

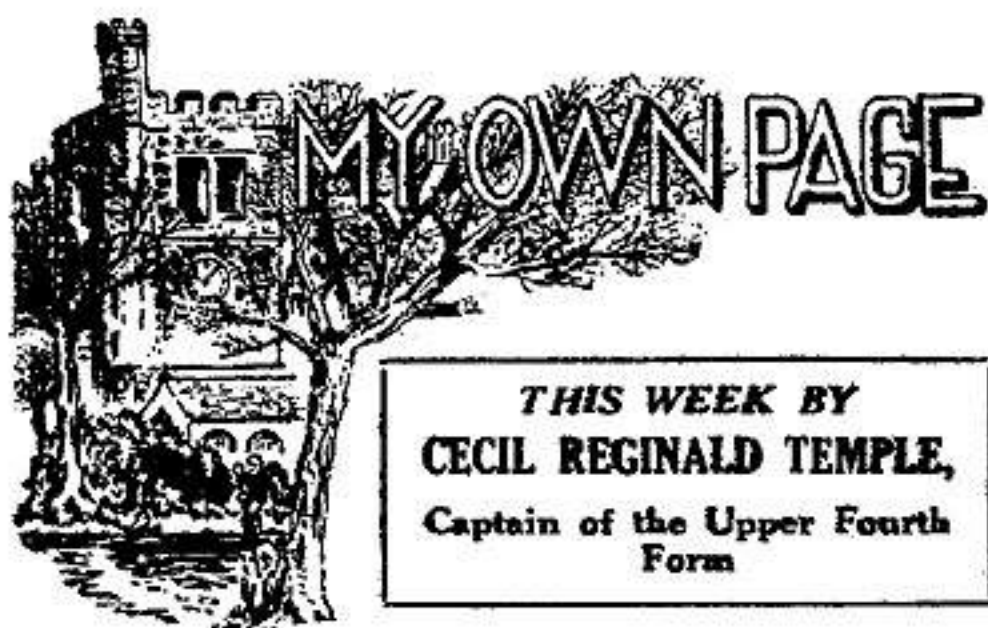
WORLD FAVOURITES—HARRY WHARTON & CO. and the MAGNET.

The Magnet ^{2^D}

*Billy Bunter's
Own Paper*



THE SECRET
of the **CAVE!**



**THIS WEEK BY
CECIL REGINALD TEMPLE,
Captain of the Upper Fourth
Form**

IT'S rather a fag to write this page. Dashed hard work, is what I call it. A fellow doesn't want to do more than he has to. A man gets quite enough writing to do at school. However, here's a detective story to begin with. It's rather good.

THE CLUE OF THE CAD'S CLOBBER!

The Cad was the nickname of a beastly criminal who had terrorised London for years. He had stolen tons of jewels and things, and money and things, and the police were pretty well fed up with him. I mean, Scotland Yard had done its best to catch the blighter, but he baffled them with a new disguise every time. I mean, he was so bally clever at disguising himself that he never looked twice the same, and every time the police tried to arrest him he turned out to be somebody else.

Though, mind you, he gave the cops a sporting chance, for he always wrote and told them what he was going to pinch next; but though they drafted squads of men all round the show, he just walked off with the swag as cool as a cucumber. So they were rather annoyed with the fellow.

"I mean, dash it all," said the chief inspector, or whatever they call the fellow who runs the Yard, "it's a bit thick, dash it! We can't arrest the bounder till we know what he looks like, and we've got no chance of knowing what he looks like till we arrest him, so—well, I mean, where are we? Our bally hands are tied—what?"

"Absolutely!" agreed his studymate. "By the way, here's a letter from the cheeky rotter. Frightful nerve—what?"

The chief inserted his monocle and glared at the letter, which ran:

"Dear Chief,—Hope you're feeling pretty well. I'm still keeping pretty well, though I had a touch of gout yesterday. Still, mustn't grumble—what? I thought I'd drop you a line to let you know I shall be at the Duke of Drizzle's dance to-night. I'll look in about midnight to pinch the Drizzle Diamonds. Hope to have the pleasure of seeing you.

"Kind regards to all at the Yard. Isn't the weather foul?"

"Sincerely,
"THE CAD."

The chief ground his bally teeth when he read this.

"Dash it!" he said. "This is going too far. I mean, pinching the Drizzle Diamonds. Doesn't the rotter know that the Drizzle family goes back to the Conquest? What's the country coming to, I'd like to know, if these blighters start taking liberties with blue-blooded dukes? I'll give him a good talking to when we catch him."

It was a bit of a forlorn hope, but the chief dressed himself in faultless style and went to the dance, accompanied by his pal, who was also faultlessly dressed. The butler showed them in to where the Duke of Drizzle was receiving guests.

The duke bowed with pure-blooded courtesy.

"Deuced glad to see ya!" he said, extending a marble-white hand. "Glad ya could come. Make yaseif at home, deah boy, won't ya?"

The chief started back as though bitten by a bally adder.

"The Cad, dash it!" he cried. "Arrest that man! He is not the duke—he is the Cad in disguise. Arrest him! What have you done with the duke, scoundrel?"

The Cad surrendered after a beastly fight with dozens of sleuths and guests and so on.

"I looked the duke in the coal cellar," he whimpered.

The crowd fell back, aghast. Horror and dismay overwhelmed them. They stared at each other with fearfully pale faces. A duke in the coal cellar! Could such things be? His family went back to the Conquest—and he was in a coal cellar!

They fell upon the rotten Cad and gave him a fearful horse-whipping for his inhuman act, while the chief hurried to the coal cellar.

"Thank ya, thank ya!" wheezed the duke, wiping coal off his whiskers. "Most good of ya, I'm sure! How did ya detect the rottah?"

The chief smiled. "He went too far, by gad! He tried to disguise himself as a gentleman, and couldn't." He lowered his voice. "It's a rotten thing to have to say, but the villain was actually wearing a white waistcoat with a dinner jacket!"

The duke staggered back in horror. "No wondah!" he moaned. "No gentleman could have done a thing like that, by Jove! I hope the fellah will be shot."

But he wasn't. At the trial he turned King's evidence against himself, and was sentenced to six months for burglary and ten years for wearing a white waistcoat with a dinner jacket. The cad!

GOOD SPORTS!

I'm fond of sport, but I don't believe in making hard work of it. Kicking a muddy football and hitting a cricket ball may be all right, but I prefer sports with more life in them. Hunting, fishing, and shooting, you know.

Some silly asses are against blood sports. That's all rot. Look at hunting, I mean—why, the bally fox enjoys it. He gets a good run of ten or twelve miles, which is dashed good exercise for a fox. And if he's pulled down by the hounds—well, he knows he's only vermin and is better out of the way. He's rather glad, on the whole, if the hounds collar him.

School is a fearful fag for a man in my position. I mean, I get in a few hunts in the Christmas vac. My pater is master of a Somerset hunt. But just as I'm beginning to enjoy it school starts again. Same with the summer hols. I can get in the yachting at Cowes, but we come back to school just as the grouse season starts. My pater rents a grouse moor in Scotland, but it's no good pointing this out to Capper. He won't give me even a fortnight's leave.

The bally Government ought to do some-

thing. School's all right for some fellows, who've nothing else to do. But I'm full up with engagements. What with the London season, the Swiss sports, a month on the Riviera, the fishing season, and the autumn shoots—well, I mean, I've simply no time for school. But I can't seem to make them understand.



ODE TO A SUIT!

No, this isn't funny. Poets write verses on things like nightingales and daffodils and so forth, which aren't half as useful or beautiful as a really well-cut lounge suit. So I'm going to write a poem on a suit, and I think it a bally good subject, too.

O glorious coat of Harris tweed,
Thou art, thou art a coat indeed!

Thy cut is clean and clever;
Thy pattern is a striking check;
And with rolled lapels at the neck
Thou art a joy for ever.

Let no moth lay his fangs on thee,
Or he shall straightway slaughtered be!

O waistcoat! O thou beauteous thing!
Thy style and cut would fit a king,
Just like a tailor's dummy;

For thou art strong and free from stain
And guaranteed to stand the strain
Of any decent tummy!

Ah, fix thy fairy form on me
And I'll be off my dot with glee!

O trousers! O thou perfect pair!
What marvels can with thee compare?

What beauties and what graces?
Thou shinest on my legs encased,
Thou claspest me about the waist,
Thou hangest on my braces!

Plus-fours would not be half so fine
Upon such slender limbs as mine.

O glorious suit, I'll love thee till
My tailor sends me in the bill!

I haven't told you much about myself and my home. I mean, there isn't room. I'd need the whole book, I mean. But the Editor asked me to mention what I want to be when I leave school. A dashed impertinent question, I think. Well, if you really want to know, Mr. Editor, I want to be what I now am—

An English Gentleman.

See?

CECIL REGINALD TEMPLE.



Cecil Reginald Temple

Cecil Reginald is captain of the Upper Fourth. In some ways he is not a bad fellow. He is straight enough, has a contempt of anything low, and is polite and considerate to those he thinks worthy of the honour. Against this he is quite a snob, and has a tendency to look down on fellows who do not belong to the "aristocracy." He himself is the son of Sir Reginald Temple, and is connected with half the peerage. Though he has a medium intellect, he considers himself clever and a born leader. The Upper Fourth sometimes call him a born dummy. He has a taste for clothes, and spends vast sums on his wardrobe. To his chums and studymates, Dabney and Fry, he is rather patronising. At sport he is moderate, chiefly because he is a slacker, and he is no better in class. Still, he is Cecil Reginald Temple—we had better leave it at that.

(Cartoon by HAROLD SKINNER.)

THE PRISONER OF THE CAVE! Samuel Vernon-Smith, millionaire father of Herbert Vernon-Smith, the Bounder of Greyfriars, trapped like a rabbit! Trapped by a hard-up estate-agent whom he regarded as little more than a useful piece of mechanism. What are the rascal's intentions? Read—

The **KIDNAPPED MILLIONAIRE!**



Mr. Samuel Vernon-Smith, the millionaire financier, sat in the deckchair, a prisoner in the heart of a cliff—a steel chain locked on his ankle and the other end secured to a padlock staple in the wall!

THE FIRST CHAPTER.

Must Have Bunter!

“YOU'RE wanted, Bunter!”
“Oh!” said Billy Bunter sarcastically. “Am I?”

“You are!” answered Harry Wharton & Co., with one voice.

William George Bunter, the fattest member of the Greyfriars Remove, eyed five smiling faces suspiciously.

It was quite right and proper, of course, for Bunter to be wanted. No party really was complete without Bunter. No excursion could be considered a real success unless Bunter joined therein. This was all clear enough to Billy Bunter.

On the other hand, it never seemed so clear to other fellows as it did to Bunter. Fellows had been known to prefer Bunter's room to his company—not, of course, realising how much they were missing.

So, right and proper as it was for the Famous Five to want Billy Bunter's company that bright April morning, Bunter was suspicious. He thought that there was a catch in it somewhere.

It was merry and bright on Blackrock Island that sunny morning. Round the little rocky island the Atlantic rolled bright and blue. Far away the rugged cliffs of Devonshire loomed against the azure sky.

Harry Wharton & Co. had not quite expected to spend their Easter holidays in Crusoe life, on a little uninhabited island, which was hardly more than a heap of steep rocks beaten by the tides of the Atlantic Ocean. But there they

were; and they seemed to be enjoying life, regardless of hardships and the roughest of rough quarters.

They had turned out, as usual, early. But they had to wait for the tide to serve for the trip planned for the day; so they were still sunning themselves on the beach of the little cove, when Bunter rolled out of old Dave Oke's hut—turning out late.

Bunter was at breakfast now. He had been at breakfast for some considerable time. He was going to be at it for some considerable time longer. It was not

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a matter to be lightly dismissed. Bunter always loaded up to the Plimsoll line—often a little over.

Seated in the soft sand, with his podgy back against a rock, Bunter ate—and ate! Bunter grumbled loud, and he grumbled long, at the grub on the lone island. But he packed it away at quite a good rate.

Harry Wharton & Co. were still waiting for the tide to recede farther. At low tide it was possible to walk round the island on a narrow strip of beach

between the sea and the giant cliffs. Only when the tide was low could they reach the sea-cave on the western side fronting the Atlantic—for there was no boat or craft of any kind on Blackrock.

“Hurry up, old fat man!” urged Bob Cherry. “We're waiting, you know!”

“You can wait!” said Billy Bunter calmly. “If you fellows think I'm going to hurry over my brekker, you're mistaken! I'm not!”

“Oh, we'll wait!” said Frank Nugent. “We must have Bunter!”

“Yes, let's wait!” agreed Johnny Bull. “Must have Bunter!”

“The waitfulness is the proper caper in the esteemed circumstances!” remarked Hurree Janset Ram Singh, with a dusky grin.

“Take your time, old fat man!” said Harry Wharton. “Must have your company.”

“Oh, yes! Take your time!” said Bob. “After all, why hurry?”

Billy Bunter blinked still more suspiciously at the smiling five through his big spectacles.

It was unusual for the chums of the Remove to be fearfully keen on his fascinating company when they were rambling over Blackrock Island. It was still more unusual for them to hang about idly, waiting for him. Bunter, happily unaware that it was the tide that they were waiting for, was surprised.

“Well, I may be ready in half an hour!” he said.

Bob Cherry gave a glance at the beach—widening as the tide receded.

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Then he gave the Owl of the Remove a nod and a cheery grin.

"We'll wait half an hour!" he agreed.

"Pleasure!" said Nugent.

"Oh!" ejaculated Bunter.

This was more and more unusual; more and more surprising. Evidently Billy Bunter's company was really wanted if five fellows were prepared to hang about another half-hour waiting for him to finish guzzling.

"Anything special on?" asked the puzzled Owl.

"We're going round to the smugglers' cave!" explained Bob. "You haven't seen it yet—"

"I don't specially want to."

"But we want you, old fat porpoise!" urged Bob. "You know what jolly good company you are!"

"That's all very well!" said Bunter morosely. "I'm not at all sure I shall come! You fellows keep on clearing off and leaving me without any company but that one-legged old blighter Oke. Now you want me—"

"We do!" assured Bob. "Simply must have you with us this morning!"

"Well, I'll see!" said Bunter loftily. "I'm not at all sure I shall come. But I'll see!"

That was William George Bunter all over. William George did not require much encouragement to spread himself!

When Bunter was not wanted, which was often, it was hard to make him come unstuck. But if he was wanted, Bunter was the man to be very lofty about it.

"You fellows haven't treated me well these hols," went on Bunter, with his mouth full. "That beast Smithy diddled us into getting stranded on this rotten island. You know I want to get away. But when that man Rance came out in a boat, you let him go without me—just because I wasn't on the spot. You had to row with him, instead of asking him politely to wait, and take me back to Potkelly in his boat. Is that what you call pally?" Billy Bunter almost forgot to eat in his indignation. "Now I'm still here, all through you fellows!"

"Sorry you're still here, old fat man!" gasped Bob.

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

"Couldn't be sorrier!" agreed Johnny Bull.

"Well, that's all very well!" said Bunter morosely. "Here I am, stranded, till that old image Tregely comes off in his boat next week. You fellows may enjoy this kind of thing. I don't! And to think that that beast Smithy told me there was a castle, and a butler, and a touring-car—and there ain't anything at all! Pulling a fellow's leg after all I've done for him!"

"Never mind Smithy now!" said Bob cheerily. "We're going to punch his head next term for stranding us here. Get on with the gorging! We can't wait more than half an hour!"

Bunter blinked at him.

"You'll wait exactly as long as I choose, or I jolly well shan't come!" he answered calmly.

"Oh, all right! We'll wait—rather than lose your company!"

"Wait, then!" said Bunter. "And shut up! Don't keep on jawing while a fellow's eating."

The Famous Five gazed at Bunter for a moment or two. Then they strolled away on the sand—to wait!

They walked down to the little stone jetty in the cove, and exchanged a few cheery words with old Dave Oke, the one-legged ancient mariner who had been the sole inhabitant of Blackrock

before their arrival. They looked away across the shining waters towards the coast of Devonshire, where the tiny fishing hamlet of Potkelly nestled somewhere under the cliffs. Finally—the tide being well out—they walked back to the hut where Billy Bunter sat by the doorway, having at last finished eating.

Bunter was leaning back against the doorpost taking a little rest after his exertions.

"Ready, old fat bean?" asked Bob.

"Well, perhaps I'll come now!" said Bunter graciously. "Mind, I'm not keen on exploring a rotten old cave—I'm coming simply because you fellows want me. I'm always doing these good-natured things."

"Oh, my hat! I mean, come on, Bunter!"

Billy Bunter heaved his weight up at last. Obviously, plainly, and unmistakably, the Famous Five of Greyfriars did want his company that morning. They were keen on it. It seemed as if they had realised, all at once, what a very nice fellow Bunter was, and felt that they couldn't do without him.

In these happy circumstances, Bunter condescended to come! And he came—rolling along the sand at the rate of a venerable snail.

"I say, you fellows, don't walk so fast!" squeaked Bunter.

"Oh, buck up!" said Bob.

"Shan't!" said Bunter. "If you want to race, you can go on without me. Please yourselves."

"Look here, fathead—" began Johnny Bull.

"That's enough!" said Bunter. "If you want me to come, you'd better not race! But please yourselves."

Bunter was wanted! So Bunter was master of the situation!

Bunter crawled—so the Famous Five slackened pace, and crawled also. It might have been a party of six snails, that slowly—very slowly—crawled along the sandy beach of the cove and disappeared, at long last, round the western cliffs.

THE SECOND CHAPTER.

Bunter Is Not Taking Any!

"WHO'S that?" ejaculated Bunter suddenly.

He came to a halt.

It was not a long walk round the little island to the western side. But it was rough going, over sand and rocks and seaweed.

Billy Bunter was not hurrying—far from it—but he was soon panting.

Every now and then he stopped to mop a perspiring fat brow and to tell the Famous Five that he had a jolly good mind not to take another step! Every time, they waited for him, with smiling patience, and he condescended at length to roll on again.

Now they were in sight of the great cavern in the cliffs that faced the Atlantic. Huge and dark and gloomy, it yawned in the massive cliff, with a high, rugged, irregular arch.

Between the cave-mouth and the sea stretched a dozen yards of sand and shingle, with sharp rocks cropping up here and there. Only at high tide could a boat float into the cave—it was when the tide was at the flood, in the old days, that the smugglers had pulled in to hide contraband cargoes in those gloomy depths.

The smugglers of olden time were dead and gone; only the legend of them lingered. But the smugglers' cave was not untenanted. At the entrance of the great cavern in the cliff, leaning on the

rock, stood a burly man in jersey and sea-boots, with a cap on the back of his tousled head, and a thick cudgel under his arm.

He was smoking a short black pipe, which he removed from his mouth and put into his pocket as he saw the party of schoolboys approaching.

Then he slipped the cudgel from under his arm into his hand, and the expression on his stubbly featured face grew threatening.

Billy Bunter did not like his looks! He did not seem disposed to start again, after halting.

Harry Wharton & Co. exchanged a grin. Each of them had a stout stick under his arm! And each of them, following the example of the man at the cave, slipped it down into his hand, ready for use.

"I say, you fellows, who is it?" squeaked Billy Bunter. "I never knew there was anybody on this beastly island, except that old goat Dave. I say, that man looks a rough brute."

"Rough as they make 'em!" said Bob cheerily. "When we came along here yesterday, he pitched into us with that cudgel, and we had to cut! But we're ready for him this time. We've got a stick each—and we've got you."

"What?" ejaculated Bunter.

"You see, that man Rance, who came out in the boat, doesn't want anybody on this jolly old island!" explained Bob. "He ordered us off, so—of course—we're staying! And he's left that hulking brute, Harker, on the island, to keep us out of the smugglers' cave."

"Oh!" said Billy Bunter.

"He got the best of it yesterday with that big stick!" said Bob. "We hadn't an earthly. But now—"

"Now we're ready to give him some of the same, if he tries it on again!" said Johnny Bull.

"The readiness is terrific."

"Oh!" repeated Bunter.

"But, of course," went on Bob gravely, "that isn't what we're relying on. We're relying on you, Bunter."

"Me!" gasped the fat Owl.

"You're going to lead the rush—"

"Eh?"

"In the forefront of the battle, you know!" said Bob, with a wink at his friends. "Remember what the Bunters did in the War, and go and do likewise."

"Oh!"

"We'll back you up, of course—that is, so far as you need any backing!" said Bob. "Come on!"

Billy Bunter did not come on! He blinked through his big spectacles at big Bill Harker, lounging at the cavern's mouth with that thick cudgel in his hand. He blinked at him uneasily. The more he blinked at him, the less he liked his looks—and still less the look of the cudgel.

The thought of that thick cudgel cracking on his fat head was quite unpleasant to Bunter.

"Come on!" urged Bob.

"Lead on, Bunter!" said Nugent.

"We're following you, old fat bean!" said Johnny Bull.

"I say, you fellows, is that why you were so jolly anxious for me to come with you?" demanded Bunter.

Bunter saw it all now!

It was not for the pleasure of his company—great as that pleasure was—that the Famous Five wanted him on that visit to the cave! This was what they wanted!

"That's it!" said Bob, with a cheery nod. "You see, that man Harker is jolly dangerous! He gave us a high old time, yesterday, with that big stick!



The more Billy Bunter blinked at Bill Harker, the less he liked his look—and still less, the look of the cudgel. "Come on!" urged Bob Cherry. "We're following you, old fat bean!" said Johnny Bull. "I say, you fellows," demanded Bunter, "is that why you fellows were so jolly anxious for me to come with you?"

We had to give him best! But with you to handle him——"

"Oh, really, Cherry——"

"You know what a fighting-man you are, Bunter!"

"Oh, yes! But——"

"You've told us how you whopped a whopping great bargee once, in the hols——"

"Oh, yes! So I—I did! But——"

"Well, now you're going to whop that longshoreman, like you whopped the bargee—just about as much——"

"And we'll stand round and cheer!" said Johnny Bull.

"The cheerfulness will be terrific."

"But we'll lend you a hand, if you want it," said Harry Wharton. "We'll back you up all right, Bunter!"

Billy Bunter blinked round at five faces—all very serious. He blinked at the lounging longshoreman again. Then he once more blinked at the Co.

Still he did not come on.

Bunter had often told the other fellows that he was the man to take the lead. Now, however, modesty supervened, and he seemed not only unwilling to lead, but even to follow!

He had often told how he had whopped a great bargee in the hols! Now he seemed to have no desire to repeat that performance. Often had he related what the Bunters had done in the War. Now it was clear that he did not want to emulate those heroic Bunters.

"Waiting, old man!" said Harry Wharton.

Billy Bunter breathed hard. He breathed deep.

From the bottom of his fat heart, he wished he had never joined in that trip. Not for a moment had he sus-

pected that he was expected to distinguish himself in battle. The beasts had said nothing about that! Really, they had got him there under false pretences.

Billy Bunter, certainly, would not have made one step in the direction of the smugglers' cave of Blackrock Island had he been aware that a dangerous ruffian with a thick cudgel was on the watch there!

"Not funky, old man?" asked Bob Cherry.

"Not Bunter!" said Johnny, shaking his head.

"Impossible!" said Nugent.

"Oh! Certainly not!" said Bunter. "Nothing funky about me, I hope! I'd knock the brute down, as soon as look at him, if you come to that. But——"

"But you'd rather not come to that?" asked Bob.

The Co. repressed a chuckle! It was only too clear that William George Bunter would rather that it did not come to that!

"Well, I mean to say," explained Bunter, "that man Rance, who came here the other day, is the estate-agent at Okeham who sold this island to Smithy's father. He's really in charge of the place, more or less! If he's left that man to see that nobody goes into the cave, I think, upon the whole, that we'd better not go."

"Oh, that's all right!" said Bob reassuringly. "This island belongs to Mr. Vernon-Smith now, and he wouldn't mind where we went, if he knew we were here. Mr. Elias Rance has nothing to do with it now."

"Not a thing!" assured Harry Wharton. "Just a meddling, cheeky

ass, butting in! He has no more right to order us off Blackrock than we have to order him off! And that hulking brute yonder has no right to keep us out of the cave—and he's jolly well not going to, so long as we've got you to handle him——"

"Come on, Bunter!"

"Lead on, Macduff!"

Billy Bunter made a movement at last. But it was not a movement to advance. It was a movement to retreat. Evidently the fighting blood of the Bunters was in a chilly state.

The long-limbed longshoreman, after watching the bunch of schoolboys for a few minutes, came lounging towards them swinging his stick in his hand. That settled it, for Bunter!

It looked as if big Harker was not going to wait for hostilities—he was going to begin them.

Billy Bunter made a step in retreat—then another—and then Bob Cherry grasped a fat arm and stopped him.

"Hold on, Bunter!" he exclaimed.

"Leggo!" roared Bunter, struggling. "That beast's coming across here!"

"That's all right! Knock him down as soon as look at him!"

"Leggo my arm!"

"Don't desert us, Bunter!"

"Save us, Bunter!"

"Oh, my hat! Here he comes! Get behind Bunter!"

"Yaroo! Leggo!" howled Bunter frantically, as Johnny Bull grasped his other arm and he was faced round towards the advancing longshoreman. "I say, you fellows, leggo! Leggo, you beasts! I say— Oh crikey!"

Billy Bunter struggled wildly. But he struggled in vain. Big Harker was

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still at a distance—but he was coming on! And there was Bunter clutched by the Famous Five, who parked themselves behind his fat form and held him between them and the enemy.

He struggled. He wriggled. He yelled. He roared. He quaked with dire alarm. He squirmed and kicked.

"Will you leggo?" raved Bunter. "Beasts! Cads! Rotters!. Yaroo! Lemme go! That brute will be here in a minute! I ain't going to protect you! Run for it, you silly idiots! Cut! I say, come on—get out of it before he comes! Will you leggo my arms, you beasts?"

"Will you tackle him if we let go?" gurgled Bob Cherry. "Rush right at him—"

"Oh, yes, certainly! Just let go!" gasped Bunter. "Just let go, and—I'll tut-tut-tackle him like anything! Give me a chance to—to rush—"

"Right-ho! Stand clear, you fellows," said Bob.

Billy Bunter's fat arms were released. The moment he was released, Bunter made a rush.

But he did not rush towards Big Harker. He rushed in the opposite direction. Evidently Bunter preferred to do his rushing with his back to the enemy.

It was a rapid rush. Bunter almost flew!

"Hold on!" roared Bob. "You're going the wrong way, Bunter! That isn't the way the Bunters went in the War!"

"Come back, Bunter!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Billy Bunter heard. But he did not heed. The sand scattered like spray under his pounding feet as he flew.

Sprinting was not really in Bunter's line—but he looked good now for the

school one hundred yards! He gasped, he puffed, and he blew—he panted, and he perspired—but he flew like a run-away locomotive.

A roar of laughter followed him.

"Well," gasped Bob Cherry, "if that's what the Bunters did in the War, I don't know how they got that bushel of Victoria Crosses that Bunter's told us about!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Billy Bunter, going strong, vanished round the bulging cliffs, homeward bound. And the Famous Five, chuckling, turned to face the longshoreman—not, it seemed, much dismayed by the desertion of William George Bunter, whose fat leg they had been playfully pulling.

THE THIRD CHAPTER.

The Upper Hand!

"O OOK it!"

That was Big Harker's terse remark as he came tramping across the sand towards the Famous Five of Greyfriars. They waited, in a cheerful bunch, for the longshoreman to arrive.

The previous day, Big Harker had had the best of it—easily! With that thick cudgel he had, in fact, knocked the schoolboys right and left—and they had had to retreat in a rather damaged state. Some of those damages were still rather painful.

But, as Bob Cherry had remarked, nut-cracking was a game that two could play at. They were ready for Mr. Harker this time. They were now as well equipped for the fray as Big Bill Harker, and prepared to give Mr. Rance's man all he wanted, and perhaps some over.

"Ook it!" repeated Harker. He swung his cudgel with a threatening leer. "You got to keep by old Dave's shanty, where you can be found when wanted. Mr. Rance will be sending for you afore long, and you can lay to that. Now, you ain't wanted 'ere! Ook it, sharp!"

The chums of the Remove looked at him with cheerful coolness. Big Harker apparently supposed that he was going to drive them off again, as he had driven them the day before. Big Harker had another guess coming.

"You going?" demanded Harker. "No," answered Harry Wharton, "we're not going! And I warn you not to handle that stick again, my man. You'll get damaged if you do!"

"And the damagefulness will be terrific, esteemed and disgusting Harker!" declared Hurree Janset Ram Singh.

Big Harker eyed them a good deal like a savage bulldog. Probably he had not expected to see them again after the rough handling of the previous day.

The businesslike way in which the schoolboys gripped their cudgels seemed to make Big Harker rather less keen on a shindy.

But he did not intend to allow them to enter the cave, or even to approach it, if he could help it; that was clear.

Mr. Rance, the estate-agent of Okeham, had left him on guard for that purpose. And Mr. Rance, of Okeham, had very particular reasons for not desiring that cave to be explored.

Harry Wharton & Co. were aware of that, though they could not begin to guess what Mr. Rance's particular reasons were.

They knew that there was some mysterious secret hidden in the old smugglers' cave, and they knew that they were going to root it out; and that was that.

"Come on!" said Bob Cherry briskly. "Better steer clear, Harker!"

"You've been warned!" grinned Johnny Bull.

And the Famous Five, in a body, advanced.

Big Harker backed away a few paces, keeping between them and the cave. Then, as they came steadily on, he threw up his right hand, with the cudgel in it, rushed at them, and slashed.

But the longshoreman did not have to deal this time with a party of schoolboys with empty hands. He had to deal with a party who carried cudgols like his own, and were ready to use them if Harker insisted on it.

Crash came his heavy cudgel, a blow that would have stunned one of the juniors had it landed. Harker was utterly reckless of the damage he did. But Harry Wharton caught the descending swipe on his stick, and neatly parried it.

At the same moment, Bob Cherry swiped, and his stick fairly rang on Big Harker's bullet head. Johnny Bull, swiping at the same moment, missed his head and got his shoulder.

Big Harker staggered and roared. Swipe, swipe, swipe!

Nugent and Hurree Singh and Harry Wharton put in the swipes rapidly.

Harker roared like a bull and bounded away.

"Follow on!" grinned Bob.

"Have a few more, old bean?" chuckled Johnny Bull.

The juniors pushed on, Harker retreating before them. Once, the enraged ruffian made a movement as if to rush on them. But he thought better of it. He was, in fact, hopelessly



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out-matched, now that it was cudgel against cudgel, and he had captured all the damages in the conflict, so far.

Suddenly he turned and ran for the cave.

"After him!" roared Bob.

"Collar him!"

The juniors rushed in hot pursuit. They were going to explore the cave to its utmost extent deep in the dark interior of the cliff, and they had no idea of having that dangerous ruffian lurking in the shadows while they explored it. Big Harker had asked for trouble, and now he was going to get a little more than he wanted.

At the cave-mouth, they overtook the longshoreman. Big Harker turned desperately, slashing right and left with his cudgel. Johnny Bull roared as he caught a heavy knock with his shoulder; but that was the only knock that Harker was able to put in. Even as it landed, he went over under two or three swipes that landed at once, sprawling in the wet sand and seaweed left by the tide.

"Man down!" grinned Bob.

He jumped at the sprawling ruffian, planted a knee on his jersey, and flourished his stick over the savage stubbly face.

"Have another, old bean?" he asked.

Harker panted.

"Old on!" he gasped. "'Old on! Blow yer, 'old on!"

"Any old thing!" said Bob cheerfully. "Have you got it into your thick skull by this time that you've bitten off more than you can chew?"

"Blow yer!" gasped Harker. "Blow yer, I says! Blow the lot of yer!"

"Ow!" said Johnny Bull, rubbing his shoulder. "Wow! Oh crikey! Ow!"

"Hurt, old chap?" asked Bob.

"Oh, no! I'm making these noises because I'm enjoying myself!" said Johnny, with ferocious sarcasm. "Ow! Wow!"

"All in the day's work, old bean!"

"Wow! Fathead! Ow!"

"You've got a cord in your pocket, Franky. Trot it out. Now, Mr. Harker, we're going to take care that you keep out of mischief! You're going for a little walk. I dare say you're an awfully nice chap in your own way, but we don't want you here!"

"Blow yer!"

"I've heard that one! You're repeating yourself, old bean! Stand by ready to crack his nut if he gives trouble, you fellows!" said Bob.

"Ready and willing!" growled Johnny Bull.

Big Bill Harker glared, scowled, and snarled. But he gave no trouble. He seemed anxious to avoid the nut-cracking operation!

Bob Cherry dragged his hairy wrists together behind him and bound them to the back of his belt. He knotted the cord, and knotted it again, and yet again.

"Better keep his paws safe!" he remarked.

There was no doubt that Big Harker's paws were safe when Bob had finished.

"Now you can get up!" said Bob.

"Like to take a walk along the shore to the cove, and see old Dave?"

"No!" snarled Harker.

"Sorry—because that's just what you're going to do! Walk him out, you fellows! You see, Mr. Harker, your room's preferred to your company! Now start! Perhaps old Dave will untie your paws for you when you get to the cove, if you ask him nicely. Starting?"

"No!" roared Harker. "I ain't!

Blow yer! Blow the lot of yer! I ain't going jest one step, and you can lay to that!"

Harker planted his feet in the sand outside the cave, evidently determined not to budge. He had failed to keep the Greyfriars juniors out of the sea-cave; but no doubt he preferred to keep an eye on their proceedings there—if he could! As it happened, he couldn't! The Famous Five had no use for Mr. Harker's eye on their proceedings!

"You won't go?" asked Bob.

"Blow yer, no!" roared Harker.

"Boot him, all together!" said Bob. "I dare say he'll start if we boot him long enough. Anyhow, it's good exercise."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Go it!"

The Bull of Bashan, famed of olden time for his roaring, had nothing on Big Harker during the next few moments.

Harker had stated that he would not go. But he went! He went quite rapidly! Thudding boots were too persuasive to be resisted. Not only did he go, but he went at a run, almost as fast as Billy Bunter had gone. With his hands tied behind him, lurching and stumbling, but keeping up quite a good speed, only anxious to get out of reach of lunging boots, the longshoreman careered away along the shore and disappeared round the cliffs in the direction of old Dave's cove.

"And now," said Bob Cherry cheerily, "now for the cave, my beloved 'earers—and spotting Rance's game, whatever it is."

And, Harker having disappeared from sight, the Famous Five tramped into the smugglers' cave.

Three times already, since their landing on Blackrock Island, they had explored it, and discovered nothing but footprints in the sand and a boat-hook hidden in a fissure. But this time they hoped for better luck!

THE FOURTH CHAPTER.

Too Late!

HERBERT VERNON-SMITH, the Bounder of Greyfriars, stood in the ancient High Street of the old Devonshire town of Okeham and looked at the office windows of Rance & Co., Estate Agents, Valuers, and Auctioneers.

The Bounder's face was clouded, his look hesitating.

He looked like a fellow who couldn't make up his mind—which was very unusual in Smithy. Smithy, generally, was very decided, and seldom hesitated. Now he seemed quite at a loss.

Adjoining the office was Mr. Rance's private house, and Smithy scanned its windows, hoping to see a familiar face. But if his father, Samuel Vernon-Smith, was within, nothing was to be seen of him at the windows.

Smithy had no doubt that he was there! Rance's house and office were the millionaire's headquarters during his stay in Devonshire. It was a week since Smithy had arrived there to join his father for the Easter holidays, and had been turned away. It had been a dismal week for Smithy!

For one thing, he had run out of cash—quite a new experience for the wealthy Bounder of Greyfriars. Most of his cash had gone on that forbidden jaunt with Pon & Co., of Highcliffe, against his father's commands. He had turned up in Devonshire after that excursion with very little left; and now that little was nearly gone.

But Smithy was thinking less of that, troublesome as it was, than of the estrangement from his father.

Mr. Vernon-Smith had told him, with grim sarcasm, that since he wanted to be his own master, he should be his own master, and left it at that.

That was not really what Smithy wanted at all! He had disregarded his father's commands and his father's wishes; in his unthinking obstinacy and determination to have his own way he had done wrong. And he was sorry for it, not so much because his father was angry, as because his father was hurt.

Now that so many days had passed, Smithy hoped to find the millionaire in a more softened mood. He had come back to Okeham in that hope.

From the office doorway a ruddy-cheeked young man looked out. He glanced at Herbert Vernon-Smith and grinned.

Smithy gave him the blackest of black scowls.

All the Rance household knew how he had been turned out. Rance's clerk remembered it, and seemed amused to see him turning up again.

The Bounder made up his mind at last. For a whole hour he had loitered undecided.

If Mr. Vernon-Smith was still adamant, he had to get through that dismal vacation the best he could. There was a chance of joining his chum, Tom Redwing, who was on a coasting trip in his father's lugger. Roughing it in old John Redwing's lugger did not appeal to Smithy very much, but he would have been glad to see his chum again.

But he was going to see his father first, and make one more attempt to set matters right. Obstinate and arrogant as he was, Smithy was sorry that he had done wrong, and was willing to eat humble pie to any extent.

He knocked at last at the door of Mr. Rance's private house.

It was opened to him by the same man who had opened it to him a week ago, and who evidently knew him again. But it did not open wide.

"Master Vernon-Smith—" he began.

"Tell my father I'm here, and ask if I may see him!" said the Bounder quietly.

"Mr. Vernon-Smith is not here, sir."

"Do you mean he has gone out?"

"No, sir, he has left."

"Left?" repeated Smithy, his heart sinking.

He had not expected that, for a moment. He stared at the man.

"Yes, sir; he left the night before last."

"Where has he gone?"

"That I cannot say, sir! Perhaps Mr. Rance could tell you. Young Mr. Rance is in his office now."

The Bounder, in deep chagrin, turned away from the door, and it closed. He moved slowly along to the adjoining office.

He had been prepared to wait, if his father was out. But he had never dreamed that Mr. Vernon-Smith might be gone. He could not understand it now.

It was not like Mr. Vernon-Smith to change his plans. All his arrangements had been made to remain in Devonshire till the first week in May. Smithy was to have been with him, but for the unhappy trouble that had arisen.

Urgent business might have called him away to London for a day or two. But the man said he had left! It was

something like a knock-down blow to the Bounder.

The ruddy-cheeked young man had stopped back into the office.

Smithy pushed open the door and entered. The young man grinned again at the sight of him.

"Toll Mr. Rance I wish to speak to him," said Vernon-Smith quietly. He was not feeling any urge to be civil, either to Mr. Rance or to his clerk, but he controlled his irritation. It was only from Rance that he could learn where to find his father.

"I'll tell him," said the ruddy-cheeked young man, his manner implying that in his opinion the want was all on the schoolboy's side.

However, he tapped at the inner door, opened it, and spoke to someone within. Then he turned back to the Greyfriars junior, grinning more widely than before.

"Mr. Rance is too busy to see anyone, sir."

"I must see him!"

"That's what Mr. Rance says; sir."

The ruddy-cheeked young man stood against the inner office door. On the Bounder's previous visit he had pushed in unpermitted. He was strongly inclined to repeat that performance, but he checked himself. Barging forcibly into Mr. Rance's office was not the way to draw information from him.

"I'll wait!" he said.

And he sat down to wait.

The clerk gave a shrug and went back to his stool and his desk.

The Bounder, with growing irritation and bitterness, waited.

He did not believe for a moment that Mr. Rance was too busy to see him. Young Mr. Rance, who carried on the business left him by old Mr. Rance, was not devoted to business matters. The Bounder, when he had barged into his private office, on his last visit, had seen him hastily conceal a racing paper under a building plan on his desk. As likely as not it was in that manner that young Mr. Rance was busy.

Smithy, during the week that he had knocked about, idle, at a loose end, had heard some of the local gossip on the subject of Rance & Co. Young Mr. Rance, it was said, was making ducks and drakes of the excellent estate business left him by old Mr. Rance.

That racing paper which the Bounder had seen in the inner office rather seemed to bear out the local gossip.

It was irritating enough to kick his heels in the outer office if young Mr. Rance was only busy on spotting winners—or losers—instead of attending to business.

But he waited as patiently as he could.

An hour crawled by. During that hour nobody came into the office. The ruddy-cheeked young man at his desk seemed to be chiefly occupied in looking out of the window or chewing the handle of his pen. It did not look as if Rance & Co. were doing much business.

Indeed, Smithy had a suspicion that Rance & Co. had been on their last legs, or near it, before the millionaire had come along and put a flood of new business in their way.

To an arrogant and headstrong fellow like the Bounder it was very nearly intolerable to be kept waiting an hour—especially by a hard-up estate-agent in a little country town. Rance, no doubt, remembered his last visit with resentment, and, if he were through with Mr. Vernon-Smith, had perhaps no motive or desire to be civil to Mr.

Vernon-Smith's son. Smithy had taken a dislike to the man at first sight—and that feeling intensified as he sat wearily and impatiently waiting.

But the door of the inner office opened at last, and a sharp-faced, narrow-eyed man looked out. It was young Mr. Rance.

He gave the Bounder an unpleasant glance.

Whether it was resentment of Smithy's high-handed proceedings at his previous visit, or whether he reciprocated the Bounder's dislike, it was plain that Elias Rance had no desire to make himself agreeable.

"Are you still here?" he snapped.

"What do you want?" Smithy rose to his feet. Only with difficulty he controlled his temper and constrained himself to answer civilly.

"I've been told at your house that my father has left, Mr. Rance," he said.

"That is correct."

"I want to know where to find him. Is he still in Devonshire?"

"Mr. Vernon-Smith left suddenly without acquainting me with his destination," answered the estate-agent. "I understood from his remarks that he intended to return to London, after viewing some properties in Somersetshire and Gloucestershire. But he gave me no details."

"Then you can tell me nothing?" asked Vernon-Smith, deeply disappointed.

"Nothing!"

"You might have said that an hour ago!" snapped Vernon-Smith.

Mr. Rance shrugged narrow shoulders.

"But for your own disgraceful conduct you would be well acquainted with your father's movements," he retorted. "You would, in fact, have joined him here."

Smithy's cheeks burned. It was true enough, but it did not concern Elias Rance; neither did such a taunt come well from a man who hid racing papers under building plans in his office! But Smithy still kept his temper.

"When did my father leave?" he asked.

"The evening before last."

"Is he coming back?"

"That is undecided. He may or may not return here for further business."

"He left no address or telephone number?"

"Neither."

"Then you could not communicate with him if you wanted to?"

"I have instructions to send all communications to his London address," answered Mr. Rance. "Possibly you had better apply there. I have no further time to waste, Master Vernon-Smith. Please leave my office."

"Look here—"

Mr. Rance turned back into the inner office and slammed the door, the slam cutting Smithy off short.

The Bounder's eyes blazed, and he made a step towards that door, with his fists clenched. But once more he controlled his temper, and turning, walked out of the office, the ruddy-cheeked young man grinning after him.

With a black brow and a heavy heart, the Bounder of Greyfriars tramped away, his clouded face a contrast to the bright April sunshine in the old High Street of Okeham.

THE FIFTH CHAPTER

The Mystery Of The Cave!

"NOW for the jolly old mystery," said Bob Cherry.

Vast and gloomy, the cave opened in the soaring cliff fronting the Atlantic.

Wet sand and straggling seaweed marked where the tide swept up the cave, and in the sand were the tracks of Harker's heavy sea boots.

At high-water mark, where ridges of heaped sand and pebbles and seaweed barred the cave, Bob Cherry lighted old Dave's lantern. Beyond that point the dim twilight of the smugglers' cave deepened to darkness.

"That's where he camped!" remarked Bob, pointing to a tarpaulin, two or three untidy blankets, and other things lying by the rocky wall a little above high-water mark on the sloping floor.

Evidently Big Harker had passed the night in the cave. That he had been left on the watch the juniors could not doubt, but what he had been left to watch was a puzzle to them.

Twice, they knew, young Mr. Rance, of Okeham, had visited that cave in a boat with Big Harker and Peter Coot. Possibly, probably, he had paid other visits of which they knew nothing. But why?

They had traced his footprints up the cave, and signs that he had carried a large bag. That was nearly a week ago. The night before last they had watched, from the cliff-top, the boat pull in with something lying in it rolled in canvas. They knew no more.

It looked as if young Mr. Rance was hiding something in that remote recess off the Devonshire coast. But what—and why? They found no answer to those puzzling questions. Whether an answer might be found by another exploration of the great cave they could not tell, but they were going to see.

On the soft sand beyond the tide-mark they hoped to pick up sign—and all the Famous Five were pretty good Scouts. Here and there they found tracks of Harker's sea boots. He seemed to have moved about a good deal.

With the lantern-light gleaming on the sandy floor they moved farther up the cave. Those heavy tracks ran before them, the footprints both going and coming, here and there overlapping one another.

If the other visitors to the cave had left footprints, Harker's heavy tread had apparently obliterated them. It was plain that the longshoreman had tramped up the cavern, and returned, more than once. It was hard to understand why, unless there was something farther up the cave upon which he had to keep a watchful eye! But what?

"Something's here," said Bob Cherry. "They wouldn't pull out to this cave with a cargo to carry it back again! That's not sense."

"Whatever it was, they left it here," agreed Harry Wharton. "But—What the thump—"

"We know that Rance is an estate-agent at Okeham—about ten miles from here," said Bob. "From what old Dave says, he's been making ducks and drakes of the business his father left him, and the local gossips say that Rance & Co. are in a bad way. But I suppose the dear man hasn't turned burglar and taken to hiding his loot here."

Harry Wharton laughed.

"Hardly!" he answered. "It can't be anything of that kind, and it can't be smuggling. But it's something fishy—that's perfectly plain. It's something he's afraid of having known."

"And I suppose he hasn't pinched any of Smithy's father's millions?" went on Bob, with a cheery grin. "He's doing business for Smithy's father, you know—he bought this island for him among other things. Smithy's pater has got more millions than he remembers—"



"Think I'm afraid of a brute like you," said Bunter, safe out of harm's way. "I'd thrash you as soon as look at you!"
 "Shiver me!" breathed Harker, struggling in his bonds. "Jest to get a 'and on you—jest that! Wouldn't I make you 'op!"

but he can't have left one about for Rance to snoop!"

"Fathead!"
 "Well, what the dickens is the game?" said Johnny Bull. "He's hiding something, and it looks as if he can't have anything to hide. But he doesn't come rooting about this cave and leaving a man on guard for fun."

"Let's see if that jolly old boathook is still there," said Bob.

He led the way to the rocky wall of the cave, and stopped at last at the fissure where the juniors had spotted the hidden boathook a week ago.

The fissure was empty now. The boathook and the extra handle that had been with it were both gone.

"They've found a new hiding-place," said Bob, as he flashed the light into the fissure in the rock. "Picked up some of our fairy footprints herabout, perhaps, and guessed that we'd spotted it—what?"

"Or taken it away!" said Nugent.
 "Why should they bring it here to take it away again?"

"Well, I suppose it's somewhere about! But what the thump did they want a boathook for, so far up from the sea?"

"Ask me another."
 That the boathook, now missing, had some connection with the mystery of the cave the Famous Five were sure. It could not have been conveyed there without a purpose. But what the connection was was hard to guess.

They tramped on up the cave, the lantern light gleaming through dense darkness as they went. They stopped at last at the wall of rock that barred the extreme end of the smugglers' cave.

There Bob flashed the light up at a cavity in the rock wall above—more than a dozen feet over their heads.

That is could not be climbed into, they knew, having already made the attempt in vain. They stared up at it curiously, wondering whether that tunnel-like opening in the rock wall held any clue to the mystery of the cavern.

"We can't get up there," said Bob slowly. "But a fellow could get up on the shoulders of a big brute like Harker. Not easy, but it could be done." He wrinkled his brows in thought. "Look here!" he added, flashing the light round on the cavern floor.

Innumerable traces of heavy sea boots showed that Harker had been there. The sand was thin at this spot, but it had plainly been trampled right and left. Again the juniors stared up at the gap in the rock above.

"If we had a ladder—" murmured Bob.

"If!" grinned Nugent.
 "Might as well ask for a lift on this jolly old island," said Johnny Bull.

"Not quite," answered Bob. "We couldn't make a lift, but we could make a ladder. Lots of timber lying about Dave's cove, and the old bean's got some tools. We made ourselves a hut, and we can make a ladder. I'm a pretty good carpenter, you know."

"Hem!"
 "Jolly good!" said Bob, with emphasis. "Don't you remember how I mended a chair-leg for you in your study, Wharton?"

"Yes, rather! I remember sitting on the floor when it gave way."

"Ha, ha, ha!"
 "Look here, I'm going to make a ladder, and I'm jolly well going to be the first to go up it, too!" hooted Bob.

"Passed nem con," grinned Johnny Bull. "If you make the ladder, old

man, nobody else will be keen on going up first. We'll stand round to catch the fragments."

"Ha, ha, ha!"
 "Oh, rats! Look here, you fatheads, we've rooted all over the shop, and we come back to that gap up there," exclaimed Bob. "Those sweeps don't keep on walking up the cave just to stare at it. I'll bet you there's something to be spotted there if we could get up to it. And we're jolly well going to make a ladder, bring it along here as soon as it's made, and see what they've parked up there—and that's that!"

Harry Wharton nodded.
 "Good egg!" he said. "There's nothing to be found in the cave, so far as we can see—and all the sign keeps on leading us to this spot. Next time we come we're going farther—and that's the way we're going."

And, that being settled, the Famous Five retraced their steps down the smugglers' cave to the shore, as puzzled and perplexed as ever, but still more keen on rooting out the strange mystery of the sea cave of Blackrock.

THE SIXTH CHAPTER.

The Rough Stuff!

YOUNG Mr. Rance looked up irritably as his office door opened.

It was late in the afternoon, close on time for the office of Rance & Co. to close. The ruddy-cheeked clerk, in fact, was gone; but Mr. Rance was still busy in the inner office, though it was not estate business that he was busy about.

Young Mr. Rance had a pink paper spread open on the desk before him, and was regarding it with a gloomy eye. Judging by his look, young Mr. Rance's quest of winners had led only to the discovery of losers.

It was Herbert Vernon-Smith who opened the door and stepped in, and young Mr. Rance gave him a stare of concentrated annoyance and dislike.

He had not seen Smithy since the junior had called that morning. Probably he had not expected to see him again at all. And it was clear that seeing him aroused Elias Rance's deepest irritation.

He rose to his feet, crumpling the pink paper in his hand.

"You impudent young rascal, how dare you come back here?" he exclaimed.

"Your clerk seems to be gone, Mr. Rance," said the Bounder, "so I showed myself in."

"Get out!"

Vernon-Smith closed the door behind him.

"I haven't come here for a row, Mr. Rance," he said. "And I see no reason why you can't be civil."

"The last time you came here you forced your way in, and laid hands on me. I desire to see no more of you! I would rather lose Mr. Vernon-Smith's business than put up with insolence from his son! Now go!"

"I was very anxious to see my father, Mr. Rance," said Vernon-Smith quietly. "I think you might overlook a spot of excitement when you barred my way, and—"

"I have told you to go!"

The Bounder compressed his lips.

"Very well, if you don't choose to be civil, have it your own way," he answered. "But I'm not going till I know where to find my father!"

Young Mr. Rance started a little. His eyes gleamed green as he fixed them on the Bounder's determined, dogged face.

"Find your father!" he repeated. "You speak as if he were lost. What nonsense are you talking?"

"I'll explain, if you'll listen a minute," said Herbert Vernon-Smith. "My father was going to stay here for two or three more weeks. He was up to the neck in business in Devonshire, buying property all over the place. If he left suddenly, he must have left a good deal of business in an unfinished state. I simply couldn't understand how he could have left without giving you either an address, or a telephone number, when you've been doing all his business for him in this county. It's not his way, and it's not sense."

"I have told you—"

"Yes, and I've guessed why you told me!" snapped the Bounder.

Rance gave another start. There was not much colour in his sharp face, but what little there was, wavered.

"What do you mean?" he breathed.

"What—"

Vernon-Smith stared at him. He could see that his words had given Rance a startling shock, but he could not see why.

"I mean this," he answered. "Since I've thought it over, it looks to me as if you're still feeling sore about the row we had the day I first came here, and you don't choose to tell me where my father's gone."

"Oh!" said Rance! "Oh, is that it?"

"That's it! Now I admit I was a bit high-handed, and I'm willing to say that I'm sorry," said Vernon-Smith.

"Now will you tell me my father's address?"

"I have said that I know nothing of it."

"My father and I parted on ill terms, Mr. Rance," said the Bounder quietly. "He was ratty with me, and he had cause. I dare say you've heard what happened. I caused a trick to be played on the telephone, and got leave from my headmaster to leave school before break-up, using my father's name. I never realised what a rotten trick it was at the time. I know I ought to have, but I didn't. But I'm not making excuses to you. I want to ask my father to forget it. Even if you've got your back up with me, even if you've taken a dislike to me, you don't want to stand between father and son. I'm asking you, as a favour, Mr. Rance, to tell me where my father is so that I can go to him, and tell him I'm sorry for what I did."

Rance did not reply.

The Bounder's manner was deeply earnest. There was no trace of arrogance about him now.

He waited for Rance's answer. But he waited in vain.

"Will you tell me?" he asked, at last.

"You are wasting my time. I have told you all I know of your father's movements!" snapped Rance.

Vernon-Smith set his lips.

"That is a lie!" he said, very distinctly.

Rance looked at him with greenish eyes.

"If you want a shindy, you shall have one, by gad!" said the Bounder of Greyfriars, between his teeth. "Pack up your lies, Mr. Elias Rance! You're not through with your business with my father. You expect him back here, and that means that you're in touch with him."

"Nothing of the kind!"

"I tell you I know!" shouted the Bounder, his temper breaking out.

"After I'd thought it over a bit, I've made a few inquiries round about. I soon found out that you were pulling my leg. You say that my father has gone viewing properties in Somerset and Gloucester. If he had, he would have gone in his car."

"He went in his car."

"Another lie!" snarled the Bounder. "My father's car is still in the garage here, as I've found out."

"Oh!" ejaculated Mr. Rance.

"That means that he's coming back, and I know it!" snarled Smithy. "And he's not far away, either."

"Probably he has returned to London. Indeed, I remember he mentioned that there was some matter in the City that required his attention."

"Probably he did nothing of the kind," sneered Vernon-Smith. "I've been on the phone to Courtman Square, and Larkin has seen and heard nothing of him. He has not been back to London."

Young Mr. Rance breathed hard.

"I can only repeat what I have told you—that I know nothing at present of his movements," he said. "If I knew anything I should, of course, tell you. Why should I not?"

"I don't know why you should not, except that you want to make yourself an unpleasant rotter!" snapped Vernon-Smith. "But I know that you could tell me, if you liked, where to find him, and you're going to. He never left in his car—it's still here. He never left by train—I've inquired at the station, where he's perfectly well known. He's still in Devonshire—and you must know where. All it amounts to is that he's changed his quarters, and

is no longer staying in your house. Give me his address."

Rance breathed harder. Mr. Samuel Vernon-Smith's present address was one that young Mr. Rance was very unlikely to give.

Vernon-Smith made a step towards him.

That Rance had a guilty secret to keep, naturally did not occur to the Bounder. It was strange enough that the man's dislike and resentment for an outbreak of temper should make him take this line; but that was the only reason Smithy could think of to account for Rance's obstinacy. But that he knew where the millionaire was to be found Herbert Vernon-Smith was certain.

He had made an appeal—humbling himself to a man he disliked. It had failed! Now he was thinking of other measures.

"Will you answer me?" he asked, between his teeth.

"I have told you all I know."

"That's false. Where is my father?"

"Leave my office."

The Bounder came nearer, his eyes burning, his fists clenched.

Rance backed a little farther behind his desk.

He was a man, and Smithy was a schoolboy. But he was a weedy man, unfit from late hours, excessive smoking, and too many whiskies-and-sodas. Smithy was strong and sturdy, and hard as nails. There was alarm, as well as rage, in young Mr. Rance's face, as the Bounder followed him round the desk—his intentions only too evident.

"Stand back!" muttered Rance. "No violence! If you dare—"

"Where's my father?"

"I know nothing—"

"Another lie, and I'll knock you spinning!" roared the Bounder.

"Where's my father, you rat?"

"Stand back!" panted Rance.

He made a jump towards the door of the outer office.

The Bounder was after him with the spring of a tiger hitting out as he came.

His temper was beyond all control now. This man, for no reason that Smithy could guess, but petty dislike and an evil temper, was standing between him and his father—between a son's repentance, and a father's forgiveness. A better-tempered and more patient fellow than the Bounder of Greyfriars might have failed to control himself at that.

His hard knuckles crashed on Rance's jaw, sending him spinning sideways.

Rance reeled and stumbled, and then went down on the office floor with a crash, and a gasping howl.

"Now, you cur!" roared the Bounder.

"Now, you rat! Tell me where my father is, or I'll thrash you till you can't crawl."

"Help!" yelled Rance.

He raised himself on his elbow—but no farther. Only too clearly the Bounder of Greyfriars was going to knock him down again, as soon as he was on his feet.

"Will you tell me, or shall I use my boots on you, you cur?" roared Herbert Vernon-Smith.

"Help!"

"Where's my father?"

"Help!"

There were voices and footsteps, and the door from the house opened. The manservant who had spoken to Smithy in the morning, stared in. He stared at a startling sight.

Rance, yelling, was squirming on the floor, the Bounder booting him as he squirmed. He was going to answer, if the enraged Bounder could make him—and as he would not get on his feet.

Smithy booted him as he sprawled—and he booted good and hard.

"Oh! Mr. Rance—" gasped the staring man at the door.

"Help! Help me, Tomlin!" shrieked Mr. Rance.

The man rushed at Vernon-Smith, and dragged him back.

Rance struggled to his feet, dusty, panting, crimson.

"Throw him out!" he gasped. "Throw that young scoundrel out! I will help you. Throw him into the street!"

It was not easy for even the two of them to throw the Bounder out. He struggled and kicked, as he was whirled across the outer office, blind with rage.

But he had to go—and he went.

Panting and dishevelled, the Bounder of Greyfriars shot out of the office doorway, and sprawled headlong on the pavement.

Mr. Rance shut the office door, and locked it, without delay. Outside, Herbert Vernon-Smith sprawled, and panted, and gasped—a dozen passers-by pausing to stare at him, as he sprawled.

THE SEVENTH CHAPTER.

Bunter The Bold!

"OH crikey!" Billy Bunter uttered that ejaculation, in startled tones. He jumped to his feet. Bunter seldom jumped—but the sight of Big Bill Harker tramping towards him, in the sandy beach of the cove, was more than enough to make the fat Owl of Greyfriars jump.

Bunter was alone in camp, by the cove of Blackrock. The Famous Five were exploring the sea-cave, and old Dave Oke had stumped away on his wooden leg inland, to a potato-patch he cultivated on one of the few spots of fertile earth on the rocky island.

Whether he was out of hearing or not, Bunter did not know; but he was out of sight, and the fat Owl was on his own—and he fairly bounded as, hearing a sound of tramping feet on the sand, he looked round and spotted the longshoreman.

The fat Owl had been taking a rest after his rapid retreat round the cliffs. He was still taking a rest, lying on his podgy back in the sand, in the shade of a cliff, when Harker happened. Bunter could do with quite a lot of rest. In fact, it was his happy intention to go on resting till it was time to eat again. But he forgot all about resting when he spotted the savage, scowling face close in the offing.

Harker's hands were bound behind him; but Bunter, though he could see that they were behind him, could not, of course, see that they were tied.

His impression was that Harker had walloped the juniors, and was coming there looking for further trouble. It was hard to guess any other reason; in fact, why he should have come. And his look was not reassuring.

Whether he had walloped the juniors or not, he had sustained some damages that leaped to the eye. And the rage in his face was quite alarming to the view. No wonder Bunter jumped!

Harker came tramping savagely on. What he wanted was to get his hands untied, and he stared round for old Dave Oke as he came. He did not see the wooden-legged mariner; but he saw Billy Bunter, and bore down on him.

Bunter gave him a terrified blink, and shot into Dave's hut. The lean-to under the cliff, in which the Famous Five camped, had no door, and was no refuge—but there was a door to Dave's

hut, and Bunter promptly slammed it after him.

"Hi!" roared Harker. "Hi, you fat young swab! Hi!"

"Oh scissors!" gasped Bunter.

On the door of Dave's hut, there was neither lock nor bolt. The sole inhabitant of Blackrock never needed to secure his door.

Bunter blinked round anxiously for something to use as a wedge. He grabbed up a stick and jammed the end under the door.

He was only just in time. A powerful kick on the outside of the door made the hut shake.

"Ooooooh!" gasped Bunter. "Oh crumbs!" He grabbed Dave's trestle-table, built out of old wreckage, to drag it to the door. But it was too heavy for the fat Owl to shift.

Crash, on the door again.

Bunter's fat heart leaped into his mouth.

"Hi! You stoopid swab!" roared Harker, outside. "Open this 'ere door, will you? I ain't going to 'urt you, you young fool you, I jst want you to untie my 'ands!"

"Wha-a-t!" gasped Bunter.

"I got my 'ands tied!" howled the longshoreman. "You step out and untie them, blow yer! 'Ear me?"

Bunter could not fail to hear him! He was bellowing almost like a bull. But Bunter did not open that door. He felt safer with a door shut between him and Big Bill Harker. Neither did he believe the longshoreman's statement.

"You—you—you go away!" gasped Billy Bunter, through his chattering teeth. "I—I don't want any trouble with you. You leave me alone!"

"Come out of it, blow yer!" roared Harker. "If you don't come out of it, you sea-slug, I'll knock the door in!"

"Oh crikey!"

Crash, crash, crash!

Harker's heavy sea-boot crashed and banged on the door.

Dave's hut was not built to resist that sort of treatment. In less than a minute, the door flew open, in three or four sections.

Billy Bunter gave a squeak of terror as the enraged longshoreman tramped in, ducking his head to enter.

"Owl! Keep off!" yelled Bunter. "I haven't done anything, have I? I don't want to stick on this putrid island! I say—I say—Yarooooooh!"

Bunter roared and rolled as a sea boot reached him. He rolled on the floor, squirmed into the doorway, and bounded out of the hut.

Big Harker tramped after him, glaring and scowling.

"Now untie my 'ands, blow yer, afore I boot yer all over Blackrock!" he roared.

"Oh crumbs!"

Bunter bounced to his feet.

He realised now that the ruffian's hands were tied behind him. How it had happened he did not know; but there it was.

Harker could use his feet—he had used one of them on Bunter—but he could not use his hands. That knowledge rather calmed the fat Owl's panic. Even Billy Bunter was not fearfully afraid of a man whose hands were tied.

All he wanted was to get out of reach of Harker's boots; then he could dodge.

Bunter was not active, but he could dodge a man whose hands were bound if he had a start. There were plenty of rocks to clamber up, where no man with tied hands could follow.

"Oh, yes! All right!" gasped Bunter. "I—I—I say, did they—did they tie your hands like that?"

It dawned on the fat Owl that the Famous Five must have fixed Harker up in that manner, and that the walloping must have gone Harker's way, after all. Bunter certainly had not the slightest intention of setting the ruffian free. He was much safer tied.

"Ay, and I'll crack their 'eads all round for it, and you can lay to that!" snarled Harker. "Get them 'ands loose for me, you swab, afore I kick you across to Potkelly!"

"Oh! Ah! Yes, certainly! All right!" stuttered Bunter. "Tut-tut-turn round, Mr. Harker! I—I—I'll do it like a shot!"

Harker had to turn his back for Bunter to get at his tied hands. That was what the astute fat Owl wanted.

Standing behind the long-limbed longshoreman, the fat Owl fumbled with the cord knotted round his hairy wrists. Then, all of a sudden, he clenched both fat hands and delivered a terrific thump in the middle of the ruffian's back.

Harker toppled over headlong, crashing down on his face in the sand.

Billy Bunter flew.

He had his start now. He forgot the weight he had to carry. His feet hardly touched the ground as he flew to a huge rock that stood near the cliff. It had steep sides and an irregular, flat top.

Billy Bunter clambered up that rock like a monkey.

He was on the top, gurgling for breath, while Harker still lay, with his rugged features and rough beard digging up the sand.

(Continued on next page.)

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THE ROYAL NAVY

The longshoreman rolled over, panting with rage. He struggled and scrambled to get on his feet again. It was not easy in the loose sand, with his hands tied behind his back.

But he got on his feet at length and glared round for Bunter with a glare that made the fat Owl exceedingly glad that he was out of reach of a boot.

Sighting Bunter on the boulder, the longshoreman tramped across to him and glared up at the fat face that blinked down.

His look was terrifying. But he was powerless. Bunter was well above his head, and he could not essay to climb the steep rock without the use of his hands.

"Blow yer!" he gasped. "Come down out of that!"

"Yah!"

"You fat swab—" roared Harker.

"You ugly, unwashed, pug-nosed, pie-faced gorilla!" retorted Bunter. Out of reach, Bunter was as bold as a lion.

"Take your ugly face away before I come down and smack it!"

"Wot!" gasped Harker.

"I've a jolly good mind," said Bunter, "to come down and boot you all round the island! I'd give you a jolly good hiding, only you're not fit for a fellow to soil his hands on! Get out of it before I change my mind and come down and wallop you!"

Harker stood glaring up at him, breathing fury. He wrenched savagely at the cords on his wrists. But he had wrenched a good many times already; Bob Cherry had done his work thoroughly.

"If I could git at you—" he gasped.

"I'd knock you down if you could!" answered Bunter cheerfully. "Think I'm afraid of a long-legged brute like you? I'd thrash you as soon as look at you!"

"Shiver me!" breathed Harker. "Jest to get a 'and on you—jest that; only jest that! Wouldn't I make you 'op! Wouldn't I make you 'owl! You can lay to that!"

"Oh, shut up!" said Bunter.

"You fat lubber out of a cook's galley!"

"I said shut up!" interrupted Bunter. "Shut up, and get out of this! Perhaps that will start you!"

There were several small pebbles on the summit of the big boulder.

Bunter grabbed one and hurled it.

At such short range even the fat Owl could not miss. That pebble landed in the middle of Big Harker's features. The roar he gave as he got it woke all the echoes of the cove.

Billy Bunter grinned down at him.

Bunter was feeling quite bucked now. He was master of the situation. That ruffian had kicked him—hard. Bunter was in a position to get his own back. In such a position, Bunter was not the man to let his chances like the sun-beams pass him by.

He grabbed up another pebble and hurled it. It missed Harker's head, but caught his ear in passing, and the longshoreman roared again.

Another chunk, following it up, landed on his bearded chin.

Bunter, grinning, grabbed up another.

Big Harker was not quick on the uptake, but he realised by that time that it was not good enough. He turned and tramped off.

Whiz! came the pebble. It caught Big Harker in the back of his bull neck as he went.

Whiz! came another, landing behind his ear.

The longshoreman, panting with fury, broke into a run. Probably for the first

time in history, Billy Bunter saw the back of an enemy—running away from the triumphant fat Owl.

"He, he, he!" chortled Bunter.

And he hurled pebble after pebble till the stumbling longshoreman was out of range.

At a safe distance, Harker leaned on Dave's hut, regarding the grinning fat Owl with a deadly eye. If looks could have slain, probably Greyfriars School would have lost its brightest and fattest ornament!

Quite undamaged by Harker's deadly looks, the fat Owl sat grinning on top of the high rock, to remain there till Harry Wharton & Co. returned to the camp. And Big Harker, leaning on the hut, muttering oaths in his shaggy beard, could only do the same.

THE EIGHTH CHAPTER.

Bunter Wants To Work!

"I SAY, you fellows!"

"Hallo, hallo, hallo!" roared

Bob Cherry.

Harry Wharton & Co. came tramping round the strip of beach at the foot of the cliffs.

They grinned at the sight of Billy Bunter perched on the high rock and Harker leaning on the hut, scowling blackly, in the worst temper ever.

"What are you doing up there, Bunter?" called out Harry Wharton.

"Oh, nothing! Just enjoying the sunshine, you know!" answered Bunter. "I'm not keeping out of the way of that long-legged beast! I'm not afraid of him, of course! Still, you fellows might kick him out before I come down!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Blessed if I see anything to cackle at!" hooted Bunter. "I've been sticking up here hours and hours and hours waiting for you fellows to come back! Hours and hours and hours—"

"We haven't been gone two hours."

"Well, it seemed like hours and hours and hours! I say, you fellows, kick that beast out and let a chap come down!" squeaked Bunter. "I'm getting hungry!"

The juniors, grinning, walked on to the hut.

Big Harker eyed them as they came up with an anxious intentness that they readily understood. Whatever was the strange secret over which he had been keeping watch and ward at the smugglers' cave, he dreaded that they might have discovered it.

"Here we are again, old bean!" said Bob Cherry cheerily.

"You been in the cave?" muttered Harker.

"Sort of," agreed Bob.

Harker looked from face to face searchingly, and they could see relief dawn in his own.

He was not aware that they had any special reason for searching the sea-cave beyond a natural schoolboy desire to explore such a place. His dread had been that a chance discovery might have been made during that exploration.

The relief in his face showed that he knew that they had discovered nothing.

That was a little puzzling, as they had said nothing. Apparently, he expected to be able to read in their looks if they had discovered the secret—whatever that strange and mysterious secret was.

Anyhow, it was unmistakable that he was relieved. The black scowl on his rugged brow relaxed a little.

"Well, no 'arm done!" he muttered.

"I had Mr. Rance's orders! That's

all! 'Keep them trespassing young rascals where they can be found when sent for!' That was what Mr. Rance said. I got to do what the gov'nor says! That's all! Now you let loose a man's 'ands, blow yer!"

The juniors made no comment on that. They had no intention of warning Rance & Co. that they were on the track of the secret. The less the enemy knew of their plans, the better.

It was true that they had made no discovery, so far—and they knew that Harker could somehow see as much! But they were, at least, on the track of a discovery; for they were assured that the gap in the rock wall at the back of the cave was the way to it.

Bob Cherry opened his pocket-knife and cut through the cords that secured the hairy wrists.

Harker rubbed his wrists, eyeing them evilly. It was clear that, now he was free, he would have liked nothing better than to rush, hitting out right and left. But he did not give way to that amiable desire. The result would have been much too painful for Mr. Harker.

"You can cut!" said Harry Wharton. "And you'd better not butt in again if we want to go into the cave another time!"

"Blow yer!" was Big Harker's reply.

He slouched away—with an evil eye on the fat junior perched on the summit of the high rock.

Billy Bunter watched him uneasily as he tramped over the sand.

He glanced back at Bunter.

"You look out, you fat swab!" he said. "P'r'aps I'll see you agin some day!"

And, with that threat, Big Harker slouched on and disappeared round the cliffs, evidently intending to return to his quarters in the smugglers' cave.

Then, at long last, Billy Bunter clambered down from his perch. It was past midday, and Bunter was, as he had said, hungry.

"I say, you fellows, that old goat Oke has gone off somewhere," he said. "Who's going to fry the fish?"

"You are!" answered Bob.

"Oh, really, Cherry—"

"We're going to be fearfully busy, old fat man! You can cook! Cook—and shut up!"

"If you think I'm going to cook for the lot of you—" roared Bunter indignantly.

"That's it! Get going!"

"Shan't!" roared Bunter.

"Where's the frying-pan?" asked Bob.

"Look here, don't be an ass!" hooted Johnny Bull. "We've got to sort out timber and draw nails—and we've got plenty to do. Why shouldn't that fat ass do a spot of work for once?"

"You shut up, Bull!" hooted back Bunter. "If you think I'm going to be a slave, you're jolly well mistaken. I've done enough for you fellows already, I think!"

"Where's that frying-pan?" hooted Bob.

"Can't one of you find the frying-pan, if Bob's going to do the cooking?" demanded Bunter warmly. "Blessed if I ever saw such a lazy lot! Look here, you find the frying-pan, instead of jawing, Bull! You others get some wood for the stove! Don't be such a set of rotten slackers!"

"You fat, frabjous, fozzling frump—"

"Yah!"

"Where's that dashed frying-pan?" roared Bob.

"Let that lazy, fat chump find it and do the cooking!" roared Johnny. "We've got enough to do, haven't we?"

"Oh, lots! I'm only going to find it for Bunter, as he's going to do the cooking!"

"I jolly well ain't!" hooted Bunter. "Catch me hanging over a smoky old stove and a frying-pan on a hot day! You fellows want to put everything on me! Beastly selfishness all round!"

"Oh, here it is!" Bob stepped into the hut, and he came out with an ancient and rather greasy-looking frying-pan in his hand. "Here you are, Bunter, if you want to do the cooking!"

"I jolly well don't!" snorted Bunter.

"Sure?"

"Yes, you fathead, quite sure!"

"Oh, all right! You shan't do it unless you want to! But I thought you'd want to when I got the frying-pan for you."

"Well, I don't, blow you!"

"I mean, considering what I'm going to do with the frying-pan!" explained Bob.

"Eh? What are you going to do with it?" yapped Bunter.

"I'm going to wallop you with it till you do the cooking!"

"What?" yelled Bunter.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Like that!" said Bob cheerily.

The flat of the frying-pan established contact with the tightest trousers in the county of Devonshire.

Whop!

"Yaroo!" roared Bunter.

"Have another?" asked Bob.

"Beast! Owl! Beast! Wow!"

Whop!

"Stoppit!" roared Bunter. "Do you hear me, you beast? Stop it! I—I'll do the cooking if you like! I—I was only waiting for you fellows to come back to do the cooking for you—"

"Oh, my hat!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Sure you want to do a spot of work for once?" grinned Bob. "If you haven't made up your mind, I'll give you a few more—"

"Beast! Yes! Keep that frying-pan away!" roared Bunter. "I don't mind doing the kik-kik-cooking! I—I want to!"

"Well, if you want to, all right!" said Bob cheerily. "Here's the frying-pan, old fat man! If you change your mind, old porpoise, give me a call and I'll hand out a few more! No trouble at all!"

"Beast!"

Billy Bunter did not change his mind! If he had to have the frying-pan, he seemed to prefer it as a cooking utensil.

For the first time since the school-boys had been stranded on Blackrock, Billy Bunter did a spot of work—and his indignant glare as he did it almost endangered his big spectacles.

THE NINTH CHAPTER.

A Lad And A Ladder!

"WHAT about that?" asked Bob Cherry, with satisfaction.

"Looks all right, What?"

"Um!"

Bob Cherry surveyed the work of his hand with a satisfied eye. His friends seemed a little doubtful.

Bob rather prided himself on his powers as a carpenter. At Greyfriars



Bob Cherry stamped on the rungs of the ladder as a final proof for his doubting friends. "Look at that!" he said. "Pretty safe, what? Look—oh! My hat! Yarooop! What—whoooooop!" The ladder gave way, and Bob went with it.

he kept a tool-box in his study, and never lost an opportunity of using the tools therefrom. If a chair leg in a Remove study was a trifle uncertain, Bob was always ready to oblige with repair work, though it was true that the chair leg was liable to display still more uncertainty after his repairs.

As for making a ladder, that, as Bob declared, was child's play. All you had to do was to get two long pieces, a dozen or so short pieces, nail them together, and there was your ladder! A few extra nails made all safe, and Bob seemed to enjoy wielding a hammer.

The Famous Five had been hard at work, after snatching a hasty lunch, ever since coming back from the smugglers' cave. There was plenty of old wreckage scattered about the cove, and lots of it had old nails in it. Old

Dave had some tools in his hut, which they borrowed.

They gathered more or less suitable wood, and they hammered and drew out rusty nails; they sawed the required lengths; they worked, in fact, like beavers. And the ladder grew and grew, like the little peach in the orchard.

Bob, as carpenter, took the lead and gave instructions. He worked indefatigably, and the other fellows worked. Billy Bunter watched them with a morose eye, till he was called on to lend a hand. Then Billy Bunter exerted himself to the extent of disappearing from sight.

If those beasts fancied that Bunter was going to handle a hammer or a saw, or draw nails with a pair of rusty

(Continued on page 14.)

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The KIDNAPPED MILLIONAIRE!



FRANK RICHARDS

(Continued from page 13.)

old pincers, those beasts were mistaken! Billy Bunter promptly disappeared—and stayed disappeared!

But, at long last, the work was done, and Bob Cherry surveyed it, as aforesaid, with satisfaction.

Two timbers, about fifteen feet long, had been sawn, and chopped, and hewed into something like shape for the side-pieces. A dozen rungs had been sawn, and chopped, and hewed into something like shapely shape. Now they were nailed in place.

Bob believed in using plenty of nails! He was really quite extravagant with those nails which had been drawn from tough old timber.

There was not a single nail left when Bob had finished. He had a blister on his right hand from incessant hammering. But he was cheery and satisfied. The work was done.

"A good job well done, what?" said Bob, glancing round at four rather dubious faces. "All we've got to do now is to carry that ladder round to the cave when the tide serves and stick it up there!"

"Better test it first!" suggested Harry Wharton.

"Not necessary," answered Bob. "But we'll do it, of course! I've put enough nails in that ladder to stand an earthquake."

"You don't think you may have put too many?" asked Nugent.

"Can't put in too many nails! No good spoiling a ship for a ha'porth of tar!" said Bob. "That ladder's all right! It's been a stiff job, but we've done it—and with such materials, and these few tools, I really think a chap can be rather proud of that ladder! Help me to stick it up against that rock, and we'll test it."

The juniors grasped that long ladder and heaved it up! They planted it against the high rock on which Billy Bunter had taken refuge from Harker.

It slanted up to the rock, resting against the summit.

Bob glanced round.

"You go up, Johnny! You're the heaviest—"

"Eh?" said Johnny Bull.

"If it bears your weight all right, old chap, it will bear ours, of course," said Bob. "You're the heaviest man here."

"I may be the heaviest," said Johnny Bull, "but I'm not the fatheadedest! I'll watch somebody else test that ladder."

"If you think that ladder isn't jolly strong—" exclaimed Bob warmly. "Look at the nails I put in it!"

"The nailfulness was terrific," murmured Hurree Jamset Ram Singh, "but the strongfulness may be a boot on the other leg."

Bob Cherry grunted. He had put a lot of work into that ladder! He was fully satisfied with the result! It was rather irritating to read dubiety in four faces!

The fact was that Bob's friends

hadn't so much faith in Bob's abilities as a carpenter as Bob himself had! Bob knew what he could do in that line—they didn't! Or—perhaps—they did! Anyhow, it was clear that not one of the four wanted to be the first man to test the strength of that ladder.

"Well, I'll jolly soon show you!" grunted Bob. "If you think that ladder will let a fellow down, just watch—and perhaps you'll own up that I can make a ladder!"

And Bob Cherry tramped up the ladder.

His friends watched him rather anxiously. They did not really feel very sure about that ladder. If nails could do it, it was all right—it fairly bristled with nails! But there had been a considerable amount of splitting in the dry old wood under so many nails and under such hefty hammering. Bob's friends could not help feeling a little anxious for him!

Bob tramped up that ladder—and tramped heavily, just to show the doubting Thomases how strong it was!

Creak, creak, creak!

"Look out, Bob!"

"Don't be an ass, Nugent!"

"Be a bit careful—"

"Don't be a fathead, Wharton!"

"It looks to me—"

"You don't know anything about carpentry, Bull! Just shut up, and watch!" hooted Bob.

"Oh, all right!"

Tramp, tramp, tramp, went Bob, up rung after rung.

His anxious friends were relieved to see him approach the summit without disaster. But the sounds of complaint from the ladder increased their doubts.

Bob looked round from the summit of the ladder against the rock. He grinned down triumphantly at his chums.

"What about that?" he called out.

"Safe as houses, what! Bunter could get up this ladder without damaging it! Right as rain!"

"Mind how you tread coming down!" called out Johnny Bull.

"Don't be an ass!"

"My esteemed Bob—"

"Don't be a goat!"

Bob Cherry began to descend.

Half-way down, he stopped and stamped on the rungs—a final proof for his doubting friends.

"Look at that!" he said. "Pretty safe, what? Look— Oh! My hat! Yaroop! What—whoooooop!"

Crash!

Bump! Crash!

"Yoooooh-hooooop!" came a roar from Bob Cherry, waking most of the echoes of Blackrock Island as he sat on the sand in the midst of the ruins of the ladder. "What the thump—yarooooop!"

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

Really they could not help it—Bob's last convincing proof having had such a very unexpected and remarkable result. They yelled.

"Oh!" gasped Bob. "Wow! Oh crikey! Ow!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"What are you sniggering at?" roared Bob, glaring at his hilarious chums. "Anything funny in a fellow bumping down on a lot of nails—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You sniggering idiots!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You cackling chumps!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Will you shut up?" roared Bob Cherry.

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

Bob Cherry scrambled up from the wreck of the ladder. He grasped a fragment of the wreck—bristling with nails

—and rushed at his comrades; and the Co. promptly scattered up the beach, still yelling like hyenas!

THE TENTH CHAPTER.

Bad Luck For Bunter!

SNORE!

Big Harker paused and glanced round as he heard that unexpected sound.

Snore!

The burly longshoreman was tramping on the beach between the smugglers' cave and the cliff that shut in Dave Oke's cove. He smoked his pipe, and grunted, and every now and then cast a glance towards the distant coast of Devonshire, glowing in the sunset. The expression on his stubbly, bearded face was discontented.

For whatever reason Harker was guarding the smugglers' cave, he found it wearisome enough. His thoughts were on his favourite pub at Penruddy. He had his sleeping quarters in the cave, but those gloomy recesses were far from attractive, and he spent a good deal of time tramping about the beach when the tide was out.

The tide was lapping up the sand now, and the longshoreman moved nearer the steep cliff to keep clear of the creeping water. And then, from an embayment of the cliff, that unexpected sound reached his ears, and he stared round.

Snore!

"My eye!" ejaculated Harker, and he grinned.

He grinned down at a fat figure reposing in soft sand at the foot of the cliff!

Sprawling at more or less graceful ease in the sand, his back leaning against a rock, lay William George Bunter—fast asleep!

Bunter had wandered about a quarter of a mile from the camp at the cove. That, naturally, had made Bunter tired.

He did not want to return to camp till supper-time; especially as work was going on there, and a fellow might be called on to lend a hand! So the fat Owl had selected a comfortable spot and sat down to rest, and—naturally—gone to sleep!

Big Harker grinned down at him—a rather tigerish grin! He had been quite anxious to see Bunter again—not in the presence of the Famous Five! Now he saw him!

Snore!

Billy Bunter, with a fat chin sunk on a podgy chest, and his big spectacles slipping down his fat little nose, slept and snored—peacefully.

He was dreaming of a spread in Lord Mauleverer's study at Greyfriars—a spread at which there had been two kinds of cake, and three kinds of jam—such a spread as delighted the fat soul of William George Bunter—and he smiled in his sleep!

But he ceased suddenly to sleep, snore, and smile as a heavy sea boot jammed into his plump ribs!

Billy Bunter, once asleep, was not easy to wake—but that lunge from Big Harker's heavy boot awakened him with a jump!

"Ooooooh!" gasped Bunter. "Beast! Lemme alone, Bob Cherry, you rotter! Wharrer you— Oh! Oh crikey!"

Billy Bunter blinked up at the burly form that towered over him, and fairly bounded. Bunter had a lot of weight to lift; but he might have been a featherweight by the way he bounded to his feet at the sight of Big Bill Harker's savagely grinning face.

"Gotcher!" grinned Harker.

"Oh lor!" gasped Bunter.

Big Harker was glad to see Bunter! But the gladness was all on his side! Billy Bunter did not share it in the very least!

He blinked wildly to and fro for a way of escape, like a scared fat rabbit. But there was no escape. The burly longshoreman stood between him and the way back to the cove—and the bulging cliff hid him from the sight of the fellows at the camp. There was no escape for Billy Bunter—and there was no help! His fat knees knocked together as he blinked at the ruffian, his eyes almost popping through his spectacles.

"Ero we are agin, you fat oyster, you!" grinned Harker. "I told you I might see you agin, didn't I?"

"Oh! Yes!" gasped Bunter. "I—I—I'm awfully g-g-glad to see you! I—I say— Oh crikey!"

"P'r'aps you'd like to heave a few more pebbles at a covey!" suggested Mr. Harker.

"Oh! Yes! No! Oh lor'!"

Mr. Harker came a step nearer.

Billy Bunter backed away, watching him in terror.

Harker made another step—and Bunter made another backward hop!

"Gotcher!" repeated Harker. "If them other young swabs know you agin, arter I done with you—"

"I—I—I say, you—you keep off!" gasped Bunter. "I—I—I say— Oh crumbs! Oh lor', I—I say—"

Big Harker, grinning, came at him.

"You got it coming," he grinned,

"and you can lay to that! I—"

It was sheer desperation that made Bunter do it!

He did not think first! There was no escape—and he was as helpless as an infant, once that brutal grip closed on him. Hardly knowing what he did in his desperate panic, the fat Owl lowered his head and butted!

Big Harker had not expected that! It was quite unlooked-for! He no more expected resistance from the fat school-boy than from a shell-fish on the beach! He was taken quite by surprise.

"Ooooooh!" he spluttered.

Bunter's bullet head crashed on his jersey, just over the spot where Big Harker had parked his last meal! It crashed like a battering-ram! Bunter's weight was behind it, and Bunter's weight was weighty!

The lanky longshoreman, with every ounce of wind driven out of him, folded up like a pocket-knife, gurgling horribly, and sat down.

"Oooooogh!" he gurgled.

Billy Bunter rolled over from the shock. He scrambled frantically up again. He gave Harker one terrified blink—the longshoreman was doubled up with both hands pressed to his jersey, emitting gurgling gasps.

Bunter stayed only for that one blink!

Then he flew!

"Urrrgh!" came from behind him. "Grooogh! Oooooogh! Gorrgrgh!" Horrible sounds came from Harker as he struggled painfully to his feet.

Bunter tore on! He charged round the bulging cliffs, panting and puffing and blowing.

But it was a case of more haste, and less speed! He caught a foot in trailing seaweed and went headlong, diving into a clammy, crackling mass.

"Oooh!" gasped Bunter. He landed in the seaweed, with a bump that left him almost as breathless as Big Harker.

The hapless fat Owl lay spluttering. There was a heavy tramping of sea boots on rocks and sand. Harker was coming! Gasping and spluttering and gurgling, the longshoreman was in pursuit, coming round the cliffs.

Billy Bunter cast a terrified blink back.

The jutting cliffs hid Harker from his sight for the moment; but he could hear the tramp of the heavy sea boots from beyond.

The ruffian was coming—and the camp was still distant! Then Billy Bunter, in his desperation, had another brain-wave! Instead of scrambling up and resuming a futile flight, he grabbed at the thick mass of seaweed into which he had stumbled and dragged it over him.

It was wet, it was evil-smelling, it was clammy—it was fearfully nasty in every way! But the fat Owl noticed none of these things—he palpitated under the mass, not daring to move, hardly daring to breathe, as the heavy tramping footsteps came round the circling cliffs.

He was screened from sight unless the longshoreman stopped at that sprawling mass of seaweed to look for him. But there were dozens of such clammy masses piled up along the cliffs. It was a good chance for Bunter!

It was, at any rate, the only chance he had—and he sprawled under the seaweed and listened with both his fat ears as the heavy tramping came closer.

Closer and closer—and Billy Bunter's fat heart almost died in his breast. If that awful ruffian spotted him—

Harker was not running. He had not wind enough to run. But he was tramping very fast. Closer and closer came the heavy tread—and it passed—and to Billy Bunter's infinite relief, died away round the cliffs in the direction of the cove.

Harker, evidently, believed that the fat schoolboy was still ahead of him; and he was still in pursuit.

"Oh crikey!" gasped Bunter.

Not till the last sound of that heavy tread had died away did the fat Owl venture to put his head out of the seaweed, like that of a tortoise from a shell.

Harker was out of sight. He had gone on towards the cove round the cliffs.

Billy Bunter thankfully crawled out of his clammy cover, gasping for breath.

He stood gasping and gasping. But he realised that he had no time to lose! Harker would not be long in discovering that he was not ahead of him; and when Harker discovered that, he would come back searching the beach, and the hapless Owl's game would be up. Harker was between him and the camp, and Bunter had to head the other way—and he lost no time about it.

Still gasping for breath, Billy Bunter rolled away—and, like the river Iser in the poem, he rolled rapidly!

THE ELEVENTH CHAPTER.

In The Smugglers' Cave!

"O Crikey!" groaned Billy Bunter. He came to a horrified halt! A wash of rippling water over his feet reminded him of the state of the tide!

"Oh lor'!" moaned the fat Owl in horror and dismay.

He had had no choice about taking that direction. There were only two directions he could have taken; and he had taken the one that led away from Big Harker.

That meant the awful prospect of tramping right round the island of Blackrock, and arriving at old Dave's cove from the other side.

It was two or three miles round the island—an awful prospect for Bunter, though better than falling into the hands of the brutal longshoreman.

Harry Wharton & Co. had made the circuit of the island more than once at

low tide. Billy Bunter hadn't—and he never meant to, if he could help it!

Now it suddenly dawned on his fat brain that that resource, awful as it was, was cut off! The tide was coming in!

The narrow strip of beach between the cliffs and the sea was narrowing more and more. Water rippled almost up to the base of the cliffs and receded.

Bunter blinked round him in utter dismay.

There was still time to retrace his steps before the tide reached the cliffs and scuttle back to the cove! But that meant running into Big Harker! There was not time to get round the island—nothing like it! The tide would be right in before he had covered half that distance.

Billy Bunter blinked at the washing tide! He blinked back along the beach. The circling cliffs shut off his view at a short distance. Nothing was to be seen of Harker yet! But the longshoreman was somewhere between him and the camp at the cove. He could not return! And he could not go on.

He blinked at the gloomy, shadowy opening of the smugglers' cave! It was not an inviting refuge!

But it was the only one that offered.

Bunter had not been in the cave, so far! The other fellows had explored it several times; but the fat Owl had no fancy for clambering over rocks, and scrambling in dark and gloomy recesses. But he had no choice left now! It was that, or falling into the hands of the longshoreman—probably already on his way back, looking for him!

The fat Owl clambered over the rough rocks at the cavern's mouth. He scrambled, grunting and gasping, over the masses of seaweed and fragments of driftwood left by the tides under the high rocky arch.

After him came a wash of water, hurrying his footsteps! He grunted and gasped on, till he reached the ridge of pebbles that marked the limit of the tide.

He tramped wearily over it, and sat down on the soft sand beyond to rest his weary limbs.

From where he sat, he had a view of the rolling Atlantic—rolling to infinity westward under the sinking sun. Far away was the smoke of a steamer, probably bound for an Irish port. Nothing else was to be seen on the boundless sea.

Near him, as his dismal blinks revealed, was a collection of tarpaulin and blankets; evidently the spot where Big Harker bedded down for the night. At the sight of it the fat junior scrambled to his feet again. He realised that the longshoreman would be coming back to his cave.

"Beast!" moaned Bunter.

He blinked into the deep shadow of the depths of the cave. It was far from inviting to the view; but he dared not remain where he was, for the longshoreman to spot him when he came.

Grunting dismally, Bunter rolled up the cave.

The twilight within was dim, and at a short distance it was quite dark.

Billy Bunter stumbled and groped on in the lowest of spirits.

He stopped at last and blinked back towards the cavern's mouth. Round him was blackness; but the cavern's mouth, at a distance, opened like a doorway on the sunset, glowing red. The shining waters rolled in, splashing and spraying.

Black against the sunset a figure stood there; a long-limbed figure in jersey and sea boots! Big Harker had returned!

The longshoreman was not looking into the cavern. He was standing out-

side, staring along the tide-swept beach.

Perhaps he was looking for Bunter, and wondering whether the fat school-boy had been swept away by the tide; as he certainly would have been by that time had he remained on the beach.

He turned at last and stared up the cavern.

That was enough for Bunter! He was quite invisible in the darkness, but he was taking no chances. He turned and hurried up the cavern.

In the blackness he could see nothing. With his fat hands outstretched before him, the hapless Owl stumbled on.

Something hard and cold met his fat fingers. He had reached the rock wall that closed in the end of the smugglers' cave.

He looked back.

From that distance the cavern's mouth was a mere patch. Between Bunter, and that patch of red sunset, a dark shadow moved, appearing and disappearing! Big Harker was coming up the cave.

Bunter gave a gurgle of terror. He groped over the rocky wall with frantic fingers in the hope of discovering some further outlet.

But his frantic groping only discovered narrow fissures in the rock here and there! He had reached the end of the cave, and there was no further way.

"Oh crikey!" breathed Bunter.

Tramp, tramp, tramp, echoed the heavy footsteps, booming in the hollows of the great sea-cave.

A twinkle of light came to his eyes. Big Harker had a lighted lantern.

The fat Owl gave a groan of terror as he saw it.

Evidently the longshoreman suspected that he might have taken refuge in the cave. At all events, he was going to ascertain.

The fat junior groped farther along the rocky wall. But there was no opening into which anything larger than a rabbit could have squeezed. He bumped several times on loose, rocky boulders, that lay about—suppressing painful squeaks lest they should reach the ears of the longshoreman.

The lantern-light twinkled closer. Harker was flashing it to and fro as he came, to scan the cave from side to side. But the cavern was so extensive that the light hardly reached the walls on either side. In a few more minutes it would have revealed Bunter—but the fat junior backed behind a rugged boulder that lay about a dozen feet from the end of the cave.

There he suppressed his breathing and waited.

Tramp, tramp, came Harker's heavy footsteps.

He halted, at length, a few feet from the rock wall.

Billy Bunter backed farther round the boulder, keeping it between him and the longshoreman. His fat heart was beating almost to suffocation.

Harker stood where he was for a full minute, turning the light round him. Then Bunter heard him grunt.

"Drowned, I reckon!"

Bunter was glad to hear it! If Harker fancied that he was "drowned," so much the better for Bunter!

"Mebbe he got to the cove!" he heard the longshoreman mutter. "Mebbe! But I reckoned he was hiding somewhere along the cliffs when I lost him! I reckon he was, the fat silly swab! Mebbe he got back to the cove—but I don't reckon he did! Hiding in the cliffs, the fat swab, and the tide got him! Drowned, I reckon!"

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Bunter crouched silent.

Big Harker stirred at last. He moved away along the rock wall, flashing the light to and fro. Although his impression was that the fat swab had been "drowned," he was going to make sure that Bunter had not dodged into the cave.

The lantern twinkled away into the darkness.

But a few minutes later, Bunter, blinking from behind the boulder, saw it returning. Having searched along the rock wall in one direction, Big Harker was coming back to search in the other.

That brought him directly towards Bunter's cover. The fat junior, with palpitating heart, backed round it as Harker approached—keeping it between him and the longshoreman all the time.

Harker passed it, and went along the rock wall till he reached the other side of the cave. Then Bunter, peering out of cover, saw the light taking the direction of the sea.

He heard the grunting voice again: "Drowned, and you can lay to that! Mebbe he'll wash up along to Penruddy—mebbe as far as Bideford or Apple-dore! It ain't no doing of mine—if that fat swab has gone and got drowned!"

The muttered words indicated some twinge of remorse in the brutal heart of the longshoreman.

It was clear that he was satisfied now that the fat schoolboy had been caught in the tide on the narrow beach. The light twinkled away towards the cavern's mouth. It disappeared from Bunter's eyes; and the heavy tramp of the longshoreman died away.

THE TWELFTH CHAPTER.

The Bounder Means Business!

YOUNG Mr. Rance gave a sudden start, and breathed hard through his sharp nose.

He halted, staring at the figure that leaned on the garage door, in the dusk, behind the establishment of Rance & Co. in Okeham High Street.

Young Mr. Rance was coming, evidently for his car. He had a key in his hand to unlock the door of the garage.

If young Mr. Rance had expected to see Herbert Vernon-Smith again, he certainly had not expected to see him there, or then! His narrow eyes gleamed like a cat's at the Bounder of Greyfriars.

"You! What are you doing here, you young rascal?" he muttered. "If you give me further trouble, I shall apply to the police for protection."

The Bounder's lips curled contemptuously.

"I may save you that trouble, Mr. Rance!" he answered.

"What do you mean, you young fool?"

"I've been waiting for you here!" said Vernon-Smith quietly. "I had to see you again, Mr. Rance—and I waited here to see you."

"I have nothing to say to you—nothing! If I ever see your father again, I shall complain to him of your insolence and ruffianism."

"Please yourself about that!" The Bounder stepped away from the garage door, approaching Rance, who stepped back quickly.

Smithy burst into a scornful laugh.

"Don't be alarmed!" he sneered. "I'm not going to hit you, Mr. Rance—not at present, at any rate. I'm going to speak to you."

"I refuse to hear a word from you, you insolent cub!" said Rance, between his teeth. "I could give you into custody for trespassing here."

"Cut that out! Will you tell me where to find my father?" asked Vernon-Smith.

"I've told you all I know! I have nothing to add—not one word! Now go!"

"That's your last word?" asked Vernon-Smith quietly.

"Yes—go!"

"Very well; I go straight from here to the police station!" said Herbert Vernon-Smith. "If you won't answer me, Mr. Rance, you may answer a police-inspector—you may like that better."

He half-turned as he spoke, as if to go. Had Rance remained silent, he would have gone. But Rance did not remain silent.

"Stop!" he panted.

The Bounder turned back.

"Well?" he rapped.

"Tell me what you mean, if you mean anything, you cub!" muttered the estate-agent of Okeham. "What have the police to do with this?"

"I will tell you!" said Vernon-Smith quietly. "You are an evil-tempered rotter, Mr. Rance, and you've taken a dislike to me—but that doesn't account for the line you've taken. It can't account for it! You've got some other reason for keeping me away from my father! What that reason is, I don't know—but it looks to me like foul play."

"Foul play!" breathed Rance. "Are you mad?"

"What's happened here, since my father turned me out, I don't know," went on the Bounder of Greyfriars, in the same quiet tone. "But something's up—and I'm going to know what it is! My father made his headquarters here—he was going to stay till May! He's gone—suddenly! You told me he had gone in the car, touring in Somersetshire! I found out that his car is still in this garage! I've learned that he never left by train! I can get no news of him—I've not been idle, Mr. Rance, since I saw you last! I want to know what has become of my father."

The Bounder's hands clenched and his eyes gleamed.

Rance stood looking at him in the dimness.

There was suspicion in the Bounder's mind—vague as yet; but it was there. Indeed, it could hardly fail to be, in a keen mind like the Bounder's, after the strange line the Okeham estate-agent had taken. A vicious temper and a personal dislike did not account for it. There was something behind it—the man had some motive for standing between the father and the son.

"You must be mad, I think!" said Rance at last, hoarsely. "Do you fancy, for one moment, that anything could have happened to Mr. Vernon-Smith?"

"If not, where is he?"

"I have said that he went—"

"In his car!" sneered the Bounder. "And his car is still here! Why did you tell me that lie, you cur?"

"A moment's forgetfulness. The fact is—"

"Oh, cut it out!" snapped the Bounder. "Where is Tomlinson?"

"Tomlinson?"

"My father's chauffeur. Are you going to tell me that he went with my father—without the car?"

"Certainly not! I have no doubt that he is still in his lodgings in Okeham. I had no accommodation for him in my house, and—"

"I know all that. You'd have told me that he was gone if I did not know that the car was here. Now you tell me he is still in his lodgings in Okeham. Well, what's his address?"



"Keep 'old of him, Peter!" panted Harker. "Keep a 'old on the young wild-cat!" Dizzy from the blow he had received, Vernon-Smith staggered on. He was powerless in the hands of his captors, and he could only stagger onward as they dragged at his arms.

Rance did not answer.

"He may know something of my father's movements or intentions, if you do not!" sneered the Bounder. "I want to see him. Where is he?"

"The fact is, Mr. Vernon-Smith never mentioned the address to me. The man is lodging in Okeham—I cannot say where."

"Very well! They will find him soon enough at Okeham police station," said Vernon-Smith. "If you know nothing, you can't tell me; it will have to be found out."

"You must be mad!" breathed Rance. "Think of the gossip, the scandal; of your father's anger if you call the police into his affairs—"

"I'm chancing that. This is your last chance, Mr. Rance," said the Bounder. "Either you put me in touch with my father, or else I go to the police. You can take your choice."

Rance stood quite still. His face was bitterly vicious and angry in expression, but otherwise it was hard to read.

It was natural enough that a business-man should dislike the idea of the police being called into his affairs. In a small country town like Okeham it would cause endless gossip and surmise—and there had been gossip enough already about the affairs of Rance & Co. since young Mr. Rance had been carrying on the business of old Mr. Rance.

But whether young Mr. Rance had anything to fear beyond unpalatable gossip the Bounder could not guess.

Whether he was a guilty man, or merely an ill-natured and malicious man, he did not want the Okeham police mixed up in his affairs. If it was

merely malice that actuated him, the Bounder's threat was enough to bring him to heel.

"Well?" rapped Smithy, as the man did not speak.

Rance spoke at last.

"You are placing me in a very awkward position, Master Vernon-Smith," he said. "Your father would be intensely angry if you did anything of the kind; and I have no doubt that I should share his resentment. I cannot afford to quarrel with Mr. Vernon-Smith, who is placing a great deal of business in my way, as you are aware. But—"

"Well?" snapped Smithy. "Cut it short!"

"I will be frank," said young Mr. Rance. "I admit that I am in touch with Mr. Vernon-Smith; but I have his strict orders not to put you into communication with him. You are aware of the cause—your disobedience and disrespect!"

The Bounder winced.

"Drop that!" he snapped. "That's no bizney of yours! I'm going to see my father—and you're not going to stop me! Either you tell me at once where to find him, or I go to the police and tell them that I suspect foul play! You can take your choice about that!"

Rance licked his dry lips.

"I have said that I have his strict orders to tell you nothing, Master Vernon-Smith. Now you place me in such a position I have no resource but to see him and tell him exactly what you say. I shall tell him that, in these circumstances, I cannot undertake to keep his address a secret from you, and

that he must deal with you himself. I wash my hands of it."

"Oh!" said the Bounder.

Mr. Rance glanced at his watch.

"I shall be seeing him," he said, "within the hour. I may go so far as to admit that I am going to see him now. I shall insist upon his communicating his own orders to you by word of mouth. Will that satisfy you?"

"Of course it will!" grunted the Bounder. He watched the sharp-featured, cunning face suspiciously, but he had a feeling that the wind had been taken out of his sails.

"Very well! I shall return to Okeham about eleven o'clock," said Mr. Rance. "If you choose to step into my office at that hour you may use the telephone and speak to your father. I shall tell him quite plainly that he must speak to you; that I can tolerate this persecution no longer."

The Bounder stood silent for a moment.

Then he nodded.

"Leave it at that, then," he said. "If that's carried out fair and square I've no quarrel with you, Mr. Rance. Leave it at that."

The Bounder turned and walked away.

Mr. Rance unlocked the garage. There was a spot of perspiration on his sharp face, and he was breathing hard and deep. His sharp mouth was shut like a vice as he drove away in the falling darkness for the Devonshire shore.

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THE THIRTEENTH CHAPTER.

Missing!

"WHERE'S Bunter?"

"Blow Bunter!" grunted Bob Cherry.

Bob was rubbing various places where he had established contact with that ladder.

That ladder was in many pieces, and all the pieces had many nails, and Bob had found quite a lot of them, and the result seemed to be displeasing.

There was a cheery scent of frying fish. Old Dave Oke was frying it for supper as the sun went down over Blackrock. A scent of cooking ought to have drawn Billy Bunter to the spot like a magnet, and undoubtedly would have done so had he been anywhere at hand.

Bob was busy with damages, but four fellows looked round for Bunter. Nobody, it was true, pined for his fascinating company. But now that it was getting dark it was time the fat Owl rolled home; and as he did not roll home it looked as if he had tumbled into trouble of some sort. Bunter was the fellow to tumble into trouble if there happened to be any lying about.

The Famous Five had been too busily at work on the ladder that afternoon to notice where he went. They remembered that Bob had called to him to lend a hand with something, and that shortly afterwards he was not to be seen.

"The fat ass wouldn't let himself be caught in the tide, I suppose," said Frank Nugent slowly, glancing towards the cliff at the western end of the cove.

The tide was washing up at the base of the great cliffs, and the narrow strip of beach had entirely disappeared under the water.

"Did he go that way?" asked Harry, with a start.

"Not that I know of. But if he did—"

"Well, even Bunter wouldn't be idiot enough to be caught in the tide," grunted Johnny Bull. "Why should he?"

"Well, where the dickens is he?"

"Let's have another look round," said Harry.

It seemed unlikely enough that Bunter had been caught in the tide. Even had he gone to sleep in the sand, as was probable enough, the inward wash of the water would certainly have awakened him when it reached him, leaving him plenty of time to scramble round the cliffs to safety before it flooded deep.

But the suggestion was rather alarming, and the four juniors scattered in various directions, leaving Bob sitting by the hut, doctoring his damages, and old Dave frying the supper.

They shouted and called and whistled up and down and round about the head of the cove. But there came no answer but the echoes of their voices, and as the darkness thickened they returned to camp at last.

"Sooper be ready," said old Dave.

"Bunter's not turned up?" asked Harry.

"No!" said Bob. "Haven't you seen the fat chump?"

"Not a sign of him."

"Lost himself somewhere!" said Bob. "Not a lot of room on this island for a fellow to lose himself," said Nugent. "I should think he could find his way back from any part."

"Well, he's such a hurbling ass—"

"He can't have walked too far along the beach and—"

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time to get back," said Frank uneasily. "He's fool enough."

"Too jolly lazy, though!"

"Well, yes," admitted Nugent.

It was extremely improbable that Bunter had walked too far. It was very improbable indeed. Walking distances did not appeal to Bunter. Whatever had happened to the fat Owl, it was not due to Bunter having unduly exerted himself. All the juniors could feel sure of that much.

But they were feeling uneasy as they sat down to supper in the glimmer of a crescent of moon peeping over the far-off cliffs of Devonshire.

They hoped every minute to hear a calling voice from the shadows, or the footsteps of the fat Owl.

But they heard nothing of him, and when supper was over, there was still no sign.

By that time it was quite dark, save for the glimmer of moonlight. The Famous Five were not only uneasy now, but beginning to be really worried.

Bunter had wandered off somewhere—where, they did not know, and could not guess. But what was keeping him away was a puzzling mystery.

By that time he should have wandered back, even if he had been ass enough to lose himself on so small an island. Obviously, he would have got back if he could have done so—it was not willingly that he was missing a meal. Unless he had, after all, gone along the beach and been cut off by the tide, there seemed no accounting for his absence.

"What the thump—" said Harry Wharton, for the tenth time.

"If it was any other fellow, we might think he's gone cliff-climbing and had a fall!" said Johnny Bull. "But Bunter wouldn't."

"No fear!"

"That brute Harker—" said Nugent. "If he fell in with him—"

"He wouldn't if he could help it!"

"He mightn't have been able to help it! But—Harker would have pitched into him, very likely; but he couldn't have prevented that fat chump from coming back, I suppose."

"Why should he?"

There was a silence, and the Famous Five stood looking uneasily towards the tide swirling round the base of the cliffs.

The fact that Billy Bunter was a worry and an irritating ass was quite forgotten now, at the bare idea that some disaster might have overtaken the hapless fat Owl! And only disaster of some kind could account for his continued absence.

"He can't have been ass enough to go to the cave, I suppose!" said Bob Cherry, after a long silence.

"He never would! Besides, Harker's there, and he would shoo him off fast enough."

Silence again.

The chums of the Remove did not know what to think. But the deep wash of the tide on the cliffs gave them a chill as they listened to it.

Old Dave had gone to his hammock in the hut. But the Famous Five did not think of turning in. They were getting too anxious about the missing Owl.

"If we had a boat—" muttered Harry.

But it was useless to think of that. The picture was in the minds of the juniors of the fat Owl, for some unknown reason, having got caught in the tide, and perhaps clinging to some rock above the rolling waters, and waiting in vain for help and rescue.

With a boat they could have pulled round the shore, searching, and calling to him. But there was no boat on Blackrock Island.

As the night grew older and the bright stars came out in the sky, their anxiety intensified. There was nothing they could do—nothing but wait and watch, and the long minutes dragged by slowly and heavily.

Billy Bunter could never have climbed the circling cliffs, if the tide had caught him; that would have been beyond the powers of any of the stranded schoolboys. But it was quite possible that he might have clambered up far enough to be out of reach of the tide. But if that was the case, they had no chance of going to his rescue.

"Hallo, hallo, hallo!" exclaimed Bob suddenly. "Oh, what luck! Look!"

He pointed out to the moonlit sea beyond the opening of the cove. "A boat!" exclaimed Harry. But the relief in his face faded out the next moment. "It's Rance! No help from him!"

There were two men in the boat, one pulling a pair of oars. The bowler-hatted man in the stern was dim in the distance, but Wharton knew that it was Rance.

"Rance!" repeated Bob. "Oh! Another trip to the cave, I suppose—the blighter always goes after dark!"

They saw the bowler-hatted head turn and caught a gleam of the moonlight on a sharp face. It was young Mr. Rance. Distant as he was, they could read the black look he cast towards the cove, and knew that he had not forgotten them, and was as savagely angry as ever at their presence on Blackrock.

A sudden movement, and a blacker scowl, indicated that he had seen them, standing there in the moonlight.

"Look here," said Bob, "that man's a shady rascal of some sort, and we've had trouble with him—he's still got the marks of Johnny's knuckles on his boko. But if he knew how we were fixed now, he might help."

"Not likely!" grunted Johnny Bull.

"The likeliness is not terrific!" murmured Hurrec Jamsset Ram Singh, shaking his dusky head.

"Give him a hail, anyhow!" said Bob. "If he'd give us a lift in that boat, some of us could get along the shore and look for Bunter—"

Bob broke off and ran down the sand to the little stone jetty that jutted out from the beach. That was as near as he could get to the passing boat, with the tide sweeping into the cove.

At the end of the jetty he waved his hat and shouted.

His comrades followed him, though with little hope in Mr. Rance. To their relief, however, the boat, instead of passing on to the westward round the island, swerved in, and floated into the cove on the tide.

Young Mr. Rance stood up and stared at them.

"You hailed me?" he snapped. "If that means that you are ready to be taken off the island, I will put in for you as I return. I shall not give up my fishing on your account—but in an hour or two's time—"

Evidently Mr. Rance misunderstood the juniors' motive in signalling the boat.

A good many days had passed since the battle of Blackrock, when the Greyfriars fellows had defeated his attempt to remove them from the island by force. Now, if they were ready to go, there was no doubt that Mr. Rance would be glad enough to give them a

passage to the mainland—on his way back from his trip to the sea-cave.

But Mr. Rance was in error. The Famous Five had no idea of leaving Blackrock Island—less than ever, now that Bunter was missing.

"It's not that, Mr. Rance!" said Bob Cherry. "One of our party is missing, and we're afraid he's been caught in the tide—"

"What?" snapped Rance, staring at him.

"He may be sticking on the cliffs, somewhere along the shore," explained Bob. "His life's in danger if that's the case, Mr. Rance. If you'd give a couple of us a lift in your boat—"

"You impudent young rascal!"

Bob's eyes flashed. But he controlled the retort that rose to his lips.

"You are on that island without permission!" snapped the estate-agent of Okham. "You resisted when I would have taken you off! If anything has happened, it is your own business. You have yourselves to thank. After disregarding my orders and treating me with personal violence, you have the impudence to ask me to concern myself about your safety—pah!"

"Nobody wants you to concern yourself about any fellow here!" snapped Bob. "It's another fellow—he wasn't present when we had our scrap with you and your gang—and I tell you his life's in danger—"

"Are you ready to leave that island?"

"How could we leave it, even if we wanted to, when there's a chap missing?"

"That is enough!"

Rance sat down again, and the boat pulled out of the cove.

"You rotter!" roared Bob Cherry. "You measly worm! I tell you that a chap's life may be in danger—"

Rance did not even look round. The boat pulled out and disappeared westward beyond the cliffs.

There was evidently no help from Mr. Rance—and Harry Wharton & Co. were left with heavy hearts to wait and watch.

THE FOURTEENTH CHAPTER.

What Bunter Saw In The Sea-Cave!

BILLY BUNTER moaned.

He groaned.
He was fearfully hungry.
He was cold!

It seemed to Bunter that all the sorrows of the universe had settled down on his fat shoulders.

How long he had been in that dreadful dark cave he did not know. It seemed like years, if not centuries.

At first, the fat Owl had been glad enough that big Harker had missed him in his search and gone back to the cavern's mouth in the belief that he had been drowned. He was safe, at all events, from the knuckly fists of the longshoreman.

But cold, darkness, discomfort, and worst of all, a dreadful sinking in his plump inside, reduced Bunter to a state of dismal woe.

He had heard and seen nothing more of Harker. The man's rough camp was just above high-water mark, far down the great cavern, and no doubt he was there now. Bunter did not care where he was, so long as he was not in the offing.

Bunter realised, with horror, that he had to make a night of it in the smugglers' cave. He dared not go near Harker—but even had the longshoreman not been there, there was no

escape from the sea-cave, now that the tide was in. Bunter could hear it booming in at the cavern's mouth, cutting off all egress for long hours to come.

Bunter moaned and groaned—not too loudly, however, lest some sound should reach the ears of the ruffian who, fortunately, believed that he had been "drowned" in the tide.

At the camp in the cove, Billy Bunter had turned up his little fat nose many a time and oft at the fare provided by old Dave Oke. It was true that that fare was, so to speak, of the fish, fishy. Stale bread, hard ship's biscuits, cheese, and fish—fish—fish—with occasional potatoes; that was the best that old Dave had to offer.

But the fat junior thought of it now with longing and yearning.

Although he had turned up his little fat nose at it, he had parked it in very considerable quantities. Now he would gladly have parked it in still greater quantities—and without even thinking of turning up that fat little nose!

"Beast!" moaned Bunter. "Beast! Wouldn't I like to give that beast Smithy just one in the eye—right in the eye! Oh dear!"

It was awful to think of what he had expected on the island purchased by Mr. Vernon-Smith—and what he had found there!

That beast—that unspeakable beast—Smithy had pulled his leg with a tale of a castle, and a butler, and a troop of servants, cars, and motor-boats! When Bunter found that there was nobody and nothing but old Dave Oke and his hut, he thought that the very worst that could happen had happened. But it hadn't. This was worse! This was awfully, fearfully, frightfully worse!

Squatting on the cavern floor, leaning against the big boulder round which he had dodged Big Harker, Bunter moaned and groaned.

It was getting late, but the night seemed endless. Prospects were awful. If moaning and groaning could have mended matters, Bunter would have been all right. But they couldn't. He moaned, and he groaned, but he derived no comfort therefrom.

Sounds other than the dull boom of the tide echoed up the cavern. He did not heed them. But he heeded when a moving light spotted the darkness of the cave.

Then, as he realised that someone was approaching, Bunter ceased to moan and groan, and indeed almost forgot how fearfully hungry he was, at the thought of the longshoreman looking for him again.

He scrambled to his feet and dodged round the big rock, ready to play mulberry-bush again, if it was another search.

Footsteps reached him, but not the heavy tramp of the longshoreman's sea boots. It was not Harker coming.

Even in the depths of woe, Billy Bunter wondered who it could possibly be. Since the tide was in, no one could have come to the cave, except by boat. That meant that a boat must have put in.

But there was no hope in that for the dolorous fat Owl. Obviously it could only be some associate of Harker's.

The light twinkled on, and the light and the footsteps passed within a few yards of the boulder behind which the shivering fat Owl crouched.

They stopped at the rock-wall at the end of the cavern. Bunter could not

see who it was; only he knew, from the light tread, that it was not Harker.

He heard a sound of the lantern being set down. The man was not looking for him, that was clear. He had gone directly to the rock-wall at the back of the cave, stopped there, and placed the lantern on the ground.

What he was up to was rather a mystery. Bunter could hear a sort of scraping, scratching sound.

He ventured, at length, to peer round the corner of the rugged boulder that hid him.

What he saw made his eyes widen behind his spectacles.

A man was standing not a dozen feet from him, in the lantern-light, with something in his hand that looked like a long slender pole. It was a boat-hook, of very unusual length, formed, in fact, by an extra handle being fitted on in a socket, making it a length of about twelve feet. With that implement the man was reaching up the rock-wall into the darkness.

His back was to Bunter—but as he groped with the boat-hook his profile became visible in the light, revealing a face that Bunter had seen before. He had seen it in the boat pulling off Blackrock on the day of the battle—the sharp-featured face of the man named Rance—the estate-agent of Okham, who had ordered the Greyfriars party off the island.

It was Rance—young Mr. Rance—the man who had left Harker on the island to watch the cave.

Bunter popped his head back. He had nothing to expect from young Mr. Rance, except being handed over to Harker, if young Mr. Rance spotted him!

But what on earth was young Mr. Rance doing—groping up the rock-wall with an elongated boat-hook?

Curiosity impelled the fat junior to take another peep.

Now he observed that the lantern had been placed aslant on the floor to cast its light upward at the rock-wall to a point about fourteen or fifteen feet up.

At that point a deep gap opened in the rock. And it was in that gap that young Mr. Rance was groping with that lengthy boat-hook.

Something suddenly slithered down. It looked, to Bunter, like a bunch of ropes that unrolled suddenly down the rock-wall.

Then, as it hung there, he saw what it was. It was a rope ladder with wooden rungs.

The fat Owl understood at last. Rance was going up into that gap, far above his head, and climbing the sheer rock was impossible. That rope ladder was fastened at the top end inside the gap. When Mr. Rance wanted it, he hooked it down with that boat-hook.

Bunter's head popped back again. But he could hear Rance's movements. He heard him drop the boat-hook to the floor, and then a clambering sound, accompanied by panting breath, told that he was climbing the rope ladder.

For a long minute those sounds continued. Then a scraping, slithering sound told that Rance was pulling up the rope ladder after him. No doubt, on his return he would hold with his hand and drop—the rope ladder remaining coiled above out of sight, leaving no clue to meet the eye of any chance visitor to the smugglers' cave.

Then there was silence.

Bunter ventured to peer again at last. The lantern stood where Rance had left it, glimmering on the rock—the boat-hook lay near it. There was no

sign of the estate-agent of Okeham, and no sign of the rope ladder by which he had ascended. Young Mr. Rance had disappeared into that gap high up the rock-wall—for what mysterious reason, Billy Bunter could not begin to guess.

Obviously, that gap gave access to some extension of the cave on a higher level—and penetrated deep into the recesses of the cliff. No sound from it reached the ears of the fat Owl. Wherever young Mr. Rance was, and whatever he was up to, he was far beyond the hearing of Billy Bunter.

THE FIFTEENTH CHAPTER.

The Kidnapped Millionaire!

MR. SAMUEL VERNON-SMITH, millionaire financier, set his plump lips and glared with a glare rather like that of a tiger in a cage.

Mr. Vernon-Smith's quarters, at the moment, rather resembled a cage; and there was no doubt, from his look, that his mood resembled that of a tiger.

The millionaire was seated in a deck-chair. On a folding table beside him stood a lamp. No other light but lamplight ever penetrated the present quarters of the kidnapped millionaire.

Round him were walls of solid rock. Over his head was a low arch of rock. It was like a room, or rather a vault, not more than ten feet either way, not more than seven feet high, of solid, unbroken rock, save in one spot—where a gap opened, like a tunnel leading away into darkness.

It was the sound of footsteps from that tunnel that caused Mr. Samuel Vernon-Smith to glare towards it. His captor was coming. And enraged as he was, the millionaire was glad to hear those footsteps breaking the dead silence of that remote recess in the cliffs of Blackrock Island.

Days and nights had passed since he had been brought there—day and night the same to the prisoner of the rock vault. During that endless, endless time, the millionaire had seen no face, heard no voice. The hours seemed to him unending—indeed, he almost fancied sometimes in those hours of terrible weariness that Rance meant to leave him there—or that something had happened to the rascal, and prevented his return.

Whether anyone was left on guard in the lower cave he did not know. If so, he saw and heard nothing of him.

That deep, dark tunnel from the sea-cave to the vault where the millionaire was imprisoned was long—too long for him to have heard even a shout from the sea-cave, and it was winding. In that prison in the heart of the cliff the millionaire was shut off from the world.

Mr. Vernon-Smith stirred as the footsteps echoed nearer, and there was a clink of metal. A slender steel chain—slender, but strong—was locked on his ankle—the other end being secured to a padlock stapled in the wall.

The kidnapper had made sure of that. Many a desperate wretch had the millionaire given at that chain, but he had long ceased to make any attempt to break or loosen it; he knew that it was in vain.

He had to wait—wait till Elias Rance chose to come—wait on the whim of the man who had cringed to him, and jumped at his orders. Now Rance was coming—it could only be Rance!

A figure emerged from the rock-tunnel into the light of the lamp—a man of slight frame, with sharp features. Young Mr. Rance, of

Okeham. He glanced at the millionaire, and smiled faintly at the expression on his plump face. If looks could have slain, young Mr. Rance would probably have fallen lifeless at the opening of the tunnel.

"You scoundrel!" was Mr. Vernon-Smith's greeting.

He knew, now that the rascal had come, that Rance had left him so long to subdue him to a mood for agreeing to his terms—likely to be hard enough! But if the rascal calculated upon that he did not know Samuel Vernon-Smith!

With every hour of his imprisonment the millionaire's rage and resentment had intensified. But the long weary hours had not brought him to a yielding mood.

"So you have come, you scoundrel!" said Mr. Vernon-Smith. He rose from the chair, his plump hands clenched.

Mr. Rance did not approach him. He leaned on the corner of the rock tunnel—out of reach of those plump hands! The length of the chain did not permit the millionaire to move so far.

"As you see!" he said, with a nod. The millionaire stood looking at him. Except for the chain on his ankle, he was free. Had young Mr. Rance been within reach the plump hands would have grasped him. But Mr. Rance was careful to keep out of reach.

There was a sardonic amusement in his face as he watched the millionaire. And there was an inflexible purpose, also.

"I have come," he said. "I have given you time to reflect—ample time! Now I am here to state my terms! I warn you to consider them—favourably. If I leave you, unsatisfied, I shall not return in a hurry!"

"I will make no terms with an embezzling rascal, a thief, and a kidnapper!" said Mr. Vernon-Smith.

"Think again!" suggested Mr. Rance calmly. "Every day you spend here, Mr. Vernon-Smith, is a loss to you—a heavy loss! What may be happening to the stocks and shares in the City, with your eye no longer on Throgmorton Street? What may be happening to your business in every quarter of the globe—your rubber estates in Malaya, your gold mines in West Africa, your ranches in Texas—your sheep-runs in Australia—you have so many irons in the fire, my dear sir."

The estate-agent spoke with sneering mockery.

In the weeks that Mr. Vernon-Smith had used his house, and his office, at Okeham, young Mr. Rance had been his humble servitor! In Mr. Vernon-Smith's eyes young Mr. Rance had been little more than an animated piece of office furniture!

But all the time—as Mr. Vernon-Smith could see now—the bitter, malicious man had nourished resentment. Apart from the profit he hoped to secure from the millionaire, he was glad to humble him in his turn.

"You will lose more by obstinacy than you will save," continued Mr. Rance. "At my office in Okeham, you kept in touch! While you were acquiring real estate in Devonshire, you were able to control your multifarious interests, my dear sir, from my humble office! But from here—"

"You rascal!"

"You have had sufficient time, Mr. Vernon-Smith, since I left you here, to enumerate all the abusive terms you may wish to apply to me!" said young Mr. Rance coolly. "I suggest talking business, now that I am here."

"You will go to prison for this!"

"I think not!" said Mr. Rance. "You, at all events, will never send me

there, my dear sir! You will never leave this remote recess under the cliffs of the island which is your own property, unless and until we come to terms."

"Trapped!" muttered the millionaire. "I—trapped by a poverty-stricken little estate-agent in a country town! If I had dreamed—"

"This is a waste of breath, my dear sir!" said Rance smoothly. "What are the facts? You entrusted certain sums into the hands of Rance & Co., for the purchase of real estate. These sums have disappeared! In a few more hours you would have discovered how matters stood—I acted in time! I could not afford to let you discover the facts in Okeham, my dear sir."

"That was not all your motive!" snapped Mr. Vernon-Smith. "You had all this ready—and it must have taken time—little as this cave contains, it must have been conveyed here, by boat, a little at a time—you have been planning this for weeks, you rascal!"

"Quite!" agreed Mr. Rance. "It is three or four weeks since ill-luck on a certain horse caused me to dip into the funds you had placed in the hands of Rance & Co. From that hour I began to make my plans—and my preparations! I had to act at the finish, suddenly, and sooner than I had intended—that is all! Now you are here! Needless to say, you must not expect to see again any of the sums you entrusted to Rance & Co. I need hardly mention that."

"I am aware of that," said Mr. Vernon-Smith, "and immediately I am free I shall institute a prosecution for embezzlement."

Mr. Rance laughed—a very unpleasant laugh.

"You are not likely to be free soon, at that rate!" he answered. "Your first step towards freedom, Mr. Vernon-Smith, is to sign a full acquittal of my debt to you, leaving me clear."

"Never!"

"Never is a long word—and will seem longer, after a few more days in this solitary retreat!" smiled Mr. Rance. "Your next step will be to place me upon my feet financially. A hundred thousand pounds, though a large sum to a poverty-stricken little estate-agent in a country town"—he grinned—"is quite a small sum to you! You will hardly miss it, I think, from your millions! What do you say?"

The millionaire looked at him.

"Not one shilling!" he said.

"Evidently we differ!" drawled Mr. Rance. "I have named my figure! You have named yours! I can only hope that with the passage of time we shall reach some agreement. I see that I have called too soon—I shall not make the same mistake again! Good-night, Mr. Vernon-Smith!"

He turned as if to go—then glanced round, evidently expecting the millionaire to speak.

Mr. Vernon-Smith did not speak. He stared at the sharp-featured face with grim rage and scorn, but he said no word.

"I think," said Mr. Rance, "that you will change your mind! You have not, probably, enjoyed your fare here—after the luxuries to which you are accustomed. I have been able to provide only canned foods and a keg of water—I fear that the supply I have left you will soon run low. I must point out that it will not be renewed."

Mr. Vernon-Smith's jaw shut like a vice.

"You have still nothing to say?" asked Rance, with a venomous look.

"Only this—that your best counsel is to release me at once, and take your



“ Oh crikey ! ” gasped Bunter, as he strove in vain to pull at the oars. “ Oh lor’ ! ” Round him was the swelling, rolling sea, heaving and surging—and drifting him farther and farther from the land—farther out into the Atlantic !

just punishment ! ” said the millionaire. “ You cannot carry this on long ! My disappearance will create a sensation, when it becomes known—you will have to deal with the police. ”

“ If you are banking on that, my dear sir, it is but a frail reed to lean upon. No one is likely to suspect a poverty-stricken little estate-agent in a country town of making away with his wealthiest patron—the man who was putting more business in the way of the firm than it has done for many years, ” said Mr. Rance coolly. “ And I think I have covered up my tracks fairly completely, Mr. Vernon-Smith ! I advise you not to bank on that. ”

“ My son ! ” muttered the millionaire. “ If I had not driven him away— ”

Rance’s eyes glittered like a rat’s at the mention of the Bounder.

“ True, my task would have been more difficult, had Master Herbert been with you ! ” he said. “ But I can assure you that it would have made no difference. Since you mention your son, my dear sir, I suggest that you should come to reasonable terms—if only for his sake. ”

“ For his sake ! ” repeated the millionaire. “ What do you mean, rascal ? ”

“ I mean this, ” said young Mr. Rance, with bitter emphasis. “ Your son has returned to Okeham, seeking you ! He has some suspicion in his mind of foul play—I have satisfied him for the time, but unless he hears from you he will go to the police ! He has so threatened me. ”

Mr. Vernon-Smith’s face lighted up. “ My son will save me, then ! ” he exclaimed. “ Since I have been a prisoner here I have thought many times that I was too harsh ! If he failed in respect, he has not failed in affection ! He will save me— ”

“ He will not save you—or himself ! ”

said Rance. “ I cannot afford to have your son scattering suspicions, Mr. Vernon-Smith ! Unless we come to terms before I leave you your son will not save you—he will share your fate ! ”

The millionaire caught his breath.

“ You cannot—you dare not— ” he breathed.

“ You will see ! ”

Rance turned again to go. He lingered for a moment, but he did not turn back again.

He disappeared down the long dark tunnel, and his footsteps died away in the hollows of the rock. For some minutes the millionaire’s voice would have reached him, had he called, as doubtless Elias Rance expected him to do. But there came no call from the rock vault, and Rance’s footsteps died into the distance towards the sea—and Mr. Vernon-Smith was left, once more, to the solitude and silence of his rock prison.

THE SIXTEENTH CHAPTER.

A Pig In Clover !

“ **B** EAST ! ” breathed Billy Bunter. But the fat Owl did not breathe that word aloud.

Billy Bunter was extremely careful to keep silent—very silent—as he listened with both fat ears to the sounds that reached him from the gap high up in the rock wall at the back of the smugglers’ cave.

Rance was coming back from his mysterious excursion into the depths of the tunnel. Where he had been, what he had been up to, Billy Bunter could not begin to guess ; it was utterly puzzling and mysterious to his fat mind.

Squatting behind the big boulder, the

fat Owl could hear the brushing, scuffling sounds, as a man lowered himself with his hands from the gap in the rock wall.

Bunter’s fat brain did not work, as a rule, either quickly or accurately ; but even Bunter did not need telling that a man lowering himself down a rock would have his face to that rock—and his back, in consequence, towards Bunter ! So the fat junior ventured to peer round the corner of the big boulder—and in the lantern-light he saw Rance, hanging with his hands at the gap, preparing to drop.

He was not using the rope-ladder to descend—it would have been difficult, if not impossible, to replace it in the tunnel from below. Neither did he need it ! Descent was a very different matter from ascent.

Young Mr. Rance lowered himself, holding on to the rock, to the full extent of his arms, and dropped as lightly as a cat.

As he dropped, Bunter’s head popped back again ! Bunter was taking no risks of young Mr. Rance spotting him and handing him over to the tender mercies of Big Harker.

That there was a fat Owl, crouching breathless in hiding, hardly more than a dozen feet from him, certainly did not occur to young Mr. Rance. He had not the remotest idea that the sea-cave had any tenant other than himself and his associates.

He picked up the long boathook in one hand and the lantern in the other, and tramped away down the cave.

“ Beast ! ” breathed Bunter again as he went.

He was glad when Rance had gone. The light twinkled away down the dark cave and vanished.

Billy Bunter was left alone again; the danger was over.

That was a relief; but now that the danger was over Billy Bunter remembered, only too acutely, that he was hungry!

He was not merely hungry by this time—he was famished—ravenous! The fried fish at Dave's cove, at which his fat little nose had turned up so often, now seemed to him like the food of the gods! Bunter was tired—and he was sleepy—but all other considerations were forgotten, his fat mind centred on food, with hopeless longing!

And there was no food—not a spot! Not before dawn could he hope to escape from the sea-girt cavern, even if then he dared to make the attempt, with Big Harker about! It looked like being a hopeless dawn for the unfortunate Owl of the Remove.

From down the vast cavern sounds came to him. He wondered whether that beast Rance was going in the boat again; and whether, if he were, Harker, by happy chance, might go with him!

Against the bright moonlight at the cavern's mouth he had dim glances of three moving figures. One of them must be Rance; another Harker; and the third, doubtless, some other beast who had rowed the estate-agent out from the shore. If only all three went—

Billy Bunter crept cautiously down the cavern to watch. The thick darkness wrapped him like a cloak; there was no danger of being seen, unless he ventured too near—which Bunter had no intention of doing.

Groping along the rugged wall of the cavern, he drew nearer till, in the moonlight from without, he could make out the three.

Rance was in the boat now. The other two were shoving it into the water. Young Mr. Rance, it seemed, did not want to get his feet wet! The longshoremen trampled in shallow water, in their heavy sea boots, and pushed the boat afloat. Then the smaller of the two scrambled into it after Rance, Big Harker pushing it a

little farther, and then, to Billy Bunter's immense joy and relief, clambering in.

The boat rocked away on the swirling tide, with all three men in it, Harker fending with an oar, and disappeared seaward.

"Beasts!" murmured Bunter, as the boat rocked out of sight.

They were gone.

Harker had been on the watch in the cave; but, with the tide in, the sea-cave was unapproachable without a boat. If he were going to continue to keep watch, he had to return before the tide went down.

Whether that was his intention or not, Billy Bunter did not know—and he did not think about it! The beast was gone—and Billy Bunter's fat thoughts concentrated on one urgent and important question—had he left any food when he had camped in the cave?

There was no need for further caution, now that the fat Owl was alone in the sea-cave.

Having ascertained that the boat had quite disappeared seaward, Billy Bunter rolled down the cavern and headed for the spot, a little distance above high-water mark, where he had seen the longshoreman's camp.

Tarpaulin and blankets and other things lay there, as he had seen them—the longshoreman had left "all standing." That, had Bunter thought of it, indicated that he intended to return.

But Bunter was not thinking of that—he was thinking of food! And his little round eyes almost popped through his big round spectacles with happy satisfaction, as he spotted the same.

There was a large rush-basket in a crevice of the rock close at hand. In that basket were a number of tins and a number of bottles. Other bottles lay empty here and there; Big Harker had, it appeared, been thirsty during his vigil in the sea-cave.

Bunter did not heed the bottles; he had no use for beer. There was half a ham in the basket, several loaves,

and a jar of butter; there was a knife and a fork, and a tin plate that looked as if it had been used a good deal since it had last been washed.

Trifles like that did not worry Bunter! He carved ham and gobbled the same—and the sound of champing jaws mingled happily with the wash of the tide.

Bunter ate—and ate—and ate!

There was plenty of ham! There was also cheese! Bread and butter were in abundance. There was an opened can of corned beef. Bunter travelled happily through them.

This was life! William George Bunter was as happy as a pig in clover!

There was plenty left when the fat Owl had finished. Harker seemed to have provisioned himself for a lengthy stay. That was fortunate—for Billy Bunter!

Unfortunately, there was nothing in the nature of jam, or marmalade, or cake—not even a biscuit! Harker's tastes in such matters no doubt differed from Bunter's. But a square meal was what Billy Bunter really wanted—and he had a square meal—not to say three or four square meals, one after another.

There was a keg of water in the crevice—that beast Harker seemed no better provided with such things as tea or coffee or cocoa than old Dave at the cove! He seemed to prefer beer, to judge by the number of empty bottles. The fat Owl drew a tin pannikin of water from the keg, to wash down all those square meals that jostled one another in his capacious inside.

Then, and not till then, did Billy Bunter blink at the sea and ascertain that there was no sign of the tide receding. It was impossible to quit the sea-cave; and it would not be possible for many hours yet.

But—now that that unspeakable beast Harker was gone—it would be possible as soon as that beastly tide went down! Bunter had to wait for the tide—and in the meantime he was sleepy!

Indeed, now that he had packed the inner Bunter as full as the inner Bunter would hold, he could hardly keep his eyes open behind his spectacles.

It was cold in the cave—with a chilly wind from the sea. But the fat Owl no longer had the prospect of trying to go to sleep on hard, cold rock—like the unfortunate gentleman in the old song, whose lodging was on the cold, hard ground!

Harker's blankets lay there, where he had left them, in an untidy pile on the tarpaulin, close by the rock wall!

Thankfully the fat Owl rolled himself in those blankets!

He was going to pass the remainder of that awful night in warm and comfortable slumber; he was going to turn out at daylight, when the tide would be out, leave that beastly cave, and tramp round the beach back to the cove. And wild horses would not drag him out of sight of old Dave's cove again, so long as he sojourned on Blackrock Island.

With a fat head pillowed on a fat arm, warmly rolled in blankets, Billy Bunter closed his eyes, and in less than a minute was fast asleep.

He slept and he snored; his happy snore mingling with the wash of the tide in the cavern and the boom of the surf on the rocks of Blackrock Island. The wicked had ceased from

Hurtling to Disaster!

Half way through the tunnel, Dick caught his foot against something that sent him headlong. He scrambled to his feet, and heard loose bricks rattling as he moved. "Dick, are you all right? There's something here!" Timber gasped. There followed the rattle of his matches, then one burst into flame. The boys saw that they had fallen over a pile of loose bricks. They were heaped in the centre of the tunnel, blocking the track! The stage was set for a smash involving the Royal Special! Already Dick and Timber can hear the roar of the oncoming Royal Train—somehow they've got to stop it—but how? This is just one of the exciting moments in Alfred Edgar's great story

"THE ROYAL SPECIAL"

which, with five other first class yarns, appears in this week's issue of

MODERN BOY
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troubling, and the weary Owl was at rest!

In the rock vault, far in the heart of the cliff, Mr. Samuel Vernon-Smith, probably, was sleepless. At the cove, five worried and anxious juniors did not close their eyes. Far away, in the town of Okeham, Herbert Vernon-Smith, waiting in angry impatience for the return of young Mr. Rance, was not thinking of sleep. But Billy Bunter, well-fed and warm, slept like a top, and snored like a grampus—and, if he dreamed, he did not dream of the startling awakening that was coming!

THE SEVENTEENTH CHAPTER.

Trapped!

HERBERT VERNON-SMITH glanced down the High Street of Okeham, glimmering in the moonlight, as the buzz of a car came to his ears.

He wondered whether it was Rance returning.

It was turned eleven o'clock, and at that hour the little country town was silent and sleeping. There were few pedestrians in the quiet old street, and hardly more than a car or two had passed since Vernon-Smith had been waiting outside the office of Rance & Co. He had arrived there at half-past ten to be in good time, and since then he had been pacing to and fro, waiting.

The office windows were dark; Rance was not there yet. In the windows of the adjoining house the last light had been extinguished; Rance's household had gone to bed.

The Bounder paced to and fro on the pavement till, at the sound of a car, he stopped, and stood looking at it as it came.

It was Mr. Rance's two-seater, with Rance driving, and Vernon-Smith was relieved as he saw him.

There had been a doubt in his mind whether the estate-agent had been making a fool of him. And Smithy's determination was fixed. If Rance did not put him into communication with his father that night, as he had promised, he was going to the police.

His suspicions were vague, and he was reluctant to take a step which he knew would irritate his father if those suspicions proved unfounded. But if Rance, after what he had promised, failed to keep his word, he felt that he could no longer doubt that there had been foul play of some kind. And in that case he was going straight from Rance's office to Okeham Police Station. His mind was made up on that.

But it was a relief to see Rance again. The man had come back only a few minutes after the hour named. It looked as if he were going to keep his word.

As the car slowed down the Bounder crossed the pavement towards it.

Young Mr. Rance gave him a curt nod.

"Jump in!" he said.

"Jump in?" repeated Smithy. "I was going to telephone—"

"It is not necessary now. I have your father's instructions to take you to him at Penruddy."

Herbert Vernon-Smith stepped into the car.

The door had hardly shut when the two-seater shot on down the High Street.

Rance drove fast. In a minute or less he shot round a corner, and then

another, and then he car buzzed on into a country road.

It was the road to the sea, and led to Penruddy, which was a few miles from the little hamlet of Potkelly.

Smithy, who had been idling about the neighbourhood for a week, knew the road, and knew that it led to Penruddy.

Rance did not speak or glance at him after he had entered the car, and the Bounder touched him on the arm impatiently.

"Not quite so fast, Mr. Rance!" he exclaimed. "I've been staying at a cottage on the Okeham road. I've left my bag there. If I'm going to stay with my father now I shall want it."

Rance drove straight on. He answered over his shoulder, without looking at his companion:

"I have Mr. Vernon-Smith's orders to take you to him immediately. If you do not choose to come I will stop the car, and you can step out."

"Of course I shall come!" snapped the Bounder angrily. "You know that. Did my father say that I was to stay with him?"

"He said nothing about his intentions! Neither should I have listened if he had!" said Rance sourly. "I desire to have no concern whatever with your family disputes. It is for your father to deal with you; and my only wish is to take you to him, and have done with you!"

"You won't be better pleased that I shall!" retorted the Bounder. "But it would not take a quarter of an hour longer to call for my bag."

"I am under Mr. Vernon-Smith's instructions, not yours! I shall not turn one yard out of my way on your instructions, Master Vernon-Smith!"

"You sulky brute!"

Rance shrugged his shoulders, and drove on in silence. The Bounder sat in silence, too. The man was surly, sulky, and uncivil; but he did not expect anything else from him.

It mattered little enough. He was going to his father; that was all the Bounder wanted.

Whether his father had sent for him in anger, on hearing what Rance had to say, or whether it was going to be a reconciliation, Smithy could not tell, and it was evidently useless to ask his companion. He could only wait till he saw his father, and hope for the best.

The car shot on rapidly by deserted, shadowy roads. The miles ran swiftly under the whirling wheels. Suddenly from the road it turned into a lane—a deep Devonshire lane, banked high, with dim hedges crowning the high banks. Then Vernon-Smith touched the driver's arm again.

"You're leaving the Penruddy road," he said.

Rance gave him an acid look.

"Do you know this country better than I do?" he sneered.

"I've been to Penruddy, and I know the road!" snapped the Bounder. "It's hardly a half-mile on. What are you leaving the road for?"

"Road up!" snapped Rance.

Vernon-Smith grunted, and sat back again. If the road was up, Rance had no choice but to go round by the lanes, and Smithy could hardly suspect him of desiring to prolong that drive in company that he disliked. The car ran on in darkness in the deep, unlighted lane.

Rance, evidently, knew his way well; but this was strange country to the Greyfriars junior, and he could only wait impatiently for the car to emerge from the dark lanes into a road again.

From the west came the boom of the

sea; they were near the shore, though nothing could be seen in the darkness and deep down between the high-hedged banks. Ghostly shapes of dim trees flitted by in the gloom.

Suddenly, with a jarring of brakes, the car rocked to a halt.

Smithy heard his companion mutter under his breath.

"What—" began the Bounder.

Without answering, Rance stepped down. In the glimmer of moonlight the Bounder saw his face—pale, set, vicious.

"Engine trouble?" snapped the Bounder.

Nothing could have been more exasperating at the moment.

Rance, without taking the trouble to answer, opened the bonnet.

The Bounder watched him with savage impatience. Minute followed minute, and the Bounder's angry impatience grew.

"How long are we going to stick here?" he snarled at last.

Rance looked round at him with an evil look.

"You will stick here, Master Herbert, until I spot the trouble and set it right, unless you choose to walk the rest!" he snarled back.

"How far it is to walk?"

"Less than half a mile, straight on. You will see the lights of the inn in a few minutes if you walk on. Please yourself."

Vernon-Smith stepped from the car.

"I shall walk, and be glad to see the last of you!" he snapped.

"Not so glad as I should be to see the last of you!" sneered Rance. "Wait or walk, as you choose. I care nothing either way!"

He bent over the bonnet again, taking no further notice of the Bounder.

Vernon-Smith gave him a black look, and started at once.

He tramped on down the dark lane, and as he went Rance lifted his head and looked after him, with a rat-like glitter in his eyes.

Vernon-Smith tramped on. In the middle of the deep lane was a gleam of the moon; the rest was in deep darkness under the high banks. From the darkness under the hedges there was a movement, and two dim, shadowy figures suddenly emerged, and Vernon-Smith, before he realised that anything was happening, found himself gripped by either arm.

He uttered a startled exclamation and struggled. His first thought was that he was in the hands of a couple of tramps or footpads.

"Let me go!" he panted. "What—"

The grip on his arms was like iron. His angry struggle did not shake that grip for a moment. One of the men who had seized him gave a loud, sharp whistle—evidently a signal.

It was followed by the sound of an engine, back along the lane. The Bounder started as he heard it. It was Rance's car, in motion again.

"Let me go!" panted the Bounder hoarsely. "What do you want? Will you let me go?"

No answer came from the dim figures—one a big, burly man, with a stubbly beard; the other smaller, with a greasy, grinning face. The castaways of Black-rock Island would have known them—Big Bill Harker and Peter Coot. But they were totally unknown to Herbert Vernon-Smith.

In amazement, rage, and growing alarm, the Bounder wrenched in vain in the grasping hands.

From the distance he could hear Rance's car backing and turning. Then

the sound of the engine died away in the night.

And it was borne in on the Bounder's mind what had happened—that the estate-agent of Okeham had led him into a trap, and left him to it! He had not been taking him to Penruddy to his father; he had been leading him into a trap planned beforehand—and the trap had closed on the Bounder of Greyfriars!

THE EIGHTEENTH CHAPTER.

In The Kidnappers' Hands!

"QUIET, you young swab!"

The Bounder, in desperation, gave a shout that rang and echoed over the dim fields. He was powerless in the grasp of two pairs of sinewy hands—either of the longshoremens was more than a match for him physically. It was little likely that a shout for help would be heard in that lonely lane by the shore at a late hour of the night; but in desperation the Bounder of Greyfriars shouted.

A rough hand was clapped over his mouth immediately. He gave another savage wrench at his pinioned arms in vain.

"Quiet, if you know what's good for you!" snapped Big Harker. "Git him along, Pete—the sooner he's in the boat the better!"

The next moment Big Harker gave a yell of pain and rage as the Bounder's boot crashed on his shin.

He staggered and released his hold; and the Bounder turned like a tiger on the other man and grappled with him.

He was utterly desperate now.

He had been trapped—he was a kidnapped prisoner. He knew that much, though the rest was dark to him. But it meant that Rance had some guilty secret to keep—it meant that his vague suspicion of foul play was now a certainty! Something had happened to his father—and he was trapped to prevent a discovery—he knew that now!

But the Bounder of Greyfriars was a dangerous man to trap! He was a schoolboy in the hands of two muscular longshoremens; but he was desperate, and he had never known what fear was. He fought like a tiger.

Harker's grasp had fallen from him as he staggered from that hack on the shin! And the Bounder almost succeeded in dragging himself loose from the other man. His clenched fist crashed into a greasy face, and Peter Coot gave a grunt of pain, and staggered—and the Bounder wrenched, and almost tore away.

But the longshoreman held on; and they struggled, losing their footing, and rolling on the earth.

Peter Coot panted to his companion; "Bear a hand here, Bill, you fool! Do you want the young swab to cut his cable! Bear a hand, you lubber!"

Harker's grasp was on the Bounder again the next moment. Smithy's chance—if it had been a chance—was gone. But he still struggled with savage desperation, hitting and kicking, resisting to the last ounce of his strength.

A crashing blow from a heavy fist almost scattered his senses. He relaxed limply on the earth.

"Keep 'old on him, Peter!" panted Big Harker. "Keep a 'old on him, the young wildcat! Put a bight on him!"

A savage grasp dragged the Bounder's hands together behind him. He still resisted feebly, but a cord was knotted round his wrists, securing them. He panted out a breathless cry—but he was not given a chance to utter another. A

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coarse muffler was passed round his head and knotted over his mouth, silencing him.

Then he was dragged roughly to his feet.

Big Harker bent over him with a savage glare.

"You give more trouble, you young swab, and I'll hand you another knock, and we'll carry you, and you can lay to that!" he snarled. "Now walk!"

They were grasping his arms again. The Bounder staggered on between them in the darkness. Dizzy from the blow he had received, his hands bound behind his back, he was powerless, and he could only stagger onward as they dragged at his arms.

In a few minutes more sand was crunching under his feet. He was being taken down the shore. Facing him, in the distance, rolled a vast body of water—the Atlantic, glimmering in the moonlight.

Where were they taking him? One of them had spoken of a boat! They were going to take him off the shore. He was a prisoner—a kidnapped prisoner—and these ruffians were acting under the orders of Rance. That much was clear to him. But what had happened to his father? What could have happened to his father, to drive Rance to desperate measures like these to secure his silence? It was of his father that the Bounder was thinking, not of himself, as he was hurried down the shore towards the pounding sea.

He cast dizzy glances up and down the shore, dimly revealed in the glimmer of the moon. Where he was, he did not know, except that this must be a lonely stretch of the shore between Penruddy and Potkelly—solitary enough by day, utterly deserted by night.

Then, as he looked seaward, he glimpsed a black mass against the silver sea, in the far distance—a rocky island that jutted from the Atlantic.

He knew that it was Blackrock—the island on which he had stranded Billy Bunter and the Famous Five, though whether they were still there he did not know and did not care—he had hardly given them a thought since.

The tide washed over his feet as he was dragged down the shore. The two longshoremens came to a halt, and he was left in Peter Coot's grasp while Big Harker tramped to a boat, pegged to the beach and half-afloat in the tide.

Harker loosened the painter, grasped the boat, and pushed it into deeper water, the tide washing round his sea-boots as he stood. Then he called to his associate, and Peter Coot dragged the Bounder on, knee-deep in water, and tipped him roughly over the gunwale.

Vernon-Smith rolled helplessly in the boat. Peter followed him in, and Harker, giving the boat a powerful shove, scrambled in after him as it rocked on the tide.

Neither of the longshoremens gave the Bounder any further heed. They grasped the oars and pulled against the pull of the tide, and the boat glided out on the sea.

Vernon-Smith struggled to a sitting position. The longshoremens pulled in silence, save for their deep breathing. They drove it seaward at a good rate, and the shore dropped into dimness behind.

A twinkling light far down the shore caught the Bounder's eyes—he could guess that it was at Potkelly. But it vanished in a moment or two, as the boat swept seaward.

He was being taken out to Blackrock. He knew that now, as the boat slanted across towards the island.

He could not understand. The stranded schoolboys might be gone—or these ruffians might not know that they were there; but there was a man on the island; old Dave Oke, the fisherman. Rance must know that there was a man on the island—it was through Rance & Co. that Mr. Vernon-Smith had purchased it. If he was seen, there was a chance—

But that hope, if it was a hope, died away at once—Rance would not be taking risks; if the old seaman was still on the island he would not see a kidnapped prisoner there.

The boat was pulling well out to sea, steering clear of the island and its rocks, circling round to the western side.

The Bounder recalled what he had heard from his father about Blackrock. The millionaire had told him of the smugglers' cave as a matter interesting to a schoolboy—and he knew it was on the western side, fronting the open ocean. He could guess his destination now.

He heard Peter Coot mutter to his companion. Harker nodded, and grasped at the Bounder, tipping him over in the bottom of the boat. As the schoolboy lay panting, the ruffian threw a sheet of canvas over him.

Smithy made an attempt to struggle up, and a blow that reached him through the canvas stretched him down again.

"Lie still, you swab!" came Harker's savage growl.

The Bounder did not stir again. He realised that he was hidden from sight as the boat approached the island; and that meant that there was a chance at least of his being seen.

Even if the Greyfriars fellows were still on Blackrock it seemed hardly likely that they would be wakeful at midnight, so far as Smithy could see; but clearly the kidnappers were taking no chances.

He lay under the canvas, hidden from any eyes that might by chance have fallen on the boat on the moonlit sea, as the rowers pulled on. He heard no word from them; the only sounds that reached him were the wash of the sea and the grinding of the oars in the rowlocks.

A heavy rocking of the boat in rough water hinted that they were pulling inshore at last. He heard the sound of an oar fending off hard rock. Then at last there was a bump of the boat, and a splashing, as heavy sea boots tramped in shallow water.

The kidnapped Bounder had reached his destination at last, and though he could see nothing, he could guess where he was—in the smugglers' cave of Blackrock Island!

THE NINETEENTH CHAPTER.

Bunter In The Boat!

BILLY BUNTER awoke.

The bumping of a heavy boat on the sand, the grinding of sea boots in the pebbles, and the sound of voices close at hand, mingled with the fat junior's dreams, and he started into wakefulness.

The threatening face of Big Harker had haunted him in his dreams, and he awoke with the thought of the ruffian in his mind, and a cold shiver running down his podgy back, in spite of the warmth of the blankets in which he was rolled.

Heavy tramping sounded close at hand.

"Take a bight on the painter, Coot!" came a deep, grunting voice, and

Bunter shivered at the tones of Big Harker.

He lay quite still, so terrified that he hardly breathed.

The longshoreman had returned, as Bunter might have foreseen, had Bunter ever foreseen anything.

Harker was speaking, which showed that he had not returned alone. Two pairs of heavy sea boots were grinding on the pebbles, and Bunter could hear the sound of a boat's bows thumping on the sand at the water's edge.

"Make fast!" came Harker's grunt again. "I reckon you'd be stranded, like them schoolboys, if the boat went off in the tide."

Bunter understood, as he heard that, that the tide had turned. There would have been no danger of the boat drifting off, had the tide still been rolling into the sea cave.

If only it was far out enough to permit a passage round the cliffs—if a fellow had a chance to dodge—Billy Bunter could have groaned aloud, in terror, as he heard the grunting voice of the longshoreman.

But he made no sound. They had not seen him yet. If they had glanced at all towards the heap of blankets, in the dimness at the side of the cave, they did not discern, or suspect, that these blankets hid the palpitating form of a terrified fat schoolboy.

They were busy for the moment with the boat. For a long minute the fat junior lay quite still, scared almost out of his fat wits.

But in the terror of discovery, and what would follow, he made an effort to pull himself together. He had a faint hope—of creeping away unseen before they discovered him.

He lifted his head a few inches, and peered towards the longshoremen at the boat. Where he lay he was in darkness, but the two figures stood out clear against the bright moonlight at the mouth of the cavern.

There were only two of them—Harker and Coot. Rance was not with them now. Peter Coot was stooping, making fast the boat's painter to a peg driven in the sand.

The boat was below high-water mark. The tide had been receding while Bunter was asleep. It had not come up so far as the pebble ridge that marked the limit of the tide. That was fortunate for Bunter, for had the two ruffians come so near it was probable that they might have observed that the blankets were occupied, in spite of the dimness.

Harker, tramping in shallow water by the boat, stooped over the gunwale to lift something out.

Billy Bunter watched him with palpitating heart. He dared not make a movement—they were too near for that. Yet to remain where he was was only to await discovery. It was an awful position for the unhappy fat Owl. He hardly breathed as he watched.

Big Harker threw aside a sheet of canvas, grasped at something that had been under it, and dragged.

Bunter's eyes bulged as he saw that it was a boyish figure—the hands tied, and a muffler bound across the mouth. There was a prisoner in the boat, and the startled fat Owl could only suppose that it was one of the juniors from Dave's cove. He could see that it was not a man.

With a swing of his sinewy arm, Big Harker tossed the prisoner out of the boat, sending him tottering on the sand.

Peter Coot, having tied the painter, stepped to him, and jerked the muffler from his face.

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 Flectway House, Farringdon Street, London, E.C.4.

MARCH winds and April showers bring forth May flowers!

It seems to me that we've had our fill of both wind and showers this month. But what's the good of grumbling if the wind blows like blazes and it rains cats and dogs? It won't make it any brighter, will it? If the weather does let you down, you have the satisfaction of knowing that the jolly old MAGNET won't let you down!

Let me put you wise as to what is in store for next week.

THE SECRET OF THE SEA-CAVE!

By Frank Richards

is the title of the next story in the brilliant series our favourite author has written. It's a smasher, too, chums! Crusocs on Blackrock Island, Harry Wharton & Co., and Vernon-Smith's millionaire father find themselves trapped in a tunnel blocked with immovable rocks. All hope of rescue seems lost until— But I won't spoil the yarn by giving away the plot. You'll read all about it next week, anyway, and you'll be thrilled, too!

After a feast of thrills, there's nothing like a good laugh. Dicky Nugent supplies this in the uproariously funny St. Sam's yarn which will appear in the "Greyfriars Herald," together with some newsy paragraphs written by other Greyfriars contributors. "My Own Page" will be taken over by Terrence Fitzgerald, of the Fifth. You'll enjoy this issue, chums. Don't miss it, on any account!

YOUR EDITOR.

"I reckon you can pipe now, if you want," he grinned. "Nobody to hear you here, I reckon."

"You rotten rascal!" came a panting voice.

"Belay it!" came Harker's grunting voice, as he turned towards the prisoner. "Belay your jawing tackle, if that's all you've got to say!"

Billy Bunter barely repressed a squeak of amazement.

The panting voice was familiar to his ears. He had not heard it since a few days before break-up at Greyfriars School; but he knew the Bounder's voice at once. And, as the bound junior moved, a gleam of moonlight fell on his face—the savagely enraged face of Herbert Vernon-Smith.

Bunter could only blink. It was not one of the Famous Five—it was Smithy!

"You rotten rascals!" came the Bounder's voice, almost suffocated with rage. "What have you brought me here for? Where is my father?"

"I reckon you'll find out afore you're much older, Mr. Vernon-Smith," came Harker's answer, with a jeering laugh. "Get a glim, Peter."

Billy Bunter drew his fat head under the blankets. Immediately there was a light he would have been seen. He had little hope of evading discovery, but he was going to evade it as long as he could. Under the blankets he heard the scratching of a match, and knew that the lantern had been lighted.

"Where are you taking me?" came the Bounder's hissing voice, as Big Harker grasped him by an elbow.

Harker did not answer him. His next words were addressed to Peter Coot.

"Get on with the glim! I reckon I want you to bear a hand getting him up; and then you can beat it to let the gov'nor know the cargo's stowed safe." Bunter heard a grunting chuckle. "You'll make the shore afore dawn, easy! Get on!"

Tramping feet went up the cave. The Bounder's passionate voice came again to Bunter's ears.

"You rotters! You rascals! I'll see you landed in gaol for this, and that scoundrel Rance along with you! I tell you— Oh!"

The sound of a blow came to Bunter's listening ears. Smithy's angry voice broke off with a sharp cry.

"I reckon I told you to belay it!" grunted Big Harker. "You'll 'op to my tune here, young feller-mc-lad!"

The Bounder did not speak again. The tramping footsteps grew fainter up the cave.

Billy Bunter breathed again.

He could hardly believe in his good luck. The two longshoremen were taking Vernon-Smith up the cavern—Peter Coot walking ahead with the lantern, Big Harker following with a grip on the Bounder's arm. With every step they were receding farther and farther from the fat Owl, huddled under the blankets.

Bunter ventured to put his head out again at last and blink in the direction they had taken. He could see nothing of them—the darkness of the cave had swallowed them; and he discerned nothing but the distant twinkle of the lantern.

With a gasp of relief the fat Owl crawled out of the blankets. They were going to take Herbert Vernon-Smith up somewhere—and Bunter could guess that it was into the gap in the rock-wall, into which he had seen Rance climb by the rope-ladder.

If that was it, Billy Bunter had at least ten minutes clear, probably more. He was not going to lose one of them.

He pitched the blankets off, scrambled to his feet, and hurried down to the water's edge.

The tide was going out, he knew that; and he hoped to see the way open to the beach. The boat at the end of the painter was rocking on the water, the receding tide tugging at it. But for the retaining rope it would have whisked away in a moment.

The fat Owl peered out into the moonlight through his big spectacles and gave a groan of disappointment.

Receding as it was, and receding fast, the tide still flooded over the beach outside the cave. The water was still deep for several yards up the cavern.

There was no way out but by swimming—a resource that did not present itself to Bunter's mind for a moment.

In dismay and disappointment he watched the lapping tide. Every now and then a wave washed back, rocking the boat, and rippling at the feet of the fat junior before it receded again.

"Oh crikey!" groaned Bunter.

His hope of getting out of the cave was gone.

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He turned his head and blinked up the dark cavern. Far in the distance, a speck in the blackness, the lantern twinkled.

After all, it would take them some little time—a good many minutes, at least—to get their prisoner up—if it was by way of the rope-ladder. There was a chance that the tide might serve before they returned.

If not, there was the boat! The boat was at Bunter's mercy! He was going on foot, if he could—but if he heard them returning before the tide gave him a passage he could go in the boat. And the fat junior, having made up his mind to that, scrambled into the boat and opened his pocket-knife, ready to cut the painter at the sound of returning footsteps.

Anxiously through his big spectacles he watched the tide welling and swelling in the glimmering moonlight.

Once, for a moment, a strip of beach came into sight—but the water washed back, dashing up the rocks.

It was likely to be long yet before the fat junior could have made the venture without being torn away by the sea. Anxious minute followed minute, and then there was a tramping sound on the sandy floor of the smugglers' cave!

Billy Bunter gave a squeak of alarm! Far in the distance the light still twinkled up the cave. But one of the longshoremen was returning—Peter Coot, he could guess, to take the boat back to the shore and report to the gov'nor that the cargo was safely stowed; leaving Big Harker on guard as before.

It was the boat or nothing—and he hacked at the painter with his knife.

It was Bunter's idea to whip that cord in two and float off; but like most of Bunter's ideas, it was not easy to carry out. The knife was blunt, and the cord was tough—and the fat junior, in a tremor of alarm and terror, sawed and sawed frantically, while the heavy tramping feet came nearer and nearer!

There was a sudden startled shout from the darkness of the cavern.

Bunter could not see Peter Coot, but Peter Coot had seen Bunter, visible in the moonlight, in the boat! The sight of him there was probably a startling surprise to the longshoreman—and alarming, as he saw how the fat junior was occupied!

Bunter heard a sound of running feet, following that startled shout. He was seen, and the longshoreman was coming on, at a run, to grasp the boat before he could cut it loose.

Frantic with terror, Bunter hacked and slashed madly at the painter. It seemed as if the rope would never part. One strand still held as he glimpsed a figure in the dim cavern, approaching him at panting speed.

One last frantic, desperate slash, and the rope parted—and the boat, in the tug of the tide, whisked away from the hand that was outstretched to grasp at the gunwale.

A swirl of water spun the boat round, and Billy Bunter, with a breathless squeak, rolled over in it. Another swirl and the boat bumped against a rock and almost capsized. Rocking wildly, it spun away, shipping a wash of water that drenched the fat junior sprawling in the bottom.

He heard a loud splashing and a fierce shouting voice. He dared not lift his head over the gunwale with the boat rocking so wildly, but he knew that Peter Coot was trampling in the water, making a desperate attempt to reach the boat before it was whirled out of the cave.

Suddenly, as the boat bumped on another rock and tilted, Bunter saw him over the gunwale that dipped to the water.

Up to his neck in water, Peter Coot was half-wading, half-swimming, his face set and desperate, in a last fierce attempt to reach the boat.

Billy Bunter could do nothing but blink at him in terror, and the next moment that savage face was shut off from his view again as the gunwale lifted.

That the longshoreman had failed was clear, for no hand grasped at the gunwale, and the boat rocked and whirled on, tossed on the tide.

When Billy Bunter ventured at last to raise his head, he was far outside the cave, and the high arch of rock was distant: and no sign was to be seen of the longshoreman.

The fat junior gasped with relief. Out on the sea, the water was calmer, and the boat, though still rocking, floated on a more or less even keel.

Billy Bunter cast a last blink back at the dark opening of the cave from which he had escaped, and gathered up the oars.

Bunter could row—he had rowed on the Sark, at Greyfriars; he had rowed on the sea at Margate. It had not even occurred to him that he might have any difficulty in managing that boat—once he got away in it. He was going to pull round to Dave's cove—the distance

was under half a mile. But the tide, which had been his friend, was now his enemy.

"Oh crikey!" gasped Bunter.

It was a heavy boat—the oars were heavy! Bunter got the oars into the rowlocks and strove to pull. For several minutes he struggled, utter dismay filling his fat heart as it dawned upon him that, so far from pulling round to the cove, he could not even bring the bows round against the tide.

Again and again, in panic, he strove but he strove in vain, and through all his strivings the boat rocked farther and farther away from the cliffs of Blackrock, wallowing broadside on.

"Oh lor'!" moaned Bunter.

He gave a despairing blink at the high cliffs of Blackrock Island. They did not seem so high now—they were sinking to the sea in the glimmering of the moon. The mainland he could not see at all.

Round him was the swelling, rolling sea, heaving and surging, and drifting him farther and farther from the land—farther and farther, out into the waste Atlantic. The Owl of the Remove sat as if turned to stone, his eyes, and his spectacles, fixed on those distant cliffs as they sank—and disappeared!

"HALLO, hallo, hallo!"

"What?"

"Is that a boat?"

Bob Cherry pointed over the

moonlit sea.

Harry Wharton & Co. had clambered up the cliff at the western side of the cove, in the faint—the very faint—hope of seeing some sign of the missing Owl.

Under the high cliffs the tide swelled and surged. Something that moved on the water, far away, caught Bob Cherry's eyes, and he pointed.

The juniors watched it. It was distant, and it was dim; but it looked like a boat.

Boat or not, occupied or not, it drifted out of their vision and vanished over the glimmering sea.

And—fortunately for their peace of mind—they did not know, they could not guess, that it held the hapless Owl of the Remove, drifting helplessly out to sea—lost in the surging wastes of the Atlantic!

THE END.

(Bunter's in a bad scrape, what? Will anybody save him, or will he? Watch out next Saturday for: "THE SECRET OF THE SEACAVE!" the final yarn in this thrilling series.)

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