But Valentine can't know anything of it. I warned Pietro."

"He looks as if he does."

Rawlings shrugged his shoulders, but there was a trace of anxiety, as well as sullen anger, in his plump, shiny face, as the boat ran under the accommodation ladder.

Valentine Compton threw a French note to the boatman, and ran lightly up the side.

"You needn't send that boat away, young Compton!" called out Rawlings. "I'm just going ashore."

"You need not," answered Compton. "The dago has nothing to hand over to you, Rawlings."

The steward gave a start, and Swain growled and scowled.

"I knew that he knew," said the captain quietly. "I could see it in his face. You've asked for this, Rawlings."

Rawlings gritted his teeth.

"Am I answerable to a schoolboy?" he snarled. "I tell you I'm standing no more lip from him—or from you, Jim Compton!"

"You cur!" Valentine Compton's voice rang over the deck of the Firefly, and drew every man on board towards the spot. "You'll answer to me, you treacherous cur! And you'll be lucky not to have to answer to the French police!"

"Is anything out?" exclaimed Swain.

"Everything!"

"By hokey!"

"What do you mean, you young swab?" That question came from Ferguson the chief engineer. "If it was all out, we should see a police boat coming off. Talk sense!"

There was a murmur from the crew. Every man on the yacht was on the spot

now, and anxious and alarmed glances were cast towards the shore.

"I'll tell you what I mean," said Compton, his eyes flashing at the steward. "That cunning rascal—more fool than rascal—packed something—I don't know what—in the hollow handle of a tennis racket, and sent it ashore by one of the boys."

"That's an old game!" granted Swain.

"Don't tell us that, the fat fool spotted it!" sneered Rawlings. "He would not have spotted it in a century. And Pietro was waiting to snatch the racket from him, and he got it away safe long ago."

"Fool and rascal!" said Compton. "Pietro tried to snatch the racket and failed."

"It's a lie!" snarled Rawlings, his fat face livid. "The fool Bunter was not on his guard—none of them could have been on their guard. It was an easy thing—"

"Fool and rascal!" repeated Compton. "One of them was on his guard—Vernon-Smith, who knows everything about this ship."

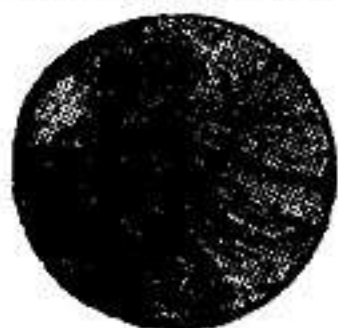
"How could he know?" roared Rawlings.

"Valentine!" exclaimed the captain.

"I tell you, he knows! You haven't forgotten that there was someone at Greyfriars—someone I could never trace—who knew. Well, I've traced him
(Continued on next page.)

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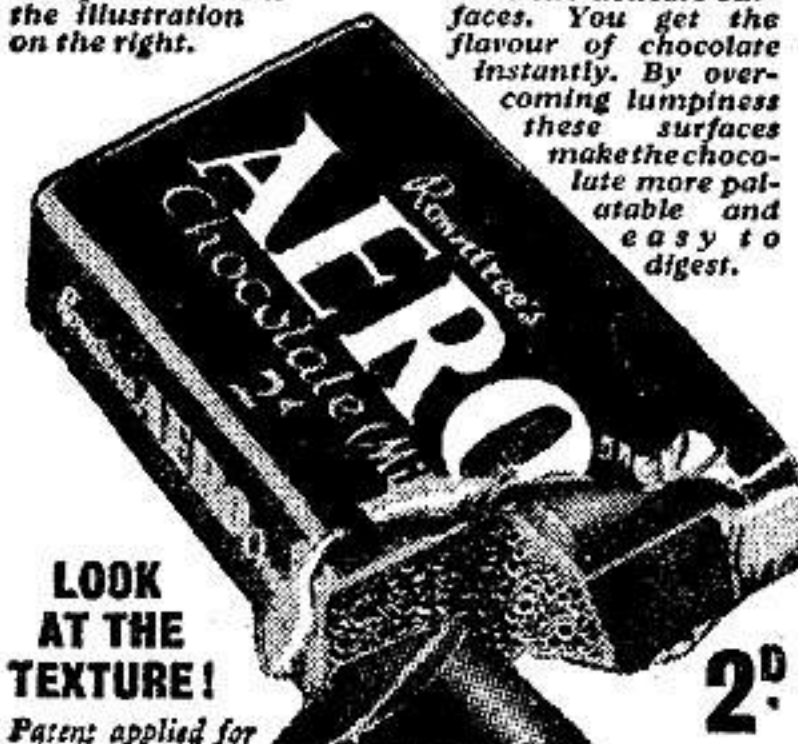
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row. It was Vernon-Smith. I know now that he told Wharton at the school, though Wharton never believed it—then."

Rawlings clenched his hands.

"I knew that boy was wise to something!" he muttered. "I've said all along that he smelt a rat!"

"Wharton knows now, Vernon-Smith knows, the Indian boy knows, and Mr. Vernon-Smith suspects something!" exclaimed Compton. "That's the outcome of your cunning and rascality, Rawlings!"

A deadly look came into Rawlings' eyes.

"They know too much, then!" he said in a low, savage tone. "But there are ways of keeping secrets at sea!"

"Do you think I could trust them where you could harm them now that I know all this?" said Compton scornfully. "The boys will never set foot on this yacht again; I've fixed all that! They're staying with Mr. Vernon-Smith, and if they choose to talk, look out for handcuffs and prison, the lot of you!"

There was a deep growl from the yacht's crew; black looks were cast at the handsome Fifth Former of Greyfriars on all sides.

Compton's eyes flashed round at a dozen lowering faces with fearless scorn; his hand rose, his finger pointing to Rawlings.

"That's the man you can thank," he said. "One boy at my school knew and kept the secret. No other need ever have known a word, but for Rawlings. I brought the schoolboys on this packet in good faith, believing that it was a cruise—a holiday from smuggling rascality, as well as from school. But that scoundrel insisted on the game going on; smuggling in the Channel, gun-running in the Bay of Biscay, smuggling again at Marseilles. I warned him, and he refused to heed the warning. A scoundrel like that can't understand a spot of decency may come in useful. This ship is already suspected in England and France. A harmless cruise with a party of schoolboys would have lulled suspicion; it would have been good business, even from a rascal's point of view. But Rawlings could not be content with that. Now you've got the result."

He panted for breath.

"It's the finish now! The schoolboys are gone; I'm sending their things ashore for them, and they will never step aboard here again. And it's the finish of the smuggling game!"

"Are you mad?" snarled Swain.

"I think I've been mad to stand in with such a crew!" said Compton bitterly. "I'd have chucked the whole rotten lot of you but for my uncle! I let you plant me at Greyfriars to use the school as a smuggling centre. Are you banking on that going on? I'm not going back to Greyfriars."

"Valentine!" exclaimed the captain.

"I mean it, uncle," said Compton. "Do you imagine I could face it, with fellows there knowing what I am? Do you think they could—or would—keep silent and let me carry on, even if I wanted to?"

"No," said the captain, with a deep breath. "Greyfriars must be washed out after this."

"And the rest will follow," said Compton. "No more smuggling for me, and no more for the Firefly! You're captain of this craft, uncle, and you can turn this crew into an honest crew, whether they like it or not. Save them from their own rascality, and save them

from the prison that is waiting for every man here."

"You young fool!" growled Swain.

"Am I the fool?" asked Compton contemptuously. "What have you got for all your cunning? You're at the mercy of two or three schoolboys; and only regard for me prevents young Vernon-Smith from walking down to the Bureau de Police and telling them where to lay their hands on a gang of smugglers. Do you think he is keeping silent on your account, Swain? Or yours, Rawlings? Do you think he would not do his duty and send the whole dingy mob of you where you belong but for my sake? If I left the yacht, and he knew I'd left it for good, the police would be on board in ten minutes."

"Oh hokey!" breathed Swain.

Rawlings' face was livid.

"I reckon we got to get steam up without wasting time," muttered Ferguson. "The game's up here, skipper. Lucky if we can cut and run."

"The game's not up yet!" Rawlings' voice came like the hiss of a serpent. "Nothing's been said yet—and the sea keeps secrets! I tell you—"

He did not finish. Valentine Compton came at him with a rush, hitting out right and left. His hard-held temper broke out in a blaze of passion; his fists fairly crashed on the steward, sending him spinning across the deck till he brought up against the rail.

Spitting with rage, Rawlings staggered there, panting and grabbing fiercely at his hip pocket. But he had no time to draw the weapon. Compton's grip was on him again, and, bulky as he was, the steward was swung over the rail by the Fifth Former of Greyfriars.

There was a yell and a splash as Rawlings went headlong into the sea.

"That much for Rawlings!" said Compton, and he went below, leaving it to the crew to fish out the steward and drag him, drenched and dripping, to the deck.

THE NINTH CHAPTER.

A Little Ventriloquism in French!

"WHY not Monte?" asked Billy Bunter.

"Fathead!"

That evening, after dinner at the Hotel Gloria, Harry Wharton & Co. were in the lounge while they waited for the car to come round. In their best bibs and tuckers, so to speak, the Famous Five looked very merry and bright.

So did Billy Bunter though he looked also as if he was nearly bursting fore and aft out of one of Smithy's dress shirts and one of Smithy's dinner jackets.

Mr. Vernon-Smith was taking charge of the party that evening to visit the opera at Nice, but, as Bunter's question showed, there were other thoughts in the fat and fatuous brain of the Owl of the Remove.

It was understood now that the Greyfriars party were staying on with Smithy, and not going back to the yacht. Mr. Vernon-Smith had explained the arrangements he had made with Compton.

Harry Wharton and Smithy knew why the Fifth Former had asked him, and Hurree Singh had a fairly clear idea, though he had said nothing; to Bob and Johnny and Frank Nugent it came as a little surprise, but they were cheerfully ready to fall in with the new arrangement; Billy Bunter had stated that he hadn't decided—but Billy Bunter did not matter, anyhow.

Wharton had little doubt that the Firefly would pull out of Villefranche without much delay, and that would settle the matter for Bunter.

Meanwhile, the fat Owl condescended to remain that night, at all events, with the hotel party. The juniors' suitcases had been sent up from the yacht, and Compton had come up to say good-bye to them. They did not expect to see him again till the new term at Greyfriars—though some of them, at least, doubted whether he would be seen then. It was a great relief to Harry Wharton's mind to have the matter settled and done with, and to be clear of Rawlings and his treacherous rascality.

Smithy had been mapping out a high old time for his guests—runs in the car up and down the country, trips across into Italy, concerts, and operas; and, above all, a trip in the aeroplane from the Gloria over the blue waters of the Mediterranean, which was coming off in a few days. Altogether, it looked like being a merry week till the party had to pack and return home for the new term at school. Only Billy Bunter was not satisfied.

Bunter was not content to let his chances, like the sunbeams, pass him by. Bunter wanted to make his fortune before he left the Riviera.

There were lots of places along the Cote d'Azur where a fellow could make his fortune—perhaps! Not only Monte Carlo, but in every French seaside town there was a casino, where they played roulette, or chemin-de-fer, or la boule—at each and every one of which Billy Bunter had no doubt that he could, given a chance, scoop it in by the handful, if not by the hatful.

With unlimited wealth just round the corner, so to speak, it was extremely irritating to the fat Owl to be bothered by a lot of nincompoops who did not know how to be sporting on a holiday.

He had expected better things of the Bunder, who was rather a scapegrace at school. But Smithy had a way of playing up to his company, whatever it was—and at present Smithy's company was highly respectable, and not a member of the Famous Five would have been found dead in a casino. Moreover, Mr. Vernon-Smith, though a very indulgent parent, would certainly not have permitted anything of the kind. So Billy Bunter had the distinction of being the only blackguard in the party—and even Bunter could only be a blackguard in theory, practice being barred. Which was fearfully annoying.

"If you say Monte again I'll biff you!" said Johnny Bull. "See? Haven't you talked enough rot for one day, fathead?"

"I mean there's grand opera at Monte as well as at Nice," explained Bunter. "I wasn't thinking of dodging away from you fellows while you're there and getting to the tables, you know."

"No deception, gentlemen!" said Bob Cherry; and there was a chortle.

"You piffing porpoise," said Frank Nugent, "they don't admit anybody under age! Even those frowsy wasters have a limit."

Bunter gave a fat wink.

"Oh, that's all right!" he said. "You drop in at a hairdresser's and stick on a moustache. See? That's near enough. Not that I'm thinking of anything of the kind, you know. I wasn't thinking of—"

"You never do," agreed Bob.

"Beast! But, I say, at Monte—"

"Kick him!" said Harry Wharton.

"Yah!"

Billy Bunter rolled out of reach round a tub of palms. The Famous Five and Smithy sat and chatted while they



Billy Bunter blinked as the ball bounced and skidded round the bowl and finally, to his immense delight, came to rest in the socket numbered nine. The fat Owl had won, and a number of twenty-franc pieces were pushed across to him. He almost gurgled with delight. It was easy money, and no mistake!

waited for Mr. Vernon-Smith to join them and start.

Billy Bunter blinked at them morosely. Compton's 500 francs were still in his pocket, and he was very keen to turn them into 5,000, or perhaps 5,000,000! Bunter was feeling like a fellow who saw the purse of Fortunatus lying at his feet and was prevented from picking it up. No fellow could be expected to tolerate that!

The fat ventriloquist of Greyfriars gave a fat little cough as a stout French gentleman stopped near the group of juniors to light a cigar.

"Here, get out!" came a voice that was so like Johnny Bull's that Johnny's friends had no doubt on the subject, and all turned their heads to stare at him.

"Johnny, you ass!" breathed Wharton.

"Good gad! Do you want a row here, Bull?" whispered the Bounder.

"Eh? What?" Johnny stared.

Luckily, the French gentleman with the cigar did not understand English. He continued with the work of ignition, taking no notice, much to the relief of the juniors.

Billy Bunter granted.

He had expected—or, at least, hoped—that that remark would cause the French gentleman to box Johnny's ears, as he certainly would have deserved, had he made it—and as he deserved, anyhow, in Bunter's opinion.

But as English was an unknown language to the stout gentleman, that ventriloquial effort missed fire!

"What are you goggling at, you fellows?" demanded Johnny Bull. "I never spoke. I heard somebody speak."

"What the deuce do you mean?" snapped the Bounder. "Lucky for you that sportsman never understood."

"I tell you I never spoke!" growled Johnny Bull. "Somebody else did!"

"Did he borrow your voice to do it with?" asked the Bounder sarcastically.

"Johnny, old man—" murmured Bob.

"Oh, don't be an ass!" said Johnny Bull.

From behind the tub of palms Bunter grinned. He was going on—and this time he was going to put it in French, which the stout gentleman was bound to understand, as it was his own language!

Bob's little joke of the previous day had enlightened Billy Bunter as to the meaning of that oft-used phrase "allez-vous-en!" Bunter still did not know how to say "come here!" in French, but he knew how to say "Get out!" And that was what he wanted to say now.

Johnny Bull, with a grunt, leaned back in his seat. And immediately a voice, that was remarkably like Johnny's, yapped out:

"Allez-vous-en!"

The stout French gentleman was hardly a yard from Johnny Bull. Evidently he understood that, for he stared round with an angry stare.

"Allez-vous-en!" repeated the voice. "Hearez-vous?"

It was like Bunter to add some of his own French!

But at that remarkable French all the juniors gave a sort of convulsive jump.

The Greyfriars ventriloquist could reproduce Johnny's voice—but Johnny's friends were not likely to suppose that Johnny used such astonishing French as "hearez-vous"! That French was Bunter's or nobody's.

"That fat ass—" gasped Harry Wharton.

He stared round, and spotted a fat face grinning through the palms.

"Bunter!" hissed Johnny Bull. "Some more of his putrid ventriloquism—"

"Oh!" exclaimed the Bounder.

"Bunter—"

"Voilà!" exclaimed the frowning French gentleman. "On me parle, n'est-ce pas? Et pourquoi cela, je vous prie?"

He stared from one flushed face to another, taking his cigar in his left hand, with the obvious intention of using his right for smacking as soon as he learned which of the schoolboys had spoken.

Seeing six glares fixed on Bunter, he jumped to the correct conclusion and walked round the palms.

"C'était vous, n'est-ce pas?" he demanded.

"Eh? No! Not at all!" gasped Bunter, in dismay. "I never said a word. I—I don't know any French! I couldn't possibly say allez-vous-en, because I don't know the French for it."

Smack!

"Yaroooh!"

Smack!

"Oh crikey! Wow!"

The French gentleman, with a snort, walked away. He left Billy Bunter rubbing two fat ears with two fat hands, and the chums of the Remove grinning.

"Now we'll jolly well kick him!" said Johnny Bull.

"Hear, hear!"

"Hearez-vous, Bunter?" chuckled Bob.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Fortunately for Bunter, Mr. Vernon-Smith arrived at that moment. The juniors walked out to the car with him, and Billy Bunter rolled after them—unkicked, but still rubbing his fat ears, and rather wishing that he had not tried ventriloquism in French.

(Continued on page 16.)

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MUTINY on the FIREFLY!



(Continued from page 13.)

THE TENTH CHAPTER.

Bunter the Punter!

"I SAY, you fellows!"
 "Shut up, Bunter!"
 "If you can't give a fellow room—"

"Getting deaf? Shut up!"

"I'll walk the rest!" hooted Bunter.

"Oh! Good!"

The car was gliding down the Avenue Massena, at Nice. A block in the traffic held it up for a few minutes.

It was a large and roomy car. But seven fellows filled it quite full, especially when one of the fellows was double width. Mr. Vernon-Smith sat by the French chauffeur. Billy Bunter was packed in with Smithy and the Famous Five, rather like a fat sardine.

His announcement that he would walk the rest was unexpected, but welcome. The other fellows felt that they could do without quite a lot of Billy Bunter's society.

"Well, it's straight on, and not more than ten minutes' walk, if you'd rather walk!" said the Bounder. "Go it, by all means!"

"Don't get lost, you fat ass!" said Harry Wharton.

"Yah!" was Bunter's reply.

"Is anybody going to miss him if he gets lost?" asked Smithy.

"Beast!"

Bunter opened the door and stepped from the car to the pavement.

Smithy pulled the door shut again.

"Room to breathe now!" he remarked.

The car rolled on again, and Billy Bunter was lost to sight in the crowded avenue.

Harry Wharton was feeling a little uncomfortable about the fat Owl—but it was Smithy's party, and Bunter was his own master. And Smithy, though he tolerated the fat Owl because the other fellows would not have turned him down, hardly made a secret of the fact that the less he saw of William George Bunter, the better he liked it.

Billy Bunter grinned as the car rolled on and vanished amid a swarm of others. And he did not walk on in the same direction.

The opera the Greyfriars party were visiting was being performed at the Casino Municipal. There was a *salle de jeu* at that establishment, in which the juniors, of course were not interested. But it was quite possible that they might have spotted a fat Owl rolling into it; so Bunter, who had his own reasons—certainly not a desire to walk—for leaving the other fellows, turned in another direction.

The Greyfriars party had already visited Nice, and walked round that city, and Bunter was aware that there were half a dozen casinos in the place. One was as good as another—or as bad!

The Casino Municipal was the best of the lot; but as the Greyfriars party were going to that building for the

opera, Bunter had to give it a miss. He rolled away in search of another.

A flare of lights in a side street soon guided him to his Mecca! But he did not immediately enter.

Whether the dingy casinos in Nice had the same rules as "Monte," Bunter did not know, but he sagely decided not to chance it. A fellow who was turned back at the guichet as too young for admission obviously could not make his fortune at the place—even if he could make it there, anyhow!

Bunter blinked into the brightly-lighted window of a hairdressing and costumier establishment. Into that establishment he rolled.

He was rather in a hurry to make his fortune, but he had to waste fifteen precious minutes in making a surprised young man understand that he wanted to buy an artificial moustache, and that he wanted it stuck on!

When the surprised young man fully comprehended he produced the goods, no doubt supposing that he had to do with a young lunatic.

However, a young lunatic's money is as good as anybody else's, so Bunter paid for his moustache and rolled out with it affixed to his upper lip, leaving the surprised young man grinning, and saying to several others:

"Regardez! Regardez ce fou! C'est un fou Anglais! Regardez donc!"

Unaware that he had left an impression behind him that he was an English lunatic, Bunter rolled happily on his way.

Fool as he certainly was, Bunter had judged the effect of the moustache correctly. It made him look years older. He rolled into the casino, took his ticket, and rolled into the building.

The enticing words *salle de jeux* met his eyes, and his spectacles, and guided him to his goal!

He pushed through swing-doors, and entered a long, stuffy apartment, where the atmosphere tasted as if it had been breathed over and over again a good many times.

This was one of the smaller casinos, and there was only one table. But there was a goodly crowd round that table.

Every seat was taken, and behind the seated punters others stood watching over their shoulders and throwing stakes on the green cloth.

Billy Bunter's eyes gleamed behind his spectacles.

Counters were used in the play, and a changeur came up to Bunter at once. The changeur glanced at his moustache and grinned, as if he saw something amusing in it; but he handed over a supply of white and red discs in exchange for the five hundred francs the fat Owl had borrowed from Compton.

Bunter was going the whole hog.

He had it all mapped out in his fat mind. Owing to the meddling of those cheeky beasts who would not let a sportsman be a sport if they could stop him he had to try his luck at this show instead of spreading himself over Monte Carlo. But it was only a beginning! This evening he was going to walk out with about ten or twenty thousand francs in his pocket. With such resources he would be prepared to give the Greyfriars party the go-by and clear off on his own. After which the breaking of the bank at Monte Carlo was the next item on the programme.

It all seemed simple to Bunter, as simple, indeed, as Bunter himself seemed to the case-hardened croupiers who were going to relieve him of his five hundred francs.

Billy Bunter was clad in self satis-

faction as in armour of triple steel. His confidence in himself was complete.

Even Bunter realised that a casino could not be run on losses! Even his fat brain could assimilate the fact that at roulette, and at la boule, as in horse-racing, there must be more losers than winners or else the frowsy fraternity of gamblers could not have survived.

But that was all right! He was going to be a winner! All it needed was cool judgment, iron nerve, clear-headedness, and uncommon intelligence—conspicuous qualities of Bunter's!

He was able to wedge into a seat at last. One of the sitters had a stack of counters before him, which grew smaller by degrees and beautifully less. When they were all gone the man went also, and Bunter got his chair. What had happened to his predecessor in that chair might really have been a warning to the fat Owl. But Bunter, after all, was only one fool among many.

He threw a red counter, representing twenty francs, on the green cloth and it rolled. A croupier hooked it with a rake and glanced at him inquiringly.

"Put in on thirty-six!" said Bunter.

"Comment?"

"Trente-six!" explained Bunter. He felt quite obliged to Monsieur Charpentier, at Greyfriars, at that moment. He could make himself understood so far, at all events.

The man grinned.

"Il n'existe pas, ici, monsieur!" he answered.

"Eh, what?" grunted Bunter, puzzled.

"Pas de roulette ici, monsieur, mais la boule!" explained the man.

The Owl of the Remove blinked at the table and discerned that the numbers ran only to nine. The game was la boule, not roulette.

"Oh, all right! Put it on nine!" said Bunter.

"Plait-il?"

"Le neuf!" said Bunter.

"Voilà!" said the croupier, and he placed Bunter's stake on the section of the green cloth marked with the number 9.

A man standing at the shallow bowl in the middle of the long table spun a rubber ball by hand. It bounced and skidded, fluttering round the bowl and finally, to Bunter's immense delight, came to rest in the socket numbered 9. The fat Owl had won, and seven twenty-franc pieces were pushed across to him. He almost gurgled with delight.

This was easy money and no mistake!

During the next half-hour, however, Bunter made the disagreeable discovery that if la boule was easy money, it was not for the punters! To his surprise and dismay, his little pile of counters melted away almost like snow in the sunshine. When, at the end of thirty hectic minutes, he counted what were left, he found his store reduced to two hundred francs. Losses seemed to predominate over wins, somehow.

"Oh lor'!" murmured Bunter.

"You silly young idiot!" said a voice over his shoulder.

The fat junior blinked up, startled. A familiar face looked down at him, the plump face of Rawlings, the steward of the Firefly. Rawlings scowled at him. Evidently he knew him in spite of the moustache.

"Get out and give me that chair, you fat fool!" he grunted.

"Shan't!" retorted Bunter. "Wharrar you mean, you cheeky ass?"

"Do your friends know you're here, you young blackguard?" asked Rawlings.

"Mind your own business!" yapped Bunter.

"Get out!"
 "Cheek!" said Bunter. "Ow! Leggo my ear!"

Rawlings took a fat ear between a finger and thumb. Billy Bunter gave a howl that made every punter at the table stare round.

Rawlings wanted that chair at the la boule table. La boule, it appeared, was one of the methods by which he got rid of his ill-gotten gains as a smuggler. Perhaps, rogue and rascal as he was, he was disgusted at the sight of a schoolboy like Bunter playing the blackguard in a casino. Anyhow, he wanted the chair, and he nipped a fat ear between a finger and thumb, that felt like a steel vice, as an inducement to Bunter to get out of it.

"Yarough! Leggo my ear!" howled Bunter. "Cheeky beast! I'll jolly well hack your shins! Wow!"

"Monsieur!" exclaimed half a dozen voices in protest.

A croupier touched Rawlings on the arm. A gold-braided chucker-out moved towards him. Rawlings released the fat ear and moved along the table, scowling. Billy Bunter gave him a contemptuous blink, and resumed punting.

THE ELEVENTH CHAPTER.

Chucked Out!

"Le cinq!" crooned the croupiers. It was number five. Bunter having staked on number three, had the pleasure, or otherwise, of seeing his stake swept away by the remorseless rake.

Then he sat and blinked at the green table, and the yellow numbers, and the whirling ball in the bowl.

Bunter was not feeling quite so bucked now.

"Before taking" was quite different from "after taking."

More than half his cash was gone. It looked as if, whoever was going to make fortunes there, it was not going to be William George Bunter!

But the fat Owl had, or fancied he had, his fat wits about him. He had noticed that cinq, or five, came up quite an uncommon number of times.

By the law of chances, any number in nine numbers should have come up on an average, once in nine spins. But cinq came up much oftener than that.

This was really explained by the fact that cinq, at la boule, answered the purpose of zero at roulette. When cinq turned up, all even chances were taken by the bank, pair and impair, etc. It did not dawn on Bunter's fat brain that cinq came up so often because it was a profitable number for the bank. It did not occur to him that the man spinning the ball could drop it in what number he liked.

But it did dawn on him, that as cinq came up so jolly often, a fellow who staked on cinq all the time was bound to win!

It did not occur to him that the same idea had occurred to about a million punters before him, and that the croupiers had a wary eye on any player who backed cinq all the time!

Quite bucked by that brilliant idea, Bunter proceeded to play on system.

With every spin of the ball, he pitched a twenty-franc counter on number five.

He did not notice a grin and a wink exchanged among the croupiers. Those rather tough gentlemen hardly took the trouble to conceal their contempt for the intelligence of the mugs whose money they raked in.

To Billy Bunter's intense annoyance and surprise cinq ceased to pop up with such monotonous regularity.

It had done so previously, it ought to have gone on doing so—but, somehow, it didn't.

It had to come up sooner or later! Bunter was sure of that! No doubt it had to; but it was not likely to so long as a punter was putting the maximum stake on it at every spin.

With a sudden jolt Bunter realised that his last counter was going!

His fat heart sank.

With intense anxiety he watched the last spin.

"Le deux!" crooned the croupiers.

Bunter's last piece was gone.

The fat Owl sat like one stunned!

"Faites vos jeux, messieurs!"

"Marquez vos jeux!"

"Rien ne va plus!"

The ball spun again without Bunter staking. He had nothing left with which to stake. The ball whizzed, and stopped.

"Le cinq!" sang out the cheery croupiers.

"Oh crikey!" gasped Bunter.

It was like the mockery of Fate, that the number he had been backing so

existence as he concentrated on the game. Up and down the table, counters showered on the glistening numbers—and Billy Bunter watched sadly, like the Peri at the gate of Paradise.

Rawlings was playing an old hand's game. If some ass like Bunter put a high stake on cinq, Rawlings would put a low stake on one or two, which, being farthest on the bowl from cinq, were likeliest to come up. But even the cautious game of "playing the croupier" had little chance of getting ahead of the bank. Rawlings was losing his money more slowly than Bunter, that was all.

Billy Bunter nudged his shoulder at last.

"I say, Rawlings—"

"Leave me alone, you fat fool!"

"Lend me—"

"Hold your silly tongue!"

Billy Bunter held his silly tongue, frowning. Really, it was an honour to a dashed steward, to be asked for a loan by a Public school man! Rawlings seemed absolutely indifferent to that distinction!

Bunter was annoyed.

He was "stony"—he was, only too clearly, not going to make his fortune. He was tired, irritable, disappointed, and peeved. He would have liked to kick Rawlings, and to kick all the grinning croupiers. He had a vague feeling that he had been welshed, though he did not know how. The casino was no longer a glowing fairy-land to his eyes. It was a dingy den with a dingy crew packed in it. Even Bunter realised that he was a fool to be there at all! Bunter would have liked to kick everybody connected with it, from Monsieur le Directeur to the gold-braided chucker-out—and especially Rawlings, for not lending him some cash, and the grinning beast with the ball, who had turned up cinq just after the fat Owl had ceased to back that number.

Kicking them all round was not practical politics. But the Greyfriars ventriloquist had his own way of getting his own back. He gave a fat little cough over Rawlings' shoulder.

"Le deux!" came from the man with the ball, as the latter, whizzing round the bowl, was on the point of stopping. Billy Bunter had his voice to the last tone.

Rawlings' stake was on deux, or two. From where he sat, he could not see into the sunken bowl in the middle of the long table, so he naturally supposed that he had won, and waited to be paid.

The next moment came the croupier's genuine announcement.

"Le quatre!"

The ball had stopped at number four. Rawlings half-rose, staring round at the man angrily.

"C'est le deux!" he exclaimed.

A dozen punters were staring at the man, supposing that he had announced "le deux." They were, happily, unaware that there was a fat ventriloquist present.

The man himself was surprised. He had heard a voice announce "le deux," but he knew, of course, that he had not spoken.

"Voilà!" he said, pointing. "Le quatre!"

"C'était le deux!" snarled Rawlings.

"Voyez, monsieur!" said the puzzled croupier, pointing to the ball resting in the socket numbered four.

"Coquin!" came—or appeared to come—from Rawlings. Billy Bunter had learned that complimentary word and what it implied.

"Comment, monsieur?" exclaimed the croupier. Undoubtedly he was a
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SOMETHING
 to
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 to!
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 in a
FORTNIGHT'S TIME!

long should have come up immediately after he had ceased to stake!

As a matter of fact, it was mockery, for the cheerful gentleman with the ball had turned up cinq that time to encourage Bunter to go on with his game—not being aware that his financial resources were exhausted.

Bunter sat and blinked mournfully.

"Get out, if you're finished, you fat fool!" It was Rawlings' voice over his podgy shoulder again.

Bunter blinked up at him.

"I say, Rawlings! Lend me a hundred francs!" he gasped.

Really, the steward of the Firefly was not a hopeful subject to "touch" for a loan! But Bunter was desperate.

Rawlings stared at him.

"I—I say, I should have got it, that time, if I'd had a stake on," breathed Bunter. "You see, I was backing it all the time, and it came up just after I'd stopped! If I'd had one more piece—"

"You mad little idiot!" said Rawlings, staring at him. "Are you such a fool as to think the number would come up while you're backing it all the time?"

"Eh? Why shouldn't it?" gasped Bunter.

"Oh, get out, you fool!" snapped Rawlings.

He jerked at Bunter's shoulder. This time the fat Owl relinquished the chair, and Rawlings sat down in it.

Bunter stood, blinking mournfully, at the green table. Rawlings forgot his

"coquin," but he did not like these painful truths.

"Coquin! Cochon!" If it was not Rawlings' voice, it was a twin to it, and there was a buzz all round the long table, and every eye was fixed on the steward of the Firefly.

"Assez, monsieur!" The gold-braided one was on the spot instantly, tapping Rawlings on the shoulder. "Taisez-vous, s'il vous plait!"

Rawlings stared round at him.

"What the dickens do you mean?" he snapped. "I never spoke!" And the Greyfriars ventriloquist went on for him. "Vous êtes cochon!"

That was enough for the chucker-out. Whether he was a "cochon" or not, he did not like being called one! In the twinkling of an eye, he had Rawlings out of the chair and was whisking him away.

He was an old hand at that game! Disgruntled losers disposed for trouble had to be got off the scene as rapidly as possible. Almost before he knew what was happening, Rawlings was whisked through the swing doors, out of the gaming-room into the vestibule.

Billy Bunter grinned.

There was a buzz of excitement up and down the table for a few moments. Then "Marquez vos jeux" was heard again, and the play was resumed.

The fat Owl rolled out, quite interested to see what happened to Rawlings. The beast had nipped his fat ear and cheeked him. So he fully deserved anything that could possibly happen to him.

Rawlings seemed to be excited. In the vestibule, he was hitting the chucker-out in the eye!

Three or four uniformed hefty men converged on the spot, and the excited steward of the Firefly found himself whisked to a side door, and hurled forth into the starry night. The door slammed on him.

Billy Bunter grinned as he rolled out at the main entrance. He had lost his five hundred francs, and he had failed to make his fortune—worse still, he had lost the hope of making that fortune! But there was consolation in what had happened to Rawlings.

As he rolled down the steps, a dishevelled and gasping figure came round the corner of the building.

"He, he, he!" cackled Bunter.

Rawlings looked at him. His face was pale and furious. Perhaps he was pleased to see Bunter at that moment! He gave him one look—and rushed!

Bunter ceased to chortle, on the spot! He flew!

After him flew Rawlings, letting out his foot!

Thud!

"Yaroooh!"

Thud, thud, thud!

"Yow-ow-ow! Beast!" gasped Bunter. "Stoppit! Oh crikey!"

He fled for his fat life! Where he went, he did not heed—he was only anxious to get away from Rawlings! For a street's length, the enraged steward followed on, kicking—till Bunter dodged round a corner, at last, and escaped. But long after Rawlings had abandoned the pursuit, the fat Owl of the Remove was still running! He did not stop till he was out of breath!

THE TWELFTH CHAPTER.

The Parting of the Ways!

VALENTINE COMPTON sat on the settee in the saloon of the Firefly, silent, with a set expression on his face.

His uncle, the hard-faced captain, THE MAGNET LIBRARY.—No. 1,509.

moved about the room restlessly. Save for his footsteps, the room was silent, and the silence had lasted long.

Several times, James Compton came to a stop, and stood facing his nephew, and seemed about to speak. But every time, he changed his mind and pursued his aimless, restless tramp.

The Greyfriars Fifth Former's set expression did not relax.

Once Swain, the mate, had looked in, scowled, and gone out again. Uncle and nephew were left to themselves. Occasionally, footsteps were heard on deck, and a sound of voices. There was the sound, at last, of a boat bumping at the side. Then the captain came to a halt.

"That's Rawlings!" he said. "The swab's been down to Nice—gambling, as usual! That's Rawlings come back."

"Call him down—and the rest—and have it out plain!" said Compton quietly. "It's got to be got over, uncle!"

The captain knitted his rugged brows.

"You've made up your mind, Valentine?"

"I've made it up!" said Valentine Compton, in the same quiet tone. "It's got to end, uncle—for you, as well as for me. I've stood by you—you can't say I have not—against the grain. Now stand by me. You've never had your heart in this—you'd never have touched such a putrid game on your own account. Do you think I don't know?"

The captain grunted.

"Of course I know," said Compton. "You'd rather have commanded an ocean tramp than a smuggling yacht, but you wanted to make money—for me! You wanted to see me through, and give me a good time, and a place in the world. I'm not ungrateful, uncle, heaven knows; but—but I can't carry on with it. And I can't touch such money, uncle—I can't! You don't care two straws for it on your own account—do you think I don't know that? We've got to throw it over together."

"It means throwing over Greyfriars!"

"That's done already!"

"It means a life of hard work and little ease—"

"And looking honest men in the face without being ashamed," said Compton. "That's my choice, a thousand times over!"

"There's not only ourselves to think of, boy. Rawlings put up money for the venture; Swain put up a share. Every man in the crew has an interest in it, down to the cook. I'm captain of this packet—but master only in name."

"The Firefly can earn her keep in honest sea-trade!" said Valentine. "If it's a hard life, it's a decent one; and no harder for us than tens of thousands of others. And there's no prison at the end of honest trade. And the whole crew are pretty close to that now! It's a mug's game, breaking the law—as well as a rotten game."

Another grunt from the captain.

"There's the stuff on board—"

"Pitch it overboard!" said Compton coolly. "Drop every spot of it into the bay, and sail clear."

"I can't see Rawlings and the rest standing for that!"

"You're master here! If Rawlings and Swain will stand for honest trade, we'll sail together as we've sailed before. If not, hand over to them what they put up in the venture. You can do that."

"I can do it; but it would leave me stripped bare."

"Then we'll begin again at the bottom of the ladder," said Valentine. "The ship will be your own then, and we'll start clear."

The captain resumed his restless pacing.

There was a step in the companion. Rawlings came into the saloon, with Swain at his heels.

The steward's face was dark and bitter. He had not returned from his trip to the casino at Nice in a good temper.

He gave Compton of the Fifth a black look—growing blacker at the glance of contempt he received in return.

"I've told Ferguson to get steam up!" he snapped.

The captain's eyes glinted at him.

"Are you taking on the command of this packet, Ted Rawlings?" he asked.

"I'm not hanging on here, to be nabbed by the French police, if that schoolboy ashore chooses to tattle!" answered Rawlings savagely. "We're pulling out of this to-night!"

"We should have pulled out earlier, if you hadn't been ashore at your usual blackguardly games!" said the captain contemptuously.

"Well, I'm on board now," sneered Rawlings, "and we're going! Lucky if we get clear. The Mediterranean and the Channel will be shut to us after this! We shall have to go farther afield. As soon as those schoolboys begin to tattle of what they've found out, we shall not dare to put into an English or French port with what we have on board."

"Valentine proposes dropping the lot over the side."

Rawlings stared, and Swain gave a savage grunt.

"The boy's mad!"

"Have a little sense, Swain," said Valentine Compton. "That's the way of safety, as well as of honesty. There's too much known now to carry on the game. You can thank Rawlings chiefly that it's known!"

Rawlings gritted his teeth.

"We shall have to lie low a bit," he said. "But we've got the seven seas to choose from. We're three in this game, Jim Compton, and you're not master here."

"Ay, ay," growled Swain, "and you can lay to that!"

The captain stood facing them, his brows darkening. If he had been undecided under his nephew's arguments, the insolence of the steward and the surly defiance of the mate, decided him. His jaw squared.

"Now hear me, you pair of swabs!" he said, rapping out the words like bullets. "We're chucking the smuggling game on this craft from now on! Every ounce of contraband is going over the side. I'm sailing this packet, and every man on board is going to obey my orders, or jump for it! Got that?"

Swain gave a growl like a bulldog. Rawlings' eyes glinted from his sleek face at the captain and his nephew.

"And where do we come in?" he asked, between his teeth. "We've got shares in the venture! You've forgotten that!"

"You're going to be paid out—unless you stand in with me to run the Firefly as a tramp and trader!"

"By hokey!" muttered Swain.

"So that's the game?" Rawlings almost panted with rage. "And if we don't choose to be paid out—what then?"

"Then you'll jump to my orders, you swab!" said Captain Compton. "And I'll take no lip from my steward, or from my mate, either! Get on deck, Bill Swain—and you, Ted Rawlings, get back to your dish-washing and hold your tongue!"

Rawlings gave him one long, deadly



Billy Bunter knocked Mr. Vernon-Smith's hat off, and it went sailing out of the window. "Why—what—what—" ejaculated the millionaire. The chauffeur slowed down the car, and Vernon-Smith jumped out to retrieve the hat. Next moment Bunter shot through the open door like a pip from an orange!

look, and left the saloon. Swain stood like a bulldog, snarling.

"You heard my order, Swain?" rapped the captain.

"I heard you," growled Swain, almost choking with rage, "and I'll tell you this, Jim Compton—"

"Hold your tongue, and get on deck!"

"I tell you—"

Swain was interrupted. The captain strode at him, grasped him by his burly shoulders, and whirled him out of the saloon.

Valentino Compton smiled faintly.

There was a sound of scuffling, of panting oaths, in the companion, and then Bill Swain went on deck in the captain's grasp. There was a bump, as he was flung there like a sack of coke.

When the Fifth Former of Greyfriars went up, the captain was on the bridge, and the yacht ruming out to sea. Swain was forward, muttering with some of the crew, and casting deadly looks aft.

Unheeding him, Captain Compton ran the Firefly out to sea under the glittering stars.

THE THIRTEENTH CHAPTER.

Bunter's Bolt!

"HALLO. hallo, hallo! Bunter!"

"That fat ass!"

"Kick him!"

"I—I say, you fellows—"

"You young rascal!" boomed Mr. Vernon-Smith. "Where have you been?"

What had become of Billy Bunter had been rather a mystery to the Greyfriars party that evening. He had failed to turn up at the Casino Municipal; and whether he had lost his way, or whether he had deliberately cleared off to "play the goat," there was no telling.

The latter seemed most probable; and the Famous Five mentally promised him a kicking when they saw him again.

Now they saw him! Coming out of the Casino Municipal, after the opera was over, they found the car in readiness, and sitting in the car was a weary, fat figure. The gleam of Bunter's spectacles greeted them as they looked in.

"I say, you fellows, I've been waiting for you," squeaked Bunter. "I was hours and hours and hours finding this beastly place after I got away from that beast Rawlings! You see, I lost my way—"

"You've been rowing with Rawlings?" exclaimed Vernon-Smith.

"The beast was chucked out of the casino, and he got into a temper," explained Bunter. "He pitched into me, and kicked me—"

"I hope he kicked you hard!"

"Beast!"

"Good gad!" exclaimed Mr. Vernon-Smith. "You young rascal, have you been in a casino! Good gad!"

"Oh! No!" gasped Bunter. "Nothing of the kind! I—I wouldn't! I haven't played la boule, and I—I haven't lost all my money! I—I've been for a—stroll! I—I've had a walk on the Promenade des Anglais. It—it's rather nice there. I say, you fellows, I'm fearfully hungry!"

Mr. Vernon-Smith glared at him. As he was in charge of the schoolboy party, he was naturally very much perturbed by Bunter's antics.

"A casino!" he gasped. "Good gad! You young scoundrel—"

"I—I haven't!" gasped Bunter. "They—they wouldn't have let me in, you know, and I never thought of sticking on a false moustache, and I never gave thirty francs for it, and—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Blessed if I see anything to cackle at! I'm fearfully hungry, and I haven't been able to get any supper, after losing all my money—"

"I shall thrash you when we get back to the hotel!" said Mr. Vernon-Smith.

"Oh crikey!"

The millionaire plumped into his seat, and the juniors packed into the car. They looked as if they had had quite a cheery evening—quite a contrast to Billy Bunter. The fat Owl looked in the lowest of spirits.

The car whizzed out of Nice and took the road for Villefranche. Billy Bunter blinked several times uneasily at the millionaire's portly back. He blinked at the juniors in the car.

"I—I say, Smithy, I—I suppose your pater was only joking!" he stammered.

The Bounder chuckled.

"Did he look like it?" he asked.

"You've got it coming, old fat man!" said Bob Cherry. "But it's all right; we were going to kick you all round. But if Smithy's pater is going to whop you, we'll let it go at that!"

"Beast!"

"Better kick him just the same!" granted Johnny Bull.

"The kickfulness is the proper caper!"

agreed Hurreo Jamset Ram Singh.

"The morefulness the kickfulness, the betterfulness for the esteemed and idiotic Bunter!"

"Hear, hear!" grinned Smithy.

"Oh, really, Smithy, if that's your idea of manners to a guest, I jolly well shan't stay with you!"

"Thanks!" said Smithy.

"Well, I mean it!" yapped Bunter.

"I don't like your manners, Smithy, and never did, and I see now that I was rather an ass to stay with you at all! I'm jolly well going back to the Firefly!"

"Bunter knows how to make our

holiday a success, doesn't he?" remarked the Bounder.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Yah!" snorted Bunter.

He disdained to waste any more of his conversation on the Removites. He sat blinking from the window of the car, his fat mind made up. Whether Mr. Vernon-Smith had been in earnest or not, he had certainly looked as if he was, and Billy Bunter was not going back with the party to be thrashed. The fact that he deserved it did not reconcile him to the idea at all.

Smithy, after all, was not the only pebble on the beach. He could jolly well go back to the Firefly if he jolly well liked.

It was true that the grub at the Hotel Gloria was magnificent. Still, it wasn't bad on the Firefly. Having decided to turn Smithy and his party down, Billy Bunter only waited for the car to reach Villefranche to carry out that intention.

"I say"—Billy Bunter suddenly poked Mr. Vernon-Smith in the back—"I say, tell the chauffeur to stop!"

"Eh—what for?" snapped Mr. Vernon-Smith, over his shoulder.

"I'm getting out!"

"What the dickens do you want to get out for, you young donkey?"

"I'm going back to the yacht!"

"You're not!" snapped Mr. Vernon-Smith.

"I suppose I can do as I jolly well like!" roared Bunter indignantly.

"No!"

"Look here, you cheeky old ass——"

"What, what? Box his ears, Herbert!"

"You bet!" said the Bounder.

Smack, smack!

"Yarcooop!" roared Bunter. "Why, you cheeky beast, you smack my head again, and I'll—Whooooooooooooop!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Now be quiet, you young fool!" snapped Mr. Vernon-Smith.

Billy Bunter sat quiet for a few minutes. His fat mind was more firmly made up than ever. If that fat City man fancied that he could give orders to Billy Bunter, that fat City man had another guess coming! But it was clear that Mr. Vernon-Smith fancied that he could, and he was not going to stop the car for Bunter. Strategy was indicated.

All of a sudden Billy Bunter reached out a fat paw and tilted the millionaire's hat from behind.

It shot off and went sailing through the open window.

"Why, what—what——" ejaculated Mr. Vernon-Smith, in astonishment.

"My hat!"

"You frabjous owl!" gasped Bob Cherry.

"You blithering idiot!" stuttered Nugent.

"My hat!" exclaimed Mr. Vernon-Smith.

The chauffeur slowed down the car and stopped.

"I'll get it, father!" said the Bounder.

He jumped out, and ran back for the rolling hat. The next moment Billy Bunter shot through the open door like a pip from an orange.

"Hallo, hallo, hallo!"

"Bunter!"

"He's gone!"

"Stop him, Smithy!"

The Bounder, hat in hand, came running back. He jumped in front of the fleeing fat Owl. But Bunter was desperate. He did not stop. He charged.

Crash! Bump!

"Ow!" gasped the Bounder.

He went over backwards as if a cannon-ball had hit him. The silk topper dropped from his hand. Bunter, reeling from the shock, sat down.

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Crunch! He sat on the hat!

"My hat!" yelled Mr. Vernon-Smith, staring from the car.

Billy Bunter bounded up and ran. He left the millionaire's hat looking more like a concertina than a hat. Smithy, gasping, staggered to his feet and picked up the hat.

"My hat!" he ejaculated, staring at the crunched topper.

"My hat!" roared Mr. Vernon-Smith.

"Oh, my hat!" gasped Bob Cherry.

The Famous Five were turning out of the car. But Billy Bunter had vanished by a path in the olive woods beside the road. Bunter was gone.

"Bother the boy!" growled Mr. Vernon-Smith. He glared at the crunched hat as Smithy handed it over. "Good gad! Get in! The young fool can be brought back to-morrow! Get in!"

He sat, with a frowning brow, punching his hat into some semblance to a hat again as the car ran on to the Hotel Gloria on the hill.

Billy Bunter had to be left for the present to his own devices. He felt quite bucked as he heard the car, in the distance, grind away on the hilly road, leaving him free to return to the yacht if he liked. Probably he would not have felt so bucked had he been aware that the Firefly had sailed. But Bunter did not know that yet.

THE FOURTEENTH CHAPTER.

Mutiny!

THE rush came suddenly.

Valentine Compton was taken by surprise when it came. He stepped down the companion on the Firefly. The light below had been turned off, and all was dark, and he heard no sound of warning in the darkness. But as he reached the foot of the stair the rush came, and hands grasped him on all sides.

He was dragged headlong into the saloon.

A rough, heavy hand—Swain's—was jammed over his mouth. His arms were held, and an arm was round his neck from behind. Strong as he was, he was powerless in the grip of four assailants, and he reeled into the saloon in their grasp, struggling fiercely after the first moment of surprise, but struggling in vain.

"Keep him quiet!" It was Rawlings' hissing voice.

"Ay, ay!" growled Swain.

The Fifth Former of Greyfriars fought fiercely, madly. He strove to wrench his head loose, to free his mouth, for a call of warning to the captain on the bridge.

But his assailants were taking care of that.

It was mutiny on the Firefly; but that mutiny would have died out suddenly had Captain Compton appeared on the scene, with his revolver in his hand and his hard eyes glinting over it.

Swain's rough hand was jammed hard on the Fifth Former's mouth, keeping him silent. In spite of his struggles, his hands were dragged behind him by unseen assailants, and he felt a cord bound round his wrists and knotted. Fiercely and desperately he resisted, but from the moment he had been seized in the dark he had no chance.

Another rope was knotted round his ankles. He was a helpless prisoner. Still the rough, hard hand pressed on his mouth.

He was dragged to the settee and flung on it, with four pairs of hands on him. Then a beam of light came from an electric torch, gleaming on his furious face and flashing eyes. In the

glimmer Rawlings was revealed, grinning savagely.

"We've got him!" breathed the steward. "Quiet! If Jim gets a chance with his gun——"

"I reckon we'll put paid to Jim, when we've got this young swab safe," muttered Swain.

"Gag him!" whispered Rawlings.

Compton's eyes blazed up at the steward. But his one thought, then, was to warn his uncle, if he could.

But he had no chance. Coolly, cruelly, the steward gripped his throat, choking him into silence, while Swain stuffed a crumpled rag into his mouth, and tied it securely in place.

Bound, gagged, helpless, he lay stretched on the settee, with the four of them panting over him—the steward, the mate, the ship's cook, and one of the seamen. Evidently the whole crew were in this. Captain Compton had marked out a new course to steer; but the crew of rascals and ruffians he commanded were not standing for it.

Rawlings grinned down at him breathlessly.

"That's for you, young feller-melad!" he muttered. "We've got you, and we'll get Jim next. You'll throw over the smuggling game, will you? You'll jettison the contraband, will you? We'll watch it!"

"Ay, ay! And you can lay to that!" growled Swain.

"Jim'll pay out our shares, will he, and run the Firefly as a cargo tramp," hissed Rawlings. "I fancy not. Jim'll lose his own share——"

"And if he's keen on tramping for cargo, he can tramp on another craft, when he gets out of where we're going to put him," grunted Swain.

The torch was shut off, and all was dark again.

Valentine Compton, lying helpless, heard the footsteps of the mutineers receding. They were leaving him there—going on deck to deal with his uncle, still unalarmed, unsuspecting.

He strained his muscles almost to cracking point in an effort to get loose. But he was tied too securely for that. He sank back on the settee, exhausted by the effort, half-suffocated by the gag.

What was happening on deck?

The captain was on the bridge—unsuspecting. Only too well Compton could guess that the whole crew were in the game. It was the work of Rawlings, backed up by the mate. The whole crew, seamen and engineers, down to the cook—every hand against the man who had turned his back on lawlessness. Even so, the rascal Rawlings had not dared to act in the open; he had relied on surprise and treachery, and he was getting away with it.

Compton lay a prisoner below; and the captain would be seized suddenly by a surprise rush on the bridge. The game was up.

And after that? Swain and the rest, rascals as they were, were incapable of the extreme of crime. But Rawlings? As he lay there, helpless in the darkness, Valentine Compton knew that he was in the shadow of death.

There was a sudden outbreak of sound above—scuffling, panting, stumbling. The captain's voice rang suddenly, sharply:

"Back, you dogs! Valentine, bear a hand!"

Again the bound Fifth Former wrenched madly at his bonds; but again he wrenched in vain. Trampling feet, panting breath, oaths and cries, but no sound of a shot. They had not given the captain a chance to get at his "gun." Swain, perhaps,

had stepped behind him on the bridge, and grasped him to begin with—then a rush of the whole crew of rats.

But the trampling and the scuffling, prolonged for minutes, told that James Compton was putting up a desperate resistance. Had Valentine been able to go to his help—had he been able to pull his revolver—matters might have gone very differently. But the treacherous steward had been too cunning for that.

The sounds of struggle ceased at last. There was a trampling and a bumping in the companion as a prisoner was dragged down from the deck.

The light flashed on.

Compton stared in the sudden light. His uncle, bound hand and foot, panting for breath, was thrown like a sack of damage to the floor.

Swain, with a sour grin, stepped to the schoolboy on the settee, and took the gag from his mouth.

"I reckon you needn't delay your jawing-tackle now, if you want to chew the rag!" he grinned.

Compton gasped.

"Uncle!"

The captain's eyes turned on him. He understood now why his nephew had not come to his aid as he saw him lying bound on the settee.

"They got you first, Valentine!" he panted. "Oh, you dog, Rawlings! You treacherous hound!"

"Pack it up, Jim Compton!" drawled Rawlings. "You can jump to a school-boy's orders, if you like, but you won't see this crew jumping."

"You can lay to that!" growled Swain.

"You've asked for it, Jim," said Ferguson. The engineer was among the men who had dragged the captain down. "You're backing out of the game. We ain't."

And there was a growl of assent from the others.

"You mutinous dogs!" snapped the captain, glaring at them from the floor. "How long do you reckon you can carry on the game without me to see you through? Do you think that greasy dog Rawlings can carry on? You've set a course for prison—the whole gang of you!"

"We're chancing that, Jim," said Rawlings, grinning. "We've chanced it long enough in your company, and we'll chance it without you."

"And what's the next move?" said the captain quietly. "Murder after mutiny?"

"Chuck it, Jim!" said Ferguson. "There's no man here will lay a hand on you, except to put you where you can't kick. You've let us down, and you've got to go! You lose what you've put into the venture, and you've got no kick coming for that. But your life's safe, and the boy's, and you ought to know your old shipmates well enough to know that."

"Ay, ay!" said Swain.

"You're putting us ashore?" asked Valentine.

Rawlings glanced at him.

"Why not?" he answered. "We're done with you, now you're done with us. You're going to be dropped in a quiet place, where you won't be able to talk, except to one another, till we've had time to pull out of the Strait, and get clear of the Mediterranean."

"Marooned?"

"You've got it!" said Rawlings. And again there was a growl of assent from the mutineers.

"Bill Swain's had a captain's ticket

in his pocket these ten years, and I reckon he can carry on as skipper," said Rawlings. "You've asked for this, Jim, and you've asked more than once. Now you've got it! Stick where you are, while we set a new course. You make your landfall at sun-up."

The mutineers crowded out of the saloon. With the mate on the bridge the Firefly swung on a new course, standing south. Against the starry sky the snowy caps of the Maritime Alps sank out of sight as the Firefly steamed through the gleaming waters, heading for Corsica.

THE FIFTEENTH CHAPTER.

Not Nice for Bunter!

"BATEAU, monsieur?" Billy Bunter knew that a bateau was a boat.

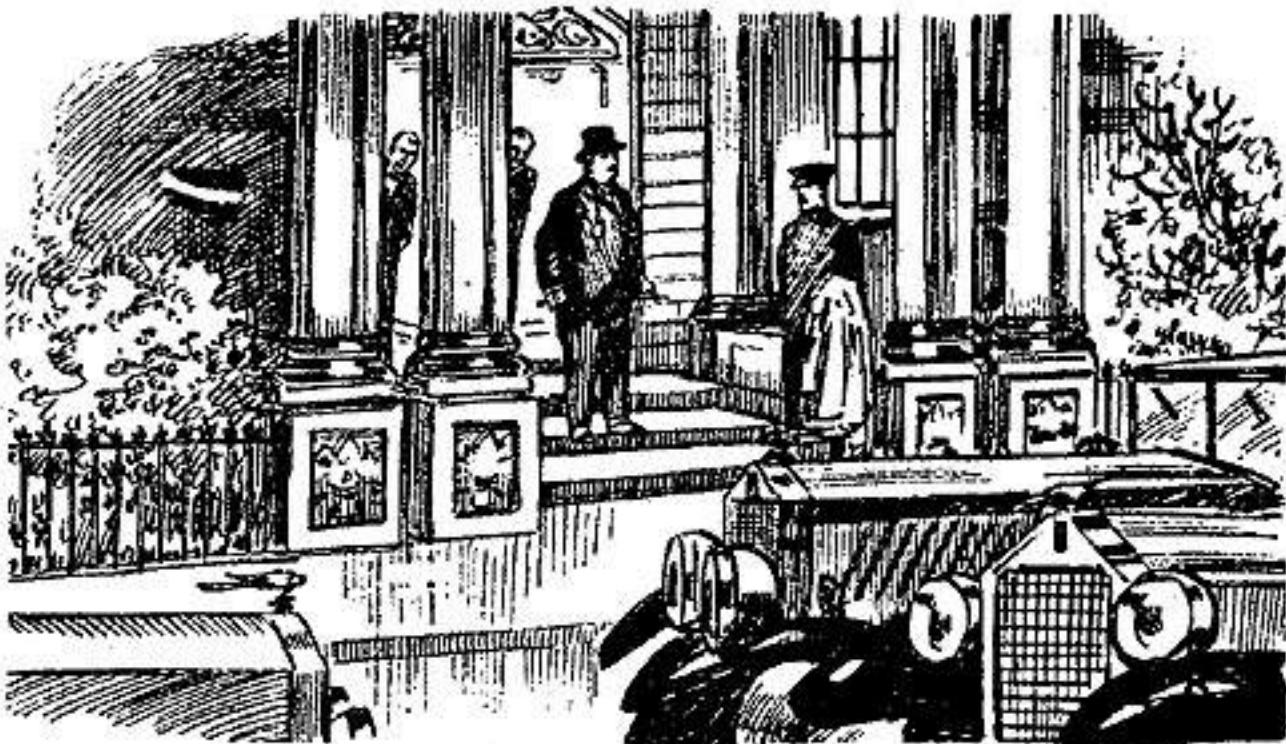
"Yes," he answered. "I mean, wee, wee!"

Late as the hour was, when Billy Bunter came down to the shore at Villefranche, there were boatmen about. Several vessels lay at anchor, and English "misters" might be going off at any time, after visits to casinos or

(Continued on next page.)

The STately HOMES of GREYFRIARS

By THE GREYFRIARS RHYMESTER



(1)

When you see No. 3 Courtman Square,
I haven't a doubt, you'll declare,
That some super-posh millionaire
Has taken his residence there.
As a matter of fact, you have said it,
The owner's done well at his biz;
With a million or more to his credit,
He likes to be swanky—and is!

(2)

Vernon-Smith is the gentleman's name;
A million good quids he can claim.
He knows how to look after same
(That's one reason why they all came).
And Smithy the Bounder, is fitted.
To copy his father a lot,
By nature he's keen and quick-witted,
And knows how to keep what he's got!

(4)

No. 3 Courtman Square has a line
Of somewhat Victorian design,
The windows and door-knockers shine,
The footmen are gorgeous and fine;
The road is worn thin by Rolls Royces
Of which Smithy Senior has four,
And how his plump nature rejoices
To see 'em lined up at the door!

(6)

It sounds very blatant indeed,
But "swank" is the Vernon-Smiths' creed,
They'll buy costly things they don't need,
To show off their riches and greed.
They cannot boast any descendant
Of families titled or old,
But they shine with a glitter resplendent,
To show the extent of their gold!

(3)

This week our long-haired poet's prolific pen writes of
COURTMAN SQUARE, the
"posh" residence of Herbert
Vernon-Smith, the Bounder
of Greyfriars and son of a
millionaire.

(5)

In addition to this he has got
A really magnificent yacht,
She's jewelled in every spot,
She glistens and glitters a lot;
She's not quite so big as a liner,
But costs rather more to control,
She's ready to slip off to China,
Or take a trip round the North Pole!

(7)

With toadies and flatterers go
This pair in their glittering show,
And Bunter is anxious to show
The very best friendship you know.
But Smithy's not one to be bitten
By flattering words, as a rule;
For Smithy is cute, it is written,
His eyes have no uses for wool!

Next Week: BUNTER COURT.

theatres. Billy Bunter spotted several standing by their boats, and sitting on the gunwales, and one of them hailed him at once.

Bunter blinked out over the starlit bay through his big spectacles. It was very late, and he was anxious for supper, and then for bed. His last meeting with Rawlings had not been agreeable; but he was quite anxious to see him again handing out supper on board the yacht. There, at least, the cheeky beast would have to behave himself.

Billy Bunter saw several dim shapes with riding lights far out on the dusky waters, and had no doubt that the Firefly was one of them. It had not even occurred to his fat brain that Captain Compton's yacht was no longer in the bay of Villefranche.

"Run me out to the Firefly!" he said.

"Comment?" asked the batelier.

"I mean, je want to go to the Firefly—comprong, yacht Anglais," explained Bunter, in his beautiful French.

"Firefly! Le Firefly?" The boatman understood that much, at least. He had taken passengers to and fro several times while the yacht lay at Villefranche. But, to Bunter's surprise and annoyance, he shook his head. "Puis pas, monsieur."

"Firefly!" hooted Bunter. "Never mind Pwee-pah. Firefly! That's the name of the yacht—see? Le Firefly, yacht Anglais. I don't want to go to the Pwee-pah. Never heard of it!"

"Je ne puis pas—"

"Oh crikey!" grunted Bunter. "If these silly foreign idiots would only learn plain English, and talk sense! I tell you, I want to go to the Firefly—je want takey bateau to Firefly, comprony? Bother the Pwee-pah!"

The boatman stared at him. He was telling Bunter, in French, that he couldn't; and Bunter was taking "puis pas" to mean the name of another vessel, so there was bound to be misunderstanding.

"No can," said the boatman, breaking into English that had a sort of family resemblance to Billy Bunter's French: "She goed 'way."

"Oh crumbs!" gasped Bunter.

He understood the boatman's English, remarkable as it was, better than the boatman understood his French.

He blinked out over the starlit waters in dismay.

If the Firefly had "goed 'way," as the French boatman expressed it, evidently there was no supper on board for Bunter.

"Gone away!" he exclaimed. "Sure?"

"Tout a fait, monsieur—goed 'way il y a quelque heures."

"Oh lor'!"

Billy Bunter stood blinking at the sea. Now that he blinked a little more carefully, he could make out that the Firefly's former anchorage was unoccupied. Captain Compton had put to sea—and William George Bunter was left on shore, to make the best of it.

Had Billy Bunter been aware of what was happening, in those very moments, on board the Firefly, out on the dusky Mediterranean, he would have been

extremely thankful that he was safe on shore.

Unaware of it, however, the fat junior was utterly dismayed.

He had turned down Smithy's party, in the belief that he had the alternative of going back to the yacht if he liked. And the yacht was gone!

It was the Hotel Gloria or nothing now! A thrashing from Mr. Vernon-Smith waited him there, if the millionaire was in earnest. A kicking from the Famous Five awaited him without any "if" about it. Worse still, he had dropped out of the car, and the car was at the Gloria by that time. He had to walk—more than half a mile uphill!

The boatman returned to his seat on the gunwale of his boat. Billy Bunter turned his weary steps inland.

"Oh crikey!" groaned Bunter.

He walked—and walked—and walked. Up the winding road he went, with his little fat legs feeling as if they were going to drop off.

Bunter had started that evening in great spirits. He had been going to make a fortune—or, at least, lay the foundations of an extensive fortune. Laden with loot from the casino, he was going to turn his fat little nose up at Smithy's party. He was going to have the finest suite of rooms at the finest hotel on the Riviera; and every evening he was going to roll off in a magnificent car, to add to his store of his boundless wealth! But it had not turned out like that! It had not turned out anything like that! It had been a gorgeous dream—but Bunter had, as it were, woke up!

Not a single franc remained in his pockets. He was fearfully hungry. He was tired and weary and sleepy. He felt bitterly that those putrid casinos ought to be shut up, if not blown up!

Hardly able to drag one fat leg after the other, Billy Bunter walked, and walked—or, rather, crawled, and crawled.

He was almost crawling on his hands and knees by the time the gates of the Gloria came in sight. The gates stood open, and he tottered up the long, curving drive to the hotel building.

As it was now long past one in the morning, he had no doubt that the Gloria would be shut for the night. It was; but, luckily, there was a night-porter and a light.

Bunter tottered in. The night-porter gazed at him.

"The lift!" groaned Bunter.

"Comment, monsieur?"

"The lift, you idiot!" hissed Bunter. He felt that if he tried to drag himself up the endless staircases, he would collapse and roll down. "I mean, l'ascenseur."

"Ferme, monsieur."

"Ferme be blowed! Wharrer you mean, you dummy?"

"Tout est ferme, monsieur."

The lift was shut down for the night. Bunter understood at last, and groaned dimly. He had to mount the stairs, or remain where he was.

"Oh crikey! Oh crumbs! Oh lor'! Beast!"

"Plait-il?" asked the French porter politely. He did not understand; and

perhaps it was just as well that he did not, or his politeness might have failed him.

"Beast! Idiot! Foreign fathead!" said Bunter. "Froggy blighter! Yah! Look here! Tell a waiter to

bring some supper to my room! Got that, you thickhead?"

The man understood one word of that polite speech.

"Souper?" he asked.

"Yes! Yes! Yes! Wee, wee, wee!" gasped Bunter.

"Trop tard, monsieur! Tout est ferme."

"Oh, you idiotic beast, isn't there any grub?" Bunter moaned. "Look here! Go to the kitchen—alley to the cuisine, and get me something! Just a trifle—a cold chicken will do."

"Plait-il?"

"A cold chicken!" hissed Bunter. "Poulet froid—got that?"

"Tout est ferme, monsieur."

"It—it's all shut, I mean touty ferme, open it again, you born idiot! I'm hungry! Can't you understand, booby? Ja'i faim!" hooted Bunter.

"Monsieur a faim?" asked the man sympathetically.

"Wee, wee, wee, wee!" gasped Bunter.

"Quel malheur, quand tout est ferme!" said the night porter.

Bunter blinked at him. He came very near hitting him. The man was saying how sad, when everything was shut. No doubt it was sympathetic. But Bunter had no use for sympathy. He wanted something to eat.

"Beast!" he hissed.

"Comment?"

"Fool! Idiot!"

"Plait-il?"

"Yah! Rotter! Foreign scum! Pig! Blockhead! Yah!"

Bunter turned drearily to the stairs.

"Bonsoir, monsieur," said the porter, apparently under the impression that Bunter had been saying good-night in his own language.

Billy Bunter crawled up the staircase. He crawled along corridors. He crawled into his room, and crawled into bed. And there, fortunately, he was able to forget his woes in sleep. Inward rumbles from empty spaces mingled with a deep and continuous snore.

THE SIXTEENTH CHAPTER.

Marooned!

RAWLINGS stood on the bridge of the Firefly with Swain, watching the high mountains of Corsica rising from the blue expanse of sea.

There was a sardonic grin on his sleek face, an inflexible scowl on Swain's. The crew were on deck, gathered round two prisoners, who stood with their hands bound. They had been freed from the rest of their bonds, to walk on deck. At half-speed, the yacht churned on towards the distant mountains that barred the blue of the sky.

Captain Compton stood silent and still, like a statue, his hard, bronzed face giving little sign of the thoughts within. Valentine Compton was quiet and cool. Both of them disdained to make any appeal to the smuggling crew—even if any appeal would have been of use.

On the deck lay a dunnage bag, which Rawlings had packed for them. That was all they were to take.

Bill Swain—skipper of the Firefly now—signalled to the engine-room. The yacht slowed more and more.

From the sea, a pile of rocks rose into view.

Captain Compton stirred at last, and shot a glance up to the two men on the bridge.

"Rawlings, you hound"—his voice

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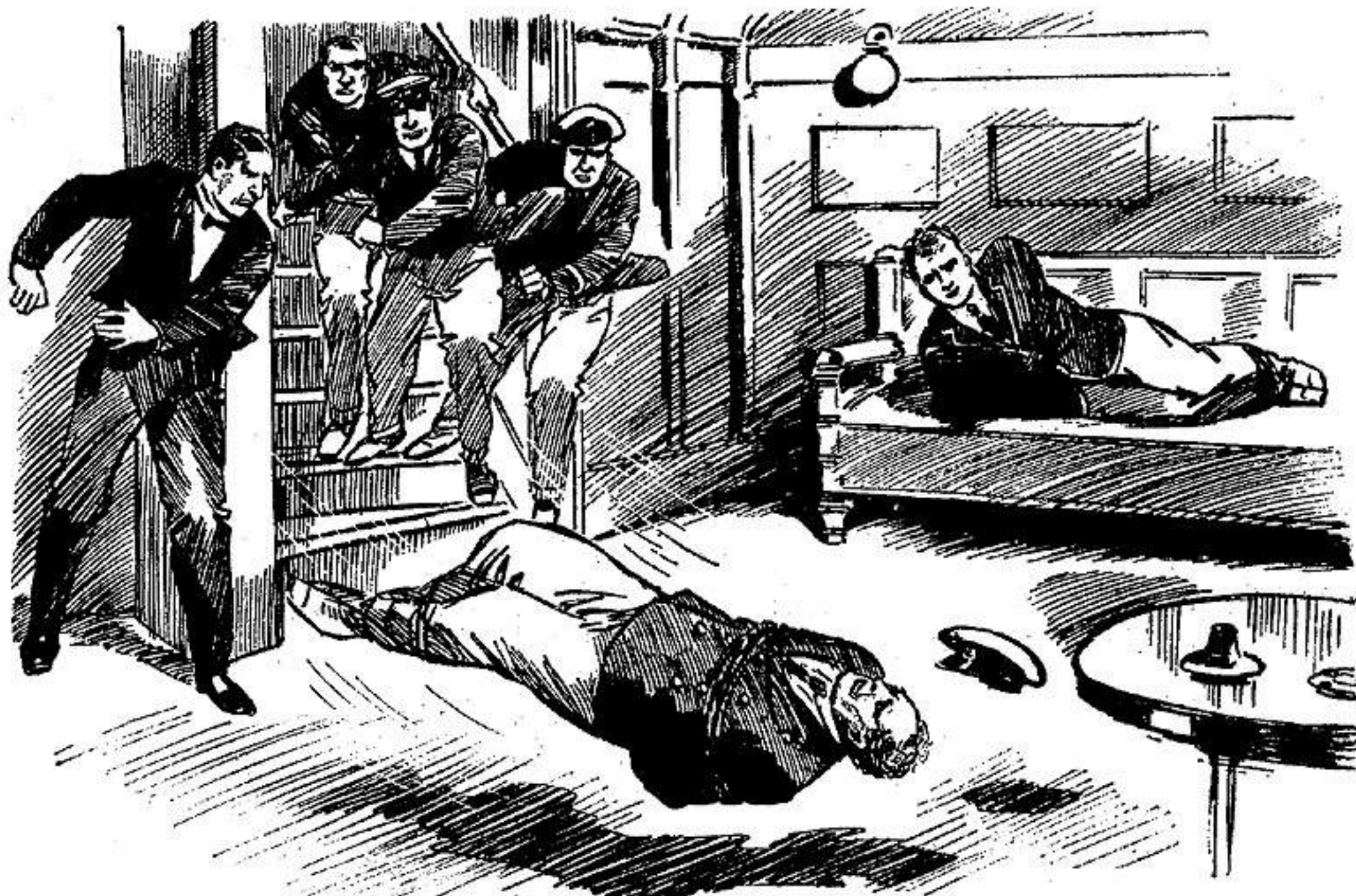


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Captain Compton, bound hand and foot, was dragged down the companion and thrown to the floor. "Uncle!" The captain turned in the direction of the voice and saw his nephew lying bound on the settee. "They got you first, Valentine!" he panted. "Pack it up!" drawled Rawlings. "You can jump to a schoolboy's orders, if you like; but you won't see this crew jumping!"

came harshly—"are you putting us ashore on Corsica?"

Rawlings laughed.

He pointed with a fat, sleek hand, at the pile of rocks, growing clearer to the view as the *Firefly* crept on.

"That's as near to Corsica as you're going, Jim Compton! You'll wait there till you're taken off."

"You dog!" breathed the captain.

"You've got no kick coming, Jim!" growled Swain. "You're left with food for a week, and word will be dropped where you're to be found. You'll stick on that rock till we're out of the Mediterranean."

"We've been shipmates, Swain!" said the captain. "Put me where you like—over the side, if you choose—but land the boy in safety."

"I reckon the boy will be safe there with you, Jim! You've got food for a week—and you'll be picked up in three days."

"I should not leave you, uncle," said Valentine quietly, "and I'd accept nothing at the hands of those mutinous scoundrels."

"Hoity-toity!" grinned Rawlings. "Here, men—stand by to lower the boat!"

The *Firefly* lay on the heaving waters. Captain Compton shot a swift glance round, over the blue Ligurian Sea, gleaming in the sunlight. Far in the distance was the smoke of a steamer heading for Leghorn, or Elba. Southward loomed the Corsican mountains. That was all—save endless sea and sky. He shut his lips hard.

The boat dropped to the water. The two prisoners were hustled into it, and Rawlings followed, carrying the dunnage bag.

The boat's crew bent to the oars, and

pulled away from the *Firefly*, standing off at a safe distance from the rocks.

Swain and the rest of the crew watched them go.

The long, low mass of rocks extended, perhaps, a cable's length from one end to the other. The highest point was not twenty feet over the sea. Of food and water there was none, unless there might be sea-birds' eggs in the crevices, and little pools of rain-water.

The boat bumped on a shelf of rock. The two prisoners were helped ashore, and Rawlings followed them with the dunnage bag.

The seamen remained in the boat.

From the water's edge the captain and his nephew stumbled up a rugged acclivity. Rawlings followed them with the bag, which he threw down in the middle of the rocky islet.

"Are you going to untie our hands, Rawlings?" asked the captain, his deep-set eyes smouldering at the sleek rascal.

"You'd like to handle me, Jim?" said the steward banteringly. "So would the boy. He's handled me already, and once is once too often. I reckon you'll wriggle loose in a few hours. You'll have time on your hands here."

He laughed, and turned, and walked back to the boat.

A few minutes more and the boat had pushed off, and was pulling back to the *Firefly*.

Standing on the rock, Captain Compton and the Fifth Former of Greyfriars watched it as it pulled back to the yacht. They saw it swing up to the davits. They saw the stream of smoke roll away from the *Firefly* as she swung into motion. Bill Swain, from the bridge, waved his hand in farewell—perhaps with some touch of compunction. Rawlings grinned from the distance

with a sleek, ruthless face that expressed sheer evil.

Leaving a bar of black smoke on the blue, the *Firefly* steamed away—away into the west, growing smaller and smaller in the distance.

It dipped at last under the sea-rim and was gone. The last wisp of smoke floated away. The castaways were left in a world of waters.

Captain Compton drew a deep, deep breath. He turned and fixed his eyes on his nephew.

"You've had your way, Valentine, though not as you hoped. We're done with smuggling now, and done with the *Firefly*."

"I'm glad of it," said Valentine Compton quietly.

"To begin again—at the bottom of the ladder!" muttered his uncle. "I've got a few hundreds. Most of what I had was on that packet, and Rawlings has his thievish fingers on it now. Well, we've asked for this, Valentine, and we've got it! We've got a hard course to steer when we get off this rock."

The Greyfriars fellow looked at him, but did not speak. He was wondering, at the back of his mind, whether they would ever get alive off that rock—whether the treacherous dastard on the yacht intended them to get off alive.

He was wrenching at his bonds. It was long and weary work, but he would be loose in time, and then—

"Keep a stiff upper-lip," said the captain. "But I needn't tell you that, boy! Rawlings was deluding those rogues. He does not mean to pass the word for us to be picked up. You guessed that?"

"Yes," said Compton.

"But this is the Mediterranean—an inland sea," said the captain. "It's

not like being marooned in the Pacific, Valentine. We're not in the great spaces here. We shall sight a dozen craft, and fishing boats may come out from Corsica. We shall be picked up before the week's out. Rely on that."

Compton of the Fifth was silent.

Swain and the rest were rough and brutal, but they would never have stood for murder. They had sailed away in the Firefly, believing that Captain Compton and his nephew would be picked off the rock in a few days. But Rawlings? If Compton had read his evil face aright, he had left them, as he believed, at least, to death. He was not the man to run risks of dangerous tales being told—of a bitter, incensed enemy seeking vengeance. Had he dared, he would have flung them over the yacht's side without compunction. It was only because the rest would not have stood for it that he had marooned them on that lonely rock in sight of the hilltops of Corsica. Deep in his heart, Valentine Compton felt that the cunning rascal believed that they were left to their death.

It was hours later, when the sun of noon was streaming down from the sky, that they succeeded at last in getting rid of the cords on their bound arms. They were free at length, and laid down on the rock to rest after their efforts.

Valentine was the first to stir.

He rose to his feet and crossed over to the spot where the dunnage bag lay. It was tied, and he untied it to take out the store of food.

A sharp exclamation left his lips when the bag was open. He stared at it with growing pallor in his face.

"What is it, Valentine?" The captain started to his feet. He came quickly towards the Greyfriars Fifth Former.

Compton gave a low, bitter laugh.

"I felt—I knew—that that dog meant us to die here!" he said. "But I never guessed his trickery!"

He turned out the contents of the dunnage bag.

A couple of folded blankets, half a dozen empty tins, three or four empty bottles, rolled on the rock.

"The food!" muttered the captain.

"There is no food—"

"Or water—"

"Or water," said Compton quietly.

James Compton clenched his hands in bitter rage. Valentine threw down the sack. His handsome face was pale, but calm. Deeply as he distrusted the treacherous rascal of the Firefly, he had not suspected this last and basest treachery. He knew now, beyond doubt, the meaning of the steward's evil grin as the Firefly sailed away. Rawlings was not leaving enemies alive behind him. The castaways were left to death on that solitary rock, unless a miracle intervened to save them!

THE SEVENTEENTH CHAPTER.

Bunter Sticks to his Old Pals!

"GONE!" said Vernon-Smith.

Harry Wharton nodded.

From the balcony of the Hotel Gloria there was a wide view of the shore and the bay. After breakfast the Bounder came out, and found the captain of the Remove staring seaward. Wharton had noted at once that the Firefly was no longer to be seen among the craft anchored off Villefranche.

The Bounder grinned.

"I dare say they were glad enough
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to clear," he remarked. "Compton knows that we'd never give him away, but the others don't. I can't see that greasy blighter Rawlings banking on it. They've gone while the going's good."

Wharton nodded again, his brow dark with thought. The blue waters had swallowed Compton of the Fifth from his sight, and he did not believe that he would ever see the handsome Fifth Former again. Now that so much was known, he could not, if he would, return to Greyfriars School for the new term. Wingate was going to lose his wonderful new recruit for the first eleven. Carne of the Sixth would have to swallow his grudges; he would never see his enemy again. Wharton had liked him—he still liked him, in spite of all that he knew—and his thoughts were sombre as they followed the Fifth Form man whose fate had been so strange.

He was gone—with that crew! Sooner or later—more likely sooner than later—the law would stretch out its grasp for the ship of secrets. They had had a long run, but it could only end one way, as all roguery had to end. What was going to become of him?

"It's rough luck!" The Bounder easily read his thoughts. "My father would have done anything for him. Too late now. He would not turn that uncle of his down, and I like him all the better for it. But—"

"But how's it going to end for him?" muttered Harry.

"Monsieur!" A waiter came out of the building, followed by a man in a jersey—one of the boatmen from the shore. "Une lettre pour monsieur!"

"For me?" said Harry.

He took the letter from the boatman, and gave a start as he saw that it was addressed in Valentine Compton's hand. The man explained in French that the letter had been given him by a young monsieur from the yacht *Anglais*, the previous evening, with instructions to deliver it in the morning. Wharton handed him a few francs, and the man touched his cap and shuffled away, leaving the captain of the Remove with the letter in his hand.

"From Compton?" said the Bounder.

"Yes. I wonder—"

Harry Wharton slit the envelope and took the letter out. The Bounder leaned on the balustrade, staring at the sea, while he read it.

"Dear Wharton,—I'm afraid you know it all now—more than I should have wanted you to. I want to tell you this. When we came on this cruise I meant it all in good faith. I believed that the smuggling was thrown over for the time, and that there would be nothing of the kind while you and your friends were on board. But I found that I was not my own master—neither was my uncle. Rawlings called the tune, and the whole crew backed him. That's the only excuse I can offer.

"But you'll be glad, I know, to hear this, too—the smuggling game is done with. My uncle would never have touched it, but for my sake. We're poor, you see, and he wanted me to have my place in the sun. But I've got him to see at last that I'd rather scrub decks, and it's the finish. We sail to-night, but never again on the same tack. Never! The yacht *Firefly* is going to be a tramp, her skipper an honest trader, and Compton of the Fifth a combination of supercargo, second mate, and deck-hand. Hard work and hard rations—rather a change from the Fifth Form at Greyfriars—what?

"Show this letter to Vernon-Smith, with my thanks to him for having kept

my secret when I had one to keep! No more for me! I think Mr. Vernon-Smith may as well see it also; for, unless I am very much mistaken, he had some very strong doubts about the *Firefly* and her crew.

"V. C."

"Look at that, Smithy!" said Harry quietly, and he handed the letter to the Bounder.

Smithy read it, and whistled softly.

"Poor old Compton! What a change for him. But he sounds as if he's looking forward to it."

"I think he is!" said Harry. "I knew that he was all right—straight as a die! Thank goodness he's pulled out of that!"

"I'll take this to the pater, as he's to see it!" said Smithy.

Wharton nodded, and the Bounder went into the hotel.

"Hallo, hallo, hallo!" Bob Cherry came out with the rest of the Co. "Where's the jolly old *Firefly*?" He stared out over the blue sea.

"Sailed last night!" said Harry.

"Oh! I sort of gathered from Compton that he would be going pretty soon, but this is rather sudden!" said Bob. "I suppose his uncle's got business somewhere and was glad of the chance of landing us on Smithy's pater." Bob grinned. "I thought once or twice that the jolly old captain had extracted all the pleasure from our society, and wouldn't miss it a lot if he lost it."

"Same here!" agreed Johnny Bull, with a grin. "But Compton's been a brick all the time."

"The brickfulness of the esteemed Compton has been terrific!" declared Hurree Jamset Ram Singh.

"But what about Bunter?" exclaimed Bob, suddenly remembering the existence of the Owl of the Remove. "Has he sailed in the jolly old yacht? He cut off last night to go aboard."

"Oh, my hat! I'd forgotten Bunter!" exclaimed Harry. "He can't have sailed on the *Firefly*!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Bob. "Fancy the fat ass getting down to the shore and finding that the yacht was gone! If he never got any supper we shall find a dead porpoise lying about the beach somewhere."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"But where the dickens can he be?" exclaimed Wharton. "I'd forgotten all about the fat idiot—"

"I say, you fellows!"

The Famous Five spun round at that familiar voice.

Billy Bunter rolled out on the balcony. They stared at him.

"So you're here!" ejaculated Frank Nugent. "What are you doing here, Bunter?"

"Oh, really, Nugent—"

"Is this a morning call, or what?" asked Johnny Bull, with a chuckle.

"Oh, really, Bull—"

"Glad to see you, old fat bean, and sorry you can't stop!" said Bob.

"Oh, really, Cherry—"

"Smithy's just gone in, Bunter," said Harry Wharton. "He will be back in a minute if you want to see him before you go—"

"Oh, really, Wharton! You didn't think I'd really turned my old pals down, did you?" asked Bunter reproachfully. "I say, you fellows, that rotten yacht was gone—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I mean to say, I never went down for a boat at all," explained Bunter. "I was only pulling your leg! As if I'd leave you in a foreign country with nobody to look after you!"

"Oh, my hat!"

"How would you manage, without me to speak French for you, and all that?" said Bunter. "Here, garson, bringez moi some breakfast—I mean dejeuner! Lots of it—beaucoup de eggs, beaucoup de bacon, beaucoup de toast, beaucoup de toot chose! Understandez-vous! When I say beaucoup I mean lots! J'al fain—lots of fain—beaucoup hungry! See? Comprenny! Bong! Buckez-vous up! Gettez vous a move on! I say, you fellows, as if I'd let you down, with me the only chap in the party speaking French—"

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

"Blessed if I see anything to cackle at! I say, what's that man standing there, blinking, for? Doesn't he understand his own language?"

"Ha, ha, ha!" shrieked the Co. It was evident that the waiter did not recognise Bunter's French as his own language.

"I say, you fellows, is Smithy shirty?" asked Bunter anxiously. "Of course, I wasn't going to turn him down really! He's not up to my social weight, as you know—but it gives him a leg up to have a fellow like me staying here. He can make out to the people here that we're friends, you know—I don't mind! I don't, really! After all, I shall never see any of them again! If Smithy likes making out that he's got a friend of my class, I don't mind letting him get away with it! I'm good-natured."

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

Smithy had come out on the balcony behind Bunter, and the expression on his face was worth watching.

"I mean it!" said Bunter. "I'm not a man to let a fellow down, even when he's showing off by making out before a lot of people that he knows me at home! Dash it all, why shouldn't I give the fellow a leg-up? And, I say—Yarooooop! Who's that kicking me? Yoooo-hooooop!"

A boot, suddenly landing on Bunter's tight trousers, pitched him forward at the Famous Five. They pushed him off again, and he sat down with a bump that almost shook the Hotel Gloria and the hill it stood upon.

"Wow!" roared Bunter. "Ow! Wow! Who—Oh crikey! I—I didn't see you, Smithy, old chap! Look here, keep off, you beast! If you kick

me again I'll walk straight out of the place and turn you down for good!"

"That does it!" said the Bounder. And he kicked again—hard!

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Ow! Keep off, you beast!" roared Bunter. "I was only jig-jig-jig-joking, you snob! Wow! Can't you take a jig-jug-jog-joke? Yaroooooh!"

Vernon-Smith drew back his foot again, and the fat Owl squirmed out of reach and jumped back into the building.

"Good-bye, Bunter!" called out the Famous Five.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

But it was not of much use saying good-bye to Bunter! Billy Bunter was not, after all, turning down his old pals—not Bunter! When, a little later, they looked in from the balcony it was to behold Bunter sitting at a table, putting away several breakfasts one after another. And when, an hour afterwards, they went out in the car with Mr. Vernon-Smith, Bunter was still sitting at the table, and still putting away breakfasts! Billy Bunter had a lot of leeway to make up—and that morning he finished breakfasting barely in time for lunch!

THE EIGHTEENTH CHAPTER.

Bunter Misses the Plane!

"THIS," said Bob Cherry, "is what Fishy would call the bee's knee, and the opossum's eyelids!"

His chums agreed that it was.

It was a sunny morning, several days after the Greyfriars party had settled down at the Gloria with Smithy and his pater.

Quite bright and early the Famous Five and the Bounder had breakfasted, and walked out to the private aerodrome belonging to the hotel.

The holidays were drawing to a close, and in a couple of days more the Greyfriars fellows had to pack and depart. But there was going to be a plane trip first—the sort of thing that made it very agreeable to be holiday-making with a millionaire.

The Hotel Gloria ran trips in the passenger plane, and Harry Wharton & Co. had calculated whether their remaining resources would run to the tickets for the trip. But Smithy, who

had already decided on it, had only to mention it to his pater. The chums of the Famous Five found that their careful financial calculations were a sheer waste of arithmetic.

Mr. Vernon-Smith had not taken tickets—he had booked the plane for a day, and Smithy's party were going to have it to themselves. Mr. Vernon-Smith was taking them on the flying trip from early morn till dewy eve. So that sunny morning the juniors turned out in great spirits.

Billy Bunter had not turned out. Something more than an air trip would have been required to draw Bunter from his bed at the unearthly hour of seven in the morning. Bunter was still snoring when the cheery juniors walked out to look at the plane, which was being prepared for the start.

The pilots were tinkering with the engine; the "garcon" was taking aboard supplies of foodstuffs which, if Bunter had seen them, might have induced him to turn out of bed, early as it was. The door stood open, with the ladder up it, and the juniors went aboard to ramble over the plane. All of them had been up before, but opportunities for going up did not, of course, often come their way, and an air trip round about the Cote d'Azur was a gorgeous prospect.

Mr. Vernon-Smith, plump and portly and genial, came along. He nodded pleasantly to the cheerful juniors. Plane trips were not so exciting to Mr. Vernon-Smith as to the schoolboys. He was accustomed to taking planes to save his immensely valuable time—indeed, he took a plane oftener than any of the Greyfriars fellows took a taxi! Still, he liked to see happy faces round him, and liked, perhaps, to feel that it was his boundless wealth that produced this happy satisfaction. Certainly, he was in a very genial mood that bright morning.

"All here, what—what?" he asked.

"All except Bunter, sir!" said Harry Wharton.

Grunt, from the millionaire! He liked the Famous Five, and was glad to see them with his son, but somehow—Bunter did not know why—he had no great liking for the Owl of the Remove. He had not, after all, given Bunter that promised thrashing; but there was little

(Continued on next page.)

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doubt that he had felt very strongly inclined to do so.

"Where is he?" he grunted. "If he's not on time he can stay behind. We start on time."

"He's in bed," said Smithy. "May as well leave him there."

The Famous Five exchanged glances. It was, of course, for Smithy to say; but it seemed rather rough luck, to them, for even the fat and lazy Owl to be left out of this glorious trip over the blue Mediterranean.

The Bounder, catching their look, smiled sarcastically.

"Oh, if you want him fearfully, let's have him," he said. "There's time to root him out! Let's all go in a deputation, and beg him to be so kind as to come and spoil the trip."

"Well—" said Bob slowly.

"Oh, come on!" said Vernon-Smith; and the chums of the Remove followed him.

Mr. Vernon-Smith, with another grunt, sat down in the passengers' cabin, opened a Paris newspaper and became deeply immersed in news of the Bourse. Prices on the Bourse, and on the Stock Exchange at home, were feeling the effects of war scare; and as Mr. Vernon-Smith knew that there was no war in the offing, he was astutely buying when more nervy persons were selling—with profits to come in a few weeks, sufficient to buy a whole fleet of aeroplanes such as the one he was now sitting in!

Quite unconscious and regardless of such matters, the juniors scudded back to the hotel. The lift carried them up, and they scudded along to Bunter's room. A sonorous snore greeted them as they entered. Billy Bunter, with his eyes shut and his mouth open, was deep in the embrace of Morpheus.

"Bunter!" roared Bob Cherry. "Wake up, old bean! Just off!"

Snore!

Smithy jerked away Bunter's pillow, lifted it in both hands, and brought it down with a whop on Bunter's head.

Billy Bunter was not easy to wake. But that woke him.

He came out of the land of dreams with a gasp and a splutter.

"Owl! Urrrgh! Beast! Wharrer you up to? Beast! Wurrgh!" spluttered Bunter. He sat up in bed, groped for his spectacles, jammed them on his fat little nose, and blinked at the smiling juniors with an infuriated blink. "I say, you fellows, wharrer marrer?"

"We're just starting, old fat man, and—"

"Have you woke me up to tell me that, you silly idiot?" yelled Bunter. "Start, and be blowed!"

"Trip in the plane, you fat chump!" said Harry. "We're going in the plane, hundreds of jolly old miles—coasts of France and Italy, Sardinia and Corsica—"

"Blow France and Italy! Bless Sardinia and Corsica! Boil 'em!" hooted Bunter. "I'm not getting up yet."

"Don't you want to come?" demanded the Bounder.

"Well, yes, I'll come!" said Bunter. "But I'm not starting yet. Wharrer you mean by waking me up, you beasts? If you want me to come you can wait!"

"If—if—if we want you to come!" gasped Smithy.

"Yes. There's such a thing as manners to a guest, though you don't seem to understand it, Smithy! Of course, you wouldn't! You new rich bounders are all alike!" snorted Bunter. "We don't treat guests like this at Bunter Court, I can jolly well tell you!"

"Are you coming, you fat frump?" roared Johnny Bull.

"Yes, I'm coming! I shall be ready to start presently. I'll let you know when. Call me again at ten o'clock."

"We start at seven-thirty, idiot!"

"Not with me," said Bunter firmly. "If you want me, you can wait. I shall get up at ten o'clock—say half-past! Then I shall want brekker—say an hour for that. Make it twelve for the start, and I'll come."

"Anybody feel like going back to Mr. Vernon-Smith and telling him to make it twelve?" asked Bob Cherry.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Blessed if I see anything to cackle at! Make it twelve or I shan't come!" said Bunter. "I mean that!"

"Look here, you fat, foozling, frabjous, footling frump—"

"You can jaw," said Bunter. "But I refuse—absolutely refuse—to start before twelve. If you want me, wait! Now shut up and let a fellow go to sleep!"

Bunter took off his spectacles and laid his fat head on the pillow again. Evidently his podgy mind was made up. If they wanted him they could wait—and that was that! That nobody wanted him did not occur to Bunter.

Vernon-Smith gave him a look. He was going—but he was so obviously disposed to punch Bunter before he went that Bob took him by the arm and led him away. The other fellows followed, grinning.

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

Harry Wharton glanced round. "Coming?" he asked. "We'll help you get ready, and—"

"Don't be a fool! I think it had better be half-past twelve—not twelve, half-past!" said Bunter. "That will be time to lunch on the plane. Tell them half-past twelve! Now shut up!"

"You blithering owl—"

Snore!

Harry Wharton followed his friends. Prompt at seven-thirty the plane took off. It was three hours later that Billy Bunter rolled out of bed. He saved some time on washing, but breakfast was a rather lengthy process, and it was nearly twelve when the fat Owl rolled out into the sunshine. Like Moses of old, he looked this way and that way, but there were no Greyfriars fellows to be seen. Puzzled, Bunter rolled down to the landing-ground.

They could hardly have started, when he had told them distinctly that he would not be ready till half-past twelve. Billy Bunter blinked round, and blinked up at the blue sky. He failed to spot the plane there—which was not surprising, as it was more than a hundred miles away.

"Beasts!" ejaculated Bunter.

And he rolled back to the hotel to find comfort in lunch. Fortunately, there was ample comfort in that.

GUSSY'S Latest Love Affair!

Why did Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, the swell of St. Jim's, waste his money on unwanted cigarettes, cigars and tobacco? He was in love with the girl in a tobacconist's shop! Not once but many times has Gussy fallen for the charms of the fair sex, but his latest love affair adds no little gaiety to life at St. Jim's. Here is a laugh-a-line yarn that every "Magnet" reader will enjoy!

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THE NINETEENTH CHAPTER.

Rescue From the Sky!

"WHAT'S that?"

"Corsica!"

"The island of the Corsican Brothers, and the jolly old vendetta! We'll have a vac in Corsica some day, you fellows."

The Greyfriars fellows were looking from the windows of the passengers' cabin on the Gloria plane. All eyes were turned on the hilltops of Corsica, rising from the sea.

It had been a glorious day. January on the sunny Riviera was rather different from that month at home. There was brilliant sunshine all the time; the skies were almost cloudless, and the sea rolled bright and blue. Glimpses of the French and Italian coasts, a glimpse of Elba, and now the mountains of Corsica—it was rather a lot to pack into a day's trip! The

Greyfriars fellows enjoyed every minute of it.

Mr. Vernon-Smith did not look out at the scenery very much. He knew Marseilles and Leghorn by heart. He had probably forgotten that Napoleon Bonaparte had ever been shut up in Elba, and would not have been interested if he had remembered. He had never heard of the Corsican Brothers, and probably not of the vendetta. He was enjoying the trip in his own way, with a pile of papers on the table in front of him, cogitating over the varied attractions of Hanky-Panky tin shares, and Verree Wonkeo Gold Mines. During the day he had sent several wireless messages off, no doubt in connection with his extensive financial operations.

Now, while the Famous Five watched Corsica rising from the blue sea, the Bounder had dropped into the chair by his father's side. He had sat there, silent, for about half an hour, while the millionaire went through one dry-looking paper after another. But Mr. Vernon-Smith became aware of him at last, and glanced round at him.

The Bounder smiled, with a touch of sarcasm.

"Got a minute, dad?" he asked.

"Two or three, if you like," answered Mr. Vernon-Smith generously.

Smithy grinned.

"We're clearing off home the day after to-morrow," he said. "Look here, father, you know what that chap Compton did for me. What are you going to do for him?"

"Anything he cares to ask, Herbert." "Rot!" said the Bounder. "He's not the chap to ask anything—or to take it, if offered."

"Then what—"

"You've seen that letter he sent Wharton. You've always liked and trusted the chap himself, if you had doubts about his uncle. But from that letter, you can see that the jolly old captain has turned over a new leaf, whatever he may have dabbled in."

"I can see that the boy believes so, Herbert," said Mr. Vernon-Smith dryly. "A splendid lad, with a rather trusting nature!"

"It's square!" said the Bounder obstinately. "The man's a bit of a tough nut; but I tell you, father, it's square. Let him have the Eastern Queen."

Mr. Vernon-Smith looked very grave. "Look what a chance it would be for him and for Compton!" urged the Bounder. "If you could make up your mind to trust him—"

"I should do so, for the boy's sake, Herbert, if I had any proof—definite proof—that the boy's belief in his new ways is well founded," said Mr. Vernon-Smith. "It would be, as you say, a chance for him, and a good prospect for the boy to sail with him, and succeed to a command in his turn when the time came. But I cannot give the command of a ship to a man of whom I am not sure."

"If you get in touch with them, and find the Firefly tramping for cargo—"

"A very unlikely contingency!" said the millionaire dryly. "The boy was in earnest, and possibly his uncle; but I formed my judgment of the crew, Herbert, especially of the man Rawlings. Unless I am mistaken in my judgment of them, they are more likely to throw Captain Compton over the side than to follow him in the paths of honest trade."

Smithy started.

"Father, you—you don't think it possible—"

The millionaire shrugged his plump shoulders.

"I think it extremely probable that, if Captain Compton was in earnest, as his nephew obviously believed, he had had trouble with that crew of rogues and rascals very soon after he sailed," he answered.

"And—and Compton," muttered the Bounder, his face pale—"one of the best fellows that ever breathed; the fellow who risked his life to pull me out of the sea—if anything's happened to him—"

"I shall make it a point to inquire what has become of the Firefly, Herbert, when we return home," said Mr. Vernon-Smith. "But if Captain Compton is really following the new course his nephew believes, I doubt very

"Some fishermen, waving to the plane," said the Bounder. "I dare say they don't often see one here."

"I can't see a boat," said Harry. "It's odd. There's certainly somebody on that rock, and it's miles out. Nobody could have got there by swimming, but I can't see anything of a boat."

"By gum! Some shipwrecked Corsican fishermen, perhaps!" said Frank Nugent. "There's no boat; we should see it easier than the men. There's two of them."

"But there's been no rough weather since that storm when Compton picked Smithy up," said Johnny Bull.

"Well, that jolly well looks like a signal of distress, anyhow," said Bob.

COME INTO THE OFFICE, BOYS AND GIRLS!

WELL, here we are again, chums, and everybody feeling merry and bright, I hope!

You've all had time to get over Christmas by now, what? It's a long time to wait for the jolly old festive season, isn't it? And it passes by like a flash. Why worry? Christmas is not the only jolly time in the year!

There's another good time coming for MAGNET readers, and it's not far distant, either—in fact, only two weeks from now.

Last week, if you remember, I dropped a hint that there were some

REALLY STUNNING FREE GIFTS

on the way for MAGNET readers. And so there are! I can guess full well how anxious you all are to learn the nature of these FREE GIFTS.

Well, I'm going to ask you to be patient for one more week, and then I'll "spill the beans," as our American friend, Fisher T. Fish, would say.

To mark this great occasion, Frank Richards is writing a super series of Greyfriars yarns that is going to take you all by storm! I need only tell you that Harry Wharton & Co. declare a "stay-in" strike, and you will quickly gather that thrills and excitement will follow in quick succession.

Watch out, then, for next week's Chat, in which full particulars will be given concerning this

GRAND TREAT!

As there is bound to be a record rush for this particular FREE GIFT issue, I strongly advise my chums to order their copy in good time. I should not feel happy—and neither would you—if you failed to secure this

BUMPER FREE GIFT ISSUE.

much whether he will be found on board, or the boy, either."

"Oh!" muttered Smithy.

He rose from the chair and moved away, with a troubled brow.

Mr. Vernon-Smith glanced after him for a moment, and then resumed his papers.

Smithy joined the bunch of juniors looking down from the windows.

Bob Cherry turned to him.

"Got your field-glasses, Smithy?" he asked.

"Anything to see?" asked the Bounder, as he unsung the glasses.

"Well, there's something down there," said Bob, pointing to a dim blur on the sea at a distance from the Corsican hill-tops. "Looks to me like a flag or something."

"It's a signal," said Harry Wharton. "It's somebody standing on a rock and waving something."

I have still a short space left at my disposal, and I'll devote it to a brief mention of next week's cover-to-cover story of your old favourites—Harry Wharton & Co., of Greyfriars.

This week sees a real thrilling wind-up of our popular smuggling series. The Greyfriars cruisers are once more back at school, after having spent a most exciting time aboard Captain Compton's steam yacht, Firefly, and lessons are the order of the day.

But the new term is to open with a sensation! They say wonders will never cease, and neither will they, as far as Billy Bunter, the prize porpoise of the Greyfriars Remove, is concerned.

Grip your chairs tight, chums, while I some news impart! Billy Bunter is in possession of a huge tuck hamper filled to the brim with good things, and he's invited his schoolfellows to the spread. Isn't this enough to rouse your interest? Laugh? You'll be tickled to death with the amusing and amazing situations which arise in:

"BILLY BUNTER'S HOUSE-WARMING!"

By Frank Richards,

next Saturday's rousing long complete story of the chums of Greyfriars. And need I mention that the "Greyfriars Herald" and our Greyfriars Rhymester's contribution will be well up to standard?

My final words of advice are stick to the MAGNET and make sure of the MAGNIFICENT FREE GIFTS that will be coming your way in a fortnight's time!

YOUR EDITOR.

"The lookfulness is terrific!" declared Hurree Jamset Ram Singh.

Herbert Vernon-Smith stared down, not very attentively. He was thinking of Valentine Compton and of what his father had said. It had not occurred to him before that the schoolboy smuggler, in sailing on his new tack, might have sailed into deadly peril, but he thought of it now. He knew that his father was right, and it was a deep weight on his mind and his heart. His glance at the rocks, blurring the sea far below the plane, was careless enough.

But it grew more attentive. Seen from above, the rocks were spread out in full view, and had a boat been there, it could not have been unseen.

There was no boat, but there were two human figures on the low rocks.

One of them—a burly figure—stood gazing up at the sky, leaning one hand on the MAGNET LIBRARY.—No. 1,509.

on a rock as if for support. The other—evidently younger—had clambered to the highest point of the rocky islet, and was waving something in his hand; it looked like a torn blanket.

Plainly enough, he was attempting to signal to the plane passing above. The distance was too great for recognition, but it seemed to the Bounder that there was something vaguely familiar in that stalwart, boyish figure waving from the rock.

All the juniors were looking serious now. It was impossible for the plane to descend to the rescue; but if there were hapless castaways on the rock, lives might be saved by sending help. Smithy, as he realised it, dismissed the matter that was troubling his mind.

He opened the glasses, and, with some difficulty, focused them on the rock. What had been dim and distant rushed into sudden clear view.

The Bounder gave a startled cry. He staggered, and caught at Wharton's shoulder. The field-glasses dropped from his hand with a crash to the cabin floor.

"Smithy," exclaimed Harry, "what did—"

"What—" gasped Bob Smithy did not answer them. His face was like chalk. He leaped back to Mr. Vernon-Smith's table. Three or four documents fluttered away as he grasped the millionaire by the shoulder.

"What the dooce—" ejaculated Mr. Vernon-Smith.

"Father—" panted the Bounder. "What's the matter? What—" Mr. Vernon-Smith stared blankly at his son's white, excited face.

"Compton!" panted the Bounder. "Compton of the Fifth—and his uncle—on that rock—"

"What!" stuttered Mr. Vernon-Smith. "Are you dreaming, Herbert? What are—"

The Bounder, in his excitement, shook him by a plump shoulder.

"I tell you, it's Compton!" he almost shrieked. "They've been stranded there! Compton, I tell you, and he looks—he looks—"

"Compton!" gasped Harry Wharton. "Compton of the Fifth!" yelled Bob Cherry.

"Good gad!" ejaculated Mr. Vernon-Smith.

Every eye was fixed on the figures on the rock. The Bounder's statement that the fellow waving the signal was Compton of the Fifth fairly astounded the Famous Five.

Mr. Vernon-Smith grabbed the field-glasses.

"Good gad!" he repeated blankly.

The glasses passed from hand to hand. It was Valentine Compton, and, seen clearly through the powerful glasses, his handsome face was white, drawn, haggard—the face of one who had suffered and started. The other, whom the juniors had last seen, a man

of iron strength, on the bridge of the Firefly, was leaning on a rock from exhaustion as he gazed upward with haggard eyes at the plane.

"Father," almost groaned the Bounder, "we've got to save them!"

"We have the wireless, my boy," said Mr. Vernon-Smith quietly. "In twenty minutes from now a fast steamer will put out from Ajaccio to pick them up and bring them on to Villefranche. We can signal to them that they are seen and that help is coming. In two hours they will be taken off that rock, and will be safe and sound. I have only to give the orders."

The millionaire hurried away.

The plane circled low over the rock—so low that Valentine Compton could see the faces of his Greyfriars friends while the wireless was tapping out its message. The juniors saw Compton of the Fifth smile—his old pleasant smile. For the next two hours their eyes were hardly off him for a moment. The pilot, at Mr. Vernon-Smith's orders, circled over the rock, keeping in sight of the castaways—till a blur of smoke came up out of the south, and a fast steamer from Ajaccio shot into sight.

The millionaire's instructions, tapped out through space, had been promptly obeyed. With eager eyes the Greyfriars fellows watched the boat from the Corsican steamer pull for the lonely rock, watched the castaways taken on board, and watched the steamer set a northerly course.

Sunset, deepened into dark as the plane flew homeward. Somewhere on the shadowed sea below the steamer was throbbing.

Harry Wharton & Co., peering through the deep dusk, glimpsed the lights below—rapidly falling behind.

The Bounder joined them with a grin on his face.

"Compton says—" he began.

The chums of the Remove jumped.

"Compton says—" repeated Wharton blankly. "How the dickens—"

The Bounder chuckled.

"They've got wireless on the steamer, and we've got a message through," he explained. "The jolly old marvels of modern science, my beloved 'earers! Compton says they've been jolly short of grub, but they're all right now—right as rain—and he was never so pleased in his life to see anybody, as he was to see our chivvies looking down at him on that rock!"

"Good old Compton!" said Bob Cherry. "Thank goodness we came on this trip to-day, Smithy, and wandered round off the beaten routes!"

"The thankfulness is terrific!"

"And we shall see old Compton in the morning!" said Smithy. "Ripping, isn't it?"

"The ripfulness is—"

"Terrific and preposterous!" chuckled Bob Cherry.

The Famous Five looked merry and bright as they met on the platform of Lantham Junction on their way back to Greyfriars for the first day of the new term. And as Smithy was spotted in the crowd, Bob Cherry roared to him, and the Bounder came up with a cheery grin. And a fat figure came rolling up with a glimmer of spectacles.

"I say, you fellows! Here we are again!" said Billy Bunter. "I say, have you fellows seen Compton of the Fifth?"

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared the six juniors.

Bunter blinked at them.

"Blessed if I see anything to cackle at!" he snapped. "I say, I want to know if Compton's on our train. We had the hols with him, you know, and the fact is, I'm going to be rather pally with him this term."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I can't find him on the platform," said Bunter. "I asked Coker of the Fifth if he'd seen him, and the beast knocked my hat off—"

"Good!" said Bob Cherry. "I'll knock it off again!"

"Beast!"

Billy Bunter dodged the exuberant Bob, and proceeded to hunt along the platform for Compton of the Fifth.

But he was not likely, in the circumstances, to have much luck!

"Sorry old Compton isn't coming back this term," remarked Bob Cherry, when the fat Owl had rolled away. "What's the latest news, Smithy—I suppose you know?"

The Bounder nodded and smiled.

"Yes—Captain Compton is in Liverpool now, taking over the command of the Eastern Queen—the pater's biggest ship—and Compton's sailing with him, this jolly old blessed day as ever was!" he answered.

"Good luck to him!" said Harry Wharton.

"Hear, hear!" agreed the Co.

"Hallo, hallo, hallo! Here's the train!"

The Removites packed in. A fat face and a big pair of spectacles blinked in after them.

"I say, you fellows—"

"Roll in, Bunter—just room!" said Bob.

"I haven't found Compton—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Beasts!"

Doors slammed along the train. It rolled off with the Greyfriars crowd for the school. Billy Bunter was left on the platform at Lantham—still in search of Compton of the Fifth!

THE END.

(Who says another yarn featuring the fat and fatuous Billy Bunter? Well, look out for next week's great story: "BILLY BUNTER'S HOUSE-WARMING!" It's screamingly funny. And don't forget that next Saturday's MAGNET will contain full particulars of our topping FREE GIFTS!)

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