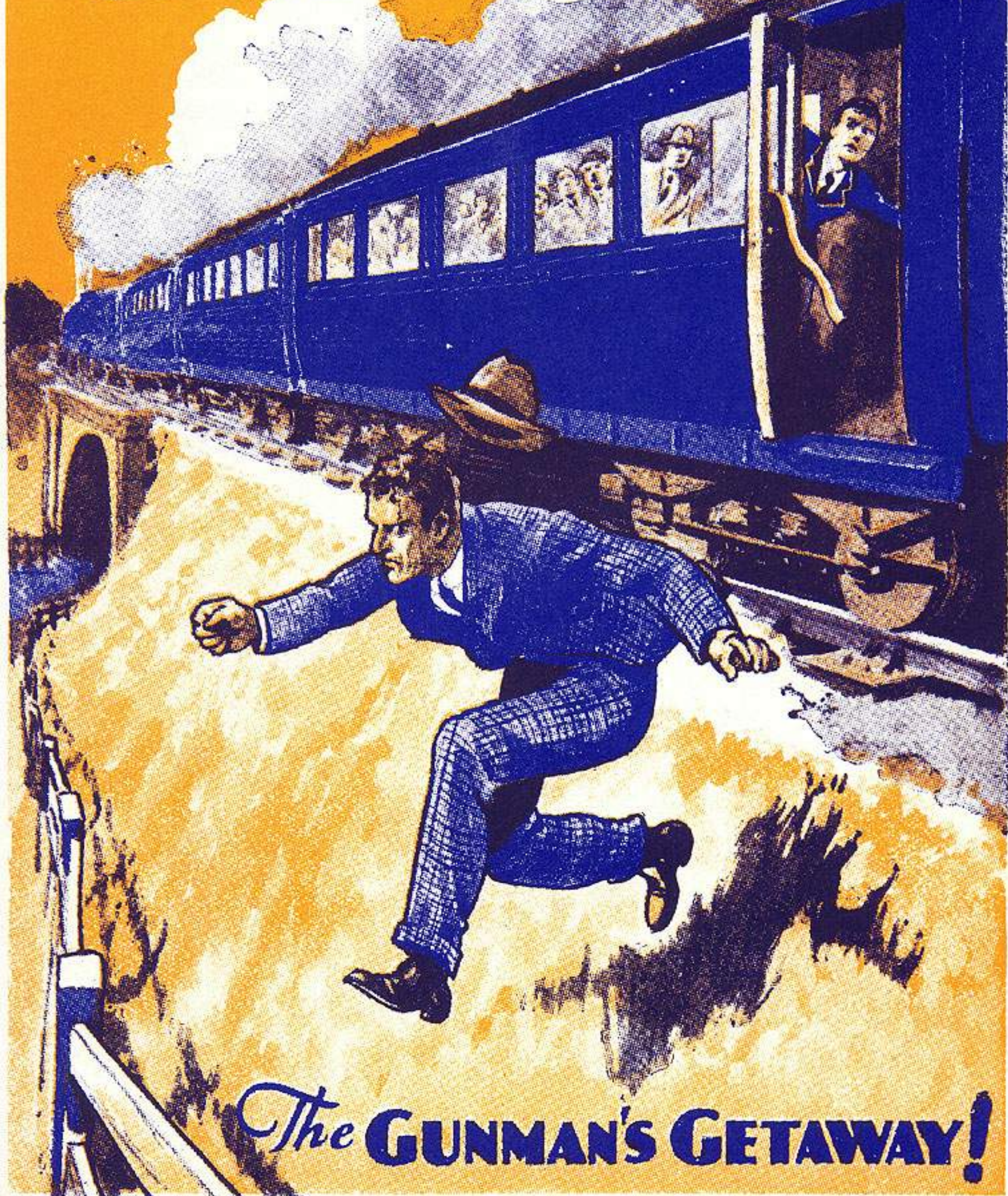


BILLY BUNTER'S OWN PAPER!

The Magnet 2^d



The **GUNMAN'S GETAWAY!**

YOUR EDITOR INVITES YOU TO—



COME INTO the OFFICE, BOYS—AND GIRLS!

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

IT isn't often that I get stumped for a reply to a reader's query (touch wood); but this week I must admit that W. Vaux, of Shropshire, has got me beat. He asks me if I know roughly how many Spanish and French ships were wrecked in the Lizard district of Cornwall during 1784, also if one of the Spanish ships contained bullion which was to be deposited in London during the unsettled state in Spain, and if so, was any attempt made to salvage the vessel. I am sorry, my Shropshire chum, but I am afraid I cannot give any information about the ships. During 1759-1788 the reigning King in Spain seems to have been Charles III who hated England, so it seems unlikely that bullion would be brought to London from Spain. I suggest my chum should get hold of a book of Spanish history from a Public Library. This same reader also wants to know the name of the sister ship to the Queen Mary now in course of construction. No name has yet been definitely decided upon for the No. 252, although Queen Elizabeth has been suggested.

The next letter comes from R. Shepherd, of Harringay, N.4, who, after stating that he has been a reader of the MAGNET for twenty years and that the Old Paper tops perfection, asks me how often they revise

THE STATUTES OF ENGLAND,

and where may they be seen other than in the British Museum?

A Chronological Table and Index of the Statutes which are still law is annually published under the direction of the Statute Law Committee. This table shows how far any enactment has been repealed or amended. I cannot say where these Statutes can be seen as they are more or less kept private.

Maurice Dearman, of Egham, Surrey, has fired in three queries, the answers to which will take up a great deal of my chat. As I have a full page at my disposal I can spare the room. Incidentally, the answers to the questions may be of interest to a great number of readers.

The first piece of information asked for concerns the

KU-KLUX-KLAN

Well, here goes, Maurice. The first organisation of the Ku-Klux-Klan in America was the outgrowth of tense feeling in the South during the reconstruction period succeeding the Civil War. It was a secret association of southern Whites united for self protection against the recently emancipated negroes in 1865-76. The second organisation, known as the Knights of the Ku-Klux-Klan, was formed by W. Joseph Simmons, a preacher, travelling salesman and experienced promoter of fraternal orders, on Thanksgiving Night in 1915. This was legally established by a charter and is known as a high-class, mystical, social, patriotic and benevolent association, and is devoted to the sacred duty of protecting womanhood, and to the idea of the Fatherhood

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of God, Brotherhood of man and pure Americanism.

The next question asked is what is the meaning of

TOC H.

Toc H. is a British social organisation. In 1915—the Great War period—there was established in Poperinghe, the well-known British billet and rest town in the Ypres area, a church institute known as Talbot House in memory of a fallen officer, G. W. L. Talbot, son of the bishop of Winchester. It was used as a club and rest centre by men returned from the trenches. Soon the name was universally known as Toc H. from the British Expeditionary Force telegraphic abbreviation of Talbot House.

After the war, the Toc H. Association was formed, and a fellowship of many thousands of young men was created, pledged to help one another and to study social, religious and civic conditions. Toc H. promotes clubs and hostels, and there are three London centres, one in Manchester, and over seventy branches. In 1921 money was provided to found three memorial chaplaincies.

Lastly, Maurice asks me whether there was a

MASSACRE OF ST. BARTHOLOMEW?

The Massacre of St. Bartholomew was the name given to the Massacre of the Huguenots, which began in Paris on St. Bartholomew's Day—August 24th, 1572.

So much for that little lot!

Here's a curious query from "Puzzled," of Leeds. He asks me to tell him something about

"DEATH VALLEY OSTRICH."

This peculiar name is given to a curious wood formation in Death Valley, in the Californian Desert. It takes the form of a giant ostrich looking over the desert. But no human hand fashioned this marvellous carving. It is an entirely natural formation.

Death Valley is the lowest and hottest part of North America, and is 250 feet below sea level. Yet, despite this, fresh water fish are found living there! You can also find "lilies of the desert" more than twice the height of a man! This is the name given to the Yucca and Sotol plants, which belong to the lily family and bear white blossoms.

Talking about Western America, do you know that there are vast tracts of land near the Mexican border that haven't been surveyed yet? Such a place is

LOST VALLEY

which I was told about some time ago. A traveller who found his way there describes it as a fertile valley half in America and half in Mexico. No one lives there, although there is good soil

and underground water, and Indian relics lying around. What's more, anyone can settle there by leasing ground from the American government for as little as 5d. or 6d. per acre per year! If the government should want your land at the expiry of the lease, they will pay you for any improvements you have made.

Sounds pretty good, doesn't it? But you're right—there's a snag in it. It's seven miles from the nearest highway—and those seven miles take some covering, for the valley is hemmed in by mighty mountains which are pretty near impassable, and that's why so few people have ever set foot in Lost Valley. In years to come, perhaps, a road may be constructed through it, but until that is done, Lost Valley is likely to remain one of the loneliest places in the world.

HERE is an interesting paragraph which I came across the other day. It proves that

DEAD MEN CAN TELL TALES!

On an island off the coast of Georgia, United States, workmen were constructing a new airport. In the course of excavation work they came across the skeletons of a long-dead race of people. And the teeth of all these men were perfect—much more perfect than people's teeth are to-day. Similar skeletons have been found on the mainland, but in these cases the teeth showed that the long-dead people suffered from the same dental troubles as people do now.

Obviously, say the scientists, it was the food and conditions of life of the islanders which kept their teeth in such perfect condition. So now they are setting to work to find out as much as they can concerning the dead men, hoping that they will solve the secret of how to keep modern people's teeth perfect.

GEE, I'd almost forgotten to say a word or two about next week's

BILL O' FARE!

First and foremost on the menu, of course, is the grand, long complete yarn dealing with the further exciting holiday adventures of Harry Wharton & Co. The title of the story:

"THE BOUNDER'S PERIL!"

By Frank Richards

will give you some idea of the plot. Billy Bunter, as usual, plays no small part. Having hooked on to Vernon-Smith, the prize porpoise of the Remora fancied himself in clover; but the Bounder's other guests—Ponsonby & Co., of Highcliffe—have put quite a different complexion on affairs. But Bunter's troubles are nothing compared to those of Vernon-Smith. Haunted by the thoughts of the gun-man who persists in dogging his father's footsteps, the Bounder determines to watch over the millionaire's safety—a perilous undertaking! But Smithy has a nerve of iron as you will agree when you read this all-thrilling yarn. By way of a light relief, you can then turn to the "Greyfriars Herald" and laugh over the amusing antics of Doctor Birchamall, of St. Sam's, while the other interesting tit-bits in this feature will tell you all the news of Greyfriars in a nut-shell. The Greyfriars Rhymester winds up this bumper programme with another of his excellent poems, choosing for his subject, Tom Brown, from 'Way Down Under. Be sure to order your copy early.

YOUR EDITOR

Three times, in little more than a week, an attempt has been made on the life of Mr. Samuel Vernon-Smith, the millionaire. What is the motive of the mysterious sniper?

The SHADOWED MILLIONAIRE!



Mr. Vernon-Smith was at the mercy of the desperado. A movement, and the automatic was ready to whip into sight. Then, suddenly, the door behind the Italian slid open and Herbert Vernon-Smith stepped into the carriage!

THE FIRST CHAPTER.

Dropped On!

"THAT chap's up to something!" said Harry Wharton.

Hurree Jamset Ram Singh nodded his dusky head.

"The upfulness is terrific!" he agreed. "But what?" asked Harry.

The two Greyfriars juniors were considerably puzzled.

Sitting on a massive, jutting branch of a big oak, a dozen feet over the broad country road, they stared down—in surprise and perplexity.

On that sunny afternoon in the Easter holidays, they had walked out of Wharton Lodge, up the Winford road. They were expecting Bob Cherry that afternoon, but Bob Cherry had not yet arrived. Half-way between Wharton Lodge and the town they had clambered on that branch of the big oak, partly for a rest in the shade, partly to scan the road towards Wimford and see whether Bob was coming.

Nothing was in view from the direction of Wimford, but from the other direction, that of distant London, came the rapid chug-chugging of a motor-bike.

They glanced at it as it came whizzing along in a cloud of dust, driven at a terrific burst of speed.

They expected it to pass like a flash and vanish towards Wimford. Instead of which it roared to a halt on the opposite side of the road, where a cart-track jutted off and led away through the Surrey woods.

The motor-cyclist jumped off and whirled his machine round the corner into the narrow, rutty track, where he left it.

Then he ran back into the road and stood staring for a moment in the direction from which he had come. Then he

shot a swift, searching glance round him, obviously to ascertain whether anyone was in sight.

As he did not lift his glance to the branches of the trees along the road, he naturally did not see the two schoolboys sitting high up on the oak.

He ran back to his machine and lifted something from it—and stepped to a tree at the corner of the track. Staring at him across the wide road, the two astonished juniors could see that he was winding something round the trunk of a beech and securing it there.

His actions were swift. In a matter of seconds he stepped away from the beech with a coil in his hand, and now

Thrilling Holiday Adventures of HARRY WHARTON & CO., of GREYFRIARS.

the Greyfriars juniors, more and more amazed, could see what it was. It was a large coil of thick, but flexible wire.

With the coil in his hand he stood watching the road again, his whole attitude expressing intent eagerness.

That the man was "up" to something was quite clear, but it was difficult to see what. He had arrived on the spot at a tremendous burst of speed; now he stood motionless, waiting and watching. Evidently, he was watching for somebody he expected to follow the way he had come. But what his object was, was quite a mystery.

From the high oak branch the juniors could see little of his face under the peak of a cap pulled low. But what

they could see was darkly swarthy. They could guess that the man was a foreigner.

"What on earth's his game, Inky?" asked Harry Wharton. "He jolly well looks as if he means mischief—but what?"

"The esteemed goodness knows!" said Hurree Jamset Ram Singh, his dark eyes fixed in perplexity on the still figure across the road.

"Looks as if he put on a burst of speed to pass somebody, and now he's waiting for him to come up!" said Harry. "Can't be a jolly old motor-bandit, I suppose! What the thump is he going to do with that wire?"

Then, as a startling thought flashed into his mind, Wharton's face paled.

"Good heavens, Inky! He can't be a car-wrecker! It looks—"

Hurree Singh whistled softly.

"It looks—" he breathed.

A car rushed by—a little Austin, the driver glancing carelessly at the man by the roadside as he passed. It hummed on and disappeared.

The man had not stirred.

Harry Wharton's heart beat fast.

At this spot the shadow of the great oak, on which the two juniors were perched, fell across the road—a dusky bar in the April sunlight. Had the swarthy man selected the spot for that very reason? A wire stretched across the road in that dark bar of shadow would be unseen by a driver till he was too close to avoid disaster.

Was it possible?

Wharton remembered that he had seen something in the newspapers of some lunatics playing such deadly tricks on motorists. Could a sane man do such a dastardly thing? It was hard to believe—yet, if the man's actions did not mean that, what did they mean?

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If he was a car-wrecker, it was clearly some particular car for which he was watching. The Austin had passed in safety.

From the distance came the hum of a large car.

Far away down the road, two juniors spotted a handsome Rolls-Royce, coming on at a good speed.

Evidently, the swarthy man spotted it, too! He came across the road swiftly, uncoiling the wire as he ran.

"Inky!" gasped Wharton.

There was no doubt now.

The wire trailed in the dark bar of shadow across the road. It was black, and lay invisible.

The swarthy man reached the oak-tree, fairly under the eyes of the staring juniors.

Swiftly he ran the end of the wire round the oak trunk, as he had run the other end round the beech on the other side.

As he dragged it taut, the wire rose from the earth, stretching at the level of a couple of feet over the ground.

A few seconds more, and the end would have been twisted fast round the oak, and that deadly obstruction would have met the car full tilt as it came rushing on.

Harry Wharton set his teeth.

He understood it all now.

The desperate rascal had been following the Rolls; he had shot ahead at top speed, to lay this deadly trap, and the Rolls was coming on to destruction. A few seconds more, and the crash would come.

But those few seconds were enough for the captain of the Greyfriars Remore. He had been sitting astride the oak branch. Swiftly he grasped it with his hands and swung.

He was almost directly over the head of the swarthy rascal below. There was only one way to stop the dastardly work in time—and Harry Wharton acted without stopping to think. He dropped, and crashed fairly on the head of the man below.

Both his feet crashed on the peaked cap. The man, with a startled gasp, dropped the wire, staggering and falling, and Harry Wharton sprawled headlong over him.

"Cospetto!" came a gasping howl of surprise and rage from the swarthy man as he crumpled under the Greyfriars junior.

The wire, released, trailed in the dust of the road again. It was only just in time, for the Rolls was almost upon it. But Harry Wharton had no time to look at the oncoming car. The man under him twisted like a cat, and grasped him. A swarthy face, demonic with rage, was close to his as he was whirled over on the earth.

"Inky!" panted Wharton.

But he did not need to call.

The Nabob of Bhanipur was already dropping. He sprang to his chum's aid and grasped the swarthy rascal. The three of them rolled over together in the road, tangled in the furious struggle, as the chauffeur jammed on his brakes and the Rolls halted with its wheels on the wire.

THE SECOND CHAPTER.

Danger Ahead!

"LOOK here, father——"

"Nonsense!" said Mr. Vernon-Smith decisively.

Herbert Vernon-Smith, the Bounder of Greyfriars, grunted.

"I tell you——" he said.

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"Rubbish!" said Mr. Vernon-Smith. Smithy gave another angry grunt.

Sitting beside his father, in the magnificent Rolls, eating up the miles on the Surrey roads, the millionaire's son did not look as if he was enjoying the good things of life, which were in such ample measure.

His brows were knitted, and there was a shade of anxiety on his rather hard face.

As Tomlinson, the chauffeur, drove steadily on, the Bounder glanced from the car every now and then with a wary, suspicious eye, as if watchful for danger.

If there was danger on the road, Mr. Samuel Vernon-Smith did not heed it. He had a bundle of papers on his knees, and was deeply immersed in them. Seldom or never did Mr. Vernon-Smith forget business matters. The City was the place where he lived and moved and had his being, and when he was not there in the body he was there in the spirit.

Deep in business papers and abstruse financial calculations, Mr. Vernon-Smith did not notice the glorious April sunset over the woods; he did not notice the woods; he hardly noticed the change to the fresh country air from the mixture of dust and petrol that he was accustomed to breathe in the happy purlieus of the City. Indeed, he would have forgotten that his son was in the car with him, had Smithy kept silent.

Mr. Vernon-Smith was piling up immense wealth chiefly for that son, but in the entrancing process he often forgot his son's existence.

Smithy, however, was not silent. He was anxious for his father, if his father was not anxious for himself.

"Look here, listen a minute!" he snapped. "I tell you, that motor-bike was following us for ten miles or more."

"What motor-bike?" asked Mr. Vernon-Smith absently.

"I've told you three times——"

"Eh? Then don't tell me a fourth time, Herbert," said Mr. Vernon-Smith. "I've got to work through these papers before we get to Seahill Park, and it's not a long run down to Sussex. Look at the scenery, my boy. I believe it's very fine in this part of Surrey."

Mr. Vernon-Smith did not glance from the car to ascertain whether the scenery was fine or not. Skies of crimson and gold sweeping dusky woods had no appeal for him.

Neither had they much for the Bounder of Greyfriars. Anyhow, he did not look at the scenery. He jabbed at his father's arm, and the millionaire uttered an impatient exclamation as he dropped a paper.

"You've got to listen, father!" snapped the Bounder. "Have you forgotten that a gunman has taken pot-shots at you three times in the last week?"

"A miss is as good as a mile, Herbert. Pick up that paper."

"He mayn't miss every time!" growled the Bounder. "I shot up to London this morning from Seahill Park, without stopping for breakfast, when I saw in the paper that that villain had potted at you a third time."

"Quite unnecessary, my boy!" said Mr. Vernon-Smith, though his tone was less impatient as he spoke. "I don't want that affair to spoil your Easter holiday."

"Blow my Easter holiday!" growled Smithy.

"Well, you have guests at Seahill Park, Herbert—the Highcliffe boys.

You must look after your guests a little."

"Pon & Co. can go and eat coke, for all I care! So can Bunter. Bother the lot of them!" said the Bounder. "I dare say they've got on all right without me; in fact, I've no doubt the Highcliffe fellows have had a happy day ragging that fat ass, Bunter, while I was off the scene."

Mr. Vernon-Smith frowned.

"You must not permit that, Herbert. The boy Bunter may have ways you don't like——"

"He has—lots!"

"But you must not forget that he saved my life when I was fired at the day I came to fetch you away from Greyfriars. Give him as good a time as you can, Herbert."

"I'm feeding the fat brute up to the chin; that's all he wants!" grunted the Bounder. "But never mind him. I tell you that motor-bike was following us a good ten miles, and then——"

"Well, well, now it is gone!" said Mr. Vernon-Smith. "There must be some tens of thousands of motor-bicycles on the roads to-day, Herbert."

"That one was following us," said Smithy obstinately. "I'm sure of it. I believe I made out that the man riding it was a foreigner, and you know that the gunman who potted at you was an Italian. He's whizzed on ahead, but——"

"And he is gone!" said Mr. Vernon-Smith. "My dear Herbert, I have no doubt that the police will very soon secure that gunman—no doubt at all. I shall certainly not allow his antics to make the slightest difference to my habits. You must not be nervous for me, when I am not nervous for myself. What are you looking at now?" he added, as the Bounder, turning his head, stared at a park wall by the roadside. He laughed. "You must not fancy a gunman behind every wall, Herbert."

"That's Wharton's place," grunted the Bounder.

"Oh!" Mr. Vernon-Smith glanced out. "Is that Wharton Lodge? I could wish, Herbert, that you had Wharton and some of his friends with you, instead of that rowdy Highcliffe set."

"I've told you I rowed with that mob at the end of the term!" grunted the Bounder, and he gave Wharton Lodge a scowl as the car buzzed past.

Mr. Vernon-Smith shrugged his plump shoulders and dropped his gaze to his papers again. Smithy stared at the trees that lined the country road on either side. Far ahead, a blur of smoke on the sunny sky told where Wimford lay. There was no sign of the motor-cyclist whose pursuit had roused the Bounder's suspicions, and who had vanished ahead of the car at a tremendous burst of speed.

Mr. Vernon-Smith had not even noticed the man at all. The millionaire's nerve was of iron. Thrice, in little more than a week, an unknown sniper had fired on him, and so long as the man was at large there was incessant danger of another attempt. But Samuel Vernon-Smith was deep in his financial documents, giving no thought to the mysterious sniper.

"Look here, father, we're getting close on Wimford," said Smithy. "Why not stop there and give the police a word about that man on the motor-bike?"

"Nonsense!"

"I feel sure——"

"Rubbish!"

Mr. Vernon-Smith answered tersely, without looking up from his papers. The

car glided on, Smithy watching the road uneasily. Suddenly he uttered a startled exclamation and jumped to his feet.

"What the thump—" he exclaimed. "Good gad! What is it now?" exclaimed Mr. Vernon-Smith, greatly annoyed. "Really, Herbert—" He broke off, staring at three struggling figures, tangled together in wild combat, that rolled from the roadside into the road, stirring a cloud of dust. "What—what— Take care, Tomlinson!"

The chauffeur was swerving to give the bunch of combatants a wide berth, as he saw them suddenly sprawling out from under the spreading branches of a great oak. Vernon-Smith stood staring. "Greyfriars men!" he gasped. "One of those chaps is Inky—Hurree Singh.

day of break-up at Greyfriars School. Mr. Vernon-Smith followed him more slowly, but quite forgetful of his precious papers now, which scattered unheeded on the floor of the car. And as he alighted, the millionaire dived a hand into an inside pocket of his coat for the revolver he carried there, and the April sunshine glinted on the barrel of the weapon as he hurried after his son.

THE THIRD CHAPTER.

A Narrow Escape!

HARRY WHARTON struggled desperately in the grasp of the swarthy car-wrecker. His dusky chum backed him up with every ounce of his strength.

then his flashing black eyes fixed on the halted car and the Bounder rushing towards him, the portly millionaire following.

He gave another backward spring to the trees at the roadside. The Bounder, heedless of the knife in his hand, even if he noticed it in the excitement of the moment, rushed straight at him.

"Herbert!" shouted Mr. Vernon-Smith. "Stop!"

"Smithy!" gasped Harry Wharton, amazed to see the Bounder of Greyfriars. Crack!

The millionaire levelled his revolver and fired at the panting, swarthy rascal at the roadside. But at the same moment, the Italian leaped back among the trees, and the bullet missed him by a yard.



There was only one way to foil the car-wrecker—and Harry Wharton acted without stopping to think. He dropped from the oak branch and crashed fairly on the head of the desperate rascal below. The man gave a startled gasp, dropped the wire, and fell. "Cospetto!" he panted.

"Herbert! Stop!" roared Mr. Vernon-Smith, as the Bounder was recklessly rushing after him.

Smithy halted reluctantly. His father passed him—his portly face set, hard and grim, the revolver lifted, his eyes on the figure dodging among the trees. He looked at that moment anything but a placid City man. He fired, and fired again, as the foreigner ran—and a wild yell came screeching back—and the breathless schoolboys saw the running man clap a hand to his face as he ran, and saw the spurt of blood through the swarthy fingers. The next moment the Italian vanished in the wood, and Mr. Vernon-Smith, standing under the big oak, fired twice into the thick greenery after him.

"Oh, my hat!" breathed Wharton.

He stared blankly at Smithy's father. He had seen Mr. Vernon-Smith a good many times; but he had never seen him like this before. He remembered that he had heard that Samuel Vernon-Smith had seen wild days in wild lands, in earlier years, and had handled deadly weapons in his time. Evidently he had not forgotten their use in his later days.

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The other must be Wharton. But who—who—that man's an Italian! Look! Stop, Tomlinson!" The Bounder yelled with excitement as he glimpsed the dark, swarthy, furious face of the man struggling with the two schoolboys. "That's the man, father—the man of the Lantham road!"

"Good gad!"

Tomlinson braked and halted the car. It was not till he had stopped that he spotted the wire, running from the beech on the left-hand side, trailing across in the shadow of the oak. He gave a startled gasp.

"Oh gum! Look!"

Herbert Vernon-Smith hurled the car door open before it had fairly stopped, and bounded out.

With blazing eyes, he rushed at the struggling bunch in the road—Harry Wharton, and Hurree Jamset Ram Singh, and the dark-faced foreigner who had sniped at the millionaire on the

But strong and sturdy as the two Greyfriars juniors were, the lithe, muscular Italian, active as a cat, was almost too much for them.

The three rolled and sprawled and panted, in a wild tangle, in a cloud of dust. None of them had eyes for the car, as it rushed up and came to a halt. The Italian was fighting like a tiger, kicking and clawing, and suddenly he wrenched himself partly loose, freed his right arm, and grabbed at the back of his trousers. Then there was a flash of steel in the sunshine, as a knife appeared in the rascal's hand.

"Look out, Inky!" panted Harry.

He eluded a reckless slash of the steel, but he had to let go, and the Italian, tearing loose from Hurree Jamset Ram Singh, leaped up and bounded back.

The two juniors staggered up, breathless, covered with dust, facing him. For a second the ruffian looked as if he would spring at them, knife in hand;

With an angry snort, the millionaire lowered the revolver and thrust it back under his coat, and turned to the group of schoolboys in the road.

"He's gone!" he growled. "But there's a mark on him to help the police to trace him, by gad! You were right, Herbert—that is the man!"

"And it's the man who was on the motor-bike behind us!" said the Bounder. "There's his machine!" He pointed to the motor-cycle in the cart-track by the road. "He's had to leave it."

"That will help the police, too!"

Mr. Vernon-Smith looked at Harry Wharton and Hurree Janset Ram Singh. The Bounder eyed them curiously. Tomlinson was taking up the wire, coiling it as he did so.

"You are Greyfriars boys—friends of my son?" said Mr. Vernon-Smith. "What has happened here? Did that scoundrel—" He glanced at the coiling wire in the chauffeur's hands.

"If we'd hit this, sir—" muttered Tomlinson.

The Bounder whistled.

"That was the game!" he said. "Did you fellows stop him? I jolly well knew there was something on when he shot ahead of us, after following us for ten miles or more. You spotted him?"

"The spotfulness was terrific, my esteemed Smithy!" said Hurree Janset Ram Singh.

"But what—" exclaimed the millionaire.

Harry Wharton explained in a few words.

Grimmer and grimmer grew the brow of the millionaire as he listened.

"The scoundrel!" he breathed. "The villain! He knew that my son was in the car with me, and he—"

"And he would have had us both!" said the Bounder coolly. "You wouldn't have seen that wire in time, Tomlinson!"

"Not in that shadow, I'm afraid, sir!" said the chauffeur. "By gum! If we'd hit it fair and square—"

"You have probably saved three lives, Wharton!" said Mr. Vernon-Smith. "The car would have been wrecked!"

The dastardly villain cared nothing for my son, or for the chauffeur, so long as he got the man he wanted! Herbert, you shall not travel with me again until this is over."

"Rot!" said Herbert.

Harry Wharton smiled.

"Jolly lucky we happened to be here," he said. "We shouldn't have been, only we were looking for Bob Cherry to come along. We couldn't make out at first what that rotter was up to—but we guessed when he pulled the wire across the road. We had no idea it was your car coming, Mr. Vernon-Smith. But I saw something in the newspaper this morning—I suppose it's the same man that—"

"The same rascal!" said Mr. Vernon-Smith. "You have not been hurt, my boys?"

"Oh, no! That's all right. Only a bit rumped."

"The rightfulness is terrific, esteemed sahib," assure the Nabob of Bhanipur. "And it is a terrific and absurd pleasure to have prevented a tremendous and ludicrous crash!"

Mr. Vernon-Smith glanced at the shady woods that had swallowed the fleeing Italian from sight. Then he glanced at the motor-cycle.

"You can put that machine out of action, Tomlinson," he said. "The villain may venture to return for it when we are gone."

"Yes, sir!"

The chauffeur got busy with the motor-bike.

Mr. Vernon-Smith pursed his lips thoughtfully.

"I shall have to stop at the police station in Wimford, Herbert," he said. "I shall send you on in the car from there and come on later by train."

"I'll wait—"

"You will not!" said Mr. Vernon-Smith. "So long as this danger lasts I shall not allow you to travel with me again, I tell you."

"Look here—" growled the Bounder.

"Say no more, Herbert, my mind is quite made up on that point."

The Bounder grunted, but he was silent.

Mr. Vernon-Smith turned to Wharton and the nabob.

"You boys will be required to make a statement to the police," he said. "You had better come on with me in the car."

"Very well, sir!" said Harry.

And when Tomlinson was through with the motor-bike the chums of the Remove packed into the car with Smithy and his father, and rolled on to Wimford. Mr. Vernon-Smith gave them a gracious remark or two, and then became immersed in his financial documents again. The Bounder eyed them rather uncertainly. If they had forgotten the "row" on the last day of the term at Greyfriars, Smithy had not.

A quarter of an hour later they were in Wimford, interviewing Inspector Stacey at the police station. After which the Rolls rolled on with the Bounder for Sussex, and Harry Wharton and Hurree Janset Ram Singh walked to the railway station to ascertain whether Bob Cherry had arrived. But Bob, who seldom lost a train, seemed to have lost one after another that day, for they could hear nothing of him there—and they started to walk back to Wharton Lodge, considerably puzzled, and wondering what on earth had become of Bob Cherry.

THE FOURTH CHAPTER.

An Unexpected Meeting!

"I SAY, you fellows!"

Harry Wharton and Hurree Janset Ram Singh jumped simultaneously.

They had nearly reached Wharton Lodge, sauntering along at a leisurely pace in the bright April sunset, when a car came rolling on behind them, and slowed down. Other cars had passed them on the road, so they gave no particular heed to one more—till that unexpected fat voice hailing them made them jump and stare round.

A handsome Daimler stopped on the road. It was driven by a liveried chauffeur. From the car a fat face adorned by a large pair of spectacles grinned at the two juniors. They stared blankly at Billy Bunter, the fat ornament of the Greyfriars Remove.

"I say, you fellows, jolly glad to see you!" said the fat Owl of the Remove affably.

"You've got most of the gladness on your side, old fat man!" answered Harry Wharton. "What the dickens are you doing here?"

"Oh, I've given Bob a lift in my car—" said Bunter carelessly.

"The esteemed Cherry!" exclaimed Hurree Janset Ram Singh, catching sight of another passenger in the Daimler.

"Bob!" exclaimed Harry in astonishment.

Billy Bunter's fat face and fat head filled the window. He was pulled aside, and Bob Cherry looked out.

He grinned at his friends rather ruefully. Bob had, it appeared, been in the wars. His nose was swollen, and had evidently been exuding claret quite recently. There was a dark shade under one eye. His lip was cut. One ear was very red and a little swollen, and there were two or three bruises spotted about.

"Been scrapping, old chap?" asked Harry.

"Has the scrappfulness been terrific?" grinned the nabob.

"Yes! That fat idiot—" grunted Bob Cherry. "That pernicious porpoise—that footling freak—"

"Oh, really, Cherry!" squeaked Billy Bunter indignantly.

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"That burbling bandersnatch!" continued Bob Cherry. "That frumpious frog—"

"If that's the way you thank a fellow for giving you a lift a hundred miles and more—" hooted Bunter.

"Shut up, you fat frump! Jolly glad to see you fellows," said Bob. "I'm fearfully late, I know—all the fault of that poity grampus—"

"Beast!"

"You didn't come by train, after all?" asked Harry. "But what—"

"That barrel of blubber blew in at Cherry Place, when I was going to start for the station," explained Bob. "He was in this car, and I let him diddle me into coming in it, instead of going for the train. Like a silly ass, I fancied that he wasn't on the make, for once. I say, what does my nose look like?"

"A tomato, chiefly."

Bob rubbed it tenderly.

"I was taken in," he explained. "That fat frowster told me he was staying at a place called Seahill Park, that I'd never heard of before, and that it was a few miles off the way from Dorset here. I suppose it was really about forty miles off the way. I let the fozzling frog take me there, to come on here after, see?"

"You've been to Smithy's place?" exclaimed Harry Wharton.

"Oh! You know it's Smithy's place, do you?" said Bob. "Well, I didn't! But when we got in, I saw Larkin, Mr. Vernon-Smith's butler, and so I knew. The blithering bloater had diddled me into going to Smithy's place—"

"Oh, really, Cherry—"

"But why?" asked Harry, puzzled.

Bob gave a snort.

"Smithy's got a Highcliffe gang staying there—Pon and his friends! It seems that Smithy was called up to town to-day—and Pon & Co. were going to improve the shining hour by ragging that fat freak, while he was gone. They don't seem to like his company at Seahill Park."

"Rotten lot of cads, you know!" said Bunter, blinking from the car over Bob's shoulder. "They sat me in a puddle the day they came, and spoiled Smithy's trousers—I mean, my trousers—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Well, I jolly well made Ponsonby sit up for it!" said Bunter. "I ragged all his clothes in his room—mucked them all up, right and left—you should have seen them! Ho, he, he! And—would you believe it?—Pon had the cheek to pitch into me, only Smithy stopped him—I mean, I jolly soon knocked the cad down—"

"I can see you doing it!" grinned Wharton.

"So that's how it was!" said Bob, taking up the tale again. "I found that the fat scoundrel had pulled my leg into going with him to Smithy's place in Sussex—and, of course, I was dragged into a row with Pon & Co. They started on Bunter, so I started on them—and I had the four at once—and I can tell you, it was a scrap!"

"You look it!" agreed Wharton, laughing.

"Well, they look it, too!" said Bob, with satisfaction. "Four to one was pretty long odds—luckily they haven't any pluck. They were satisfied before I was. I fancy their features are worse than mine."

"Oh, my hat!" said Harry Wharton. "I wish I'd been there!"

"I wish you had!" said Bob, rubbing his nose. "So then I cleared off, and came on here, and that fat freak came, because he was funky of staying there

with the Highcliffe cads till Smithy came home—"

"You jolly well let me down!" yapped Bunter. "You might have stayed with me till that beast Smithy came back—"

"Yes, I can see myself sticking in Smithy's place without being asked!" growled Bob.

"I asked you!" said Bunter, with dignity.

"Fathead! So that's how I'm late," explained Bob. "Seahill Park was forty miles out of the way, if it was a foot—down on the Sussex coast. This is one of Mr. Vernon-Smith's cars—I believe he keeps a whole fleet of them—"

"Only four or five there," said Bunter. "Nothing like the lot we have at Bunter Court. I say, you fellows, hop in, and I'll run you on to your little place, Wharton. I suppose you can put me up for the night, old chap."

"Suppose again!" suggested Wharton.

"Oh, really, Wharton! After I've given your pal a lift for hundreds of miles—" said Bunter warmly.

"My dear ass, my little place isn't good enough for you!" said the captain of the Remove, shaking his head.

"Well, I can rough it," said Bunter.

"It's not the sort of place I'm accustomed to in the hols., of course; but, dash it all, I can rough it for one night. That's all right."

"You frabjous owl—"

"Beast!"

"Smithy's on his way home now, fathead," said Harry. "We met him and his father this afternoon, and we left him in Wimford an hour ago, starting back to Sussex."

"Oh!" said Bunter. "Oh! I see! I'm afraid I shan't be able to stay the night, Wharton! I don't want to hurt your feelings, old chap, but your place isn't quite what I'm used to. But I'll tell you what I'll do—I'll come in to supper, and go back to Sussex afterwards. I'd rather make sure that Smithy's in before I get back. The fact is, I'm hungry."

Harry Wharton laughed.

"You can come in and feed, you fat frump, if you clear off afterwards," he said.

Billy Bunter sniffed.

"If you put it like that, Wharton, I certainly shan't come!" he answered.

"Well, I do put it like that!"

"He, he, he! I don't mind your little joke, old chap! Hop in! I say, I'm fearfully hungry!"

And Harry Wharton and the nabob stepped in, and the chauffeur—one of Mr. Vernon-Smith's many chauffeurs—drove on to Wharton Lodge.

THE FIFTH CHAPTER.

Pon Plots a Plot!

HERBERT VERNON-SMITH grinned.

In the best circles, perhaps, a host did not grin at the sight of his guests with damaged and discoloured countenances. But Smithy grinned, evidently amused by the looks of Pon & Co.

Smithy liked the knuts of Highcliffe about as much as they liked him. It suited them to be together for the hols., that was all. The Bounder's unlimited cash was the magnet that drew Pon & Co. to Seahill Park—and Smithy was quite keen enough to be perfectly aware of it. But he wanted a "rowdy" holiday with a set of young blackguards by way of a change after enforced good behaviour at school—and for that purpose he could have made no better selection.

Standing in the hall at Seahill Park, with Larkin taking his hat and coat, Smithy looked at them—and grinned. They were dressed for dinner. So far as clothes went, Pon & Co. looked as elegant as ever. But their faces were decidedly decorative.

Cecil Ponsonby had a swollen nose. Gadsby had a darkened eye. Monson seemed to have a list to port in his jaw, which he moved with difficulty. Vava-sour was the least damaged—having taken the smallest part in the scrap with Bob Cherry. But he had several aches and pains, and a thickened ear.

"You fellows been scrappin'?" asked Smithy. "You must be frightfully keen on scrappin' if you've been goin' for one another."

"Nothin' of the sort!" snapped Ponsonby. "That fat fool Bunter—"

"What?" yelled the Bounder. "You haven't let Bunter handle you like that, have you? Oh, my hat!"

"No, you ass!" howled Ponsonby angrily. "That fat fool brought a young ruffian here, and—and—"

"That brute Cherry, of your Form at Greyfriars, Smithy!" said Gadsby, rubbing his eyes. "There was a fearful row!"

The Bounder stared.

"Cherry! Has Bob Cherry been here? What on earth brought him here?"

"That fat freak Bunter!" said Monson. "He cleared off in a car in the mornin', and came back with Cherry."

"Oh, my hat! Is he still here?"

"Oh, no! He cleared off again, and Bunter went with him," answered Gadsby.

"We gave him all he wanted, before he went," added Monson.

The Bounder laughed.

"You look as if he gave you more than you wanted," he said banteringly. "I suppose the long and the short of it is, that you started raggin' Bunter, after I was gone, and he had the big idea of gettin' Cherry here to handle you! Is that it?"

"Well, what did you want that frowsy fat freak here at all for?" grunted Ponsonby. "He's no use, and no ornament, that I know of."

"I don't want him here. My father asked me to stand him for the Easter hols, because he butted in, when that dago was potting at him, and made the brute miss!" answered Vernon-Smith. "The fat blighter traded on it, to land himself here for Easter. If he's cleared, so much the better. All the same it was rather thick to start raggin' the fat ass as soon as my back was turned."

"Well, if you don't want him, he's gone, and that's that!" said Gadsby.

The Bounder frowned. He had promised his father to stand the fat Owl for the holidays, and make the best of him. Mr. Vernon-Smith was grateful for Bunter's intervention on break-up day at Greyfriars, which had saved him from a whizzing bullet. The Bounder's chief feeling on the subject was annoyance at being landed with Bunter. Still, he had made a promise, and he had intended to keep it.

"My father will expect him here," he said, "and the pater will be down to-night some time. Still, I dare say he will blow in again. He can't have gone for good—unless he's stuck somebody else for the hols. Look here, no more rags on Bunter—I'd be glad to be shut of him, but my father's made a point of it, and I'm going to put up with him."

"My dear fellow," said Ponsonby, "if you make a point of it, of course, we'll regard him as the apple of our eye."

"Absolutely!" said Vavasour.

The Bounder nodded, and ran upstairs to change for dinner.

Pon & Co. exchanged glances when he disappeared.

"Think that fat freak will come back, Pon?" asked Vavasour.

"I shouldn't wonder," Ponsonby's eyes glittered. "If he does, we'll make him wish that he hadn't! I'm not standin' that fat scoundrel here."

"But Smithy—" said Gadsby dubiously.

"Hang Smithy!" growled Pon.

"Bet you he blows in again," said Monson. "He's only steerin' clear till Smithy gets back. He cleared off in one of the old bean's cars—and he's still got the car."

"Well, if he does—"

Buzzzzzz!

The telephone bell rang, in the cabinet adjoining the hall. Larkin came to take the call.

His voice reached the Highcliffe knuts, as they stood lounging round the log fire in the hall.

"Yes, Master Bunter! Larkin speaking."

Pon set his lips. Evidently it was Billy Bunter on the telephone. Larkin's voice went on:

"Yes, sir! Master Herbert came in about a quarter of an hour ago, sir."

Pon scowled, and the other three grinned. Clearly Billy Bunter wanted to make sure that the Bounder was there before he ventured back into the distinguished company of the knuts of Highcliffe.

"Yes, sir! I will tell Master Herbert!" said Larkin; and he put up the receiver, and came out of the cabinet.

Ponsonby called to him, as he went towards the staircase.

"Was that Bunter, Larkin?"

"Yes, sir!" answered the butler, glancing round. A faint smile hovered over his portly face.

Mr. Vernon-Smith's butler had been considerably shocked and scandalised by the hectic happenings at Seahill Park. But he had also been rather entertained by Billy Bunter's extraordinary idea of getting Bob Cherry there to deal with Smithy's other guests. He had been still more entertained by the sight of the four Highcliffians knocked out by one Greyfriars man.

Larkin was a well-trained butler; but his eyes glimmered, as they rested on Pon's nose and Gaddy's eye.

"Is he coming back?" snapped Ponsonby.

"Yes, sir!" answered Larkin. "He has asked me to tell Master Herbert that he is coming back in the car, and will arrive soon after ten."

Larkin mounted the stairs, to convey that message to the Bounder.

Pon's eyes gleamed under his scowling brows.

"So the fat cad's comin'!" he muttered. He lowered his voice. "Look here, it will be pretty dark at ten—and the gates here are a quarter of a mile from the house. Black as a hat under those trees along the avenue. Somethin' might happen to that fat rotter, on the drive—what?"

"Oh, rot!" said Gadsby uneasily. "Smithy will kick up a fuss—"

"Smithy can go and eat coke!" said Ponsonby coolly. "Smithy won't know what's on. Vav can get him playin' billiards after dinner—you can stick in and mark for them, Gaddy—that will keep Smithy busy—"

"But what—" asked Monson doubtfully.

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"You and I, old bean, can take a stroll on the avenue towards ten o'clock, and wait for the car. You stop the car, and keep the chauffeur talkin' for a minute or two—"

"Easy enough," said Monson; "but what—"

"And I step into the car, and roll Bunter out on his neck!" said Ponsonby. "I'll roll him into the pool—"

"Oh, gad! There'll be a row if you drown him."

"It's only a foot deep, fathcad! Ilo may get wet!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Mum's the word!" murmured Ponsonby, as Herbert Vernon-Smith appeared on the staircase. And the grinning knuts said no more, as the Bounder came down and joined them.

Pon & Co. were very bright and cheery at dinner. After that function was over, the party adjourned to the billiards-room, where there were coffee and cigarettes. Pon played a hundred up with the Bounder, and then left him to Vavasour.

It was a mild and balmy April evening. The french windows of the billiards-room stood wide open. While Vernon-Smith played billiards with Vavasour, and Gadsby looked on and marked for them, Pon and Monson lounged in the doorway and smoked cigarettes.

At the chime of ten, they exchanged a grin, and strolled out.

Herbert Vernon-Smith did not even glance at them as they went. The Bounder had no suspicion.

The play went on; but Gadsby was no longer watching it. Gaddy strolled to the french windows, and stood there, looking out, his hands in his pockets, and a grin on his face. On the open terrace before the house the spring starlight was bright; but under the heavy branches of the long avenue of oaks and beeches it was, as Ponsonby had said, as black as a hat.

Into that blackness Pon and Monson had disappeared, to walk as far as the ornamental pool, which was half-way to the gates and close by the avenue.

Gadsby, grinning, listened for the sound of a car—and for the yells of the hapless Owl of the Remove when he rolled into the water. He little guessed what was happening, under those dark branches, while he grinned and listened.

THE SIXTH CHAPTER.

To Go or Not to Go!

"THE grub's all right!"

Billy Bunter made that remark. For some little time the fat junior had been sitting in an armchair in the hall at Wharton Lodge, with a deeply thoughtful expression on his fat face. His remark showed on what an important subject his fat thoughts were running.

Harry Wharton, Hurree Singh and Bob Cherry were chatting in a group near the fire. They glanced round as Bunter spoke.

Colonel Wharton and Miss Wharton were in the library. The old Colonel had not been fearfully pleased to see Bunter, though he was civil. Aunt Amy had been as kind and amiable as usual. The three juniors were as amiable as possible, comforted by the knowledge that William George Bunter was taking his departure that evening. They were discussing the coming of Frank Nugent and Johnny Bull, which, for reasons unknown to Bunter, they seemed to be rather looking forward to.

Billy Bunter had parked an excellent meal—in fact, several one after another. He rested at his ease in a deep chair, and seemed disinclined to move—often Bunter's state after a meal. He blinked through his big spectacles at the three juniors, as they looked round at him.

As Bunter was going, Harry Wharton wanted to be as polite as possible. Still, he was wondering a little when the fat Owl was going to start. The car was waiting for him—it had come round to the door some time ago. But the Owl of the Remove seemed in no hurry. He came out of a deep reverie with the remark that the grub was all right.

"Quite all right!" added Bunter, as if to assure Wharton on that point. "And after all, old chap, if the grub's all right, everything's all right! What?"

"The allrightfulness is terrific!" assented Hurree Jamset Ram Singh, with a dusky smile.

Bunter sat up in the chair and blinked around him. It was rather a disparaging blink. Quite plainly, he was comparing Wharton's home with Smithy's magnificent place on the Sussex shore—to the disadvantage of the former. Colonel Wharton was far from being a millionaire like Mr. Vernon-Smith. There was solid comfort, but few signs of money splashed about.

"Of course," said Bunter thoughtfully, "this is a poky little place, after Smithy's tremendous mansion in Sussex, Wharton!"

"Must be!" agreed Harry politely. "I've never seen the tremendous mansion, but I've no doubt that this place would be lost in it, Bunter! Gratters on having such a tremendous place to spread yourself in for the hols."

"This hall," went on Bunter, "isn't much bigger than the telephone cabinet at Seahill Park. Your little park—what you call a park—he, he, he!—is hardly as large as the kitchen garden there."

"Carry on," said Harry, as the fat junior paused. "But your car's been waiting about half an hour, Bunter."

"Never mind about that," said Bunter. "The fact is, Wharton, old chap, that though your place is a poky little hole, compared with Smithy's, I'm not fearfully keen on going back there."

"I am!" said Harry.

"Eh?"

"Quite keen on your going back there, old fat man."

"Oh, really, Wharton! What I mean is," said Bunter, "the grub's all right, and that's the main thing. You don't have so many courses at dinner as Smithy does—and only Wells waiting at table, instead of a butler and half a dozen footmen—but after all, the grub itself is the chief thing, isn't it? Well, as I said, that's all right. I'm satisfied about that."

Hurree Jamset Ram Singh grinned a dusky grin, and Bob Cherry chuckled. They could see what was coming.

Harry Wharton looked fixedly at the fat Owl.

"Time's getting on, Bunter," he remarked.

"Oh, that's all right!" said Bunter. "The fact is, I'm not keen on Smithy's whacking place. You see, I'm used to the grand style at Bunter Court—it's not such a novelty to me, as it would be to you fellows. See?"

"The seefulness is terrific!" murmured the Nabob of Bhanipur.

"Humble as your place is, old chap, I could make myself quite comfortable here, I think—at least, for a few days!" said Bunter. "Your uncle's a bit of a grumpy old stick, but dash it all, I've



For a second, the swarthy rascal, knife in hand, looked as if he would spring at Harry Wharton and Hurree Singh. Then his flashing eyes alighted on the halted car and Vernon-Smith rushing towards him, with the portly millionaire following!

stood him before and I can stand him again. As for Smithy, if he wants me, he shouldn't have that Highcliffe crew at his place. He knows I bar Ponsonby. He can't complain if I turn him down, in the circumstances."

"I don't think he would weep bitter tears, if you did, old fat man!" said Bob Cherry solemnly. "He might even be pleased!"

"Oh, really, Cherry! Smithy's awfully keen to have me there—you see, it gives him a leg-up before the servants, to show off a fellow like me from his school."

"Oh crikey!"

"But I can't stand his Highcliffe friends," said Bunter firmly, "and I jolly well won't! Next time Smithy's away, they'll begin ragging again—and I can't always be dragging you in to whop them, Bob."

"You jolly well can't!" agreed Bob Cherry. "You wouldn't have got me there to-day, you fat villain, if you hadn't diddled me into going."

"Smithy's back now," went on Bunter, unheeding. "Larkin told me so on the phone. Still, I'm not keen. This is a twopenny-ha'penny little place compared with Seahill Park, but I can rough it a bit. Cut out and tell that chauffeur to run the car back to the garage, Harry, will you?"

"Eh?"

"I'm not going!" said Bunter. "I'll keep the car for a bit. It will be useful as your uncle has only one car, and it's rather a rotten old go-cart. Old Smith said I could use his cars, so I shall use this one, see? I dare say your uncle won't mind putting up the chauffeur for a few days, Wharton. You haven't much room here, but you can shove him in somewhere."

"Oh, my hat!"

"Only there's one thing we'd better discuss first," went on Bunter, blinking at the captain of the Greyfriars

Remove. "You fellows have just been talking about Nugent and Johnny Bull. Nugent's coming along to-morrow, isn't he?"

"Yes!"

"Well, I don't mind Nugent. He can come!" said Bunter.

"Thanks!" said Harry Wharton, with a deep sarcasm that was a sheer waste on William George Bunter.

"That's all right," said Bunter. "But about Bull—well, I'd rather you phoned him up and told him to put it off for a bit. I think you were saying he's coming in two or three days? Well, he's a bit of a hippopotamus, and I'd rather he came after I'm gone."

"He will come after you're gone," said Harry.

"You'll phone him, and make that clear?" asked Bunter.

"No need to phone—it's quite clear!" answered Harry. "You can't keep that car waiting outside much longer, Bunter."

"I've told you to send it back to the garage. Send Wells out to tell the man. I'm staying, old chap—but mind, it's understood that Bull doesn't come while I'm here. I see quite enough of Johnny Bull in term!" explained Bunter. "It's rather too thick to have to stand him in the hols as well. Leave him up in Yorkshire till I'm gone. Say, a week."

"A week?" repeated Harry.

"I think I can give you a week. I may be able to give you all Easter—I'll see. It depends a good deal on how I can fix up my engagements for the holidays. Anyhow, you can rely on a week."

"Is that all?" asked Harry.

"Yes, that's all. One of you fellows put the radio on, will you? And if you're going to jaw, go somewhere else."

Bunter settled back comfortably in

his armchair. The matter was settled, so far as Bunter was concerned.

It was not, however, settled, so far as Wharton was concerned.

"I'll step out and tell Mr. Vernon-Smith's chauffeur you're coming now, Bunter!" said Harry.

"Eh?" Bunter sat up again. "I'm not going, old chap!"

"You are!" said Wharton tersely. And he went out to speak to the waiting chauffeur.

Billy Bunter blinked after him as he went. Then he blinked at the grinning faces of Bob Cherry and the Nabob of Bhanipur.

"That silly ass doesn't seem to understand," said the fat Owl peevishly. "I say, Bob, you might hand me that cushion. Put it behind my head, will you?"

"Certainly!" answered Bob.

The cushion was about a foot out of Bunter's reach. But the fat Owl saw no reason for exerting himself to reach it. Bob Cherry, however, was more than willing to oblige.

He picked up the cushion, stepped to Bunter, and put it behind his head with a biff.

"Wow!" roared Bunter, as he rolled out of the armchair. "Ow! Wharrer you up to, you mad idiot? Yow-ow!"

"Have another?" asked Bob affably.

"Ow!" roared Bunter. "Beast!"

Harry Wharton came in again.

"Ready, Bunter?" he asked.

Billy Bunter scrambled up, his face red with wrath.

"Look here, Wharton—" he roared.

"Looking!" said Harry cheerfully.

"If that silly fathead is going to play silly tricks on a chap, I'm jolly well not staying here!" hooted Bunter.

"You can't expect it! Now—"

Harry Wharton laughed.

"Let's have this clear," he said. "If

Bob biffs you with that cushion again, you're going?"

"Yes, I jolly well am!"

"Biff him with the cushion, will you, Bob?"

"What-ho!"

"I—I—I say— Keep off, you silly idiot!" yelled Bunter, as Bob biffed with the cushion. "Stop him! Yaroooh!"

Biff, biff!

"Yow-ow-whoop! Keep off, you beast!"

Biff!

"Oh crikey! Yarooop!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Biff, biff, biff!

Bob Cherry was warming to the work. Billy Bunter dodged up and down, and round about, pursued by the biffing cushion. He was fairly driven out of the doorway at last. A last biff caught him as he went, and he yelled, and bolted for the car.

Harry Wharton, chuckling, took out his hat and coat. The fat junior glared at him from the car, with a glare that might have cracked his spectacles.

"Good-bye, Bunter!"

"Beast!"

And the car rolled away with Bunter for Sussex.

THE SEVENTH CHAPTER.

A Blow in the Dark!

"BLACK as a hat!" grunted Monson.

"All the better!" answered Ponsonby.

It was deeply dark, under the overhanging branches of the trees that shaded the long, wide avenue at Seahill Park.

The lighted windows of the mansion had disappeared behind the two Highcliffe fellows. The avenue seemed like a dark tunnel.

But a pale glimmer of water, through the old trees, revealed where the ornamental pool lay, a little to one side of the drive, and Ponsonby came to a halt.

"You stick here, Monson!" he said. "As soon as the car comes up from the gates, the chauffeur will see you, in the glare of the headlights. Wave to him and make him stop. I'll get farther on, and come up behind the car when it's stopped. If that fat ass sees you, he won't see me—till I bag him."

Monson chuckled.

"Smithy may get into a wax about it," he said.

"Let him!" said Ponsonby indifferently. "We're here to please ourselves, not to please that Greyfriars outsider. Like his cheek to fancy he can land that fat Greyfriars freak on us."

"Go it!" said Monson.

He remained standing in the dark avenue, ready to stop the car when it came. It was well after ten o'clock now, and Bunter had stated that he would be in soon after ten. He did not expect to have to wait long.

Ponsonby walked on down the avenue, about twenty yards farther. Bunter's car would pass him before it stopped; and when the dandy of Highcliffe came up from behind, there was no doubt that he would take the fat Owl completely by surprise.

It would only be a moment's work to whip open the door of the car and grab Bunter. Once his grasp was on the fat junior, all the rest was easy. One hefty wrench would jerk him headlong out of the car—and before he

knew what was happening to him, he would be wallowing in the water. Which, Pon hoped, would make the Owl of Greyfriars fed-up with holidays at Seahill Park.

But it was necessary for Pon to hunt cover. If he was spotted in the glare of the headlights, Bunter would be on his guard at once.

He picked out the darkest spot, where two trees grew close together, with intermingled branches, at the side of the drive. Between the trunks was a space absolutely black, into which the dandy of Highcliffe had to grope his way.

He groped into the space, with his hand outstretched before him, and gave a gasp of horrified surprise, as his fingers came in contact with something that was certainly not a tree-trunk!

It was a human face!

Not for an instant had it occurred to Ponsonby that some unknown person might already be hidden in that shadowed spot. Who could be in ambush there?

The sudden shock of touching an unseen human face in the dark made all his nerves jump. He started back, gasping.

"Wha-a-t—who—" stuttered Ponsonby, in amazement and terror.

He caught the sound of a sudden, startled breath. The unseen man was as surprised as Ponsonby.

In sheer terror Ponsonby jumped back; and in another second he would have been racing up the avenue to rejoin Monson, quite forgetful of his intended jape on the Owl of the Remove.

But in that second a shadow stirred swiftly in the dark, and a fierce blow was struck.

A sharp and terrible cry left Ponsonby's lips as he reeled under that fierce and savage blow, and he went down with a heavy crash on the drive.

He did not utter another sound as he fell. That savage blow had scattered his senses, and he was unconscious even as he touched the ground.

He lay crumpled there, senseless.

Over him crouched a shadowy figure, panting.

From up the avenue came a startled shout. That fearful cry from Ponsonby as he was stricken down reached Monson, startling him almost out of his wits.

"Pon!" shouted Monson. "Pon! What's up? What's the matter, Pon?"

There was no answer to Monson's alarmed shout. The shadowy figure that bent over Pon's senseless body darted away under the trees. Pon was left lying where he fell, his upturned face glimmering white in the gloom.

"Pon!" yelled Monson, greatly alarmed. "Pon!"

He stared through the darkness, with a thumping heart. What had happened there, in the dark? Something had happened—but what? Why did not Ponsonby answer?

Monson ran a few steps, to look for him—and stopped again. His face was white as he tried to peer through the gloom. Something had happened to Ponsonby, or he would have answered.

"Pon!" yelled Monson desperately. "Why don't you answer, you fool? Pon!"

Only the echo of his voice answered. Monson stood trembling; but he screwed up his courage at last, and hurried on. He stumbled over something that lay on the earth.

He knew what it was before he looked. But what could have hap-

... hand was shaking like an

aspen as he groped for a matchbox and struck a match.

The flickering flame glimmered on a dead-white face, with a streak of red oozing down the colourless skin.

Monson gazed at it in horror.

Ponsonby lay at his feet, senseless; and, only too plainly, he had been struck down by some unseen hand. The match went out.

Monson turned, and raced desperately up the avenue towards the house. Someone had struck Ponsonby down—and very likely he was still at hand! In utter terror Monson ran, as if for his life.

It seemed to him that he heard pursuing feet behind in the darkness. It was probably only the echo of his own. But the bare thought of a dark figure running behind him frightened the Highcliffe junior almost out of his senses. He shrieked hoarsely and incoherently as he ran.

It was only a matter of a few minutes, but it seemed centuries, before he saw the lighted facade of the mansion. He bolted for the open french windows of the billiards-room like a hunted hare.

Gadsby had stepped out on the terrace, and stood staring at him. The husky shrieks that Monson uttered as he fled startled Gadsby, and he jumped clear of the ground at the sight of Monson racing up, white as chalk.

"What's happened?" gasped Gadsby.

Monson did not answer—he could not. He brushed past Gadsby and staggered into the lighted room.

Vavasour was taking a shot, the Bouncer standing with the butt of his cue resting on the floor. Both of them forgot the game at the sight of Monson, staggering in from the night. "What the dooce—" exclaimed Vernon-Smith.

Monson staggered to the billiardstable, and stood leaning on it, or, rather, collapsing on it, his breath coming in panting sobs. Gadsby followed him in, staring.

"What's the row, Gaddy?" asked Vernon-Smith.

"Blessed, if I know," said the amazed Gaddy. "Where's Pon, Monson?"

Monson was panting helplessly for breath. He was winded by his desperate flight, and between breathlessness and terror, he could only stutter spasmodically.

Gadsby stood staring at him, but the Bouncer, with a knitted brow, strode to him and grasped him by the shoulder and shook him angrily.

"What's up, you stutterin' fool?" he asked roughly. "Has somethin' happened to Pon, or what? Cough it up, can't you?"

Monson tried to speak.

"Pon!" he stammered. "He—he's knocked out! Oh, gad! Stunned, I think. He—he's lying on the avenue! Oh!"

"Pon knocked out!" repeated the Bouncer incredulously. "What do you mean, you as? Who's knocked him out?"

"I—I don't know! He—he's lying there." Monson shuddered. "Lying there—stunned—blood on his face—I stumbled over him—"

He groaned.

"And you left him there?" said the Bouncer, with a contempt he did not take the trouble to conceal.

"I—I couldn't do anything. He's senseless, I tell you—and—and whoever did it, he—he's there. He might have—er—"

Monson broke off with a shiver.

"Good old Highcliffe!" said the

Bounder, with a bitter sneer. "There's a Greyfriars man here who's not frightened, anyhow!" He gripped his cue and ran to the open french windows. "You fellows call Larkin—if you've got nerve enough for that. Tell him to turn out the servants, with lights!"

The Bounder ran out into the night. Monson, unheeding, still clung to the billiards-table, in a state of collapse. Gadsby rang the bell and rushed to the door, shouting for Larkin. The Bounder ran down the dark avenue—but he ran alone.

THE EIGHTH CHAPTER.

By Whose Hand?

BILLY BUNTER gave an angry grunt, as there was a sudden jamming of brakes, and the car came to a halt.

The fat junior had been asleep most of the way from Wharton Lodge, and he did not even know that the car had turned in at the gateway of Seahill Park.

It halted quite suddenly, and he almost slipped off to the floor, and awoke with a jump. He grunted, snorted, and blinked round peevishly through his big spectacles, and yapped at the driver.

"What the thump are you stopping for? Where are we?"

Blinking from the car, Bunter could only see black shadows of trees. Ahead, the glare of the headlights showed endless trees, lining the wide avenue.

"Where are we?" hooted Bunter. "Ain't we anywhere near Smithy's place yet? Are you going to be all night about it? Where are we?"

"In the avenue, sir; it's only a few minutes on to the house, but—"

"Oh, we've got in, have we?" grunted Bunter. "Then what the dickens have you stopped here for? Got on to the house!"

Instead of obeying that command, the chauffeur descended from the driving-seat.

Billy Bunter blinked at him angrily, and then, as he saw what the driver had seen, he gave a sudden jump and a startled howl:

"Oh crikey!"

Leaning from the window of the car, the fat Owl gazed in horror at a still figure that lay at the side of the avenue, in the glare of the headlights.

He could see the white, still face, with the streak of crimson on it.

"There's been an accident, sir!" said the chauffeur. "That's one of Master Herbert's friends, Mr. Ponsonby."

"Pon! Oh crumbs!"

The fat Owl opened the door and stepped out. Little as he liked the dandy of Highcliffe, Bunter was more than ready to help him now. He rolled after the chauffeur, who was stepping quickly to the spot where the senseless Highcliffe junior lay.

There was a patter of rapid-running feet on the drive, from the direction of the house.

Vernon-Smith came up, panting for breath. The billiards-cue was in his grasp, the only weapon that had been at hand when he ran out, after Monson's startling announcement. He saw the lights of the car as he came, and he arrived breathless as the chauffeur bent over the unconscious Highcliffe.

"I—I—I say, it's Pon, Smithy!" stammered Bunter, blinking in horror at the still, white face. "He—he's had a knock!"

"He's had a hard knock, Master Herbert," said the chauffeur, stooping

over Ponsonby. "There's a big bruise here. He's had a knock on the head and—"

"So Monson said!" The Bounder stared round him in the shadows. "But who—who— Get him into the car, Williams! We must get him to the house as quickly as we can!"

Between the chauffeur and Vernon-Smith, the insensible junior was lifted into the car. Bunter rolled in, and sat down again. There was a low moan from Ponsonby. He was beginning to revive. The Bounder held him on the seat, while Williams drove on again, up to the house.

"I—I—I say, Smithy, who did that?" gasped Bunter.

"How should I know, you fool?" growled Vernon-Smith.

"Oh, really, Smithy—"

"Shut up, you ass!"

"Beast!"

The car was not long in reaching the house. The great door stood wide open, light streaming out into the April night. Larkin was there, and a dozen men-servants, some of them with lanterns or electric torches in their hands. Gadsby and Vavasour were with them. Monson was still in a state of collapse in the billiards-room.

"Master Herbert!" exclaimed Larkin, in horror, as he looked into the car. "What—"

"Help me out with him!" rapped the Bounder.

Ponsonby was carried into the house. Billy Bunter rolled in after him. Gadsby and Vavasour did not give him a look. They had quite forgotten what had been planned for Bunter on his arrival, in their consternation at what had happened to Ponsonby.

The dandy of Highcliffe was laid on a settee in the hall. He was coming to himself now, and his eyes were open, staring round him wildly.

Monson came tottering out of the billiards-room.

"You—you've found him!" he stammered. "Is—is he much hurt?"

"He's had a crack on the head!" said Vernon-Smith. "Whoever hit him had something in his hand—something hard! He will be able to speak in a minute or two."

"But who—?" gasped Gadsby.

"And—and why?" stuttered Vavasour.

The Bounder did not answer that. Already a dark suspicion was in his mind. Someone, it was clear, had been lurking in the darkness of the avenue, and Pon must have barged into him. Mr. Vernon-Smith was expected late that night. The man who had attempted to wreck the car on the Wimford road had had ample time to get ahead of him. Was that it?

Ponsonby sat up, dizzily, supported by Gadsby's arm. His hand went feebly to his bruised head, and he groaned.

"I say, you fellows, what was Pon out there in the dark for at this time of night?" asked Billy Bunter.

Gadsby and Monson and Vavasour looked at him and one another. But they did not answer.

Ponsonby gave another groan.

"Oh, my head! Have you got the brute?"

"Who?" asked Vernon-Smith quietly.

"Did you see him, Pon?"

"No. I—I barged into him!" Ponsonby shuddered. "He was hidden behind a tree, and I—I touched him in the dark. Then he got me with something—" He finished with another groan.

"Then you saw nothing of him?" asked the Bounder, disappointed. "You couldn't say if he was a foreigner?"

"I never saw him at all! Oh, my

head!" groaned Ponsonby. "Help me to my room, somebody!"

"Wait a minute!" said Vernon-Smith. If he was concerned for the injured Highcliffe junior, that was a mere trifle compared with his anxiety for his father. "You say he was hidden behind a tree, close by where we found you, I suppose?"

"Yes, I suppose so. I fell when he knocked me on the head—it felt like the kick of a mule—"

"Thank goodness you're all right now!" The Bounder set his teeth. "That's the darkest part of the avenue. He was watching and waiting there. Thank goodness you ran into him! Here, Gaddy—Vav. help Pon to his room!"

The Bounder turned away, leaving the dandy of Highcliffe in the hands of his friends. He groaned as they helped him up the stairs.

Smithy was turning to Larkin, when Billy Bunter touched him on the arm.

"I say, Smithy—"

"Did you see the man, Bunter?" exclaimed the Bounder eagerly. It occurred to him that the fat Owl might have seen something.

"Eh? Oh, no! I was asleep when Williams stopped the car!" answered Bunter. "I was going to say—"

"What? Quick!"

"What about supper?"

"You fat fool!" yelled the Bounder.

"Oh, really, Smithy! I had dinner with Wharton at his place, but that was a good while ago, and I'm hungry. I say— Yaroooooh!" roared Bunter, in surprise and wrath, as the Bounder gave him an angry shove, and sent him spinning across the hall. "Ow! Beast! Wharrer you up to? Wow!"

Billy Bunter sat down, hard. Unheeding him, the Bounder turned to Larkin:

"Call out every man in the place, Larkin, and set them searching for that scoundrel. Then get on the telephone and call up the police. That man was watching for my father. Do you understand?"

With that, Vernon-Smith hurriedly donned a coat and cap, and ran out of the house. He ran swiftly down the dark drive, careless whether Ponsonby's assailant might be still lingering in the shadows there. He was thinking only of his father.

Mr. Vernon-Smith was coming down by train, and would take a taxi from Seahill Station, and, but for Ponsonby's adventure, the Bounder knew, he was certain, that a desperate enemy would have been watching and waiting for him on the dark avenue—perhaps was watching and waiting still!

In the gateway, leaning on the big bronze gates, the Bounder panted for breath and watched the road. A car passed him, with a police-inspector and a constable in it, and rushed on up the avenue to the house.

Smithy did not heed it. He waited, and it was an hour later that a taxi from the railway station came buzzing up, and he ran forward and shouted as it was about to turn in at the gateway.

A surprised face under a silk hat stared at him from the taxi.

"Herbert!" exclaimed Mr. Vernon-Smith. "What—"

His face set hard and grim, as the Bounder told him. He dismissed the taxi, and walked in with his son, his hands in his coat-pocket, grasping the revolver he had carried ever since his life was threatened.

Up and down the avenue, among the shadowy trees, lights were gleaming and twinkling, as a crowd of searchers hunted for the mysterious man who had

struck down Cecil Ponsonby. But the search was in vain. That assailant, whether he was the millionaire's enemy or not, had realised that his game was up when the alarm was given, and he was gone—vanished without leaving a trace behind him, except the bruise on Pon's bandaged head!

THE NINTH CHAPTER.

Pon's Programme!

"**B**EASTS!" murmured Billy Bunter.

It was a couple of days later. Billy Bunter, having done well at lunch—perhaps a little too well—had rolled out on the lawn, intending to dispose his fat limbs in a hammock there, and rest after his exertions.

Ponsonby and Gadsby sauntered out after him.

Hence Bunter's remark.

Bunter was not a suspicious fellow, as a rule. But now he had a strong suspicion that if he went to sleep in that hammock, something would happen to the hammock while he was asleep!

So he rolled on, to seek a more secure spot.

Blinking back over a fat shoulder from a shady garden path a few minutes later, he spotted two Highcliffe caps in the rear.

"Beasts!" hissed Bunter again.

This sort of thing was a worry to Bunter.

He was sticking to Smithy for Easter; and in many ways he was in luck—the grub was unlimited and good, the servants innumerable, handsome cars were at his orders. Millionaireing was quite enjoyable, so far as that went.

The fact that Smithy did not want him there did not worry Bunter. So long as Smithy did not boot him out, that was all right.

But there was a fly in the ointment, all the same—in fact, four flies, the knuts of Highcliffe.

They could not "rag" Bunter openly, especially while Mr. Vernon-Smith was there. But they were always looking for chances of making him sorry that he was sticking to Smithy.

Three of them, perhaps, might have tolerated him, with contemptuous indifference; but Ponsonby was not so placable.

Pon's handsome nose was still showing signs of Bob Cherry's hefty punching. Bunter was the cause of it. And Pon's head was still bandaged, and still had a lingering ache in it, from the knock he had received on the dark avenue. Rather unreasonably, he put that down to Bunter's account.

Bunter certainly had not wanted him to lie in wait for the car that night. It could hardly be said that it was Bunter's fault that he had run into the desperado hidden under the trees. Still, but for Bunter it would not have happened; and Pon had a malicious and revengeful temper. Neither had he forgotten the "rag" in his room, when Bunter had raided his elegant clobber and havoocked the same.

Billy Bunter was quite aware that if Pon ran him down, out of sight of the house, something would happen to him. He rolled on with a frowning brow—the two Highcliffe caps still in the rear.

"Beasts!" breathed Bunter, for the third time.

He arrived at a little shady summer-house, where he would have liked to halt, for the nap he needed. But he did not want Pon and Gaddy to run him down there.

But Bunter could be strategic.

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He blinked back along the shady path cautiously, and then dodged behind the summer-house and crouched down there.

He had no doubt that Pon and Gaddy would pass on, not seeing him, and that would be that!

He grinned as he heard the sound of approaching footsteps on the path and a sound of voices.

"Where has that fat frog got to?" It was Pon's voice.

"Squatting in that summer-house, very likely!" said Gadsby.

"Let's look!"

Bunter heard the two Highcliffians step into the summer-house. Then he heard Ponsonby's grunt:

"Not here!"

"Oh, let him rip!" yawned Gadsby. "Got a cigarette? I've left mine indoors."

"Beasts!" breathed Bunter, for the fourth time, as he heard the Highcliffians sit down in the summer-house, and the scratch of matches follow.

They had given up the hunt—which was what Bunter wanted. But they had sat down in the summer-house to smoke cigarettes, which certainly he did not want. He could not stir while they were there without being spotted.

"It's pretty slow here while the old bean's about!" said Gadsby. "Smithy keeps on good behaviour while his pater's around."

"The old ass is goin' to-morrow."

"Thank goodness for that!"

Ponsonby gave a sneering laugh.

"He's got to get back to the bulls and bears of the City! I suppose he's worth half a dozen millions—but he's piling up more! I dare say that's why that Italian johnny's after him—some man he's diddled somehow."

"Shouldn't wonder!" yawned Gadsby. "Better not let Smithy hear you say so, though," he chuckled.

"Hang Smithy!"

"Well, he's a bit of an outsider," said Gadsby. "But he must be fond of that pater of his. Blessed if I should have thought he was fond of anybody but himself. You never really know a fellow."

"They're a pair of rank outsiders," sneered Ponsonby. "I shouldn't stand much more of this, if the old bean was staying on. We didn't come here to be good little boys under a parental eye, that I know of."

"Smithy will make the fur fly again when the old bounder's gone back to the City," said Gadsby. "He's goin' this afternoon, and we shall have a jolly evenin', old bean."

"That's all you know!" said Ponsonby. "Smithy's goin', too!"

"Hardly!" said Gadsby. "The old bean is more anxious about Smithy than about himself. He won't let Smithy travel with him."

"I know that! Smithy's given me the tip," grunted Pon. "He's goin' to clear off before his father starts, and take the same train from Seahill Station, without lettin' the old bean know. Smith senior is goin' up by train—gettin' tired of bein' potted at in his car, I suppose. Smithy's fool enough to fancy that something may happen on the train."

"Well, it might," said Gadsby. "That gunman who is after him seems to be makin' a habit of it."

"That's what Smithy thinks, anyhow, and he's goin' to keep an affectionate filial eye on the old bean from the next carriage!" sneered Ponsonby. "Fancy Smithy—a hard knut like that! Soft spot somewhere."

"Well, dash it all, Pon, the man's his father!" said Gadsby. "I should feel pretty rotten if my pater was in the same boat."

"Anyhow, he's goin', and I'm to pull

the old bean's leg if he wants to know where Smithy is, when he starts," said Ponsonby. "Smithy won't be back till late at night—may stay the night in London! That washes out our jolly evenin' with Smithy."

Gadsby laughed.

"We can survive the loss of his company for an evening," he remarked. "He gets on my nerves a bit sometimes."

"Well, we shall find somethin' to do!" said Ponsonby in a significant tone. "We shall be left here—with Bunter."

"Chance to make that fat ass sorry for himself, what? Mind he doesn't spring that ruffian Cherry on us again, though, as he did last time."

"He can't. Cherry would never have barged in here if he'd known it was Smithy's place—the fat rotter pulled his leg somehow. Besides, we'll see that he doesn't get away in a car to fetch anybody."

"We can do that," agreed Gadsby. "I'm fed-up with the fat fool's grubby face about. What's the game?"

"There's a gate on the sands at the other end of the park. Might take him for a nice little walk by the sad sea waves, and strand him in a jolly little spot where he will be cut off by the tide."

"Oh gad!"

"A night out may do him good! Missin' a few meals is sure to do him good! I've expected him to burst all over the dinin'-table more than once."

Gadsby chuckled.

"There's a rock half a mile out in the bay that's cut off when the tide's in," went on Ponsonby. "You can walk out to it at low tide. I've been there with Smithy. There's a hut where they keep fishin' tackle and stuff. We walk that fat freak out there, and leave him there—"

"He won't go if he can help it; he won't be able to help it, when Smithy and his pater are gone," said Ponsonby coolly. "If he won't walk, we'll roll him."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Behind the summer-house, Billy Bunter shook an unseen fat fist! His little round eyes gleamed behind his big round spectacles.

Smithy was going away again—and this was what was scheduled to happen while he was away. Aware that the millionaire would not allow his son to travel with him while the danger lasted, Billy Bunter had taken it for granted that Smithy would stay when his father went. But for the fact that Pon had stalked him that afternoon and driven him to hunt cover, he would have remained in complete ignorance of what was intended—and would have fallen into the Highcliffians' clutches as helplessly as a fat rabbit.

"Beasts!" breathed Bunter.

It was ten minutes later before Pon and Gadsby, having finished smoking, left the summer-house and strolled away.

Then the fat Owl of the Remove emerged from his hiding-place.

He shook a fat fist after two Highcliffe caps that were vanishing over distant shrubberies.

"Beasts!" hissed Bunter.

The Owl of the Remove rolled back to the house—no longer thinking of a nap. He was thinking of what was booked to happen on the morrow. If that beast Smithy really went to London—

Sad to relate, the thought occurred to Bunter of giving the Bounder's game away to Mr. Vernon-Smith—in which case, it was certain, Smithy would not have taken his father's train. But he realised that if Smithy stayed at home for such a reason as that, he would not be likely to protect the fat Owl against



Biff, biff! "Oh crikey! Yarooop!" **Biff, biff, biff!** Bob Cherry was warming to the work, and Billy Bunter was fairly driven out of the doorway. A last biff caught him as he went, and he yelled and bolted for the car.

the raggers. Rather he would be likely to lend them a vigorous hand—if not to boot Bunter out of Seahill Park altogether.

But what was to be done? Pon had declared that Bunter could not repeat his former performance of bringing Bob Cherry on the scene. Bunter was not so sure of that. He went into the house and rolled along to his room. Every fellow's room at that magnificent establishment had a telephone in it. Billy Bunter locked his door, sat down to the telephone, and rang up Wharton Lodge.

THE TENTH CHAPTER.

Bob Cherry is Wanted!

"GAME!" said Bob Cherry. Four Greyfriars juniors were playing tennis in the sunny April afternoon at Wharton Lodge. Wells, the butler, arrived on the court as Bob announced that it was "game."

Harry Wharton and Bob. Hurree Singh and Frank Nugent were looking merry and bright. Four members of the famous Co. were together again, and the fifth member, Johnny Bull, was to arrive on the morrow. It was a long way down from Yorkshire to Surrey, and Johnny was expected late in the day. His friends—who did not share Billy Bunter's views on the subject in the very least—were looking forward to Johnny's coming.

"Master Cherry—" said Wells. "Hallo, hallo, hallo!" roared Bob. "The telephone, sir—" "Somebody on the phone for me?" asked Bob. "Who is it, Wells?" "Master Bunter, sir."

"What the dickens does Bunter want me for?" exclaimed Bob in astonishment. "Didn't he ask for Wharton?"

"No, sir; for you, and he says it is very important, sir."

"Oh, all right!" Wells went back to the house. Bob put his racket under his arm.

"You fellows mind waiting to finish the set?" he asked. "I suppose I'd better go and hear what the fat bounder wants."

"Right-ho, old bean!"

Bob, considerably puzzled, followed Wells to the house. Had Billy Bunter rung up Wharton, it could easily have been guessed what he wanted. But what he wanted Bob for was rather a mystery. Bob could not ask him to Wharton Lodge.

However, the cheery Bob went in and picked up the receiver. He bawled into the mouthpiece:

"Hallo, hallo, hallo!"

"Is that you, Bob, old chap?" came a fat squeak from Sussex.

"Bob old chap speaking," answered Bob Cherry. "What do you want, fatty?"

"I say, Bob. I've missed you awfully—"

"Eh?"

"I've never missed any chap so much as I do you, old fellow!"

"Oh, my hat!"

"We've always been pals, haven't we, old fellow?"

"Not that I know of."

"Beast!"

"That sounds more like you, old fat bean!" chuckled Bob.

"I—I—I mean, dear old chap—"

"Oh crumbs! I can't cash a postal order for you along a telephone wire, Bunter, so what's the dear old chap for?"

"I—I've always liked you, old fellow. I've missed you fearfully! So—so I mentioned it to Smithy, and—and he wants you to come over here to-morrow—"

"Smithy does!" ejaculated Bob.

"Yes; fearfully keen on it. He asked me specially to ring you up and tell you, old fellow. You'll come?"

Bob Cherry chuckled.

"If Smithy's fearfully keen to see me he can say so," he remarked. "Tell him to come to the phone and whisper those sweet words himself."

"He—he—he's gone out."

"He can ring me up when he comes in, then."

"I—I mean, he—he's got the toothache, and can't phone. That's why he asked me to call you up. See? He's got a fearful swelling on his cheek from carache—"

"As well as toothache! Poor chap!"

"I mean toothache. Such a fearful swelling that he can't speak a word. He said to me—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Blessed if I see anything to cackle at!" howled Bunter.

"Go it, old fat fibber!" chorled Bob. "What did he say to you while he couldn't speak a word?"

"Oh! I—I mean, he—he can hardly speak a word—just whisper, see? It gives him a fearful pain to speak with such a headache—"

"Headache, too! Poor old Smithy!"

"I mean carache—that is, toothache. Don't keep on sniggering, you silly ass! I think you might be a bit sympathetic when poor old Smithy's laid up with head—ear—I mean toothache!"

"So I would be, old fat man, if I believed a word of it!" said Bob cheerfully. "What are you trying to pull my leg for, you fat frump? Think I'd butt into Smithy's place without being asked? My name's not Bunter."

"That's all right, as he'll be out

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The SHADOWED MILLIONAIRE!



(Continued from page 13.)

to-morrow, you needn't be afraid of running into Smithy."

"Oh, my hat! He's asking me over because he's going out, is he?"

"Oh, no! I mean, he isn't going out. That's what I really meant to say, old chap. He's not going up to London with his father, or anything of that sort."

"Ha, ha, ha!" yelled Bob.

He guessed the mystery now. For the second time, Billy Bunter was going to be left at Seahill Park with the Highcliffe party, and he wanted a fellow on the scene who packed a hefty punch. It was all clear now.

"Oh, do stop cackling!" came the peevish, fat voice. "I think you might stand by a chap, after all I've done for you, Cherry. Smithy's frightfully keen to see you here—"

"I don't think!" chuckled Bob. "Is Pon frightfully keen, too? How's his nose? Think you're going to diddle me twice in the same way, you fat lunatic?"

"Oh, really, Cherry—"

"Is that the lot?"

"No, you beast! I mean, no, dear old fellow! If you come by train I'll meet you at Seahill Station. Shall I wait at the station for you to-morrow?"

"If you like."

"What train are you coming by?"

"None!"

"You silly ass! If you're not coming by train what's the good of my waiting at the station?" howled Bunter.

"No good at all. But you can do it if you like. It's a free country."

"Beast!"

"Go it!" chuckled Bob.

"I say, old fellow, do come! The grub is splendid!" urged Bunter. "I can put you up for the night, all right, as Smithy will be away. I mean, he won't be away. He's fearfully eager for you to come. And—and Pon's rather keen, too."

"He would be!" chortled Bob.

"He said to me only this morning: 'I'd like to see that chap Cherry here. Such a really nice chap!' His very words, old fellow."

"Sounds like him!" agreed Bob.

"You'll come, old chap? Come along early, won't you? Smithy's leaving in the afternoon—I mean—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Mind, it's not like it was before, old fellow. I'm not getting you here to handle those Highcliffe oads when Smithy's gone."

"You're not!" assented Bob. "Right on the wicket, old fat man! You're most decidedly not! That chicken won't fight twice."

"It's because I miss you so much, old fellow. You're such a really nice chap, you know," explained Bunter. "I feel as if I can't enjoy the holiday without you. I don't think you're a noisy, clumsy beast about a place, old chap—I don't really!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" yelled Bob.

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"You'll come, then?"

"No, I won't come. Good-bye!"

"Beast!"

Bob Cherry, chuckling, put up the receiver. If Billy Bunter was still talking at the Sussex end, his dulcet tones were lost.

There was a wide grin on Bob's ruddy face as he walked back to the tennis court. Three fellows there gave him inquiring looks.

"What did he want?" asked Frank Nugent.

"Me," said Bob. "I'm such a really nice chap that he misses me fearfully, and can't enjoy the holiday without me. Flattering, ain't it?"

"The flatterfulness is terrific!" grinned Hurree Jamset Ram Singh.

"But what did he really want?" asked Harry Wharton, laughing.

"Well, I sort of guessed that Smithy's leaving him with Pon & Co. to-morrow, and he wants somebody to put in some punching if they get rorty!" chuckled Bob. "I'm to put in a long railway trip, and arrive at a place where I'm not invited and not wanted, to punch the heads of the fellows who are staying there. That's all!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"And I've turned it down," said Bob. "It's a fearfully attractive offer, but I've turned it down."

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

And the chums of the Remove resumed tennis. Billy Bunter was getting rather an extraordinary Easter holiday, and they wished him luck; but certainly nobody there was prepared to go over to Seahill Park and punch the heads of his fellow-guests. Really, that was asking a little too much!

Harry Wharton & Co. rather wondered how Bunter was getting on in those extraordinary circumstances.

They little guessed!

THE ELEVENTH CHAPTER.

Bunter's Latest!

BILLY BUNTER jammed the receiver back on the hooks and snorted. He was annoyed.

It seemed that Pon had been right, after all. Bob Cherry was not to be caught in the same way twice. Bunter had put it tactfully. He had assured Bob that Smithy was asking him there, which ought to have been enough to satisfy any fellow. Bob, it appeared, had not believed that statement. It was, Bunter bitterly reflected, like him.

The fat Owl of the Remove sat and blinked at the telephone through his big spectacles, in troubled thought.

Somehow he had to put "paid" to Pon & Co. on the morrow, when Smithy and his pater were gone. But Billy Bunter was not at the end of his resources yet.

Slowly a fat grin overspread his face.

Bob Cherry was not available. The other fellows at Wharton Lodge, evidently, were equally unavailable. But there was one member of the Famous Five who had not yet arrived there. Bunter knew when Johnny Bull was expected. He was leaving his home, Moor Fell, in Yorkshire, early the next morning, to come down to Surrey.

At Wharton Lodge, Bunter had expressed objections to Johnny Bull; but at Seahill Park, Johnny was as welcome as the flowers in May—in the peculiar circumstances.

Johnny packed a powerful punch, and he had a scornful dislike for the knutty sportsmen of Highcliffe. Johnny was the man—if Johnny could be inveigled,

diddled, and bamboozled into serving Billy Bunter's turn.

Bunter, grinning, lifted the receiver again.

"Telegrams!" he squeaked.

A minute later he was dictating a telegram over the phone.

"J. Bull, Moor Fell, Yorkshire. Staying with Smithy at Seahill Park, Sussex, for a few days. Explain when we meet. Come straight here. Will meet your train Seahill Station on Tuesday afternoon.—Wharton."

Having dispatched that telegram, through the medium of the telephone exchange, Billy Bunter felt easier in his fat mind.

Johnny Bull, in far-off Yorkshire, would probably be a little surprised to receive that telegram. But would he have any doubts? How could he?

He was expecting to go straight to Wharton Lodge, in Surrey, and find his friends there; but though he might be surprised, there was nothing in this to make him suspicious.

The chums of the Remove might quite possibly have been asked by Smithy for a few days, in which case, of course, as Johnny was expected, Wharton would wire him to join them at Smithy's place.

Wharton's name on the telegram was enough.

Billy Bunter felt that, in the circumstances, he was justified in borrowing Wharton's name. He was accustomed to borrowing anything he wanted—and his fat brain did not even realise that there were certain legal penalties for trickery of this kind.

Johnny, it was fairly certain, would come straight on to Seahill Park, and once he was there, the rest would be all right.

Bob had cleared off immediately he found it was Smithy's place. But Johnny, in the belief that his friends were staying with Smithy, wouldn't!

At least, Bunter hoped he wouldn't!

He would have to pull Johnny's leg somehow, when he arrived, but if fibbing would pull him through, Bunter was not going to be at a loss for fibs. In fact, fibbing was his long suit.

"That's that!" grinned Bunter, as he rolled out of his room, grinning all over his fat face at the thought of the surprise that awaited Pon & Co. on the morrow. They would be expecting to have Bunter all to themselves, after Smithy and his father had departed. Bunter enjoyed, in anticipation, the looks on their faces, when they beheld Johnny Bull! There was going to be a hitch in Pon's programme!

Billy Bunter was quite merry and bright that evening.

Pon & Co. on the other hand, were rather glum.

While Mr. Vernon-Smith was present at his Sussex mansion, the "rowdy" proceedings of the schoolboy house-party were checked.

Indulgent as he was to his son, closing his eyes to a good many things that he would have done better to observe, Mr. Vernon-Smith certainly would not have permitted card-playing at midnight, with currency notes on the table, and billiards with a fiver on the game.

As Pon & Co. were there chiefly to annex a share of the Bunder's ample wealth, this was a waste of time to them. They were only anxious for Mr. Samuel Vernon-Smith to get back to the bulls and bears in the City, and leave them to carry on in their own delectable way.

Possibly Mr. Vernon-Smith was unaware that he was a wet blanket on the

knotty party. Or perhaps he did not care.

There were plenty of other resources, as well as billiards and bridge and banker, if Pon & Co. had cared for them. Smithy, with all his blackguardly ways, was no loafer or slacker—but it was useless for him to suggest tennis, badminton, a run in the motorboat, a sailing trip round the bay, or anything that required strenuousness. The Highcliffe knuts had no use for strenuousness; moreover they were there on the make!

So the time passed rather heavily for Pon & Co. while Mr. Vernon-Smith was there, and, but for a few motor-runs, which landed them in disreputable spots, they felt that they could hardly have stood it at all.

On this last evening, there was billiards; but without money on the game, billiards only bored Pon & Co. They went to bed quite early, for them—comforted by the happy knowledge that Smithy's pater would be gone on the morrow—after which, Smithy would be himself again, so to speak!

In the morning, they went out for a run in one of Mr. Vernon-Smith's fleet of cars. Pon politely asked Bunter to join up—a polite invitation which the fat Owl warily declined.

They were back to lunch, and at lunch they looked brighter. Mr. Vernon-Smith was going by the four o'clock train, and then there was going to be a tremendous rag on Billy Bunter, which was a cheerful prospect.

After enduring the presence of the millionaire for several days, it really seemed too good to be true to Pon & Co. when the car came round to take him to the station.

The Bounder had disappeared.

Pon & Co. knew that he had already gone to the railway station, and was waiting there for his father's train. They did not know that Billy Bunter was also aware of that circumstance!

"Where is Herbert?" Mr. Vernon-Smith asked, when he was ready to go out to the car. "Has Herbert gone out?"

"He went for a run on his bike, sir!" answered Ponsonby. The Bounder had left him that tale to tell. "He doesn't seem to have got back yet."

Mr. Vernon-Smith grunted.

But trains, like time and tide, wait for no man; and if Smithy was not there to say good-bye to his father, that was that.

The millionaire went out to the car, leaving Pon & Co. grinning in the doorway.

Billy Bunter rolled out after him.

"I'm going to Seahill to get some toffee," said Bunter, as the millionaire was stepping in. "Can I come with you, and come back in the car?"

"Certainly, my boy!" said Mr. Vernon-Smith. "Get in. Williams, you will wait for Master Bunter in the town, after taking me to the station."

"Yes, sir!"

The car rolled away down the avenue.

"The fat freak!" grunted Ponsonby, staring after it, as it went. "Well, he will be back in half an hour—lots of time—Smithy won't be back till the last train to-night, if he comes back to-night at all. Lots of time for Bunter! Let's get a game—not for nuts!"

The Highcliffians went into the smoke-room and sat down to bridge—not for nuts!

Billy Bunter, with a cheery fat grin on his face, rolled away in the car for Seahill town and station. Pon & Co. expected him back with toffee! They little dreamed what he would be bringing back with him.

THE TWELFTH CHAPTER.

Bamboozling Johnny Bull!

JOHNNY BULL rose from his seat, picked up a suitcase, and stepped from the train, as it stopped in Seahill Station at half-past five.

The sturdy, stocky junior from Yorkshire stood on the platform, glancing up and down, expecting to see his friends there.

Johnny had been rather surprised by that telegram, but not in the least suspicious. He was surprised chiefly because the Co. had had a "row" with Smithy on the last day of the term, so he had been far from expecting to hear that his friends were with the Bounder in the holidays.

Still, he was glad that that little trouble had blown over—and he had no doubt that it had, as he had been wired by Wharton, from Smithy's place, to come there direct.

As for Bunter, the thought of that fat and fatuous youth had not crossed his mind at all. He knew nothing of Bunter being with Smithy for Easter, and had, in fact, very nearly forgotten his fat existence.

But he was reminded of it now!

Looking up and down the platform for his friends, he did not see the familiar faces of the Co. But he saw the equally familiar, if less welcome, countenance of the Owl of the Remove.

For the last hour or so, Billy Bunter had been sitting on the platform, chewing toffee.

He did not know by what train Johnny would be coming, and he had to wait till it came. But—in the circumstances—he preferred a platform seat at a railway station to the most luxurious armchair at Seahill Park.

He had seen Mr. Vernon-Smith take the train, and had seen Smithy, after his father was settled in a carriage, dodge out of a waiting-room and whip into the next carriage.

Mr. Vernon-Smith rolled off to London, utterly unconscious of the fact that his son was on the same train.

After which, Bunter waited, and watched, and chewed toffee. Williams was waiting with the car, outside the station, to take him back to the Park when he was ready. He was not going to be ready till Johnny Bull turned up.

The toffee was finished, and Bunter was very shiny and sticky, when the five-thirty came in, and Johnny Bull alighted therefrom. And Billy Bunter, with a fat and sticky grin on his face, rolled to greet him.

"Hallo, old chap!" said Bunter affably.

Johnny stared at him.

"You!" he ejaculated.

"Little me!" said Bunter with a cheery nod. "Glad to see you, old fellow!"

"Where's Wharton?"

"He couldn't come to the station, as it turned out!" explained Bunter. Which was perfectly true, as Harry Wharton was more than fifty miles away.

"The other fellows about?" asked Johnny.

"No; they're all with Wharton," answered Bunter, again telling the truth, by accident as it were.

"Oh, all right!" said Johnny. "Wharton said in his telegram that he would meet me at the station—What are you grinning at, Bunter?"

"W-w-was I grinning?" stammered Bunter.

"Yes—like a hyena."

"Oh, really, Bull—"

"Well, if they're not here, I may as well be moving," said Johnny, picking

up the suitcase again. "You coming, Bunter?"

"Well, I came specially to the station to meet you, Bull, as the other fellows couldn't come!" said Bunter warmly.

"Oh, did you?" said Johnny. He was not specially bucked at seeing Bunter. Seeing him, he concluded that he had somehow hooked on to the party at Smithy's place, which was not surprising at all. Bunter had great hooking powers in holiday-time.

"Yes, I jolly well did!" said Bunter. "Wharton—hem!—asked me to, as he—he couldn't come."

"Is it far to Seahill Park?"

"Only about a mile."

"I suppose I can get a taxi?" said Johnny Bull. "Come on, if you're coming, and I'll give you a lift in it."

"I've got a car waiting!" said Bunter, with dignity. "Smithy's pater has got no end of cars, and I can have one whenever I like."

"You're in luck!" said Johnny. "Are you staying with Smithy, or did you come along with Wharton from his place?"

"Oh! I—I'm staying with Smithy! I've been with Smithy ever since the school broke up for Easter."

"How the dickens did you wangle it?" asked Johnny, in surprise.

"Oh, don't be an ass!" said Bunter. "These Vernon-Smiths are jolly glad to get a fellow of my social standing at their place."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Oh, don't cackle! Look here, Bull! If you're coming to a swanky place like Seahill Park, I want you to remember that you're not in the Remove passage at Greyfriars. See? There's such a thing as manners!"

"Fathead!" said Johnny cheerfully, and he walked out of the station with his suitcase, Bunter rolling after him, with a frown on his podgy brow.

"Here's the car!" he grunted.

Williams touched his hat to Johnny Bull. Mr. Vernon-Smith had placed him at Bunter's orders for the afternoon; but he had wondered why the fat young gent had kept him hanging about outside the station for an hour and a half. Now that Bunter emerged from the station with a companion, he understood.

He opened the door of the car, and the two Removites stepped in. Williams drove away for Seahill Park.

"What are the fellows doing this afternoon, Bunter?" asked Johnny, as the car ran out of the seaside town. He was rather puzzled that none of the four had been able to come to the station, and it was a little surprising that they had sent Bunter—and still more surprising that Bunter had taken the trouble to come. "Why couldn't any of them come along?"

"Oh, they're playing tennis!" explained Bunter.

Now that Johnny was there, he had to draw upon his unlimited resources of fibbing—if Johnny was not to spot the facts.

Had Johnny spotted them, he would certainly never have entered Smithy's place uninvited—his departure would have been prompt, and there was little doubt that he would have booted Bunter vigorously before he departed.

Which, of course, would not have suited William George Bunter at all.

But it was rather a weak spot in Bunter's fibbing system, that he always told the first "whopper" that came into his head, without giving the matter the amount of thought it really needed.

"Tennis?" said Johnny, staring at Bunter. As the telegram had stated that Wharton would meet him at the station, and explain matters, he certainly did not expect to hear that his chum had given him a miss to play tennis.

"Yes; you see, they couldn't leave the game. Smithy wouldn't have liked them to break off before finishing the set—"

"Smithy?" exclaimed Johnny Bull. "What the dickens do you mean, you fat ass? If Smithy's playing, they can't all four be playing, too!"

"Oh! I—I forgot that! I—I—I mean—"

"Well, what do you mean, you fat ass?"

"I—I—I mean—" Bunter had to pause before he handed out the next one.

"Well, we shall be there in a few minutes, anyhow!" grunted Johnny Bull, as the car bowed along at a good speed. "Blessed if I know why you're telling me lies, Bunter! Force of habit, I suppose!"

"Oh!" ejaculated Bunter, in dismay. "I—I—I mean, they—they're not playing tennis, old chap—"

"You burbling ass!"

"What I mean is, they were playing tennis, but they went down to the beach afterwards," explained Bunter.

He realised that, as Johnny Bull would see none of the Greyfriars fellows at Seahill Park, he had to explain their absence somehow—he rather wished he had thought of that a little earlier. But there was room in Billy Bunter's fat brain for only one idea at a time.

"Rot!" grunted Johnny. "Wharton wouldn't clear off, after telling me in his telegram that he would meet me at the station!"

"You—you see, they—they have to be a bit careful with Smithy! You know how touchy Smithy is—always taking offence at something."

"Oh!" said Johnny. He was, in point of fact, aware of that little weakness of the Bounder's.

"You see, Smithy proposed a run in the motor-boat!" went on Bunter, getting into his stride, as it were. "Wharton said, 'No'; you'd be expecting him at the station. So—so Smithy looked sulky, and Bob Cherry said: 'Oh, Bull won't mind—let's!' So they went down to the beach. I—I said I'd go to the station for you, and they—they said, 'All right!' See?"

"I—I see!" said Johnny Bull slowly.

Bunter had done better this time—he had described something that might quite possibly have occurred, had Harry Wharton & Co been guests at Seahill Park.

"So—so that's how it was!" said Bunter cheerfully. "Smithy called out to me, to look after you while they were gone, and make you feel at home, and all that. They'll be back in an hour or two—unless—unless they're delayed. Of course, they might be."

Grunt from Johnny Bull.

"But it's all right, old chap," said Bunter. "I'll look after you. I've got carty blong at Smithy's place."

"You're got whatter?"

"Carty blong, old chap—that's French!" added Bunter kindly. "It means that I can do as I jolly well like."

"Do you mean carte blanche, you fat ass?"

"No, I don't—I mean carty blong! I don't want you to teach me French, THE MAGNET LIBRARY.—No. 1,523.

Bull. Smithy's given me carty blong and—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Oh, shut up cackling!" said Bunter crossly. "As I say, I've got carty blong, and I can do anything I like! The grub's awfully good!" went on Bunter. His eyes glistened behind his spectacles, as he referred to a subject so near his heart. "I can tell you, the grub's simply ripping! These Smiths may be no class, but they've got a jolly good cook. Not so good as our chef at Bunter Court, perhaps—but very nearly. I'll tell you what we had for dinner last night—"

"Chuck it!"

"Oh, here we are!" said Bunter, as the car turned in at a great gateway, and a lodgekeeper touched his hat. "By the way, Bull, you'll find some Highcliffe chaps here—"

"Highcliffe chaps!" exclaimed Johnny.

"Yes, Pon and his gang, from Highcliffe—"

"Oh!" said Johnny, rather grimly. "I remember now, I heard at Greyfriars that Smithy had fixed up with that crew for Easter. Blessed if I can understand my pals being here with that lot!"

"They're a rotten lot, and no mistake," agreed Bunter. "I shouldn't wonder if they're jolly uncivil to you, Bull, now Smithy's away—I mean, gone out."

"Oh, rot!" said Johnny. "I never see Pon without wanting to punch his cheeky head—but I suppose we can be civil to one another in Smithy's place."

"I'd jolly well begin by punching his head, if I were you!" advised Bunter. "Don't give him a chance to jaw. As soon as you see him, hit him in the eye!"

"Fathead!"

"Hit him right in the eye, and—"

"Ass!"

"Beast!"

And the car ran on up the long avenue, and stopped at the grand entrance of the millionaire's mansion.

THE THIRTEENTH CHAPTER.

Unexpected!

CECIL PONSONBY sat up, removed the cigarette from his mouth, listened—and grinned sourly. The door on the hall was closed, but a fat voice reached him.

"Larkin! Here, Larkin!"

It was the fat squeak of William George Bunter.

"He's come back after all!" murmured Pon.

And Gadsby, Monson, and Vavasour grinned.

The Highcliffe knuts had played bridge for more than an hour, smoked innumerable cigarettes, and then they would have been glad to get on with the rag on Billy Bunter, by way of an enlivening change.

But Bunter, who had gone in the car to the station with Mr. Vernon-Smith, had not returned as expected.

Once or twice Pon glanced out of the smoke-room into the hall, but there was no sign of the fat Owl of Greyfriars.

That Bunter had the least inkling of the Highcliffe plot—even that he was aware that Smithy had gone up to town with his father—Pon did not suspect for a moment. Not a word had been said in Bunter's hearing, so far as the dandy of Highcliffe knew.

But he began to wonder whether the fat junior had cleared off, for some reason of his own, and thus by sheer accident avoided the intended ragging.

So, as he was bored with smoking, and tired of bridge, it was a relief to Pon to hear the fat voice squeaking in the hall.

He rose from the armchair, and threw away the stump of his cigarette.

"Time we got that fat freak on his travels," he remarked. "Just bag him, and walk him out of the place—see? You and I will take an arm each, Gaddy."

"I say, if he kicks up a fuss—"

said Monson.

"No 'if' about that—he will!" said Ponsonby. "It won't buy him anything."

"But the servants—"

"They won't interfere. They won't know what the game is, for one thing; and it's no business of theirs, for another."

"But what will they think?" murmured Vavasour.

Ponsonby shrugged his shoulders.

"Whatever they doocid well like!" he retorted. "What do I care? We can carry on as we please in this sort of a show."

"Oh, all right!"

Ponsonby threw open the door, and his friends followed him out into the hall, with anticipatory grins.

Larkin was in the hall, attending to Bunter's instructions. And another figure was standing there, at which the four Highcliffians stared blankly.

They knew the sturdy, stocky Yorkshire junior at a glance, and their eyes fairly popped at the sight of Johnny Bull of the Greyfriars Remove.

Johnny had his hat and coat off, and a footman had carried in his suitcase. He was glancing about him in the spacious hall, while Bunter talked to the butler.

Larkin had a faint expression of surprise on his face.

He had Mr. Vernon-Smith's instructions to give the fat junior every attention during his stay at Seahill Park, so Bunter was in a position to give orders, at least, while Smithy was away.

But Larkin had certainly not expected him to bring a visitor in; and he had a strong suspicion that that visitor was intended to serve the same purpose as Bob Cherry a few days ago.

However, that was no business of Larkin's, and he listened respectfully as Bunter squeaked directions.

"The room next to mine," Bunter was saying.

"Quite so, sir," said Larkin.

"And have tea served at once, Larkin!"

"Very good, sir!"

"And—"

"What the dooce does this mean, Larkin?" exclaimed Ponsonby, coming angrily forward. "Who's this fellow?"

Johnny Bull, who was at a little distance in the spacious hall, looked round as Pon spoke, with a glitter in his eyes.

In the belief that his friends were staying there, and that Smithy, of course, had authorised Wharton to send that telegram, Johnny was prepared to overcome his dislike of Pon & Co., to the extent of treating them with civility, under Mr. Vernon-Smith's roof. But he was not prepared to take any cheek from Ponsonby. He was going to be civil if the Highcliffians were—otherwise, not.

Larkin coughed.

"This gentleman, sir, is Master Bull,



In sheer terror, Ponsonby jumped back. In another second he would have been racing away. But in that second a shadow stirred softly in the dark and a fierce blow was struck. A sharp and terrible cry left Ponsonby's lips as he went toppling backwards!

a schoolfellow of Master Herbert's at Greyfriars," he said.

"What is he doin' here?" snapped Ponsonby. "Smithy's not asked him here—I know that."

"Perhaps you had better inquire of him, sir," said Larkin; and he moved away to the service door.

Pon cast a dark glance after him, discerning impertinence in Larkin's tone and manner.

Billy Bunter grinned.

The angry surprise in the faces of the Highcliffe knuts amused Bunter. He was not afraid of them, with Johnny Bull on hand.

Ponsonby breathed wrath. After the first minute or two of astonishment at seeing Johnny Bull there, he guessed what it meant. Bunter had found out somehow that Smithy was away, and had called in another protector. It was quite an unexpected move.

Bunter wagged a warning fat forefinger at him.

"You can cut that out, Ponsonby," he said coolly. "I don't want any cheek from you, and my pal Bull doesn't, either."

"You frowsy fat frog—"

"Yah!" retorted Bunter.

Ponsonby made a stride at him, with clenched fists and gleaming eyes.

Billy Bunter promptly retreated across the hall to where Johnny Bull stood, with his face growing grimmer.

The dandy of Highcliffe checked his rage. He had not forgotten the battle-royal with Bob Cherry; and he was not keen on Johnny repeating Bob's performance. Johnny was not, perhaps, quite so hefty a fighting man as Bob Cherry; but he was sturdy and strong, worth two or three of the Highcliffe knuts, and certainly would not have hesitated to tackle all four of them, if driven to it. Pon was not

looking for a desperate fistical encounter.

"That's the sort of manners they have at Highcliffe, Bull, old chap," chuckled Bunter. "Gang of hooligans—what? Kicking up a row the minute Smithy's back is turned! What a crew!"

Johnny Bull grunted. He disliked, more and more, the quarters in which he found himself, and was more surprised that his friends were there at the same time as Pon & Co. It did not occur to him that they weren't there.

"Look here, Bull!" Ponsonby checked his insolence at the gleam in Johnny's eye; but he could not be civil. "Look here! I want to know what you're doin' here, see?"

"I should think that was plain enough," grunted Johnny Bull. "If you don't like my company, you can't like it less than I like yours. Keep your distance, and we shan't row."

"You've barged in here—"

"Oh, chuck it!" snapped Johnny.

"Are you going to make out that you've been invited here?" exclaimed Ponsonby savagely.

Johnny stared at him.

"Mad?" he asked. "Think I'm the fellow to butt into a place without being invited? Don't be a fool!"

"Oh gad!" said Monson. "Has Smithy really asked him, Pon? Lettin' us down, askin' a crew of Greyfriars cads here."

"Chance for you to enjoy some decent and respectable company for once," said Johnny Bull. "You don't get much at Highcliffe."

"Smithy can't have asked him, without mentionin' it to us," said Gadsby.

"Absolutely!" agreed Vavasour.

"It's a trick, same as it was before," snarled Ponsonby. "That fat scoundrel

landed that ruffian, Cherry, on us, and now he's landed another ruffian."

"Better language, please!" said Johnny Bull quietly.

"Look here, I know Smithy never asked you here! Did you know that this was Smithy's place at all?" demanded Ponsonby.

"Yes, of course I did! What do you mean?"

Ponsonby looked at him.

He disliked the sturdy Yorkshire junior intensely. There had been an occasion when Johnny Bull had taken him by the neck, and shaken him like a rat; and Pon had a long memory for such things. Still, he knew that Johnny was not a fellow like Bunter to barge into a place without being asked.

As he was assured that the Bounder had never asked him, it was obviously some trick on Bunter's part—and the reason was clear enough. But how the astute fat Owl had wangled this was a mystery. Pon was puzzled and perplexed, and growing angrier and angrier.

"If you got Smithy's invitation through Bunter, you can take it from me that it was spoo!" he said.

"Oh, don't talk rot!" grunted Johnny. "Think I'd take it from Bunter?"

"Then you didn't?"

"No, I didn't! I never knew Bunter was here till half an hour ago."

"Well, I jolly well know there's a catch in it somewhere!" snapped Ponsonby. "You'll get the boot fast enough if Smithy comes in and finds you here. He doesn't want you any more than we do."

Johnny's jaw squared.

"That's enough, Ponsonby," he said. "I don't want to have any trouble in
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Smithy's place; but I'm not standing any more Highcliffe cheek! Shut up!" "Yes, shut up, Pon!" squeaked Bunter. "Bull ain't here to welsh Smithy at cards, like you and your pals, anyhow."

Pon was already near boiling-point. That was rather too much for him. He made a rush at Billy Bunter.

The fat junior skipped behind Johnny Bull, as actively as a kangaroo. "I say, old chap, keep that cad off!" he gasped.

Johnny Bull did not need asking. He gave Ponsonby a shove on the chest, that sent him spinning backwards.

"Hands off!" he said curtly.

Ponsonby spun two or three yards, then, his foot slipping on the polished floor, he went over headlong. The back of his head, as he crashed, banged on an armoured figure that stood in the hall, and sent it toppling.

Bang! Crash! Bang! Clatter!

"Oh gad!" gasped Vavasour.

"He, he, he!" squeaked Billy Bunter.

"Ow!" Ponsonby sat up dizzily in the midst of scattered sections of ancient armour. "Ow! Ooogh! Wooogh!"

Two or three startled servants popped into the hall. They stared at the dandy of Highcliffe, sitting among the disconnected armour.

Ponsonby, with a scarlet face, picked himself up.

He gave Johnny Bull a deadly look. Johnny stood ready for him to come on, if he wanted to. But Pon did not want to. Breathing fury, he stalked away, followed by his friends—leaving the servants to set the effigy up again.

Billy Bunter's fat cackle followed him.

"Well, my hat!" grunted Johnny. "This is a jolly place for a fellow to come to, and no mistake! It beats me how Wharton can be here, with that gang—You flabby chump, what are you grinning at?"

Billy Bunter did not explain what he was grinning at. But he grinned, till his grin extended from one fat ear to the other.

THE FOURTEENTH CHAPTER.

Face to Face!

"SILENZIO, signor!"

The voice was quiet—little above a whisper—but it struck on the ears of Mr. Samuel Vernon-Smith as sharply as a rifle-shot.

He started convulsively and stared up.

The express was rolling swiftly through the beautiful county of Sussex. A minute after starting, Mr. Vernon-Smith had opened a leather case, and taken a bundle of documents therefrom, and ever since he had been deep in those documents. He had no eyes for Sussex downs or sunny April skies.

It was a corridor train, and passengers passed sometimes up and down the corridor, but drew no glance from the millionaire. He had reserved his carriage, and had it to himself, and did not expect to be interrupted.

The interruption came unexpectedly.

The door on the corridor slid open, a man stepped in, and the door slid shut behind him.

He stood with his back to it, his eyes on Mr. Vernon-Smith, his right hand in the pocket of his jacket. A bulge in that pocket showed that the hidden hand held something—which was pointed towards the millionaire as he sat and stared.

Mr. Vernon-Smith did not need to ask what it was. The murmured words in *THE MAGNET* LIBRARY.—No. 1,573.

Italian, the bulge in the coat, told him enough.

After the first moment of startled surprise he was cool again; but he knew that he was in the presence of the mysterious assassin who had, again and again, sought his life, and that the deadly automatic was trained on him at the distance of only a few feet.

"Silence, sir!" The man repeated his injunction, in English this time, in the same low murmur. "A movement or a call will cost you your life! Do not slip your hand towards that pocket, I beg. You will never live to draw the revolver you have there!"

Mr. Vernon-Smith sat still.

His eyes searched the man. He bore little resemblance to the Italian who had fired on him near Greyfriars, and who had attempted to wreck his car on the Wimford road.

The black moustache was gone, the black eyebrows were lighter in hue, the complexion less swarthy. But he was the same man—the millionaire knew that, in spite of disguise. In a crowd he would have passed him unrecognised, but at close view he knew him.

If the City man's heart was beating faster, he gave no sign of it. His manner was calm and contemptuous.

"You!" he said, and his voice was perfectly steady. "What do you want?"

The Italian's black eyes glittered at the documents outspread on the millionaire's portly knees. He smiled.

"I think I see a word that interests me on your papers, signor," he remarked. "Those documents deal with the N'gombo Concession."

"Does that concern you?" asked Mr. Vernon-Smith quietly.

"Si, signor!" The Italian smiled again, not a pleasant smile, with a gleam of white teeth. "It concerns me so much that your life, signor, is of no more consequence to me than blowing out the flame of a candle."

"Who are you?"

"You may call me Nessuno, if you desire to address me by name, signor."

"Nessuno!" repeated Mr. Vernon-Smith. "That means nobody, I think?"

"Vero!" assented the Italian, with a nod. "Truly, signor! My name is tolerably well known in the world of Italian finance—not unknown in your own great city, signor! But I will not mention it, for if you come to my terms, you will survive this interview, and I do not desire you to remember it."

Mr. Vernon-Smith watched the dark face more with curiosity than any other feeling. His look showed that the mention of the African word "N'gombo" had enlightened him a good deal.

It was on the N'gombo Concession, in Kenya, that Mr. Vernon-Smith's attention had been chiefly concentrated of late. N'gombo documents accompanied him wherever he went!

"Make yourself clear!" he snapped.

"I can spare you five minutes, signor!" said Nessuno, as the Italian called himself. "No more! In that time we reach a steep gradient, and the train will slow—and if I shoot you dead where you sit, signor, that will be my chance for leaving the train in a hurry! You understand me?"

"Quite!"

"N'gombo," said the Italian, "is an unsettled district on the border of Kenya, a British colony, and Abyssinia—the new Italian empire. Unfortunately, it is on the British side of the line. Such a line, however, in forest and desert, may be modified a little—to include N'gombo in the territory now governed by my Duce!"

"Hardly!"

"The border-line is a little uncertain in such a quarter, signor! But if N'gombo falls into the hands of Signor Vernon-Smith and the syndicate he is forming to take it up, addio to that—good-bye to it, signor! You will take the greatest care that the border-line does not waver. Non è vero?"

"Quite!"

"But with N'gombo in Italian hands—what? I think it would be, what you call, all right! At least N'gombo would be Italian—in my hands! Some time ago, signor, you travelled in the colony of Kenya, with your son and his school-fellows. You bought an option on N'gombo at that time—it has still a few weeks to run. Correct me if I am wrong."

"That is correct."

"It is your intention to take up this option at a cost of twenty thousand pounds."

"Possibly!"

"Then N'gombo will be yours. Is it not so?"

"And of what value is it to you, Mr. Nessuno?" asked Mr. Vernon-Smith. "A stretch of forest and desert and rocky waste—"

"But stanniferous!" grinned the Italian. "Few, if any, know that tin lies under the rocks of Kenya. You know—and I know. Some day it will dawn on the financial world as a great discovery. In the days of the slump, signor, you bought your option at a rubbish price—the metal, tin, was then a drug in the market—but you are a foreseeing man, signor. Now the time you foresaw has come, and tin booms in the market, and an immense fortune awaits the syndicate that works the stanniferous deposits at N'gombo! Non è vero?"

"You seem to be well posted, Mr. Nessuno!" said Mr. Vernon-Smith quietly. "Suppose it is as you say—what then?"

The hand hidden in the coat pocket moved, and the bulge grew more pronounced.

"Name your price for the option on N'gombo, signor, and I will buy it from you!" said the Italian. "My firm in Milan are prepared to form the syndicate for its exploitation. Now that Abyssinia is ours, the way is clear! I am not, like you, thinking only of profit—I am thinking of making sure of an indispensable metal for war munitions for my country! In my own interests, I would not take these measures. Do me the honour to believe that, signor."

"I am willing to believe you are more fool than rascal, if that is what you mean!" said Mr. Vernon-Smith. "But I have not the slightest desire to provide Italy with access to metal for munitions of war."

The black eyes flashed at him.

"Let us come down to the tacks of brass, as you say in this country," said the Italian coolly. "N'gombo is to be Italian, if a thousand lives stood in the way. I am a man of finance—not a bravo. If you will deal with me, live! Name your price for the option!"

"It is not for sale, Mr. Nessuno!"

"Take care, signor! Your death will effect the same purpose—the option expires in a few weeks, and your death will cause more than sufficient delay. Others do not know what you know—you are not the man to tell secrets till the power is all in your hands. You understand?"

"Oh, quite!" said Mr. Vernon-Smith contemptuously. "You fancy that my nerves may be rattled by a succession of attempts on my life, and that you may gain your ends by threats, instead of risking your unwashed neck! I understand perfectly!"

"Do you refuse?"

Mr. Vernon-Smith paused before replying—though it was only a pause to gain time.

He was at the assassin's mercy. At his first movement, the automatic was ready to whip into sight. The man had his back to the corridor door. Once or twice, during that brief talk, a passenger had passed up or down the corridor, but there was nothing to draw a suspicious glance—only two men in conversation, one sitting and the other standing. There was no help—and though the villain's escape would not be easy, after he had fired, it was plain that he was prepared to take the chance.

The deadly gleam in the eyes of the man who called himself "Nobody," showed that he was in desperate earnest.

The millionaire paused—long. He was quietly and coolly calculating his chance of a spring at the man before the shot could speed. It was the slimmest of chances, but it was that, or yielding—and surrender was not a word in Samuel Vernon-Smith's vocabulary.

The black eyes flashed at him as the Italian read his intention. The hidden hand whipped from the pocket, grasping the automatic—and at the same moment the door behind the Italian suddenly slid open, two hands grasped him by the collar, and he was dragged over backwards, to fall with a crash in the corridor of the rushing train!

THE FIFTEENTH CHAPTER.

Smithy Means Business!

BANG!

The report of the automatic sounded sharply through the roar of the express, as the weapon in the Italian's hand exploded.

But he was sprawling on his back, and the bullet crashed through a glass panel, sending smashed glass spraying in all directions.

A split second more, and a boot, stamping savagely on the Italian's arm, almost crippled it, and the pistol rolled from his relaxing fingers.

Herbert Vernon-Smith kicked it along the corridor, far out of reach of the desperate rascal.

It was the Bounder who had seized the assassin and dragged him over—and Mr. Vernon-Smith, leaping to his feet, stared blankly at his son.

"Herbert!" he gasped.

The Bounder, unheeding, flung himself at the Italian, who was struggling up, foaming with rage like a wild animal.

Six or seven passengers had come out into the corridor, with startled faces, and the guard was coming up. Smithy grasped the Italian, seeking to pin him down—in a few moments overwhelming aid would have reached him.

But the Italian, with a desperate effort, scrambled up, the Bounder clinging to him like a cat, and exerting all his strength, he flung the Greyfriars junior off.

The Bounder staggered into the carriage, colliding with his father and blocking his way for a moment. That moment was enough for the agile, quick-witted rascal. He rushed down the corridor, and as a passenger grabbed at him flashed out a knife. The passenger jumped away, and the Italian rushed past.

"Collar him!" shrieked the Bounder, rushing into the corridor in pursuit.

But he was only in time to see a fly-

ing figure leap from the train and roll headlong down a grassy embankment.

He stared from a window, clenching his teeth with rage.

He saw the rolling figure of the man who had made that desperate leap, but only for a moment—then the rush of the train carried him on, and the Italian was lost to his sight.

"Herbert——" gasped Mr. Vernon-Smith.

"He's gone!" said the Bounder, between his teeth. "Gone, father! But—he must have got hurt in that fall—they'll get him when they look for him—surely they'll get him!"

"Herbert!" repeated Mr. Vernon-

(Continued on next page.)

The STATELY HOMES of GREYFRIARS

THE LAD FROM LANCASHIRE

By

The Greyfriars Rhymester



(1)

Mark Linley's a Lancashire lad,
His father's a mill-hand in cotton.
"He's only a scholarship cad!"
Says Skinner, and others as rotten.
But Mark doesn't care what they say,
Their sneers only make him more
merry;
His real friends are better than they;
And best friend of all is Bob Cherry.

(2)

We're proud of our Lancashire lad,
He's handsome, athletic and clever;
He thinks that the South isn't bad,
But Lanes is his county for ever!
His holidays always are spent
At Blackpool, he loves every minute!
And though he likes places in Kent,
With Blackpool they're simply not in it!

(4)

His home is at Bury, you see,
A cottage quite close to the Irwell;
His father says: "Well, it suits me!"
His mother says yes, it suits her well!
And Mark says the same, and declares
He's sure he is living in clover,
And if it is tiny, who cares?
It's not so much fog to look over!

(6)

Down South we think Lancashire men
Are born with rosettes on, and rattles!
For that's how we see them all when
They come to the Cup Final battles!
And Lancashire shortly will send
To London another assembly
To cheer along Preston North End,
Good luck and bon voyage—to
Wembley!

(3)

He isn't a fellow to boast,
Few Lancashire fellows would do so,
But here, on the South country coast,
He feels like a Robinson Crusoe;
He lives in a foreigners' land,
He likes them, especially Bob Cherry,
But still, he would much rather stand
By the Market Place statue at Bury.

(5)

But Bunter replies with a snort:
"It wouldn't suit me—it's too parky!
I wish you could see Bunter Court!"
"So do you, I expect!" answers Marky.
Then Bunter turns up his fat nose
And says: "You low beast, keep your
distance!"
Which doesn't crush Mark, for he knows
There's no Bunter Court in existence!

(7)

At football, Mark Linley is keen;
At full-back he's cool and reliant,
His play is both clever and clean,
We look upon him as a giant!
If cads sneer, forget them, because
Their voices will sound very thinly
Against the great roar of applause
To that best of good fellows, Mark
Linley!

Next Week: TOM BROWN, from 'WAY DOWN UNDER.

Smith. He was staring at his son, almost like a man in a dream. "You bore—on this train! What—"

"Sorry to see me here?" asked Smithy, with a sarcastic grin.

"You saved my life, Herbert—that villain would have fired in another moment. But—but—" Mr. Vernon-Smith gasped. "How did you get here?"

"I've been in the next compartment ever since you left Seahill," answered the Bounder. "I've had my eyes open, father. I never knew that villain—he's changed his looks a good deal—but when I found that he had stepped into your carriage, and stayed there, I came along to give him a squint."

"Oh!" gasped Mr. Vernon-Smith.

"Lucky I did, what?" grinned the Bounder.

"Yes, yes! But— So that is why you were not to be found when I left!" exclaimed Mr. Vernon-Smith. "Your friend Ponsonby told me that you had gone out on a bicycle—"

"So I had—down to the station!"

"You young rascal!" said Mr. Vernon-Smith. "I never dreamed of danger on a crowded train—"

"I did!"

"We are stopping!" said Mr. Vernon-Smith.

The corridor was in a buzz with excited passengers, as the train slowed down and stopped at the next station.

Mr. Vernon-Smith gathered up his precious documents, and he alighted with his son. Urgent business affairs in the City had to be postponed. The capture of the man from Milan was the most urgent affair at the moment—and within a few minutes after the millionaire and his son had left the train, search for him was going on down the line, and the telephone was telling the news far and wide.

That he had been injured in his desperate leap from the train seemed likely enough; in which case, his capture was inevitable.

But fortune had favoured the desperate rascal.

It was two hours later that Mr. Vernon-Smith resumed his journey, and by that time there had been no news of the man who called himself "Nessuno."

When Mr. Vernon-Smith took the train the Bounder followed him in, with a lurking grin on his face.

"You had better take the next train back to Seahill, Herbert!" rapped Mr. Vernon-Smith.

"Rot!" said Herbert.

Mr. Vernon-Smith gave him a glare—and then smiled.

"Have you forgotten your guests there?" he asked.

"They can look after themselves."

"I cannot allow you to remain with me, Herbert, in the circumstances. You must take the next train back from London," said the millionaire.

"Are you taking it?" asked the Bounder.

"No, you young donkey!"

"Then I'm not!"

Mr. Vernon-Smith glared again.

"I tell you I will not allow you to run into danger!" he hooted.

"That's all right!" said Smithy coolly. "I'm not in danger—you are! If you turn me out of this carriage, father, I shall squat in the next. If you don't let me in at Courtman Square, I shall sit on the doorstep. If you don't give me a seat in your car to-morrow, when you go into the City, I shall hang on behind! I'm not losing

sight of you again till the police get hold of that gunman."

"I tell you—" roared Mr. Vernon-Smith.

The Bounder shook his head.

"I'm telling you!" he said.

"That rascal is practically certain to be caught!" said Mr. Vernon-Smith. "They will get him to-night, I imagine."

"Then I'll go back to Seahill Park in the morning."

"You will go back immediately we reach the terminus."

"Guess again!" said the Bounder coolly.

The millionaire gave him another glare, and turned to his documents. Ngombo claimed his attention till they arrived in London. The Bounder sat with a cheerful grin on his face. He had quite made up his mind.

"Now, Herbert," said Mr. Vernon-Smith, when they alighted at the terminus, "I will see you off in your train for Sussex."

"Are you coming back?"

"No!"

"Then wash it out!"

Mr. Vernon-Smith breathed hard.

"If you had not saved my life this afternoon, Herbert, I would box your ears!" he said.

"I'll save it again if that Italian comes fooling around!" said the Bounder. "I'm not in a hurry to inherit your millions, father."

Mr. Vernon-Smith's frowning brow relaxed.

"I will let you stay the night in London," he said; "but you must return to Seahill Park and safety in the morning, you young rascal!"

"I will if you do!" said Smithy. "Why not put in the rest of Easter there, father! You're safer there, till that scoundrel is laid by the heels. You can make up your mind to it that I'm not losing sight of you again so long as that gunman is running loose."

Mr. Vernon-Smith grunted, and they left the station together.

THE SIXTEENTH CHAPTER.

Puzzling!

JOHNNY BULL frowned—a puzzled frown.

Billy Bunter grinned—a fat grin.

Bunter was satisfied, if Johnny was not.

There had been tea—an ample tea—served on the lawn, under the shade of the ancient beech, from a bough of which the hammock was slung.

Johnny, after his journey, was glad of a rest, and glad of tea, and so far as surroundings went he had nothing to grumble at. The green lawn, shaded by trees, was very pleasant, looked on by innumerable windows of the great mansion. In the distance the park stretched away, bordered, towards the sea, by an old wall on the edge of the beach. Through the branches the sea was visible in blue patches. Such a spot for the holidays might have pleased any fellow, though the view, near at hand, was rather spoiled by four fellows strolling about smoking cigarettes.

But Johnny was quite perplexed.

Billy Bunter, after tea, stretched himself in the hammock slung under the old beech. He could do so safely with Johnny Bull at hand. But for his deeply artful dodge in getting Johnny there he would have been tipped out of that hammock very quickly. Now he sprawled at his fat ease, grinning, amused by the black looks of Pon & Co.,

and by the puzzled expression on Johnny Bull's face.

Still in the full belief that that telegram was genuine, Johnny did not doubt that Wharton would explain when they met. But he simply could not imagine how his friends came to be staying in the same place with the Highcliffe fellows.

Billy Bunter evidently was on cat-and-dog terms with them.

Johnny was still more puzzled by their absence from the house. It was extraordinary for all of them to clear off just before his arrival.

He supposed that they would come in to tea, but they did not. After tea they had not come in. He was getting more and more perplexed.

Pon & Co. did not deign to take tea with the Greyfriars juniors. They were keeping their distance, scowling occasionally from that distance.

Gadsby and Vavasour went in presently to play billiards, and Monson strolled away; but Pon continued to pace on the lawn, smoking one cigarette after another, with a black brow.

He was debating in his mind whether to take the risk of tackling Johnny Bull, and barging him out of the place. But the sturdy, stocky Yorkshire junior looked dangerous to tackle, and Pon remembered the encounter with Bob Cherry, of which traces still remained on his nose.

Johnny glanced at him every now and then, and he would have been glad to call to him and ask about Smithy and the other fellows, but he did not care to speak to Ponsonby.

Certainly Pon would have been very much astonished had he learned that Johnny believed Harry Wharton & Co. to be staying at Seahill Park.

That did not occur to him for a moment, though he was puzzled by Johnny's presence, and could not make out how Bunter had got him there.

"Look here, Bunter," said Johnny, at last, "I can't make out the fellows staying out like this. Why the dickens don't they come in?"

"Oh, they'll come in later, old chap!" grinned Bunter. "Don't you worry!"

Grunt from Johnny Bull.

"You've got my company," added Bunter, with dignity.

"Fathead!"

"Oh, really, Bull—"

"If you know which way they went, why not go and meet them?" asked Johnny. "Roll out of that hammock, fatty, and come along—what?"

"Oh crikey!" ejaculated Bunter. "I—I say, they may be—be miles away! Miles and miles! In fact, I shouldn't be surprised if they didn't get back to-night at all."

Johnny stared at him.

"You silly ass! They couldn't stay the night out!" he snapped.

"Well, if they lose their train back," said Bunter.

"Their train? You told me they'd gone along the beach."

"I—I mean, they might get cut off by the tide."

"What?" roared Johnny Bull.

"Don't yell at a chap!" said Bunter peevishly. "You made me jump! I shouldn't be at all surprised if we don't see them before bed-time. It's all right, old chap! Larkin's got your room ready."

"I'd better ask Larkin if he knows when they're coming in, I suppose," said Johnny.

Bunter sat up in alarm.

"I—I say!" he stammered. "The— the fact is, they went down to the beach, old fellow. They may be back any



Ponsonby & Co. were pressing Johnny Bull hard when Billy Bunter screwed up his courage, such as it was, to lend his champion a hand. He clenched his fat fists and hit out blindly. A podgy fist caught Gadsby under the chin and he pitched over. Then a smashing blow from Johnny Bull sent Vavasour reeling!

minute. Keep your eye on that path—that's the way down to the gate on the beach. You may see them any—any minute now."

Johnny Bull grunted, and relapsed into puzzled silence.

Ponsonby went into the house at last to join his friends, bestowing a scowl on Johnny Bull as he went.

Johnny moved restlessly about the lawn, with his hands in his pockets, while Billy Bunter settled down comfortably in the hammock, his fat head resting on soft cushions, quite at his ease.

Johnny Bull was beginning to feel angry now, as well as perplexed.

This really was not the way to treat a fellow who had travelled nearly the length of the kingdom to see his friends. He was not, like the Bounder, a fellow to take offence easily, but he was growing annoyed.

Bunter, on the other hand, was quite satisfied. It did not matter whether Johnny was puzzled, annoyed, angry, or anything else, so long as he remained there to protect Bunter from Pon and his knavish tricks. It was, so far as Bunter could see, all right.

Quite satisfied that it was all right, Bunter closed his little round eyes behind his big, round spectacles, and dozed.

A sound like the rumble of distant thunder reached Johnny Bull's ears, and he glanced round at the fat junior in the hammock.

Snore!

Bunter, with his eyes shut and his mouth open, slept and snored. Johnny grunted and resumed his restless pacing.

He glanced several times at the path through the trees which led to the wall on the beach and the gate there. As his friends did not come in, he was tempted to go and look for them. Still, they might come back by any of half a

dozen ways, and he did not want to miss them.

He stepped at last to the massive, gnarled trunk of the old beech, and clambered up. It was a huge old tree, one of the largest on the Seahill estate, and from the top branches it was possible to obtain a widespread view, far over the park and the park wall, and the sands beyond and the blue sea.

If his friends were anywhere in sight he would be able to spot them from the top of the beech. He clambered actively from branch to branch, and disappeared into the foliage.

High up in the tree, he stood with his foot jammed in a forked bough, holding on to a higher branch, and swept the surrounding landscape with his eyes.

He had a glorious view, landscape and seascape, but he saw nothing of his friends or the Bounder; which, if he had only known it, was not surprising, as they were not in the same county!

He remained there, watching like Sister Anne and, like Sister Anne, failing to see anybody coming.

From below, the deep snore of Billy Bunter rumbled up to his ears.

But that snore, after a time, was not the only sound. Voices floated up through the branches of the big beech—Pon & Co. had come out of the house again.

"Where's that Greyfriars cad, Bull?" It was Ponsonby's voice.

"Not here!" said Gadsby.

"He can't be gone!" said Monson.

"I can't make out what he's barging in here at all for," growled Ponsonby. "He's a low ruffian, but he's not a cadger like Bunter. That fat scoundrel must have fooled him, somehow, I think. He's got him here, like that other brute Cherry."

"Absolutely!" said Vavasour.

"Well, he's cleared off now. Have that fat rotter out of that hammock!"

"Good egg!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Johnny Bull, in the tree above, grinned. Evidently, the Highcliffe knuts did not guess that he had climbed the tree to look for his friends—which was natural enough, as Pon & Co. did not know that he supposed his friends to be there at all.

They were going to rag Bunter, taking advantage of his supposed absence.

The rumbling snore suddenly ceased. There was the sound of a heavy bump. It was followed by a fearful yell:

"Yaroooh!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Ow! I say, you fellows— Oh crikey!" roared Bunter. "I say, Bull— Rescue, Greyfriars! Yaroooh! Oh crumbs! Help!"

Johnny Bull was not the fellow to leave that appeal unregarded. He slithered rapidly down the branches of the beech—to the rescue!

THE SEVENTEENTH CHAPTER.

Hard Hitting!

BILLY BUNTER roared. He had been awakened suddenly and unpleasantly by rolling headlong out of the hammock and landing in the grass below.

He blinked in terror at the four grinning faces that surrounded him.

Johnny Bull was not to be seen, but Pon & Co. were only too visible! The fat Owl of Greyfriars was in the hands of the Philistines!

"Rag the cad!" grinned Ponsonby.

"Serag him!"

"Roll him along! Boot him as far as the beach!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Ow, leggo! Yaroooh! Leave off!"

kicking me, you beasts!" shrieked Billy Bunter. "I say, you fellows—yo-hoop!" Rescue! Yaroooooh! Whooop!"

Bunter rolled, and roared, and yelled, amid howls of laughter from the Highcliffians. It would have fared hard with the fat Owl, had not help been at hand. But help was coming.

A stocky figure dropped from the branches of the beech! Before Pon & Co. realised that Johnny Bull was there, he was jumping at them. His right caught Pon under the ear, and sent him spinning—his left landed in Monson's eye, and Monson staggered away and sat down.

Gadsby and Vavasour jumped back. "That—that Greyfriars cad!" gasped Vavasour.

"Ow! Wow!" yelled Bunter. "Help!" Rescue! Yaroooooh! Ow! Wow! Whooop!"

Ponsonby scrambled to his feet, crimson with rage. His head was singing from the knock under his ear.

He glared at Johnny Bull furiously. "Back up, you fellows!" he panted. And he led the rush.

Had Pon been aware that Johnny Bull was so close at hand he would not have ventured to begin that rag. But now rage supplied the place of courage, and he fairly hurled himself at the Greyfriars junior.

Johnny Bull met him grimly, his jaw squaring. He did not expect fair play from the Highcliffe fellows, and he knew that he was going to have his hands full; but he did not flinch.

"Back up, Bunter!" he shouted.

"Ow! Wow!" was Bunter's answer. "Yow-ow!"

Ponsonby backed from Johnny's left and right—but his three friends rushed in to help, and Johnny was driven back by the four. He backed against the massive trunk of the beech, so that he could not be taken from behind, and faced them undauntedly.

Billy Bunter sat and gasped for breath. He blinked through his big spectacles at the affray under the beech. "Oh crikey!" gasped Bunter.

Johnny was holding his own, but he was hard pressed. Bob Cherry had beaten the four of them together, a few days ago; but Johnny had plenty to do to hold his own. Bunter staggered to his feet.

The fat Owl was no fighting-man—but he screwed up his courage, such as it was, to lend his champion a hand.

Pon & Co., pressing Johnny hard, did not even look at the Owl—passing him by like the idle wind which they regarded not.

Billy Bunter clenched his fat fists—hesitated—and then rushed in, hitting out blindly.

A podgy fist caught Gadsby under the chin. With Bunter's tremendous weight behind it, it came like a sledge-hammer.

Gadsby pitched over headlong, and rolled dizzily in the grass. He felt as if his head had been knocked off.

"Oooooogh!" spluttered Gaddy.

The next moment, Bunter was backing away, promptly, as Vavasour turned on him. He skipped round the beech, Vavasour following him up.

The relief was timely for Johnny Bull. He was left with only two adversaries to deal with—and he was more than a match for any two knutty Highcliffians.

He came at them with lashing fists and glinting eyes, and Ponsonby went over, with a crash, and Monson followed him.

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"I say, help!" yelled Bunter, as Vavasour reached him.

Johnny reached Vavasour the next moment. A single punch sent Vavasour headlong, and he collapsed in the grass.

"Oh crikey!" gasped Bunter. "Oh lor'! Oh dear! Oooooogh!"

"All serene, fathead!" grunted Johnny Bull. He dabbed a streaming nose. "The rotten funks don't want any more!"

Pon & Co. evidently didn't! Vavasour was already departing, cutting off towards the house as soon as he got on his feet. Gadsby tottered after him, with his hands to his spinning head.

Ponsonby and Monson scrambled up, panting, and stood eyeing Johnny Bull—who stared at them with cool contempt.

"Want any more?" he snapped. "Come on, the two of you! Lots more if you want it!"

Pon and Monson did not come on. Panting, they followed their friends.

"Yah! Funks!" yelled Bunter, as their backs were turned. "Yah, you ain't half licked yet! Yah! Highcliffe funks!"

Ponsonby paused—and half-turned. But Monson tramped on, and Pon followed him. The Highcliffians had had enough—more than enough.

Billy Bunter chuckled.

"I say, old chap, we've licked them!" he said. "He, he, he! I fancy those cads will keep their distance after this! He, he, he!"

Johnny Bull pressed a handkerchief to a streaming nose, and grunted.

"Blessed if I can understand this!" he said. "What on earth is Wharton here for—with that crew about? Pretty sort of a cat and dog holiday!"

"He, he, he!"

"What are you cackling at, you fat image?"

"Oh, nothing! He, he, he!"

Johnny Bull grunted again, and dabbed his damaged nose. Billy Bunter sat in the hammock and grinned. Pon & Co. had had a lesson—and he had no doubt that they would steer clear so long as Johnny Bull was on the spot. Johnny, it was true, was rather damaged by the hectic combat—but as Bunter was not damaged, that did not matter.

Billy Bunter was feeling greatly pleased with his astuteness in getting Johnny on the scene. He could not help realising that few fellows would have been bright enough to think of such a stunt.

It was all right for Bunter—which was all that mattered. But it was not—alas!—going to remain all right!

THE EIGHTEENTH CHAPTER.

Let Down!

"YOU fat scoundrel—"

"Eh?"

"You podgy villain—"

"What?"

"You—you—you—" gasped Johnny Bull.

Billy Bunter sat up in the hammock and blinked at him in astonishment and alarm. Johnny Bull had gone into the house to bathe his nose. When he emerged, he came suddenly, with his face red with wrath. He glared at the fat junior in the hammock, as if he could have eaten him.

"I—I say, what's up?" stammered Bunter. He could see that something was.

"You pernicious porpoise!" shrieked

Johnny Bull. "I've just asked Larkin—"

"Oh crikey!"

"I asked him when Smithy and the fellows would be coming in!" shrieked Johnny Bull, "and he's told me that they're not here at all. He says that Smithy went out on his bike hours and hours ago, and that Wharton hasn't been here at all—or the other fellows—"

"Oh crumbs!"

"They're not staying here at all!" roared Johnny Bull. "I showed him the telegram, and he said it must be a trick! So it is! And I jolly well know who did it, too! You did!"

"Oh, no, I—I didn't!" gasped Bunter. "I—I say, old chap, it—it's all right! Wharton and the other fellows are here, you know—they—they've gone down to the—the beach, and—"

"Larkin says they're not here, and haven't been here!" yelled Johnny. "Only Bob dropped in, one day last week, and had a row with those Highcliffe cads!"

"Larkin's a fool, old chap!" said Bunter. "He—he doesn't know! The—the fact is, he—he—he drinks!"

"Wh-a-at?"

"Drinks like a fish!" said Bunter. "Don't you take any notice of what Larkin says! The fellows are here all right! How could Wharton have sent you that telegram yesterday, if he wasn't here?"

"He never sent it, you fat villain! You did!"

"N-n-nothing of the kind, old chap! If you think I got you here to keep those Highcliffe cads from ragging, you're quite mistaken! I never thought of anything of the kind, of course. Don't take any notice of Larkin! He—he wanders in his mind a little—"

"You—you—you—" gasped Johnny Bull.

"Besides, you're all right here!" urged Bunter. "This is ever so much better than Wharton Lodge! The grub's splendid! I dare say Smithy will be civil to you, when he comes back from London—if he isn't, you can punch his head—"

"What?"

"Same as you did Pon's! Not that he's gone to London with his father," added Bunter hastily. "I don't mean that. He—he's gone down to the beach with the other fellows—and he may be back any—any minute! I suppose you can take my word for that, Bull! It's a bit caddish to take a butler's word against a Public school man's word, I think!"

"You—you—" gasped Johnny.

"You see, it's all right!" urged Bunter. "Wharton sent you that telegram—being here with the other fellows, you know. I—I dare say Larkin's forgotten they're staying here—he's rather forgetful. Not much of a butler, really—he wouldn't do for Bunter Court, I can tell you. Don't take any notice of him, old chap. I hope you don't think I sent that telegram from the telephone in my room yesterday. Such an idea never entered my head, of course."

Johnny Bull gazed at him almost speechless.

"It's just on dinner-time," added Bunter. "I can tell you, the dinners here are—are magnificent. You wouldn't get anything like it at Wharton Lodge. The food here—"

"You—you—" gasped Johnny.

"The food here is really first-class, old chap. Smithy's rather a bounder,

but he does you jolly well in the way of food. At lunch to-day we had—"

"I'll smash you!" roared Johnny Bull. "I'll burst you all over Smithy's place, you bloated bloater!"

"Oh, really, Bull! Look here—"

"You've landed me here!" shrieked Johnny. "What the thump would Smithy say if he came back and found me here, without having asked me—"

"That's all right. If you don't like Smithy you needn't stay on after he gets back—I dare say he wouldn't let you, anyhow. But it's all right if you stay till he comes back. You see—"

"And Wharton expecting me all this time at his place!" roared Johnny. "He will think I've had an accident, or something."

"Well, it's all Wharton's fault," said Bunter. "I should have stayed on there if he'd been civil. I had to turn him down for his rotten bad manners. Besides, I don't suppose he really wants you there, old chap."

"What?"

"I mean, how could he?" argued Bunter.

Johnny Bull did not answer that question. He seemed to think that it was a time for action, not for words. He grabbed Billy Bunter and yanked him headlong out of the hammock.

Bump!

"Yoo-hooooop!" roared Bunter.

Smack, smack, smack!

"Yow-ow-ow! Beast! Yarooooh! Whooop!" roared Bunter. "Why, you're worse than the—yoo-hoop!—Highcliffe cads, you beast! Wow! I never sent that telegram—yow-ow!—and I only sent it because that beast Cherry wouldn't come when I phoned him! Yooooop! Yow-ow-ow!"

Smack, smack!

"Ow! Beast! Yoo-hooooop!"

"There!" gasped Johnny Bull. "Now I'm going!"

He ran back into the House for his belongings, leaving Billy Bunter gasping and spluttering on the lawn.

The fat Owl was still gurgling for breath when Johnny Bull came out, in hat and coat, with his suitcase in his hand. He tramped away down the avenue towards the distant gates.

From the windows of the billiards-room Ponsonby & Co. watched him go—in surprise and satisfaction.

From the lawn Billy Bunter watched him, his eyes nearly popping through his spectacles in his dismay.

"I say, old chap—" yelled Bunter.

Johnny tramped on.

"I say, you're not going!" shrieked Bunter.

Johnny glanced over his shoulder.

"I'm going to the station now, you fat villain! I've a jolly good mind to boot you before I go!"

"I say, hold on!" howled Bunter.

"I'll order a car for you—"

"Rats!"

"I'll come to the station with you, old fellow—"

"Look out for my boot, if you do!"

"I—I—I say—"

Johnny Bull tramped on and disappeared. Now that he knew how matters stood at Seahill Park he was only too anxious to get off that magnificent estate without losing a moment about it. He was thankful that Vernon-Smith had not yet turned up. The thought of meeting the Bounder's surprised stare when he arrived and found an uninvited guest there made him feel hot all over. He was only thinking of getting clear before he met Smithy, and he hurried away down the long avenue as fast as he could walk.

Billy Bunter blinked after him in utter dismay.

His wonderful scheme, which had seemed to be working like a charm, had let him down with a bump!

Johnny Bull had gone. Pon & Co. remained. Smithy was not yet back from London. The fat Owl blinked round him through his big spectacles. He gave a yelp of alarm at the sight of four figures coming down from the house.

"Oh crikey!" gasped Bunter.

Pon & Co. were coming at a run. Why Johnny had gone they knew no more than why he had come; but he was gone—and that was enough for Pon & Co. They headed for Billy Bunter—and their looks showed what he had to expect when they reached him.

The hapless fat Owl turned to run. But he stopped. He had about as much chance in a foot race with Pon as a tortoise in a race with a hare!

For a moment he stood blinking at the Highcliffians, his eyes almost popping through his spectacles. Then he clambered desperately up the gnarled trunk of the beech. It was a case of any port in a storm—and that was Bunter's only refuge!

"Collar him!" shouted Ponsonby.

He raced ahead of his friends as Bunter clambered wildly. With desperate efforts, the fat junior dragged himself out of reach. Ponsonby made a clutch at a whisking fat ankle, and grasped it.

"Oooooogh!" gasped Bunter.

"Now, you fat frog!" gasped Ponsonby.

He tugged. Bunter, in desperation, hung on with his fat hands and lashed out with the other foot.

Ponsonby gave a yell as a heel crashed on his face. He let go, and staggered back, yelling.

Bunter clambered on into the thick branches. There, jammed in a forked bough, he gasped for breath and streamed with perspiration, while the Highcliffians gathered under the tree and glared up at him.

THE NINETEENTH CHAPTER.

Treed!

LARKIN came across the lawn from the house with a rather extraordinary expression on his portly face.

From amid the branches of the big beech on the lawn a crimson, fat face, and a pair of large spectacles glimmered.

Under the tree Pon & Co. were gathered, casting ferocious glances upwards.

Really, the proceedings of Master Herbert's guests, that Easter holiday, were enough to surprise any butler!

It was no business of Larkin's, of course, and he had no intention of interfering. But he was surprised, and disapproved strongly. Really, he would not have expected Master Herbert's guests to act like a gang of young hooligans as soon as Master Herbert's back was turned.

The dinner-gong had sounded—unheeded by Pon & Co. They had Bunter treed, and were not disposed to let him escape. Pon did not want to climb after him—one kick on the features was enough for Pon. But he was not going to give him a chance of getting away.

"Dinner, gentlemen!" murmured Larkin.

He coughed. He could not tell Master

Herbert's guests what he thought of them; but no doubt they could read it in his face.

"I say, Larkin!" came a fat squeak from above.

Larkin glanced up.

"Yes, Master Bunter!"

"I—I say, will you keep those beasts off if I come down, Larkin?"

"Hem! I am afraid I cannot interfere, Master Bunter. It is not my place to do so."

"Beast!"

"Hem!"

"It's your fault that beast Bull has gone!" hooted Bunter. "What did you want to jaw to him for, you silly fool?"

Larkin smiled faintly. Johnny Bull's arrival had surprised him, but as soon as Johnny inquired after his friends and showed the telegram the butler had seen at once how the matter stood. No doubt he derived some entertainment from Bunter's extraordinary dodges to obtain a bodyguard at Seahill Park during that exciting Easter!

"I could not refuse to answer Master Bull's questions, sir," he said.

"You silly idiot!"

"Hem!"

"Look here, I can't stick up in this tree!" howled Bunter.

"Indeed, sir!" said Larkin.

"Will you clear those Highcliffe beasts off, while I come down?"

"Probably the young gentlemen will be coming in to dinner, sir!" said Larkin.

"I want to come in to dinner, too!" wailed Bunter. "I'm hungry!"

"Come on, then," grinned Gadsby. "What's stoppin' you?"

"Beast!"

"Dinner will be served, gentlemen!" hinted Larkin.

Gadsby, and Monson, and Vavasour looked at Ponsonby. They were ready to back him up in ragging the Owl of Greyfriars, but they did not want to miss dinner for that purpose.

"You fellows cut in," said Ponsonby. "I'll stay here."

"Beast!" came a roar from above.

"You can come down, if you like, you fat rotter!"

"Yah!"

Gadsby and Monson and Vavasour, grinning, walked away. Ponsonby sat down in the hammock, to wait—and watch. Billy Bunter blinked at him in fury from the branches of the beech.

He was out of reach of ragging, for the moment. But he wanted his dinner. Very much indeed he wanted his dinner.

But it was clear that if he descended from the tree, it was not dinner that he was going to get. It was something much less agreeable than dinner!

Now that Johnny Bull was gone, there was nothing to prevent Pon & Co. from carrying out their scheme of stranding him on the rock in the bay. And the scrap with Johnny Bull had not made Pon more placable—neither had the crash of Bunter's heel on his features. Pon's look showed what the hapless fat Owl had to expect, as soon as the dandy of Highcliffe got hold of him!

"I say, Larkin!" yelled Bunter, as the butler turned to follow the three Highcliffe juniors to the house.

"Yes, sir!" said Larkin, stopping.

"Will you hold that beast while I come down?"

"I am afraid Master Herbert would not like me to intervene among his guests, sir!" said Larkin.

"Think I can stick up here till Smithy comes back?" yelled Bunter.

"You must please yourself about that, sir."

"Beast!"

"Is that all, sir?"

"Rotter!"

"Thank you, sir!" said Larkin, unmoved. And he went back into the house, leaving Bunter perched in the tree, and Ponsonby swinging in the hammock.

"Oh crikey!" groaned Bunter.

He blinked down at Ponsonby. Ponsonby grinned up at him. Bunter shook a fat fist at him, nearly over-balanced, and clung to a branch, with a gasp of alarm.

Pon sat and smoked cigarettes. Minutes—long, long minutes—dragged slowly by. Every minute he hoped that Pon would give it up, and go in to dinner. It was difficult for Billy Bunter to understand how any fellow could be regardless of the call of the dinner-gong. He could really hardly believe that Pon would go on sitting there, indifferent to dinner.

But Pon did.

"I—I say, Pon, old ch-ch-chap!" gasped Bunter at last. "I say, you're missing your dinner, you know! I say, if you go in to dinner, I—I shan't come down and clear off, you know!"

Pon grinned, but did not take the trouble to answer.

"Oh, you rotter!" groaned Bunter.

He wanted his dinner. Still more, he wanted to escape. Even dinner would not have attracted him into the dining-room of Seahill Park while the Highcliffe fellows were there. If he could only get away he would take the greatest care to steer clear of Smithy's place till Smithy came back.

Unfortunately, Ponsonby was quite

aware of all that, and he had no intention of giving the fat Owl a chance to escape. It seemed to Bunter that a century at least had passed, when Gadsby, Monson, and Vavasour came out of the house, in a grinning bunch, and walked across the lawn to the beech.

Ponsonby rose from the hammock.

"Still treed?" grinned Monson, glancing up at the branches.

"He doesn't seem to want to come down!" said Ponsonby.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You fellows wait here, while I go in and get some dinner," said Pon. "Bag him if he comes down, and keep him for me!"

"What-ho!" chortled Gadsby.

"Absolutely!" grinned Vavasour.

"I say, the old bean's coming back," said Monson. "He's phoned Larkin from London. They're coming back together to-morrow!"

"What the dooce is Smithy bringin' the old bean back for?" exclaimed Ponsonby angrily. "I thought he was gone for the week."

"Well, he's comin' back with Smithy, from what Larkin said," remarked Gadsby. "Larkin's to send the car to the station for them in the mornin'."

Ponsonby gave an angry grunt. It was not agreeable news to him that Mr. Vernon-Smith had changed his plans and was returning to Seahill Park instead of remaining for the rest of the week among the bulls and bears in the City. He had had more than enough of the wet blanket.

"Bother him!" grunted Ponsonby. "We don't want him here. Like

Smithy's cheek to land his pater on us again."

"I dare say somethin's happened," said Monson. "Perhaps that Italian sportsman has got after him again in London."

"All the more reason why he should keep clear of this show!" growled Ponsonby. "We don't want that brute hanging about the place." Pon rubbed his head, where there was still a bruise under his hair. "Well, keep an eye on that fat freak while I go in."

Ponsonby walked away to the house, and his friends sat down, under the beech, and smoked cigarettes—with an eye open for Billy Bunter.

The fat Owl groaned dismally.

He was tired of that tree! He had a safe seat in a forked bough—but it was extremely uncomfortable. And he was hungry—and getting hungrier! And that beast, Smithy, was not coming back till the following morning!

Billy Bunter had felt greatly bucked when he had succeeded in sticking to Smithy for the Easter hols. But he had really not expected this sort of thing. It was not the sort of thing a fellow would expect on a holiday. He was finding Easter altogether too exciting. Even Bunter Court and the happy society of his brother Sammy and his sister Bessie was better than this!

Smithy was a beast to leave him in the lurch like this. Johnny Bull was a beast for clearing off—Bob Cherry was a beast for not having come. It was, in fact, a beastly world altogether—and a beastly outlook for Bunter. But he dared not descend from the tree!

He knew what to expect once he fell into the hands of Monson, Gadsby, and Vavasour. He waited patiently, but the Highcliffe juniors remained on guard.

"I say, you fellows," squeaked Bunter at last.

The Highcliffians glanced up, grinning.

"Comin' down?" grinned Gadsby.

"Waitin' for you to drop!" chuckled Monson.

"Absolutely!" chortled Vavasour.

"I—I say, I—I'm fearfully hungry!" said Bunter pathetically.

"Ha, ha, ha! Why don't you come down then?"

"Will you make it pax if I come down?"

"Come down and see!"

"Boast!"

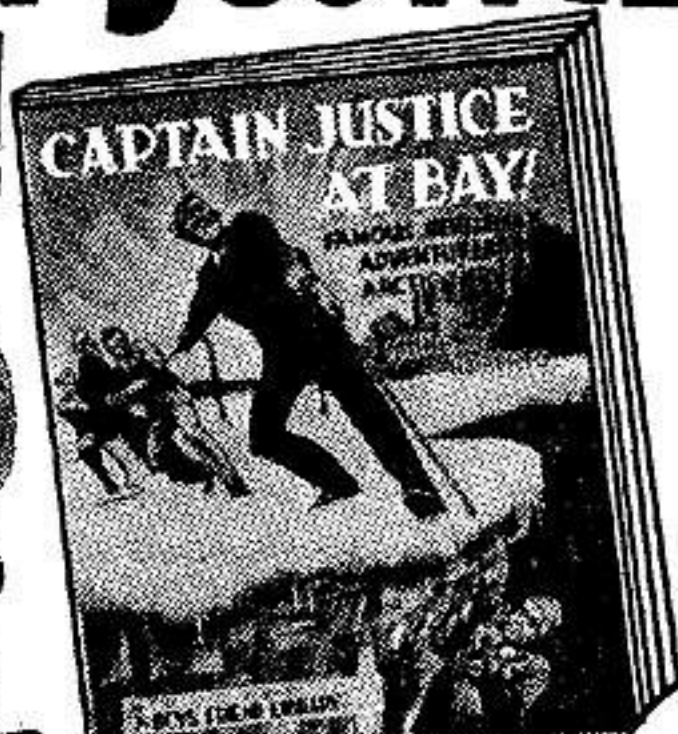
"Ha, ha, ha!"

Ponsonby came sauntering down from the house, smoking a cigarette. He joined his friends under the beech. So long as the light lasted, the Highcliffe knits played banker to while away the time while they waited for Bunter. They seemed to be in quite cheery spirits. "Treecing" Bunter was quite a jest, from their point of view! They were quite enjoying the situation.

Billy Bunter was not!

Curious faces looked out, from time to time, from door or window. No doubt the extraordinary proceedings of Master Herbert's guests caused a great deal of curious interest among Larkin's numerous staff. But if Billy Bunter hoped that anyone would butt in, he was disappointed. Nobody was thinking of butting in. Master Herbert's guests were left to disport themselves in their own peculiar way—and as the dusk deepened into nightfall, Billy Bunter was still "treed"—and wishing from the bottom of his fat heart that he had never hooked on to the Bouncer for Easter!

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THE TWENTIETH CHAPTER.

Pon's Catch!

BILLY BUNTER pricked up his fat ears.

A whispering voice reached him from below:

It was quite dark now. Lighted windows, in the great facade of Mr. Vernon-Smith's mansion, shed a glimmer into the balmy April night. But the light did not reach so far as the big beech on the lawn. Under the heavy branches, the darkness was thick. But Bunter, peering from above, could see the glowing ends of cigarettes in the dark.

"I'm fed-up with this!" It was Ponsonby's whispering voice. "Let's go in and have some billiards."

"But that fat bounder—"

"He won't know we're gone."

"Oh, all right. Don't let him hear,"

Billy Bunter breathed deep with relief. Probably Pon & Co. had expected him to drop, like a ripe apple, long before this. It was not surprising that they were fed-up—though certainly they were not nearly so fed-up as the fat Owl.

He listened intently.

There was a sound of footsteps below, and the cigarette-ends vanished. Pon & Co. were gone—leaving Bunter to suppose that they were still there—and to keep him treed! At least, Bunter supposed so! His fat brain was not quick on the uptake—and it did not occur to him that those whispering voices had been intended to reach his fat ears!

As a matter of fact, now that it was too dark to play cards, Pon & Co. were fed-up with their vigil. But Pon had no intention of letting the fat Owl escape.

Gadsby and Monson and Vavasour moved off, and Bunter heard them go. Ponsonby remained invisible in the deep gloom under the tree, close to the trunk.

If Bunter, in the belief that his foes were gone, descended, he would drop right into Pon's clutches. And Pon had no doubt that he would.

Billy Bunter strained his fat ears to listen. Three of the Highcliff fellows had gone, and he heard them go—and did not doubt that they were four!

He hooked himself out of the branches at last, and prepared to descend. Now that the coast was clear—or he fancied it was—he was glad of a chance of getting out of that beech.

Grunting, the fat junior lowered himself down the thick old trunk. Pon, invisible below, grinned in the dark as the sounds of grunting, brushing, and scuffling told him, that Bunter was coming.

He moved round the massive trunk, to stand exactly under the spot where Bunter was descending. He was going to grab him the moment he landed; he was not giving him a chance of bolting.

Standing close to the trunk, staring up, he could see nothing of Bunter; but he could hear him. A moment more, and he would be able to grab him.

Happily unconscious of the ambushed Highcliffian below, Bunter lowered himself, wriggling and grunting, holding on to a bough while he tried to get a hold on the trunk to clamber down.

Then he slipped! That, of course, was exactly like Bunter. Being about as active as a hippopotamus, Bunter was no climber. He slipped, lost his hold, and shot down.

He gave a startled squeak as he went. In a split second he would have bumped down on the grass, had nothing been in the way.

But something was in the way!

Ponsonby was!

Crash!

Bunter knew that he crashed on something that crumpled under his weight, and that yelled wildly as it crumpled. He did not, for the moment, know what it was.

He landed, bumping, and sprawling, and spluttering.

"Oooogh!" spluttered Bunter.

"Urrrrgh!" came a suffocated, anguished moan from beneath him.

"Oh!" gasped Bunter. "Oh crikey!"

He was sprawling on something that moaned horribly. He scrambled up, planting a fat knee on a waistcoat, and a fat paw on a nose. He scrambled hurriedly, realising what it was now!

"Beast!" gasped Bunter.

"Urrrrgh!" came a moan from the darkness.

Ponsonby was in no state to bag Bunter. Bunter was within his reach, but Pon, dazed and dizzy, and completely winded, lay crumpled in the grass, and could only moan.

There was a shout, and running feet.

"Got him?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Gadsby & Co. were not far away. The sounds under the beech reached them, and they came rushing back, fully expecting to find Bunter in Pon's grasp.

"Oh crikey!" gasped Bunter.

He scrambled desperately up as the three Highcliffians came dashing under the branches, and bolted into the night.

"Got him, Pon!" exclaimed Gadsby.

"Why—what—who—?" Gadsby stumbled over something in the dark and fell across it. "Who—what—?"

"Urrrrgh! Gerroff!" moaned Pon.

"Oooogh!"

"What the dickens—"

"Woooooogh!"

Monson struck a match. The flickering light showed Pon sprawling on his back, Gaddy sprawling over Pon's legs, and both of them spluttering wildly.

"Oh, gad!" gasped Monson.

"Urrrrgh!" moaned Pon. "The

brute fell on me—urrh! I'm winded—gurrh! My head's cracked, I believe—wurrgh! He's smashed my nose with his foot—ooogh! Oh, gad! Oh, gad! Ooooh! Get hold of him! Croooogh!"

"Where is he?" gasped Vavasour, staring round.

Pon's friends picked him up. He stood sagging in their helpless hands, moaning and gasping.

"I—I—I'll smash him!" he gasped.

"Wait till I get my hands on the fat rotter! I'll—I'll—I'll—urrh!"

"But where—?" exclaimed Monson.

Billy Bunter had had a narrow escape, but that lucky tumble saved him.

Bunter did the shadowy lawn at about sixty m.p.h.

Ponsonby, hanging on to Monson and Vavasour for support, while he gurgled for his second wind, was not, for the moment, bothering about Billy Bunter.

He gurgled and gasped, and gasped and gurgled. He mumbled and moaned. The darkness swallowed Bunter. His escape had been narrow—but a miss was as good as a mile!

The fleeing fat Owl did not head for the house. He headed for the garage. His one idea was to get out of Seahill Park, and stay out till Smithy came back. In Smithy's absence, Easter at Seahill Park was altogether too exciting. Billy Bunter was going—and, like the guests in Macbeth, the fat guest at Seahill Park stood not upon the order of his going, but went at once.

"Urrrrgh!" moaned Ponsonby.

"Wurrh! Have you got him? Urrrrgh!"

"Where is he?"

"He came down—urrgh!—he fell on me, I tell you—gurrh!—smashed me like a p-pancake! Groogh! Oh crumbs! Have you let him get away? Oooogh!"

"He's gone!" said Monson, staring into the shadows.

"Urrrrgh! I'll smash him! I'll—oooh! Ow!" moaned Pon.

The buzz of a car came from the drive, across the park spaces. Three of the Highcliffians stared round. Pon was past caring. Pon had both hands pressed to his waistcoat, and was busy moaning.

"Hallo, there's a car!" exclaimed Gadsby. "Is that Smithy coming?"

A red tail-light winked in the darkness and vanished. It was not Smithy coming! It was Bunter going!

Billy Bunter was gone!

THE TWENTY-FIRST CHAPTER.

Unexpected!

HARRY WHARTON, standing on the platform at Wimford Station, waved his hand as a train stopped, a carriage door flew open, and a stocky figure jumped out, suitcase in hand.

"Hallo, hallo, hallo!" bawled Bob Cherry.

"Johnny at last!" said Frank Nugent.

"The esteemed and ridiculous Johnny!" remarked Hurree Jamset Ram Singh.

The Co. were all there—waiting for Johnny Bull!

It was rather a late hour in the evening—it had long been dark. Johnny was arriving very late. Why, his friends did not know.

They had expected him in the afternoon. Still, it was a long trip down from Yorkshire, and a fellow might easily be delayed changing trains. But when evening was closing in, they wondered whether anything had happened to Johnny. Wharton was thinking of ringing up Moor Fell, when the telephone bell rang—and he was relieved to

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hear Johnny's voice over the wires. But he was amazed to hear that Johnny was speaking from a Sussex railway station, where he was waiting for a train up to Surrey.

What Johnny Bull was doing in Sussex was a mystery to his friends.

However, they were glad to hear that he was coming at last, and they walked down to Wimford, to meet him when he arrived there.

Now he had arrived.

He did not look in the best of tempers. But he grinned at his friends as they gathered round him.

"Glad to see you chaps!" he said.

"The gladfulness of our absurd selves is also terrific!" declared Hurreo Jamset Ram Singh. "But what is the whyfulness?"

"Went to sleep in the train and missed a dozen stations?" asked Bob Cherry.

"Fathead!" answered Johnny.

"Well, what the dickens have you been doing in Sussex?" asked Frank Nugent. "You rang up from Seahill, in Sussex?"

"That fat scoundrel——"

"Eh?"

"The bloated blighter——"

"Have you seen Bunter?" exclaimed Harry Wharton.

There could be no doubt to whom that description applied.

Johnny Bull snorted!

"Look at that!" he growled.

He groped in his pocket for a crumpled telegram, and held it up for the inspection of his friends. They gazed at it in amazement.

Harry Wharton's eyes almost bulged as he saw his own name at the end of it.

"What the thump!" he gasped. "I never sent that——"

"I know you didn't—now!" grunted Johnny Bull. "But when I got it I thought you had! What was a fellow to think?"

"But who——" gasped Wharton.

"Bunter!" roared Bob Cherry. "Oh, my hat! Have you been scrapping with that Highcliffe gang, at Smithy's place?"

"Look at my nose!" grunted Johnny Bull.

His friends looked—and smiled. The condition of Johnny's nose indicated clearly that there had been scrapping.

"The fat villain made me believe that you fellows were there, staying with Smithy. He said you'd gone down to the beach, and I hung about waiting for you to come in——"

"Oh crumbs!"

"And I had a terrific scrap with that Highcliffe gang—that's why the fat scoundrel played this idiotic trick, of course. Smithy's away to-day—and it seems that they rag him every time Smithy's away——"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I might have been stranded there

for the night, and left you fellows wondering what on earth had become of me, only I found it out from the butler," said Johnny. "So I cleared off, and phoned you from the railway station, and here I am!"

Bob Cherry chortled.

"Poor old Bunter! He's having a wild and woolly Easter with Smithy!"

"I dare say Pon & Co. have slaughtered him by this time!" said Johnny Bull. "I jolly well hope so, at any rate!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Well, here you are at last!" said Harry Wharton, laughing. "That fat blighter ought to be scragged—but I've no doubt that Pon's giving him all the scragging he deserves, and a little over."

"Probably a lot over!" chuckled Bob.

"Come on, Johnny, old bean! Better late than never!" said the captain of the Remove; and the Famous Five walked out of the station, and a taxi bore them away down the long country road to Wharton Lodge.

Be Sure and Read:—

**"PETTICOAT RULE
AT GREYFRIARS!"**

in the

GEM

On Sale Now - - - 2d.

Four members of the Co. were grinning over Johnny's adventure. The amazing antics of the Owl of the Remove had their comic side. Johnny was not so disposed to grin. After a long journey that day, he had had a long walk to Seahill Station, a long wait at that station for a train, and the train had been a slow one—stopping at nearly every station on the way. However, all was well that ended well, and Johnny's face wore a cheery grin by the time the juniors arrived at Wharton Lodge.

Wells, the butler, let them in. There was a slightly peculiar expression on his face. He took Johnny's bag, and the Famous Five walked cheerily into the hall.

"I say, you fellows!"

Five fellows jumped, as if moved by the same spring.

They jumped almost clear of the floor, as that fat, familiar voice greeted them.

A fat figure rose from an armchair by the fire.

They gazed at Billy Bunter.

Bunter grinned, and blinked at them through his big spectacles.

"I say, you fellows, surprised you, what?" he asked.

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

"Or his ghost?" stuttered Bob Cherry.

"How did you get here?" roared Wharton.

"Eh? I came over by car!" said Bunter. "I can always have a car, if I like, at Smithy's place, you know! I rather fancied Bull would get in before me—you must have got landed in a jolly slow train, old chap—he, he, he!"

"You—you—you——" gasped Johnny Bull. He glared at the cheerful Bunter as if he could have eaten him.

"It's all right, Harry, old chap," said Bunter breezily. "I'm sorry I shan't be able to stay long—only the night! You see, Smithy being away to-night, I thought I'd give you a look in—I'm not the fellow to forget old pals when I'm staying at a magnificent place and living on the fat of the land. I've seen your aunt, old chap—and it's all arranged about my room—not much like my room at Seahill Park, I must say; but I can stand it! Don't you worry!"

"Kill him!" said Bob.

"I—I say, you fellows——" Bunter dodged round the armchair. "I—I say, no larks, you know! Ain't you glad to see me?"

"Glad to see you?" gasped Wharton.

"Well, I should think you ought to be, after all I've done for you!" said Bunter warmly. "And I can jolly well tell you that it ain't every fellow who would leave a magnificent mansion to put in a night at your humble home, just because you know him at school."

"Bag him!"

"Bump him!"

"Boot him!"

"I—I—I say, hold on!" yelled Bunter. "I—I say, I—I daren't go back till that beast Smithy comes home, and he ain't coming home till to-morrow! I—I—I say, be a sport, you know! I'm going in the morning—really and truly—first thing in the morning! You can tut-tut-take my word that I'm gig-gig-going in the mum-mum-morning! Honest Injun!"

Harry Wharton & Co. gazed at him. Then they burst into a laugh.

"You fat villain——" said Harry.

"Oh, really, Wharton——"

"It's all right, you fat chump!"

"Oh, all right!" said Billy Bunter. "As you're so pressing, old chap, I'll stay the night!"

And he did!

THE END.

(Look out for another feast of thrills and exciting situations in: **"THE BOUNDER'S PERIL!"** the next yarn in this powerful series. You'll find it in next Saturday's bumper issue of the MAGNET.)

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When Answering Advertisements Please Mention This Paper.

THE HEAD'S LASTING LESSON!

Bringing to an end Dicky Nugent's super serial:
"THE ST. SAM'S TREZZURE HUNT!"

SIR GOUTY INTERVENES!

"Reskew, St. Sam's!" Doctor Birchermall uttered that cry, as he struggled furiously in the grip of P.-c. Podge on the steps of the Head's house.

It had been easy for the Head to tell Scrownger how he would deal with the perlice before the bracelets were on his wrists, but now that the fateful hour had struck, it didn't seem quite such an easy matter to arrange.

Of course, it would have been all right if the Head's skeeming had brought him a share in the Trezzure Hunt prize. The price of a new helmet and a small donation to the perlice funds would probably have settled the whole thing in no time, but all the Head's skeeming had come to naught. What was more, he had no longer any friends to whom he could turn for a helping hand. Any such request would probably bring him a helping boot, he reflected bitterly!

"Help! Reskew!" yelled the Head, as he indulged in a brisk bout of all-in wrestling with the podgy perliceman from Muggleton.

P.-c. Podge was puffing like a grampus as he tried to conker the Head's resistance.

"Wot I says is this 'ere: you comelongerme!" he puffed. "Eadmater or no 'admater, you'll get solitary refinement for assawit-ing a officer in the hexecution of 'is dooty! Kim on!"

"Shan't!" yelled the Head, despritley. "Reskew, St. Sam's! Go for him, boys! I'll hold your coats!"

But Jack Jolly and his chums only shook their heads.

"Sorry, air—nothing doing!" said Jolly. "All through this trezzure hunt you've been a bad hat—and we're not going to crown your efforts with success!"

"Ow-ow-ow! Help me, somebody!" howled the Head. "What about you, Sir Gouty? Surely you're not going to see me taken off to clink?"

"CLONK!" P.-c. Podge, tired of fighting the Head, had decided to settle the argument. So he had hit the Head on the napper with his truncheon.

It was a terrible blow—a blow that would easily have felled an ox. It made the Head utter a peevish squeal.

"Whoooooop! What do you think you're doing of?" "Jest a-showin' you 'oo's 'oo, that's hall!" said the podgy perliceman, grimly. "Now you come quietly. See?"

"Half-a-minnit, officer!" P.-c. Podge pawed. All eyes were turned on Sir Gouty Greybeard, whose refined voice had spoken.

"Yessir! Wot mite you want, sir?" asked the perlice-constable, salooting respectfully.

Sir Gouty polished his monocle with a thoughtful air—as well as with his handkerchief!



The GREYFRIARS HERALD

No. 237.

EDITED BY HARRY WHARTON.

April 24th, 1937.



Aunt Skinner tells you HOW TO SPRING-CLEAN A STUDY!

"What is the best way of spring-cleaning a study?" is the question that readers are always asking us at this time of the year.

Let your Aunt Skinner gave you a few tips, my dears!

ACCESSORIES NEEDED. Broom, vacuum cleaner, pail, scrubbing-brush, soap and water. If your study happens to be very dirty, a garden spade and a pick-axe may come in useful.

SPIRIT OF SPRING-CLEANING.—There must be nothing half-hearted about spring-cleaning. Set about it as though you mean it. Take a ten-yard run and fling yourself joyfully into the study. Tear down the pictures, then kick over the chairs, and turn the table upside-down.

ROUTINE.—Finish one thing before you start the next. Dust the furniture first, then sweep the floor. Pour pails of water over the carpet. Paint the lino. Carefully clean all your vacuums with the vacuum cleaner.

RE-ARRANGING.—Spring-cleaning gives you an excellent opportunity to re-arrange your furniture. Changing the position of things a bit is as good as a tonic. Hang the pictures from the middle of the ceiling. Stand the table in the fireplace. Lay the lino wrong side up. Pile the chairs on top of the desk. Stand the sofa upside-down, with one half of it poking out of the window.

SUPERFLUOUS FURNITURE.—Get rid of all articles for which you have no further use. An easy way of doing this is to throw them out of the window.

FINISHING OFF.—Having got everything clean and ship-shape, sweep the chimney.

Go to work on these lines, my dears, and you will find spring-cleaning a pleasure!

THE END.

SPRING IS HERE, LADS!

Chortles

DICK RAKE

Brown and Bulstrode were noticed digging up their little plots one afternoon last week—though, of course, they may have been merely burying the hatchet!

Footer had to be stopped on Little Side on Wednesday while half a dozen frisky lambs were shoo-ed off the pitch.

When the sun broke through the clouds recently, Gosling was observed to open his parlour window and look out with a sour grin.

Mrs. Mimble is having a nice new ice-cream container fitted in the tuckshop.

Frank Nugent has the Remove cricket fixture-list almost complete.

Two hundred readers have informed the "Herald" that they've already heard the cuckoo. In fact, several said they'd even seen one; but it turned out to be Temple of the Fourth.

Coker & Co. tried out a new racing-skiff on the river last Saturday and were over-turned in the gale.

Several of the masters have ordered new umbrellas.

"M'yes. Thinking it over, it really does look as if Spring is here.

SW-SW-SWIMMING C-C-COLD?

NO—BR-R-R—FEAR!

Says FRANK NUGENT

The time to start swimming is early in the season.

Any milksoop can go swimming in a heat wave. Your real water-lover prefers the spring when there's still a nip in the air and a touch of ice about the water.

That's what Bob Cherry says. I believe him. I went swimming with him in the Sark swimming-pool last Wednesday, so I can speak from experience.

The one or two strollers in the vicinity all wore overcoats with the collars turned up. We walked up in sweaters and trousers, with towels round our necks.

Lookers-on told us we were potty. Poor fish! Little did they know of the joy of crawling down to the water's edge with only bathing-costumes as a protection against the keen wind! Little did they appreciate the happiness of taking a header into ice-cold water that turned your body blue at the first touch!

Cold? Br-r-r—I mean, pooh! After the first ten minutes you hardly notice it. So Bob Cherry says, anyway. I didn't stay in ten minutes myself, so I have to take his word for it.

It's jolly healthy, anyway. A chap feels fine after it's all over. I can't say I felt remarkably fine myself, but that's only because I had an attack of a peculiar kind of numbness in my body. Healthy? I should say it is!

Why, Bob says that the bad cold I've since caught would have been 'flu at the least if I hadn't had that swim!

TRAPEZE ARTISTS AT LARGE!

Amazing Scene In Court!

Richard Russell, George Bulstrode, and Johnny Bull, trapeze artists, charged with behaviour likely to lead to a breach of the peace, caused an uproar at the Woodshed Sessions by demonstrating their act before Judge Brown.

P.-c. Robert Cherry, giving evidence, said that prisoners created terror in the Rag by performing a trapeze stunt over the heads of peaceful citizens.

Judge Brown: "What is a stunt? I always thought it was something to do with growth." (Groans and laughter.)

Messrs. Rake, Linley, Desmond, and Todd hav-

ing given evidence, the Judge asked for a description of prisoners' act.

Russell promptly gave a shrill whistle and yelled: "Allez! Up!" And, to the utter amazement of the court, the three prisoners threw aside their gauds and began to perform the most extraordinary acrobatics all over the place.

The woodshed where the court was held happens to have a ladder in it running parallel to the ceiling and held in position by hooks. Russell and Bul-



strode and Bull made full use of this useful aid to their art and within a few seconds they were flying through the air.

The Judge didn't quite like the look of it. He blinked up at them once or twice, then he yelled "Court adjourned!" and bolted—quickly followed by the rest of the court!

Prisoners finished their act and afterwards escaped at their leisure!

wrists and was rolling down to the gates.

PUNISHING DOCTOR BIRCHEMALL!

"Guilty or not guilty?" Sir Gouty Greybeard asked that question, half an hour later, as he sat in state at the Head's desk.

Mr. Lickham and Jack Jolly & Co. and Tubby Barrell, who had been giving evidence, all turned towards Doctor Birchermall and Scrownger.

The pair presented a pitiable sight. They were cringing like a couple of whipped curs. Now that they had been brought to book, their looks spoke volumes.

"Not guilty!" whimpered Scrownger. "It was the Head who tempted me!"

"Not guilty!" sniffed the Head. "It was Scrownger who tempted me!"

Sir Gouty rubbed his chin thoughtfully.

"Egad! It strikes me that neither of you wanted much tempting!" he remarked, with a laff. "But I blame you the most, Birchermall. Scrownger is a meek infant. But you were old enough to know bettah. May I leave it to you, Mr. Lickham, to administrah a suitable punishment to Scrownger?"

"Ha, ha! Yes, rather, sir!" grinned Mr. Lickham. "Go to my study, Scrownger. I will see you later—complete with instruments of tortcher!"

"Yarooooo!" Scrownger staggered out, looking as white as a sheet. Doctor Birchermall began to nod at the neeze.

"Look here, Sir Gouty," he mermered feebly, "if you try any tricks like that on me, I'll—"

"Silence!" rapped out Sir Gouty, fiercely. "I find you guilty, Birchermall, and I shall sentence you just as I think fit! If you object to the sentence, you can appeal to the Board of Guvvornors. You'll get short shrift from them, I assure you!"

"Grooooo! Mersy!" "Mersy!" cried Sir Gouty, scornfully. "What mersy did you have on those who stood in your path when you were trying to win the Trezzure Hunt for Scrownger? What mersy did you have for those yungstahs when you had them in your power? None whatever!"

"What about taking him out in a boat an' keel-hawling him?" suggested Mr. Lickham brightly.

"Beest!" groaned the Head.

Sir Gouty snappad his finger.

"No; we won't do that. I have a bettah plan. We'll make him run the gauntlet!"

"Good wheeze!" "Jolly good idea, by Jove!"

"We'll assemble the entire skool in Big Hall," grinned Sir Gouty, "and we'll make him go through the hall from end to end! The boys can arm them-

selves with noddid towels!"

"All screen, sir!"

"Summon the skool at once, then, Lickham!" ordered Sir Gouty. "I will see the sentence carried out. I expect you will want carrying out yourself afterwards, Birchermall!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Sir Gouty's prophecy proved correct.

In the course of his checkered career, Doctor Alfred Birchermall had been through many uncomfortable eggperiences. But never had he been through a more uncomfortable eggperience than running the gauntlet in Big Hall! The fellows had many old scores to settle with the Head and they settled them while they had the chance. Noddid towels biffed him all he didn't know whether he was on his head or his heels.

As the Head at last staggered wearily out of Big Hall, he realised to the full that the way of the transgressor is hard!

WINNERS ALL!

"Well, that's that, bai Jove!" remarked Sir Gouty Greybeard from the platform, when silence had once more settled on Big Hall.

"And now the only thing that remains to be done is to find the troo winner of the grate Trezzure Hunt!"

"Please, sir, what's easy!" yelled Tubby Barrell. "I'm the winner!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" "Dashed if I see anything

to laff at!" declared Tubby indignantly. "You can't get away from it that I won two rounds!"

"Yes—becawse you found out beforehand what was wanted!" grinned Loyle.

Tubby snorted.

"Don't you beleave him, Sir Gouty! If anyone tells you I was hiding under the table when the Head told Scrownger, it's a fib! And if you think I pinched the Head's letter containing all the details of the trezzure hunt, you're mistaken!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" "Beests! I'm the winner, Sir Gouty. Don't take any

jeenerous chap, and I don't mind sharing it with Jolly in the least!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" Burleigh of the Sixth stepped forward.

"I call for three cheers for the winners of the Trezzure Hunt!" he yelled.

"Hip, hip, hip—"

"HOORAY!"

The cheers fairly made the welkin ring! Most fellows thought Tubby Barrell was rather lucky to get a half share of the prize under the circumstances, but they much preferred that to seeing the unscrew-pulous Scrownger get away with the lot, and they cheered again and again.

"Speech!" they cried, when the cheers had died away.

Jack Jolly stepped to the four.

"Thanks awfully for the cheers, you fellows!" he grinned. "But I really feel

I don't deserve the prize any more than the rest of you, so I've decided that the best thing I can do is to spend it all on a whacking grate feed—to which I have much plezzure in inviting you all!"

The cheers broke out with renewed vigour at that plezzant announcement.

Then Tubby Barrell, in his turn, stepped fourth.

"I say, you chaps," he cried, "you don't really deserve it, but I always was a forgiving sort of chap, and I'll forgive you this time. As Jolly is standing a feed, I'll do the same. In fact, we'll make it one big feed while we're about it!"

The fellows fairly gasped—but when they had regained their breaths they cheered more loudly than ever!

So the grate Trezzure Hunt ended in a trooly happy fashun with the St. Sam's fellows winners all. Fifty pounds' worth of tuck was ordered from the tuckshop and the fellows skoffed every crum of it.

Just when the feasting and merriment were at their height the door opened and Doctor Birchermall poked his head in. There was a changed eggpression

on his face. Somehow, the fellows thought they could detect something in it that had never been there before—honesty, Frank Fearless thought it was.

"Room for a little 'un, boys?" asked Dr. Birchermall, wheedlingly. "Thanks, Jolly—I won't say no!"

"I don't remember asking you to say 'yes'!" grinned Jack Jolly, as the Head started tucking in.

"But I don't bear malice—and, anyway, this affair ought to be a lesson to you!"

"Beleeve me, Jolly," said Doctor Birchermall, as he munched pork pie, "it's going to be a lasting lesson to me. Honner bright it is!"

And it was, too. The lesson the Head learned from the grate Trezzure Hunt lasted fully a couple of hours!

THE END.

THE END.

THE END.

THE END.

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