

"THE KIDNAPPED HIKER!"

This week's extra-special story of
Harry Wharton & Co. of Greyfriars.

The MAGNET²



THE KIDNAPPED HIKER!



By FRANK RICHARDS.

THE FIRST CHAPTER.

Billy Bunter Begs for It!

"KEEP to the path!" said Bob Cherry.

"Rot!" said Billy Bunter. Billy Bunter, of course, knew best! Billy Bunter always did!

The track, scarcely marked, wound across a Yorkshire moor. In the far distance, a patch of smoke against the blue sky marked where the town of Blackalade lay. But there was no habitation anywhere near the track that the Greyfriars hikers were following. The only sign of life was a gipsy encampment about a quarter of a mile away.

Harry Wharton & Co. were heading for a clump of trees far ahead, where they intended to camp for lunch. The winding track across the moor was twice as long as a short cut through the gorse would have been. But there were good reasons for keeping to the path.

"Stick to the path, fathead!" said Johnny Bull.

Billy Bunter halted. He fixed an indignant glare on the other hikers through his big spectacles.

"Look here," said Bunter. "I'm tired! I'm hungry! We're going to camp under those trees! Well, cut across the moor, and get there! See? What's the good of wandering about for nothing?"

"They warned us, in Middlemoor, that it was dangerous to leave the path on this moor," said Harry Wharton. Sniff from Bunter!

"There's a lot of old mine workings on the moor, fathead," said Frank Nugent. "Lots of the pits are covered with bush and grass and gorse. A fellow might tumble into them."

Another sniff from Bunter! Billy Bunter, certainly, was not the bravest member of the Greyfriars party

who were hiking in the holidays. But unseen perils did not scare him. He was as bold as a lion till the danger was in sight!

"If you're funky—" said Bunter contemptuously.

"Who's funky?" roared Johnny Bull.

"You fellows are!" sneered Bunter.

"I can't see any danger! If I could, I shouldn't be scared of it! Not like you fellows! Look here, let's take a short cut to camp! If you're frightened, keep behind me, and follow in my footsteps. I'll see you through."

The Greyfriars hikers looked at Billy Bunter as if they could have eaten him. Lord Mauleverer grinned. All through that hike, Mauly, whose good temper was a marvel, had taken Billy Bunter as a sort of standing joke, and never lost patience with him. The Famous Five were not quite so patient as Mauly! Often they kicked Bunter. Still oftener, they told him what they thought of him.

"Take him along by his ears!" suggested Frank Nugent. "Plenty of room for a good hold!"

"Beast!"

Billy Bunter turned from the path, and marched away across the open moor. Even the short-sighted Owl of the Remove could see the big clump of oaks in the distance, and was in no danger of losing his way. As for the danger of hidden pits on the moor, Bunter disregarded that entirely.

"Come back!" roared Bob Cherry.

Bunter blinked round over a fat shoulder.

"Shan't!" he replied.

"You blithering owl—" roared Johnny Bull.

"Yah!"

"It's not safe to wander on the moor, Bunter!" called out Harry Wharton.

"Stick to the path, if you're funky!" retorted Bunter. "Blessed if I ever saw such a set of funks! Haven't you pluck

enough to follow where a plucky chap leads? Keep on, if you like, and you'll find me sitting under the trees waiting for you to come crawling up."

And Billy Bunter, like the deep and dark blue ocean in the poem, rolled on!

The hikers glared after him, in great exasperation.

"Better fetch him back!" said Bob.

"Oh, let him rip!" growled Johnny Bull. "If he takes a tumble, it will be a lesson to him."

"Yaas," remarked Lord Mauleverer.

"It's a free country, you know! Let him take a tumble if he likes!"

"But the tumblefulness might be terrifically damaging," suggested Hurree Jamset Ram Singh. "The idiotic Bunter might break an esteemed leg, or even his atrocious neck."

"Let him!" grunted Johnny Bull.

"I'm fed-up with the silly ass!"

"Come back, Bunter!" bawled Bob Cherry.

Billy Bunter did not take the trouble to answer again.

He plugged on.

"What about chancing it?" asked Bob. "It looks a mile to those jolly old trees, by the path. A short cut would save half."

"A short cut is sometimes the longest way round," answered Harry Wharton. "They gave us the tip at Middlemoor; and they know the country, and we don't."

"Let's go and yank him back then," said Nugent.

"I'm not chasing after the fat idiot!" growled Johnny Bull. "We've got a mile before us yet, and we've done a good many. Leave him to it."

"Hallo, hallo, hallo!" yelled Bob. "Look!"

"Oh orikey!"

Billy Bunter, plugging through the gorse, was still in full view. But all of a sudden he ceased to be in view.

—DEALING WITH THEIR AMAZING HOLIDAY ADVENTURES!

He vanished!

As if the earth had opened and swallowed him up, Billy Bunter disappeared from sight.

As a matter of fact, it had!

The Greyfriars hikers gazed blankly at the spot where Bunter had been! Only waving golden gorse met their eyes. It was really like magic to see Bunter perform the vanishing trick like that!

"My only esteemed hat!" ejaculated Hurree Jamset Ram Singh.

"He's gone!" gasped Nugent.

"Yaas, begad, he's gone!" said Lord Mauleverer. "Lucky we didn't go on and leave him to it, what? Come on."

Mauly started running in the direction Bunter had taken. The Famous Five followed him fast.

As they neared the spot where Bunter had disappeared, a fat, squealing voice fell on their ears.

"I say, you fellows! Help! Oh lor! I'm all wet! Yaroooh! Help! Beasts! Oh crikey!"

Evidently Bunter had not broken his neck! Neither, to judge by the fearful howls he was uttering, had he damaged his lungs!

"Careful!" exclaimed Wharton, as the juniors plunged through the gorse. "Look out where you're going! We don't want to follow him down!"

"I say, you fellows!"

"Coming!" shouted Bob.

"Beasts! Buck up! I'm all wet! I'm all muddy! Yaroooh! I say, you fellows, help!" squeaked Billy Bunter.

Bunter's fat squeak seemed to come from the depths of the earth. Harry Wharton & Co. reached the spot. In the midst of the gorse and thick grass, a pit opened in the moor, screened from sight by the over-growths. It had been quite hidden when Bunter plunged on it; now it was partly open, as he had torn away a great deal of the vegetation in his descent. Carefully the Greyfriars hikers gathered round the rugged crumbling edges of the pit. It was not more than six or seven feet wide, the sunlight glimmering down into dusky, dismal depths.

Fortunately for Bunter, the depth was not great. Equally fortunately for him, the old pit was partly flooded by the rains. Bunter had plumped into a foot of water and a foot of mud, which had saved him from damage, but otherwise had not added to his comfort. He stood gasping now, with water up over his knees, smothered with mud, dripping and reeking with it, his fat features hardly distinguishable under it. His upturned muddy face was about ten feet below the level of the moor, as he blinked up dizzily at the hikers above.

"Oh, my hat! There's a picture for you!" gasped Bob Cherry. And the hikers roared.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

THE SECOND CHAPTER.

Deep Down!

"I SAY, you fellows!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Beasts!" roared Bunter.

"I'm all wet!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I'm all muddy!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I've broken my neck!" yelled Bunter. "I mean, my leg! My leg's broken in two places!"

"And he's standing on it!" said Bob Cherry. "Fancy a fellow standing on a leg that's broken in two places!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I mean, my arm!" yelled Bunter.

"My arm's broken! I believe the spinal column of my arm is smashed in three places!"

"Oh crumbs!"

"Blessed if I see anything to cackle at!" shrieked Bunter. "Get me out of this! I suppose that's your gratitude to a fellow for showing you a short cut! Oh, you rotters! Get me out, will you?"

"Certainly," answered Bob. "Any fellow who's got an arm ten feet long reach down and hook Bunter out!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Come down for me, you beasts!" roared Bunter. "It's all right—you'll fall in the mud, as I did! You won't break any bones, if that's what you're afraid of."

"Might break the spinal columns of our arms in three places, old fat bean, as you've done."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"My—my arm isn't quite broken; in fact, it—it was only a knock! You can jump down all right."

"And how are we to get out again?" asked Harry Wharton.

"Oh, really, Wharton—"

"Nobody could climb out of that pit," remarked Johnny Bull. "Anybody who goes down has to stay there. If we all go we're there for good."

"The goodness would not be terrific," remarked Hurree Jamset Ram Singh.

"Are you going to leave me here to perish?" shrieked Bunter.

Only William George Bunter knows what has happened to Bob Cherry, who has mysteriously disappeared from the Greyfriars Hikers' Camp. And Bunter won't tell—not until he's had his supper!

"Serve you jolly well right if we did!"

"Beast!"

"We shall have to get the fat idiot out somehow," said Frank Nugent. "But how on earth are we going to do it?"

"Goodness knows! He won't be got out in a hurry, that's pretty certain," said Harry.

"Oh, you rotters! Are you going to leave me in this filthy mud, after all I've done for you? I say, you fellows—"

"Oh, ring off!" said Bob. "We're going to get you out somehow, though goodness knows how."

"Look here, all of you come down!" said Bunter. "If you stand on one another's shoulders I might be able to climb out over you, see?"

"And how would the last man climb out?" asked Bob.

"Oh, really, Cherry! If you're going to be beastly selfish—"

"Drop something on his head and shut him up!" suggested Johnny Bull.

"Beast!" yelled Bunter.

It was rather a problem that the hikers had before them. A monkey could hardly have climbed out, up the almost perpendicular walls of the disused pit. It was useless to drop in after Bunter, even if the hikers had any fancy for dropping into a morass of evil-smelling mud; which they hadn't! Bunter was far out of reach, and obviously only a long ladder or strong ropes could have solved the problem. Probably there was no such ladder within five miles; neither did the hikers possess a rope long enough or strong enough for the purpose.

Bunter had asked for it; in fact, begged for it; but he could not, of course, be left to what he had begged for. He had to be rescued somehow.

"Four or five miles back to Middlemoor to borrow a rope!" said Johnny Bull, in a voice resembling that of the Great Huge Bear. "And all because that fat chump fancied that he knew best!"

"Well, we've got to get him out," said Harry.

"Camp here," said Johnny. "If I'm going to tramp miles for him, I'm not going to do it till after lunch."

"Why, you beast!" roared Bunter, in spluttering indignation. "Think I'm going to stay here while you rotters camp and lunch?"

"Looks like it to me!" answered Johnny Bull.

"I say, you fellows—"

"The fact is, we shall have to have a rest before we go for a rope," said Harry. "You must make the best of it, Bunter, and be thankful it's no worse."

"Beast!" roared Bunter.

Lord Mauleverer rose from the side of the pit, shaded his eyes with his hand, and looked away across the moor.

"I rather think we needn't go back to Middlemoor for the rope, you men," remarked his lordship thoughtfully. "Might borrow one off those gipsy sportsmen yonder—not more than a quarter of a mile."

"Good old Mauly!" exclaimed Bob Cherry. "I'd forgotten them! Ten to one they've got a rope that would do."

The juniors all rose from the pit and looked towards the gipsy encampment on the moor. A gaily painted but very dingy caravan stood there, with a bony horse feeding on the moor near it. Two figures were to be seen at the encampment, that was all. They were both men, but too far off to be seen clearly; but from the look of the van the juniors had no doubt that they were gipsies. One of them wore a brightly coloured scarf round his head in place of a hat.

"That's the idea," said Harry Wharton. "One of us can cut across, and we can tip them to lend a hand pulling Bunter up! It won't be easy."

"And whoever goes may take a tumble like Bunter!" growled Johnny Bull. "The moor is pitted with these rotten spots!"

"Well, we shall have to risk that," said Harry, "and we're not clumsy asses like Bunter, anyhow. Two of us had better go."

"Yaas, let's!" said Lord Mauleverer, and he started, and Bob Cherry went with him. Scanning the way carefully as they went, the two juniors walked away to the gipsy encampment.

"I say, you fellows," came a yell from the pit, "don't you go away and leave me here."

Wharton looked down again.

"We're not going, ass! Mauly and Bob have gone to see if they can get a rope from the gipsies."

"How long are they going to be?" demanded Bunter.

"May be back in half an hour."

"You want me to stick in this mud for half an hour?" yelled Bunter indignantly.

"You silly ass!" roared Johnny Bull. "Is there any other way of getting you out?"

"Beast! Look here, those gipsies mayn't have a rope! One of you go back to Middlemoor at the same time, to make sure of getting one. See? It's only about four miles."

"Anything else?" asked Johnny Bull sarcastically.

"Yes! One of you might drop down here and keep me company," said THE MAGNET LIBRARY.—No. 1,337.

Bunter. "I want somebody to hold me, or I may be slipping over in this filthy mud."

"Anybody keen on going down into that mud to hold Bunter, because he's too lazy to stand?" asked Johnny.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"The keenfulness is not terrific!" chuckled Hurree Jamset Ram Singh.

"Oh, you rotters! Catch me hiking with you again!" groaned Bunter. "I've a jolly good mind to turn you down and clear off. Then you could jolly well see what you could do without me!"

"Oh, my hat!"

"I mean it," hooted Bunter. "If you don't jolly well play up now, after all I've done for you, I'll jolly well leave you on your own."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Beasts!"

The hikers sat down round the pit, to wait for Bob and Mauly to return. They were glad of a rest, and they waited patiently. Billy Bunter, at the bottom of the pit, waited less patiently—as was, perhaps, natural in the circumstances. The waiting juniors sorted out Bob Cherry's Holiday Annual, to read it in a bunch, to pass the time of waiting. And with the stony-hearted selfishness to which Billy Bunter was only too sadly accustomed, they gave all their attention to the entrancing pages of the Holiday Annual, and none at all to the howls and squeals of the fat junior at the bottom of the pit, standing first on one weary fat leg and then on the other.

THE THIRD CHAPTER.

Company for Billy Bunter!

"O H gad!" murmured Lord Mauleverer.

"Handsome pair!" murmured Bob Cherry, with a rueful grin.

The two juniors arrived at the gipsy camp. Now that they had arrived they were rather doubtful of their wisdom in coming. There are gipsies and gipsies! The two swarthy-looking men who sat on old boxes, smoking by the halted van, were not favourable specimens of the race. As they were evidently travelling on their own, with no other members of the tribe, it was possible that they were outcasts of the tribe—certainly they looked as if they might be. They looked a pair of dark, beetle-browed, surly ruffians, as tough a pair as the hikers had seen in the course of a long hike; not at all the sort of men to meet in a lonely place.

The man with a coloured scarf round his head was a short, thickset fellow, as dark as an Italian, with black, shiny eyes, and a jutting jaw. He glanced at the two hikers furtively under his thick brows, and muttered a few words to the other man—a taller, thinner fellow, dressed in a dingy old shirt and a battered old straw hat and ragged trousers. The second man removed the pipe from his mouth and glanced also at the two juniors, in the same furtive way.

Without being unduly suspicious, Bob and Mauly could not help thinking that the two were debating together whether it was practicable, and worth while, to rob the schoolboys who had walked up to their camp on the moor. They looked more than capable of it.

The van was parked in the grass beside a road that ran across the moor. There was not much traffic on the road, but there was some. Every now and then a car honked past on the way to Blackslade. Probably the two swarthy

men decided that it was not good enough, for they ceased to look at the schoolboys, turned from them indifferently, and resumed smoking their foul, black pipes. Bob and Mauly slowed down.

"Better put it to them, old bean," said Mauleverer. "They look tough, but they look pretty hefty, and a hefty man's wanted to drag Bunter up."

"They look more like footpads than decent gipsies," muttered Bob.

"Yaas; but they can't go through our pockets, with cars coming up and down the road. Come on!"

"Right-ho!"

And the two juniors walked up to the men seated near the van. The man in the scarf fixed his black eyes on them sullenly; the other stared indifferently across the moor.

"We're in want of help," began Lord Mauleverer politely. "One of our friends has fallen into a pit. If you've got a good rope in your van—"

"Seek elsewhere!" grunted the man in the scarf.

"We'll pay for help," said Bob Cherry, rather gruffly.

The man eyed him.

"What will you pay?" he asked.

"Five shillings," answered Bob, "if you'll bring the rope and help us pull the chap out of the pit."

"How far is it?"

"About a quarter of a mile."

"What do you say, Joseph?" asked the man in the scarf.

"No," said Joseph.

"Make it ten," suggested Lord Mauleverer amiably. "After all, it's rather a walk, and Bunter's a good weight to pull up."

"No," said Joseph again, without even looking at the juniors.

"Well, look here, will you lend us the rope?" demanded Bob.

"No," said Joseph.

Bob Cherry's brow darkened. But Lord Mauleverer weighed in with undiminished affability.

"Suppose we make it a pound?" he suggested.

The thickset man in the scarf looked at his companion again. Joseph shook his head.

"Make it a pound each—a pound for me and a pound for Michael—and we will do as you wish," he said.

"Do you think we're millionaires, or blithering idiots?" demanded Bob Cherry wrathfully. "Keep your blessed old rope, and hang yourselves on it, if you like! Come on, Mauly! Let's walk on to Middlemoor. Might get a lift in a car on the road, too."

"Yaas," said Lord Mauleverer, and the two juniors turned away.

Upon which Joseph hooked himself off the old box he was seated on and put his black pipe into a frowsy pocket.

"We will go," he said. "I have a rope in the van."

Michael nodded, and rose also. The two juniors turned back. They were rather glad to get out of the long trip back to Middlemoor.

Joseph went into the van and came out with a coil of rope. He looped it over his arm, carefully looked the van, and announced that he was ready.

"This way!" said Bob, not very amiably.

And he led the way back across the moor, with Mauleverer and the two gipsies following.

It was not a rapid walk back, the gipsies slouching along lazily, and the Greyfriars fellows accommodating their pace to that of Michael and Joseph. But they arrived on the spot at last.

"Hallo, hallo, hallo!" bawled Bob, as

they sighted the group of juniors round the Holiday Annual at the mouth of the pit.

Harry Wharton & Co. jumped up at once. The Holiday Annual was put back into Bob's rucksack, which he had left with his friends.

"Oh, here you are!" said Harry. "Thank goodness you've got a rope!"

"Where is he?" asked Michael, staring round in the gorse.

Wharton pointed out the pit. Where Bunter was, was revealed by a fat, indignant squeak from the depths.

"I say, you fellows! I say, you beasts! I say, you rotters! How much longer are you going to keep me here, you beasts!"

Michael and Joseph peered over the side of the pit and grinned at the muddy countenance turned up from below. Then they stepped back and eyed the party of hikers. Joseph did not uncoil the rope. They seemed in no hurry to begin. They looked over the moor with searching eyes, in all directions, as if to ascertain how solitary the spot was. It was solitary enough; far from the road where the gipsy van was parked. Only the van and the distant smoke of Blackslade were in sight; all else was bare moor, gorse, and grass and trees. The two gipsies drew closer together and muttered to one another in low tones, regardless of the hikers.

"Well, get on with it, now you're here," said Bob Cherry.

Michael gave him a scowl. Joseph glanced round at the hikers, as if appraising them. Then he spoke.

"Your friend is at the bottom of the pit," he said. "It would be very disagreeable for you to join him there."

Harry Wharton stared at him.

"We're not thinking of joining him there," he said. "What do you mean?"

"I mean," said Joseph smoothly, "that it is worth more than a pound to pull out the fat one. I think it is worth five pounds."

"Five pounds!" agreed the man in the scarf.

"If you wait till you screw five pounds out of us," said Johnny Bull, "you'll be getting your old-age pension about the same time. If you're too dashed lazy to help, lend us the rope and stand aside."

"I think you will give us five pounds for pulling up your friend," said Joseph smoothly, "and if you do not, we shall not pull him up, neither will you. You will join him in the pit."

"Oh gad!" murmured Lord Mauleverer.

The hikers drew together. Evidently, the two ruffians, in that lonely place, fancied that they could deal as they liked with the schoolboys. It was rather a mistake on their part.

"So that's the game, is it?" said Bob Cherry grimly.

"That," said Joseph, in the same smooth tone, "is the game. Five pounds is our price for not pitching you into the pit after the fat one. Cheap, I call it, as we could take all you have if we chose."

"I say, you fellows—"

"Shut up, Bunter!"

"Beast!" roared Bunter.

"Now, look here, my man!" said Lord Mauleverer urbanely. "You can't go back on a bargain. That's not cricket. Get on with it! A pound to pull Bunter up, or five shillings for the loan of the rope, whichever you like."

"And make up your minds sharp," snapped Johnny Bull, "and don't give us any more lip, or you may get into the pit yourselves."

Joseph laughed. Evidently he did not consider himself in any danger of that. "Make it five pounds," he said. "Otherwise, I shall toss you into the pit, to begin with, my young friend."

"Will you, by gum?" said Johnny Bull between his teeth.

"I say, you fellows!" yelled Bunter. The fat Owl heard what was said. "I say, give them what they want. I'll square later. You jolly well get me out of this, see?"

Joseph glanced down at him. "You had better stand from under, you fat one!" he said. "One of your friends will be coming down immediately."

"Oh crikey!" gasped Bunter. He scrambled hurriedly to the side of the pit and clamped himself there.

the schoolboys did not crumple up on the spot. To the still greater surprise of the two rascals, it was themselves that crumpled up!

There was a wild and whirling tussle for a few minutes, on the edge of the moorland pit! Then a whirling figure went over the edge, and splashed and crashed into the mud below. Instantly it was followed by another! But neither was a hiker!

Joseph, splashing deep in mud and mire, was struggling up, when Michael landed on him, driving him under again. And Billy Bunter, crouching back against the side of the pit, blinked in amazement through his muddy spectacles, at the two yelling, spluttering, gasping ruffians, struggling up smothered from head to foot with mud.

a shadow of a doubt, that they could handle a party of junior schoolboys as they chose. Evidently, they had miscalculated a little.

"Well, we've got the rope!" said Bob. "Lower it down for Bunter. Stand ready, Bunter."

"Oh crikey!" Tying one end of the rope to a tree-stump near at hand, as an additional precaution, the hikers lowered the other end into the pit. Bunter made a move towards it; and was immediately shoved back by Joseph, so roughly that he sat down with a splash, a squelch and a howl. Then Joseph grasped the rope.

"Let go that rope!" called out Harry Wharton.

A snarl was the only answer. "We'll leave it for you to climb out



"If you want the loan of this rope," said the gipsy, "it'll cost you five pounds. Otherwise I shall toss you into the pit to join your fat friend. Now, what is it to be?" "Hand over that rope!" said Bob Cherry, grabbing at the coil on the rascal's arm. "Now stand clear and shut up!"

THE FOURTH CHAPTER.

Pull I

"Oh crikey!" gasped Bunter. "Urrrrgh!" spluttered Joseph.

"Gurrrgh!" gurgled Michael.

They stood up, drenched and dripping. Water streamed down them, mud smothered them. They were in even a worse state than Bunter! Six breathless, grinning faces looked down at them from the top of the pit.

"Hallo, hallo, hallo!" roared Bob Cherry. "What price that?"

"Priceless!" chuckled Johnny Bull. "Ha, ha, ha!"

"Sorry you spoke, dear men?" inquired Lord Mauleverer. "I warned you that it wasn't cricket, you know!"

The two gipsies glared up with almost murderous looks. Never had a pair of ruffianly rascals been so astonished. They had taken it for granted, without

afterwards," said Harry. "But we're getting Bunter out first! Let go!"

"I will not let go!" hissed the gipsy between his teeth. "And when I am out I will throw you all into the pit, one after another."

Harry Wharton broke loose a large lump of turf, leaned over the pit, and dropped it fairly on Joseph's head. There was a roar from Joseph, as he sat down in a foot of water and a foot of mud. He was almost babbling with rage as he scrambled up.

"Have some more?" asked the captain of the Greyfriars Remove coolly. "You'll get plenty if you touch that rope again, you scoundrel."

"Let him have a few as a warning, and drop 'em hard," said Johnny Bull. "Yaas, go it," said Lord Mauleverer cheerfully. "This is rather amusin'—not for those sportsmen, of course; but for us."

"Ha, ha, ha!" THE MAGNET LIBRARY.—No. 1,337.

Certainly, he did not want another of the hikers dropping on his head.

"Now," said Joseph, with the same silky smoothness, turning to the hikers again. "What is it to be?"

"Hand over that rope!" said Bob, and he grabbed at the coil on the rascal's arm and jerked it away. "Now stand clear and shut up!"

Joseph's eyes glittered, and he grasped at Bob. His thin, wiry arms were very strong and sinewy, and undoubtedly Bob would have been pitched headlong into the pit, had he been alone to handle the ruffian. But, like one man, the hikers rushed to his aid. Joseph was grasped on all sides. Michael leaped to his aid, growling a good deal like a bulldog. But there were six of the hikers, and they were all sturdy, and all full of pluck—a very different proposition from what the smooth-tongued Joseph had imagined. Three each tackled the two ruffians, and, to the surprise of Joseph and Michael,

Another heavy clod, suspended over Joseph, caused him to back away from the rope. Apparently he did not want any more on his head.

"Now, Bunter!" called out Wharton.

"Oh crikey!" gurgled Bunter.

The fat Owl splashed towards the hanging rope again. This time he was allowed to take hold of it without molestation.

"Climb!" called out Bob cheerily.

"Beast!" howled Bunter. "Do you think I'm a monkey on a stick, you silly idiot? Pull me up!"

"Tie the rope round you then, fat-head."

"Beast!"

Billy Bunter passed the end of the rope round his ample person, and knotted it under the armpits. The two gypsies watched him savagely, but they did not venture to interfere. Pelting with clods from above was not so amusing to them as to the hikers.

"Mainsail haul—all hands on deck!" said Bob Cherry.

Six sturdy hikers grasped the rope, and marched away from the pit, pulling. Billy Bunter was extracted from the mud, a good deal like a cork from a bottle. He swung into the air, bumping against the side of the pit, and yelling:

"Yaroooh! I say, you fellows! Wow! This rope's pinching me—yow-wow! Stop bumping me, you beasts! Yow-ow-ow!"

"Pull, you beggars, pull!" gasped Bob Cherry. "Oh, my hat! How many tons does he weigh?"

"Fifty, I think!" gasped Nugent.

"The tonfulness of the esteemed Bunter is terrific!" panted the dusky Nabob of Bhanipur. "My only esteemed hat!"

"Yaroooh! I tell you this rope is pinching me!" shrieked Bunter.

"Like us to drop you again?" roared Johnny Bull.

"Beast!"

No doubt the rope was pinching Bunter; but, really, there was no help for it; though, judging by Bunter's howls, it was a special and malicious injury that the hikers were inflicting on him.

With a long pull, a strong pull, and a pull all together, the hikers brought the weighty Owl of the Remove to the top of the pit.

His fat face and muddy spectacles glared over the verge.

"Grooogh! I say, you fellows! Wow! Help me out!" yelled Bunter. "Stop pulling that beastly rope, and come and help me out!"

If the hikers had stopped pulling, on the rope, Billy Bunter would assuredly have gone down again. They pulled, and pulled, and Bunter was dragged bodily up over the edge, which crumbled under him, sending down a shower of earth and stones on Michael and Joseph. The fat junior was dragged out at last, and sprawled in the gorse, roaring.

"Ooooooh! Beasts! Woooooh! Grooogh!"

"Landed at last," said Bob cheerfully.

"Never landed such a fat fish before!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Untie me, you rotters!" yelled Bunter.

The hikers untied him. Bunter rolled farther away from the pit, and sat up. He was in a shocking state. Mud clothed him like a garment. He wiped his big spectacles, jammed them on his muddy nose again, and glared at the hikers with an indignant and accusing glare.

"Beasts! If this is how you treat a fellow who comes on a hike with you, I'm fed-up with it, and I can jolly well

tell you so! I wish now I'd gone with Smithy on his yacht when he asked me!"

"Only Smithy forgot to ask you!" sighed Bob Cherry.

"Leaving a fellow sticking for hours and hours in a filthy pit!" roared Bunter, "and nearly dragging him to pieces getting him out! If that's what you call pally, I can only say—urrgh! Gurrgh! Some of that filthy mud's got into my mouth! Wurrgh!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Cackle!" howled Bunter. "Cackle! You'll cackle on the other side of your mouths when I turn you down and leave you to get on without me."

"Better stick to us for the rest of the hols, old fat bean," chuckled Bob. "Nobody else will stand you."

"And we're fools to stand you!" growled Johnny Bull.

"Oh, Bunter's all right," said Mauleverer tolerantly. "Bunter's frightfully amusin'—much more amusin' than he knows."

"Yah!" hooted Bunter. "Look at the state I'm in!"

"Well, whose fault is it, you blithering chump!" demanded Johnny Bull. "Didn't we warn you not to tumble into a pit?"

"Beast!"

"This is how Bunter thanks fellows for getting him out!" said Johnny. "Let's pitch him in again."

Billy Bunter scrambled to his feet, and scrambled back to the moorland path. He was not likely to quit that safe path again. Bunter had had enough of short cuts across the moor.

Harry Wharton took the end of the rope, and leaned over the pit, meeting the muddy, evil glare of Michael and Joseph below. He tossed the end of the rope down to them.

"We've tied this end safe," he said. "You can climb out! You've got yourselves to thank for what's happened. Good-bye."

"And you'll find five bob in the grass here, waitin' for you," called out Lord Mauleverer. He placed two half-crowns in a conspicuous spot.

"Well, you howling ass!" said Johnny Bull, "are you going to pay the rascals, after they tried to rob us?"

"Yaas! We can't borrow their rope for nothin', you know. I should hate to be under an obligation to such very unpleasant persons!" drawled his lordship.

"I say, you fellows!" squeaked Billy Bunter. "Let's get on for goodness' sake. I've got to get a wash somewhere!"

"My only hat! Bunter wants a wash!" gasped Bob Cherry. "First time I've ever heard him say so! Come on, you men—don't let's disappoint him when he wants a wash for once."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The hikers walked back to the path, slinging on their packs. Michael and Joseph were left to clamber out of the pit at their leisure; the hikers wasted no more thought on the two rascals.

They followed the path across the moor, Bunter keeping to it even more carefully than the other fellows! He squelched mud as he marched, and emitted a series of grunts, groans, and gasps.

But the distant clump of oaks was reached at last. There was a moorland pool in the shade of the big, wide-spreading trees, and there Bunter was able to get the wash he so badly needed. He washed, and he changed, and looked quite a new Bunter when he had finished, while the other fellows prepared lunch.

After which Billy Bunter demonstrated that his misadventure had not affected his appetite.

But lunch did not have the effect of banishing the indignant frown from the fat brow of William George Bunter.

Generally, the parking of an enormous quantity of foodstuffs in his capacious inside was sufficient to restore Bunter's good humour. On this occasion he parked as much as usual; but it did not produce the usual effect. Bunter was angry—Bunter was scornful! Like the ancient prophet, he was angry, and considered that he did well to be angry.

But his anger, his indignation, and his scorn passed the other hikers by, like the idle wind which they regarded not. Sad to relate, they did not even notice that he was angry, indignant, and scornful! But, as it happened, they were shortly to have those important facts brought very prominently to their attention.

THE FIFTH CHAPTER.

Luck for Ponsonby!

"JERVIS!"

"Sir!"

"Stop!"

The chauffeur stopped the green Austin.

Cecil Ponsonby, of the Fourth Form at Highcliffe, stood up in the car, glancing at the stretch of moorland beside the road.

His pals, Gadsby and Monson, sat where they were. Pon was staring at a dingy gipsy caravan parked in the grass near the road; but Gaddy and Monson were not interested in it, or in the two rough-looking fellows who lounged by it. They were engaged in scraping off mud, and looked as if they had collected a great deal from somewhere. Mud, in fact, almost clothed them from head to foot. It was easy to see that both of them were in extremely bad tempers.

Pon stepped from the car.

"Where on earth are you goin', Pon?"

asked Gadsby.

"To speak to those gypsies."

"What on earth for?" asked Monson.

"To pick up news, if I can, of that Greyfriars crew, fathead! We heard about them at Middlemoor, and they can't be far off. More likely than not those gypsies may have seen something of them."

Pon walked across from the car to the gipsy camp.

Gadsby and Monson exchanged a glance and shrugged their shoulders.

Hunting the Greyfriars hikers was still the chief occupation of the dandy of Highcliffe. Gaddy and Monson had little interest in it. Still, they did not object to extending the motor tour to the moors of Yorkshire. So long as Pon's father let him have the car and the chauffeur Gaddy and Monson were ready to make use of them. But they were more than fed-up with the Greyfriars hikers, while defeat after defeat only made Pon the more savagely determined.

Black scowls from the two muddy gypsies greeted Pon as he came up to them. Michael and Joseph had had a weary and muddy tramp back to their van, after clambering out of the pit with the aid of the rope. They felt inclined to "bash" this well-dressed, supercilious-looking young fellow—and would probably have done so had he come along alone. They were simply yearning to bash somebody, as a vent for their wrath. Scowls from low-browed, unwashed gypsies did not, however, affect Pon's equanimity. He

looked at them with cool contempt as he addressed them.

"I'm looking for some fellows who've passed this way, I think," said Ponsonby. "Hikers! Seen anythin' of them?"

He was surprised by the effect of that question. Michael and Joseph glared at him almost tigerishly, and broke into a volley of savage abuse. It did not take Pon long to guess that they had, indeed, seen something of the hikers, and had had trouble with them. Concluding, from his question, that Ponsonby was a friend of the hikers, they spluttered abuse at him, and only the presence of the others in the car kept them from laying rough hands on the dandy of Highcliffe.

"You've seen them, then?" grinned Ponsonby.

Another volley of abuse! "That's enough," cut in Ponsonby contemptuously. "You can chuck that! The fellows are no friends of mine, as you seem to think—quite the reverse. I'm after them to give them as bad a time as I can! I want to find out where they are."

"No friends of yours?" said Joseph, eyeing him sharply. "What do you want with them, then?"

"One of them has got somethin' that belongs to me," said Ponsonby. "I'm after it—and them! Where can I pick up the crew?"

Michael lifted an unwashed hand and pointed to a clump of trees visible in the far distance across the moor.

"That is the way they went," he said.

"Can a car get there?"

"No!"

"Are they camping?"

"I don't know?"

"What's farther on?"

"The road to Blackslade," said Joseph.

"You can get a car round by Blackslade, sir."

Now that they understood that Pon was not a friend, but a foe, of the hikers who had handled them, the two rascals were quite willing to give information.

Ponsonby scanned them curiously and thoughtfully.

"I take it that you've had trouble with that crew," he said.

"They threw us into a pit!" grunted Michael sullenly.

"You look like it!" agreed Ponsonby. He glanced round at the car.

"Jervis!"

"Sir!"

"Drive on, and wait a little way up the road."

"Yes, sir!"

The green Austin glided on.

Ponsonby sat on one of the old boxes near the van. He took out his cigarette-case, opened it, and extended it to the gipsies. They stared at him in blank surprise; but very willingly helped themselves to Pon's expensive cigarettes. Michael, the stocky ruffian, was still scowling sullenly; but the keener rascal, the smooth-tongued Joseph, was eyeing Ponsonby very curiously. Probably his keen eyes read a great deal of Pon's character in his face.

"I'd like to talk to you for a few minutes," said Pon, when the car had gone. "I gather that you're not feelin' very friendly to that crew of hoodlums?"

"Give us a chance—" muttered Michael, between his teeth. He broke off at a sign from Joseph.

"No, sir," said Joseph, his eyes reading Pon's face.

"You've got a van here," said Ponsonby. "You don't stay long in one place, I fancy, and when you travel you've often got something in that van that's missing from the neighbourhood."

Michael scowled savagely, but was silent at another sign from Joseph. The latter grinned.

"You are a young gentleman who knows his way about, sir," he said. "A very keen young gentleman for your age, sir."

"I'm no fool, and I can see what's pretty plain," answered Ponsonby coolly. "Sometimes, I imagine, you've got chickens in the van, sometimes a dog that's missing—what?"

"Look here—" began Michael.

"Let the young gentleman speak, Michael," said Joseph smoothly. "He is not wasting his breath for nothing."

"Exactly," assented Ponsonby. "I'm talkin' business. Did you notice a fellow among those hikers—a rather hefty fellow, heftiest of the lot, with a mop of flaxen hair?"

"We noticed him rather specially, sir," said Joseph, while Michael gritted his teeth.

"Well, that's the fellow I'm after."

A USEFUL POCKET KNIFE GOES TO—

W. Ambrose, Oppo. Nunnery, Nunnery Street, Castle Hedingham, Essex, who sent in the following amusing joke:



Schoolmaster: "There is no difficulty in the world that cannot be overcome."

Tommy: "Pisass, sir, have you tried putting toothpaste back into the tube?"

POCKET KNIVES AWARDED FOR ALL WINNING JOKES!

said Pon, sinking his voice. "His name's Cherry—Bob Cherry! He's got something that belongs to me—"

"Something you want, you mean, sir?" asked Joseph smoothly.

Ponsonby stared at him angrily for a moment; then he nodded.

"Put it how you like," he said. "Look here." Pon sank his voice again, though there were only the gipsies' ears to hear. "I can't handle that gang—you know that, as you seem to have tried to handle them yourselves. Fellows like you can get about the moors in a van—or on foot—and keep an eye on that crew—and find a chance of picking up the fellow I've mentioned, when he's not with the others."

"No doubt, sir," said Joseph smoothly, while Michael only stared.

"You might pick him up and bundle him into your van!" said Ponsonby.

"The same as I fancy you often do with stray dogs."

"Quite easily, sir, if—"

"If you were paid for it," said Pon.

"Well, if you get hold of that fellow, and stick him somewhere where I can speak to him, without the brute bein' able to use his hands, it's worth a couple of pounds to you."

"Not more than that, sir!" asked Joseph.

"If I get what I want from him, I'll make it a fiver. If not, a couple of pounds for your trouble. And if you handle him rather roughly, nobody will make a fuss about it."

Joseph grinned.

"I think I catch on, sir," he said. "I think we shall be very glad to serve you, sir. May I ask your name?"

"Robinson," said Ponsonby calmly. He had no intention of giving his real name to a pair of ruffians, with whom he had entered into such a compact.

"George Robinson."

"Thank you, sir!" murmured Joseph, realising that he was going to know nothing about this young gentleman's name, except that it was not Robinson!

"Well, is it a go?" asked Pon.

"Certainly, sir!"

"Then we'd better make a few arrangements—"

For some minutes Ponsonby and Joseph talked in low tones, while Michael looked on. Then the dandy of Highcliffe walked up the road after the car, smiling.

Joseph looked after him as he went, with a peculiar expression on his face.

"Michael," he said, in his smooth tones, "we are a pair of rogues, you and I—we have been kicked out of our tribe, Michael, because we go a little too far even for their rather easy code. I am a man of education, Michael, and you are just a brute—but in rascality we are on a par. Is it not so?"

"Oh, shut it!" growled Michael.

"But," continued Joseph, "both of us together, my friend Michael, do not make up such a thorough-going rascal as that young gentleman who has just left us! And he drives in a car, with excellent clothes on his back, and money in his pockets—and we trundle a cheap van and steal chickens and dogs, and even washing from the line! The world, Michael, is not just and fair to its rogues!"

"Oh, shut it!" said Michael again.

And the philosophical Joseph "shut it," and stood staring meditatively after Ponsonby as he stepped into the car and drove away.

THE SIXTH CHAPTER.

Billy Bunter is Mysterious!

"WAIT!" said Billy Bunter.

"Eh?"

"Just wait!"

"We're not waiting for you, you fat slug, if that's what you mean," grunted Johnny Bull. "If you lag behind, stay behind, and be blown to you."

"That isn't what I mean," sneered Bunter.

"Well, what do you mean, if you mean anything?" inquired Bob Cherry.

"That's telling!"

This mysterious answer ought really to have excited the curiosity, perhaps the uneasiness, of the Greyfriars hikers. It ought to have made them wonder what Bunter meant, and what deep, dark thoughts were passing in his podgy brain.

But it didn't! Billy Bunter could be as darkly mysterious as he liked, without exciting the slightest curiosity. What he meant was a mystery which nobody thought it worth while to penetrate!

So Bob just said "fathead!" and marched on, and the other hikers

marched on, and Bunter, mysteriously, lagged behind.

The hikers were on the march again, in the golden September afternoon. The holidays were drawing to an end; and the chums of the Remove had agreed to keep on the hike till the latest possible date. They were enjoying every day of the hike, especially now that they were on the breezy moors of the great county of Yorkshire. They found Yorkshire scenery magnificent; and Yorkshire folk kindly and agreeable; and when Johnny Bull asked them if Yorkshire wasn't the finest county ever, they agreed that it was—only, of course, excepting their own!

With a fine, sunny, sky over their heads, and the health-giving breezes of the Yorkshire moors in their lungs, the hikers were feeling fit as fiddles, and merry as crickets.

Billy Bunter's dark and mysterious hints did not worry them. Probably they would not have been worried had they even known the deep, dark thoughts that worked in the fatuous depths of Bunter's podgy brain.

Bunter, for once, was not grumbling and grouching as he marched. He seemed to derive some solace for the fatigues of the march from the deep, dark thoughts within!

Bunter was "up" to something! That was clear, if any fellow had noticed it! But no fellow did! In the estimation of the other hikers, Billy Bunter's unimportance was unlimited.

"I call this jolly!" remarked Bob Cherry, as the hikers swung on merrily along a deep lane sunk between two great stretches of moorland.

"The jollifunness is truly terrific!" declared Hurree Jamset Ram Singh.

"Even Bunter's enjoying himself!" said Bob. "He hasn't grouched or groaned for a good ten minutes."

"Oh, really, Cherry—"

"It's doin' Bunter good," said Lord Mauleverer. "I'm sure it's bringin' down his fat!"

"Oh, really, Mauly—"

"Bunter ought to get weighed, if we come across a machine that will stand it," said Mauleverer. "I'm sure he'll miss a stone or two."

"I believe I'm losing weight," said Bunter bitterly. "I never get enough to eat, as you jolly well know."

There was a rumble of wheels and the cracking of a whip in the lane behind the hikers. They crowded to the side of the lane to give the vehicle room to pass.

"Hallo, hallo, hallo!" ejaculated Bob Cherry. "Seen those gents before?"

"The gipsies!" exclaimed Nugent.

It was a dingy painted van that came rumbling along, drawn by a bony horse. Joseph was driving, and Michael sat beside him smoking a black pipe. The lane was narrow, and the hikers stood in a row against the bank for the van to pass. The two gipsies scowled at them, and Joseph made a motion with his whip, as if disposed to use it on the hikers. But evidently he thought better of it. The van rumbled on and disappeared ahead, Joseph's eye lingering very keenly on Bob Cherry till he was past.

"The dear men seem to be going our way," remarked Bob, little guessing that that was intentional on the part of the gipsies.

"Well, they're gone," said Nugent. "Glad to see the last of them."

"I say, you fellows, when are we going to camp? I'm tired."

"You needn't have told us that one," said Bob; "as we've done two miles, we know you're tired—fagged out—exhausted!"

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"Beast!"

"Only three more miles, old bean," said Harry Wharton encouragingly. "We've heard of a ripping place for camping, about three miles on."

"Lot you care if I fall down exhausted!" said Bunter. "Never mind—just wait!"

"Wait for what, fathead?"

"You'll find out!" said Bunter.

"Is the fat ass wandering in his mind?" asked Johnny Bull.

"Has he one to wander in?" asked Nugent.

"Just wait!" sneered Bunter.

Again the hikers might have guessed that something was on—if they had been curious about Billy Bunter's dark and mysterious reflections! But they weren't—not in the least! They hiked on cheerily, and the fat Owl of the Remove rolled on behind, with a podgy frown on his brow, and a gleam in his little round eyes behind his big round spectacles.

When the camping-place was reached, all the hikers—except Bunter—thought it worth the march. It was a glorious moorland, with a precipitous "pike" rising against the sky, from the steep sides of which a stream cascaded down, which the juniors had been told was called Grimsdale Water. Beyond the pike, dark and rugged fells rose against the sky. In a snug spot near the tumbling stream the camp was pitched.

Down went the packs, up went the tent. Six hikers enjoyed a dip in the cool, clear water—Bunter, who felt no need of a dip, sitting on the bank and resting his fat limbs. Then came supper, sitting on the turf by the stream, under the sinking sun. Billy Bunter did his usual full justice to supper; but he did not, as usual, roll away to his blankets afterwards and snore.

"Where's your Holiday Annual, Bob?" he asked.

"In my rucksack."

"Well, lend it to me, will you?"

"Certainly, old bean."

Bob did not get up—neither did Bunter.

"Well, if you're going to lend it to me, hand it over!" said Bunter.

"You can't get it?" asked Bob. "It's in the tent."

"I'm sitting down!" said Bunter, with chilling dignity.

"So am I!" remarked Bob.

"Beast!"

"It's getting a bit dim for reading, Bunter," remarked Wharton.

"Rot!" said Bunter.

He heaved up his considerable weight and went into the tent. He came out with Bob Cherry's Annual in his fat hand and sat down again.

"The fact is," said Bunter, "I rather think I can spot the secret in this book! You fellows know what Pon thinks—"

"Pon's a silly ass!" said Bob.

"Well, I fancy he's right," said Bunter. "You see, I had the Annual that day last term when the smash-and-grab man came on me in the wood and tried to get me to carry a message to the other rascal. I didn't know Pon was spying, of course, and I didn't know at the time that the fellow put a message in the book for his pal—but he jolly well did! It turned out that Pon was watching him—"

"My dear ass, we've rooted through the book a hundred times, and there's nothing in it," said Bob.

"Well, Pon thinks there is, and he's no fool!" said Bunter. "He's been after this Annual all through the hols. I know that smash-and-grab man, Micky the Sprat, had it in his hands, and he spun me a yarn to make me show it to the other man—only the police got

him before I could. Well, that jolly well looks as if the message is in it. There's a reward of fifty pounds out for whoever finds the jewellery he took away from old Lazarus' shop in Courtfield. That's what Pon's after."

"Well, if you can root out any old message in that book, go in and win!" yawned Bob. "I fancy it will take time."

"We've all been at it!" said Nugent. "Nothing in it."

"Mauly thinks there's something in it, don't you, Mauly?"

"Yaas."

"So do I," said Bunter. "It may take time, of course. Still, a fellow with brains can find it, if it's there."

"Well, you've got the book," said Johnny Bull. "But what about the brains?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Yah!"

Billy Bunter, though he had announced his intention of exploring that Holiday Annual once more, to unearth the secret message which Ponsonby believed it to contain, did not open it. He sat with it on his fat knees, and blinked at the hikers through his big spectacles.

"What about a walk before going to bed?" he asked.

"Jolly good idea!" said Bob Cherry, jumping up at once. "Fancy Bunter suggesting a walk!"

"Oh, I'm not coming," said Bunter. "I'll stay here and mind the camp!"

"Bunter wants to get rid of our select and entertaining society!" grinned Bob. "We're boring Bunter!"

"Well, as a matter of fact, you are," said Bunter calmly. "I want to go through this book, and your silly chattering interrupts me."

"Oh gad!" said Lord Mauleverer, rising lazily. "Let's go for a walk, dear men! I'm not frightfully keen on any more walkin', but if Bunter's stayin' in camp, a walk has its attractions."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

And the hikers, who had, anyhow, intended to have a ramble along the banks of Grimsdale Water before turning in, strolled out of the camp. And nobody noticed the triumphant grin on Billy Bunter's fat face as they went!

THE SEVENTH CHAPTER.

Billy Bunter Bolts!

"HALLO, hallo, hallo!"

"Bunter!"

"Where are you, fatty?"

"Where on earth's Bunter?"

"The disappearfulness of the esteemed Bunter seems to be terrific."

Dusk was deepening into dark when the hikers came back from their ramble along the moorland stream. They rather expected to see the light of the lantern glimmering from the tent, but all was dark. They quite expected to hear Billy Bunter's snore, but all was silent. The Owl of the Remove was to be neither seen nor heard—which was unusual.

"Where on earth has he got to?" asked Bob, puzzled. And he lifted up his voice again—a voice that had a strong resemblance to that of Stentor of ancient times—and roared: "Bunter! Bunter! Bunter! Bunter! Bunter!"

"Bunt!" came back in booming echoes from the dusky moorland. But there was no other answer. The voice of Billy Bunter, unlike that of the turtle of old, was not heard in the land!

Harry Wharton stepped into the tent and lighted the lantern slung to the



Utterly unsuspecting of danger, Bob Cherry came on, and swung under the shady branches of the oaks. What happened next was sudden. Two dusky figures leaped at him in the shade, and before he knew that he was seized he was down on his back in the grass. "Oh lor!" gasped Billy Bunter as he watched this strange scene from his place of concealment.

pole. A glance showed that the tent was vacant. Bunter was not there.

Where he was was a mystery! Bunter certainly was not the fellow to wander away! Only a very powerful motive could have induced him to set his fat little legs into motion again, once they were at anchor.

"Puzzle—find Bunter!" said Frank Nugent.

"Bunter!" roared Bob.

"He's not in the tent," said Harry, "and—"

"And he's not out of it," said Bob. "O where and O where can he be?"

"He's not the fellow to go for a walk," said Nugent. "What the merry dickens can have become of him? What are you grinning at, Mauly?"

Lord Mauleverer chuckled.

"Frightfully deep!" he remarked.

"Eh, what?"

"Dear old Bunter suggested that we should go for that walk! While we were out of sight, he's cut."

"Cut!" yelled the hikers.

"Yaaa! Bunter's turned us down!"

"Oh, great pip!"

"Turned us down!" gasped Johnny Bull. "Yes, he said he would—he's said so a lot of times! I always said it was too good to be true."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The hikers roared. Billy Bunter, as a hiker, had put a very severe strain on the patience and good-temper of the rest of the party. Even Mauly had felt the strain. It had been an enjoyable hike—a happy hike—but there was no doubt that Bunter could have added to its enjoyment and happiness, at any time, by disappearing over the horizon. If he had done so at last, it was not really a crushing blow—though perhaps Bunter fancied that it was!

"The blithering owl!" gasped Bob Cherry. "He got us away while he

sneaked off—did he fancy we should try to stop him?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The hikers yelled again!

"Dear old Bunter!" chortled Bob. "He pictured us standing round, with tears in our eyes, begging him not to go! Perhaps he thought we should keep him by force rather than lose him!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I hope the fat duffer won't lose his way on the moors," said Harry. "It's rather wild country for trotting about after dark."

"Well, if he does, he will find it again in the morning," said Johnny Bull. "Anyhow, it's his own bizney."

"Yes, that's so; but—" The captain of the Greyfriars Remove cast a rather uneasy glance round at the shadowy moorland. Billy Bunter was a fellow who had ample confidence in himself, and no doubt he had walked off quite cheerily, never doubting that he would reach the road and walk into the nearest town without mishap. But the fat Owl's confidence in himself, unfortunately, was rather ill-founded. Bunter could have lost himself in a five-acre meadow—and by Grimslade Water the dusky moors stretched for miles and miles.

Still, it could not be helped. It was impossible to look for him on the darkening moors, especially as the hikers did not know what direction he had taken, or how far away he might be.

"Silly ass!" said Johnny Bull. "What about turning in?"

It was not quite dark, and the hikers went into the tent. Then they made a discovery. Pinned to the tent-pole was a piece of paper, which Wharton had not noticed in his glance round. But the hikers noticed it now, and Wharton unhooked it, guessing at once what it was. The almost illegible scrawl of Billy Bunter covered it.

"He's left us a farewell note!" said Harry, laughing.

He held up the paper in the lantern-light, and the hikers gathered and read it together—with grinning faces. But the grins died off their faces as they perused that rather remarkable farewell message of the Owl of Greyfriars. In Bunter's sprawling, scrawling hand, and Bunter's own particular brand of spelling, it ran:

"BEESTS!

"I'm gowing. Leaving a fellow sticking in a pit, you rotters? Now you can see what you can do without me. I refuse to hike with you any more. I can see now that I was rather a phool to go about in such kumpany at all. It lets a fellow down! I can tell you plainly that I'm done with you!"

"I'm taking the Hollyday Annual with me. You needn't think I'm gowing to keep it; I shall hand it back to Bob next term at Greyfriars. I'm not powing to spot the messidge in it, and get the reward for finding the joolery that smash-and-grabb men hid somewhere near Greyfriars. Nothing of the sort? I'm just taking the book to read? As you kno, I'm fond of reeding?"

"W. G. BUNTER.

"P.S.—Yore a lot of beests?"

"N.B.—Yore a lot of kuds?"

The Greyfriars hikers read that message. They gazed at it. They stared at it. They glared at it!

"The fat, frowsy, footling, frabjous freak!" hissed Bob Cherry. "That's why he bamboozled us—he was going to bolt with my Holiday Annual! That's why he wanted it—pulling my leg all the time! Why, I—I—I'll—"

Words failed Robert Cherry.

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"The footling fathead!" gasped Wharton. "He fancies he can find out what that crook put in the book—if he put anything in—and find where old Lazarus' stuff was parked! The blithering bandersnatch!"

"That's why he deprived us of his jolly old company," remarked Frank Nugent. "He's after that fifty-pounds reward—the same as Pon & Co."

"I suppose he got the tip from Pon," said Harry. "It's taken some weeks to sink into his fat head. But he's on it now!"

"I'll burst him!" roared Bob.

"The burstfulness is the proper caper," chuckled Hurree Jamset Ram Singh. "But the catchfulness is firstfully necessary!"

Bob Cherry stared out of the tent. Darkness like a cloak lay on the moors. Wherever Billy Bunter was, he was not to be found that night, it was certain.

He was gone! And Bob's Holiday Annual was gone with him! As Bunter stated in his letter that he was not after the secret and the reward, it was certain that he was—Bunter's statements having to be taken in a contrary sense! It was not likely that he had burdened himself with a heavy book for reading on his way—especially as he had gone after dark! It was the supposed secret of the Holiday Annual that he was after—and the reward, which had led Pon & Co. on like a will-of-the-wisp!

The hikers had searched the book often enough for that mysterious message, without finding it. Still, if it were there, they hoped to find it; and often in leisure moments they scanned the pages of the Holiday Annual to look for it. They had had quite a number of scraps with Pon on account of his determination to "snaffle" that book; and it was extremely exasperating for Billy Bunter to walk it off like this.

"We can't find the fat chump to-night," said Bob at last, "but we'll jolly well root after him in the morning. He's not going to snoop my Annual and get away with it!"

"No fear," agreed Nugent.

"Why, if Pon came across him, he would bag it at once," said Bob, "and

if that jolly old Annual has a fifty-quid secret in it, we're not making those Highcliffe cads a present of it."

"Haven't seen Pon for a long time," said Harry. "I fancy he's fed-up and chucked it. But certainly we've got to get the Annual back from that fat frump. If there's anything in it, we can look for the jolly old loot ourselves next term, when we shall be on the spot at Greyfriars."

"Yes, rather! Fifty quid is worth picking up—if there's anything in it," agreed Johnny Bull. "Anyhow, Bunter won't get far to-night! He's most likely lost his way already."

"Ten to one!" assented the captain of the Remove. "I shouldn't wonder if we find him snoring under a bush a quarter of a mile away, in the morning."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

And as nothing could be done, and Billy Bunter had to be left to his own fatuous devices, the hikers turned into their blankets and were soon sleeping the sleep of the just.

THE EIGHTH CHAPTER.

The Trail of the Owl!

BRIGHT and early in the morning, the Grayfriars hikers were afoot. It was a fine sunny morning, with a nip of autumn in the air, fresh and invigorating on the breezy moorland. A dip in Grimslade Water was followed by brekker, and then the hikers prepared to take the trail of the vanished Owl. Billy Bunter himself, certainly, they had no keen desire to recapture. But the Holiday Annual had to be recaptured; they were all agreed on that. And where Bunter was, that celebrated volume was! When the Annual was recovered; they were prepared to let Bunter go on his way—and indeed to start him on it with a kick or two! If Bunter had an impression that his society was sorely missed, he was undoubtedly labouring under a delusion. It wasn't!

The hikers had discovered that, besides the famous Annual, Bunter had not gone empty-handed. He had helped

himself to the supply of provender with a liberal hand. Indeed, the amount of "grub" he had taken had probably only been limited by the capacity of his pockets to hold it. Had he not been too lazy to carry a pack, he would probably have taken the lot, and the hikers would have been left to whistle for their breakfast.

As he had been able to carry only a part of the food supplies, Bunter had selected that part with care. The juniors had made rather expensive purchases when passing through Middlemoor the previous day. There had been a cake, and a bag of scones, and a bag of buns, and a packet of flaky jam-tarts. Some of these had been used for supper—the rest had gone with Bunter. The fat junior had expected to have to walk about a mile to the Blackslade road, and then a couple of miles into the town, where he was going to take the train. But he had provisioned himself as if for a long journey. Bunter was a forgetful fellow in many things; but in this matter he was very careful indeed. Whatever he might forget, he never forgot tuck.

From the valley of Grimslade Water, the hikers came out on the high moor, and hunted for traces of Bunter. They could guess what his plan had been when he bolted—but they could guess, too, that most likely he had not carried it out. It was ten to one, at least, that he had lost his way in the dark on the wild, rugged moor.

They were not long in finding traces of the fleeing Owl! Less than a hundred yards from Grimslade Water the first trace was found. It was a paper bag that had contained buns—and it was empty, save for a few crumbs! Thus, early had Bunter stopped for his first snack.

"Hallo, hallo, hallo! The fat boulder's been here!" exclaimed Bob Cherry, catching up the paper bag.

"May have blown about," said Johnny Bull.

"Look!" Bob pointed to a deep depression in the grass, where a sea of crumbs mingled with the roots. The hikers chuckled. It was plain that Bunter had sat down there for a feed.

They scanned the wide-stretching moorland. There was no sign of the fat Owl to be seen; and they wondered where—and how—he had passed the night. So far as they knew, there was no habitation nearer than Blackslade on one side, and Middlemoor on the other, and Grimslade School a good many miles distant in another direction; so it was not likely that he had passed it under a roof.

They headed in the direction of the Blackslade road. Not a sign of Bunter was picked up in that direction. But when they reached the road, they spotted a dingy caravan drawn up, and two gipsies eating their breakfast in the grass beside it.

"My hat!" ejaculated Bob. "We seem bound to fall in with those sportsmen! Shall we ask them if they've seen Bunter?"

"Not likely to tell us," said Harry. "Let's get back! Bunter meant to come this way; but it's pretty certain he never did!"

Michael and Joseph stared sullenly at the hikers across the road, and muttered together in low tones. Giving the two dingy rascals no heed, Harry Wharton & Co. turned back and tramped on the moor again. They took up the trail once more from the spot where they had found the paper bag, and tried in another direction. It was half an hour later that another paper bag rewarded them—empty, like the first. But as no

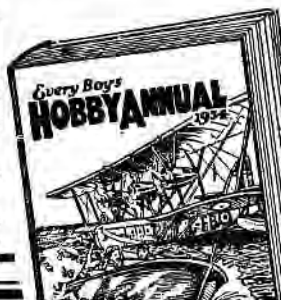
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two large folding photogravure plates

crumbs were found near it, they concluded that it had blown about in the wind; and it was only a very vague clue to Bunter. All it proved was, that the fat junior had not taken, as he must have intended, the direction of the high-road.

"He's still on the moor somewhere," said Harry Wharton. "If he's slept under a bush, most likely he's not up yet—it's only ten o'clock. But—this means losing the morning's march, you fellows."

"Well, it's jolly here, on the moors," said Johnny Bull. "Couldn't find better air or better scenery anywhere!"

Harry Wharton laughed.

"Right!" he said. "Anyhow, I think we ought to find Bunter, apart from the Holiday Annual. Goodness knows what trouble he may have landed in. I don't

know whether there are pits on this part of the moors—but if there are, Bunter's the man to tumble into one of them!"

Half an hour later the next clue was discovered. It was an empty ginger-beer bottle!

Further search revealed, in another direction, and at a considerable distance, a cardboard box that had contained jam tarts!

"The blithering idiot," said Johnny Bull.

Four clues in all had now been picked up—all in different directions. Obviously Bunter, whether he had known it or not, had lost his way, and had been wandering at random when he had stopped from time to time to refresh himself. Where he might be now was a mystery. Miles away, perhaps, or

behind the next bush! It was rather like hunting for a needle in a haystack.

"Let's get back to camp to lunch," said Harry Wharton at last. "This afternoon we'd better scatter and try all over the place. If we don't find the fat ass by sunset, we shall have to give him up."

And they went back to camp.

After lunch the trail was taken again: but it was clear by this time that only an extensive search was likely to discover Bunter. The six hikers scattered, taking each a different direction, each selecting the region he was to search for the missing Owl. They were soon out of sight of one another, swallowed up in the rugged inequalities of the moor. And under the clear September

(Continued on next page.)



"Linesman" will be pleased to answer your Soccer queries. Write to him, c/o The MAGNET, The Fleetway House, Farringdon Street, London, E.C.4.

INCLUDED in my correspondence this week is a letter from a reader who tells me that the members of his side have had quite a lot of argument recently concerning captaincy in football. At the start of these arguments they were really concerned with the question of who should be appointed captain, and apparently the question was eventually decided in the happy-go-lucky way of tossing for it.

Behind this method, of course, there is the suggestion that the captaincy of a football team does not matter much, anyway. And the boys of this particular team are not the only people who think the captaincy question in football is of little importance. Two or three seasons ago I believe Barnsley decided to let every member of the team captain the side in turn. The skipper was changed match after match. This may have been done with a view to discovery of the player best qualified to skipper the side, but surely a much better scheme than that could have been thought of.

THE NON-PLAYING SKIPPER!

There are first-class football teams of which the captain is no more than a figure-head. All he does is to lead the side when they come out of the pavilion and toss for choice of ends. There his duties finish. There is a very good reason for this attitude. The managers of some of the clubs insist on carrying out in these days some of the duties which were formerly left to the skipper of the side. Perhaps you have noticed, when you have been watching this or that first-class match, that there has been a sudden change in the make-up of the side. Certain players have been switched from one position to another. Or, again, the tactics of a team may have been changed. The captain has been given the credit of making these changes—or debited with them according to the result.

I happen to know, however, that in many cases the word has been sent down to the players by the manager. He has communicated his views via the trainer.

Perhaps, as one comes to think of it, this is after all about the best way of

skippering a football side: to have a non-playing skipper. A fellow with real football knowledge, who sits up in the stand, has a better view of the game as a whole, and of the way things are going, than any of the players. Moreover, he can use all his brains on thinking out reasons for failure, whereas the playing skipper, no matter who he may be, must give a lot of attention to the individual part which he has to play in the proceedings.

TEACHING THEM YOUNG!

It is obvious, however, that the average boys' team cannot be captained from the grand stand, and it is up to each club to find a skipper on whose judgment the other players will rely. I have always held that, other things being equal, the centre-half is the ideal player to captain the football side. He is right in the centre of operations, and is in a good position to pass on his ideas to the men in front and to the men behind. Moreover, he can sense, perhaps better than any other one player, how the game is going in the tactical sense: the mistakes that are being made, and so on. But don't choose your captain merely because he is the centre-half. Give the job to the wisest footballing head in the team.

I mentioned last week the schools of football which were being arranged by the Corinthian club, and I promised to tell you some more about the things it is thought necessary to teach the boys.

I note that on the practical side it is going to teach, among the first things, the art of trapping the ball. The ability to get a ball down is among the first things which a real footballer should learn.

There are different ways of trapping the ball, of course, but the most effective way is that of what might be called "stroking," the ball with the inside or the outside of the boot—according to the way it comes, just as it begins to bounce. It is true that a ball thus stroked may go a little way from the player, but in trapping it thus backward spin is imparted, and the ball comes back.

After some practice at this method of trapping an outside wing forward, for instance, will be able to get the ball under complete control without the necessity of stopping in his run. The quicker a footballer can get the ball under control the better. Alex. James, the star forward of Arsenal, has a wonderful way of bringing down a ball which comes to him even two or three feet above the ground. He seems almost to "catch it" on his instep by letting the leg give pretty much in the same way as a cricketer catches a cricket ball in his hands. I am afraid, however, that this method of bringing the ball under control is only for the experts. Certainly it requires a lot of practice, and I know several quite good players who have tried the James method without being able to get anywhere near the same pitch of efficiency.

NEVER TOO OLD TO LEARN!

This is essentially the day of the young player in football, and during the next few months we shall hear of many lads who are making their mark in first-class teams. Quick promotion is almost assured in these times for the boys who show exceptional promise. I sometimes think that the way young players are pushed on in these times is bad for them, and I found a manager the other day who agreed with me.

There are two big risks which are run in putting a boy into first-class football too soon, he said.

One risk is that he fails and gets so disappointed with himself. The other—and the greater risk of the two—is that he meets with a measure of success, and is spoilt thereby.

This particular manager assured me that swelled head has "killed" more footballers than any other complaint. I have met some of these lads who thought they knew all about the game before they had been in it "five minutes." That is a fatal attitude of mind.

The young player who looks at the game as Meredith used to look at it has a much greater chance of being successful. Meredith played for Manchester City when he was nearly fifty years of age. One day, when he was very near the end of his career, I met this finest of all outside rights, and asked him if he would be really sorry when his playing days came to an end. "I certainly shall regret it," said Meredith, "because there are so many things I still want to learn about the game." That was Meredith at a time when he had nearly fifty International caps in his wardrobe.

"LINESMAN."

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sunlight the search went on over a space of miles—with very unexpected results for one member of the party!

THE NINTH CHAPTER.

Bunter on His Own!

"BEASTS!" groaned Billy Bunter. Bunter was not feeling merry or bright!

He was sorry by that time that he had bolted from the hikers' camp by Grimsdale Water! Indeed, he had been sorry for some time now!

How it had happened Bunter did not know!

But it had!

From the hikers' camp to the Blackslade road was about a mile; Bunter knew that, and knew the direction. He had tripped away quite merrily, after pinning up his note in the tent to greet the eyes of the ungrateful hikers when they returned from their ramble. But the darkness on the moor had completely baffled and beaten William George Bunter.

Stopping from time to time to rest, and, of course, to feed, Billy Bunter had wandered and wandered and wandered, sometimes in a zigzag, sometimes in circles.

He never reached the Blackslade road. He could not even discern the moorland track that led to it. He was hopelessly lost ten minutes after he had started, and when he at last gave up the hope of getting to the high road and thought of finding his way back to the hikers' camp for the night, he found that that was an equally hopeless proposition.

When he realised that he was lost on the moor Bunter's feelings were not to be envied. He had heard of people being lost for days and days on the northern moors—even of people perishing of hunger before they were found! Bunter certainly was not likely to perish of hunger in a hurry; his pockets were crammed with food, and he had a good cargo inside! But the remote possibility was awful to think of.

Bunter spent the night curled up in thick grass under a bush. Luckily, it was a rather warm night, and Bunter, whatever he could or could not do, could sleep well in almost any circumstances. Bright sunshine was streaming down on him when he awakened, and it rather cheered him. In the daylight he had no doubt of finding his way off that beastly moor! He awakened, of course, hungry, and he sat up and made a clean sweep of the provisions he had left. Like Esop's load of old, Bunter's load had lightened as he progressed; now it was gone, save for the Holiday Annual. That still remained, as Bunter could not eat it!

Cheered by the bright sunshine, and by the extensive feed he had just packed away, Bunter started to find his way off the moor.

But he found it not!

It was not so easy for a short-sighted and extremely obtuse fellow to find! Moreover, instead of keeping straight on in any one direction, the fat Owl continually turned into a new direction, when he fancied he saw anything like a track, or anything in the distance that looked like a road or a habitation or anything of an encouraging nature! On those lines Bunter was not likely to find his way off an extensive Yorkshire moor. Also he needed very frequent rests, and after each rest he was blissfully unconscious of the way he had come, and as often as not retraced his own footsteps! By noon Bunter was in

a sad and despairing state—and probably the only reason why he had not tumbled into a moorland pit was because there weren't any on that part of Grimsdale Moor.

Neither did he sight a single soul! He might have fancied that Yorkshire was as uninhabited as the Sahara.

A straight walk of a few miles would have extricated him from all his troubles. But Bunter never kept on straight for more than a hundred yards or so.

At noon it was quite hot on the moor, and the hapless fat Owl crawled into the shade of a clump of trees that grew lonely among the grass and gorse. He found a shady and comfortable spot to rest his weary limbs in the thickets that grew among the trees. That was something; but Bunter was hungry again now, and there was nothing to eat! Likewise, he was thirsty, and there was nothing to drink! Fortunately, he could sleep. That was a great resource.

He slept for a few hours, but the aching void in the inner Bunter awoke him, and he sat up and groaned:

"Beasts!"

His reflections on the subject of the hikers were naturally bitter! Their ingratitude had driven him to this—and this was how it had turned out!

He had mapped out quite an astute plan! By the exercise of his gigantic intellectual powers he was going to unearth that secret in the Holiday Annual—the hidden message by which Mikey the Sprat had intended to tell Skid Smith where to look for the loot from Mr. Lazarus'. Having unearthed that secret, he was going to discover the hidden loot and march into Courtfield Police Station with it, and claim the reward of fifty pounds offered for its recovery! After which Bob Cherry could have his mouldy old Annual back, and be blowed to him!

That was the plan. But it had not worked out like that!

By this time he ought to have been at the other end of England, having astutely borrowed enough from Mauly for his railway fare.

Instead of which, here he was lost on Grimsdale Moor—very likely only a few miles from the spot he had started from!

Worst of all, he was hungry, and getting hungrier! Already it was well on in the afternoon, and the prospect of another night on the moor was simply terrifying.

When he bolted he had rather dreaded that the hikers might pursue him to recapture the Annual! Later, he had hoped that they might pursue him—and find him! Now he yearned to see them or hear them—even if they whopped him with the purloined Annual, or kicked him all the way back to camp! Gladly Bunter would have been kicked all the way to anywhere where there was food!

"Beasts!" groaned the hapless Owl.

He knew that if he was to get off the moor before another nightfall, he ought to be up and doing. But he was tired to the bone—tired out, hungry, and in the lowest of spirits. Instead of getting up and going, he sat in the thickets among the trees, and groaned.

And then suddenly came the blessed sound of footsteps!

Running footsteps approached the clump of trees from the open moor!

Bunter could almost have cried with relief.

Human beings at last—in a desolate desert where he was feeling like Robinson Crusoe on his island!

If it was those beasts looking for him, if it was some daleman or some moorland shepherd—whichever and whatever

it was, surely, it meant rescue from his awful plight!

Bunter dragged himself to his feet and peered through the bushes. As he did so a panting voice reached his ears.

"Cover, quick! Get out of sight, Michael, you fool!"

"Shut it, Joseph! He's not seen us!"

Bunter had a glimpse of a stocky figure with a coloured scarf round the bullet head above it. He had a glimpse of a lean, swarthy man with bright, black eyes, hard and shiny. And his fat heart died within him. One glimpse was enough to recognise the two ruffianly gipsies who had been pitched into the muddy pit beside him the previous day.

It was not help, it was not rescue; it was only another danger! Well he knew how little likely the two rascals were to help any member of the Greyfriars hiking party. If they saw him they would steal anything he had of value about him—and that was all! Suppressing a groan, the miserable fat Owl cowered deep into the cover of the bushes, only hoping that the sharp, suspicious eyes of the gipsies would not pick him out in his cover.

But they were not looking towards him; evidently they had no idea that anyone but themselves was in that lonely clump of trees. Crouching in hiding themselves, they were watching the open moorland, and it dawned on Bunter that they were watching for someone who was coming—that they were crouching there in ambush.

They were silent now—silent as a couple of wild beasts watching for prey. But footsteps were heard again, approaching the trees; and the sound of a shrill whistle, which seemed familiar to Bunter's fat ears. Someone was coming, and whistling as he came.

"Oh lor!" breathed Billy Bunter.

He trembled from head to foot. He forgot that he was hungry—forgot that he was lost on the moor. He palpitated with terror in the bushes. The close proximity of the two ruffians sent cold shivers down Bunter's fat spine.

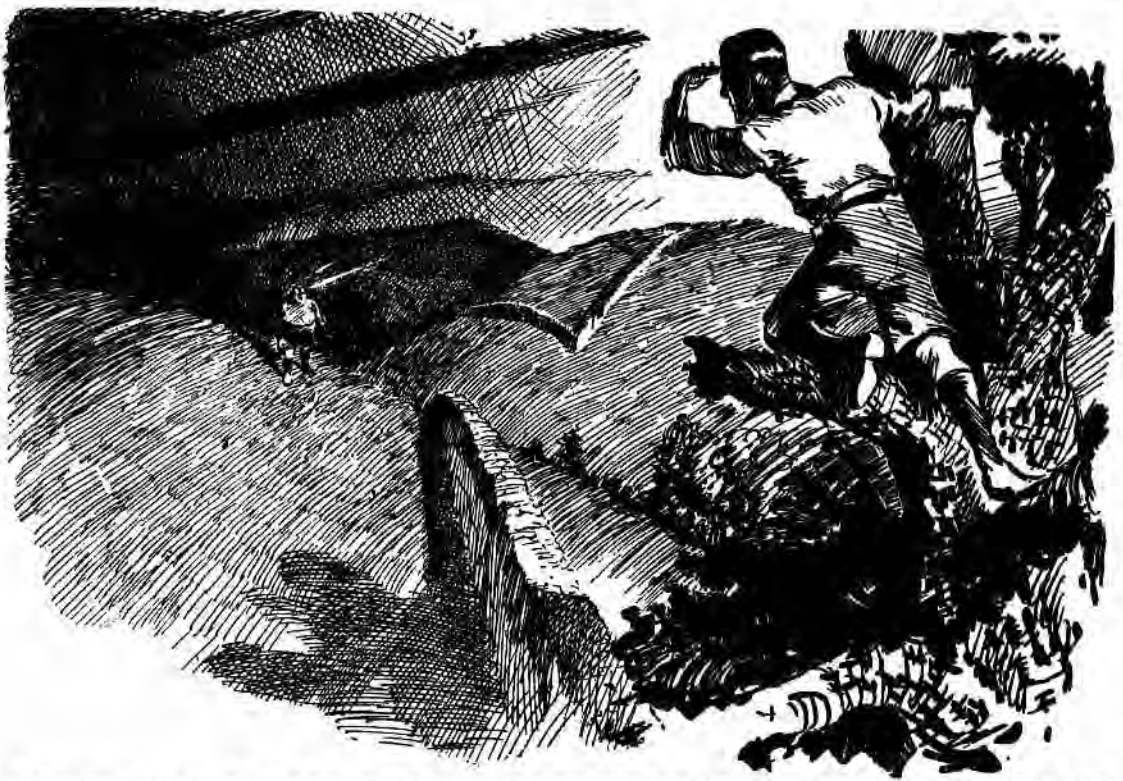
They were about to attack somebody—somebody who was coming unsuspectingly up to the trees. And what would they do to Bunter, if they found him there, watching them? That was a terrifying and unnerving thought. The fat Owl of the Remove crouched low, palpitating, and strove to still even the sound of his breathing. But he could hardly restrain a startled squeak when there was a rush of feet and the sound of a struggle.

THE TENTH CHAPTER.

Kidnapped!

BOB CHERRY whistled cheerfully, if not tunelessly, as he came swinging across the sunny moor towards the lonely clump of old oaks. Scattered over the wide moor, all the hikers were on the hunt, and they had long ago lost sight of one another. Bob, having spotted that clump of trees from afar, headed for it as a quite probable spot to pick up the trail of the missing Owl. He would not have been surprised to find Billy Bunter snoring in the shade there—as indeed, he would have done an hour earlier. Anyhow, he was going to root through the trees before he went farther. Hunting for Bunter, Bob was quite unaware that he was himself also hunted.

He had no idea that Pon & Co. were in the vicinity at all, and certainly would never have guessed that Pon had met the gipsies and enlisted their services. And Michael and Joseph,



The sun was sinking deep in the west, but the nabob's keen eyes swept over the surrounding moorland far and wide. And at a distance he had a glimpse of a fat figure and the flash of a large pair of spectacles reflecting the rays of the setting sun. "The absurd and idiotic Bunter!" exclaimed Hurree Singh.

accustomed to the wiles of poachers, to dodging keepers and farmers, did not let the Greyfriars junior see them stalking him. It seemed like a stroke of sheer luck to the two rascals when the juniors scattered, taking different ways, and they had a chance of tracking Bob to a distance from his friends. And when they observed that he was heading for the clump of trees it was all clear for Joseph and Michael. Heads down in the gorse and bushes, they ran for the clump and reached it a few minutes ahead of Bob, and waited for him there. Nothing could have suited them better. Lonely as the moor was, they preferred what they had to do to be done in cover.

Utterly unsuspecting of danger, Bob Cherry came on, and swung under the shady branches of the oaks.

What happened next was sudden.

Two dusky figures leaped at him in the shade, and before he knew that he was seized he was down on his back in the grass.

"Oh crums!" gasped Bob.

Michael's burly knee was planted on him. The stocky ruffian scowled down at him. Joseph, holding his wrists, grinned.

Bob stared up at the swarthy faces. He knew the two gipsies again at once. "You rotters!" he panted. Michael lifted a knotted fist, as if to dash it into the upturned face of the schoolboy he was pinning down. The ruffian was still sore and savage from the happenings of the previous day. But Joseph touched his arm.

"That will do, Michael!" he said, in his smooth tones. "If he struggles knock him on the head—if not, leave him alone!"

Michael grunted angrily.

"Well, you've got me," said Bob

coolly. "I suppose you've been watching for a chance, you rotters. You'd better remember that my friends are not very far away."

"Far enough for our purpose, I think," said Joseph. "Hold him, Michael, while I look over the moor."

The bony gipsy stepped out of the oaks and scanned the moor. Bob Cherry gave a powerful heave, in the hope of throwing the stocky ruffian while the other rascal was gone. But he was pinned down under Michael's weight and he could hardly move. And he did not make a second attempt. He was entirely at the gipsy's mercy, and he did not want a heavy fist crashing down in his face.

Joseph came back.

"No one in sight," he said. "They have scattered, and they are far away. All is safe."

"Safer to knock him on the head!" growled Michael.

"You are a brute, Michael," said Joseph pleasantly, "and you have no more sense than a brute. We are getting quite near enough to the law, and there is no need to get nearer. I have a cord here; bind his hands!"

"What the thump—" exclaimed Bob in astonishment.

He had supposed that the two outcasts had intended to rob him, and perhaps to ill-use him, also, in revenge for the defeat of yesterday. The discovery that they intended to make him a prisoner amazed him.

"Do not raise your voice," said Joseph. "There is no one to hear—but do not raise it, all the same. If I let my good friend Michael hit you once with that hefty fist of his you will remember it for a long time."

"You've got me," answered Bob. "But what on earth is your game?"

I've got about three shillings in my pockets, if that's what you're after. I've got a few sandwiches in my rucksack, and a bottle of ginger-pop. That's all you'll get out of me."

"That is not what we want. What we want," said Joseph, with a cat-like smile, "is your honoured company in our van."

"Wha-a-at?" stuttered Bob.

"It will be an honour for us, as well as a pleasure," said Joseph. "Will you walk to the van with us? It is not very far away."

"No, I jolly well won't!"

"Possibly you will change your mind when Michael begins to twist your arm," said Joseph cheerily. "Make his hands safe, Michael. He is altogether too handy with his fists to be left the use of them."

Michael, grunting, knotted the cord round Bob's wrists. Then the schoolboy was allowed to rise to his feet. The brawny fist of the stocky gipsy was fastened on his arm.

Joseph took another survey of the moor, and was satisfied.

"I think we shall find a clear way back to the road," he remarked.

"Come!"

"Look here—" began Bob.

"You need say nothing, my young friend."

"Knock him on the head!" growled Michael.

"If we knock him on the head, my good Michael, there are certain legal penalties attached. And, worse still, we shall have to carry him to the van," answered Joseph. "He looks to be a good weight, and I prefer to let him walk. You were always a fool, Michael."

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(Continued from page 13.)

"But what the thump do you want me in your van for?" demanded Bob Cherry. "You're not going in for kidnapping, I suppose?"

"Not at all," said Joseph. "On moral grounds, my young friend, we should have no objection to that, or to anything else short of homicide. We are not particular, are we, Michael?"

"Oh, shut it!" said Michael. "But kidnapping is not our game," went on Joseph imperturbably. "There is nothing in it of a profitable nature." "Then what the dickens do you want?"

"Merely your agreeable company for a few hours—perhaps a day or two. It all depends on when our estimable employer comes along to see you."

Bob stared blankly at the oily-tongued Joseph. He was so astounded at this strange turn of affairs that he almost wondered whether he was dreaming.

"Your employer?" he stuttered. "A young gentleman who is very eager to meet you," smiled Joseph.

"Who, then?" gasped Bob.

"I regret that I cannot tell you his name, except that it is, in all probability, not Robinson," answered Joseph.

"Well, my hat!" said Bob blankly.

"Are you going on gabbling and gabbling all the afternoon, you gabbling fool?" demanded the sullen Michael, scowling at the talkative Joseph. "Let's get the young cove away while the coast's clear."

"Will you honour us by walking in our company, Master Cherry?" asked Joseph. "It is only about a mile. Our van is on the moor between this clump and the Blacklade road. Please Come!"

"Go and eat coke!" answered Bob. "And I'd like to know how you know my name, you blackguard."

"I was informed by the young gentleman whose name is not Robinson," answered Joseph. "Come!"

"I won't stir a step."

"Can you persuade him to stir a step, Michael? A slight twist of the arm is what I suggest."

"Wow!" gasped Bob as the stocky ruffian gave his arm a cruel twist. "Oh, you rotter! You cur! Oh! leave off, you brute!"

"You will come now?" asked Joseph, still smooth and polite.

There was no help for it. With his teeth set and his eyes gleaming Bob Cherry walked out of the trees, with a gipsy on either side of him, Michael still grasping his arm.

He cast a quick glance round, in the hope of spotting some of his friends in the distance. But the wild, rugged moor was bare. Between the two kidnappers he was hurried away.

Neither Bob nor the gipsies dreamed of suspecting that when they were gone two terrified eyes blinked after them.

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from the oaks through a pair of big spectacles.

"Oh lor!" gasped Billy Bunter.

THE ELEVENTH CHAPTER.

The Prisoner of the Caravan!

BOB CHERRY walked between the two gipsies like a fellow in a dream. He could not begin to understand what it all meant. But it was clear enough that he was a kidnapped prisoner, and that he was to be taken to a gipsy van, and that there was no help for it. With his hands tied, and Michael's rough grasp on his arm, he had no chance either of resistance or escape.

But as he went he searched the moor with his eyes on all sides. Up and down Grimsdale Moor the other hikers were searching for Bunter, and at any moment one of them might be sighted. But keenly as he watched for some figure to appear in sight, he was hardly so keenly watchful as the oily Joseph.

It was Joseph who spotted a hat rising into sight from beyond a mass of gorse at a distance of a hundred yards or so. The next moment Bob spotted it and opened his mouth to yell, but Joseph's hand was clapped over his mouth before he could utter a sound.

"Down!" breathed Joseph. He threw himself down in the gorse, dragging Bob with him. The slower Michael followed his example, grasping Bob savagely.

Bob Cherry struggled silently, but savagely. One of his friends was within call if he could have called to him.

But he was powerless. Joseph's hand was hard as a vice over his mouth; sinewy hands grasped him and kept him down.

Exhausted by the fierce effort, Bob lay breathless in the grasp of the gipsies, hidden from sight in the waving gorse.

He could hear a sound of footsteps and rustling at a short distance.

One of the hikers was passing only a dozen yards from the spot where the gipsies crouched in cover with their prisoner.

Bob's heart beat almost to suffocation. It was possible that the hiker might pass that very spot and come on the gipsies. But the rustling passed on a dozen yards away—and Harry Wharton went on searching for Bunter, little dreaming that he had passed so close to his comrade in enemy hands.

The rustling died away.

Full five minutes longer the gipsies waited; then Joseph cautiously raised his head and peered round.

He had a glimpse of Harry Wharton's hat disappearing over a fold of the moor in the distance.

When it had vanished he rose to his feet.

"All clear!" said Joseph. "Come!"

"Oh, you rotter!" panted Bob.

The gipsies started again, Bob walking between them, watching the moor like cats as they went. Bob tramped on savagely. With his hands loose he would have taken the chance of a scrap with the two ruffians. But they had taken care of that.

They tramped down into a hollow of the moor, where, out of sight of the general level, the dingy van was at a halt, the bony horse feeding near it. Joseph unlocked the door of the van and signed to Bob to enter.

"Will you honour us, Master Cherry?" he asked in his oily, mocking tones. "Poor quarters, I fear; but, after all, one must not be too particular, hiker."

"Shut it and chuck him in!" growled Michael.

Bob tramped up the low step into the van, Michael shoving him on roughly. He stumbled into the dingy interior.

It was indeed poor quarters, as Joseph had said. The van was small and extremely dirty and evil-smelling; it was cluttered with all sorts of things—some of which, as Bob guessed, did not belong to the two rascals, but had been pilfered by the wayside. It was plain that the two outcasts of a gipsy tribe followed the peculiar avocation of snappers-up of unconscionable trifles.

"Be seated," said Joseph, with a wave of the hand, as if welcoming a guest to a magnificent abode. The smooth Joseph seemed to have a vein of sardonic humour in him, in contrast to the brutal sullenness of his associate.

There was nothing to be seated on, except the dirty floor. A rough push from Michael seated Bob on that with a bump.

"Ow!" gasped Bob.

"And now," said Joseph, smiling, "we will search our young friend. Two pounds for a small and easy service, my good Michael, is worth having—and five pounds is a larger sum. But if our young friend has about him anything that is worth five pounds to the young gentleman whose name is not Robinson, it may be worth as much to us—or more! That young gentleman did not look as if he would offer more than the value of an article; rather less, in fact!"

Kneeling beside Bob on the floor, the oily-tongued rascal searched him carefully, and then searched his rucksack.

A few shillings and a few small articles of little value rewarded him; Bob had nothing about him that was worth five pounds.

Joseph seemed puzzled.

"No luck!" he said. "I should suspect that young gentleman of talking out of his hat; but he was very plainly a young gentleman who knew what he was talking about, and he certainly meant business."

"He never said what he wanted from the covey," grunted Michael.

"No!" Joseph shook his head sorrowfully. "He did not trust us, Michael. But perhaps we may learn more from our young friend here."

"I think you must be mad, or the fellow you're speaking of must be mad!" said Bob. "I've nothing of any value. And I'm jolly glad I don't carry the funds!" He grinned. "If anybody's told you it was worth while to go through my pockets, he was pulling your leg. You'd better let me go; you've done enough already to get three months each."

"We shall not stay long enough in Yorkshire to make the acquaintance of any of the magistrates," said Joseph. "We are here to-day, and gone to-morrow, my young friend. Perhaps you have left something of value in your camp?" He eyed Bob narrowly.

"A pair of boots and some shirts," said Bob, "and some socks—"

"We shall learn more when the young gentleman calls," said Joseph, and he shrugged his bony shoulders.

"Mean to say the fellow is coming here to see me?" demanded Bob.

"Exactly! You will wait here for him."

"Stick something in his mouth," growled Michael. "If some of the other coveys come this way—"

Joseph nodded. It was pretty certain that Bob's friends would look for him when he was missed, and quite possible that they might pass by where the gipsies were camped.

Michael forced open Bob's mouth with a rough, hard hand, and Joseph gagged him with care. Then the school-boy's feet were tied together, and he was left lying on the floor, while the two rascals quitted the van and locked the door after them.

Hardly able to move a limb, barely to utter a sound, Bob Cherry lay in the stuffy van in a state of mingled amazement and rage.

He could scarcely believe that someone had hired the gipsies to kidnap him and was coming to see him in his imprisonment, yet there seemed no other way of accounting for the actions of the two lawless rascals.

Through the flimsy walls of the caravan he could hear the voices of the gipsies in talk, though he could not catch the words.

Presently the sound of voices ceased, and he had an impression that one of them had gone.

There was a little window in the van; but it was covered by a thick curtain, evidently as a precaution against anyone glancing in from outside and spotting the prisoner. It was deeply dusky and very warm and stuffy, and Bob passed an hour of intense discomfort, during which his temper rose very near boiling-point. Again and again he wrenched at his bonds, but it was useless.

He could only wait.

Suddenly the silence was broken. There were footsteps and voices, and the junior gave a start as he recognised the familiar tones of Harry Wharton and Lord Mauleverer. His friends were there—only a few yards from him—if only he could have called to them.

He strained at the gag till his face was as crimson as a beetroot; but it was in vain, and he could only lie in rage and misery, with rescue at hand—so near and yet so far!

THE TWELFTH CHAPTER.

So Near, Yet So Far!

"THE gipsies!" exclaimed Harry Wharton.

"Yaas, begad!" murmured Lord Mauleverer.

Harry Wharton and Mauly, working from different directions, had sighted one another on the moor near the hollow where the gipsy van was camped.

They joined up to compare notes; but neither had anything to communicate. Neither had seen or heard anything of the missing Owl.

They walked into the grassy hollow together, and caught sight of the van there, and stopped to look at it.

Of the two gipsies only one was to be seen—the lean, oily Joseph—sitting on an upturned box near the van, smoking a black pipe. He glanced at them furtively under his swarthy brows.

"They seem to be hauntin' us," remarked Lord Mauleverer. "We saw them on the Blackslade road this mornin'. Now they're here on the moor. May have seen somethin' of that silly ass Bunter."

"Not much good asking them!"

"Well, they're not obligin' gents," admitted Mauleverer, "and I've got a sort of feelin' that they don't like us a lot! But a tip works wonders, old bean, and it's worth a few bob to get a clue to that howlin' ass."

Wharton hesitated. He did not want to come into contact with the ruffians again. Still, as the van had evidently travelled from the road, across the moor, to this quiet spot, it was possible that the gipsies might have seen something

of Bunter, and it was worth while to inquire—if it was made worth their while to forget their enmity and speak.

"Oh, all right!" said Harry. "Let's!" And the two juniors walked down to the van.

The hikers were fed-up by this time with hunting Bunter. It was quite likely that the fat Owl had escaped from the moor at some point, and was already in a railway train travelling southward. In that case, Bob's Holiday Annual was gone for good. On the other hand, it was more than likely that the obtuse, short-sighted Owl was hopelessly lost—in which case it was difficult to make up their minds to leave him to his fate, irritating and exasperating as he was.

On account of the Holiday Annual alone they certainly would not have kept up the search beyond that day. But if Bunter was still lost on the moor, the matter was serious.

At the same time the thought that very likely he was safe in a train, chuckling over his escape, was deeply and intensely exasperating.

Exactly what they had better do in such peculiar circumstances the hikers really did not know; but, anyhow, they were going to keep up the hunt till dusk, and hope for the best.

Joseph rose to his feet as they came up. He was glad that he had taken the

of Bunter. Bob had not yet been missed by his friends, as it was not yet time for returning to the camp by Grimsdale Water. But Joseph knew nothing of Bunter and that fat youth's vagaries. He took it for granted that it was the prisoner in the van whom these fellows had missed, and for whom they were searching. He stood in readiness for an attack, much to the amazement of the hikers.

"What should I know of him?" rasped Joseph. "What do you mean? Why do you come here? Hands off, I warn you!"

"Nobody's goin' to lay hands on you, old bean, if you behave yourself," said Mauleverer. "I'm simply askin' you a question. If you've any information to give I'll pay for it."

Joseph's suspicious eyes searched his face, and Wharton's. He hardly knew what to make of this.

"Well, have you seen the chap?" asked Mauleverer.

"No!" snarled Joseph.

"Hold on," said Harry. "He doesn't know yet which ~~man~~ is missing."

"Begad, no! You see, my good man—"

"I know nothing of him!" rasped Joseph. "Leave my camp! I am but a poor gipsy, but I have a right to my camp! Go your ways!"

"We apologise for bargin' in, dear man," said Lord Mauleverer gracefully, "but, you see, we're rather anxious about the chap! If you can put us on his track I'll stand you a ten-bob note."

"I have not seen him! I know nothing! I saw you all together this morning on the Blackslade road—I have seen none since! If one of your party has wandered away, no doubt he will find his way back, unless he is a fool."

"Well, the fellow I'm speakin' of is rather a fool," said Mauleverer placidly. "In fact, a pretty complete ass! But it's not one of the fellows you saw this mornin' lookin' along the road—"

Joseph started again.

"What do you mean? He was with you then!" he exclaimed. "You were all together then."

"Not the fellow I'm speakin' of; he left camp last night," explained Mauleverer. "Rather fat chap, in specs—the plump fellow who fell into the pit—you remember him?"

"Oh!" exclaimed Joseph. It dawned on him that it was not Bob Cherry for whom the hikers were seeking. "Have you lost the fat one?"

"Yaas."

"Well, I have not seen him! You may go your ways."

Wharton's eyes were fixed keenly on the swarthy face. He was more than suspicious of the man, and the thought was in his mind that the gipsies might have had something to do with Bunter's disappearance. The furtive, watchful uneasiness of the lean gipsy must have had some cause.

"Oh gad!" exclaimed Mauleverer suddenly, as two figures descended from the higher level of the moor into the grassy dingle. "Pon!"

"Ponsonby!" exclaimed Harry.

Michael, the gipsy, evidently guiding Pon to the spot, came slouching down the slope, the dandy of Highcliffe behind him. At the sight of the two Greyfriars juniors, Michael scowled blackly, and Ponsonby halted, with startled alarm in his face. Wharton and Mauleverer stared at him in blank astonishment. They had not known before that Pon was anywhere in Yorkshire at all, and though they were not exactly surprised to see him turn up, they were amazed to see him in such company.

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THIS GREYFRIARS LIM-ERICK WINS A SPECIAL PRIZE

for S. Burke, of Drumcaw, Clough, Co. Down, Ireland.

Fat Bunter, once boarding a train, Looked round at the guard in disdain.

A small boy said: "Jim, Can't you assist him?" He replied: "I'm a guard, not a crane!"

Now, you other budding poets—what about it?—Ed.

precaution to gag the prisoner in the caravan. But for that precaution his rascally game would have been up with a vengeance now.

He cast a rather anxious glance towards the distant road.

Michael had gone more than an hour ago, to report to "Mr. Robinson," and was to return with him. If Mr. Robinson came in the car he was due now, as Pon & Co. were at Blackslade, only a few miles away. It was rather unfortunate, from Joseph's point of view, that the two hikers had dropped in when Mr. Robinson might arrive at any moment. And he gave them a surly stare, gruffly inquiring what they wanted. His surly look and tone brought a gleam to Wharton's eyes; but Lord Mauleverer answered with unmovable urbanity.

"Sorry to bother, dear man, but we're lookin' for a member of our party who's missin'. If you've seen anythin' of him—"

Mauleverer broke off in sheer astonishment at the effect of those words on the gipsy. Joseph gave a violent start and backed away a couple of paces, his eyes glinting with suspicion and rage. He clenched his swarthy hands, not as if for attack, but for defence, as if he thought that the two hikers were about to assail him.

"Oh gad! What's the matter with the man?" exclaimed the surprised Mauly. "Look here, if you know anythin' of the missin' man—"

Mauleverer was speaking, of course,

"Well, my hat!" said Harry. "That precious rascal seems to have picked up some pretty blackguardly acquaintances. Let's get out, Mauly—that brute either can't or won't tell us anything."

"Yaaa, let's!"

Little did the two hikers dream that their voices, as they spoke, reached the ears of their comrade lying a helpless, silent prisoner in the locked van. They passed quite close by the caravan as they went, and heard a scuffling, rustling sound within, but naturally it did not occur to them that it was made by a bound and gagged prisoner striving to draw their attention. Giving Ponsonby and his gipsy guide a wide berth, they left the dingle, much to the relief of Joseph, and disappeared over the moor.

THE THIRTEENTH CHAPTER.

Nothing for Pon!

PONSONBY stared after the Greyfriars fellows as they went. Not till they had disappeared from sight did he resume his way, following Michael down into the dingle. Joseph touched his hat with smooth, half-jeering civility, and Pon gave him a questioning, suspicious look.

"What were those fellows doin' here?" he demanded.

"Looking for a friend they have lost," answered Joseph. He grinned at the alarm on the Highcliffe fellow's face. "Not the boy Cherry, my master! They have lost the fat one."

"Oh, that fat fool Bunter, I suppose," said Ponsonby. "They know nothing of—"

"Nothing, or they would not have gone so peaceably!" grinned Joseph. "The boy Cherry is in the van!"

"Oh gum!" Ponsonby broke into a chuckle, greatly entertained by the idea that Wharton had been so near his chum without guessing that he was a prisoner in the gipsy van. "I suppose you've fixed him so that he can't call out, then?"

"Quite!" smiled Joseph. He grinned at his associate. "You found Mr. Robinson at the Blackslade Hotel, Michael?"

"Can't you see I did?" grunted the stocky gipsy.

"Then that is the name you have given at the hotel, my master?" grinned Joseph.

"Why not? I've told you it's my name!" snapped Ponsonby.

"The two boys who were here a few minutes ago recognised you, and spoke quite another name!" grinned Joseph.

Ponsonby scowled.

"No bizney of yours, anyhow! If the fellow I want is in the van, open the door and let me in to him. And then stand back!"

Michael gave a grunt; but Joseph answered with oily smoothness:

"The man who pays gives orders here. Stand away from the van, Michael!"

Michael grunted again, and slouched away. Joseph unlocked the door of the van and threw it open.

Ponsonby stepped in and shut the door after him.

He stood looking down, with an amused grin, at the bound schoolboy lying on the floor. Bob Cherry glared up at him as if he could have eaten him. He had heard his friends outside the van utter the name of Ponsonby, and it had given him a glimmer of the truth. Now that he saw the dandy of Highcliffe in the van, he could have no further doubt. The mysterious employer of the outcast gipsies, whose

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name was "not Robinson," was evidently Cecil Ponsonby, of the Fourth Form at Highcliffe School; the implacable enemy of the chums of Greyfriars.

"So here you are!" grinned Ponsonby.

He stooped and removed the gag from Bob's mouth. The Greyfriars junior spluttered for breath.

"You rotter!" he gasped. "You cur! You've done this!"

Ponsonby raised his eyebrows.

"What have I done?" he inquired.

"You cowardly rotter!" roared Bob. "You've paid those two rascals to get me here and tie me up like this! You wouldn't dare step into the van if my hands were loose, and you know it."

"If I know it, why waste your breath tellin' me?" asked Pon blandly.

"Oh, you rotter!" gasped Bob.

"But you're rather in error," went on Ponsonby coolly. "I had nothin' to do with your bein' kidnapped—you'd find it rather hard to prove that I had, at any rate. I'll tell you how the matter stands. I find that you've been nobbled by a couple of gipsies; for what reason I really can't undertake to say. Naturally, I'm going to get you out of it!"

"You are?" ejaculated Bob, staring at him.

"Naturally!"

"Well, if you mean that, get on with it," said Bob.

"What's the hurry? Let's chat a little first," said Pon, leaning on the door and lighting a cigarette. "One good turn deserves another, what?"

"Do you want me to tip you half-a-crown?" asked Bob savagely.

"Hardly!" Pon laughed. "I want you to lend me your Holiday Annual that you carry in that rucksack."

"Do you think I hadn't guessed that, you rotter? Well, you can have all the Holiday Annuals I've got in that rucksack, and welcome!"

"You mean you've not got it about you?"

"I mean just that, you pilfering rotter—you'll have to look for another chance to pinch it!"

Ponsonby stooped over the rucksack and fumbled in it. It did not take him many seconds to ascertain that the volume was not there.

"Is it left at your camp, wherever that is?" he asked.

"No!"

"Then where is it?"

"Find out!"

Ponsonby stood silent for a few minutes, smoking his cigarette, and looking down at the prisoner with gleaming, malicious eyes. And Joseph, who had tiptoed to the little cracked window to overhear what was said within the van, wondered whether his inquisitive ears heard aright. He had taken this young gentleman for a rather hard character, as cunning and unscrupulous as a rascal as he was himself; and he had been deeply interested to learn what article of value it was that the dandy of Highcliffe wanted from the prisoner. Now he knew! It was a book—a Holiday Annual—such as could be bought at any newsagent's for five shillings! And Joseph rubbed his lean, swartly nose in amazed perplexity—the most astonished man in the wide county of Yorks!

"What rotten luck," said Ponsonby at last. "You've always got that dashed book in your rucksack—you've been watchin' over it like a dashed hen over an egg ever since I got after you. I was sure that if these sportsmen got you, they'd get that, too! What rotten luck!"

"Well, as I've not got it, are you going to let me loose?" demanded Bob in sulphurous tones.

"Not at all! No bizney of mine to rescue a fool who falls into bad hands," answered Ponsonby. "I'd do it, if you put me on to that book. You know why I want it, and you know that I mean to have it!"

"I know you jolly well won't get it!" retorted Bob. "I know I'd chuck it into the deepest pit on Grimslade sooner!"

"All serene," drawled Ponsonby. "I'll see you again to-morrow and ask you if you've changed your mind."

Bob Cherry gasped.

"You—villain! Do you mean to say that you're going to leave me in the hands of those scoundrels—like this—"

"No bizney of mine to interfere, is it?" drawled Pon. "I'm not a jolly old knight-errant, goin' around rescuin' fools in distress."

"Do you know that this is kidnapping?" roared Bob. "You could be sent to prison for this, you rascal!"

"I wonder how you'd prove it!" said Pon casually. "I don't quite see how you'd prove that you'd ever been tied up in this van at all. Still less how you'd prove that I had anything to do with it."

"Oh, if a fellow could get his hands on you!" gasped Bob.

"Handin' over that Annual?" drawled Pon.

"No!" roared Bob.

"Then good-bye for the present! Charmed to see you, but I've got another engagement now, and I shall have to tear myself away!"

And Ponsonby opened the door of the van; Joseph swiftly backing away from the window as the rusty hinges creaked.

Bob was left fairly wriggling with rage on the floor of the van. The door closed on him again, and the key turned.

Joseph came forward, his black eyes very curiously on Ponsonby's face. Now that he knew what this young gentleman was after, Joseph was beginning to wonder whether he was a little cracked.

There was at least some risk for Ponsonby in what he was doing; and there was the pay he had offered the gipsies for their aid—and all to obtain possession of a volume, obtainable anywhere for five shillings!

"You are through with him, my master?" asked Joseph.

Ponsonby nodded.

"Yes; but I want to see him again to-morrow. You can keep him!" He felt in his pocket and drew out two pound notes, and did not fail to note the greedy snap in the gipsy's black eyes. He went on with perfect coolness: "That's all the money I've brought with me—what I promised you."

Joseph grinned.

"A wary young gentleman!" he murmured. "A wary young gentleman!"

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"A wary young gentleman!" he murmured. "A wary young gentleman!"

"I think I know my way about," said Ponsonby with cool contempt. "I should not be likely to bring money here. Now look here—you'd better get off this moor, where those rotters may butt in on you at any minute. By this time to-morrow, you can do ten miles."

"Easily!"

"There's a little village on the edge of the moor, just on the Lancashire border, called Chupe. I'll find you there this time to-morrow," said Ponsonby. "I shall run over in the car. Stop on the common near the village. And keep that brute out of sight."

"Rely on us, my master!"

Ponsonby walked out of the dingle. It was a mile back to the road, and



The Greyfriars hikers were hurrying off to the rescue of their kidnapped chum when Billy Bunter rushed after them. "I say, you fellows—ow!—I'm all out of breath! I say—" "What is it?" roared Wharton. "Where's the sugar?" gasped Bunter. "I want some with the pudding!"

he tramped across the moor in the sinking sunlight. On the Blackslade road, Jervis was waiting with the car; and though Jervis' wooden face expressed nothing, there was no doubt that the chauffeur was wondering very much what his lofty and lordly young master was "up" to. Gadsby and Monson were not there; Pon was leaving his pals out of this! Gadsby and Monson had a rather high limit; but certainly they would not have had a hand in such an enterprise as kidnapping.

Pon stepped into the car. "Back to Blackslade!" he said curtly.

And the green Austin buzzed away. The gipsy van was also in motion. Joseph had re-entered the van, and carefully gagged his prisoner again; and then the horse was harnessed on, and the caravan rumbled away by a rugged track on the moor. And Bob Cherry, as he realised that every roll of the wheels was taking him farther and farther away from his friends, lay on the jolting floor in a frame of mind that could not have been expressed in words.

THE FOURTEENTH CHAPTER.

Found at Last!

"MY only esteemed hat!" ejaculated Hurree Jamset Ram Singh, the dusky Nabob of Bhanipur.

Hurree Singh was hanging to a high branch of a tree, scanning the expanse of Grimslade Moor from that rather perilous perch. The sun was sinking deep in the west; but there was still plenty of light, and the nabob's keen eyes swept over the surrounding moorland, far and wide. And at a distance, he had a glimpse of a figure that moved in the lonely expanse.

It was too far off for Hurree Singh to make it out, keen as his dark eyes

were. But it moved, and the movement caught his eyes. It moved slowly—very slowly—rather like a tired snail.

The nabob fixed his eyes upon it. From the ground he could never have seen it, but from the high treetop he picked it up, and he watched it intently, wondering whether it was Billy Bunter! It might have been one of the searching hikers, or a stranger on the moor—but from the snail's pace at which it moved, it seemed probable that it was Bunter.

As he gazed at it there came a sudden flash of light from the slowly progressing figure.

The nabob chuckled. It was the flash of a large pair of spectacles, reflecting the rays of the setting sun!

"The absurd and idiotic Bunter!" exclaimed Hurree Singh.

He marked the spot carefully with his eye, and slithered down the tree. Long tramping over the moors had tired him, as it had all the hikers; but he started at a steady trot. Having sighted Bunter, it was only a question of reaching him; the fat Owl was not likely to get very far before the nabob came on him, his rate of progress being about a hundred yards an hour! Hurree Jamset Ram Singh had no fear of losing him again.

He trotted on, and presently spotted the fat, weary figure that was tottering on the rugged moor.

Bunter looked quite done!

After what had happened in the clump of oaks, the hapless Owl had started once more, in an attempt to get off the moor. He was tired, and he was hungry and thirsty—terribly so! Having bolted all his provisions in the morning, he had naturally had nothing since, and at sunset Bunter was feeling as if he could have eaten the hind leg of a mule! He tottered along, every now and then blinking round him hopelessly, in a

state of dismal depression and despair. The Holiday Annual was under his fat arm, and more than once he had been tempted to throw it away, to save the trouble of carrying it. However, he was still sticking to it, hoping every minute to see a path or a road, or somebody to help him out.

"Oh crikey!" gasped Bunter, as, blinking round once more, he spotted a lithe figure coming towards him at a trot. "I say! Help! Help! Help!" The nabob grinned.

"My esteemed Bunter—"

"Oh!" gasped Bunter. "Is it you, Inky?" He halted, blinking at the nabob through his big spectacles. "I say—ow! I say—wow! Oh dear!"

He plumped down in the grass, gasping.

"I say, Inky! Got any grub?"

"I have some ridiculous chocolate—"

"Quick!" gasped Bunter, holding out a fat paw. "Quick! I'm starving!"

Hurree Jamset Ram Singh handed over the chocolate. It disappeared as if by magic.

"Got any more?" gasped Bunter.

The nabob shook his head.

"Anything to drink?"

Hurree Singh handed over his water-bottle. The Owl of the Remove poured the contents down his fat neck.

"That's better," he said.

Bunter was feeling a little revived.

"How did you find me?" he asked.

"By looking for you, my esteemed and absurd Bunter."

"Look here, if you're after the Holiday Annual—" Bunter blinked suspiciously at the nabob.

Hurree Singh, with a grin, jerked that famous volume from under Billy Bunter's fat arm, and slipped it into his rucksack.

"Look here, you beast—" gasped Bunter.

"That esteemed volume belongs to THE MAGNET LIBRARY.—No. 1,337.

the absurd Cherry," remarked Hurree Jamset Ram Singh.

"Do you think I was going to pinch it, you silly ass? I—I just wanted it to read in the train."

"Exactly," assented the nabob. "But you may purchasefully obtain another to read in the ridiculous train, my idiotic Bunter! Now I will guide you to the road, and you may take the absurd train as soon as you like."

"I—I'd rather take that book with me, Inky."

"Go hon!"

"I—I'm too tired to go to Blackslade now," groaned Bunter. "I—I think I'd better get back to camp. Is it far?"

"About three miles."

"Oh crikey! I can't walk three miles."

"But it is a shorter distance to the road, and you can pick up the absurd motor-bus for Blackslade, and—"

"Beast!" groaned Bunter.

Without the Holiday Annual, and the hope of fifty pounds' reward attached thereto, Bunter had no desire to take the south-bound train. Neither, indeed, was he feeling inclined for a journey of any sort. What he wanted was to crawl into bed and sleep the clock round. He wanted to eat, and then to sleep; and nothing else at the moment seemed of much consequence to William George Bunter!

"Well, are you coming?" asked Hurree Singh. "It will be dark soon, my esteemed Bunter, and then I may not be able to find the way, being an idiotic stranger in these delectable regions."

"Oh lor!"

Bunter staggered to his feet.

The bare idea of continuing in a lost state on the moor was terrifying, and it inspired him almost with energy.

"Come on!" he gasped.

"This way," said Hurree Singh. "The road—"

"I'm not going to the road!" howled Bunter. "I'm going back to camp, you beast!"

"But you have left us, my esteemed fat Bunter—"

"I—I haven't—"

"You have turned us downfully—"

"That was only a j-j-joke," groaned Bunter. "I—I was just pulling your leg, old chap! I—I never meant it! Not a word! Oh lor! Tut-tut-take me back to the camp, you rotter! Oh dear!"

Hurree Singh chuckled.

"This way to camp!" he said, and the fat junior tottered after him as he started.

The hapless Owl emitted a gasp or a groan at every step. For once Bunter was not "gammoning"; he really was tired out and exhausted. He could hardly drag one fat leg after another.

Hurree Singh gave him a helping hand, and Bunter leaned on him heavily. Progress was slow.

Deeper dropped the sun, and shadows lengthened and darkened on Grims-lade Moor. But there was a cheery call from the distance after a time, and Frank Nugent came trotting up.

"Found him!" he exclaimed.

"The foundfulness is terrific!" said Hurree Jamset Ram Singh. "And the mighty avoidpoids of the esteemed Bunter is still more preposterous! Will you take his other absurd arm, my ridiculous Franky?"

Nugent took Bunter's other arm.

Between them, the two juniors propelled him onward. Slowly but surely they drew nearer to the camp by Grims-lade Water.

"I say, you fellows," groaned Bunter,

"I—I—I c-o-o-can't walk any more! C-a-carry me!"

"Gladly—if I were a steam derrick!" said Nugent. "As I'm not, it can't be done, old fat bean!"

"Beast!"

"Keep your esteemed pecker up."

"Rotter!"

Having thus gracefully rendered thanks for aid received, Billy Bunter plugged and tottered on, leaning his heavy weight on the two juniors.

Near Grims-lade Water, Johnny Bull, also on his way back to camp, joined them, and a little later Harry Wharton and Lord Mauleverer came along. The hikers had arranged to gather at the camp at dusk, successful or unsuccessful, and, fortunately, one of them had been successful. Taking it in turns to heave the weary Owl along, the hikers marched into camp, only Bob Cherry now being missing from the party.

They got into camp at last, and Billy Bunter plumped down with a groan of relief.

"Give me some grub!" he gasped.

The hikers looked at him! Billy Bunter had given them a day's hunting on the moor, and no end of worry and trouble, and they had promised him the kicking of his life when found. But Bunter, evidently, was in no state now to be dealt with as he deserved. He had suffered for his sins—severely; and the hikers let it go at that! Instead of kicking him, they proceeded to supply the wants of the hungry and hapless Owl.

The stove was started, the supper cooked; and while it was a-cooking, Bunter bolted biscuits and bananas and cake, and sandwiches—anything that came to hand—to take the keen edge off his ravenous appetite. But he was ready for supper when supper was ready, and it was quite a revived and lively Bunter that sat down to supper, and stuffed and stuffed and stuffed, as if determined not to leave a scrap of anything that was edible in the camp by Grims-lade Water.

THE FIFTEENTH CHAPTER.

What Bunter Knew!

HARRY WHARTON clambered up the steep bank of Grims-lade Water, and stared across the dark moorland rather anxiously. It had been dark more than an hour now, and Bob Cherry had not arrived. Taking his electric torch from his pocket, Wharton turned on the light and waved it to and fro, as a signal to his chum, if he was on his way back to camp. He hoped to hear Bob's cheery "Hallo, hallo, hallo!" from the moor. But there was no sound—Bob evidently was not at hand. With a rather worried brow, the captain of the Greysfriars Remove descended to the camp again.

"Bob—" began Nugent, looking at him.

"No sign of him," answered Harry. "I wish he'd come in. Of course, he's not an ass like Bunter, to lose himself. But—"

"Must have gone far afield, looking for that fat chump!" said Johnny Bull. "Still, we agreed to meet him here again at dusk."

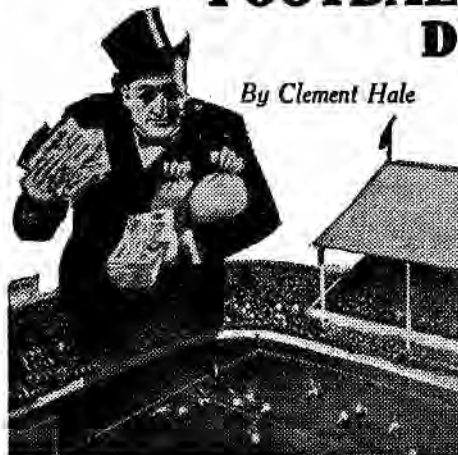
"After dark, a fellow might lose his way," said Lord Mauleverer. "But—Bob would have kept to the arrangement. I wonder—" There was a cloud of thought on Mauly's brow.

"What?" asked Harry. "Those gipsies—that lean-faced blighter, Joseph, had somethin' up his sleeve," said Mauleverer quietly. "You

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remember when we were talkin' to him—"

Wharton started.

"It's possible! But—even if Bob had had a shindy with them, he could have got back! They couldn't have hurt him—"

Billy Bunter blinked up.

"I say, you fellows—"

"Oh, don't worry, Bunter!"

"Oh, really, Wharton! I was going to ask you if there was any more pudding—"

"Cram some pudding into him, and shut him up!" said the captain of the Remove.

"Beast!"

Nugent passed the pudding to Bunter. The fat junior filled his mouth before he spoke again.

"I say, you fellows—"

"Oh, do dry up."

"Oh, all right," said Bunter. "If you don't want to know where Bob is—"

The hikers jumped.

"Do you know anything about him, you fat ass?" exclaimed Nugent. "Why haven't you said so, you blithering dummy?"

"I forgot—till you mentioned him," answered Bunter, munching. "When a fellow's tired out and starving—"

"Have you seen Bob since you got lost?" exclaimed Wharton.

"I didn't exactly get lost. I missed my way—"

"Have you seen Bob?" roared Wharton.

"You needn't yell at a chap! I was going to tell you, only you keep on interrupting me. Those gipsies have got him!"

"What?"

The hikers gathered round Billy Bunter. It was utterly unexpected to hear that Bunter had seen anything of Bob Cherry.

"Where did you see him—what do you mean—"

"It was in a clump of oaks—miles and miles and miles away," answered Bunter. "Those two beasts collared him there. I say, you fellows, there isn't enough sugar in this pudding. You know I like plenty of sugar—"

"You saw the gipsies collar Bob?" gasped Wharton.

"Yes; they tied his hands and took him away. Where's the sugar?"

"Sugar!" hissed Johnny Bull. "I'll give you sugar, you fat scoundrel! I'll jolly well give you—"

"Yaroooh! Keep off, you beast!" roared Bunter. "Wharrer you getting your rag out for, I'd like to know? I'm not saying anything against the pudding, if you made it—only I like plenty of sugar."

"Tell us what's happened, Bunter, if anything has," said Harry Wharton. "Quick—get it out!"

"I'm getting it out as fast as I can, ain't I? Look here, one of you get the sugar while I'm telling you, and save time, see?"

"If you don't get it out in two seconds," said Harry, in concentrated tones, "I'll pitch you head first into the water!"

Billy Bunter got it out—not in two seconds, but quite rapidly. The looks on the hiker's faces warned him that he had better drop the subject of sugar for the pudding, important and urgent as it was.

The hikers listened in amazement.

From what Bunter had seen and heard in the clump of oaks, it was plain that Michael and Joseph had seized Bob, apparently on account of some unknown person who had hired them to do so.

It was so amazing, that the juniors

found it hard to believe; but there was the fact that Bob was missing; and there was also the fact that the gipsy in the dingle had been furtive and uneasy and alarmed when Wharton and Mauly came on him there. And there was the fact—which now occurred to them—that Pon had been seen with the gipsies. They had a glimmering of the whole thing now.

"Pon!" said Harry Wharton between his teeth. "You remember he got a gang of tramps to go for us—now he's got hold of some gipsies. We know what he's after. It's that Highcliffe scoundrel at the bottom of it. If Bunter's got it right, Bob must have been in the van at the very time we were standing beside it, talking to that lean-faced villain!"

"Might have heard us talkin'!" said Lord Mauleverer. "Oh gad—if we'd only guessed—"

"How could we?" Wharton clenched his hands. "And to think that that fat idiot knew this all the time, and never told us the moment he met us—"

"Oh, really, Wharton—"

"Why didn't you tell us at once?" roared Johnny Bull.

"I forgot—"

"Forgot!" yelled Johnny.

"Well, I was fagged out and famished, and—"

"Oh, kill him!"

"That's the way you thank a chap for telling you where to find poor old Bob!" said Bunter bitterly. "That's the thanks I usually get!"

"Why didn't you help him?" roared Johnny. "You saw him collared, and you let them grab him without lending a hand, you flabby funk!"

"Oh, really, Bull—"

"Well, Bunter couldn't have done much in the scrapping line," said Harry. "Either of those ruffians could have knocked him out with a tap from a finger!"

"Oh, really, Wharton, you beast! As—as a matter of fact, I—I rushed to help him," said Bunter. "I—I rushed like—like anything, but—but—but I caught my foot in something, and—and fell—and—and then they were gone! If you're trying to make out that I'm afraid of those gipsies—"

"Oh, cheese it! Thank goodness we know where to look for Bob now, at any rate!" said Harry. "We might have sat

up all night, waiting for him to come in, if that blithering idiot hadn't let this out. Let's be going."

"What-ho!" said Johnny Bull.

"And get hold of something—it will mean a scrap, if they've got Bob in their van!"

"And somebody," said Johnny Bull emphatically, "is going to get hurt!"

Each of the hikers selected a stick, and Wharton took out his electric torch. There was a howl of alarmed expostulation from Billy Bunter.

"I say, you fellows! You're not leaving me here alone?"

"You can come along if you like," said Johnny.

"You're such a terrific scrapper, you'll be frightfully useful!"

"Beast! You know I'm too jolly tired to stir a step! Look here, you're not going to leave me here!" bawled Bunter. "Might be some tramps come along—"

"Go to sleep and shut up! Come on, you men!"

"Beasts!" roared Bunter. "Look here, you can go after Bob in the morning. I dare say he's all right! Anyhow, think of me!"

"Think of you!" gasped Nugent.

"Yes, you beast! Think of me," exclaimed Bunter indignantly. "Think I want to be left here alone all night?"

The hikers, however, did not seem to be thinking of Bunter. They did not even waste a single small thought on him. They marched off up the steep bank of Grimslade Water.

"Beasts!" roared Bunter.

And he gave his attention to the pudding, while the hikers gave their attention to clambering up the dark and rugged moorbank. They were not far away, however, when Bunter was heard in motion, and his fat voice was heard shouting:

"I say, you fellows! I say! It's important!"

"Hold on a minute," said Harry, looking back.

"Don't waste time on that fat freak!" growled Johnny Bull. "Haven't we got to get after Bob, fathead?"

"There may be something he's forgotten—"

"I say, you fellows—" yelled Bunter. Harry Wharton ran back.

"What is it—quick?" he snapped.

Bunter gasped.

"Ow! I'm all out of breath! I say—"

"What?" roared Wharton.

"Where's the sugar?" gasped Bunter.

"The sugar!" shrieked Wharton.

"Yes. I want some with the pudding—yarooooooh!" bellowed Bunter, as the captain of the Remove smote.

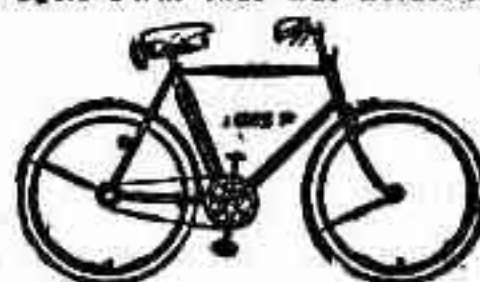
Bunter sat down suddenly. He sat and roared—forgetful, for the moment, even of the sugar! And the hikers

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tramped off over the moor and left him to roar.

THE SIXTEENTH CHAPTER.

The Pursuit I

"ONE!" said Harry Wharton between his teeth. "The rotters!" breathed Nugent.

A long tramp across the dark moor had brought the hikers to the dingle, where Wharton and Mauly had seen the van in the afternoon, and talked to Joseph—their voices, as they now guessed, audible to their comrade looked in the caravan. It was not easy to pick a way across the moor, but the hikers succeeded in finding the dingle, by the help of a couple of electric torches to light them on the way. It was midnight when they arrived there—tired, but not too tired to deal with the gypsies.

But the gypsies were gone!

They found the spot where the van had rested, the wheel-marks easily traced in the soil. But there was no sign of the van, of the horse of the two gypsies, or—worst of all—of the schoolboy who was a prisoner in the hands of the rascals!

"Shifted their camp, perhaps," said Johnny Bull, staring round in the darkness of the hollow. "We can follow the wheels easily enough, and find them if they're still about."

But the juniors had little hope that the gypsies were camped in another part of the dingle, or on the moor at all. It was only too probable that Wharton and Mauly's visit to the camp had alarmed them, and that, with the prisoner in their hands, they had decided to clear off to a safe distance.

However, the hikers proceeded to follow the tracks of the wheels, easy enough to pick up with the aid of the torches.

The track led up the slope of the dingle, up to the moor, and then in the direction of the Blackslade road.

Flashing on a light every now and then, to make sure that they were not losing the trail, the hikers followed on and came out on the turnpike road. There, of course, the track was lost. But though there were no tracks to be picked up on the high road, the direction taken by the gypsies was ascertained. The van had pulled off the moor on to the road, bearing to the left as it went. The direction of the wheel-tracks leaving the moorland told that much.

To the right, some miles away, lay the town of Blackslade. It was not to Blackslade that the caravan had gone. To the left the road ran across moorland, leading the hikers did not know whither, but, as they could guess, into a rural region. That was the way of the kidnappers.

"That's something, you men," said Harry. "We know that they got on to the road, and we know which way they went. Until we come to a turning, at least, we can follow on."

And the hikers followed on.

The road was as lonely as the moor itself. It was a fine night, with stars gleaming in a sky of deep dark blue. But for the fact that they had been on foot all through the day, the hikers would have enjoyed that night march. But though every fellow was tired, they did not think of stopping to rest. They had had a rest over supper before Bunter let out what he knew, and that had to be enough. No fellow there

was going to think of resting till Bob Cherry was found.

Slowly, perhaps, but steadily, the hikers marched on. A quarter of a mile on they reached the first turning, and there they stopped. Whether the caravan had taken that turning, or gone straight on, was a problem that they had to solve. In the daytime it would have been easy enough to pick up news of a gipsy caravan passing in the dead of night it was quite a different matter. At that hour only some wandering tramp was likely to be met with. Not even a motor-car had passed them.

But the hikers were in luck. As they stood looking about them, a shadowy figure lifted itself from the grass by the roadside. Startled, the hikers drew together, grasping their sticks. Wharton flashed the light on the figure, and revealed a stubbly, unshaven face, surmounted by an exceedingly battered bowler hat.

Evidently it was a tramp whose repose in the grass by the wayside had been disturbed by the arrival of the juniors.

The man looked a rather rough character, and it was perhaps fortunate that it was not one fellow, on his lonely own, who had met him in that dark and solitary spot. Rough-looking as he was, the hikers were glad to see him. He sat blinking in the light of the electric torch, and Harry Wharton stepped towards him.

"We're looking for somebody," he said. "Perhaps you've seen a van pass—a gipsy caravan. Been here long?"

The tramp blinked at him.

"Been here since dusk," he answered. "Camped down 'ere at dark! Looking for a gipsy caravan, are you?"

"Yes," said Harry. He took a half-crown from his pocket. "If you've seen it, which way did it go?"

A grubby hand was stretched out.

"Take that turning, sir," answered the tramp, civilly enough. "They stopped 'ere and asked me the way to Chupe."

"Chupe! Where is that?"

"About ten mile. You 'ave to get on the other road, and that lane leads to it—a mile on."

"How many men with the van?" asked Harry. He wanted to make sure.

"Two!" said the tramp. "One driving and one walking." He grinned. "And they fair had to push the 'orse up the 'ill!"

"What were they like?"

"Couldn't say, sir—only one was short and the other long. The short one wore a rag on his 'ead."

Evidently it was Joseph and Michael's van! Harry Wharton dropped the half-crown into the grubby hand. The tramp dropped back into the grass, and the hikers turned from the road into the lane.

"All serene, if they're making for Chupe," said Harry. "I've never heard of it before; but we can find it all right, even if we miss the van."

"Right as rain!" said Nugent. "And they can't be going quick. That geege of theirs was no great shakes of a horse, and this is hilly country. With Bob in the van, one of them had to walk."

"They wouldn't hurry, either, if you come to that!" remarked Lord Mauleverer. "They can't have the faintest idea that we're after them. We should never have dreamed that they'd collared Bob if that howling ass Bunter hadn't spotted them."

"That's so. We're most likely making better speed than they are," said Harry. "Put it on, as much as you can."

At a steady walk the hikers went onward. They reached the "other road" that the tramp had spoken of, and there a signpost indicated the way to Chupe and several other places. They swung on in the new direction—with tired and heavy legs, but determined hearts. The early glimmer of dawn was in the sky when a cart came rumbling along the road, with a sleepy-looking carter in it.

Harry Wharton called up to him.

"Seen a gipsy caravan on the road?"

"Reet!" answered the carter.

"Was it going to Chupe?"

"Reet!"

"Two men with it?"

"Reet!" The carter seemed a man of few words!

"Thanks," said Harry.

"Aw reet!" said the carter, more volubly. And he drove on.

Encouraged by the certainty that they were on the track, the hikers marched on, weary but determined. Dawn glimmered over the countryside, and there were early signs of awakening life. Presently there was a grinding of heavy wheels on the road behind them, and they glanced round at an empty lorry.

"Hold on, you men!" said Lord Mauleverer. "I don't know whether any of you are feeling a bit tired—"

"We're not stopping!" grunted Johnny Bull.

"Yaas, we are—"

"We're not!" hooted Johnny.

"Only a few minutes, dear man—long enough to ask that sportsman in the lorry for a lift!"

"Oh!" said Johnny.

The lorry, which had been used to carry bags of cement, was not an attractive vehicle for a ride. But anything on wheels was welcome to the tired and weary hikers. They hailed the driver, who looked them over, and willingly agreed to give them a lift at a "bob" a head! He was going to a place within two miles of Chupe.

Gladly the juniors clambered into the lorry. It rolled on with them, not by any means rapidly, but at more than twice the rate of their march. It was sheer pleasure to sit down and rest their limbs, even on the hard floor of the lorry. Frank Nugent nodded off to sleep, and the other fellows dozed. It was Lord Mauleverer who spoke suddenly, when the lorry had rumbled on about three miles on the road.

"Stop, please! We get down here."

The lorry driver looked round, nodded, and stopped.

"What the thump are you up to, Mauly?" exclaimed Johnny Bull, starting out of his doze. "We're nowhere near Chupe yet."

"No; but—"

"Do you want to walk, fathead?"

"No; but—"

"Well, let's keep on, then, you ass!"

"Yaas; but, you see—"

"Well, what are you stopping for, Mauly?" asked Harry Wharton. "We don't want to lose time."

"I had a sort of idea that the gypsies might have stopped on the road, before gettin' to Chupe," explained his lordship. "It's a long trip for that bony old gee of theirs, and they're not pressed for time."

"Well, yes; but—"

"An' I was right—they've stopped!"

"How do you know, fathead?" demanded Johnny Bull.

"Because," said Mauleverer gently, "I've just spotted the van, standin' yonder by those trees."



Crash, crash! Bang, bang! The whole van rocked and groaned under the hikers' attack. The door would not have lasted long; but it flew open and the two gipsies leaped out and rushed at Harry Wharton & Co. "Back up!" roared Lord Mauleverer. "Give 'em beans, old tops!"

"Oh!" exclaimed all the hikers together.

They bounded to their feet. They were not sleepy now. On a patch of grass by the roadside, hardly twenty yards away, a dingy gipsy caravan was halted. The horse was tethered near it, but nothing was seen of the gipsies. But it was the van of which the hikers were in search—they knew it at once, as well as the bony horse. Michael and Joseph, apparently, were asleep in the van—not up at that early hour, after their night travelling.

The hikers jumped out of the lorry. The lorry rumbled on, and left them. And the Greyfriars hikers, with grim faces, walked across to the van.

THE SEVENTEENTH CHAPTER.

Rescue!

BANG! A thundering bang on the door of the caravan startled three sleepers into wide wakefulness.

Bob Cherry, cramped and uneasy in his bonds, was sleeping fitfully. The two gipsies were sleeping soundly enough. But that terrific bang on the door would have awakened Rip Van Winkle.

Bang!
"Open this door, you rascals!" roared Johnny Bull.

"Open this door, you terrific and preposterous scoundrels!" shouted Hurree Jamset Ram Singh.

Bob Cherry's eyes danced. Weary and cramped and aching, he was in a state of utter discomfort; but he forgot it as he heard the voices of his chums shouting outside the caravan. He was still gagged, and could not call to them; the gipsies had not taken the risk of his calling out while the van

was on a road. But it was not needed! That vigorous summons at the door told that his friends knew that he was there.

Michael and Joseph did not share his satisfaction by any means. They scrambled up from their dirty blankets, exchanging a startled glance. A glimmer of the rising sun came in at the little window, and Joseph immediately put his lean face to the window—to look out, and to prevent anyone outside from looking in.

"There's one of the rotters!" exclaimed Nugent, and the hikers crowded to the little window.

"What may you be wanting, young gentlemen?" asked Joseph, in his smooth tones. "You have awakened me—"

"We want Bob Cherry, you scoundrell!" answered Harry Wharton. "Open the door, or we'll break it in!"

"I don't quite understand you, sir," said Joseph smoothly. "When I saw you yesterday, I told you I knew nothing of your missing friend, and I have not seen him since."

"I'm speaking of Bob Cherry, whom you collared on Grimslade Moor and got away in your van!" answered Harry. "You've got him there now, you rascal! You were seen to kidnap him, if you want to know."

Joseph, the gipsy, caught his breath. In spite of his cool impudence, he was taken utterly aback. But he recovered himself quickly.

"You are mistaken, my master!" he said, still smooth and oily. "I have not seen him. Why should I—"

"Because you were paid to do it, you villain!" said Wharton. "We know all about it now, and we'll make Ponsonby sorry for himself next time we come across the rotter! Open that door!"

"No one but an officer of the law has a right to order me to open my door,"

said Joseph. "You may, if you please, fetch a policeman!"

"And give you a chance to out while we're gone!" hooted Johnny Bull. "Are you opening that door or not?"

"I refuse to open my door at your orders, certainly," smiled Joseph. "And I beg you to be quiet, as I am going back to bed. No one is in this van excepting my friend Michael—"

"Open the door and let's look, then!" said Harry. "It won't take a minute."

The lean-faced rascal was so cool and so assured that the juniors almost wondered whether they had been mistaken. But, mistaken or not, they were not likely to go without searching the van.

Joseph shook his head.

"You have no right to give me orders," he answered. "I will open my door to a constable, and to no one else. Fetch one if you like."

He closed the window, and drew the ragged curtain over it.

The hikers looked at one another. "About four miles to fetch a bobby!" said Nugent. "Not quite good enough. What are we going to do?"

What Johnny Bull, for one, was going to do was evident from his actions. He lifted his thick stick and crashed it on the caravan window, sending broken glass and smashed sashes into the interior together.

"Oh, my hat!" ejaculated Wharton. There was a yell of rage from the gipsies in the caravan. Johnny grabbed the curtain with both hands, dragged with all his force, and tore it away.

"There's Bob!" he yelled. He glimpsed the bound schoolboy on the floor of the van, struggling to rise.

A stick lashed from the window from within. The hikers backed out of reach. Joseph—no longer smooth and oily—showed a lean face distorted with rage,

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yelling threats, and Michael's savage growl was heard.

"Smash in the door!" snorted Johnny Bull. "It's a flimsy affair—we can smash it in with our sticks. Go it!"

Crash, crash! Bang, bang!

The whole van rocked and groaned under the attack. The door would not have lasted long; but it flew open, and the two gipsies, with cudgels in their hands, leaped out and rushed at the assailants.

"Back up!" roared Lord Mauleverer. "Give 'em beans, old tops!"

The two ruffians were dangerous enough, slashing with their cudgels, and the hikers were glad that they had brought the stout sticks along. Savage as the rascals were, they had no chance against five. Harry Wharton & Co. met them more than half way, hitting hard, and hitting often.

It lasted a minute—a wild and whirling minute! Then Joseph and Michael dodged away and ran—halting breathless at a distance to glare back at the hikers, left in possession of the caravan.

Wharton jumped into the van.

"Bob, old chap!" he panted.

Swiftly the gag was torn away, and the cord cut. Bob's friends helped him from the van—tottering, his limbs cramped from the bonds. But he grinned at them cheerily.

"Hallo, hallo, hallo!" he gasped huskily. "You've found me, then! Never was so glad to see you fellows."

"The gladfulness of our esteemed selves is also preposterous!" said Hurree Jamset Ram Singh with a joyous grin.

Bob sat down in the grass, rubbing his wrists and ankles, chafed by the cords. Johnny Bull glared in the direction of the scowling gipsies.

"Those rotters have got to be run in," he said. "They can be sent to chokoy for kidnapping—and Pon along with them, too!"

"I fancy it wouldn't be easy to nail Pon," said Harry. "We'll deal with the cur ourselves later. And we can give those brutes a lesson ourselves!"

While Bob chafed his limbs, the other hikers proceeded to give that lesson to the outcast gipsies. They gathered on one side of the van; and with a powerful heave all together, hurled it over on its side. It crashed down, with a terrific clatter from within. The horse was untethered, led into a pasture-meadow, and set running.

Michael and Joseph looked on—from a distance! The expressions on their sullen, swarthy faces were indescribable. But they did not venture to approach. They had had enough of the hikers at close quarters.

Johnny Bull clambered into the overturned van and hurled out its contents—all sorts and conditions of things. The other fellows picked them up as they were flung out, and tossed them away over hedges.

It was quite a thorough "ragging"—and, undoubtedly, it was a lesson to Joseph and Michael to steer clear of the Greyfriars hikers.

"I fancy that will do!" said Harry Wharton at last. "Whatever Pon may have paid those rotters, they've earned it—by the time they get their van to rights again!"

"What-ho!" chuckled Bob Cherry.

"The earnestness will have been terrific," grinned Hurree Jamset Ram Singh. "The ludicrous van will not be a going concern for some time, especially as one of the idiotic wheels has snapped in two absurd pieces! It will teach those ridiculous rascals that the way of the transgressor is a rolling stone that gathers no moss!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

And having bestowed that valuable lesson on the kidnappers, the Greyfriars hikers left the spot—leaving Joseph and Michael scowling after them like two demons in a pantomime.

* * * * *

Snore!

That cheery sound greeted the Greyfriars hikers when they arrived at their camp on Grimsdale Water. Having stopped for breakfast at a village inn, and walked back by easy stages, it was nearly noon when they arrived.

Bunter, also, had breakfasted. Then he had gone to sleep again. Having eaten all there was to eat in the camp, there was nothing for Bunter to do but to sleep—which was a thing he could do really well!

The hikers grinned as they heard the snore echoing from the tent. Bob Cherry looked in. Bunter was extended there with his eyes shut and his mouth open. Bob bent over him.

"Hallo, hallo, hallo!" he roared, in a voice that almost lifted the roof of the tent.

Bunter jumped out of slumber.

"Oh!" he gasped.

He sat up and blinked.

"Oh! Beast! You made me jump! I'd hardly closed my eyes! Beast!"

"Haven't you got lunch ready for us?" demanded Johnny Bull.

"Oh, really, Bull! How could I get lunch ready when there's nothing left? I hope you fellows have brought some grub in with you."

"Oh, my hat!" ejaculated Harry Wharton. "Where's the ham?"

"I ate it!"

"Where's the cold beef?"

"I ate it!"

"Where's the tin of salmon?"

"Oh, really, Wharton—"

"Where's the cake?"

"Oh, really, Nugent—"

"Where's the bread and cheese?"

"Oh, really, Mauly—"

"Where are the esteemed bananas?"

"Oh, really, Inky—"

Bob Cherry chuckled.

"Looks like a march before lunch, if we're going to have any," he remarked. "Let's see Bunter off at the railway station, as he's leaving us, and then—"

"Oh, really, Cherry—"

The hikers struck the tent and marched. But they did not see Billy Bunter off at a railway station. Billy Bunter was not, after all, turning down his old pals—he was sticking to them—like a leech!

That afternoon, when Pon ran over to Chupe in the green Austin, he did not find the gipsies there—or the kidnapped hiker. Pon had been beaten again—and there was a hectic time in store for Pon when next he came into contact with the Greyfriars hikers.

THE END.

(There's another grand yarn of the Greyfriars hikers in store for you—next week! If you've not got a standing order for the MAGNET with your news-agent, make sure you don't miss "THE HIKERS' PRISONER!" Order your copy now!)

A WONDERFUL ADVENTURE STORY

By.....FRANK RICHARDS

Robinson Crusoes of 1933!

Who are they?

Why, Jim Dainty & Co., the cheery Chums of Grimsdale School! With Dr. "Sammy" Sparshott, their headmaster, they set out on a holiday cruise. A storm; wrecked—and the Grimsladers find themselves stranded on an unknown island in the heart of the mighty Atlantic Ocean.

Jim Dainty & Co. think it a glorious adventure, but they have reckoned without the villainy of Ezra Sarson, an unscrupulous rascal who has also landed on Castaway Island.

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No escape for the Grimslade castaways—and ever menaced by enemies who will show them no mercy!

Never has popular Frank Richards written a more thrilling story than

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Every MAGNET reader should make a point of following the amazing adventures of Jim Dainty & Co. in this magnificent story. Look out for it every Saturday in

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Come Into The Office, Boys!

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

WOULD you believe that it was possible for an island to appear suddenly on the face of the ocean, remain there for a month, and then disappear—and pop up again a short while afterwards? Sounds amazing, doesn't it—but it's true. I was yarning with an old traveller the other day, and he gave me some interesting information concerning

THE DISAPPEARING ISLAND.

Its name is Anak Krakatoa, and it is in the Dutch East Indies. It is of volcanic origin, and gets up to the most wonderful tricks. In 1883, for instance, there was the biggest eruption of modern times down there, and two-thirds of the island was destroyed—together with 20,000 inhabitants! Then strange happenings began to take place; islands popped up and popped down again, including Anak Krakatoa, which is the crater of the volcano. It rose one June, sunk again in August, and then re-rose. And now there are three new islands surrounding it!

Krakatoa is something of a puzzle. It is still active, and no one can tell when it is likely to burst out again. Needless to say, it is given a wide berth nowadays, but scientists are always keeping an eye on it by means of aeroplanes.

From a Halifax reader there comes a query this week, asking if I can tell him something about

THE CHELSEA PENSIONERS.

He doesn't mean the football team, but the old soldiers you will see any Saturday afternoon cheering on the teams at Stamford Bridge—for these old warriors are mostly enthusiastic Soccer fans. There are about 570 of these grizzled veterans, and everything is done to see that they are amply repaid for their services to their country. They have no duties to perform, and are supplied with everything they need, such as clothing, food, and beer—as well as being given a small allowance each week for "tobacco money."

A Chelsea pensioner can get up when he pleases, and have his meals just whenever he likes. Each pensioner has his own cubicle, and lives a perfectly free life. Chelsea Hospital dates from the time of Nell Gwynne, who was responsible for its foundation.

Ever heard of

THE MUTINY OF THE FLOWERY LAND?

George Jackson, of Bangor, asks me to tell him something about it. It was one of the most gruesome mutinies in the history of the sea. The mutineers were eight in number—six Spaniards, one Greek, and a Turk. They murdered three English sailors, the captain, his brother,

and the chief-mate. They then ordered the second-mate and three men to leave in a boat, and when one of the men fell overboard, they pelted him with bottles until he sank. They scuttled the ship, leaving the Chinese cook to drown. They got away, but seven of them were subsequently hanged for the mutiny.

One of the most astonishing mutinies was aboard an American ship, the Frank N. Thayer. Five men were killed, the captain and five more men were severely wounded, and the vessel was set on fire, and had to be abandoned. And yet the mutineers only numbered two men! They were Indian coolies who had, apparently, "run amok." They jumped overboard after setting fire to the ship.

Several readers have asked me to give them a few more paragraphs concerning "Things you'd Hardly Believe." Well, have you heard about

THE RIVER THAT CHANGES ITS MIND?

The Montana River is one of the most curious in the world, and also one of the most obstinate. It simply will not "stay put." Every now and again, it takes a fancy to change its course, and off it goes—taking no notice of man's attempts to keep it in order. The result is, that some of the bridges which have been built across it are now merely crossing stretches of dry land! Two magnificent—and expensive—steel bridges have already been left high and dry, and the river is threatening to play the same trick on a third. Furthermore, it has taken into its head to cross a highway, thus causing a terrific amount of confusion to traffic.

THE PERFECT HOME PASTIME.

With the approach of winter comes the old problem of how best to find entertainment during the long evenings. Although there are numerous different diversions to be found outside the home, many people prefer to find amusement nearer the home. There is no better answer to such a quest than Riley "Home" Billiards.

Home Billiards in this country has always been synonymous with the name of E. J. Riley, Ltd. This firm has for long specialised in the manufacture of billiard tables specially suited to the private house. Riley "Home" Billiard Tables are made in a variety of sizes suitable for any size of room, and the makers particularly emphasise the fact that their "Home" Billiard Tables are not toys. Every model, right down to the smallest, is a perfect replica in construction of a full size billiard table.

The fact that any Riley "Home" Billiard Table can be obtained on easy terms makes it possible for every home to possess one. As little as 8s. per month brings a Riley "Home" Billiard Table, complete with all accessories, and seven days' free trial is allowed.

One of the most popular Riley Billiard Tables is the Riley "Combine." Here is an article of furniture which can be transformed in two minutes from a luxurious dining table to a flawless billiard table or vice versa. Riley "Combine" Tables are offered in many attractive designs and various sizes for cash or easy terms, from as low as £22 10s.

Full details of all Riley Billiard Tables will be supplied on application to the manufacturers, E. J. Riley, Ltd., Royal Works, Accrington, or Dept. 88, 147, Aldersgate Street, London, E.C.1.

Now for a few

RAPID-FIRE REPLIES.

Where is the Tallest Chimney in the World? ("Steeplejack," of Broadstairs): In America. It is 500 feet in height. The tallest in England is in Lancashire, and is nearly 370 feet in height.

How did the "Cutty Sark" Get Its Name? (K. J. D., of Durham): The curious name came from Burns' poem, "Tam o' Shanter."

A Cricketing Query. (K. Adams, of Reading): "Umpire" says: Yes, the batsman would be out in the case you mention, for the ball has not touched the ground. There are many well-known cases of players being caught out in the manner you describe.

How Many are there in the Crew of a Modern Ocean Liner? (Jack Cummings, of Ealing): Well over a thousand men and women. In addition to the seamen and engineering staff, there are also such people as messenger-boys, nurses, Turkish-bath attendants, kiosk attendants, interpreters, librarians, and so on. There is even an editor for the ship's paper, and a cinema operator.

Is Sydney Bridge Longer than Hell Gate Bridge? ("Enquirer," of Hastings): Yes, it is the longest single-span bridge in the world. Hell Gate Bridge, near New York, is constructed in a similar manner, but is between 500 and 600 feet shorter.

My space is running short, but I must not forget to remind you that those two famous annuals—"The Greyfriars Holiday Annual," and the "Popular Book of Boys' Stories" are now on sale. There is certain to be a tremendous demand for them, chums, so if you don't want to be left out in the cold, ask your news-agent to reserve copies for you. You will find them the finest value of any boys' books on the market. The Holiday Annual costs only 5s. this year, and the Popular Book of Boys' Stories is still only 2s. 6d. Don't fail to get them!

There is another bumper issue in store for you next week. Look out for it! The long complete tale of the Greyfriars chums is entitled:

"THE HIKERS' PRISONER."

By Frank Richards.

I don't need to tell you much about it, because you all know what Frank Richards can do when he gets going—and you'll enjoy every line of this fine yarn. Take my tip and order your copy NOW!

There will also be the opening story of a wonderful new series of nerve-tingling stories dealing with the African jungle, and starring a modern Hercules who is known as "Umzugan the Mighty." A "Greyfriars Herald" supplement, of course, will be found in next week's all-star programme, and the usual shorter features,

YOUR EDITOR,

ALLISON OF AVONSHIRE!

By JOHN BREARLEY



Success!

CANNONBALL MIKE DOYLE, sipping a cup of scalding tea in the little kitchen parlour at Kelsey next morning, spoke seriously.

"Bill," he said, "'tis no use your worrying yourself about Corsica Phil Valetti, see? Forget about last night. Wash it out. Meself, I'd sooner it had ended some other way, maybe, but believe me, Phil Valetti asked for many a broken neck in his time! So snap out of it, son, that's all!"

Bill, heavy-eyed and sombre of face, shrugged. Right now he should have been playing cricket for the County at Daleham, instead of which he was lingering over a late breakfast, preparatory to making a long call at Avonport police station.

Still very clear in his memory was the spectacle of Corsica Phil's last roaring plunge to death the previous night. But precisely what had happened since was all a vague unpleasant jumble—a sort of half-remembered nightmare. Although, as Mike said, Valetti had well earned his fate, the swiftness, the awful finality of the tragedy, had left Bill in a maze.

Other incidents, some clear-cut, others hazy, jostled each other in his mind. The hasty climb through a yawning break in the hedge, and the grim discovery there! Then a dash for the nearest A.A. box, the arrival of police patrols, an ambulance, and curious whispering countryfolk, and at last, a long weary drive home. Only too painfully it reminded him of that dread night when his father had been so brutally attacked by Valetti.

Bill shivered. But presently he became aware of Mike's slow, musing voice again, coming as from a distance.

"I never thought I'd ever drive in another race ag'inat Corsica Phil." The Irishman seemed to be speaking to himself. "Four years ago the last one was. And then he pulled over on me—just like last night—and ran me clean off the track at Dayton! I could a' crashed him then, but—"

Mike set down his teacup, looked at Bill, and grunted.

"The Allison supercharger and his
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own tricky driving did it for me, instead, last night!" he concluded pensively. "Now, pull up, youngster, and let's get going for another nice sweet pow-wow at the police station. More trouble still ahead, Bill! So come on, and get it over!"

And there was trouble, of course, during the next few days.

Loads of it. An inquest for one thing; a first-class row with the railway company over the level-crossing for another. Most trying of all, however, was the police investigation that caused Bill to miss not only the finish of the Severnshire match, but the Glamorgan fixture as well.

Eventually, however, as Mike expressed it, "everything came out all right in the wash."

All that the authorities really cared was that the international criminal career of one, Felipe Alfredo Valetti, alias Corsica Phil, alias Joe the Hump, had come to an abrupt close. Officially Bill and Mike were hauled over the coals for taking the law into their own hands, and unofficially were slapped on the back by the British and American police alike. In any case, the people of Avonshire and the cricket world in general would have risen in wrath had "young Bill" suffered anything like serious blame.

The partners' story, to which they stuck doggedly, was that after Valetti and some confederate (unknown) had burgled their cottage, they had picked up the Corsican's trail at the filling station in Little Bramley and chased him. Mike also told how he had "shadowed" the notorious crook previously, and discovered something of his plans.

Of Len, little was said. It was known that the ex-boss of the Allison Motor Works had been a close associate of Valetti's, but as Bill held his obstinate tongue, and Mike lied like a genius, the police could do nothing. The last Bill ever heard was that his wastrel cousin had left France and "gone East."

Thus, at long last, ended the bitter Allison family feud.

But "out of evil cometh good." If the "Valetti case" did nothing else, it certainly shed the fierce light of

publicity on the new Simon Allison supercharger.

So great was the advertisement indeed, that certain keen gentlemen in the motoring trade held a private investigation of their own over the famous pursuit of Valetti. And one morning, a few days after the case was over, into the Kelsey cottage strode a brisk, cheerful, squarely-built man, who announced himself as Mr. James Farr—the new owner of the Allison Motor Works.

Fixing the comrades with a bright and business-like eye, Mr. Farr came down to brass tacks at once.

"Gentlemen, I just want to ask you one question. Is it an honest-to-goodness fact that you overhauled that Corsica fellow in an ordinary tourer fitted with your new supercharger?"

"It is! And we'll prove it any time!" was the blunt reply.

Mr. Farr's eye gleamed brighter than ever.

"Then that's good enough for me!" he declared. "Now here's my offer. Sell me the supercharger! I'm out to boom the Allison Works sky-high, and I want someone in the family to help me. I'll pay you a good round sum in hard cash, plus a third interest in the firm. Mr. Allison, there's always a post waiting for your father if ever he can take it, and another for you when you're not playing cricket. As for you, Cannonball, I'm here to offer you the immediate job of Chief Superintendent, and if you don't take it, I'll make you!"

After that Mr. Barr discussed actual figures and terms. He could afford to be generous, having picked up the works for a song—and he was. Further, he realised shrewdly that the name of Simon Allison was as gold now in the motor world.

Bill, for his part, was only too willing to deal, delighted beyond words at the idea of joining the family firm. On behalf of his father he engaged a lawyer to clinch the business forthwith. And in due course, under the capable guidance of Mr. Farr and the Cannonball, the triumphant future of the Allison supercharger was assured.

Bill's own especial triumph came a fortnight later.

"Good Old Madman!"

VERY appropriately it came, too, on the last day of the county cricket season, on a fine summer's evening. A great crowd—a record crowd, indeed—packed the Avonshire ground.

But, as most of them were home supporters, gloom reigned supreme at the moment. For, in radio parlance, a deep depression from Yorkshire was centred over Avonshire, and the outlook for Yorkshire's opponents was rotten!

"So near and yet so far"—that was how most Avonshire folk regarded the position just then. During the last three matches some devastating bowling by young Bill had put them neck and neck with Yorkshire in the race for county honours, and now, with everything hanging on the last match of the season, Avonshire had "mucked it."

Left with just 200 to get for the all-important victory, they had started well and then collapsed against the tremendously strong Yorkshire attack. Hence, at 6.20, they still wanted another sixty runs; and the only batsmen left to get them were Dick Hayes, the stumper, and young Bill Allison, whose biggest score so far had been 22.

Some of the Avonshire crowd began to move sadly towards the exits.

Nevertheless, those who remained gave Bill an uproarious ovation as the youthful left-hander strode out of the pavilion, even though most of them expected to see him returning pretty soon. And when he reached the pitch, beaming cheerfully as usual, little Dick Hayes came waddling down the wicket to greet him in accents grim.

"Listen, you big stiff!" hissed Dick. "Ne'mind those mourners in the pav.—we've still got an outside chance of winning! You hit out, Bill, and keep hitting, see? Go barmy—I know you can do it, while I keep my end up somehow. But if you try to kid yourself you're a real batsman I'll skin you!"

"And who's going to help you?" retorted Bill as he walked to the crease.

But then, the moment Bill had taken guard his grin vanished. His heart began to thump against his ribs.

"Hit!" Dick had said. Right-ho! Ever since he had been a first-class cricketer Bill had been somewhat ashamed of his batting. In every innings, after making one or two unscientific but effective shots, he had become nervous and tried to bat in orthodox manner, always with disastrous results. But now—

Now, with the championship to play for, Bill threw science to the winds and "went barmy."

Bowes was bowling, and bowling at his fastest and best. Bill watched the fair-haired Yorkshire giant hurtle up to the wicket, saw the ball come whistling down straight for his leg stump. It pitched, kicked, and then rose chest-high. He stepped back, lammed out with all his force, and—

Smack!

Every head in the Avonshire County ground turned mechanically to follow the red dot.

Up and up! On the boundary the immaculate Sutcliffe backstepped into position, watched the ball with longing eyes, then waved his hands resignedly. Ten yards above his head sang the ball, dropping plumb into the crowd on the mound. Next moment the umpire raised his arms on high, and the Avonshire supporters exploded.

"Well hit—well hit, Bill!"

"Good old Madman!"

"Six penn'orth! Oh, well swiped!" Bill grinned and twirled his bat. And after that juicy beginning the keen-eyed, steel-wristed young slogger rather lost track of things.

Again and again the red pill kept popping up, and Bill smashed at it viciously—anywhere, any old how. Sometimes his shots were good enough for Hobbs or Hammond, sometimes they were just awful. But they connected—came down on the ball with a good clean solid clump. That was all Bill cared.

Fours and twos sped from the swinging, swishing bat in all directions. The onlookers worked themselves up into a delirium of joy. Yorkshire began to look grave. But still the hefty youngster kept going. It was sheer berserk swinging—the sort that will knock any bowler in the world off his length at times. And this was one of the times, for Bill was inspired.

Occasionally, in an agony of apprehension, he had to stand idle while Dick Hayes took the bowling. But always the gallant little stumper scrambled the ball away somehow and ran like a hare. Then it was Bill's turn again

to hit like fury, blind to everything but the bowler at the other end.

There was cheering, he remembered afterwards—great waves of sound, as though the whole world had gone mad! Faces around him grew blurred—figures in white seemed to spring up here and there and mysteriously vanish again. Leyland took over from Bowes, Macaulay bowled for Verity, and bowled like a demon. But all the time Bill was there, the ball was there, and he kept hitting—hitting—hitting!

He grew breathless, tight-lipped and hard-eyed with concentrated excitement. Time flitted by. Over followed over.

Crack! Another ball—another six! Smack! More cheering, more running. How much longer could he keep it up, he wondered—and then forgot to wonder any more as he straight-drove Rhodes into the deep.

Dick Hayes shouted something to him as he raced past, but Bill couldn't hear the words for the noise all over the ground. As he finished his second run, however, the fieldsmen crossed over, and—

"Last over!"

The umpire's voice cut through the din like a knife.

(Continued on next page.)

Thrills in the African Jungle!

Look out for

UMZUGAAN THE MIGHTY

the strong man of the African Wilds. He appears in our wonderful new series of Thrill Yarns, staged in the jungles of wildest Africa, which starts in next week's full-value-for-money issue of "The Magnet." You'll all like Umzugaan—he's a modern Hercules who is fighting the evil power of a dreaded witch doctor.

Don't forget

"UMZUGAAN THE MIGHTY"

STARS IN

NEXT WEEK'S "MAGNET"

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Last over! Bill spun round, and for the first time took a good look at clock and scoreboard.

Five runs wanted!

"Oh gosh! And I've let Dick have the bowling!"

Trembling with sudden anxiety Bill dug his bat into the turf, leaned on it, and turned imploring eyes upon his partner. Ten thousand other people did likewise. For that mistake in tactics had given Yorkshire their last chance, and Sellers, their alert skipper, was quick to grasp it.

He chuckled the ball to Bowes for a final whirlwind over. The hard, dour fighters from the North hadn't given up hope yet!

Amid gripping silence the Yorkshire express merchant began his attack on Dick's wicket. His first ball no one could have played; his second missed Hayles' leg peg by a coat of varnish. The crowd gasped. Then he bumped the third, and, though the Avonshire man ducked, he didn't duck soon enough.

Thump! Right heartily the ball socked against Dick's shoulder, staggered him slightly, and went bobbing away towards fine leg. And—

"Come on!"

Young Bill Allison's husky shout echoed round the packed, silent ground. Dick ran.

"Ouch! Your end!" he grunted as he passed Bill, and Bill, flinging himself full length, just beat Barber's throw-in by a fraction.

The crowd sprang up in masses, yelling their heads off as the lad scrambled to his feet again.

Four runs now! And Bill Bowes bowled to Bill Allison.

It was a ball, too—one out of the bag! All the power and speed at the Yorkshireman's command were behind that hissing fizzer, which Bill scarcely

saw. Purely by instinct he half-whirled, feet together and knees bent. His bat flashed across and up, hooking the ball off his eyebrows.

There was an instantaneous shout, instantly stifled. Then again—dead silence!

Everyone watched. Out in the deep a fieldman leapt vainly into the air, and Leyland came speeding along the boundary, running desperately with arms crooked and hands ready. But Bill wasn't worrying any longer. He could still feel the impact of that gorgeous hook, and knew it was a safe six all the way—it must be!

Smack against the rails thudded the leather, with Leyland yards away. And as that winning hit rebounded on to the field Bill and Dick started to run.

So did the spectators.

Avonshire had done it—they had won! For the first time for thirty years the County Cricket Championship was theirs again. Like a horde of raving lunatics their supporters swarmed on to the field. The two heroes were surrounded before they had scampered ten yards.

Then the fun became fast and furious. Hears, joyous voices clamoured in their ears, eager hands gripped them, pulling them this way and that. Suddenly Bill found himself hoisted shoulder-high above a sea of upturned faces, with Dick bobbing violently alongside and protesting wheezily. But round the ground, and round again they were chaired and cheered—the two "rabbits" who, by sheer pluck and determination, had defied the mighty lions of the North.

"Well played, Bill—well slogged!"

"Allison—Hayes!"

"Good old Avonshire! Hurray-ay!"

Meanwhile, over in a quieter corner near the pavilion, a long, lean Irish-

man lounged beside another older man, who sat huddled in a bath-chair. Although, as chief super, of the flourishing Allison Works, Cannonball Mike Doyle was a busy man these days, he had been on the County ground all the afternoon, escort to old Simon Allison on this, the inventor's second outing since leaving Avonport hospital.

In smiling silence the two men watched the scene of wild enthusiasm until, as Bill was carried past, Mike cupped his hands and let loose one of his most piercing yells. Then, apparently ashamed of such a display of high spirits, the dour one grunted.

"Mad—and always will be!" he chuckled quietly, still keeping his deep-set eyes on Bill's swaying figure. "But 'tis a grand young madman ye are, Bill! And it's Cannonball Mike Doyle who says so!"

Tapping a stick of chewing-gum on his thumbnail, the one-time ace bent closer to the invalid in the chair. But even so, he had to shout to make himself heard.

"Well, guv'nor, what with the Allison Works, the Allison supercharger, and young Allison of Avonshire goin' strong out there, 'tis a mighty proud man yez ought to be!"

Old Simon Allison lifted his faded eyes. He tried to speak, but all he could manage was a proud, happy smile as the cheering swelled out again.

"All-i-son! We-want-Bill Allison!"

"Be glory, ye've got him!" said Mike.

THE END.

(A super series of thrilling adventure in the African jungle, starring the son of a black chieftain. That's the new treat for you. Watch out for "UMZU-GAAN THE MIGHTY!" the first nerve-tingling yarn next Saturday.)

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