

Special Enlarged Christmas Number!

The Magnet 2



No. 1,087. Vol. XXXIV.

EVERY SATURDAY.

Week Ending December 15th, 1928.

THE PHANTOM OF THE CAVE!

(An eerie incident from the grand Christmas story of Harry Wharton & Co., the Chums of Greyfriars School.)



Number One of a unique series of articles telling you of the various processes through which your favourite paper passes before the finished copy comes into your hands on a Saturday morning.

IN the dark, primeval forests of Canada as much as at Fleetway House, in the heart of the Empire's capital, is the weekly birthday of the MAGNET made possible.

An amazing number of jobs—many entailing the greatest hardships and demanding hefty muscles to make their accomplishment possible, all of them romantic and depending for their success on considerable craft and skill—have to be carried out by all sorts and conditions of people, in several parts of the world, before the MAGNET can come into your hands on Saturday morning.

The forests of Canada send their quota of spruce and other timber forests to be made into MAGNET paper—timber felled by hardy lumbermen and sent grinding and bumping down mighty turbulent rivers to the pulping mills far distant from the forests.

Printing-ink has to be made by the thousand gallon, hundreds of tons a year being required by the various papers that are brothers and sisters of the MAGNET. A fine art, is this making of ink from the raw materials, comprising varnishes and gums, various oils, anilines and other items, all of which must be most skilfully chosen and mixed to produce the printing-ink.

Giants in Harness!

Authors and artists have to be urged and coaxed to give of their best, by your Editor, toiling away, day in and day out, in that bewilderingly large and fascinating hive of journalistic industry known as Fleetway House which, in the very heart of the City of London, is built over the historic hidden waters of the ancient River Fleet.

Once that river was lined with Roman villas inhabited by the wealthy, and was famous for its clear waters in which lived fish providing splendid sport for the ancient anglers. It degenerated to a mere ditch, was finally closed in, and now the great edifice where the MAGNET is produced rears its noble pile above the almost forgotten stream.

Block-makers and compositors, a veritable army of them, perform feats of wizardry in the process and composing rooms in enormous buildings on the south side of the Thames. And giants in harness, in the form of amazing and thunderous printing presses, seize on the harvest of all these workers—each part and parcel of a vast and astonishingly efficient organisation.

The Appointed Hour!

Straightway these mighty printing-presses pour out many thousands of copies of the MAGNET, week by week, at lightning speed, but withal in as calm a manner as though the entire business were not almost as miraculous as any of the miracles performed of old!

Then there is the distributing side of the organisation, the members of which live and have their being for the purpose of seeing that no reader of the MAGNET, no matter how remote his home, in whatever out-of-the-way corner of the world he lives, shall be without his copy of the paper at the appointed hour each week!

In the paper-timber lands of Quebec, whence comes the MAGNET paper, there are some 625,000 acres—1,000 square miles, an area larger than Greater London!—of forest almost choked with timber destined for the pulping mills, and muscular axe-swingers stream daily throughout the winter from the loggers' camps to set their keen-edged weapons swinging at

the resisting sides of the towering spruce and balsam trees.

The measure of their labours is gauged when you realise that the Imperial Paper Mills alone eat up hundreds of thousands of tons—not just logs but *tons*—of trees each year for the making of paper for the use of the MAGNET, and other publications. The pulping mills which feed the ravenous printing-presses of the Amalgamated Press make and export 2,000 tons of paper-pulp every year!

Of the paper thus produced, 7,500 miles, averaging three feet in width, are used up every week for all the firm's publications.

Whirled to the Mills!

The great felled trees, their hindering branches neatly axed off, are useless where they lie. By sheer brute force and sweat of brow they must be conveyed—by teamsters—to the banks of the rivers when these are in full flood, and then the immense skidways (colossal heaps of trimmed logs) have to be piloted to the pulping mills at the coast.

In due course, steamships collect the precious stuff turned out by the machinery there, and hurry it to Gravesend, in England, where it is made into finished paper.

Before the swift-flowing river can seize the trimmed logs and whirl them away on the start of their long and adventurous trip to the pulping-mills, many of the trunks are lashed together with ropes and chains to form big rafts, the largest of which carry a crew whose job it is to escort the moving mass to its destination.

Frequent jams occur at the bends in the river. Great hold-ups happen when a log, breaking away from its raft, swirls crosswise and, one end catching the bank, wedges its neighbour, knocks that crosswise too, and in a brace of shakes turns the river into a maelstrom of grinding and leaping tree-trunks.

The paper for your MAGNET is very, very far from being an accomplished fact just then!

(Next week's MAGNET will contain number two of this most interesting series of articles on "How the MAGNET is Made." Don't miss it—order your copy in good time!)



And these logs, ready for despatch to the paper mills far distant from the forest, eventually become the paper on which your "Magnet" is printed.

THE BEST STORY OF THE WEEK! Grub, glorious grub has led William George Bunter into many a painful adventure which would have long since cured the average "grub raider." But Bunter won't learn his lesson, not even when his latest "raid" lands him into the strangest and most hair-raising experience of his life!



A Special Christmas Story dealing with the Adventures of Harry Wharton & Co., the Chums of Greyfriars. By FRANK RICHARDS.

THE FIRST CHAPTER.

A Tight Corner!



"Hi!" gasped Billy Bunter.

He jumped.

In the circumstances it was enough to make any fellow jump.

Billy Bunter was standing in Study No. 4 in the Remove. As No. 4 Study belonged to Vernon-Smith and Redwing, Bunter, naturally, had no business there. But it was not uncommon for Billy Bunter to be found in places where he had no business.

Bunter had made sure that the coast was clear before he entered the study. He had seen Smithy and Redwing downstairs. They were discussing the half-holiday, and what they were going to do with it. How was Bunter to guess that they were just coming up to the study? Naturally, he couldn't, and didn't.

Bunter needed only a few minutes in the study. To blink into the cupboard, to bag the cake he knew was there, and to escape with his plunder, would not have taken Bunter long. In these matters he was experienced, and had had much practice.

But of the few minutes he needed not one was granted him. There were footsteps in the Remove passage; and he heard the Bounder's rather strident voice, and Redwing's low, pleasant tones in reply. The beasts were coming to the study. And even as Bunter jumped the footsteps stopped outside, and a hand was laid on the door-handle.

Billy Bunter's fat brain, as a rule,

did not work quickly. But circumstances alter cases. He knew what to expect if the Bounder found him there. Only the previous day Smithy had found him in precisely similar circumstances, and Bunter had travelled as far as the stairs with the Bounder dribbling him. If the Bounder found him again, history was certain to repeat itself.

For a second or two Bunter blinked with a terrified blink at the door. Then, with wonderful presence of mind, he flattened himself against the wall behind the door, so that in opening it concealed him. It was the only available hiding-place.

The door flew open.

Billy Bunter suppressed a howl as it tapped him on his fat little nose. It was no time to howl. If the door was left open he was hidden from sight. And while there was life there was hope.

Vernon-Smith came into the study. Tom Redwing remained in the doorway. So the door did not close.

Bunter scarcely breathed.

If the Bounder had run upstairs to fetch something from the study he was likely to leave again and close the door after him, without seeing that Bunter was there. Bunter hoped that it was so. But his hope was short-lived. He heard a creak from the study table as Vernon-Smith sat down on a corner of it. Apparently the beast had come to stay!

"Here they come!" said Redwing's voice.

There was a tramp of footsteps in the passage.

Bunter suppressed a groan.

More beasts were coming. Evidently he had chosen a most unfortunate time for raiding the Bounder's study cupboard.

"Hallo! Hallo! Hallo!" boomed Bob Cherry's voice. "Here we are, Smithy!"

"Trot in!" said the Bounder.

Harry Wharton & Co. trotted in. Bunter could not see them, but he could tell from the many footsteps that all the Famous Five were there.

"Beasts!" he murmured inaudibly.

But the door remained wide open, hiding the fat junior who was flattened against the wall behind it. It squeezed Bunter hard as somebody leaned on the other side of it. Bunter found a little difficulty in breathing. Still, with a fellow leaning on the door it was not likely to be closed. There was a silver lining to the cloud.

"What's on, Smithy?" asked Harry Wharton.

"Reddy and I have fixed up an excursion for this afternoon," answered the Bounder. "If you fellows would like to come—"

"Give it a name," said Johnny Bull.

Bunter judged by the voice that it was Johnny's rather solid weight that was leaning on the door. He dared not move. And he was finding it harder and harder to breathe. Breath was always rather short with Bunter at the best of times.

"It's fine weather for once," said the Bounder. "We're going up to Redwing's home at Hawkscliff, and taking a hamper to picnic there. Reddy's pater is away at sea; but Reddy expects him home for Christmas, and he

THE MAGNET LIBRARY.—No. 1,087.



wants to fix up the cottage a bit. It's been shut up a long time. We're going up in a boat."

"Jolly cold at sea this time of year!" said Bob.

"The coldfulness will be terrific, my esteemed Smithy," remarked Hurree Jamset Ram Singh.

"It will be a quick run by boat, and Reddy can handle a boat like a duck can swim," said Smithy. "I've hired old Trumper's boat, and it's all ready down at Pegg. It's ten miles to walk, but next to no distance by boat. Reddy says the wind is right."

"Right as rain," said Redwing, "and safe as houses. I've sailed old Trumper's boat before. And I'll undertake not to put you on the rocks, or to get carried out to sea."

Harry Wharton laughed.

"We can trust you to pull us through, Reddy. If the weather changes—"

"If the weather changes we can leave the boat up at Hawkscliff and walk back," said Smithy. "You're not afraid of a walk."

"No fear!"

"Jolly good wheeze!" said Bob Cherry. "Let's!"

"Hear, hear!"

"The coldfulness will be great, but the enjoyfulness will be terrific," said Hurree Jamset Ram Singh.

"Is it a go?" asked the Bounder.

"It's a go," answered the Famous Five, with one voice.

"Good! The boat's to be ready at three. And I've given orders for the hamper to be put in it," said the Bounder. "Old Trumper will be minding it till we get there. We've only got to walk down to Pegg. Leave here at half-past two."

"Right!"

"Jolly glad you're coming, you fellows!" said the Bounder cordially. "My only hat!"

Smithy slipped from the table as he uttered that startled ejaculation. His glance had fallen on a foot that protruded from behind the door.

He stared at it blankly.

"Who—What—There's somebody behind the door!"

"Ow!" came a startled gasp. "There isn't, Smithy! There—there's nobody here!"

"Bunter!"

Johnny Bull detached himself from the door on which he was leaning, and pulled it away from the wall.

A gasping, fat junior was revealed.

"The esteemed and ridiculous Bunter!" ejaculated Hurree Jamset Ram Singh.

"I—I say, you fellows!" gasped Bunter.

"You fat sweep!" roared the Bounder. "What are you up to in my study?"

"N-n-nothing, old chap! I—I didn't come here after your cake."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I—I—I came to—to speak to you, Smithy!" gasped Bunter, blinking warily and uneasily at the frowning Bounder. "I—I—I was going to—to ask you to—to spend Christmas with me, old chap!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I—I want you to come to Bunter Court for the Christmas vac, old fellow," said Bunter. "You can bring Redwing if you like. I don't mind his being a common fellow, and the son of a common tarry-breeks. I'm no snob."

"Thank you!" said Redwing.

"The—the fact is, we shall have

rather a distinguished gathering at Bunter Court this Christmas," said the Owl of the Remove. "I'll tell you what! All you fellows come! And—and I'll come up to Hawkscliff with you this afternoon. I—I'd like to visit Reddy's place—I would really, you know! I've done slumming before."

Herbert Vernon-Smith did not answer Bunter in words.

He made a stride towards him and grasped him by the collar and swung him into the doorway.

"Yow-ow-ow! Leggo!" roared Bunter. "I say, you fellows, draggimoff! If you kick me, Smithy, I'll jolly well—Yoooooop!"

Harry Wharton & Co. cleared out of the way, grinning. The Bounder's boot was planted fairly on William George Bunter's tight trousers.

Bunter flew.

"Yaroooooh!"

Bump!

"Yow-ow-ow!" roared Bunter, as he sprawled in the Remove passage. "Ow! Beast! I'll jolly well lick you for that, Smithy! I—Yaroooooh!"

Billy Bunter picked himself up in hot haste and fled along the Remove passage. Twice the Bounder's active boot landed before the fat junior vanished down the stairs.

"Beast!" floated back from the Remove staircase.

And then William George Bunter was gone.

In Study No. 4 the cake upon which Bunter had had felonious designs was handed out of the cupboard and disposed of in large slices by the seven juniors there while they cheerfully discussed the afternoon's trip.

But probably they would not have discussed the trip and the cake so equably had they known of the thoughts that were working in the fat brain of William George Bunter.

THE SECOND CHAPTER.

Bunter Bags the Boat!



THE sea rolled like a sheet of silver under the afternoon sunshine. It was a clear, cold December day, and the wind that whistled round the high rocks of the great Shoulder was cold and sharp. The tide was going out, leaving wide stretches of ribbed sea sand glistening in the sun. The fishermen's boats, drawn well above high-water mark, were far from the receding water. Only one boat was at the water's edge, and by it stood old Dave Trumper, the fisherman—a massive figure, in jersey and sea-boots.

Clear as the day was, it was cold, and certainly not the day that Bunter would have chosen for a sail on the bay. But Billy Bunter was feeling warm enough as he came in sight of the shore and the waiting fisherman standing by the boat.

Bunter had made record speed.

By the time he emerged from the lane and came out in sight of the straggling fishing village of Pegg and the wide stretch of sands beyond Bunter was perspiring with exertion, in spite of the December cold.

He panted and puffed and blew as he rolled onward across the sand towards the solitary boat.

He glanced back over his shoulder; but there was no one to be seen behind him, and he grinned. Bunter was

there first—an easy first. That had not been a difficult feat, for the Remove fellows were not starting till half-past two, and Bunter had started immediately he had recovered from the application of the Bounder's boot. Great thoughts were working in the podgy brain of W. G. Bunter. For the boat, and the trip to Hawkscliff along the coast, Bunter did not care a straw—but he cared much and deeply for the hamper that Smithy had ordered for the trip. Smithy had kicked Bunter out of his study—as unceremoniously as if William George Bunter were a fellow who did not matter. Bunter was going to show Smithy that he was a fellow who did matter—and Smithy, perhaps, would repent that hasty kicking when he arrived at Pegg with his friends and found boat and hamper gone.

Old Trumper touched his hat as Bunter came up. He was there to mind the boat, which he had prepared for the trip, till the Greyfriars fellows came, and he supposed that Bunter was the first of the party to arrive.

"Got it all ready?" asked Bunter cheerily.

"Yes, sir," said Trumper.

"Is the hamper here?"

"In the boat, sir."

Bunter blinked into the boat. There was the lunch hamper—a large one. It looked as if Smithy had ordered a rather good spread to be taken up to Hawkscliff, no doubt guessing that a trip by sea in the keen wintry air would make the fellows hungry.

Billy Bunter's little round eyes glistened behind his big spectacles. The sight of that hamper rewarded him for all his exertions.

But while Trumper was there it was obviously impossible to annex either the boat or the hamper. Trumper was in charge, and, though he had no suspicion of Bunter, whom he knew to be a Greyfriars fellow, certainly he would not have allowed the fat junior to make off with the hamper. But William George Bunter was full of strategy.

"The fellows will be along in a few minutes, Trumper," he remarked.

"Ay, ay!" said old Trumper.

"Smithy wants you to meet him and help with the rugs and things," said Bunter airily. "He's getting a lift as far as the end of the lane. Cut across and wait for him there, will you? I'll stay with the boat."

"Ay, ay, Master Bunter!" answered the old fisherman unsuspiciously.

He started across the sand towards the village.

Bunter grinned.

Really it was hardly necessary to be diplomatic to take in a simple and unsuspecting old fellow like Dave Trumper.

The stalwart fisherman tramped up the shelving sand without a backward glance, nothing doubting that the message was authentic and that he would meet Vernon-Smith's party where the lane entered the village street.

Bunter clambered into the boat.

A moment more and the big hamper was under his fat hands. The size of that hamper had gratified the Owl of the Remove when his eyes fell on it. But its size made it rather difficult to negotiate. Bunter found that he could barely lift it.

"Oh!" ejaculated the fat Removeite.

Getting that hamper out of the boat and clearing off with it was quite out of the question.

But William George Bunter had not yet exhausted his strategy.



There was the sound of footsteps in the Remove passage, and Bunter, with great presence of mind, flattened himself against the wall behind the door. It was the only available hiding place. The fat Removite suppressed a howl the next moment as the door flew open and tapped him on his fat little nose. (See Chapter 1).

Had the boat been afloat Bunter would have cast off and pushed out into the bay; but the receding tide barely lapped the boat, and it lay heeled on the sand. And it was much too heavy for Bunter to shove down into the water on his own. The Owl of the Remove blinked up and down the shore. Dave Trumper had disappeared from sight beyond some of the fishermen's cabins. Near at hand two longshoremen were standing, smoking their pipes and idly watching the sea. Billy Bunter waved his hand to them and shouted:

"Hi!"

The two ancient mariners glanced round.

"Give me a shove off!" called out Bunter. He groped in his pocket, and held up a shilling.

"Right you are, sir!"

The two longshoremen came along to the boat, grasped it, and ran it down into the water. Bunter tossed the shilling ashore; and the ancient mariners, having fielded it, set a course for the Anchor Inn. Bunter picked up an oar, shoved on a chalk rock, and sent the boat spinning out into deeper water.

"He, he, he!"

The bay was calm, only ruffled by the wind. Outside the bay the North Sea was rolling heavily, but Bunter had no eyes for that. He did not intend to go outside the bay.

His bright idea was to row across a corner of the bay and land along the shore at a point hidden from Pegg by

the cliffs. There he would be safe from the beasts to whom the boat and the hamper belonged, and there he would be free to feast royally on the contents of the hamper. Like all great ideas, it was beautifully simple.

Bunter was no sailorman, and he did not think of trying to step the mast and hoist the sail. But he was able to handle a pair of oars; and with the outgoing tide to help him, it was easy for him to get away from the shore. Had the tide been coming in, Bunter would never have got off; and he reflected that it was extremely fortunate that the tide was going out. It was not to seem so fortunate to him a little later. Bunter's mind had been so full of his scheme for bagging Smithy's hamper that he had not even thought of danger. It was a case of fools rushing in where angels fear to tread.

"He, he, he!"

Bunter chuckled explosively.

Across the wide sands from the direction of Pegg came a string of running figures making for the sea.

That it was a party of Greyfriars juniors Bunter had not the slightest doubt. But it did not worry the Owl of the Remove much, in fact, he merely grinned.

The beasts had not been far behind Bunter, after all. But a miss was as good as a mile. Already a dozen yards of lapping water separated Bunter from the beach. He was far out of reach.

"Beasts!" said Bunter.

And he grinned cheerily at the running figures, and tugged at the oars.

THE THIRD CHAPTER.

Too Late!

HARRY WHARTON & CO. swung cheerily along the lane in the keen air. They were looking forward to the trip along the coast to Hawkscliff, and thinking of anything but William

George Bunter. That fat and fatuous youth had been entirely dismissed from their minds.

"Hallo, hallo, hallo! There's Trumper!" exclaimed Bob Cherry, as the juniors reached the corner of the village street.

The Bounder stopped, with a frown.

"Why aren't you with the boat, Trumper?" he asked. "Some longshoreman might pinch that hamper—"

"Master Bunter's there, sir!" said Trumper.

"Bunter!" exclaimed the Bounder. Bob Cherry chuckled.

"Bunty means to come along," he remarked. "He's started first."

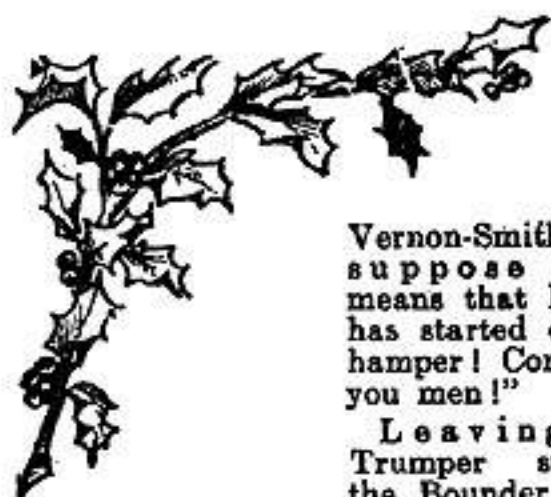
"I'll jolly well boot him out of the boat if I find him in it!" growled the Bounder. "You shouldn't have left the boat, Trumper!"

"Master Bunter gave me your message—"

"What!"

"To come and help with the rugs, sir. He said you was getting a lift as far as the beach," said old Trumper, puzzled.

"I never sent any message!" grunted THE MAGNET LIBRARY.—No. 1,087.



Vernon-Smith. "I suppose that means that Bunter has started on the hamper! Come on, you men!"

Leaving old Trumper staring, the Bounder broke

into a run. Redwing followed him fast—not so much on account of the hamper as to restrain Smithy's wrath when he reached Bunter. The Bounder was rather apt to be heavy-handed in such circumstances.

"Come on!" said Harry Wharton, laughing. "We don't want Smithy to slaughter Bunter!"

And the Famous Five ran for the beach.

As the wide sands and the sea burst on their view, a yell of wrath broke from the Bounder.

"He's got the boat!"

"Oh, my hat!" ejaculated Redwing.

"Come on!"

Vernon-Smith put on speed, fairly racing down to the sea. Behind him came Redwing, and, strung out behind, the Famous Five, one after another, every fellow putting on his best speed.

"The fat pirate!" gasped Bob Cherry. "Ho's bagged the boat—bagged the jolly old boat and the hamper, too! After him!"

The Bounder was the first to reach the water's edge. He stopped there, trampling in wet sand, with a furious face.

"Bunter!" he roared.

"He, he, he!" came back a fat chuckle on the sea breeze.

"Bring that boat back!" yelled the Bounder.

"He, he, he!"

Redwing came up, panting.

"The fat fool!" he exclaimed. "It's not safe for that duffer to go out in the boat alone!"

"Come back!" roared the Bounder.

"He, he, he!"

"Come back, you fat buccancer!" shouted Bob Cherry.

"He, he, he!"

Billy Bunter rested on his oars. The boat was heavy to pull, and a little exertion went a long way with Bunter. The outgoing tide was carrying him out, and he was safely out of reach. So he was satisfied to rest a little and grin back at his baffled pursuers.

"Come back!" shouted Harry Wharton.

Bunter laid in his oars.

His next proceeding was frivolous and disrespectful. He put the thumb of one hand to his nose and extended his fat fingers. Then he put the thumb of the other hand to the extended little finger and extended the fingers of that hand.

That frivolous gesture was intended to express Bunter's profound contempt for the fellows who could not get at him.

"Why, I—I—I'll—" gasped the Bounder.

Billy Bunter grinned at the exasperated juniors.

"The fat villain!" exclaimed Frank Nugent. "Why, this is giddy piracy on the high seas!"

"Come back, Bunter!"

THE MAGNET LIBRARY.—No. 1,087.

"You fat rotter!"

"You terrific and preposterous sweep!"

"I'll smash you!" yelled the Bounder.

"He, he, he!"

The Bounder, in his rage, stooped and jerked a loose chunk of chalk from the sand. Bob Cherry promptly knocked it out of his hand.

"Draw it mild, Smithy!" he said.

"Mind your own business! I'll—"

"My dear chap!"

"Oh, rats!"

"Don't be an ass, Smithy!" said Harry Wharton sharply. "Chucking chalk is a dirty trick!"

"Do you think I'm going to let that fat freak clear off with my boat?" howled the Bounder.

"There's a limit, old bean!"

"Oh, go and eat coke!"

But apparently the Bounder admitted that there was a limit, for he did not seek another missile. He stood with the sea lapping over his shoes, staring after the boat and shouting furiously at Bunter.

The Owl of the Remove waved a fat hand in farewell.

"We might get out another boat and go after him," suggested Nugent.

"There's no boat here!" snarled the Bounder. "He'll be out of sight before we can get one run down to the water!"

"I hope the fat duffer won't get out into the current that comes round the Shoulder!" said Redwing anxiously.

"Let him, and be blown to him!" snarled the Bounder. "Just like you to be thinking of him!"

"Well, you see, old chap—"

"Oh, rats!"

Redwing smiled faintly, and said no more. Herbert Vernon-Smith was not in a mood to be argued with.

Billy Bunter had taken up the oars again now. The tide was running out swiftly, and it was carrying the boat fast. Already the fat junior looked small in the distance.

The Bounder gritted his teeth.

"We can't get after him. He's going to dodge into one of the little inlets across that corner of the bay."

"We might go round—" began Wharton.

"And hunt for him till dark without finding him!" growled the Bounder.

Harry Wharton nodded. It was not much use going round the circling shore of the bay. The beach was broken up by jutting masses of chalk, the base of the great cliffs, and there were a dozen inlets where a boat could have lain unseen by anyone more than a few yards away. Hunting along the shore for Bunter would have been a good deal like hunting for a needle in a bundle of hay.

"Well, what's the game?" asked Bob Cherry. "We can't get to Hawkscliff without a boat, and time's going!"

The Bounder growled.

"We can get another boat. We can't get another hamper, though—no time for that. That hamper was sent from Courtfield."

"We can get a bundle of sandwiches at the Anchor while the boat's being run down," said Redwing.

"Sandwiches—while Bunter's scoffing cold chicken and pate de foie gras!" snarled the Bounder.

Redwing laughed.

"There's no help for it, old chap, if we're going at all. No use crying over spilt milk."

"I'll smash him!"

"The smashfulness must be unavoidably postponed, my esteemed Smithy, as the honourable and execrable Bunter is out of reach," remarked Hurree Jamset Ram Singh. "We are wasting time, and, as the English proverb says, a stitch in time saves ninepence."

"Oh, come on!" grunted the Bounder.

There was no help for it. The boat was a mere speck now, towards the northern shore of the wide bay. Bunter's rowing consisted chiefly of catching crabs; but the tide was carrying him fast and far.

The juniors turned back from the beach, Redwing casting one last anxious glance after the disappearing boat.

"I hope he's safe," he said.

"Serve him right if he isn't!" snapped the Bounder.

"You don't know these currents, Smithy—"

"Oh, rats! Come on!"

It was half an hour later that the Greyfriars party stepped the mast in another boat, and ran out into the bay, with a big bundle of sandwiches in the place of the well-filled hamper. Tom Redwing, who had been born and bred to the sea, handled the boat like an old sailorman, and the faces of the juniors were bright and cheery as they ran before the wind. And the Bounder, at long last, forgot his bad temper, and was as bright and cheery as the rest. It was quite an enjoyable half-holiday, after all, in spite of the piratical propensities of William George Bunter.

THE FOURTH CHAPTER.

The Haunted Cave!



"He, he, he!"

Billy Bunter cachinnated joyously.

The beach and the village of Pegg had disappeared; the chalk cliffs beyond were a dim blue against a grey sky. Far out on the waters, Billy Bunter was alone in his glory.

He was feeling eminently satisfied.

True, there was the piper to pay later at Greyfriars. Bunter had got away with the plunder, but when he met the Bounder again it was certain that Smithy would reward him according to his merits. Still, that could not be helped, and Bunter was not the fellow to meet trouble half-way. He was safe out of the reach of pursuit, and Smithy's big hamper was at his mercy. That was quite enough for Bunter for the present, and the future could take care of itself.

Bunter had intended to land on one of the small sandy beaches among the cliffs on the northern side of Pegg Bay. But he found it rather difficult to steer in, and he let the boat drift with the tide. It would be time enough to exert himself, he considered, when he had had a feed. Bunter was hungry. It was two hours or more since dinner, and he had had nothing since that meal—nothing but a bag of toffee he had found in Squiff's study, and some bull-eyes he had discovered in Ogilvy's study. And the keen sea air gave an added edge to his always powerful appetite. Bunter was in a state now to do full justice to the hamper.

Letting the boat drift at its own sweet will, the Owl of the Remove jerked open the lid of the hamper.

His eyes glistened at the sight of what it contained.

Herbert Vernon-Smith was the fellow to "spread" himself on such an occasion, and certainly the Bounder had

spread himself this time. That hamper, specially sent down from Chunkley's in Courtfield, had probably cost about as much as most Remove fellows spent in half a term. The Bounder had a superabundance of that useful article—cash, and he spent it freely. It could not have been spent in a better cause, Bunter considered, as he started on a delicious cold chicken.

Happiness beamed in the fat face of William George Bunter.

His plump jaws worked without cessation.

The boat rocked and drifted, utterly unheeded by the Owl of the Remove. That the outgoing tide raced round the rocks of the Shoulder, booming in the sea-caves, boiling over the long spurs of chalk that ran out like groynes into the sea. Bunter probably knew, if he had thought about it. Even on a calm day the water was never at peace at the foot of that mighty cliff, hollowed out into caves and irregular masses by the action of the waves during countless centuries. But Billy Bunter was too happily occupied to give a thought to such trivial matters.

It was the bumping of the boat on a chalky ledge that first appraised him of the fact that he was getting into rough waters.

"Ow!" gasped Bunter.

He was leaning over the hamper at the moment, and the bump threw him off his balance, and he sprawled, with his head into the hamper.

"Grooogh!"

The fat junior extracted his features from the good things in the hamper, started up, and blinked round him with a startled blink.

"Ow!" he stuttered.

The boat was rocking violently, and Bunter sat down quite suddenly. He did not venture to rise to his feet again, but gained his fat knees, holding on to a rowlock, and blinked round the waters

capsized, or to crash to pieces on the rocks. Again and again it bumped on half-submerged chalk, and bumped off again and rocked on.

"Ow, ow, ow! Help!" shrieked Bunter.

Only the crying of sea-gulls answered him.

He was drenched in spray that soaked him through and through. He was close now to the open sea, and the wind that came round the great cliff from the north cut him almost like a knife. He did not even touch the oars. In the open bay he could have rowed ashore; but once caught in the mad current that raced round the base of the mighty Shoulder, he was utterly helpless. Even the hardy fishermen of Pegg warily avoided that dangerous spot.

Bunter crouched in the rocking boat.

depths. Through crannies and fissures the wind howled wildly, with eerie wailing, and the deep hollows were filled with the echoing of the booming waters.

"Oh dear!" groaned Bunter.

If the fisher-folk were to be believed the sea-cave was haunted by the phantoms of the smugglers who had once lurked there. But Bunter was not thinking of ghosts now. The eddying water swept him fairly into the opening of the cave, and his brain whirled, as the boat spun into darkness under the over-arching rock above.

Bump!

The boat grounded as the eddy receded. The rush of the water had carried him right into the cavern and stranded him there.

The boat rolled on its side, and Bunter rolled helplessly out. He scrambled up, blinking round him in terror. A dim twilight reigned in the great cave, and beyond was impenetrable blackness.

The water had receded, but the eddying current swept into the opening again, and raced up to the stranded boat and the terrified Bunter. But it did not reach quite so far as before. It stirred and shifted the boat, but did not lift it, and again the water receded. Bunter remembered thankfully that it was an ebb tide. Had the tide been at the flood it would have swept the boat and Bunter far up into the depths of the great cavern, once they had entered.

"Ow! Oh dear!" mumbled Bunter.

He scrambled a few steps farther up the shelving sand that formed the floor of the cave. But the darkness beyond daunted him, and he stopped. He knew that he was safe from the sea now; the next eddying wave that swept into the haunted cave did not reach the stranded boat.

"Oh crumbs!"

Bunter



Xuletide
Greetings
to all my Chums



of an outlet. He dared not go out of sight of the glimmer of daylight from the sea.

For some time Billy Bunter sat on the boat, blinking at the receding sea, which was leaving a stretch of sand between him and the mouth of the cave—sand that would be covered again deep when the tide turned. He knew that the sea would not recede far enough for him to leave the cave on foot and clamber along the rocks to the beach. As for getting the boat out again and trusting himself to the lashing waters from which he had narrowly escaped, he shuddered at the thought.

He was a prisoner in the haunted cave.

He had to remain there till he was found and rescued! But the Owl of the Remove gradually drew comfort from the knowledge that he would be missed at calling-over at Greyfriars; that seven fellows knew that he had gone out in a boat; and that search was certain to be made, and not given up till he was found. There was comfort in that reflection.

But there was no comfort in the reflection that he was more than likely to have to spend the night in the lonely cavern. At that thought Billy Bunter blinked uneasily into the black shadows deeper in the cave, and the tale of the ghostly smugglers came back unpleasantly into his mind. Already the dim twilight in the sea-cave was deepening into thick dusk; the patch of daylight at the cavern mouth was growing dimmer. The short December day was drawing on to dim evening.

"Oh crikey!" groaned Bunter.

Then he remembered that he was hungry. There was one solace at least for the shipwrecked Owl. He grabbed knife and fork and a cold chicken, and ate, and was comforted!

THE FIFTH CHAPTER.

Struck Down:



HERE we are again!" said Bob Cherry cheerfully.

The boat ran into the little cove at Hawkscliff, and the sail dropped. The Famous Five were rather glad to get out of the keen wind on the sea, shut off now by the cliffs, and Smithy shared their feelings.

Tom Redwing's sunburnt face was glowing with health and satisfaction. He had thoroughly enjoyed the run along the coast, and the keen wind on the North Sea was nothing to the hardy sailor's son. He brought the boat to a mooring, by a shelf of rock in deep water, and made fast.

"Jolly glad to get out of that giddy breeze!" said Frank Nugent, as he jumped ashore.

"The gladfulness is terrific!" murmured Hurree Jamset Ram Singh.

"Did you fellows feel the wind?" asked Tom.

"Just a little," said Harry Wharton, laughing. "We're not all made of iron, old chap. I suppose we shall have to walk back to the school—we couldn't get back against this wind."

"Well, we should have to tack a good bit out to sea," said Tom. "It would be all right; but I don't think the Head would like us to be out at sea after dark."

"I don't think he would," grinned

Bob Cherry. "In fact, I jolly well think he would lick us if he found it out. If we happened to get blown across to Holland or Norway we should be late for calling-over, too!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"The latefulness would be great and the coldfulness terrific!" said Hurree Jamset Ram Singh. "The walkfulness home is the proper caper, my esteemed chums."

"But it was a ripping run!" said Harry Wharton. "You fellows remember the cruise in the South Seas in the *vao*?"

"What-ho!" said Bob. "It was warmer there."

"The warmfulness was preposterously greater," said Hurree Singh. "That was an esteemed and enjoyable voyage. But the esteemed British seas in winter are ridiculously chilly!"

"This way!" said Tom cheerfully, and he led the way by a rugged path up the cliffs.

The juniors came out into the irregular street of Hawkscliff. The tiny village consisted of no more than a dozen or so cabins and cottages. The cottage that belonged to Redwing's father backed against a cliff. Although, since Tom Redwing had inherited his uncle's fortune and become a Greyfriars fellow, hard times were over for him, his father still followed the sea, and Tom spent his holidays in the old cottage when his father was at home.

Tom opened the door, which was on the latch.

"You don't lock up the place?" asked Bob.

Redwing smiled and shook his head.

"Nobody in Hawkscliff locks his doors. Why should they? This is quite off the beat of tramps and vagrants; and there's nothing to pinch, anyhow!"

He threw the door open, and then the window.

The little cottage was clean and tidy as a new pin. Tom Redwing brought in an armful of firewood from the shed and started a fire on the old stone hearth. The Bounder unpacked the sandwiches.

"That fat villain!" he muttered. He was thinking of the well-packed hamper which should have been there.

"Never mind, Smithy!" said Bob cheerfully. "Sandwiches will go down A.I. After that run, I could eat anything, for one!"

"Same here!" said Nugent.

Redwing jammed a kettle on the fire. "Hot coffee in a few minutes," he said.

"Hear, hear!"

Sitting round a blazing fire, disposing of sandwiches and steaming coffee, the Greyfriars fellows felt very cheery. The run in the sailing-boat had brought back to their minds recollections of their holidays in the Pacific, where they had passed several days in an open boat at sea. They talked of that old voyage as they sat round the fire.

"That was a gorgeous time," said Bob Cherry. "We ran into a few little troubles, but it was ripping!"

"The ripfulness was great!" remarked Hurree Singh. "Do you rememberfully recall how warm it was?"

The juniors chuckled.

"Too jolly warm sometimes!" said Nugent. "But it was a great time! We were lucky to get the best of that scamp Soames."

"Soames!" said Harry Wharton thoughtfully. "I've often thought of

that chap, and wondered whether he got away in the boat, or whether—"

He paused.

"Nothing's ever been heard of him, Smithy?" asked Johnny Bull.

The Bounder shook his head.

"My father's heard nothin' of him," he said. "If he got away alive he wouldn't be likely to show up again on this side of the globe."

"Queer sort of a blighter," said Bob ruminatively. "When we used to see him with your father he seemed the perfect manservant; just a top-notch valet and nothing else. And then, on that voyage, he broke out into a sort of jolly old Captain Kidd. I suppose he was about as desperate a character as a man could be; but he had lots of pluck and jolly nice manners. I hope he got away in the boat that time."

"Not likely!" said the Bounder. "What a chance has a man alone in a boat in the middle of the Pacific?"

"Precious little, I suppose," agreed Bob. "He was an awful villain, and I suppose he deserved what he got, whatever it was."

"Alive or dead, he will never show up here in England!" said Smithy. "He would never dare. Which is just as well for Reddy."

"Why for me?" asked Tom.

"You got the fortune your uncle left," said the Bounder. "Soames was after it, and committed a good many crimes in trying to get hold of it. If he's still living, I fancy he would be feeling sore. It was you that beat him all along the line. I imagine he would make himself jolly unpleasant, if you came across him again."

Redwing nodded.

"He might," he agreed.

Leaving his chums sitting round the fire, Redwing went up the little, narrow staircase, to open the windows of the two upper rooms, and let in the sea breeze.

The juniors heard his footsteps in the room above.

The footsteps ceased, and there was a sound of a bump. Bob Cherry glanced up at the low ceiling.

"Reddy's tumbled over something," he said. "Hallo, hallo, hallo! Hurt yourself, Reddy?"

There was no answer from upstairs.

"Reddy!" bawled Bob.

The sailorman's son did not reply.

"Why the dooce doesn't he answer?" said the Bounder, puzzled. He rose, and went to the foot of the little stair. "Reddy, old man!" he shouted up the narrow staircase.

Still there was no word from above.

The juniors looked at one another in astonishment. From the sound they had heard, Redwing had evidently fallen; but it seemed scarcely possible that an accidental fall had rendered him unable to speak.

"What the dickens—" said Harry Wharton.

"I'm going to see!"

The Bounder ran up the stairs. From the little landing at the top two rooms opened. Harry Wharton & Co. remained in a group at the foot of the stairs.

There was a sudden yell from the Bounder.

"Come up, you fellows! Reddy—"

"What—"

"He's hurt!"

The juniors raced up the stairs. The Bounder was standing in one of the bedrooms, staring down at Tom Redwing, who lay on the floor, motionless. He was insensible.

THE SIXTH CHAPTER.

The Unknown!



WHAT the thump!" gasped Bob Cherry.

The Bounder dropped on his knees beside the insensible junior. His face was white and startled.

Redwing was unconscious. There was a dark mark on his temple, where a bruise was forming.

"Somebody was here!" panted the Bounder. "Redwing was struck down—stunned!"

"Great Scott!"

"Search the place!" hissed the Bounder. "I'll look after Redwing. Search the place, and get hold of the brute—"

Wharton put head and shoulders out of the window and stared round. The cliff sloped away from the back of the cottage, steep and rugged. Steep as it was, there was plenty of hold for a clambering man. Wharton's eyes followed the face of the cliff up, and he spotted a clambering figure almost at the top.

"There he is!" he shouted.

The next moment the clambering figure had vanished over the summit of the cliff. All Wharton had seen of him was a rough grey coat and a pair of sea boots.

"Where?" exclaimed Bob.

"He's gone—over the cliff!"

"Who on earth—"

"Goodness knows! Some sneaking

"All serene—any old thing."

Redwing's head was bandaged, and he rose to his feet. He was still a little dizzy, but otherwise quite himself. The sailorman's son had lived a hardy life, and taken a good many hard knocks in his time.

"Did you fellows see anything of the brute?" asked Smithy.

"Just a glimpse of him—clearing off over the cliff at the back," answered Wharton. "A man in sea-boots and a thick grey coat. He had his back to me, of course, and did not see his face."

"We've got to get him!" said the Bounder savagely.

"Not much chance, I'm afraid. He might have gone a dozen different ways once he was on top of the cliff. We'd better find out what he was doing here. There may be something missing."

"Nothing here of any value," said

Billy Bunter rested on his oars and grinned back at his baffled pursuers. "Come back!" shouted Harry Wharton. Instead of obeying, the fat Removite put the thumb of one hand to his nose, and extended his fat fingers. Then he put the thumb of the other hand to the extended little finger, and extended the fingers of that hand. "The fat rotter!" said Wharton. (See Chapter 3).



"He's coming to," said Nugent.

Redwing's eyes opened.

With his head resting on Smithy's knee, he lay dazed and his startled eyes stared up at the juniors.

"What—" he muttered.

He passed his hand over his brow.

"Oh, my head! He struck me—"

"Who?" exclaimed Smithy.

"I don't know, hardly saw him. He was here!" muttered Redwing dazedly. "He struck me down and passed me! Is he gone?"

"Search the place!" shouted the Bounder.

"Come on!" exclaimed Wharton.

The juniors, with excited faces, made a hurried search. The unknown, who over he had been, was no longer in the room, and the other room was found to be empty. On the landing was a little window that was wide open. Outside it was the rugged slope of the cliff against which the cottage was built almost within reach.

"That's the way he went!" exclaimed Johnny Bull.

thief, I suppose. Reddy ought to have kept the place locked up after all."

It was useless to think of pursuing the man up the cliff. Now that he had reached the top, it was certain that he would be out of sight before the cliff could be climbed.

The juniors hurried back to the room where Redwing lay.

Vernon-Smith was bathing his chum's forehead with cold water. Redwing's face was pale, but he was quite conscious now, and quit cool. The heavy blow had hurt him, but his unconsciousness had lasted only a few minutes.

"It's all right, you fellows," he said. "I'm not damaged much! I've had harder knocks than this."

"Better make a cold compress," said Harry.

"Dash it all, I'm not going back to school bandaged!" said Redwing.

"You jolly well are!" said the Bounder. "You'll have a lump there as big as an egg if you don't take care, fathead."

Redwing smiled faintly.

Redwing. "I can't understand it. It's the first time anything of the sort has happened at Hawkscliff. Must have been some tramp, I suppose."

"Look round the place, anyhow, and see if anything is gone," said Nugent.

"Didn't you see his face Reddy?"

"No. I stepped into the room never dreaming, of course, that anyone was here. He must have been here when we came in, and kept quiet. I never dreamed there was anybody in the room. All of a sudden somebody jumped at me and knocked me spinning. That's all I know."

"Well, it must have been a thief, or he wouldn't have been here at all," said Nugent. "He was rooting about the place, of course, when he heard us come in downstairs."

"I can't catch on to it," said Tom. "I've never heard of tramps coming this way. It's a dead-end, and leads nowhere. But I suppose it must have been some tramp. Anyhow, there can't

THE MAGNET LIBRARY.—No. 1,087.



be anything gone. But I'll look round."

"Look at this!" said the Bounder.

At the end of the room was an ancient oak bureau. Every drawer in it was open, and a number of papers had been turned out, as if the bureau had been hastily searched.

"He was going through that!" said the Bounder.

"Looks like it," said Tom. "That bureau belongs to my father, and he keeps papers and things in it. That's always kept locked. The man must have picked the locks to get it open."

Redwing examined the papers that had fallen out, gathered them up, and replaced them.

"He wasn't after these," he said. "He must have fancied there was some money in the bureau, I suppose, though why he should expect to find money in a sailorman's cottage here, beats me."

"You don't think it was a Hawkscliff man?" asked Johnny Bull.

"I know it wasn't," answered Tom promptly. "I know every soul in Hawkscliff, and there isn't anyone I wouldn't trust with the fortune I brought home from the South Seas."

Wharton uttered an exclamation.

"That may be the clue, Reddy. I suppose all the people here know about your bringing home your Uncle Peter's fortune from the South Seas?"

"Yes; it was a nine days' wonder here," said Tom, with a smile. "I had to spin the yarn twenty times, or more."

"That may be it. Somebody who heard of it thought you might have kept some of the stuff in the house—"

"But it's well known I did not," said Tom. "All the stuff was disposed of and the money banked. Your father saw to that for me, Smithy." He shook his head. "After all this time, too, if that was the explanation it would have been tried on before, I should think."

"Well, yes, I suppose so," admitted Wharton.

"Just a tramp sneaking about the place for anything he could find," said Tom. "That must be it. He's given me rather a nasty knock, bother him. But there's not a lot of harm done."

"You'll lock up the place after this?" said Nugent.

"Yes, and leave the key with somebody. Not that it will make much difference. Anybody could force a way in if he liked. Still, I may as well lock it up. Let's get down."

The juniors went back to the lower room. The startling occurrence puzzled them a good deal, but they were driven to the conclusion that the unknown assailant had been some prowling tramp, who had been cornered in the house by the unexpected arrival of the Greyfriars party.

"We could go to the police station about it when we get back," suggested Nugent.

"What's the good?" said Redwing. "We can't give any description of the

man. And there's no harm done. Let it drop."

"He might come back—"

"Not likely, now he knows there's nothing here to pinch."

"Well, I suppose that's so."

"I don't believe it was a tramp," said the Bounder. "A tramp wouldn't be fixed with implements for picking locks, as a rule; and there's precious few tramps could have gone up that steep cliff so quickly as that man went. A sailorman, used to climbing—"

"Well, we're never likely to know," said Tom.

"Whoever he was, he came here specially to search the place," said the Bounder positively, "and it was somebody who'd heard of the South Sea treasure, Reddy, and he was after it, or hoped to find some of it, at least. Ten to one."

"But who—?" said Nugent.

"Goodness knows."

And the problem had to be given up.

THE SEVENTH CHAPTER.

Missing!

JUST in time, you slackers!" said Peter Todd, with a grin.

Greyfriars School was assembled in Big Hall for calling-over, and the doors were about to be closed when seven juniors pushed in. They joined the ranks of the Remove as quietly as possible, though Mr. Quelch, who was about to call the roll, gave them a grim glance. However, they were just in time, and all was well.

"Here we are again!" murmured Bob Cherry. "We had to scud back from Hawkscliff, Toddy, old man. If we hadn't got a lift on the road we shouldn't have done it. But all's well that ends well."

"That esteemed lift was a stitch in time," remarked Hurree Jamset Ram Singh.

"Seen anything of Bunter?" asked Peter.

"Bunter? No. Isn't he here?"

"Conspicuous by his jolly old absence," said Toddy. "I saw him cut out of gates in a most terrific hurry early this afternoon. That was before you fellows went out."

"Oh, we've seen him since then," said Bob. "He bagged our boat at Pegg and got away with Smithy's hamper. If he's eaten all there was in that hamper I dare say he's burst."

Toddy chuckled.

"You've been out in a boat?" asked Hazeldene. "Jolly nice weather for boating, I should think."

"Oh, it was all right. But we walked back. But—"

"Silence!" called out Wingate of the Sixth.

And the murmur of voices died away in the Remove as Mr. Quelch began to call the roll.

There was a pause when he came to Bunter's name.

"Bunter!" repeated the Remove master.

But no fat voice answered "adsum!"

Mr. Quelch frowned, and marked Bunter as absent, and went on calling the roll. After roll-call Tom Redwing was called to his Form master's study to explain his bandaged head. This he did, to Mr. Quelch's satisfaction. But when the Remove master dismissed him Redwing lingered.

"About Bunter, sir—" he ventured.

Mr. Quelch looked at him.

"Bunter is still absent," he said. "Do you know what has become of him, Redwing?"

"No, sir; but I think I ought to mention that he went out in a boat on Pegg Bay, and as he hasn't come back—"

"It is scarcely the time of year for going out in a boat," said Mr. Quelch. "But the day has been very calm. You do not suppose that anything has happened to Bunter, Redwing?"

"Well, no, sir; there was no danger for any ordinary fellow, but Bunter is such a fool—I—I—I mean—" Redwing stammered.

Mr. Quelch smiled faintly.

"I shall bear in mind what you have told me, Redwing, if Bunter does not return soon. You may go!"

Redwing left the study.

There was a cloud on his face when he came into No. 4 in the Remove. Vernon-Smith was there, with a cigarette in his mouth. He threw it into the fire immediately Redwing came in.

"Napper hurting, old bean?" he asked.

"Not much."

"Then what's that worried look about?"

"I'm thinking of Bunter—"

"Oh, blow Bunter!" growled the Bounder. "I've been thinking of him, too. I've got a fives bat ready for him when he comes in."

"I hope he will come in all right," said Tom.

The Bounder stared.

"Why shouldn't he?"

"Well, he's a clumsy ass, and a blind owl," said Tom. "If he let the boat drift into a dangerous current—"

"What rot!" said the Bounder carelessly.

"Well, you see—"

"Rot, I tell you! You don't think that the fat idiot has got himself drowned, do you?" exclaimed the Bounder impatiently.

"Well, no; that's not likely. But he may have got into some trouble. The sea's never safe under the Shoulder, and—"

"Why should he go there?"

"Well, he shouldn't; but he's idiot enough for anything. I'm not sure he could have rowed that heavy boat back when he wanted to, against the tide. More likely to run it ashore somewhere among the rocks. I think he's very likely booked for a night out somewhere along the cliffs."

"Serve him jolly well right!" said Smithy, unsympathetically.

"It's not a light matter, Smithy, for a fellow to be stranded out at night in December," said Tom.

"Oh, rot! He can walk home, I suppose, if he's got ashore. I'm not worrying about Bunter, anyhow. I wish he'd come in, so that I can get going with the fives bat, that's all. I'm going to skin him!"

Redwing said no more.

After prep that evening he went down to ascertain whether Bunter had come in.

In the Rag most of the Remove fellows were discussing Bunter and his absence. It was not the first time, by any means, that Bunter had been late for calling-over. But it was drawing near dorm now, and it was very unusual for fellows to stay out of gates so late. Harry Wharton & Co. could not help wondering whether some accident had happened to the boat the fat





"Come on, you fellows!" yelled Vernon-Smith. "Reddy's hurt!" "What the thump!" gasped Bob Cherry, as he and the other Removites rushed into the bed-room. Vernon-Smith, his face white and startled, dropped on his knee beside the insensible junior. "Somebody was here!" he panted. "Redwing was struck down—stunned!" (See Chapter 5.)

junior had annexed. Redwing was feeling almost certain of it by this time. The story of Bunter's capture of the boat and the hamper was known to all the Remove now, and they had chuckled a good deal over it. But by this time most faces were grave.

"The fat chump!" said Bob Cherry uneasily. "A kid of six ought to have been safe in a boat on a fine day. But you can never tell with Bunter."

"If there's any trouble around, you can depend on Bunter to butt into it," grunted Peter Todd.

"Fellows have been blown out to sea," remarked Skinner. "Fancy Bunter in an open boat at sea—with his jolly old appetite! It's really awful to contemplate!"

"Oh, shut up, Skinner!" said Bob.

"There was a lot of stuff in the hamper," said Vernon-Smith. "Enough for half a dozen fellows, at least."

"Then it will last Bunter a couple of hours!" said Skinner. "After that, he will have to subsist on his own fat, like a polar bear in the winter. Luckily, he's got tons!"

But nobody laughed at Skinner's humorous suggestions. If Billy Bunter was on the sea on a December night, it was no jesting matter.

At nine o'clock, Tom Redwing was called to the Remove master's study. He found Mr. Quelch looking grave and concerned.

Redwing was asked to give particulars of Bunter's proceedings that afternoon, and the Form master listened

attentively. Bunter, according to Redwing's description, had taken the boat for a "lark."

"A very foolish proceeding," said Mr. Quelch. "Still, it is very improbable that anything can have happened to Bunter on a calm day. You do not imagine that he would be unthinking enough to go outside the bay, Redwing?"

"No, sir. But—"

"But what?"

"If he drifted into the tidal current under the Shoulder, the boat may have been cast ashore," said Tom. "It's possible that it might have been carried out to sea on the tide, but more likely that it went on the rocks. In that case, Bunter could have scrambled ashore—but I hardly think he could have clambered over the cliffs, especially as it got dark so early—"

Mr. Quelch compressed his lips.

"Then Bunter may be somewhere along the shore, unable to get away?" he exclaimed.

"I think it's possible, sir."

"If he does not return by bed-time, he will be searched for," said Mr. Quelch. "You may go."

Bunter had not returned by bed-time. Mr. Quelch himself shepherded the Remove to their dormitory and, as they went, they had a view of the Sixth-Form prefects gathering in the hall, in coats and mufflers—some of them looking far from good-tempered. Evidently, there was to be a search for

Bunter, and the prefects had been called upon to undertake it.

After lights out, there was a buzz of voices in the Remove dormitory. Some of the fellows were anxious about Bunter, and all of them were interested and curious. That something had happened to the Owl of the Remove was certain by this time. Many fellows remained awake until a very late hour, listening for some sound of Bunter's return. But by the time the last of the Remove had dropped off to sleep, Bunter had not returned.

THE EIGHTH CHAPTER.

The Phantom of the Cave!



EASTS!"

Billy Bunter, blinking dismally from the darkening orifice of the sea-cave, uttered that ejaculation several times, as if he found solace in it.

He was thinking of Harry Wharton & Co. They were the beasts who were, in Bunter's opinion, to blame for his present disagreeable position.

Exactly how they were to blame, Bunter did not trouble to work out. Certainly, they had not wanted him to bag the boat and hamper. Still, they were the beasts, there was no doubt about that, and William George Bunter was a much-injured youth.

THE MAGNET LIBRARY.—No. 1,087.



The fading of the dim daylight worried Bunter. So long as the daylight lasted, the Owl of the Remove dallied with the idea of pushing the boat down to the receding water and getting afloat again and trying his luck in getting back to the beach. But he had not made the attempt. In the first place, the boat was heavy, and it was doubtful whether Bunter could have shoved it down to the water by his own unaided efforts. It was certain that he could not have done so without great exertion—and exertion never appealed to Bunter.

Then—even if he did get the boat afloat—it was more than doubtful whether he could navigate it in the hurrying cross-currents that raced and tore under the rocks of the Shoulder. Assuredly it would have been a risky experiment for a clumsy fellow like Bunter.

Bunter did not realise that he was a clumsy fellow, but he knew that he hated risks. He had had a lucky escape in being washed up into the sea-cave by the eddying waters—he might have been tossed anywhere on the sprawling chalk rocks that spread out from the foot of the cliff. Having escaped that catastrophe once, Bunter was not disposed to risk it a second time.

But the alternative was to remain in the sea-cave—and that was not an agreeable alternative. So long as it was daylight, it was not so bad for the fat junior—comforted by the knowledge that he would be searched for, and undoubtedly found sooner or later. But as darkness deepened, Bunter blinked with more and more uneasiness into the deep shadows of the cave.

Bunter was an ass, no doubt, but he was not ass enough to believe in ghosts. Still, there was something eerie, uncanny in darkness and solitude in such a place. Absurd stories of spectre smugglers, of the ghosts of revenue officers who had fallen in fierce frays in that very cave, did not seem so absurd as the blackness of night closed in.

The hollow cliff was full of strange sounds—through nooks and crannies there was a wailing of wind which, to a superstitious mind, might easily have seemed the wailing of unquiet spirits. Bunter's mind was not superstitious, but it was funky, which was quite as bad in his present situation.

Reasoning the matter out was not much use. There were no such things as ghosts—and he was alone, so there was nothing to fear from any living being. That was logic. But logic was of no more use in this matter than it generally is.

The blackening depths of the cave, the low, weird wailing of the wind, the hollow echoing boom of the water, had endless terrors for the hapless Owl, though his reason told him that there was nothing to fear.

He left the boat at last, and moved as far as he could towards the mouth of the sea-cave, to keep as near as possible to the glimmer of light that remained.

The sea had gone out a great distance, but the great cave was extensive, and Bunter remembered that at low tide the water still flowed in at the opening. At the lowest point of the ebb, he found the water at his feet, and could go no farther, while the high arch of massive chalk rock still stretched dimly over his head.

From where he stood Bunter could make out a strip of the wide sea and a good portion of the sky, in which stars

were coming out. Even the stars were a comfort, in his horrid solitude.

But the wash and murmur of the water round his boots drove him up the cave again. The tide had turned, the ebb was coming in.

Bunter unwillingly retreated from the advancing water.

The interior of the sea-cave was quite black now, and he had to grope his way.

He stumbled over stones and pebbles and jutting chalk, and at last bumped against something in the dark, with a howl of terror.

But it was only the boat, which he had reached again.

He tramped on past the boat and, with great presence of mind, dragged the hamper after him. If he was going to be a prisoner all night in that awful cavern, he would want all there was in the hamper. So long as some of Smithy's good things remained, there was still balm in Gilead, so to speak.

He heard the boat shifting and lurching as the tide reached it and lifted it. The advancing water pushed it farther and farther. When Bunter looked back, he saw only a tiny hole to mark the opening of the cave, with white foam flashing in the starlight, as the rough waves rushed and roared and broke. The sea, to his scared eyes, seemed like some hungry monster, roaring behind him, stretching out to clutch him. He groped and stumbled farther and farther up the cavern.

"Oh dear!" mumbled Bunter.

He stopped at last, and sat down on the hamper. The hollow boom of the sea filled the cave with noise, and the lapping of the water on the sandy floor had, to his terrified mind, a stealthy sound, like the creeping of some savage animal.

He was beyond high-water mark now, and the sand round him was dry. In the blackness, he could not see the roof or sides of the cave, but he knew that it extended much deeper into the cliff. The sandy floor sloped upward with a gentle incline.

"Beasts!" groaned Bunter.

The echo of his groan in the hollow cave startled him. He blinked round him in the blackness with terrified eyes.

It seemed to the scared Owl that strange and grizzly shapes bodied themselves from the gloom. In the whispering wail of the wind he could hear the voices of the spectre smugglers.

He sat on the hamper quaking.

He had no matches, and could not see his watch or guess the time. But he knew that the greater part of the night must be still before him. How was he going to stand it till dawn?

He would be searched for, but would they think of searching in the sea-cave? Even if they did, could they get a boat round through the lashing waters, always wild and rough when the tide was at the flood? Bunter realised that he had no chance whatever of being found before dawn, and that he would be fortunate if he was found then.

He could have groaned aloud at the thought; but he dared not groan aloud. The echoes were too terrifying.

Suddenly he gave a great start. From the sea came incessant splashing and lapping; but it seemed to Bunter that amid the other sounds, to which his ears were now accustomed, he heard the sound of oars.

He started, and listened intently, his fat heart thumping with hope. If they knew where he was, after all—if they had come for him—

Surely that was the steady plash of oars in the water—coming up the flooded

cave from the sea? Surely that was the grind of rowlocks that accompanied it?

Bunter jumped to his feet.

He was sure that it was a boat! His fat ears could not have deceived him. He could see nothing, but he was sure that a boat was pulling into the sea-cave.

"This way!" shouted Bunter. "Here! Help! Help! This way, you fellows!"

The shout filled the hollow cave with deafening echoes that rolled back like thunder.

Bunter ceased to shout and waited for the booming echoes to die away, and listened.

Silence!

There was no sound—no plash of an oar, no grinding of an oar in a rowlock! Dead silence!

Bunter panted for breath.

"Help!" he yelled desperately. "This way! Here I am—I'm Bunter! Come this way! Help!"

Again the thunder of echoes boomed and died away. Again silence. Back into Bunter's mind came the grizzly story he had heard of a phantom boat manned by phantom smugglers, haunting the scene of their old activities. With a shudder of terror the hapless Owl sank down on the sandy floor of the cave, not daring to call again, and listening—listening with heart-breaking terror for sounds from the darkness.

Silence! The washing of the sea in the mouth of the cavern hardly broke the silence to Bunter's ears, now so accustomed to it. Crouching on the soft sand, he listened—listened! From somewhere in the darkness came a stealthy sound.

Bunter groaned aloud in fear.

He was not alone in the sea-cave! His whole quivering, shuddering body told him that he was no longer alone. Who—what was in the blackness that encircled him? If it was a human being why did he not speak? A living ear must have heard his frantic shouting. Bunter crouched, listening, watching, almost fainting with terror.

From the darkness came a faint ghostly glimmer, a strange phosphorescent light, weird, wild, unearthly. Bunter's glazed eyes fastened on it, fixed with fear. He made out the dim shape of a face—a face of deathly whiteness, with staring eyes, horribly lighted by that faint phosphorescent glow. A moan of terror fell from Bunter's lips, and he sank down on the sand in a dead faint!

THE NINTH CHAPTER.

Found!



"HAT the thump—"

"Here he is!"

"Bunter?"

"Yes."

Wingate of the Sixth flashed the light of his electric torch on the fat figure that lay extended on the beach.

Gwynne and Loder and Walker turned their lanterns on it.

It was Bunter.

For more than an hour the Greyfriars prefects had been searching the shore for the missing junior, shouting his name, without receiving a reply. Some of the fishermen in Pegg had joined in the search. More than a dozen lights glimmered at different points along the dark shore; a dozen voices were calling. And suddenly, unexpectedly, George Wingate had come on the missing Removite.

"Looks as if he's fainted," said Wingate, scanning the fat junior. "He doesn't seem to be hurt."

"What the thump has he fainted for?" growled Loder.

"Goodness knows."

"Here's the boat—I suppose it's the boat," said Gwynne. "There's a hamper in it. The young ass must have drifted ashore when the tide came in."

The Sixth-Formers looked at the boat and into it. Evidently it was the boat in which Bunter had gone out that afternoon. The hamper lay in it, with Chunkley's label still visible. It lay heeled over on the sand, the water lifting it occasionally and bumping it farther ashore. But Bunter was at a little distance from the boat, several yards from high-water mark, which the incoming tide had not yet reached.

"Blessed if I make this out," said Wingate. "He must have drifted ashore and scrambled up the beach, and fallen down in a faint. Nothing to faint for when he was safe ashore that I can see."

"Shamming, perhaps," guessed Loder. "I suppose he knows there's a thumping licking due."

"He's not shamming."

And even Loder, on a closer inspection of Bunter, had to admit that there was no shamming about it. The fat junior was completely unconscious.

"Well, we've found him," said Wingate. "He will have to be carried to the school—"

"We can get a trap at the Anchor!" said Gwynne.

"I suppose he ought to see a doctor," said Wingate, with a doubtful look at the unconscious Owl.

"Nothing the matter with him but funk," said Loder. "He will come to soon enough."

"Well, we'd better get him to the Anchor. Bear a hand, Gwynne—he's not a light weight."

Bunter showed no sign of returning consciousness as he was lifted by the two stalwart Sixth-Formers. Wingate called to old Trumper, who was one of the search-party, and asked him to take charge of the boat, and to tell the others that the search was over. Then he started for the inn. Loder and Walker and the rest started to walk back to Greyfriars.

In a short time the Anchor trap was driving for the school, with Wingate and Gwynne in it, supporting the unconscious Bunter between them. The state the junior was in puzzled them. There was no sign of an injury, and why he had fainted they could not guess; but there was something alarming in his remaining unconscious so long.

"If he hasn't come to by the time we get to Friardale we'll stop at the doctor's," said Wingate.

"Better," agreed Gwynne. "He must have had a fright—if he's been on the sea all these hours—but blessed if I can make out why he should faint after getting ashore."

"It's queer."

The trap rattled on by muddy lanes. The lights of Friardale were visible when Billy Bunter gave the first sign of returning to consciousness. A long, shuddering sigh came from the fat junior.

"He's coming to," said Gwynne.

Bunter's eyes opened.

He stared with a terrified blink, and shivered.

"Keep away! Oh, keep away!" he moaned. "Help!"

"You're all right now, Bunter," said Wingate soothingly. "We've found you—we're taking you back to the school. Buck up!"

"Keep it off!"

"Eh? Keep what off?" ejaculated Wingate.

"The ghost! Oh!"

"My only hat!" said Gwynne. "Has the young idiot been seeing ghosts in the dark?"

"Pull yourself together, Bunter," said Wingate. "Don't be a young ass! You're all right now."

Bunter blinked at him dizzily. He seemed to recognise the two Sixth-Formers at last.

"Is that Wingate?" he gasped.

"Yes, you young ass."

"Oh! Did you find me in the cave?"

"The cave!" repeated Wingate blankly.

ashore. You couldn't have got ashore if you had."

"I was in the cave."

"Eh, what cave?"

"The haunted cave—the big sea-cave under the Shoulder—"

"Fathead!" said Wingate. "We found you on the beach near Pegg—a good mile from the Shoulder. Don't be a goat."

"I—I tell you—"

"Better not talk any more," said Wingate, more gently. He concluded that Bunter was wandering in his mind. "Keep it till we get to the school."



"Do you understand," said the man in the grey coat, "your father is on the high seas, and from what I've learned he will not be home this side of Christmas."

"You scoundrel!" exclaimed Tom Redwing, his eyes flashing. "And why have you played such a miserable trick on me?" "To bring you alone on the cliff this afternoon," came the reply. "But enough said—you are coming with me now!" (See Chapter 14.)

"I—I saw it there—" Bunter shuddered.

"You saw what?"

"The ghost!" shivered Bunter.

"He's wandering in his mind," said Gwynne. "I suppose he's been frightened. Buck up, Bunter."

"I saw it—a horrible face—in the dark," quavered Bunter. "I—I don't remember after that—did I faint?"

"You jolly well did, you fat duffer. You were in a dead faint when we picked you up on the beach."

"On the beach!" gasped Bunter.

"Yes."

"How did I get on the beach?"

"You ought to know that—I suppose you didn't faint before you got

Bunter relapsed into silence. The trap rattled on, and reached the gates of Greyfriars at last. Gosling came out and helped to lift Bunter from the trap. The fat junior stood unsteadily; and Wingate grasped his arm, to help him to the house.

"Take his other fin, Gwynne," said Wingate. "He seems to be all out."

Between the two prefects, Bunter was walked up to the House. Mr. Quelch met them at the door. Loder and the others had already arrived, by short cuts, and had informed the Remove master and the Head that Bunter was found and was being brought back. Mr. Quelch's glance fixed very grimly



on the Owl of the Remove; but it softened as he scanned the fat junior's haggard face.

"We've got him, sir," said Wingate. "He was in a dead faint—and he's been talking queerly since—"

"Take him to his dormitory," said Mr. Quelch. "Go to bed now, Bunter—you can explain matters in the morning. One moment—are you hungry?"

"No, sir," mumbled Bunter.

"Very well take him up, please."

Bunter was taken up to the Remove dormitory. The fat junior had recovered a good deal by this time, though he seemed still in a dazed state. Mr. Quelch switched on the light, and several of the Removites woke up.

"Bunter!" ejaculated Bob Cherry.

"Do not talk to Bunter to-night, my boys," said Mr. Quelch. "He seems to have had some very painful experience, and the sooner he is asleep the better. Wharton, you will see that there is no talking."

"Very well, sir," said Wharton.

Bunter turned in. Mr. Quelch scanned his face rather anxiously as he laid his head on the pillow. Certainly, there seemed to be something unusual about Bunter.

The Remove master decided to stay till Bunter was safely asleep. He had not long to wait. In about two minutes Bunter's deep snore was rumbling through the Remove dormitory. The Form master smiled faintly, put out the light, and left the dormitory: leaving Bunter to snore, and the other fellows to fall asleep again.

THE TENTH CHAPTER.

Bunter's Ghost Story!



LANG, clang, clang!

The rising-bell rang out over Greyfriars in the dim December morning.

In the Remove dormitory fellows opened their eyes and yawned: a steady snore still proceeding from Billy Bunter's bed.

"Well, he got back all right, after all," remarked Bob Cherry, glancing towards the Owl of the Remove.

"Too late for my fives bat," said the Bounder. "But he can have that to-day."

"Hallo, hallo, hallo! Wake up, Bunter!" roared Bob Cherry.

Billy Bunter opened his eyes.

He blinked at the Remove fellows and sat up in bed.

"I say, you fellows—"

"Had a nice day out yesterday?" grinned Skinner.

"Oh dear! it was awful, you fellows," said Bunter. "I say, I'm not going to get up! I'm ill."

"Did you scoff all that was in the hamper?" asked Vernon-Smith. "I've no doubt you feel rather ill, if you did."

"Oh, really, Smithy—"

"Turn out, you fat slacker," said Bob.

"I'm not going to get up," said Bunter. "I'm ill! I've been through frightful things—awful things! Horrible! You fellows tell Quelch that I'm fearfully ill, will you, and I can't get up."

"You can tell Quelch your whoppers yourself, old fat man," said Harry Wharton, laughing.

"I'm feeling awfully bad, you know," said Bunter pathetically.

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"Not so bad as you'll feel presently," said the Bounder. "I've got a fives bat in my study ready for you."

Bunter blinked at him in alarm.

"I—I say, Smithy, if you're going to make a rotten fuss about the hamper, you—"

"I jolly well am!" said the Bounder emphatically.

"I'll pay for it, if you like," said Bunter. "Of course, I intended to pay for it all along. I'm expecting a postal-order—"

"All serene," said Vernon-Smith sarcastically. "If your postal-order comes before morning break, and you square, the licking's off. Otherwise, look out for it."

"I—I say, it—it may not come this morning—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Possibly not!" chuckled Bob Cherry.

"The possibility is terrific."

"The fact is, I'm expecting a lot of Christmas tips," said Bunter. "I'll settle up in a day or two, Smithy. I'll pay for the boat, too—whatever it was you paid to hire it. Nothing mean about me. If I don't get my Christmas tips before we break up, I'll send you a remittance from Bunter Court. I suppose you can trust me!" added Bunter, with dignity.

"Hardly," grinned the Bounder. "But you can trust me to give you the licking of your life in break to-day."

"Beast!"

"Better turn out, Bunter," said Peter Todd. "No good trying to gammon Quelch about being ill. He's too downy a bird."

"But I am ill," protested Bunter. "I've had a fearful time—wrecked in the smugglers' cave, and all that. I—I saw the ghost—"

"The what?" yelled the juniors.

"The ghost of the haunted cave—"

"Oh, my hat!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I—I—I mean, it—it looked like a ghost." In the daylight, the dread vision in the haunted cave was not so terrifying. Superstitious fears vanished at cock crow. Yet Bunter remembered what he had seen in the darkness of the cavern, and the remembrance made him shiver. "I—I say, you fellows, it was awful, you know."

"Go it," said Skinner. "Christmas is the time for ghosts. What sort of a jolly old spook was it?"

"An—awful face—white as—chalk, and—and with horrible eyes, and—and a dreadful, unearthly light—"

"Pile it on, old fat bean."

"I tell you I saw it!" howled Bunter.

"You fat duffer," said Bob. "You got frightened and fancied you saw something. Were you really in the smugglers' cave at all?"

"Yes, you beast!"

"How on earth did you get out, then?" asked Wharton. "You haven't sense enough to handle a boat among those rocks."

"I—I don't know. Wingate said he found me on the beach," said Bunter, recollecting. "But he couldn't have, you know, because I was in the cave."

"Perhaps the ghost carried you out of the cave and dumped you down on the beach," suggested Skinner. "Must have been rather a hefty spook, if he did, to negotiate your weight."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Beast! I—I think I fainted when I saw the ghost, and—and after that I—I—I don't know what happened. I say you fellows it was awful!"

"Must have been for a funk like you in that jolly old cave after dark," said

Skinner. "No wonder you fancied you saw ghosts."

"I say, you fellows, you tell Quelch I'm ill!" said Bunter. "Tell him I want my breakfast in bed. After what I've gone through, I simply can't turn out."

"Fathead!"

The dormitory door opened, and Mr. Quelch looked in. The Remove master had come to the dormitory with the kindly intention of seeing how Bunter was that morning, and telling him he need not get up if he did not feel well enough. Unfortunately, the Owl of the Remove did not see him.

"You fellows pitch it to Quelch," said the fat junior. "Even a beast like Quelch will understand that a fellow doesn't feel fit after what I've gone through."

"Dry up, ass!" breathed Peter Todd, catching sight of the Remove master at the door.

Mr. Quelch had stopped dead there as Bunter's dulcet tones fell on his ears.

"Shan't!" retorted Bunter. "I'm jolly well not going to get up! Tell old Quelch I want my brekker in bed, and tell him I'm not fit for classes to-day. He can send for the doctor if he likes. I'd rather see the doctor than stand old Quelch any day."

"Bunter!"

Mr. Quelch's voice was not loud, but deep.

Bunter jumped.

He blinked round at the figure in the doorway.

"Oh!" he gasped.

"Bunter, what—"

"Oh dear! I—I didn't see you, sir!" stuttered Bunter. "I—I—I wasn't speaking of you, sir! I—I was just saying that—that—"

"I heard what you said, Bunter."

"Oh, lor'!"

"You will rise at once, Bunter! You will come to my study after breakfast," said Mr. Quelch.

The Remove master rustled away. Billy Bunter blinked round dolorously at the grinning Removites.

"I say, you fellows, why didn't you tell me old Quelch was there? Oh dear! That means six!"

"Still feeling too ill to get up?" chuckled Peter Todd. "Do you want to stay in bed till Quelch comes back for you?"

Apparently Bunter didn't, for he turned out at once. As a matter of fact the Owl of the Remove was none the worse for his strange adventure. He demonstrated at breakfast that his appetite, at least, had not suffered.

THE ELEVENTH CHAPTER.

Doubting Thomases!



"BEAST!" murmured Bunter.

He closed Mr. Quelch's door quietly before he ventured to make that remark.

Bunter came away from his Form master's study with a frowning brow.

Mr. Quelch had proved, as he expected, a beast. Anybody, Bunter considered, might have listened patiently and sympathetically to his story of that hair-raising adventure in the haunted cave. Mr. Quelch had listened impatiently, and far from sympathetically. Obviously he had believed hardly a word of Bunter's remarkable statement. Had Bunter possessed a reputation for truthfulness his story would have been rather hard to believe. As his reputation was exactly the reverse, it was

easy to foresee what a hard-headed Form master would think of such a story.

Mr. Quelch made no attempt to conceal his scornful impatience when Bunter described the deathly face he had seen in the sea cave. He did not even believe that Bunter had been in the sea cave at all. As the search-party had found him on the beach a mile from the cave, it certainly seemed improbable.

Bunter, who was telling the truth for once, or more truth than usual, at all events, was naturally indignant. Fortunately for him Mr. Quelch did not suppose that he had invented the whole yarn. He took the view that the fat Owl had been frightened in the dark, did not really remember what had happened to him, and had fancied most of what he narrated.

Bunter rolled out into the quad with an indignant frown upon his fat brow.

Really, it was hard lines not to be believed on the rare occasions when he was keeping somewhere near the facts.

"Hallo! Hallo! Hallo! Licked!" inquired Bob Cherry.

Snort from Bunter.

"After what I've been through even Quelch wouldn't be beast enough to lick a fellow," he said. "But he was insulting—doubted my word."

"Not really?" ejaculated Bob.

"Actually!" said Bunter.

"Now I wonder why?" said Bob gravely. "Has such a thing ever happened before, old fat bean?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You can cackle," said Bunter. "I told Quelch exactly what had happened. He didn't believe me. Sniffed."

"You didn't tell him that ghost story?" exclaimed Harry Wharton.

"Of course I did."

"You had the nerve to spin that yarn to Quelch?" ejaculated Johnny Bull.

"It's true!" howled Bunter. "Of course, I don't exactly believe in ghosts. Still, there was something—an awful face—a hideous, fearful face."

"Was there a looking-glass in the cave?" asked Skinner.

"A looking-glass? No. Why?"

"Well, if there had been you might have seen an awful, hideous face—in the glass, you know."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You silly ass!" hooted Bunter. "It was a ghostly face—white as a ghost with staring eyes, and a—a—a weird sort of light. There was something familiar about it, too—just as if I'd seen it before somewhere."

"That supports the theory of a looking-glass," chuckled Nugent.

"Oh, don't be an ass!"

"And you saw this jolly old chivvy in the smugglers' cave under the Shoulder?" asked Bob, with a grin.

"Y.e."

"We've heard from Wingate that he found you on the open beach near the village. That's a mile from the smugglers' cave across the water."

"I can't make that out," admitted Bunter. "I think I fainted when I saw that awful face. After that I don't remember what happened till I found I was in the trap with Wingate and Gwynne."

"You swam a mile across the bay in a dead faint?" suggested Skinner. "It sounds likely."

"Well, I couldn't have done that," said Bunter.

"Go hon!"

"And the boat was there and the hamper in it. Old Trumper brought the

hamper up to the school early this morning," said Harry Wharton. "If the boat ever was in the sea cave, how did it get out again with you in it, and the hamper, too?"

"And you in a dead faint all the time!" chuckled Nugent.

"It beats me!" confessed Bunter.

"I wonder Quelch didn't beat you, too, if you spun him a yarn like that!" said the Bounder.

"It's all true!" howled Bunter.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"But what really happened while you

A
good
Xmas
yarn is
rare, but
one combin-
ing the season's
mirth with a
thrilling detective
mystery is a marvel.
The Union Jack,
always foremost, again
offers such a seasonable
Sexton Blake story. It is
out
at
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on
Thursday
The Crime of the
Christmas
Tree

were out in that boat?" asked Peter Todd.

"I've told you what happened, you beast!"

"Yes; and now tell us what really happened. Nothing to make a mystery about, is there?"

"Beast!"

"I suppose he drifted about till the tide turned, and washed him home again," said Bob. "As that was long after dark, he was scared out of his fat wits, and fancied the rest."

"That's what Quelch thinks!" growled Bunter. "He actually had the cheek to tell me so!"

"Well, that's how it was, fathead!" said Wharton.

"It wasn't!" roared Bunter. "Think I don't know whether I was in the sea-cave or not? Of course, I—I suppose it wasn't a real ghost; but if it wasn't, it was somebody playing ghost!"

"Such a jolly old spot to play ghost in," said Skinner. "Nobody ever goes there in the winter. You weren't expected yesterday afternoon, I suppose?"

"Of course not, ass!"

"So the Johnny who was playing ghost plays it just to amuse himself; with nobody to see him?"

Bunter made no reply to that. It really did seem improbable, even to Bunter.

"I've got my hamper back," said Vernon-Smith. "Bunter had scoffed about two-thirds of the stuff. Very

likely he went to sleep in the boat afterwards, and dreamed all this. After a gorge like that he was bound to have something like a nightmare."

"It really happened, you know," said Bunter feebly.

"There's something that will really happen," said the Bounder, "and that's the fives bat."

"Beast!"

The bell rang for first school, and the Removites went to their Form-room, grinning over Bunter's story. But William George Bunter was not grinning. He was worried. Broad daylight as it was now, the strange and spectral face he had seen in the sea-cave haunted Bunter's memory; and there was something in that spectral face that touched a chord of his memory—as if that face had looked out of some forgotten episode of the past. But for the life of him Bunter could not remember where he had seen it before—or when.

That the boat must have been rowed back from the sea-cave, across the bay to the beach, where the prefects had found it, was clear. Who had rowed it and landed Bunter on the sand? That was a mystery. The fat junior began to wonder whether his imagination had really deceived him after all, or whether he had dreamed the whole incident.

The other fellows had no doubt about it at all.

And in morning break Bunter had something more than solid ghosts to worry about. That was the Bounder's fives bat. After the feast there was the reckoning; and for the rest of that day the Owl of the Remove felt dismally that the life of a grub-raider was hardly worth living.

THE TWELFTH CHAPTER. Declined Without Thanks.



"Y not?"

Peter Todd looked up as his fat study-mate made that cryptic remark.

It was a week since Bunter's adventure in the sea-cave; and that weird

adventure had been forgotten by the Remove fellows, and almost forgotten by Bunter himself. The Owl of the Remove had grown tired of relating his thrilling experience to unbelieving ears; and the rest of the Remove had grown more tired still.

Besides, Bunter had other matters to think about now. Greyfriars was about to break up for the Christmas holidays.

Bunter had talked considerably, as the Christmas vacation approached, of the great things that were to happen at Bunter Court that vac.

According to Bunter, the Christmas festivities at Bunter Court were to be on a gigantic scale, regardless of expense.

But it was noticeable that, as Christmas drew near, Billy Bunter seemed less and less inclined to go home for the holidays, and enjoy those magnificent festivities on his native heath.

He was prepared to give them all up and accompany Lord Mauleverer to Mauleverer Towers for Christmas; the only fly in the ointment being that Mauly wasn't prepared to let him do it, and made that fact quite plain.

Lord Mauleverer having been drawn blank, Bunter confided to Harry
(Continued on page 18.)



(Continued from page 15.)

Wharton & Co. that he had decided, after all, to spend the vac with his old pals.

The Co. agreed that it was a good idea, and recommended him to go and tell those old pals so, doggedly declining to recognise themselves in the character of Bunter's old pals.

Herbert Vernon-Smith was next on the roll of honour; but the Bounder, so far from jumping at the idea of taking Bunter home with him, hurled a cushion at him, and the matter dropped abruptly.

Peter Todd, his study-mate, was almost Bunter's last resource. But even Peter failed him. Bunter explained that, out of pure friendship, he was willing to spend the vac with Peter, overlooking the fact that Peter, being only a wretched solicitor's son, hadn't a home that was really worthy of Bunter's presence, to ask him to. Peter, so far from being flattered by Bunter's kind patronage actually smote him, and the subject dropped, and Bunter dropped, simultaneously.

After which Bunter gave the matter a good deal of thought. He was thinking it out in the study that evening, instead of doing any prep—he had no time for prep, in the circumstances. Break-up was close at hand now, and the matter had to be settled—unless Bunter was to go home to the glories of Bunter Court, which for some inexplicable reason he seemed unwilling to do.

"Why not?" repeated Bunter, blinking at Toddy through his big spectacles.

"Wandering in your mind?" asked Peter.

"About Christmas—" said Bunter. Peter chuckled.

"You've thought of another giddy victim?" he asked.

"I decline to answer that," said Bunter, with dignity. "My difficulty is to choose. When a fellow has so many friends, all eager for him, it's not easy to decide. I had to turn Manleverer down—he's rather a bore—and as for Wharton and his lot, I've had a Christmas with them, and it was rather rotten. I thought of Smithy; but on the whole a fellow must draw a line somewhere, and I draw it at new-rich outsiders. But—"

Bunter paused thoughtfully.

Peter Todd grinned. He was rather interested to know which Remove man Bunter had selected as the next victim.

"The fellow's a common sort of lout," said Bunter. "But, after all, I'm the man to be kind to the poor."

He blinked at Peter.

"I was thinking of Redwing," he explained. "He's only the son of a common seafaring man—a tarry Jack. Not the kind of fellow for me to sneak to, really. But, after all, I'm no snob. You know I'm no snob. Toddy. Look

at my being friendly with you, Frinstance."

Toddy glanced round for a ruler. Fortunately for Bunter, there was not one within reach.

"Besides, the fellow can behave himself," said Bunter argumentatively. "Whatever he was, he's a Greyfriars man now. We've put some polish on him here. He's got money, too—though nobody would ever guess it from the way he talks. His uncle left him enough to keep him at Greyfriars, anyhow. I hear that his father's coming home from sea for Christmas. Well, they're bound to be doing something—and I might do worse than put in a few days with Redwing."

"Poor old Reddy!" said Peter.

"He will be honoured," said Bunter. "A common fellow like that would naturally be glad to have a gentleman staying with him. In the circumstances, I can make him the offer—as naturally he wouldn't have the cheek to ask a fellow like me to his humble home."

"You're going to put it to him like that?" asked Peter.

"Yes."

"Better guard with your left when you do it!" advised Peter.

"Yah!"

Billy Bunter detached himself from the armchair, bestowed a contemptuous blink on Peter, and rolled out of the study.

He rolled cheerfully along to Study No. 4 to make Tom Redwing that flattering offer.

The Owl of the Remove tapped at the door, opened it, and blinked into the study. The Bounder and Redwing were there, and seemed to be engaged in an argument. Smithy's face was flushed and angry, and Redwing's had a rather distressed look. Bunter grinned. Smithy and Redwing were fast friends and good chums, but life in Study No. 4 was not all harmony.

"Utter rot!" the Bounder was saying, as Bunter presented himself. "The idea of sticking in a place like Hawkscliff all through the vac—"

"My father will be home from sea, Smithy—"

"No reason why you should stay in that forgotten hole all through the holidays. You can come to my place for a few days."

"I can't, old chap."

"You mean, you won't!"

"What a fellow you are for ragging a chap, Smithy!" said Tom patiently. "I can't! I'd like a holiday, and you know I would."

"I don't."

"You do, Smithy," said Tom quietly. "And if my father doesn't get back before Christmas—he may not after all, though he hopes to—"

"Rot! You've got to say 'Yes' or 'No'."

Tom compressed his lips.

"Very well: it's 'No' in that case, Smithy. I've got to keep it open in case my father is home."

Neither of the two juniors had observed Bunter or heard his tap on the door as the argument proceeded. But at that moment the Bounder caught sight of the grinning Owl in the doorway and turned a fierce scowl on him.

"Get out, you fat freak!"

"Oh, really, Smithy—"

"Get out!" roared the Bounder angrily.

"I suppose I can come here and speak to Redwing if I like!" said Bunter. "I haven't come to see you, Smithy! If

you don't mind my mentioning it, I'm rather particular whom I speak to!"

"You fat idiot!"

"What do you want, Bunter?" asked Redwing.

"Just dropped in for a chat about Christmas, old fellow," answered Bunter affably. "You needn't butt in, Smithy! I'm not talking to you! You're going up to Hawkscliff for Christmas, Reddy?"

Redwing nodded.

"Rather a hole to spend Christmas in, isn't it?" asked Bunter.

"That needn't worry you."

"But, don't you see, my dear chap, now you've got money, you're not bound to spend your vac in that rotten hole," said Bunter. "A day or two, perhaps; but you can afford to go to some decent place—some show where they make a point of putting up a jolly Christmas, you know. You can afford it now."

Redwing smiled.

"Thank you for the tip, Bunter! I suppose you mean well," he said, "but Hawkscliff is quite good enough for me, thanks! I hope my father will be home by Christmas."

"Well, you could leave him there," said Bunter. "Suitable for him, and all that. I suppose there's a pub or something!"

Redwing looked at him.

"Shut the door after you, Bunter!" he said quietly.

"I haven't finished yet, old chap," said Bunter brightly. "I don't see what you're grinning at, Smithy. It would be more tactful of you, and in better taste, to clear out of the study while I'm discussing the Christmas holidays with my pal!"

The Bounder chuckled. His ill-humour seemed to have been dissipated as he listened to Bunter, as if he found the fat Owl entertaining—as no doubt he did.

"Now, this is what I think, Reddy," said Bunter. "You've got a rotten home; you couldn't ask a fellow there. But you've got money, only you don't know how to spend it. I'll advise you."

"You needn't take the trouble."

"No trouble at all," explained Bunter. "I'm always kind to the lower classes—fellows of really good family always are; you know. My idea is this: You can afford to pay, and you could get a decent holiday at some place on the South Coast, where they get up Christmas jollities for paying guests, you know. Lots of such places."

"Is that all?" asked Redwing restively.

"I understand you feel a bit doubtful," said Bunter, "but that's all right. With a decent fellow—a gentleman—to keep you company and see you through, you'd be all right. I'll come with you!"

"Oh!" gasped Redwing.

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

"Blessed if I see anything to cackle at!" said Bunter. "I wish you'd shut up, Smithy! You see what I mean, Redwing? I'd come with you and see you through. All you'd have to do, to keep up appearances, would be to keep your eye on me and do everything I do. You'd pass all right."

"Oh, my hat!" said Tom.

"Of course, this diffidence of yours is very right and proper in a fellow of your class," said Bunter. "But, as I said, I'd see you through. I'd let it be supposed that you were a friend of mine. Of course, you wouldn't mention your father or anything of that sort."

he couldn't come—you understand that. I should have to be firm about that."

Redwing rose to his feet.

"Well, what do you say?" asked Bunter. "It's a chance for you to get a decent holiday, in good company, with a well-bred fellow to show you the ropes, and see you through and all that."

"Which way do you prefer to leave a study, Bunter?" asked Redwing.

"Eh?"

"I mean, on your feet or on your neck?"

Bunter blinked at him.

"Oh, really, Reddy—"

"Why the thump don't you kick him out, Reddy?" demanded the Bounder impatiently.

"If you don't mean to accept my offer, Redwing—" said Bunter, with a great deal of dignity.

"Get out!"

"This," said Bunter, addressing space, "is what comes of being kind to the lower classes! It never pays! All I can say is— Yarooooooop!"

Bunter said that quite suddenly as Tom Redwing took him by the collar, spun him round, and whirled him out into the passage.

The Owl of the Remove spun across the passage and brought up against the opposite wall, gasping.

The door of Study No. 4 slammed.

"Owl!" gasped Bunter. "Wow!"

Any fellow but Bunter might have considered Redwing's answer definite. But Redwing was Bunter's very last resource. It was Redwing or Bunter Court for Christmas—neck or nothing!

A minute later the study door opened again, and Bunter blinked in through his big spectacles.

"I say, Redwing, old chap—"

"Buzz off, you fat fool!" snapped Redwing.

For once his placid good temper seemed quite ruffled.

"Don't be waxy, old fellow!" urged Bunter. "If you think that your father ought to come, I'll agree. There, I suppose that's what's worrying you! Let him come with us. I only stipulate that you make him promise to keep sober—"

Bunter had more to say, but he never said it. He was interrupted by a whirling cushion, which landed just under his fat chin and fairly lifted him out of the doorway. There was a crash in the Remove passage.

"Whooooop!"

The door slammed once more. This time it was not reopened. Even Billy Bunter was convinced at last. He picked himself up and rolled away—more than ever convinced that kindness to the lower classes did not really pay. Peter Todd grinned as the fat junior rolled back into Study No. 7.

"Fixed it up with Reddy?" he asked.

Bunter sniffed.

"On second thoughts, I feel that I couldn't stand that low rotter!" he said. "There's a limit, Peter."

"Then you're booked for Bunter Court!" said Peter sympathetically. "What a blow for your relations!"

A remark which William George Bunter did not deign to answer.

THE THIRTEENTH CHAPTER.

News for Redwing!



UZZZZZ!

Mr. Quelch grunted.

It was morning break on the last day of the term.

The Remove master was in his study.

At the end of the term a Form master had plenty of matters on his hands, and the buzz of the telephone bell was neither grateful nor comforting. Morning break gave the Remove a welcome rest from their Form master. It also gave Mr. Quelch a welcome rest from his Form. The raucous note of the telephone-bell interrupted Mr. Quelch's brief period of repose.

He took up the receiver.

"Is that Greyfriars?"

"Yes."

"Mr. Quelch?"

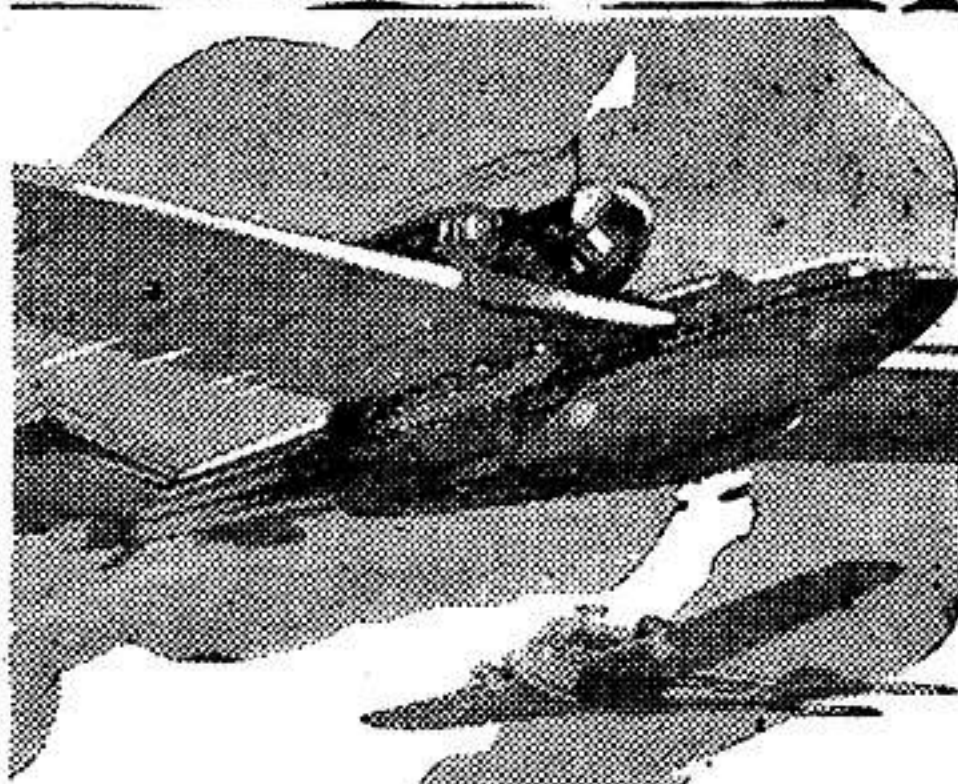
"Mr. Quelch speaking—"

"Excuse me for rousing you, sir," said the voice over the wires. "It's John Redwing speaking, sir."

"Oh!" said Mr. Quelch more amiably. "Redwing's father?"

"Ay, ay, sir!"

(Continued on next page.)



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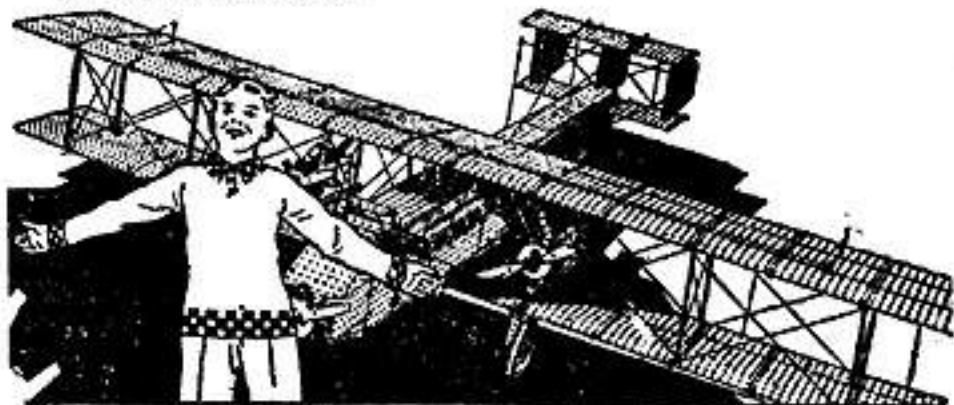
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Mr. Quelch smiled faintly.

He had seen the old sailorman several times, though it was some months since he had seen him last, John Redwing having gone on a long voyage. His son's accession to fortune had made no difference to the bluff, sturdy old seaman. Mr. Quelch had a very great respect for the big, simple seafaring man—more than he had for some of the parents of Remove fellows. His voice became very much softened.

"It is no trouble, Mr. Redwing! I am very glad you have rung me up. Your son is progressing well here."

"That's good hearing, sir!" came the voice.

"He is in every way a credit to my Form, Mr. Redwing. You will be pleased with his term's report, I think. But you had something to say—"

"Ay, ay, sir! I've just got home from sea, and if so be as it would not be against the rules, sir, I'd like to see my boy. I was just wondering, sir, if you'd let him come up to Hawkscliff this afternoon."

"If you would prefer to come to the school, Mr. Redwing, I should be very glad to see you myself."

"Thank you kindly, sir; but I've often thought that it won't do Tom a lot of good for me to be seen much at his big school, sir. If you'd be so kind as to let him come up to Hawkscliff this afternoon for an hour or so—"

"Certainly it can be arranged!" said Mr. Quelch. "I will certainly give Redwing leave from class this afternoon, Mr. Redwing, if you desire it."

"Ay, ay, sir! Thank you kindly! You just tell him his father's at home, sir, and I know he'll be glad to come. P'raps you'll tell him, sir, that I'll walk along the cliffs to meet him on his way?"

"Very good! I will certainly tell him so."

"Thank you, sir."

Mr. Quelch's interlocutor rang off. The Remove master returned to his table and his papers, dismissing the matter from his mind for the moment.

When the Remove came into their Form-room for third school Mr. Quelch called Redwing to his desk as the sailorman's son entered with the rest.

"Redwing, I have had a telephone message from your father," he said.

Redwing's face lighted up.

"My father, sir? Then he is back from sea already?"

"Apparently so," said Mr. Quelch, with a smile. "He desires you to go up to Hawkscliff this afternoon, and I have told him that I will give you leave from class."

"Oh, thank you, sir!" exclaimed Tom.

"Mr. Redwing mentioned that he would walk along the cliffs to meet you," said Mr. Quelch. "You may leave here immediately after dinner, Redwing. You will be back for lock-up, of course."

"Certainly, sir."

Tom's face was very bright as he went to his place. He had expected his father home from sea by Christmas, but it had not been certain. Now it was certain, and he rejoiced accordingly.

The Bounder gave him rather a sarcastic look as he dropped into his seat.

"That settles it about the vac?" he asked.

"Yes, Smithy."

"You won't come with me for Christmas, then?"

"I can't, Smithy," said Tom, his brow clouding. "A few days, perhaps, if you wanted me—"

THE MAGNET LIBRARY.—No. 1,087.

"That fat fool Bunter was right on one point," muttered the Bounder. "You can afford something better than that old cottage stuck on a cliff, Redwing. You're not poor now."

"It's my old home, Smithy—and my father's. Father wouldn't give it up for anything."

"Oh, rot!"

"It's only a cottage, Smithy," said Tom, with a faint smile; "but my people have lived there hundreds of years—there have always been Redwings at Hawkscliff, and we're proud of it in our own way. We're part and parcel of the place. It's good enough for my father and me."

"Rubbish!"

Mr. Quelch glanced round, and Redwing said no more. The Bounder was in an ill-humour, and Tom was glad that the discussion ended.

At dinner that day Redwing's face was very bright. Bob Cherry tapped him on the shoulder when the Remove came out from the dining-hall.

"Hallo, hallo, hallo! Enjoying life?" he asked, with a grin.

Redwing laughed.

"Well, rather!" he said. "You heard what Quelch told me in the Form-room?"

"Yes—and I'm jolly glad!" said Bob.

"Dad's been away at sea for a jolly long time—all this term and the term before," said Tom. "I hoped he would get home for Christmas, but I didn't expect him so early as this. It's rather jolly!"

"Gratters, old bean!" said Bob.

"Like a chap to walk with you part of the way? I could come as far as Pegg, or a bit farther, and get back in time for class."

"I'd like it no end."

"Done, then!"

Tom Redwing lost no time in getting ready to start. Bob Cherry walked down to the gates with him, and the Bounder joined them at the gates. Smithy was not in the best of tempers, and he gave Bob a rather sour look.

"I thought you might like a pal to walk with you part of the way, Reddy," he said. "But you seem to have got one already."

"Come along, Smithy, and don't be an ass," said Bob unceremoniously.

"Yes, come on, old chap!" said Tom. And the Bounder came.

The three juniors walked down the lane together. On the cliffs above Pegg, Bob Cherry stopped.

"We shall have to get back now, Smithy," he said. "Just about time to get in for school."

"I'm going on a bit," said Smithy.

"You won't have time to get back."

"Oh, I'll chance that!" said the Bounder carelessly.

"Better get back, Smithy," said Tom.

"You don't want to wind up the term with a row with Quelch."

"I don't mind," said the Bounder coolly.

"Look here, old chap—"

"Are we standing here, or going on?" asked the Bounder sarcastically.

"I'm going back," said Bob Cherry.

"You're an ass if you don't come, too, Smithy. Ta-ta, Reddy, old bean!"

And Bob swung round and started back to the school.

Redwing paused.

Vernon-Smith was in one of his wilful and stubborn moods, and Redwing knew from of old how useless it was to argue with him when he was in that mood.

"Coming on?" said the Bounder.

"You'd better go back, Smithy," said Redwing. "You know how Quelch

cuts up rusty if a fellow stays out without leave."

"Let him! If you don't want my company—"

"You know it's not that. But—"

"Come on, then!"

"All right."

The two juniors pursued their way.

Bob Cherry reached Greyfriars in time to dodge into the Remove Form-room for classes. The absence of Vernon-Smith was noted at once by Mr. Quelch. He duly made a note of it, with an expression on his face that boded no good to the Bounder when he should turn up at last.

THE FOURTEENTH CHAPTER.

The Hand of An Enemy!



TOM REDWING and the Bounder went on their way by the rugged path along the cliffs that led to Hawkscliff. It was lonely. Even in summer there were few wayfarers by

that lonely path, and in winter it was always solitary. Some of the brightness had faded out of Tom's face with the thought that trouble awaited his chum when he returned to the school. He walked in silence, and the Bounder was silent and frowning.

It was strange enough that a fast friendship had ever been formed between the millionaire's son and the son of a seafaring man, and it was a friendship that had had many ups and downs. The Bounder's petulant and exacting temper made it difficult for any fellow to pull with him for any length of time, and all Tom's patience and placid good-humour had been called upon many times to prevent a breach.

But he was very anxious that nothing should ever happen to break that friendship. The Bounder had chummed with him when he was a scholarship boy, caring nothing for his poverty, and Tom did not forget that. But their thoughts, their tastes, and their views were poles asunder, and all the Remove had wondered why they remained chums.

"It's rot!" said the Bounder at last, breaking a long silence.

"What is, Smithy?" asked Tom quietly.

"Sticking in a dead-and-alive hole like Hawkscliff all through the vac. You've got money now, and you know how to spend it."

"Bunter's told me that," said Tom, with a smile.

"You'd have a good time if you came home with me," said Smithy sulkily. "You're my pal, and you ought to come."

"You see, old chap—"

"Put in a week at home. That will be all right. Then put in the rest of the vac with me."

"My father's been away for six months, Smithy. A sailorman's son doesn't see much of his father at any time."

"No need for him to go to sea at all, now you've got money in the bank," grunted the Bounder.

Tom shook his head.

"Father will never live on that, so long as he can follow the sea," he answered. "I'd like him to, of course; but he never was a man to eat the bread of idleness. I don't think he could if he tried. Besides, the uncle who left me his money was my mother's brother, and father doesn't think he has any claim on it."

"The seafaring men seem to grow up with jolly particular ideas in their heads at Hawkscliff," jeered the Bounder.

Tom compressed his lips a little and made no reply.

Vernon-Smith came to a halt at last.

"Look here, Reddy—"

"It's more than time you turned back, Smithy," said Tom. "You've missed a whole class already. Quelch will be waxy."

"Hang Quelch!" said the Bounder irritably. "After to-morrow, we shall be shut of him, anyhow, for a time."

"No good getting his rag out on the last day of term."

"Oh, rats! Look here, Reddy, I want you to come to my place for the vac," said Vernon-Smith. "Put in a week at home, and then come along to me. That will suit your father all right, if you tell him."

"A few days, Smithy—"

"Oh, cut that out! If you don't come I'll ask Skinner; he won't turn up his nose at it."

"You must suit yourself, old chap," said Tom.

"Is that all you've got to say?" snapped the Bounder.

"That's all."

"Then you can go and eat coke! Leave me alone for the vac, and leave me alone next term at Greyfriars, too," said the Bounder savagely. "I'm fed-up with you!"

The Bounder turned on his heel and walked away, with a scowling brow. Tom Redwing sighed, and pursued his way.

He looked back once, but the Bounder did not turn his head. In a few minutes he was out of sight.

Redwing swung on his way.

He had no doubt that Herbert Vernon-Smith would come out of his sulks by the following day. But a dispute with his chum troubled him, and clouded the brightness of the day for him. If only Smithy would have been a little more reasonable— But in the widely different circumstances of the two strangely-assorted chums there were certain to be difficulties, and Tom knew how to be patient.

The clink of a falling stone on the rugged path made him look round quickly. Mr. Quelch had told him that his father would come along the cliffs to meet him, and Tom was rather surprised that he had not met him before this, as he was now nearly half-way to Hawkscliff.

The path at this point ran through a hollow on the summit of a chalk cliff, with great masses of weather-worn chalk rising on either side, shutting off the view of the sea on the one hand and of the inland country on the other. It was one of the loneliest places along the coast. Great craggy boulders were scattered about, through which the rugged path wound its way.

Tom looked about him in surprise. The loose stone that had fallen must have been dislodged by the foot of some wayfarer, for there was little wind. Yet he could see no one.

If it had been his father, John Redwing would have been following the path and would have been in sight. But there was no one in sight.

Redwing concluded that someone was clambering over the cliff, among the chalk rocks, and he went on his way. Again the clink of a slipping stone was heard, and he stopped and stared about him. It seemed to him that he was being followed by some person who was keeping out of sight among the rocks.

But Redwing smiled at the thought. A



"You are my prisoner now," said Soames, as he drove the boat-hook against a rock, and the boat glided into the deep gloom of the sea-cave. Redwing shivered in his bonds as the vast arch of rock shut out the gleam of the stars. "You will be searched for," went on Soames, "but you will not be found."

(See Chapter 16.)

footpad in broad daylight was unlikely, especially in such a place. But, somehow, there came back into his mind the recollection of the unknown who had searched the cottage at Hawkscliff, and who had struck him down and escaped. Smithy had believed that that was not some chance tramp, but an enemy who had some purpose to serve. If he was being followed now—

But Redwing dismissed the thought. Even if Smithy had been right, no enemy could be near him now. No one but his father could have known that he would be following that lonely path that afternoon.

Redwing quickened his steps a little, however. In spite of himself, a feeling came over him that there was danger on the lonely cliff. At all events, it was certain that someone was at hand who was intentionally keeping out of sight.

He was now in the most solitary spot on the cliffs, and, unless John Redwing was coming along from Hawkscliff, there was no help for miles, if danger threatened.

Suddenly there was a sound of scrambling footsteps on the rough chalk

behind him, and Tom swung round and faced back.

A man in a grey coat and sea-boots had leaped out from the rocks, and was on the path now, coming towards him at a run.

Redwing fixed his eyes on the man.

The thick grey coat and the sea-boots reminded him of Wharton's description of the unknown at the cottage. The man's face was almost completely hidden by a thick brown beard and moustache and a large pair of horn-rimmed spectacles. So far as he knew, Tom had never seen the man before.

"Stop!"

The voice was not loud, but very sharp and clear. There was a familiar ring in its tones to Redwing's ear.

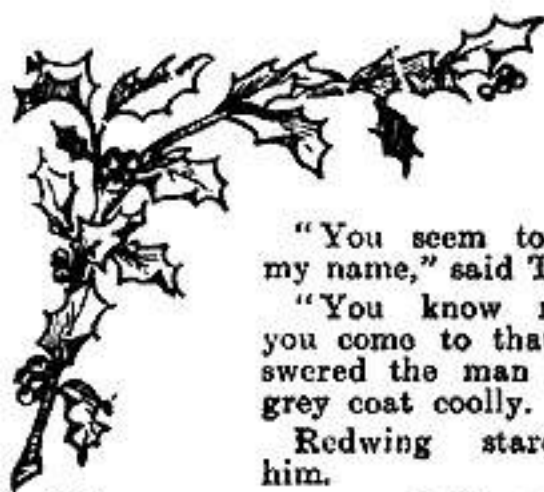
Redwing had already stopped, and he stood on his guard. The man looked like a seafaring man, and certainly not like a footpad. But that he intended hostility Redwing knew now.

"What do you want?" he asked quietly.

A soft laugh came from under the thick beard.

"You, Tom Redwing!"

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"You seem to know my name," said Tom.

"You know me, if you come to that," answered the man in the grey coat coolly.

Redwing stared at him.

"I've never seen you before, that I know of."

"And you did not expect the sea to give up its dead," said the bearded man, in a tone of bitter derision. "You have sailed the seas with me, Tom Redwing—the South Seas, my lad. But there is no time for talk now; we can talk later. We have much to speak about."

"Keep your distance, whoever you are," said Tom, between his teeth. "If you think I am alone here you are mistaken. My father is coming along this path and may be here any minute."

The bearded man laughed again.

"Your father is on the high seas, my boy."

"He has returned—"

"He has not returned. It was I who telephoned to your Form master at the school this morning."

Tom started.

"You!" he exclaimed.

"I!" assented the man in the grey coat. "Do you understand now? Your father is on the high seas, and from what I have learned of his ship he will not be home this side of Christmas."

"You scoundrel!" exclaimed Tom, his eyes flashing. "And why have you played such a miserable trick on me?"

"To bring you alone on the cliff this afternoon. But enough said, you are coming with me now."

The bearded man came at the schoolboy with a rush. Redwing, with set teeth, struck out at him.

The blow landed on the bearded face, and for a moment the man staggered. But the next moment his grasp was on the junior, and they were struggling. Redwing fought fiercely; but he was a boy against a man, and he was hopelessly overmatched, sturdy as he was.

He went with a crash to the ground, and a sinewy knee was planted on his chest, the bearded face glaring down at him.

From an inside pocket of the grey coat the man snatched a soft pad. It was pressed on the schoolboy's face.

A sickly odour filled Redwing's nostrils. He knew that it was chloroform, and he struggled madly. But a hand of iron held the pad there, in spite of his furious resistance, and his senses swam. The bearded face that bent over Tom danced before his whirling vision. But even in those moments, as his senses were fleeing, knowledge came to him. In the struggle the thick beard had been dragged aside—the horn-rimmed spectacles had slipped from their place. A hard, clear-cut, smooth-shaven face was partly revealed—only partly, but Redwing knew it now.

"Soames!" he panted.

And then his senses fled, and he knew nothing more.

ANOTHER FEAST of FUN and FICTION in this week's SPECIAL ENLARGED CHRISTMAS NUMBER of the "GEM."

THE MAGNET LIBRARY.—No. 1,087.

THE FIFTEENTH CHAPTER.

Waiting for Redwing!

LSAY, you fellows—"

"Bow-wow!"

"Smithy's looking like a demon!" chuckled Billy Bunter, as he blinked into Study No. 1 in the Remove.

"Quelch gave him six."

"Well, he asked for it," said Bob Cherry.

"The askfulness was terrific," remarked Hurree Jamset Ram Singh. "The esteemed and ludicrous Smithy out classes, and the ridiculous Quelch was naturally infuriated."

"Here he comes!" grinned Bunter.

There was a heavy tread in the Remove passage. Herbert Vernon-Smith came along the stairs. Harry Wharton & Co. glanced out of the open doorway as he passed.

If the Bounder did not, as Bunter had said, look like a demon, at all events, he looked exceedingly savage and angry.

"Hallo, hallo, hallo!" called out Bob Cherry.

"Coming into tea, old bean?" called Harry Wharton.

The Bounder paused for a moment to scowl into the study.

"No!" he answered.

Then he tramped on.

"The likfulness causes a terrific deterioration in the manners of the esteemed Smithy," remarked Hurree Singh.

"He, he, he!" came from Billy Bunter. "Looks as if he's getting ready for a merry Christmas! He, he, he!"

There was a loud slam along the Remove passage. Smithy had gone into his study. The closing of his door, with a terrific bang, apprised all whom it might concern that the Bounder was in a bad temper.

"Sulky brute, you know," said Bunter. "You don't want a grumpy beast like that to tea, you fellows. I'll come in, if you like."

And, without waiting to ascertain whether the Famous Five liked, Billy Bunter rolled in.

Frank Nugent picked up a cushion, and dropped it again.

"Last day of term," he remarked.

"It's the last time—let's stand Bunter."

"Oh, really, Franky—"

"Only don't jaw," said Nugent.

"Beast! Pass the cake!"

Nugent grinned, and passed the cake. Bunter did not need an enthusiastic welcome to a tea-party; but he needed a good tea. There was a good tea, so Bunter was satisfied.

"Any more cake?" he inquired, when the festive board was cleared.

"No."

"Anything in the cupboard?"

"Nothing."

Bunter rose from the table.

"I don't call this much of a spread," he remarked. "Measly, if you don't mind my mentioning it. You fellows all going off together to-morrow?"

"The togetherness will be terrific, my esteemed Bunter."

"I've turned that fellow Redwing down," said Bunter.

"Eh?"

"I was thinking of taking him up for Christmas. You know my kind and generous nature. But I felt that it was rather too thick. A fellow has to draw a line somewhere. As the matter stands, I shall be free for the vac after all," said Bunter. "I've told Toddy I can't come with him. His pater's a solicitor, you know—one of those stuffy Bloomsbury houses—you can smell the Christmas goose cooking all over the

house. He, he, he! Not in my line! I've decided, after all, to stick to my old pals. I was afraid at first that I couldn't manage it, Wharton! But it's all right, old fellow, I'll come."

The captain of the Remove made no reply to that in words. He rose from his chair, took Billy Bunter's fat ear between a finger and thumb, led him to the door, twirled him out, and closed the door after him.

"Beast!" came a howl through the keyhole.

And Bunter departed, leaving his old pals grinning.

There was no prep that evening, and most of the Remove gathered in the Rag.

"Redwing's not back," Bob Cherry remarked. "He was to be back at lock-up. But it's a jolly long way from Hawkscliff."

The Bounder came into the Rag later and looked round, evidently in search of his chum. Smithy's face was still clouded; but it was not the licking from Mr. Quelch that was worrying him. The hardy Bounder had long ago recovered from that.

"Hasn't Redwing come in, you men?" he asked.

"Haven't seen him," answered Wharton.

The Bounder went to the window and stared out into the quadrangle. A keen wind from the sea stirred the leafless branches of the elms, and wailed round the old roofs and chimney-pots of Greyfriars.

The Bounder was not in a happy mood. He had parted from his chum in anger, and his angry unreasonableness had clouded Tom's happiness that day. As was usually the case, the Bounder had repented of his irritable petulance, and he was ready to make amends, in a rather sulky way, when Redwing came in. Certainly he did not want to part with Tom on bad terms when the fellows left Greyfriars the next day for the Christmas holidays. But Redwing had not come, and the hour was growing late. There was a sing-song going on in the Rag, and the cheery noise irritated the Bounder.

"Redwing's jolly late," he said, joining Harry Wharton by the fire.

"May be staying the night up at Hawkscliff," said Harry.

"Quelch told him to be back by lock-up."

"Might have telephoned."

The Bounder nodded.

"I suppose that's possible. Nothing can have happened to him, anyhow."

"What on earth could have happened?" said Wharton, with a stare.

"It's rather a rocky path over the cliffs, but Redwing knows it like a book."

"There was that man rooting about his place last week—"

"Some tramp."

"I don't believe it was a tramp," grunted the Bounder. "Still, I suppose he's all right. Especially as his father's home. I wish he'd come in, though."

"He's all right," said Harry. He looked at the Bounder rather curiously. "You haven't been ragging with Redwing, have you, Smithy?"

"Oh, you've guessed that, have you?" grunted Smithy.

"You look like it! Dash it all, you might keep your temper on the day Tom's father comes home from sea, and just before break-up for Christmas, too!" said Wharton warmly.

"You take it for granted it was my fault!" sneered Vernon-Smith.

"I jolly well know it was!"

The Bounder shrugged his shoulders.

"Well, it was, if you want to know," he said, rather unexpectedly. "It always is, I suppose. But it was only a few words, and Redwing never bears a grudge. I wish he'd come in."

But Tom Redwing did not come in.

THE SIXTEENTH CHAPTER.

In the Haunted Cave!

TOM REDWING opened his eyes.

Over his upturned face stretched the dark winter sky, gleaming here and there with stars like points of fire in the blackness.

The cold wind of the sea was on his face.

He stirred, and tried to rise.

His head ached, there was a sickly taste in his mouth. He remembered the chloroform-pad and shuddered. He could not rise. A strong cord was bound round his arms, another round his legs, and he lay helpless. He could feel that he was in motion, and he was not long in discovering that he lay in the stern of a boat.

He struggled at last into a half-sitting position, leaning back in the stern seat. He stared dizzily at the man who sat at a pair of oars, facing him.

It was the man in the thick beard, the grey coat, and sea-boots. He was rowing steadily, steering with the oars, and the boat glided among great chalk rocks and ridges over which the sea foamed. Beyond the oarsman rose a mighty mass against the sky, blotting out the stars; and Tom knew the Shoulder, the great cliff familiar to his eyes since childhood.

"Soames!" he muttered.

He gazed almost spellbound at the man.

The beard, he knew, was false. Soames dared not show himself in his true colours in England, after those wild and desperate days in the South Seas, when he had fought and striven to rob Redwing of his uncle's fortune.

But Redwing knew him now.

His amazement was almost stunning, to see before him, to know that it was the sea-lawyer of the Pacific who had attacked him and seized him. Even now he could not penetrate the man's motive. Revengeful Soames might be—his defeat had been bitter and complete. All his schemes had failed, and he had fled a ruined man—as all believed, to death in an open boat on the ocean. Yet Soames was no man to devote time and energy to so futile a thing as vengeance. There was some other motive, though Redwing could not guess what it was.

"You've come to." Soames' voice was the quiet, smooth voice Redwing remembered from of old, when the man had been Mr. Samuel Vernon-Smith's valet. "Keep quiet, my young friend. There is no danger of anyone hearing you if you call; but I take no risks. At the first cry I shall stun you with an oar. That is a warning."

"Where are you taking me?"

"Cannot you see?"

"There is no landing at the foot of the Shoulder," said Tom. "You will dash the boat to pieces."

"You know better, my boy. I am persuaded that you have heard of the sea-cave there."

"The sea-cave?" repeated Tom.

"You have not forgotten it," smiled Soames. "It was from the talk of you and your friends on Mr. Vernon-Smith's yacht, last year, that I first heard of it. Here I searched for it and found it. But I do not doubt that it is better known to you than to me."

"The sea-cave!" said Tom again.

"Yes, I know it well, but I did not suppose you knew—" He stared at Soames. "You have been hiding in the sea-cave?"

"A safe headquarters in the winter," smiled Soames, still pulling steadily at the oars. "In the summer there may be trippers, but in winter even the fishermen carefully avoid those rocks and shoals. I have been disturbed there but once, and that was by some chance."

"Bunter!" said Tom.

He knew now.

"That fat fool!" assented Soames. "But after his experience in the haunted cave, he is not likely to come there again, I think."

"It was you—"

"A little chalk rubbed on the face, and a little phosphorus," said Soames. "I had all in readiness, to play up to the legend of the haunted cave, if there should be intruders."

"Then Bunter was telling the truth!" muttered Tom.

"He was not believed?" Soames laughed. "I suppose not. All the better! It was as well for him that he was a fool who could be frightened. Otherwise, Bunter might have become a ghost himself. He was in a more dangerous place than he knew. When I rowed into the cave and found him there—" Soames paused. "He was not believed, you say?"

"No. He was found on the beach, and the fellows believe that he fancied the whole thing. I thought so. It was you, I suppose, who took him in the boat and left him on the beach?"

"Quite. The fat fool had fainted, and a touch of chloroform prolonged his unconsciousness as long as was needed. It might have been safer for me to sink him in the sea, but—" Soames shrugged his shoulders.

The boat was gliding now into the rugged rocks that half hid the opening of the sea-cave. Soames stood up, a boat-hook in his hand, and fended off from the chalk. The boat slid into the passage that led up to the flooded cave.

Tom Redwing breathed hard.

"Why are you bringing me here, Soames?" he asked very quietly.

"You are my prisoner."

"I know that. But why?"

"You should guess that."

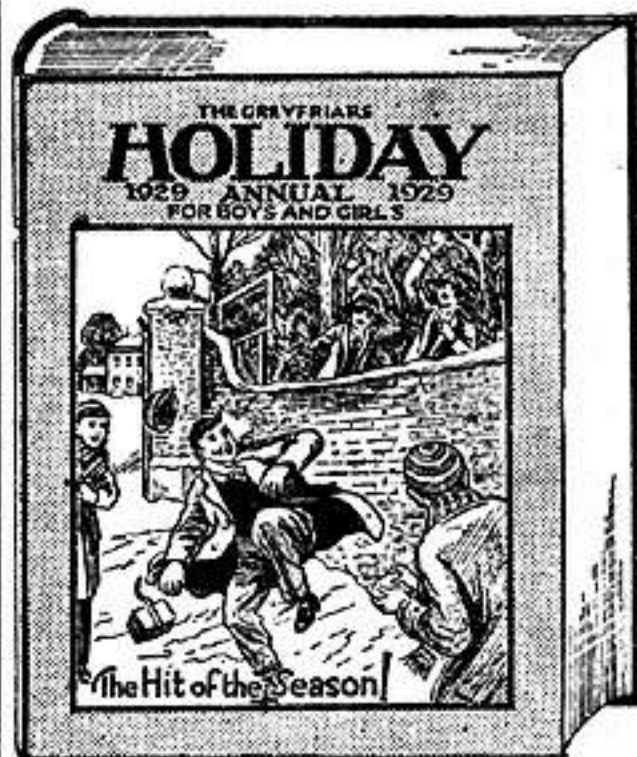
Tom gave a start.

"It was you in my father's cottage that day. It was you who struck me down—"

"Exactly. I found nothing there—nothing but your father's papers, which I took the liberty of glancing at," said Soames calmly. "I did not expect to

(Continued on next page.)

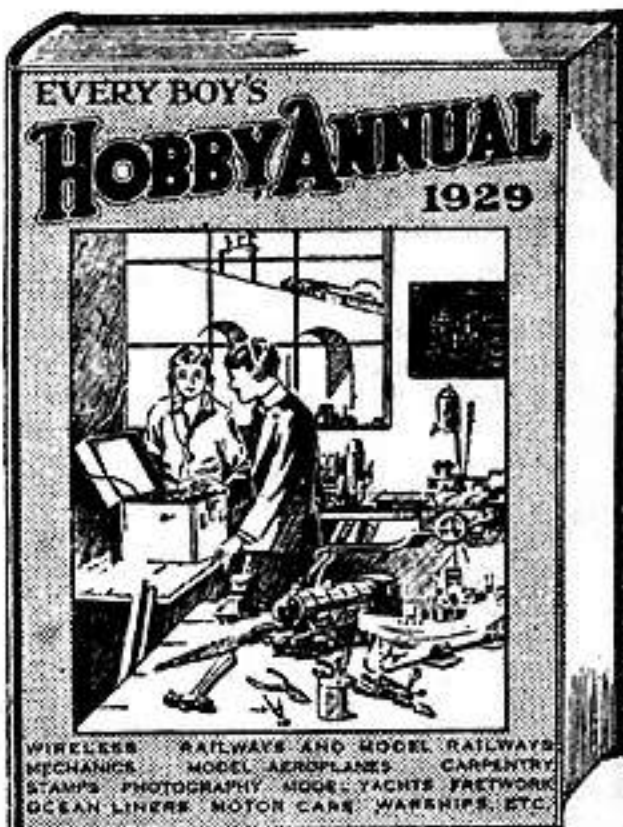
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find Black Peter's treasure there—only information that would help me to get my hands on it. I learned a good deal. Your arrival with your friends interrupted me. Had you come alone, you would have seen the interior of the sea-cave earlier. But with so many on the spot—” He shrugged and did not finish.

“You must be mad,” said Redwing, in a low voice. “My uncle's fortune has been turned into money. It is safely banked. You can never hope to touch it. Did you fancy it would be kept in the shape of pearls and jewels?”

“No. I came to seek what I could find,” answered Soames. “Had the treasure still been in a form which I could handle and seize, I should not have troubled you, Redwing. It was not, and so you are necessary to my plans. You defeated me; you brought me to ruin—you and your friends. You have no mercy to expect at my hands.”

“I ask for none,” answered Tom dis-

dainfully. “But you must be mad. It will soon be found out that the telephone message was a trick. I shall be searched for—”

“At Hawkscliff,” said Soames. “Your friend walked with you half-way. The search will not begin nearer than that. Five miles from here, my young friend. Who will suppose that you were rowed five miles on the sea on a December night?”

Redwing's heart sank

It was true enough. Who among his friends was likely to imagine for one moment that he was hidden in the sea-cave on the edge of Pegg Bay? The search for him, when it began, would lie somewhere near Pegg.

“But—” he said.

Soames drove a boathook against a rock, and the boat glided into the deep gloom of the sea-cave. Overhead, the vast arch of rock shut out the gleam of the stars.

Redwing shivered.

“You will be searched for, but you will not be found.” Soames was invisible now in the gloom, and his voice came eerily from the darkness. “It will be supposed that you fell from the cliffs, probably—on such a path such accidents must have happened before now. For days I have been watching your cabin at Hawkscliff, thinking that you might come there alone; but you did not come. I could leave it no longer. I am aware that your school breaks up for Christmas to-morrow. As your father has not returned, you would no doubt have gone away with your friends. I guessed as much, at all events. No doubt with Vernon-Smith.”

“Very likely,” said Tom.

Soames laughed.

“I have been in the house of Mr. Vernon-Smith, as his valet,” he said. “It is a crowded mansion. It would have been hard to carry out my plans there. But that message on the telephone was a simple trick, and I had no doubt that it would be successful. Indeed, it is probable that you will not be searched for at all—as they believe that you are with your father, and the school breaks up for the holidays to-morrow. What more natural than to suppose that you have stayed at home, instead of returning to Greyfriars for the last day?”

The boat jarred on the soft sand.

All was blackness in the cave. Redwing could see hardly an inch from his face.

“Step out.”

Redwing felt the cord about his feet loosened. His legs were free, and he stumbled to his feet. A strong hand grasped his shoulder and guided him, and he stepped out of the boat.

“Stand there! I warn you not to move about with your hands tied. The place is full of pitfalls, and you may easily break a limb, or your neck.”

“I know.”

Tom stood still.

He heard the unseen man dragging the boat out of the water, high up on the sand that made a floor of the vast cave.

Then the hand fell upon his shoulder again.

“Come!”

Tom set his teeth

“Then you intend to keep me here?”

“That is a foolish question. You cannot fancy that I have brought you here for a jest.”

“Until when?”

“Until the fortune of your uncle, Black Peter, is in my hands!” came the cold, dispassionate voice from the darkness.

“That is impossible—you must know it is impossible!”

“In that case, I am sorry for you,” said Soames, “for you will never see the light of day again, and there will be one more ghost to haunt the haunted cave. But enough of words. Come!”

Tom Redwing was led away into the darkness, stumbling on the thick sand and rugged chalk. The deep murmur of the sea died away behind him, and as it faded into silence, it seemed to Tom that hope faded with it. In the hands of a relentless enemy, hidden from the light of day and all human eyes in the depths of the sea-washed cave, it was a black Christmastide that lay before Tom Redwing.

THE END

(You'll find heaps of thrills in “THE CLUE OF THE CORAL KNIFE!” next week's magnificent story of the Chums of Greyfriars. Order early, boys.)

Five Minutes with Your Editor!

HERE we are again, chums, all “Jolly, Merry and Bright,” as young Dicky Nugent would say, for the spirit of Christmas is here, and with Christmas all faces radiate happiness and good fellowship. If this particular number of the MAGNET has helped to “keep the ball rolling”—and I somehow think that it has—then the time I and others have given to it has been well spent.

Talking of time, you won't think me mean for labelling this Chat “Five Minutes with your Editor,” will you? But, of course, you

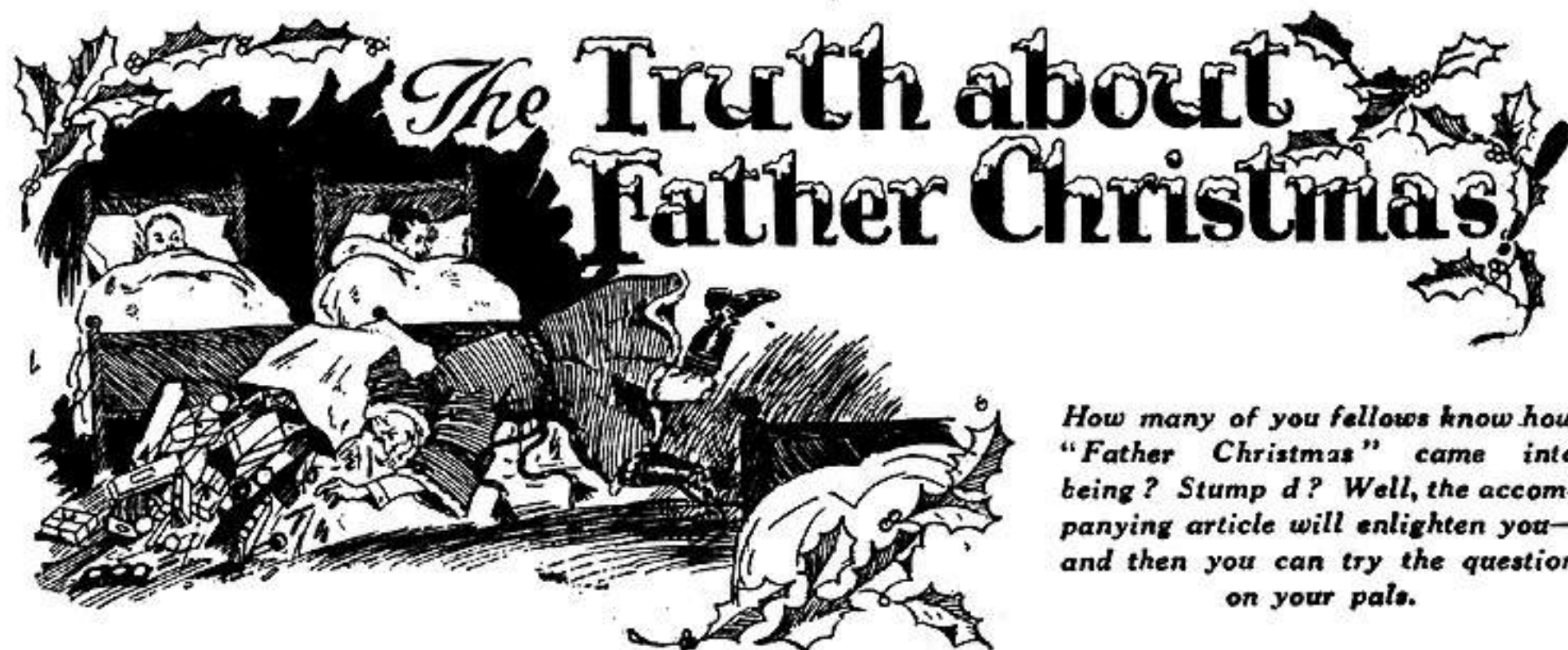
won't. This corner is the place where we can drop business and talk together like the good pals we are. But brevity in speeches is always a good thing to remember, otherwise the audience is inclined to get restive and bored. Five minutes, then. Now, for a kick-off, I wish you good chums the Happiest of Happy Christmases. You're all going to have a good time during the greatest month the year provides. There are fathers and mothers, aunts and uncles all dying to buy you presents; to take you out; to lavish on you those things for which you have longed most during the year. Time will never see a change in this direction, for Christmas and its attendant generosity has come to stay. And I shall be in the thick of it just as much as any of you. No, I'm not old, and I've no grey hairs—and I can still leap a five-bar gate with the best of 'em, for editing the MAGNET and its companion papers keeps a chap young; it keeps him in touch with youth, and where youth is there is no greater happiness. Jove, some of my adult friends envy me when I talk to them about you fellows, for I claim to have the biggest body of chums in the world. Age makes no difference. Once a MAGNET supporter, always a MAGNET supporter. Why, only this morning I received quite a dozen letters from the “old uns”—fellows who started to read the MAGNET twenty odd years ago and are still reading it regularly. That's the stuff to give 'em. Some of these “old uns” have sons of their own, and it's a case of “following in father's footsteps” for they take in the MAGNET, too. There's proof, if any is needed of the quality and consistency of the MAGNET. But to return to Christmas. A number of you have started your Christmas shopping. I gather that from the appreciative remarks you have made about the “Holiday,” “Hobby,” and “Nature” Annuals—books which you have either bought for yourselves or for your cousins and pals. Those of you who haven't decided on the present your best pal would like should find no further difficulty once you see these Annuals.

But let's talk now of Christmas puddings and mince-pies. Have you done your bit in the kitchen? Have you stoned the raisins, scraped the almonds (and eaten a whack of 'em); have you helped to stir the pudding? YES! Bravo! And are you all ready to sample the famous pudding on the great day? Once more—louder this time—YES!

And so am I!

Let's look forward, then, to the “twenty-fifth,” and on the great day let us feast and make merry. And if your ears should burn when toasts are being made put it down to the good wishes that are speeding through the ether from the heart of that absent friend of yours who signs himself

YOUR EDITOR.



How many of you fellows know how "Father Christmas" came into being? Stumped? Well, the accompanying article will enlighten you—and then you can try the question on your pals.

The Ghost of Ghosts!

CHIEF of all the varied ghosts that walk on Christmas Eve is Father Christmas himself. He is the ghost of good St. Nicholas who, in his time, was a real flesh-and-blood man. But that time is such a long way back in the past that most people have completely forgotten he ever existed, and probably very few fellows indeed connect him in any way with Santa Claus.

St. Nicholas actually originated Father Christmas, otherwise Santa Claus; or rather he is the foundation for the good old-fashioned custom of presents being distributed in utmost secrecy in the dead of night on Christmas Eve by a jolly-looking old fellow with red face, flowing scarlet robes and—most important, this—a sack bulging with all manner of good things.

This jolly old chap is known all over the world, and his part is duly taken on Christmas Eve by many thousands of people in every European country and most places where English-speaking folk are living—in whatever remote corner of the world that may be.

But we haven't looked yet into the ways and person of that good St. Nicholas we mentioned just now. When he died, in the year 326, they made him a saint, and he became the patron saint of Russia—where all his Father Christmas tricks had been performed.

St. Nicholas' Day!

The legends that have accumulated about him are very numerous. They all demonstrate most forcibly how benevolent he was and how jolly good-natured, and those who had cause to congratulate themselves on having met him—and shared in the good things which it was his custom to distribute to the needy, in just the same way as Father Christmas "does his trick" these days—were determined his memory should never die out.

So each December 6th they kept up his festival. The custom of making St. Nicholas' Day a big celebration gradually spread, and as stories and legends began to cluster thickly about his memory so rumour of him travelled all over the world.

His festival survives now in the Santa Claus of Christmas, the date originally allotted to his own particular celebrations having mostly become absorbed in the great, world-wide holiday of Christmas.

In England, his day—December 6th—was in ancient times celebrated solemnly at Eton and other big public schools, until his memory became absorbed in his "ghost"—our very own Father Christmas who, despite flowing robes, curly-toed snowshoes and enormous sack, has never yet encountered a chimney so small that he couldn't get down it!

Otherwise in Other Lands!

A further miracle of his appearance is that the snowy-white wool which borders his robes never seems to become soiled, no matter how sooty the chimney he clammers down en route to the stockings hung up on Christmas Eve!

But that is the Britisher's conception of Father Christmas. They picture him otherwise in other lands. In Germany, the "ghost" of good St. Nicholas has

to be, in appearance and costume, the counterpart of a bishop who gives out good things not by stealth in the dead of night, but with great ceremony to the assembled family. Moreover, he is said to have up his sleeve dire penalties to the bad 'uns at Christmas.

He is known as Bonhomme Noel in France, and he goes his midnight rounds accompanied by a little old, weasened-faced fellow who instead of having his features wrinkled with hearty smiles, frowns most forbiddingly. This is La Pere Fouettard, or Father Whipper.

His name explains his errand plainly enough. He hasn't a toy-bulging sack but carries instead on his shoulder a wicker basket packed with birch rods. One of the latter he leaves by the side of the wooden sabots—shoes—of each French youngster whose conduct since the previous Christmas has rather left something to be desired.

Kriss Kringle—Alias Santa Claus!

In France they don't hang up stockings on Christmas Eve, but put their wooden shoes in front of the hearth, where Bonhomme Noel is certain to trip over them as he emerges from the chimney—thus having his attention called to their emptiness in no uncertain way.

But whatever name he is known by, Christmas would never be Christmas without a visit from him.

In America he is seldom referred to otherwise than as Santa Claus, which is a form of the old Dutch name Sankt Klaus or Sankt Nikolas—as the early Dutch settlers in New York knew him. The Dutch were the first to hang up their stockings on the eve of the Santa Claus holiday, and they prayed to him as a protector against robbers.

The Dutch Santa Claus is now called Kriss Kringle, and whether the Dutch are in America or Holland they "keep him up" as merrily as we do.

In the Bacon Tub!

Rather peculiar, all this, seeing that St. Nicholas is really the patron saint of Russia. There they will tell you that the real flesh-and-blood Nicholas used to slip gold through the keyholes and beneath the doors of deserving people, and that one of his first acts, on inheriting three bars of gold from his father, was to give the lot away to a man who was broke and down on his luck.

He went a funny way about it, for he slipped one of the bars through the man's open window each night, for three nights, in fear that people should find out how benevolent he was.

He is also said to be the patron saint of pawnbrokers, because of the three bags of gold (transferred to three gold balls) which he gave to the daughters of a poor man on the eve of their wedding. He is the patron saint of boys, also, for legend has it that he once "put together" three youngsters who had been cut up and pickled in a salting-tub for use as bacon!

His supposed remains are buried in the church of San Nicola, in Italy, and every year thousands of pilgrims from far and wide visit his tomb. Apparently we have much to thank him for, not the least being the start he gave to the embodiment of all that is happy and generous at Christmas.

So jolly good luck to his ghost—merry d Father Christmas!

ol THE MAGNET LIBRARY.—No. 1,087.



The gentleman who is nearly as old as Methuselah.

WOLVES OF THE SPANISH MAIN!

By
ERNEST McKEAG.



Like an arrow from a bow Roger leaped forward, belaying pin in hand. Crash. The belaying pin crashed on the skull of the foremost pirate, and he dropped in a huddled heap to the deck.

HOW THE STORY BEGAN.

Spurred on by the call of the sea and lures of treasure on the Spanish Main, young Roger Bartlett sets out for the seaport of Fotheringham. He is nearing his destination when he overhears two pirates named Abednigo One-Eye and Slim plotting the death of the owner of a nearby house. Despite Roger's warning, the man is fatally wounded in the fight with the scoundrels, and in his last moments, hands over to the lad a sealed packet, charging him to take it to a man known as "The Chevalier." The packet contains the chart of an island on which a great treasure lies buried, and it is soon evident that One-Eye and Slim will stop at nothing to get hold of it. The schooner *Celestine* on which Roger and the Chevalier set sail for the Spanish Main is attacked by the pirates' barque, the *Swordfish*, and the two comrades are taken prisoners. Baffled in his search for the chart, which Roger has hidden, One-Eye sends the Chevalier to his doom by making him walk the plank. Later Roger is rescued and hidden in the hold of the ship by Jem, a powder-boy on the pirate craft. Shortly afterwards the two ships arrive at the pirate headquarters on the island of Cayacos, and Roger overhears Slim and another ruffian named Gomez plotting to fire the powder magazine of the *Swordfish*. The lad at once retrieves the treasure chart from its hiding-place, and, seeing smoke issuing from the hold of the ship, shouts a warning to Jem. Next moment Roger is seen by one of the pirates. "Come quick!" yells the man. "I ha' him!"

The End of the "Swordfish!"

THE burly pirate leaped forward and dropped on Roger who went reeling to the deck. But the lad wriggled like an eel and prang quickly to his feet. His attacker was not to be put off so easily, however, and he rushed forward again. Roger dodged

him nimbly, but he was forced to retreat across the deck.

The pirate whipped out a carved dagger, and advanced warily.

"Yield ye, or by the bones o' Blackbeard I'll rip ye crosswise!" he hissed. "Come, boy, you cannot escape!"

From the fo'c's'le of the barque came the remainder of the pirates, streaming out on deck in response to the first one's cries. Roger, realising what was about to happen, retreated across the deck, seeking vainly for a way of escape. He stumbled and would have fallen, for he could not see where he was going. It was, however, against the foremast that he had struck, and as he realised this his hand went out quickly to the rack of belaying pins on the mast.

A quick wrench of his wrist, and he had drawn out a pin from the rack. Then, like an arrow from a bow, he shot forward, the belaying pin brandished high in the air. The ruffian saw him coming, but so swiftly had Roger acted, that the scoundrel could not avoid him. The belaying pin crashed on the pirate's skull, and as he dropped in a huddled heap to the deck, Roger made a dart for the bulwarks.

He had almost gained them when what he had feared happened.

Came a blinding flash of flame, a thunderous roar that seemed to burst the ear-drums! The train laid by Gomez had reached its objective. Inferno broke loose, and Roger felt as though a giant hand had stretched out, picked him up, and sent him flying through the air!

Then he struck the waters and they closed over him! Instinct prompted Roger to strike out, for, after that first sickening explosion, the cool waters of the lagoon had somewhat restored him. His head broke water, and he had a fleeting glimpse of a mighty sheet of flame that leaped heavenward. The next second a pall of thick, black smoke descended over everything, blotting out his vision.

The *Swordfish* had gone!

As the pall of smoke wreathed and was parted by some faint passing breeze, an awesome sight met Roger's gaze. All the forward part of the *Swordfish* had been blown completely away, and even as he watched, he saw the craft sink beneath the waves.

What had happened to those aboard? Roger could only guess at that! Some, perhaps, had been as lucky as he was, and had been hurled clear of the doomed vessel. But the majority must have gone down with her.

Shaken considerably, Roger realised only too clearly that a way of escape had been miraculously opened to him. He could see the tempting shores of the lagoon in the distance, and he struck out vigorously for them.

It was a long and tiring swim before his feet struck the fine, hard sand, and he scrambled out on to the beach. There he paused for a moment to survey the scene of disaster.

The *Swordfish* was gone—but the schooner *Celestine* still floated serenely upon the waters of the lagoon, and he

could see, half-obscured by the drifting smoke, a boat being rowed rapidly towards her.

Slim, then, and his fellow-plotter Gomez, had escaped! How many of the pirates had gone to their doom Roger knew not; but the number must have been considerable. Slim, however, and his rascally confederate Gomez, were still alive, and did they but know that Roger possessed the chart that meant everything, the youngster's life would not be worth a moment's purchase.

Roger turned and thrust his way into the undergrowth, determined to place as much space as possible between himself and the pirates.

It was hard going through the undergrowth, for the creepers caught at his feet and sought to trip him up. But he forced his way through, determined rather to face the perils of the forest than fall again into the hands of the pirates. Luck guided the youngster's footsteps, and after some little time he could hear the plashing of falling water. He emerged into a small clearing, and saw there a tinkling cascade of crystal clear water.

Throwing himself down on his stomach, Roger laved his face in the water and drank deep of it. Then he raised himself to a sitting position and gazed around. The clearing was small, and several palms raised their heads high into the air. Great clusters of coconuts were on the palms, and Roger was glad of this, for it meant that he would not starve. He had food and water, and was safe for the time being, anyway.

The rays of the fiery sun poured down into the clearing and sent steam rising from Roger's clothes. Quickly he stripped himself and laid out his clothes to dry in the sun. The package of papers which he had thrust into his shirt was sodden with the salt water and he extracted the papers from the package and opened them carefully, laying them, too, to dry in the sun. One was the chart—a crudely-drawn sketch—the other two papers were letters, one written in a fine scholarly hand; the other a scrawl such as a half-educated seaman might write.

Having done this, Roger waited with what patience he could muster for his clothes to dry. They did not take long, so strong were the rays of the sun, and soon Roger was clad again in dry things. Then he turned his attention to the papers. First he regarded the chart, which was crudely drawn on paper that was much stained by seawater, and mightily torn and tattered.

"'Tis useless without the latitude and longitude," he muttered. "Perhaps that is given in the letters."

Roger took up the first letter—the one written in a scholarly hand—and read the inscription thereon.

"To the Chevalier de Monterey from Sir Richard Greatorix. Greeting!—To you, good friend, I bequeath the enclosed chart, trusting in you to rescue mine only son from the power of the scoundrels who wrenched him from me. Ye have heard how, ten years ago during my voyage from the Indies, the vessel which brought me was assailed by pirates, and mine son was taken from me, while I myself was marooned upon some reef, the position of which I know not. Ye know, too, that I had given up my son for dead, and when, after great suffering, I was rescued by a passing vessel, I returned home, mourning his loss.

"I had believed my son to be dead until the receipt of the enclosed letter

and the chart. From the letter you will learn that he was saved from death by the intervention of an old Irish seaman who saved him, only to lose him again later. The sailor has given here the whereabouts of the treasure hidden by the pirates who stole my son, and the greater portion of the treasure is that which was wrested from me, and which rightly belongs to my son, who, I fear, I shall ne'er see again.

"The chart gives neither latitude nor longitude. That, as you will learn from the accompanying letter, was scratched upon the back of a locket which hung around my child's neck. Save ye the child, monsieur, and the thanks of one who feels death slowly creeping upon him will be yours. And now, good friend—"

The writing ceased abruptly, and Roger remembered how the man he had seen writing this very letter had sprang to his feet when he had interrupted him. He folded the letter up and placed it back in the package with the chart. Then he bent down to pick up the other letter. But, even as he did so, a passing breeze picked up the missive and sent it whirling away into the surrounding undergrowth.

Roger made a snatch at it—but too late!

For even as it was almost in his grasp the undergrowth parted slightly, and a hand stretched forth, seemingly from nowhere.

The next moment the letter had been grasped in the hand, which immediately vanished again through the undergrowth, leaving Roger astounded at this sudden calamity.

How Roger and the Chevalier were Forestalled.

ROGER was on his feet in a flash, and had thrust aside the undergrowth, determined, if need be, to fight to the death rather than allow the letter to fall into the hands of the pirates. But

a sudden surprise was in store for him, for with a rustling of twigs and branches a figure advanced into the clearing—a figure wrapped in a long black cloak. But the hood of the cloak was thrown back from the face of the newcomer, and Roger gave a gasp of amazement as he saw the clear-cut features of one he knew so well.

"The Chevalier!" he cried gleefully.

"Ay, lad, 'tis I!" The Chevalier

threw aside his cloak, advanced towards Roger and gripped him by the hand. "And right glad I am to see ye alive and well, Roger lad, for I made no doubt that ye had been blown sky-high together wi' One-Eye's rats."

"But—but how come ye here, and alive?" gasped the lad. "Did I not see ye wi' mine own eyes plunge to the sharks? Did I not hear ye scream as their teeth bit deep into ye?"

"Ye heard me scream, lad, 'tis true," was the Chevalier's reply. "'Twas not from pain, though. 'Twould ha' been a pity to rob One-Eye o' his short-lived triumph. Besides, 'twere better that he should not know that I had not gone to my doom."

"How then were ye saved?"

"I had seen to it, lad, that a rope trailed i' th' water astern o' th' barque," said the Chevalier. "I had been incarcerated i' a filthy hole aft, wi' a port that opened o'er the stern. There were ropes i' th' place, and one o' them I threw overboard, first making one end fast. When I did walk the plank I screamed to let One-Eye think that the sharks had got me; but I swam and caught hold o' th' rope and pulled myself back aboard. These many days ha' I lurked aboard the barque until the explosion sent me plunging into the water, and I swam ashore here."

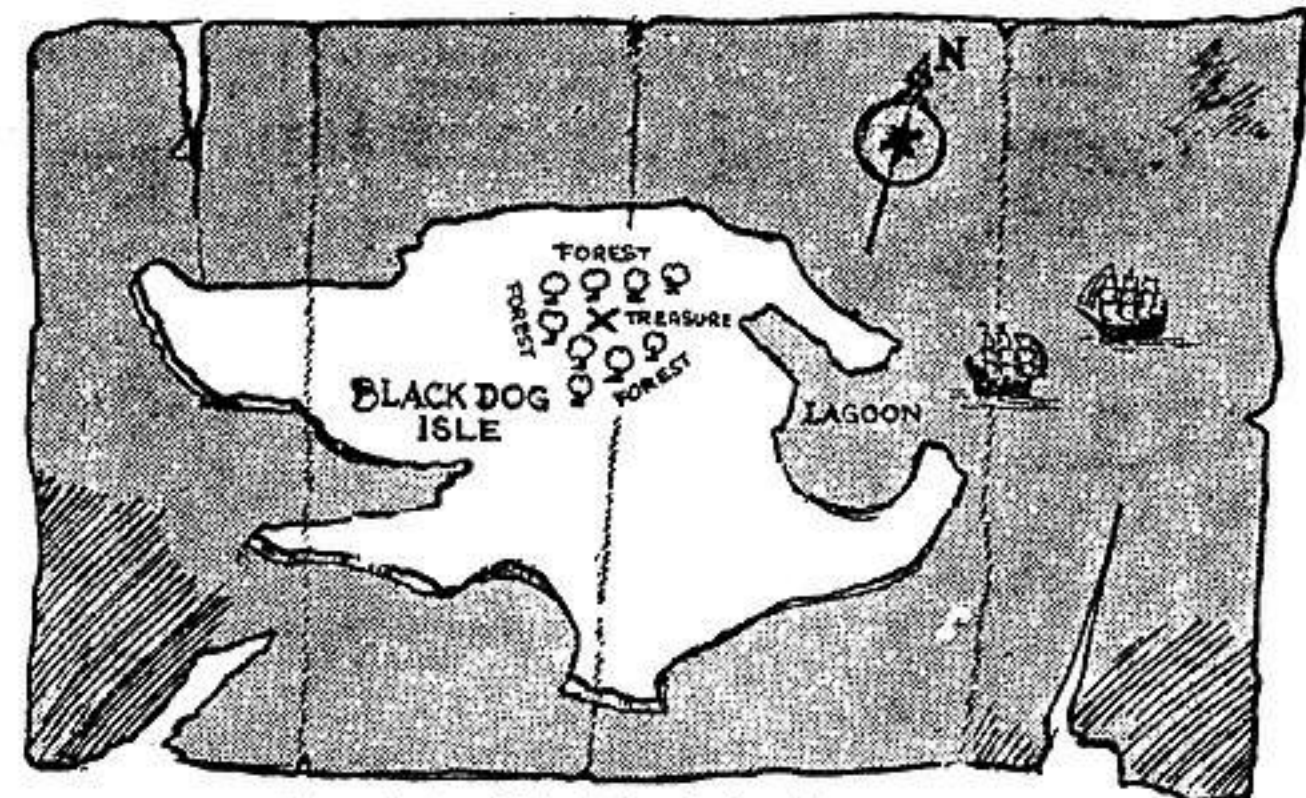
"Then—then 'twas you who saved me from Lop-Ear!" gasped Roger. "Had I but known it right glad would I ha' been. And 'twas ye who led the pirates to thinking the Swordfish was haunted?"

"Ay, lad, for constantly was I being discovered by the scum, and had to run them through lest they gave the alarm. Methinks the doom they met was less than they deserved. But come, lad, let's think out now what we must do. Ye ha' read o' what the quest is that lies before us?"

"I ha' but read the letter o' Sir Richard Greatorix," replied Roger.

"'Tis enough," was the Chevalier's answer. "This letter from the Irishman tells how the pirates' craft was piled upon the rocks, o' how Blackbeard, the pirate, luried his treasure, and put to death those of his crew who knew o' its hiding-place. He would ha' put the child and Irishman to death, too had the latter not escaped him and ta'en the child wi' him."

"They parted in Santa Domingo, the Irishman being pressed aboard another pirate craft, but 'ere he was ta'en he had scratched the latitude and longitude



The chart which tells of the hidden treasure.

of the island on the back of a locket hung around the child's neck. First, Roger lad, must we find that child, for that is our quest. The treasure must wait. Now, lad, that ye know all, an' ye know, too, what enemies we must outwit—for One-Eye and Slim will put the boy to death once they ha' the locket—are ye willing to carry on wi' the quest?"

"Right readily am I," Roger answered quickly.

"Then, lad, there is no time to be lost," said the Chevalier. "One-Eye still lives, for I saw him swimming i' th' lagoon. Slim, too, and his henchman the dago, ha' gained the Celestine. We ha' still the pirates to outwit, lad, though thanks to Slim there are but half o' them now to face. Come, lad, give me the papers that ye ha' guarded so well, for we ha' much to do."

"What is your plan, monsieur?" Roger asked, as he made the papers into a packet and handed them to the Chevalier.

"We must seize the Celestine," the Chevalier said. "Alone and single-handed, lad, if needs be. I know this isle, and down by the lagoon is a hut which has oft been used as headquarters of these sea wolves. 'Tis like that One-Eye and Slim will go there, so we must take the same direction, and watch for the opportunity we need."

Naught was to be gained by delay, and stealthily the Chevalier and Roger began to thrust their way through the undergrowth, making in the direction of the beach of the lagoon. The little stream which ran from the foot of the cascade took a turn and wandered down to the shore. Following this enabled them—the two comrades—to proceed more easily than would have been the case had they been forced to make their way through the forest. The Chevalier went first, with Roger hard on his heels.

Presently the Chevalier halted, and caught Roger by the arm.

"Look, lad!" he said, pushing aside a curtain of undergrowth. "There be the headquarters of the pirates, an' if I'm not mistaken there be also the rats—Slim and One-Eye."

In a clearing that ran down to the shimmering, silver sands of the lagoon stood a log hut, a trickle of smoke from the roof. Towards this two figures were making their way, and it needed no second glance to tell Roger that they were Slim and One-Eye. Dotted around the clearing were little groups of pirates, and several fires had been kindled. One Eye and Slim had lost no time in getting their men ashore, and those who had been lucky enough to escape the explosion of the Swordfish were now making themselves as comfortable as circumstances would permit.

The hut lay hard by the encroaching forest, and the Chevalier waited until One-Eye and Slim had disappeared inside the hut.

The sun by this time had set, and the

short, tropic twilight was already threatening to give place to the darkness of night.

"Fate has played into our hands, lad," said the Chevalier. "There can be but few men left aboard the Celestine, and methinks I can hazard a guess why. Ye know that Slim would thwart One-Eye, an' he could, and sink me if I believe not that One-Eye would play the same game. They mistrust each other, lad, and are feared to let each other out o' their sight aboard the schooner lest one o' them slips out o' the lagoon wi' the vessel."

"An' what would ye that we do, monsieur," asked Roger.

"Mark ye, night is already falling. The watch aboard the schooner will not be great, therefore why should we not seize a boat, row out to the schooner and capture her? Then, by dint o' arms must we force the scoundrels aboard her to do our bidding. They are but scurvy rats, an' would like as not accept service under us when they are faced wi' cold steel."

Roger took a deep breath. This was something that appealed to him. 'Twould be no easy task, he knew, to seize the schooner and get her out of the lagoon, but should the attempt prove successful they would have a mighty advantage of the pirates. Briefly the Chevalier's plan meant that they must maroon One-Eye, Slim, and the majority of the pirates. The Celestine then would be in the hands of her rightful captain, the Chevalier, and they could continue on their quest.

"I am wi' ye, monsieur," answered Roger.

"Good! I knew ye would not fail me, lad."

Lights were already twinkling aboard the Celestine, and darkness was falling fast. Worming their way down towards the beach, taking every advantage of the cover afforded by the undergrowth, the Chevalier and Roger progressed. They could hear the rowdy shouts of the pirates as they encamped around the fires, could hear their raucous voices raised in ribald, drunken songs and quarrellings. Glad of the chance of stretching their legs the pirates were taking full advantage of the opportunity now given them to drink and make merry. Their boats hauled up on the beach were unattended, and it was an easy matter for Roger and the Chevalier to seize a boat, launch it upon the waters of the lagoon, and silently take their seats in the thwarts.

Then, bending to the oars they pulled strongly, making for the black outline of the Celestine.

Too engrossed in their task were they to note that another boat with several hands to the oars had forestalled them, and was even now approaching the Celestine. But as they neared the schooner they saw that all was not well. Those aboard the schooner had leaped into activity. There came the creak of yards and ropes as the shadowy blacknesses of the sails sprang into being, and they heard the rattle of the cable in the hawse. Lights flickered, and men ran rapidly along the deck of the schooner.

Roger wheeled to the Chevalier, a look of inquiry upon his face.

"The schooner is setting sail, monsieur," he gasped. "What means this?"

"It means that we ha' been forestalled, lad," was the grim reply. "Either One-Eye or Slim has sought to play the same trick upon his fellow-rogue, and has succeeded. Our only

means of escape has been taken from us, and we, too, are likely to be marooned here wi' the rest of the scum."

Thrown to the Sharks!



At a moment there was silence in the boat, the Chevalier sitting with stern, set face gazing in the direction of the schooner, and Roger keeping his eyes fixed upon the countenance of his companion, and waiting for whatever instructions the Chevalier might offer.

"Is there naught we can do, monsieur?" he asked eventually.

"Ay, lad!" With a sudden move the Chevalier took up his oars again. "There is one thing—yet so slight is the chance of success that it seems well-nigh madness to try it. But we are in a cleft stick, lad, and aught is better than being left here on th' island. If the Celestine sails without us we are beaten. Therefore, bend on your oars, lad, and be ye ready for the fray."

Roger lost no time in turning his attention to his oars once more, but as they rowed for the Celestine he wondered what new scheme had come into the ready brain of the Chevalier. It was not, however, until the boat slipped silently into the shadow cast by the schooner that the Chevalier, in guarded tones, told Roger of his plan.

"'Tis certain that one o' th' scoundrels has stolen a march upon the other," he said. "Why should not the same idea ha' come to both of them? List ye, lad! If we clamber aboard, making great noise when we jump on th' deck, might they not think that we are more than two? Might they not imagine that we are but the fore-runners o' others?"

"Ye mean that we two must endeavour to capture the schooner?" gasped Roger.

"'Tis our only hope, lad," was the Chevalier's reply. "Ye are not armed, but I ha' my rapier. Count on me, lad, to pink the first o' the rats that would seek to hinder us. Snatch ye the first weapon that comes to your hand and stand by me. 'Tis a mighty poor chance we ha', lad, but aught is better than to be marooned here wi' the rest o' the scum. Ye are not afeared?"

"Nay, monsieur," answered Roger. "I stand by ye."

"Then come! See, a rope trails i' the water yonder. Follow hard behind me!"

The words were hardly out of the Chevalier's lips before he had seized a rope which dangled over the side of the schooner. Then, nimble as any ape, he began to scale the ship's side, with Roger hard behind him.

No sooner had the Chevalier reached the bulwarks than he drew his rapier from beneath his black cloak, and leaped lightly down to the deck. Roger reached the top of the bulwarks at that instant—just in time to see three swarthy-faced ruffians, disturbed by the noise, swing around from a cleat where they had been making fast a rope.

"Have at ye, scum!" roared the Chevalier. "Take ye the fate ye deserve for leaving your comrades behind!"

There was a clank of steel as one man made a vain endeavour to whip out his cutless and bring it into play.

(Continued on page 30.)



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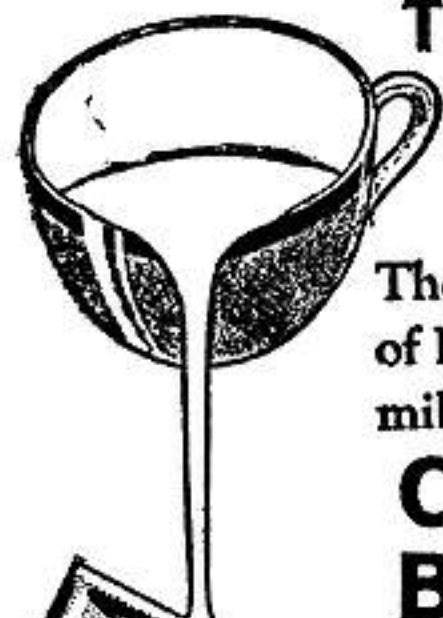
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Hardly had he drawn it from its scabbard than the Chevalier was upon him. A scream came from the man's lips as the lightning-like rapier of the Chevalier cut in under his guard and pinked him. The cutlass dropped with a clatter to the deck, and the next instant Roger had darted forward and seized it.

The Chevalier and Roger then flung themselves upon the remaining men who, taken aback by this unexpected attack, turned and ran. It was indeed a desperate venture upon which Roger and the Chevalier had embarked, but its very audacity was in their favour. As the Chevalier had surmised, the pirates concluded that the two of them

men he had left aboard the schooner would not dare to revolt against him. One-Eye had looked away most of the arms in the stern cabin. This, intended to save him against mutiny on the part of the crew, was to prove his undoing, for the pirates were nearly all unarmed.

"So you would pit your puny strength against me, would ye, whelp?" cried One-Eye fiercely. "Go ye, then, to the sharks!" The next moment Roger was gripped in the mighty arms of One-Eye and sent hurtling over the bulwarks of the schooner. (See page 31.)



were but the forerunners of the band of men who had been left behind on the shores of the lagoon, for it was too dark to recognise the faces of the attackers.

Another thing counted in their favour, too, as they were to discover later. It was One-Eye who had attempted to steal a march upon Slim, and he had laid his plans well. He had left aboard the schooner only sufficient men to work her out of the lagoon and away to sea. Then, having plied Slim with rum until that scoundrel was in a semi-conscious state, he had slipped away with three rowers and boarded the schooner.

To make absolutely sure that the

The sails of the Celestine had already been hoisted, and the wind was catching them and bellying them out. The anchor had been weighed, and the schooner was gathering way and heading straight for the barrier-reef which guarded the lagoon.

As Roger sprang up to the poop he saw two figures there; one, the helmsman, his face showing white in the light of the binnacle, the other a face that he recognised only too well.

"One-Eye!" he cried, dashing forward, his cutlass raised to cut down the pirate. "So we meet again!"

"So 'tis, my little strutting turkey cock!" yelled One-Eye, his face twitching violently with rage. "And sink me

if he be not with he whom I sent to the sharks! Rip me, if there be not treachery here!"

His hand went to the hilt of his cutlass. The next moment he had engaged Roger's blade, and the two fought furiously. The clashing of steel rang out on the night air, but, try as he would, One-Eye could not break the lad's guard.

The helmsman, leaving the wheel, dashed forward to intervene.

"Rot ye, get back to the wheel!" yelled One-Eye. "Ye'll ha' us on the reef, an' ye keep her not on her course! Leave the cub to me! I'll split him cross-wise, rip me if I don't!"

Disaster was near to the Celestine at that moment. Robbed of her steersman, the craft heeled and lurched like a stricken thing. She had now gathered a fair amount of way, and was heading for where the broken line of white, phosphorescent foam showed the position of the reef which guarded the entrance of the lagoon.

But One-Eye's words warned the steersman of the danger of the situation, and he dashed back to the wheel in the nick of time, and spun it round, altering the schooner's course so that she narrowly avoided the jagged reef which would have ripped the bottom out of her had she struck it.

The Chevalier who, in the wake of Roger, had also gained the poop was fighting like a fiend. From his point of vantage at the top of the ladder he was able to beat back the onslaught of the pirates who, on the main-deck, had rallied and were pressing aft to strive to gain the poop. But, hampered as they were by lack of arms, they could do but little.

Belaying pins flung by hefty hands flew through the air; but it seemed as though the Chevalier possessed a charmed life, for they flew wide and none of them struck him.

Meanwhile, the fight between One-Eye and Roger waxed furious. The pirate, uttering a volley of oaths, strove hard to break down the lad's guard, but Roger, despite the aching of his sword arm, fought valiantly.

"Rip me, but I'll make shark's meat o' ye yet boy!" grunted One-Eye; and then, before Roger could divine his intention, he sprang back and dropped his cutlass.

Swift as a flash his hands went to his belt and he brought out two pistols ready primed. Hastily he levelled them, and the next instant might well have been Roger's last, for, at that point-blank range, One-Eye could scarcely have missed him.

But Fate again played into the hands of Roger and the Chevalier.

The pirates on the main deck, still unable to gain the arms which One-Eye had locked away, were endeavouring to lay low the Chevalier by flinging belaying-pins in his direction. One that missed its target went hurtling farther along the poop, and caught the helmsman square on the point of the jaw. The man dropped like a log to the deck, and the schooner, robbed of its guiding hand lurched and heeled over.

One-Eye, taken totally by surprise, had no time to grip his footing on the deck, and the sudden lurch sent him flying against the bulwarks. Roger

too, stumbled, but he had not been sent crashing against the side of the vessel, and he recovered himself before One-Eye could do so. The pistols dropped from the pirate's grasp, and he slithered into the scuppers.

In a flash Roger was upon him, and his cutlass lashed through the air and descended!

One-Eye, as slippery as an eel, twisted just in time and avoided the cut. The next moment he was upon his feet again. But he was now unarmed, and as Roger wheeled and jumped at him, One-Eye, with a curse, sprang for the safety of the main-deck, took a flying leap over the poop-rails, and landed with a heavy thud upon the deck. The next moment he scuttled like a rat into the shelter of the shadows thrown by the sails.

"Take ye the wheel, Roger, lad!" yelled the Chevalier. "Sink me, but I can handle this scum, and once we are at sea I'll teach them who is master aboard this craft. Head her for the break i' th' reef, lad, and 'ere many

minutes are past we shall be out at sea and away from this den o' rogues!"

Roger sprang to the wheel. He was just in time to stop the schooner piling herself up on the reef. He could see the line of foam which marked the rocks, could see also the calm water that marked the opening through which he must steer the vessel. As he spun around the wheel the Celestine settled on her course. In a few moments all would be well.

"Keep her steady as ye go, Roger, lad!" called out the Chevalier. "Fear not, these scum are helpless, and rip me if I do not slit everyone o' them, an' they take not service under me. The gallows' rats will soon yield."

Fate had been on the side of the audacious pair. Unable to put up a resistance the pirates had retired, and the Chevalier, his dreaded rapier dyed red with the blood of those who had sought to stay him, leaped lightly down the poop ladder and followed them for'ard.

Roger was left alone at the wheel,

but he heaved a sigh of triumph, for the unbelievable had come to pass. He and the Chevalier had succeeded in regaining command of the Celestine.

The schooner was now tossing on the bar. In a moment or two they would be out of the lagoon with the open sea before them.

The Celestine lurched, quivered for a while on the bar, and then was outside scudding through the calm, tropic waters. Roger could have cried aloud in triumph just then.

But his triumph was short-lived.

Even as he swung round the wheel to bring the breeze fair behind the schooner, a shadowy figure, which had crept unobserved along the deck and gained the poop, sprang at him. Roger was seized in a grip of iron, and, before he could put up any resistance, was dragged to the bulwarks and forced back against them.

The next moment Roger found himself flung by the mighty arms of Abednego One-Eye over the bulwarks of the schooner. He struck the water with a mighty splash.

When he broke surface again it was to see the shadowy shape of the Celestine scudding along under a fair wind, leaving him swimming helplessly in the shark-infested waters.

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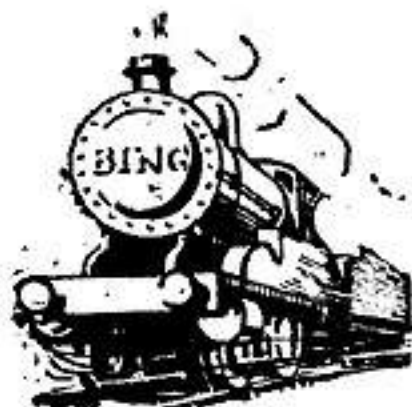
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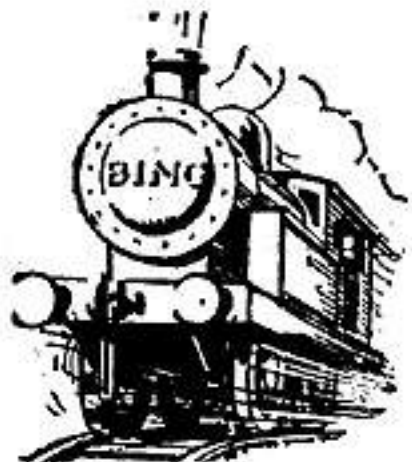
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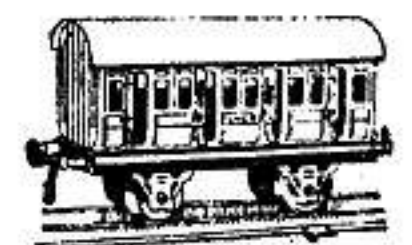
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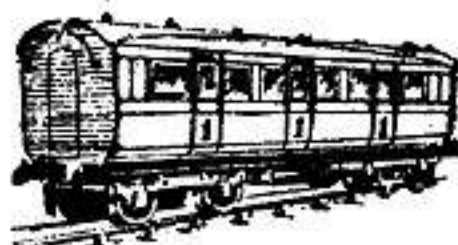
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Mr. Lickham's Christmas Party!

by Dicky Nugent.



Many people in the village street they have seen a white, shrouded figure gliding through the park, whilst from the house weird shrieks and groans and peals of mocking laughter have been heard.

"OW d'ye do, boys?" cried Dr. Birchmell, as he galloped into the breakfast-room at Lickham Lodge. "Good-morning, sir!" chorused Jack Jolly & Co. cheerily, while Tubby Barrell, who was busy feeding his face, merely grunted.

"Breaker ready? Good!" grinned the Head, sitting down at the table and taking an enormous bite out of a slice of toast. "Serve it up, Portleigh!"

"What will you have, sir?" asked Portleigh, the butler.

"Oh, just a snack, Portleigh! A couple of haddocks and half a dozen rashers with kidneys and eggs will do me nicely thank you!"

Portleigh, the butler, bowed and went off to execute the order, and the headmaster of St. Sam's filled in the interval by scoffing a basin of porridge that had just been put before Jack Jolly.

"A lovely morning after the snow," remarked Bright respectively.

"Top-hole!" agreed the Head, who was in one of his most genial moods. "After breakfast, my boys, I will beg to borrow, or pinch a pair of skis, and show you a few of the tricks I used to perform in my young days in Switzerland."

Dr. Birchmell and the four St. Sam's juniors were Mr. Lickham's guests at the magnificent old Elizabethan mansion called Lickham Lodge. The joke of it was that although the guests didn't know it, Lickham Lodge was not the property of Mr. Lickham at St. Sam's at all. It really belonged to quite another Mr. Lickham—a mysterious Society man whom even the servants had never seen. Naturally, they had accepted the master of the Fourth as their own Mr. Lickham without question, for they had no reasons for doubting him.

Mr. Lickham had gone about in fear The MAGNET LIBRARY—No. 1,067.

and trembling at first.

But success had given him more courage now, and he was beginning to look more like one would expect of a country gentleman to appear. At times he even felt that he really was the true owner of Lickham Lodge.

"What are we doing after breakfast?" inquired Mr. Lickham, as he devoured grate chunks of haddock and egg.

"I was just suggesting winter sports, Lickham," answered Dr. Birchmell, grinning, away at the plentiful food before him. "I'm awfully clever at tobogganing and skiing, you know. I started all Switzerland with my darling feet."

"You mean your daring feet?" suggested the host of Lickham Lodge faintly. "The plover of 'foot' is 'feet,' not 'feet,' I believe."

Dr. Birchmell frowned.

"Anyway, I was looked upon as the greatest skist of my time. Switzerland used to fairly echo with my fame in those days, and I was known everywhere as Alpine Alf, the dare-devil of the mountains."

The juniors, who had heard some of Dr. Birchmell's vain boasting in the past, merely grinned, while Mr. Lickham, who was still puzzling his brains over the plover of "foot," tried to look seawardly impressed, and waded into his breakfast with more vigour than ever.

After the meal was over the obsequious party put on mufflers and prepared to go out into the snow, while Dr. Birchmell searched the house for a pair of skis. Not being able to find such articles he took up a couple of floorboards from the kitchen floor, and tied them to the soles of his boots. Thus arrayed he set out to show the others how he had leaped down the mountains of Switzerland in the days when he had been the far-famed Alpine Alf.

Evidently times had altered a lot since then, for when the Head got to work he found that instead of creating an impression with the boys he only created an impression on his nose—caused by falling with a terrific wallop.

Mr. Lickham who was no lover of winter sports followed him, and the boys were left to keep themselves amused. Needless to say they managed to do that quite successfully, and when they came into lunch they were covered all over in mud and snow, bruised, and battered from head to foot, but very well satisfied with their first morning at Lickham Lodge.

As for Dr. Birchmell he merely smiled skeptically. "Tut-tut! I have no patience with such childish tales!" he exclaimed. "Surely, Lickham, you feel no fear at the thought of an imaginary specter?" "N-n-not at all, sir," answered Mr. Lickham, his teeth chattering so much that he could hardly speak. "I assure you, sir, I'm n-n-not a bit frightened."

"Well, all I can say is you look it," But Dr. Birchmell did nothing of the kind. Instead, he stood for one instant, petrified with fear. Then, with a terrified howl, he fled for the door of the library.

The others acted just as quickly, even Jack Jolly & Co. getting into a panic for a moment, and the whole crowd reached the doorway together.

"Crash!" There was an agitated chorus of yells as they all got jammed in the doorway at the same time.

"Lemme get out!" yelled the Head, the few remaining hairs on his bald pate standing on end with terror. "Yow-ow-wow! Look at it! It's coming for us!"

The specter was indeed gliding towards them, and they all redoubled their efforts to get through the doorway.

"Quick! It's got me!" howled Mr. Lickham suddenly. "Yarooooo!"

He made a frantic effort to escape and succeeded at last. The whole crowd pitched through the doorway together, and rolled over on the floor of the passage like a lot of tinpans.

Portleigh, the butler, rushed up as they were all scrambling to their feet. He held a double-barrelled shot-gun in one hand, a blunderbuss in the other, and a outlaws in the other.

"Gentlemen," he cried, "what ever are you doing?"

"Save us, Portleigh!" moaned Dr. Birchmell. "We are persecuted by a disembodied spirit. Go and shoot it imaginatively, and you will earn our internal gratitude."

Portleigh, who was evidently stout of heart as well as stout of build, rolled through the open doorway to investigate, while the St. Sam's party stood farther down the passage ready to bolt at a moment's notice.

But there was no need to do that, for after a minute or so Portleigh looked out again, wearing a reassuring grin on his plump face.

"It's all right, gentlemen!" he called out. "I can't see him myself, anyway."

"Thank heaven for that!" gasped Dr. Birchmell, greatly relieved. "I don't think I'll go back into that haunted chamber of horrors again in a hurry. Would you care to sleep with me to-night, Lickham? Perhaps you won't feel so scared if you know I'm with you."

"Thanks for nothing!" snorted Mr. Lickham. "After your disgusting exhibition of bloo funk just now, I think I'd rather be on my own."

Dr. Birchmell had recovered sufficiently by this time to bestow a glare on his host.

"I hope you don't think for a moment I was frightened of that specter, Lickham," he said severely. "The reason I left the library so hurriedly was that I'd just remembered where I'd left my pipe."

"M-m-m-r-r-r-r-r-r-r!" murmured Mr. Lickham.

Anyhow, nobody felt much like returning to the library just then, so they all trooped up to bed. But their sleep that night was to be by no means untroubled and dreamless—thanks to the specter of Lickham Lodge.

THE END.

(Look out for further thrills and eerie situations at Lickham Lodge next week, chums, in "THE ST. SAM'S SPOOKS RETURN!" It shows Dicky Nugent in top form.)

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II.

HE rest of the day passed quickly in pastimes and games and feeds, and the St. Sam's party felt at the evening that life at the house of Mr. Lickham was well worth living.

Although everything was snug and cheerful indoors, snow was falling heavily outside, and the wind moaned and howled mournfully down the chimbleys, so that, in fact, that the talk soon turned to ghosts and apparitions.

Portleigh, the butler, as he came up with a fresh trayload of stone jinnies heard the conversation and joined in, giving some information that thrilled the juniors no end.

"Beggins your pardon, gentlemen," he said respectfully, "you might be interested to know that there is a legend about a specter which haunts this very house round about Christmas time."

"Few!" whistled Jack Jolly & Co., while Tubby Barrell, who had been rooting round the library in search of toffs, hastily rolled back to the fireplace again.

"The villagers tell me," continued Portleigh, as he skilfully poured out a foaming ginger-pop, "that for many years, while the house was empty, weird shrieks and groans and peels of mocking laughter were heard here in the dead of night. Whether they were caused by spooks and goblins or merely ghosts and specters nobody knows. But many people in the village swear they have seen a white, shrouded figure gliding through the park towards the house at this time of the year."

"Yarooooo!" yelled Tubby Barrell, beginning to quiver and quake like a jelly, while Mr. Lickham's face turned a garish green as he listened.



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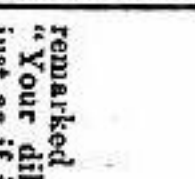
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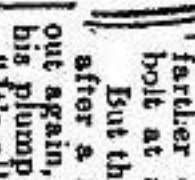
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