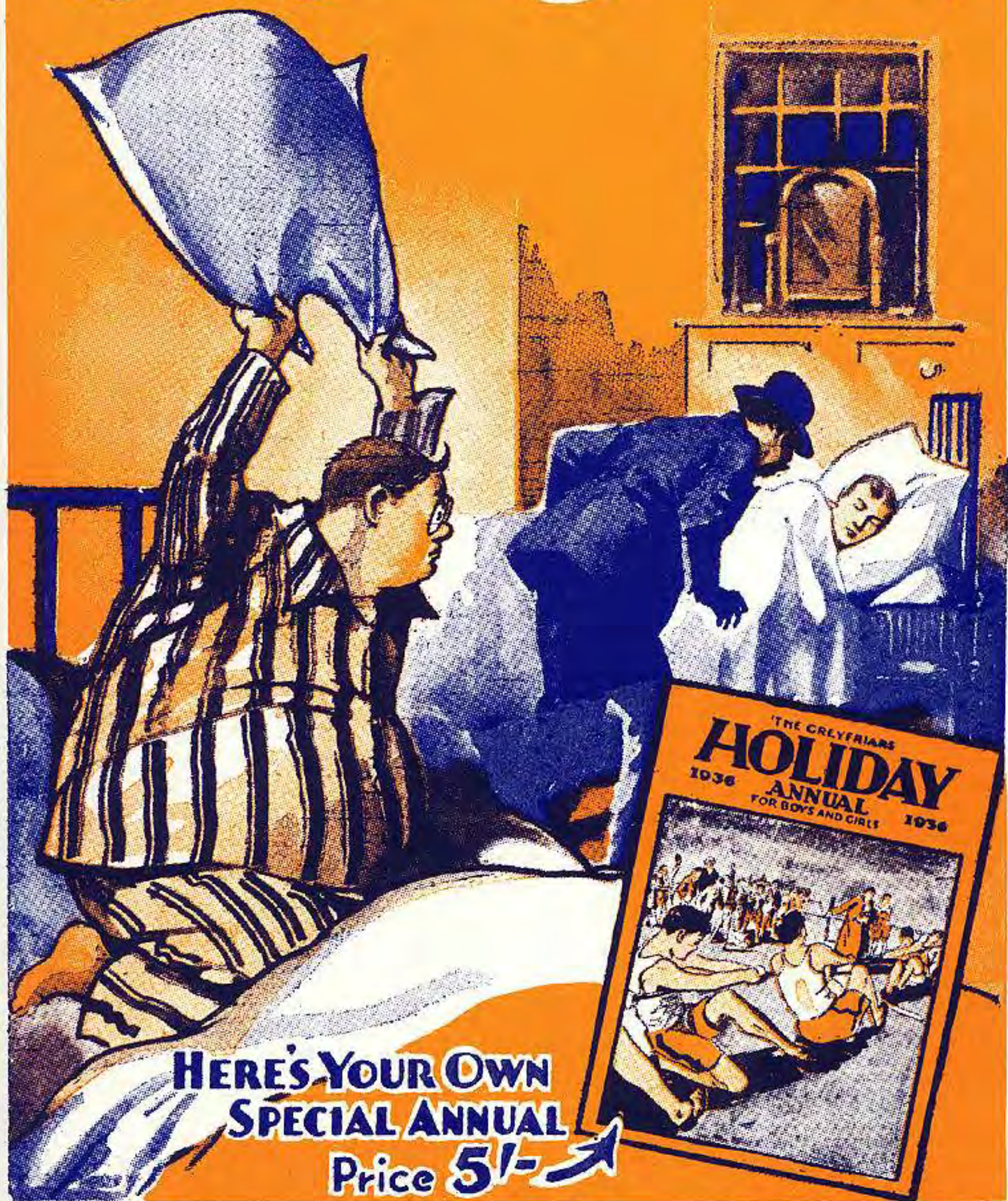


GREYFRIARS BOY'S STRANGE ADVENTURE! SEE INSIDE.

The Magnet 2^D



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SMITHY'S STRANGE ADVENTURE!

By FRANK RICHARDS



—THE WORLD-FAMOUS CHUMS OF GREYFRIARS.

THE FIRST CHAPTER.

High Words!

"SILLY ass!"

"Fathead!"

Billy Bunter, of the Greyfriars Remove, grinned.

Herbert Vernon-Smith and his chum, Tom Redwing, were engaged in an argument, and the argument appeared to be waxing somewhat warm. Bunter came on them in the Greyfriars quad, and stopped to listen.

Bunter was, as a matter of fact, rather busy just then. He was looking for Harry Wharton & Co. Those cheery youths seemed to have disappeared.

It was rather urgent; for Billy Bunter's arrangements for the Christmas holidays were not yet settled. He wanted to see the Famous Five, very particularly, about that. But perhaps they did not want to be seen about that important matter. It was possible that they were dodging Bunter. Fellows had a way of dodging Bunter when he wanted to discuss the "hols." Anyhow, they had disappeared. Bunter was busy hunting for them.

But Bunter was never too busy to listen to what did not concern him. Finding Smithy and Redwing engaged in a warm argument, which looked like developing into a row, the fat Owl of the Remove paused by the frosty old elms, and gave them his attention.

Vernon-Smith's brows were knitted. He looked irritated and angry. Redwing, as usual, was good-tempered and patient. But he was quietly firm.

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"You're a silly ass!" went on the Bounder.

"Leave it at that, old chap!"

"And a cheeky ass, too!" snapped Smithy, his eyes gleaming.

"I don't see where the cheek comes in, old fellow!" said Tom mildly. "A chap is at liberty to decline a kind invitation if he likes, I suppose."

"I've asked you for Christmas—"

"I'm sorry—but—"

"Cheeky idiot!"

Billy Bunter blinked at Redwing through his big spectacles. He blinked in amazement.

Smithy, almost the richest fellow at Greyfriars School, son of a millionaire, had asked Redwing home for Christmas—and the trouble appeared to be that Tom declined! Billy Bunter wouldn't have declined! Bunter would have jumped at it with both feet. Billy Bunter was sometimes offensive, in one way or another, but he had never given offence by declining an invitation for the holidays!

If Smithy had asked him instead, he would have had no reason to knit his brows over the answer. Bunter would rather have gone home with the wealthy Bounder than with Harry Wharton. And Tom Redwing was turning it down! Bunter fully agreed that he was an ass and an idiot!

"Think you won't have a good time with me?" demanded the Bounder angrily. He took no notice of the inquisitive Owl; his eyes were fixed angrily on the sunburnt face of his chum.

"Of course, I know I should, Smithy," said Tom. "But—"

"Hang your butts!" snapped Smithy. "You call yourself a pal, and you turn me down for the hols. There's plenty of fellows in the Remove would jump at it, as you jolly well know."

"I know," said Tom. "You've got lots of friends, Smithy! But—"

"Will you come?"

"I'd like to! But—"

"Will you or not?" snapped the Bounder.

"I've said that I can't!" answered Redwing quietly. "My father's home from sea, and I'm going to spend Christmas with him. I don't see a lot of him, Smithy! It's up to me, even if I didn't want to—and I do!"

"Christmas in a cabin up at Hawks-cliff, with a sailorman home from sea!" sneered the Bounder. "You think that's better than a holiday at my father's place in London, and all the shows—"

"Of course I don't, fathead! But it's good enough for me," Redwing smiled. "I'm not rich like you, Smithy, and that little cabin up at Hawks-cliff is my home—all I had, before I had the luck to come to this school. I can be quite happy there—"

"Idiot!"

"My dear chap—"

"Bring your pater along with you, and come!" said Vernon-Smith. "It will be a bit of a change for him. My father will make him welcome."

Redwing stared.

"Smithy, old man! My father's a sailorman—he would be like a fish out of water in a millionaire's mansion in London! What an idea!"

"You mean you don't want to come!"

You're letting me down! Well, I shan't ask you again!" growled Vernon-Smith. "Go and eat coke!"

"No need to get shirty about it, old chap—"

"Oh, shut up!"

Vernon-Smith had quite lost his temper. The millionaire's son was accustomed to having his own way. There were, as he had said, plenty of fellows who would have jumped at an invitation to the millionaire's mansion in London. Everything that money could buy was at Smithy's disposal—and there were many, many things that money could buy.

Possibly there was an idea at the back of Smithy's arrogant mind, that he was offering Redwing a jolly good thing, which he was really not in a position to refuse. It was not without some reason that Vernon-Smith had been nicknamed "the Bounder" at Greyfriars; there was a touch of the "bounder" in him! Certainly he was deeply offended by his chum preferring the sailorman's cottage at Hawkscliff to the millionaire's mansion in Courtman Square.

"Smithy—"

"I said shut up!" snapped the Bounder, very distinctly. "If you want to know what I think of you, you're a cheeky ass! Now leave me alone."

Redwing compressed his lips a little.

"We've been good pals, Smithy," he said, "but I'm afraid you can't quite forget that your father's a millionaire, and mine a seaman before the mast. I think—"

"Oh, get out!"

"We'd fixed to go over this afternoon to see the football match—the Air Force game at Wapshot—"

The Bounder sneered.

"If you don't want the hols at my father's house, you don't want a lift in my car!" he answered.

"I certainly don't want a lift in your car, Smithy, and you know I'd rather go by train!" said Tom, with a trace of anger at last. "Wash it out, then—I won't come."

And with that, Tom Redwing turned and walked away—so quickly, that he almost ran into Billy Bunter.

"Here, look where you're going, blow you!" snapped Bunter.

Tom gave him a look and strode on. Vernon-Smith stood staring after him with an angry brow. His angry frown did not relax as Billy Bunter approached—with his most agreeable and ingratiating grin on his fat face.

"Cheeky ass, and no mistake, Smithy!" said the fat Owl of the Remove.

"What?" growled Smithy.

"A poverty-stricken outsider like that turning down a fellow like you!" said Bunter indignantly. "Cheek, if you like! Blessed if I know what the lower classes are coming to, old chap!"

The Bounder looked at him. This sort of thing ought to have pleased him, in Bunter's opinion, as he was deeply and intensely angry with Redwing. But he did not look pleased!

Had not Bunter been so short-sighted as he was fatheaded, he would have discerned the danger-signals in the Bounder's grim look. But Billy Bunter never saw anything till it was too late, and he rattled happily on:

"Cheeky cad! Christmas in a cottage with a rough old tarry-brecks home from sea! He, he, he! Leave him to it, Smithy. I'll tell you what, old chap! You don't want Redwing! I'll come!"

"You'll come, will you?" said Smithy.

"Yes, old chap! You'd rather have a gentleman at your Christmas party,

what? You're wasting kindness on that low blighter. I fancy I shall do you a bit more credit! What?" Bunter smirked. "And look here, I'll come this afternoon with you, in the car. Is it settled about Christmas, Smithy?"

"Quite!" said the Bounder grimly.

"Good! Wharton's rather keen for me to go home with him, but I shall have to turn him down after all. Mauly's asked me to Mauleverer Towers, but old Mauly's a bit of a bore! I shall like it all right at your place, Smithy. City people, I suppose—a bit bounderish! But that's all right—I'm no snob! It will be a bit of a leg-up for you, Smithy, taking home a decent Public School chap—rather an improvement on that low outsider Redwing—rotten low cad, you know, and I say—Oh! Owl! Leggo! Beast! Wharrer you kicking me for? Yaroooooh!"

Smithy had suddenly grasped the fat Owl by the collar and twirled him round. He did not explain what he was kicking Bunter for. He just kicked him—and he kicked him hard!

"Yoo—hooooop!" roared Bunter. "Yarooooop! Oh, you awful beast! I jolly well won't come home with you for Christmas now—Whooooop!"

Bunter flew! Smithy had landed three kicks. He seemed to find some satisfaction in it, for he followed Bunter up, kicking again and yet again, and still once more, till the fat Owl got out of reach, and flew

Christmas in a haunted Elizabethan house, looking for lost treasure from a Spanish galleon wrecked off the lonely Cornish coast! Such is the thrilling holiday adventure in store for Harry Wharton & Co.!

across the quad as if he were on the cinder-path.

Vernon-Smith thrust his hands into his pockets, and stamped away, scowling. Billy Bunter flew on, yelling.

Crash!

He crashed into Loder of the Sixth before he saw him. Loder staggered and yelled.

"Oh, what the thump, you mad young ass—"

Smack, smack, smack!

"Yarooooop!"

Billy Bunter careered off, in wild flight again. It was a panting and breathless Bunter that dodged into the House. For the next quarter of an hour Billy Bunter did not even think about his unsettled plans for the Christmas holidays. He was too busy getting his second wind.

THE SECOND CHAPTER.

The Mysterious Italian!

"B UON giorno, signore!" Harry Wharton & Co. almost jumped.

It was the first time that the chums of the Remove had been greeted in the Italian language at the school gates.

Italian was rather an uncommon language there.

The Remove fellows learned Latin and French of a kind, and there were fellows who took Greek. But Italian was not in the curriculum at all.

Neither were Italians often seen on that countryside in Kent. Every now and then a dusky gentleman of that race would stop with a barrel-organ outside the Cross Keys or the Red Cow. Sometimes a swarthy descendant of the ancient Romans would be seen with strings of onions. But there were not a lot of Italians about.

So they were surprised.

But they were polite as well as surprised. Greyfriars fellows were always polite to everybody but other Greyfriars fellows!

The dark-skinned, chubby gentleman, who came along the road from Courtfield, stopped at the gates and spoke to them, raised his hat politely as he did so, with foreign grace—so the Famous Five of the Remove politely "capped" him in return.

They could guess that "Buon giorno!" meant "Good-morning!". So Harry Wharton answered:

"Good-morning!"

"Saffronillo!" said Bob Cherry, apparently seeking to answer the foreign gentleman in his own language. "Ice-creamo! Soho squaro!"

The swarthy man blinked at him, evidently not understanding that variety of his own language; but he smiled, displaying a glittering set of extremely white teeth.

"Parlate Italiano?" he asked.

"You're getting a bit too deep for me," said Bob affably. "But I'll try. Greeko Streeto! Macaroni, vermicelli! Adante moderato!"

The foreign gentleman looked perplexed, as well he might.

"Shut up, Bob, you ass!" said Harry Wharton. "Look here, sir, if you speak English—"

"Si, si, signorino!" said the foreign gentleman, beaming. "Certo, I speak your language! May I ask if this beautiful school is Greyfriars?"

"That's right," said Harry.

"You want to see the Head?" asked Frank Nugent.

It was not uncommon for learned foreign gentlemen to call to see Dr. Locke. This chubby gentleman, however, did not look like anything in the schoolmaster or professor line. He was very well-dressed, and had rather a man-of-the-world look. His face, though chubby, was extremely keen, his black eyes sharp and searching.

"The Head?" he repeated. "La testa?"

He was puzzled again.

"I mean the headmaster," explained Frank.

"Oh! No! I call with a message! You know the name of the riceo signore, Vernon-Smeet?"

"Vernon-Smith!" exclaimed Wharton. "Oh, yes, rather! You mean you've a message for Vernon-Smith from his father?"

"Si, sir! Yes, yes! It giovane—the young Vernon-Smeet—he is around?" asked the Italian.

"I saw him talking to Redwing a few minutes ago," said Johnny Bull. "He's about somewhere."

"The aboutfulness is terrific!" remarked Hurree Jamsot Ram Singh.

He turned his head and waved a dusky hand at the Bounder.

Herbert Vernon-Smith was tramping, with his hands driven deep into his pockets, at a little distance. There was a scowl on his face.

"Hallo, hallo, hallo, Smithy!" roared Bob Cherry.

Vernon-Smith gave an angry stare at the group of juniors at the gate.

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After his talk with Redwing, he was in a mood to be angry about anything.

"What the thump are you bawling at me for, you silly fathead?" he snapped.

"Same to you, and many of them, old bean!" said Bob cheerily. "Here's a sportsman, with a message from your father."

"Rot!" snapped the Bounder.

"Well, he says so, at any rate!" said Bob.

"Rubbish! I had a letter from my father this morning," said the Bounder. "He said nothing about—"

He broke off, and came down to the gate, still with a scowl on his rather hard face.

"Here's the man, Smithy," said Harry Wharton quietly. "May as well be civil to a foreigner."

The Bounder grunted. He was not feeling like being civil to anybody just then. When Smithy's temper was sour his manners often left much to be desired.

"Who are you, and what do you want?" he asked, fixing his eyes on the chubby-featured, dark gentleman.

"Buon giorno, signore—"

"Oh, out that out!" said Vernon-Smith. "If you've come from my father, get it off your chest!"

The swarthy face coloured a little.

Harry Wharton & Co. stood silent and uncomfortable. The Bounder's manner was far from polite. And the Italian was evidently not a mere messenger—not one of the innumerable employees of Mr. Vernon-Smith. His appearance showed that he was a man of some position—on a social footing at least equal to Mr. Vernon-Smith's. Civility to a stranger cost nothing; but the Bounder appeared to have none to waste.

"You are the son of Signore Vernon-Smeeth, the so great millionaire and financial gentleman?" asked the Italian.

"Yes, I am!" snapped Smithy. "Cough it up!"

The black eyes fixed on Herbert Vernon-Smith's face. The Italian scanned him so keenly that it almost seemed as if he was storing the Bounder's features in his memory, to be recalled later.

"I pass to-day by the town of Courtfield, signore," he explained. "Mr. Vernon-Smeeth, whom I meet in London, he say, perhaps I like to call at Greyfriars and his son show me about his school. To me, as a foreigner, it is of great interest."

The Bounder scanned the Italian quite as keenly as the Italian scanned him.

Smithy was the son of Mr. Vernon-Smith, a very hard and keen gentleman. Smithy had, perhaps, a natural turn to suspicion. To the chums of the Remove there seemed nothing to call for suspicion. The visitor should naturally have asked to see the headmaster, in the circumstances, as he was a stranger in the place, instead of speaking to the schoolboys at the gate—but that was all.

"You saw my father this morning?" asked Vernon-Smith.

"Si, si—in London this morning."

"Is his arm still bad?" asked Smithy. He glanced at the juniors. "I told you fellows that my father slipped, getting out of his car, and hurt his arm, and he's to carry it in a sling."

Harry Wharton & Co. could only stare. Smithy had told them nothing of the sort that they remembered.

"I suppose you noticed?" said the

Bounder irritably. "I'm rather anxious about my father's injury. Is his arm still in a sling?"

"Si, si! His arm is still bad, but he goes to get better," said the Italian. "When I ask him this morning, he say there is no longer pain."

"Oh, he did, did he?" said the Bounder grimly. "Lend me a hand with this rotter, you fellows, and we'll make him explain what he's up to, coming here with a lying pretence of coming from my father!"

And the Bounder, making a sudden spring at the foreign gentleman, grasped him by the collar of his coat and pitched him headlong into the gateway.

Harry Wharton & Co. stood dumb-founded.

"Smithy!" gasped Wharton.

"Collar him!" shouted the Bounder.

The Italian had spun over and fallen. But he was on his feet in the twinkling of an eye, and bounding out at the gate.

The chums of the Remove did not touch him. They were utterly astounded at Smithy's unexpected action, and they saw no reason whatever for laying hands on the swarthy foreigner.

Vernon-Smith grasped at the man, and received a violent shove that sent him spinning. The Italian darted down the road, leaped a gap in the frosty hedge, and vanished through the woods towards the banks of the Sark.

The Bounder staggered to his feet.

"You silly dummies!" he yelled. "Why didn't you collar him?"

"Why the thump should we collar the man?" demanded Johnny Bull. "You seem to have scared the fellow out of his wits by pitching into him. I'd like to know what you mean by it."

"And so should I!" exclaimed Wharton hotly. "If that man came from your father, Vernon-Smith—"

"You silly ass! I don't suppose my father's ever seen him! He's certainly not seen my father to-day, or lately at all!" snarled the Bounder. "He's some sort of a swindler and up to some game here!"

"Well, I don't see it! He knew all about your father having his arm injured—"

said Frank Nugent.

The Bounder gave a contemptuous snort.

"My father hasn't had his arm injured!" he snapped.

"Wha-a-t? You said—"

"Yes, I said he had, to draw the spoofer on and make him give himself away!" snapped Vernon-Smith. "And he took the bait at once and gave himself away, just as I expected he would!"

"Oh!" gasped Nugent.

The Famous Five understood now. The Bounder had been "drawing" the man, and certainly he had led him to give himself away pretty completely.

"Now he's got clear!" snapped Vernon-Smith. "Goodness knows what he wanted—chance to pinch something in the school, I suppose! Anyhow, he never came from my father. He's some confidence trickster, or pickpocket, or something! If you'd collared him—"

"Well, he's gone now!" said Bob.

"The gonefulness is terrific!"

"Silly set of asses!" granted the Bounder, and he tramped back into the quad in a worse temper than ever.

THE THIRD CHAPTER.

Two of Them!

"I SAY, you fellows—"

"Run for it!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

After the school dinner Harry Wharton & Co. were strolling in the

quad. That day was the last half-holiday of the term, and as there was no game on at Greyfriars they were considering whether to get along to Wapshot to see the football match there, which was between an air camp team and a Kentish League eleven and was likely to be worth watching. Billy Bunter, looking for them, found them this time—but the mere sight of Billy Bunter set them into rapid motion. The fat Owl of the Remove, blinking wrathfully after them through his big spectacles, yelled:

"I say, stop! 'Tain't about Christmas!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The juniors, laughing, came to a halt. If Bunter was not going to make arrangements for the holidays with them they were willing to hear what he had to say. The fat Owl came panting up.

"I say, you fellows, about—"

"Not Christmas!" grinned Bob, holding up a warning finger.

"Beast! About this afternoon—"

"Oh, all right!" said Harry Wharton. "Like to come along to Wapshot, old fat man? Nice walk of five miles or so—do you good!"

"The walkfulness will bring down the esteemed and ridiculous fat!" remarked Hurree Jamset Ram Singh.

"That's just what I was going to suggest!" said Bunter. "I hear that it's going to be a great game—and the snow seems holding off, so it won't be stopped, most likely. Those Air Force men are worth watching, I hear. Let's go, shall we? I'm fearfully keen."

The chums of the Remove looked at Bunter. If Bunter was keen on Soccer, either to play or to watch, they were glad to hear it. But this fearful keenness was rather a recent development. Generally, Billy Bunter would not have carried his weight a dozen yards to see a Cup Final.

"But," went on Bunter, "we can't walk! I mean, it would be all right for me, but you fellows would get fagged right out."

"We should?" gasped Bob Cherry.

"Yes, old chap—I should be worried about you. You can't stay the distance—you've not got the physique, you know."

"Oh crikey!"

"I shouldn't want to be stopping every mile, waiting for you fellows to come up, and all that! Let's go in a car!"

"Good egg!" said Nugent. "Phone home to Bunter Court for the Rolls, old fat man!"

"Well, it would hardly get here in time," said Bunter thoughtfully. "If you'd suggested it before dinner it would have been all right."

"Oh, my hat!"

"The all-rightfulness would not have been terrific!" murmured Hurree Jamset Ram Singh.

"Oh, really, Inky! But that's all serene," said Bunter. "We can get a car. They send out cars from Courtfield Garage, you know."

"But they expect a chap to pay for it!" objected Bob. "And that's where the shoe pinches. We're not millionaires like old Smithy."

"They're sending one out for Smithy, you fellows." Bunter gave a cautious blink round, and lowered his voice. "We're going to bag Smithy's car!"

"Are we?" gasped Harry Wharton blankly.

"I can see Smithy letting us do it!" grinned Bob Cherry.

"That's where my strategy comes in!" explained Bunter. "I've worked it all out. Smithy has lines from Quelch, and Quelch has ordered him to show them

up before he goes out this afternoon. Well, you know the Bounder—he likes ragging old Quelch. I jolly well know he hasn't done his lines yet, and he hasn't time before he goes as he phoned for the car to come at two sharp."

"How do you know?" growled Johnny Bull, with a snort.

"Superfluous question!" grinned Bob. "Doesn't Bunter know everything—except his lessons, of course?"

"Oh, really, Cherry! I heard Smithy mention it to Redwing," said Bunter. "You fellows never hear anything."

"We're not so keen on other fellows' affairs!" Wharton pointed out.

"Oh, really, Wharton! Well, that's how it is!" said the fat Owl. "Smithy daren't let that car come up to the school, as he's going to sneak off with-

him out by bagging his car for the afternoon! See? I'll let you fellows come in it."

"Thanks awfully!" said Harry Wharton, laughing. "But when we want to steal a ride we'll do our pinching without your leave."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Oh, don't cackle!" snapped Bunter. "I'm offering you a run in a jolly good car—there and back! In return I shall expect you to stand tea at Wapshot. There's quite a decent place near the air camp. I'd stand you the tea as well as the drive, but, as it happens, I've been disappointed about a postal order."

"And you can't pinch a tea as well as a car?" asked Bob.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The Famous Five, deaf to the voice of the charmer, did walk off. They had no time to listen to more of Billy Bunter's entertaining conversation if they were going to see the football match at Wapshot. Smithy, in a car, could start much later if he was going, but the chums of the Remove could not afford to splash money about on cars as the wealthy Bounder did. And certainly they had not the remotest idea of bagging Smithy's car—even as a punishment for the serious offence of kicking Bunter!

So they walked off, leaving the Owl of the Remove to waste his sweetness on the desert air.

It was a cold, frosty December afternoon; the sky was heavy with what looked like coming snow, but they hoped



"You—you—you beast!" gasped Billy Bunter. "I jolly well won't get out of this car!" "I think you will!" grinned Vernon-Smith. And Bunter did—in a heap, as the Bounder unceremoniously pitched him head-first out! The fat junior rolled in a bank of snow beside the road!

out Quelch spotting him. It's stopping for him down the road. Well, we walk along and bag it—see?"

"You howling ass!"

"Oh, really, Nugent! It will be all right—Redwing isn't going, as that ass Smithy has rowed with him. He's always rowing with somebody, you know. Now he's rowed with Redwing! And he kicked me!" went on Bunter, his little round eyes gleaming behind his big, round spectacles. "Kicked me, you know, because I turned down his invitation for Christmas—"

"Oh crumbs!"

"I told him I couldn't come with him, among a lot of City bounders, you know—hardly up to the style of a Public school man!" said Bunter. "I fancy he had been rather banking on me coming—wanted to show off a really decent chap from his school, you know—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Blessed if I see anything to cackle at! Well, he got into a temper through Redwing turning him down—I mean, through my turning him down—and kicked me! I'm jolly well going to pay

"Look here, you fellows, it's a go, isn't it? I want you to come—I like your company, you know! And—and Smithy may cut up rusty, and—and you can handle him if he does."

Harry Wharton glanced up at the clock tower over the leafless elms.

"Time we got off," he remarked. "We can get a lift on the motor-bus as far as Potts' Lane; after that it's Shanks' pony. If you've done your funny turn, Bunter—"

"I say, old chap, it's quite safe to bag the car! I'll tackle Smithy if he gives any trouble. Besides, he won't be there if we get there first and get the car away before he comes! You can tell the chauffeur that Smithy's kept in, Wharton—"

"I'm not such an experienced liar as you are, old fat man. I should make a muck of it," answered the captain of the Remove.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Well, look here—I say, you fellows, don't walk off while a chap's talking!" roared Bunter. "I say—Beasts! Rotters!"

that it would hold off long enough for the match to be played at Wapshot. They started in cheery spirits, swinging along at a good rate to the corner where they were to pick up the motor-bus which ran from Courtfield to Redclyffe.

The motor-bus landed them at a spot three miles from the school, where a lane turned off the main road, which was a short cut to Wapshot.

It was a mile and a half even by the short cut; but a mile and a half was little to the sturdy juniors, and they turned into the lane and tramped on cheerily.

Potts' Lane wound through high hedges that enclosed pastureland, glimmering white with a late fall of snow. There were several inches of snow in the lane, and tracks in it showed that the Greyfriars juniors were not the first to pass that way. It was heavy going.

"Hallo, hallo, hallo!" ejaculated Bob Cherry suddenly.

"What—"

"It's raining Italians to-day!" said Bob, with a grin.

He made a gesture towards a little building that stood back from the lane. It was an old Army hut, which had been put up after the War as the residence of a small-holder who had tried his luck there, but had long since given it up and gone.

The lonely hut had stood empty and deserted since; in the summer the juniors had passed it several times on their bicycles, but had never seen any sign of occupation about the place.

It seemed to be occupied now.

There was no smoke from the chimney; but the front door was open, and a thick-set, bull-necked man stood there gazing out. His swarthy face and black hair and eyes were those of an Italian.

The juniors could not help regarding him with some curiosity. They hardly ever saw an Italian anywhere near Greyfriars. Now, as Bob remarked, it seemed to be raining Italians! Only that morning a chubby-faced Italian had called to see Herbert Vernon-Smith, and now here was another of the same race.

The bull-necked man was scanning the lane as if in expectation of seeing someone arrive. He fixed his glinting black eyes on the bunch of schoolboys, and then, as he noted that he had drawn their attention to himself, he stepped back into the hut and closed the door.

The Famous Five walked on, looking and feeling rather thoughtful. It was an odd coincidence, at least, to see a second Italian on the same day, and they could not help wondering whether he had some connection with the first. The man who had come to Greyfriars had been some sort of an impostor, as the Bounder had proved by catching him out. Certainly he had looked a respectable man enough; but it was certain that he had lied in pretending that he came from Smithy's father, and it was scarcely possible that his motive could be any but a questionable one.

"I wonder—" murmured Nugent. "Same here," said Bob. "I wonder if—"

"The wonderfulness is terrific," grinned the Nabob of Bhanipur.

"It's jolly queer," said Harry slowly. "Looks to me as if there's something on—though goodness knows what!"

The old Army hut disappeared from sight; but at a distance, after mounting a steep rise in the lane, the juniors looked back and saw it again over the hedges. The door was open again, and the bull-necked Italian had come out and was crossing the field towards the lane; and up the lane, from the direction of the main road, came a small saloon car. It was an all-black car, and showed up sharply against the snow on the ground.

"That's what the sportsman was

watching for when we saw him," remarked Bob Cherry.

The car stopped at the field gate. The distance from where the juniors stood was considerable, but the frosty air was clear and their eyesight good. They could see the man who drove the car, and they could see that his face was swarthy and chubby. It was the Italian who had asked for Vernon-Smith at the school gates that morning.

Evidently there was a connection between the two Italians.

The bull-necked man stepped into the car; it backed and turned and drove away towards the Redclyffe road. With the snow on the ground rapid driving was rather dangerous, but the black saloon went at a great pace and vanished in a few minutes from the eyes of the Famous Five.

"I wonder what the dickens those two dashed foreigners are up to?" said Johnny Bull. "No good, you can bet on that."

The same thought was in the minds of all the famous Co. as they trudged on their way to Wapshot, but they did not expect to see anything of the two Italians again—little dreaming just then how much they were destined to see of both of them before the Christmas holidays were over. They arrived at Wapshot in good time for the Soccer match, and in the excitement of watching the game soon forgot all about the Italians.

THE FOURTH CHAPTER.

Bunter, Too!

"COMING?"

"No!" Vernon-Smith asked the question ungraciously. Tom Redwing's answer was curt.

The Bounder shrugged his shoulders and turned away.

After what he had said to his chum that morning it was not likely that Redwing would avail himself of a lift in the car. The Bounder had given him the chance, but so ungraciously that it was very clear that he was still in a state of offended resentment. A drive with the Bounder that afternoon meant a wrangle, if not a quarrel, and Redwing did not want any more of it. Patient as he was with his wilful and headstrong chum, there was a limit to his patience. Moreover, he had already made other arrangements for the afternoon, joining some of the Remove and Fourth in fixing up a pick-up.

But the Bounder scowled, angrier than ever, as he swung away; he tramped out of gates with a black brow.

His lines for his Form-master, Mr. Quelch, had been quite dismissed from his mind. There was time for the lines when he got back; it would be all right

if Quelch did not know that the Bounder had been out.

Quelch had ordered him to bring the lines to his study before he went out of gates, but it was like Smithy to disregard his Form-master's orders. If it led to trouble, as very likely it would, that would be no new experience for the scapegrace of Greyfriars.

He was not even thinking of it now;

his mind was full of his resentment against his chum—who had turned him down for the holidays, as he regarded it.

It was odd, perhaps, that the Bounder was so attached to Redwing, who was unlike him in every way; but, though he was on friendly terms with Harry Wharton & Co. and a dozen other fellows, he had never really made a friend at Greyfriars, except the sailor-man's son. Skinner and Snoop, Bolsover major and Fisher T. Fish—plenty of fellows, in fact—would have been glad to accept his invitation for Christmas; even the famous Co. might have accepted it. But Smithy did not want them; he wanted Redwing, and Redwing would not come.

Least of all, certainly, did he want Billy Bunter.

And when he arrived at the corner of Courtfield Common and found the car there, and Billy Bunter also, he scowled more blackly than before.

Bunter was there, standing blinking at the car and the Courtfield chauffeur. Harry Wharton & Co. had turned down his bright idea of bagging that car; but the fat Owl had not given up the idea of getting a lift in it, all the same. Bagging it on his own was impracticable, but the astute Owl had another card up his sleeve.

He blinked at Herbert Vernon-Smith through his big spectacles as the Bounder came tramping up.

"Waiting for you, Smithy, old chap!" said Bunter breezily.

"You fat idiot!"

"Oh, really, Smithy—"

"Get out, you fat fool!"

Vernon-Smith tramped past him.

"Oh, all right," said Bunter. His eyes gleamed through his spectacles. "All right! If you don't want my company, Vernon-Smith—"

"You know I don't!" yapped the Bounder. "Does anybody?"

"You cheeky beast!" howled Bunter.

"Clear off, you fat fool!"

"I'm going to clear off," said Bunter.

"And if Quelch asks me whether you've gone out, Smithy, you can't expect me to keep it dark. You'll get six when you come in—and serve you jolly well right, you beast!"

Vernon-Smith started.

Reckless as he was, and regardless of his Form-master's authority, he did not want Mr. Quelch to learn, if he could help it, that he had gone out before doing his lines. "Six" from Quelch's cane was neither grateful nor comforting, even to a tough nut like the Bounder of Greyfriars.

He looked long and hard at the fat Owl.

Bunter grinned.

He had Smithy in the hollow of his fat hand, the astute Owl considered. Whether Bunter would have "sneaked" about the Bounder was perhaps doubtful; but, at all events, he could have had he liked, and the consequences would have been painful for Smithy. Those lines had been left over for several days; they had been doubled, and the Remove master had told Vernon-Smith, very severely and sternly, that the imposition had to be done before he went out of gates that half-holiday. It was quite certain that Quelch would be deeply incensed if he knew what Bunter could tell him.

The chauffeur opened the car door.

Smithy drew a deep breath.

"Step in, Bunter!" he said quietly.

"Well, if you really want me to come, old chap—" said Bunter affably.

"I said step in!"

"Right-ho, old bean!"

Bunter stepped in. The Bounder followed him into the car, the chauffeur shut the door and took his seat, and

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the car glided away on the Redclyffe road. Smithy sat silent and grim. The Owl of the Remove, on the other hand, was cheery and chatty.

"I say, Smithy, we shall see some of the other chaps at Wapshot," he remarked. "Wharton's lot have gone. If we run into them there, we'll all have tea together, shall we?"

"If we do!" said Smithy. "It's not likely."

"Well, there'll be rather a crowd," admitted Bunter. "We'll tea at that jolly little place near the air camp. I'll stand the tea, Smithy, as you're standing the car, what?"

"Oh, do!" said the Bounder sardonically.

He knew how Bunter "stood" a tea! Bunter would stand quite an expensive spread—and discover, when the bill came along, that he had left all his money behind! It came rather expensive to a fellow to be treated by William George Bunter.

"I—I say, tell the man not to go so fast, old chap!" said Bunter uneasily. "The roads are jolly slippery, you know!"

"You can get out if you don't like it."

"Oh, really, Smithy—"

"Shut up, anyhow!"

"Look here, you beast, slow down!" snapped Bunter. "We shall get a skid! There's hardly another car on the road!"

Vernon-Smith did not trouble to answer. He liked speed in a car, and

GREAT NEWS, BOYS! GRAND

he was always careless of possible danger.

"Not another car on the road except that little black saloon that's been behind us all the time," snorted Bunter, blinking through the glass at the back of the car. "Not another car to be seen! Look here, I'm not going to have my neck broken, Smithy, if you are!"

"No loss if you did!"

"Beast!"

"It won't be long now," added the Bounder. "You're getting out soon."

"What do you mean, blow you?" growled Bunter. "We're hardly half-way to Wapshot so far! That's Potts' Lane just ahead."

"I know."

The car ran on, and the Bounder signalled to the driver to stop as it came abreast of the end of Potts' Lane. Billy Bunter gave a squeak.

"Look here, Smithy, we're not going up that narrow lane in the car! 'Tain't safe! Stick to the main road!"

"I'm not thinking of goin' through in the car."

"What have we stopped here for, then?"

"To drop a passenger."

Bunter blinked at him as he threw open the door. There was no passenger in the car excepting themselves.

"What the dickens do you mean, Smithy?" asked the fat Owl peevishly. "What passenger are you going to drop?"

"You!" answered the Bounder tersely.

"Wha-a-t?" spluttered Bunter.

Smithy pointed to the snowy lane.

"You can walk to Wapshot that way, if you want to go!" he remarked. "Or you can walk back to Greyfriars—or go

to Jericho, or anything you dashed well like! Get out of this car!"

Billy Bunter's eyes, and his very spectacles, gleamed with wrath. It dawned on his fat brain now why the Bounder had so quietly acceded to his demand for a lift in the car. He was three miles from the school—and a mile and a half from Wapshot by the short cut! And that unutterable beast was going to strand him there!

"You—you—you beast!" gasped Bunter. "Pulling my leg! I jolly well won't get out!"

"I think you will!" grinned Smithy.

And Bunter did—in a heap, as the Bounder unceremoniously pitched him head-first out! He rolled in a bank of snow beside the road and roared.

"Ow! Beast! Wow! I say, old fellow—Smithy, old beast—I mean, old chap—I say—"

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared the Bounder. He slammed the car door and signed to the grinning chauffeur to drive on.

Bunter scrambled up.

"Smithy!" he yelled. "I say, Smithy, you can't leave me here! I can't walk to Wapshot—I can't walk back—I can't— Oh, you rotter! Beast!"

Bunter shook a fat fist after the gliding car. He gasped with rage and indignation. But there was no help for it. Away at a spanking speed went the Bounder's car, and after it, at the same speed, ran the little black saloon that had followed it from the school. Both

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of them disappeared from Billy Bunter's gaze—and he was left on his lonely own, a solitary figure in a snowy landscape!

THE FIFTH CHAPTER.

Any Port in a Storm!

WORDS failed Billy Bunter.

Besides, his feelings could not have been expressed in words, anyhow. And he needed all his breath.

Standing at the corner of Potts' Lane, after the car had vanished, Bunter had to think it out.

Three miles back to Greyfriars was exactly twice as bad as a mile and a half to Wapshot! Harry Wharton & Co. were at Wapshot, and, beasts as they were, they would stand him his train fare back, at least, even if he did not succeed in "sticking" them for a tea. If he missed them in the crowd there, certainly his last state would be worse than his first. But that was a chance he really had to take.

Bunter started to walk up Potts' Lane. It was rather hilly, it was inches deep in snow, hardly any traffic having disturbed the last fall. Tyre tracks showed that a car had been up the lane and back again some time ago; but there was no car to be seen now, or Bunter would have tried to beg a lift. It was not a day for motoring, with snowy, skiddy roads, and the hilly lane was little used by any vehicles at any time.

Bunter tramped!

Fortunately, he was in no hurry. He had not the slightest desire to see the football match at the air camp ground—he only desired to arrive in time to

watch for Harry Wharton & Co. when they came away. Ten to one they would have tea before they started home, and if they did, Bunter was not going to be left out. As the match could hardly have started yet, Bunter had more than an hour and a half to negotiate a mile and a half—which was fairly easy even for Billy Bunter.

So his fat little legs went at a snail-like pace as he plugged up Potts' Lane from the Redclyffe road, and he stopped at intervals for a rest. But his rests were brief, for the snow on the ground was cold and clammy. And fences ridged with snow, hedge-banks gleaming with frost, did not look inviting for sitting down.

Shakespeare has remarked, with his usual wisdom, that when sorrows come they come not single spies, but in battalions! Thus it was with Bunter.

It began to snow!

As if it was not bad enough for the fattest and laziest fellow in the wide world to be landed miles from everywhere, it had to snow! It only remained for cruel Fate to play that trick—and cruel Fate played it!

A cold, freezing wind, laden with whirling flakes, smote Billy Bunter, and smote him sharp and hard.

The snowfall must have been very disconcerting to the footballers at Wapshot and the crowd who watched them. Bunter, of course, did not give a thought to that. There was only one person in the universe that mattered—and his name was W. G. Bunter.

But W. G. Bunter mattered very much

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—very much indeed! Billy Bunter was deeply and tenderly concerned about W. G. Bunter.

He groaned dismally.

On either side of him, as he plugged on, were snowy hedges and snowy fields, stretching into dim infinity. There was no shelter by leafless trees, ridged on all their branches with snow. Only one building was to be seen—an old Army hut back in the frosty fields.

Bunter groaned, and stopped under a tree, hoping that the snow flurry would pass off. Instead of passing off, it thickened. It was, perhaps, a little better under the tree than in the open.

But not for long! A branch, heavily laden with accumulated snow, sagged, and shot its burden downwards—on Bunter!

The fat junior jumped, with a startled squeak, as a regular avalanche of snow landed on him.

"Oh crikey!"

He scrambled away from the tree! The open was better than this! But in the open it was awful—falling snow and cutting wind! Billy Bunter thought of the Bounder with deep feelings. He had only one comfort. Very likely the Bounder's car would skid in this, and he would get a tumble!

His eyes and his spectacles turned on the old Army hut across the fields. It had been unoccupied he knew for years. It was to let, but nobody wanted it. It was sure to be dark and damp, and dank and dismal. But it was better than a snowstorm in the open, if he could get into it!

It would be just like the owner to lock it up against tramps and wayfarers, Bunter reflected bitterly. Ten to one, if he trudged across the snowy field to it, he would find that he could

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not get in. But the little wooden porch in the front was better than nothing.

The gate was half open, jammed in snow. Bunter trudged through, and plugged up the path to the little wooden building, the fast-falling flakes covering his footprints as fast as he made them.

He reached the hut. The front door, as he expected, was locked, and the little porch gave hardly any shelter. The wind from the sea blew right into it, whirling snowflakes. A hefty gust flung Bunter against the door, and he bumped on it, gasping.

"Oh lor!" groaned Bunter.

He plugged out of the porch and plugged round the building. Behind it he would have, at least, some shelter from the searching wind. He blinked at every window, with eager eyes for one open. None was open; but several were cracked, and two or three were broken—as so often happens to the windows of lonely buildings left unoccupied.

The fat Owl squeezed up close to a window where a whole pane was missing save for a few jagged edges. He inserted his arm, and groped for the catch inside. The catch was old and rusty and stiff; but he jerked it back, and then, with some difficulty, got the casement open.

It was a small window, and not easy for Bunter to jam his fat circumference through. But he squeezed and shoved and struggled through, and dropped, gasping, into the room inside.

He closed the window after him. The room was empty, dank, and chill. The wind whistled in at the open pane, blowing in snow. Having recovered his breath after his exertions, the fat junior crossed to the door, opened it, and passed into the adjoining room.

This was the main room, on which the front door opened. There were no passages; only three rooms in a row, opening out of one another.

"Oh!" gasped Bunter suddenly.

His eyes almost popped through his spectacles in his surprise. On the floor of the middle room were traces of snow, evidently dropped from the boots of someone who had been there that day.

Bunter's fat heart jerked uncomfortably. He had taken it for granted that the old hut was unoccupied, as it had been for some time. If it was, after all, occupied, the occupant was very likely to take Billy Bunter for a burglar!

But the silence reassured him. The occupant, if any, was not at home just then. Bunter remembered the tyre-tracks in the lane. Somebody had been there, but had gone in a car. To make sure, he crossed the middle room, opened the farther door, and blinked into the third room. It was unfurnished and empty.

He had the place to himself!

There was no fire in the rusty old grate, and no sort of fuel to be seen. Except for a couple of old benches and a trestle table, there was no furniture. In such a state the place could hardly be occupied. Bunter certainly did not want to be discovered there by some irate tenant returning.

But he took comfort. Somebody had been there, but most likely it was only somebody who had obtained the key from the estate agent at Courtfield, and come to view the place, and gone again in his car. That seemed most probable to Bunter.

He sat on one of the old benches, to rest his weary fat limbs and wait for the snow to stop. It dawned on him that the middle room was not so cold as the others. Yet there was no fire, and had been no fire. Blinking round him through his big spectacles, he discovered, with astonishment, a small brazier standing in the grate, packed with smouldering charcoal.

His spectacles almost fell off in his surprise.

Bunter had been abroad in holiday time, and he was aware that in Continental countries it was not uncommon for such a contrivance to be used to take the chill off a room.

The warmth, faint as it was, was grateful and comforting on that bitter December day. But it was amazing. Some foreigner might have been there to view the place—possibly. But why had he brought a brazier with him, and, above all, why had he left it behind?

It could only mean that he was coming back! That, again, could only mean that the place, after being empty so long, was taken, and that Bunter was a trespasser, likely to be found there at any moment, with trouble to follow.

He almost made up his fat mind to go. But a heavy blast of wind, dashing snow against the door and window, banished that idea. He jolly well wasn't going out in that!

After all, if the man come back, he could explain that he had taken shelter from the snow—meaning no harm. A good-tempered man wouldn't mind! Bunter hoped that the man, if he came, would prove good-tempered—not one of those hasty persons who might kick a fellow out before he had time to explain that he wasn't a tramp or a burglar!

Meanwhile, he snuggled over the little brazier for warmth. He watched the window for a sign of the snow abating, and he listened for a sound of anyone coming.

The snow did not abate, but after a time he heard the snorting of a car labouring up the snowy lane, and knew that someone was coming. He rose from the bench, went to the front window, and rubbed a spot clear to peer through.

If the man looked a reasonable, good-tempered sort of chap he would await his entrance, and explain. If he looked a beast, Bunter would retreat into the side room, where he had entered, and keep doggo. As a last resource, he could get out of the window again. But that was a very last resource in the present state of the weather.

Having rubbed the frosty mist clear on a spot of the pane, Bunter blinked through, and scanned the car that had stopped at the gate.

As he did so, his eyes widened behind his spectacles, and his fat jaw dropped, in an extraordinary mingling of astonishment and terror.

Transfixed by what he saw, the fat Owl of the Remove stood rooted, his fat, little nose pressed to the window-pane, his astounded eyes almost bulging through his spectacles.

THE SIXTH CHAPTER.

The Hold-Up!

"THE mad fool!" snarled the Bounder.

There was a sudden grinding of brakes.

It was so near a collision that it made Vernon-Smith, iron-nerved as he was, catch his breath.

Smithy was a couple of miles past Potts' Lane, after his parting with Billy Bunter, when it happened. At that point the Wapshot road turned off the Redelyffe road. The snow had started to fall, and the Courtfield chauffeur had slowed down, in view of the dangerous state of the road. He turned the corner, and as he did so the black saloon, which had been hanging on behind at a short distance, suddenly accelerated, and shot ahead.

It came swooping round the corner, passed the Bounder's car, shot in front, and pulled across. It was not a skid—it was a deliberate action, and the black saloon car blocked the way. The Courtfield chauffeur jammed on his brakes and stopped, with his car almost nosing into the black saloon.

The black car had stopped—right in the way. The Wapshot road was little more than a lane, much narrower than the main road the Bounder had just left behind. There was no room for his car to pass until the black saloon shifted.

He rattled down the window and shouted savagely:

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With a grasp on Vernon-Smith's arm, Count Zero turned towards the Courtfield chauffeur. "You will drive my servant where he directs you!" he said quietly. "If you resist, or attract attention, he will kill you!" With Beppo's automatic pressing on his ribs, the chauffeur was forced to obey.

"You dashed ass, do you want an accident? What the dickens do you think you are up to? Mad, or what? Get out of the way!"

Two men jumped from the black saloon.

One was a short, thick-set, bull-necked man, with a swarthy Italian face. The other was also an Italian, with a face equally dusky, but chubby in its outlines—a face the Bounder had seen before. It was the man who had spoken to him at the school gate that morning. It was the chubby man who had been driving.

Vernon-Smith stared at him blankly.

He had almost forgotten the incident of the morning. He had supposed that the foreigner was some sort of a rogue, coming to the school with a pretended message from Mr. Samuel Vernon-Smith. But the fellow had cut and run, and Smithy had not supposed for a moment that he would ever see him again.

Now he saw him.

He was surprised to see him, and still more surprised at his actions. Leaving the black saloon the two Italians made for the Bounder's car.

"Presto, Beppo!" rapped the chubby man.

The bull-necked man—evidently named Beppo—ran to the Courtfield chauffeur. To that individual's utter amazement, he jammed the muzzle of an automatic into his ribs. The chauffeur gave a convulsive jump.

"My eye! Is this a hold-up?" he ejaculated.

Evidently it was.

The chauffeur sat very still. With an automatic grinding through his coat into his ribs, and black fierce eyes glinting at him from a dark fierce face, he had no choice in the matter.

The Bounder stared like a fellow in a dream.

It was a hold-up. The chubby man stepped to the window of the car, and

in his hand also was an automatic. Its ugly little black barrel menaced the Bounder.

"We meet again, signorino," smiled the Italian. "Be silent! Do not call, though there is no one to hear! We meet again—and this time I know you by sight, my little Vernon-Smeeth."

The Bounder gritted his teeth.

He knew now what that visit to the school in the morning meant. The man was not a pickpocket or a sneak-thief; his object in calling at Greyfriars had been to see Herbert Vernon-Smith, so that he would know him by sight. In that, certainly, he had succeeded.

This hold-up had been planned—for what reason the Bounder could not begin to guess. But it had evidently been necessary for the Italian to know him by sight, as a first measure.

"Step from the car!"

"What do you want?" muttered the Bounder savagely. "If you're a thief, I suppose you can bag what I've got. I suppose you've found out somehow that my father's rich, and I have money about me."

To his surprise the chubby, swarthy face flushed. The man did not seem to like being taken for a thief, though it was hard to guess what else he was.

"I am not here to rob you, boy!" he snapped. "Step from the car! Presto!"

"And why?"

"Ask nothing; obey!"

The Italian shot a swift glance round him. There was no one in sight on the road, or in the adjoining pastures in the falling snow. In such weather everything was favourable for that sudden hold-up.

But there was danger every minute of some pedestrian coming along; and though there were no cars on the roads, the motor-buses rolled along from Redclyffe at half-hour intervals—and the

spot was in sight from the main road if the Redclyffe motor-bus should pass. For the moment all was safe; but the hold-up men had no time to waste.

The Italian made a threatening gesture with the pistol.

"Step out!"

"I won't!" said the Bounder, between his teeth. "What do you want? Don't think you can scare me with that popgun. I am no fool to be frightened."

"You have courage, and nerve. It is true that I shall not shoot you," grinned the chubby man. "But if you give me trouble, I shall stun you with a blow, and take you with me, senseless."

He wrenched open the door, and grasped the Bounder with his left hand. Vernon-Smith clung to the door, his eyes blazing.

"So this is kidnapping?" he hissed.

"Step out!"

The Bounder resisted. But the smiling, swarthy face changed its look to one of concentrated ferocity. The hand holding the pistol rose, and the Bounder knew that a stunning blow was coming.

He stepped from the car.

The driver looked at him helplessly. With a grasp on the Bounder's arm, a steely grip that the schoolboy had no chance of breaking, the Italian turned towards the Courtfield driver.

"You will drive my servant where he directs you," he said quietly. "If you resist, or attempt to attract attention, he will kill you, throw your body behind a hedge, and drive the car himself. I warn you that you are in desperate hands."

He added a few words in Italian to the bull-necked man.

Beppo dropped into the seat beside the Courtfield driver. Concealed by his coat, his automatic was still pressing

on the driver's ribs. There was no help for it, and the Courtfield man backed his car to the main road and drove away.

Vernon-Smith ground his teeth with helpless rage as his car disappeared from sight. He was left alone with the chubby-faced Italian, who was smiling again now. He looked a good-tempered, indeed pleasant-mannered man, but the Bounder had not forgotten the blaze of ferocity he had seen in his face.

"You will honour me by stepping into my car, little signor."

Smithy breathed hard as he cast a desperate glance round. But for his sulky temper his chum Redwing would have been with him. There might have been a chance with two of them. Now he was alone, at the mercy of a man who was ready to strike him senseless at a sign of resistance.

He stepped into the black saloon.

The automatic pistol disappeared into the Italian's coat. He whipped a loop of cord over the Bounder's wrists, and drew it tight.

"Scusatemi!" he said apologetically. "Have no fear; you will not be harmed!"

"Do I look as if I was afraid?" growled Vernon-Smith. "Don't be a silly ass!"

The Italian stared at him, laughed, and set the car in motion. He backed into the main road and started—in the direction opposite from that taken by Beppo in the Courtfield car.

Dangerous as the road was in the falling snow, the black saloon shot along swiftly—going back the way the Bounder had come. Smithy sat silent and savage.

To his surprise the car turned as the corner of Potts' Lane was reached. He stared round at the Italian.

The car snorted up the hilly, snowy lane. Apparently the Italian had a stopping-place there. Probably it was his intention to wait for dark before getting away with his prisoner. He had had luck in the hold-up, but carrying off the kidnapped schoolboy in broad daylight was another matter.

The car stopped at a gate, and the Bounder, as he saw the old Army hut beyond, understood. He guessed that he was to be "parked" there till it was safe to get him away.

"You rotter!" he breathed. "Oh, you rotter! You'll smart for this! Do you think my father's the man to pay ransom to a kidnapping scoundrel?"

"That is not my intention, little signor."

"Then what?" asked the amazed Bounder.

If he was not kidnapped for ransom, he could not imagine why he had been kidnapped.

"Your father, the excellent Vernon-Smeeth, has never mentioned me to you?" asked the Italian, smiling.

"He has not spoken of Count Zero?"

"Count Zero?" repeated the Bounder. "No."

"Possibly not. But now you meet him—not a motor-bandit, little signor, not a kidnapper—a count of Italy! But we are here—descend!"

He stepped from the car, and drew the Bounder after him. With his hands bound, unable to resist, Vernon-Smith was walked up the snowy path to the hut, Count Zero's grip like iron on his arm.

THE SEVENTH CHAPTER.

Bunter Behind the Scenes!

BILLY BUNTER almost fell down.

It was difficult for the Owl of the Remove to believe his eyes, or his spectacles, as he stared through the window of the old hut.

He blinked at Herbert Vernon-Smith's savage face as the Bounder came up the path from the gate, his hands tied together, and the grip of the swarthy Italian on his arm.

Smithy was a prisoner—that was evident to the fat Owl's amazed eyes.

Somehow or other he had been got out of his car and brought here—a prisoner. It was absolutely amazing, to Bunter.

Stupefied by what he saw, the fat Owl blinked, with bulging eyes, as the Bounder came closer, with the Italian's grip on his arm. Not till they had nearly reached the door did the amazed Owl wake to a realisation of his own peril.

Then he backed from the window, gasping.

Only the fact that the panes were thickly frosted prevented him from being seen by the dusky man coming up the path, for there were no curtains or blinds. But except in the spot that Bunter had rubbed clear to look through, the glass was opaque—he could not be seen.

But as he stood palpitating he heard the two of them stop in the porch and the sound of a key inserted in a lock.

He had no time to lose.

Bunter had feared that perhaps some bad-tempered man might find him there and kick him out. He understood now that it was something much more serious than that that he had to expect if that swarthy foreigner found him there. The man had plainly seized Vernon-Smith by violence—he was a kidnapper! What he might do to a fellow who spotted him in his secret den would hardly bear thinking of.

The fat Owl backed away, in deep trepidation, to the adjoining room, backed into it, and shut the door. He was safe for the moment from observation when the Italian entered the hut.

He was none too soon. He heard the click of a key, the creaking of a damp old door pushed open, footsteps, and a slam. The Italian and his prisoner were in the living-room, which Bunter had quitted less than a minute ago.

Bunter hardly breathed.

What would that awful foreign villain do if he found him there? Knock him on the head, perhaps! At least, keep him a prisoner like the Bounder. He would hardly let him clear off to tell what he had seen.

He crept across the room towards the window by which he had clambered in. The bare floorboard creaked under him.

The sound was slight, but to Bunter's terrified ears it sounded almost like

thunder. He stopped, his heart thumping. If the villain heard him and came to investigate—He remembered, too, that the damp old window had creaked loudly when he opened it, the rusty hinges grated. Certainly the man would hear from the adjoining room.

He dared not attempt to open the window—he hardly dared stir; indeed, he hardly dared breathe. He blinked round for somewhere to hide, in case the kidnapper looked in. But the room was empty; there was nothing to hide behind; not even a cupboard to creep into.

Footsteps! Bunter, without stopping to think, backed behind the door, so that it would hide him if it were opened.

Only a few seconds later it opened.

He did not see the man who looked in. Count Zero gave only a careless glance into the room.

Bunter, blotted from sight behind the open door, ceased to breathe for the moment. It was only a moment, but it seemed a century, an age, to the terrified fat junior.

Then the door closed again.

Bunter panted.

He heard the footsteps cross the living-room to the door on the other side. He guessed that the man was glancing into the other empty room. He heard a door open, and then shut again.

The man had glanced in, and was not likely to do so again. So long as he kept quiet, Bunter was safe.

The murmur of voices reached him. There were two or three chinks in the rickety old door, and Bunter, moving with great caution, applied his eye to one of them. He could see into the living-room through the chink, and he saw Herbert Vernon-Smith sitting on the bench where, a short time before, he had been sitting himself, the prisoner's bound hands resting on his knees.

The chubby-faced Italian was standing, looking at him, a smile on his dusky face. It was Zero who was speaking.

"No? You have never heard of me, little signor? No? But have no fear; you are not in lawless hands. You are—what do you call it in your frightful language?—a hostage!"

"A hostage!" repeated Vernon-Smith.

"Soon you leave school, I think, for il Natale—you call it Christmas in your barbarous tongue. Natale and the Capo d'Anno you will spend with me—Christmas and the New Year Day."

"Are you mad?" asked Vernon-Smith, in amazement.

And Bunter, behind the door, wondered also.

Count Zero laughed, with a gleam of white teeth.

"Pazzo, no! I am not mad, little signor! You will be my Christmas guest. I shall try to make you comfortable. Not here," he added, grinning. "You are here only for a few hours. You go to other quarters when it is dark. In the day-time there are too many eyes open even in this so frightful English weather. After it is dark, we travel safely."

"I guessed that one!" snarled the Bounder. "You came to the school this morning to pick me out, and I suppose you have been watching the place for me to-day."

"Certo! I learn it is holiday at the school this day. I think perhaps you take walk. I keep one watch," smiled Zero. "Having learned to know you by the sight, it is easy. I see you walk out; I see you mount a car; I follow. There is a fat ragazzo in your company. Had he remained, I take him also—not for that I want him, but to

(Continued on page 12.)

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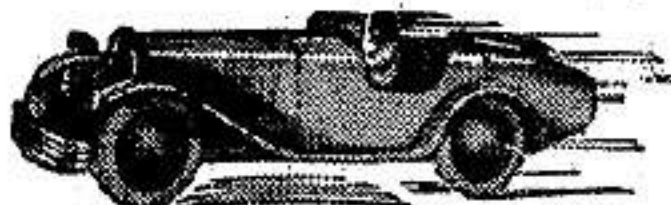
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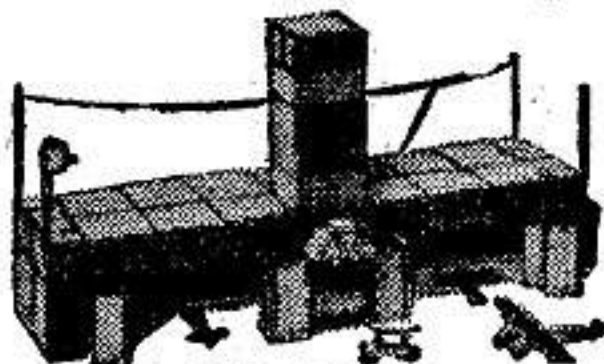
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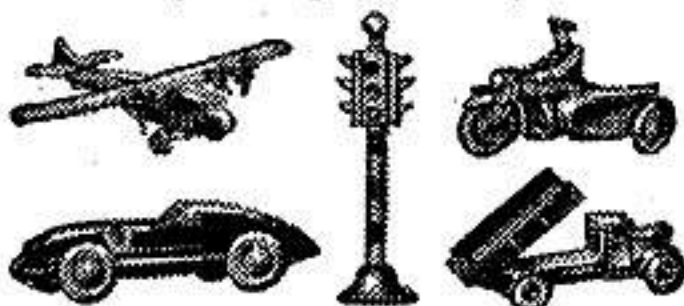
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keep his tongue quiet. He would be prisoner also where you are going."

Bunter, behind the door, suppressed a gasp.

He did not know that "ragazzo" meant "boy," but he knew that it was to him that the Italian alluded. He knew now what would happen to him if this villainous foreigner found him.

"But you drop the fat ragazzo out of your car," went on Zero. "That is all to the best. I am not troubled with him. My luck is good. On such a day, which is frightful weather even for England, there are few on the roads. As if to please me, you take a lonely road in a car. I stop you in the most solitary spot. I take you."

He smiled genially, evidently pleased with his easy success in an enterprise that might have proved very difficult.

"This wretched place"—the Italian shivered, glancing round the dismal hut—"it is useful, as being so near the school, to place you if I catch you, till it is safe to carry you so far." He chuckled. "I ask of an agent a key for no view. Is it not simple? I keep a key two, three days. Then I shall return the key, with a message that it will not suit."

"You're a pretty cunning rascal," said Vernon-Smith, "but I don't see what your game is! You've got me—"

"Certo!" grinned the Italian. "Sicuro!"

"But what do you want me for if it's not ransom?" snarled the Bounder. "You haven't kidnapped me to ask me to a Christmas party, I suppose?"

The count laughed loud and long.

"I like you, ragazzo mio!" he said. "I admire courage—and you have courage! Many boys, they would be terrified."

The Bounder gave a grunt of contempt.

"It's not so jolly easy to frighten me!" he snapped. "But can't you tell me what you've pulled off this stunt for?"

"I have said—you are a hostage. Your father, the rich and financial Vernon-Smeet, will listen to you, if not to me. From a place where he will never find you, he will receive a letter from you. You will ask him to sell his estate of Polpelly to certain agents to whom he has refused to make the sale. For this estate, I think, he give a few thousands of your pounds. He shall sell at a profit—anything in reason. But if he still refuse to sell, he shall never see his son again!"

"Mad, I suppose!" said the amazed Bounder. "I know my father has an old place on the coast of Devonshire called Polpelly. It's worth next to nothing, and I don't see why he shouldn't sell it if anybody wants to buy it. But if you fancy he can be threatened into doing anything he doesn't choose to do, you don't know my pater."

"Do I not?" smiled the count. "But perhaps he forgo that obstinacy when he receive a letter from his son, a prisoner."

"You'll find out different."

"But if he still refuse, he receive another letter, and in the second letter there will be an ear that once adorned his son's head!" said the count. "And I think that the great Vernon-Smeet will not wait till he receive the second ear! What do you think?"

Vernon-Smith looked at the man. The dark, chubby face was smiling, but the glint in the black eyes was like cold steel.

A shiver went through the Bounder, in spite of his nerve. Unbelievable as

it was, he knew that the desperado was in earnest.

"You fancy you can play Italian brigand tricks in this country?" he said. There was a husky note in his voice.

"I think so!" assented the count.

"And why, if you're not mad, do you want Polpelly, a rambling old house on the coast, gone to rack and ruin—worth nothing, unless, as my father thinks, there is tin under the ground. You're not after a mining proposition, I suppose?"

"I know nothing of tin. No; I do not seek a mining proposition." The count laughed. "I have a reason; it is not for amusement that I come to this frightful climate. But that reason I shall not confide to you, little signor."

"And you think you'll get away with this?" said the Bounder, between his teeth. "Why, you fool, I shall be missed at the school! I shall be searched for. The driver of my car will go to the police."

"Non ancora—not yet!" smiled the count. "Your driver will drive your car a hundred miles from here—Beppo will see to that. And after, Beppo will drop him in a lonely spot, with many miles to walk, and escape in the car. The good chauffeur will not talk to your so efficient police until long after you are in a safe place. And your school-master, I think, will scarcely know where to look for you."

The Bounder's heart sank.

It was plain that the kidnapper had laid his plans carefully. There did not seem a hitch anywhere. So long as the wintry daylight lasted, the kidnapped schoolboy was safe out of sight in that lonely hut. After dark, it would be easy for the count to run him, in the car, unseen, anywhere he liked.

Vernon-Smith sat silent.

Count Zero turned to the window, and looked out. His car, at the gate, was roofed with white. The snow was still falling. He shivered. The brazier took the bitterest chill off the room, but it was very cold. He muttered to himself in his own tongue, and the Bounder caught the word "freddo," which, from its similarity to the French word "froid," he guessed referred to the cold. No doubt he found an English winter rather a change from sunny Italy.

"Hai fredda, signorino?" he asked.

"You have cold, little signor?"

"I'm jolly nearly freezing!" grunted the Bounder.

"Anche io—also I!" said the Italian. "It is for my sins, no doubt, that I am in this fearful country. But there are rugs in the car—also one basket, with food and wine. We shall eat before we begin a so long journey to a distant place! But, scusatemi—I must see you safe, even to leave you for some minutes."

He drew a cord from his pocket, and tied the Bounder to the bench on which he sat. Then he opened the front door and went out, putting up his coat collar, and carefully closing the door after him.

The Bounder, left alone, wrenched savagely at the cords. But he knew that it was useless. Then suddenly he gave so convulsive a jump that the bench almost overturned, as a door creaked open, and a fat voice squeaked:

"I say, Smithy, is that beast gone?"

THE EIGHTH CHAPTER.

Escape!

VERNON-SMITH stared at the Owl of the Remove with starting eyes.

The ghost of Billy Bunter could not have startled him more.

No more than the Italian count, had

he imagined that there was anyone else in the lonely hut—least of all Billy Bunter!

Indeed, for a second, the Bounder almost fancied that his eyes and ears were deceiving him.

Billy Bunter peered round the room cautiously through his big spectacles. Through the chink he had seen the Italian go, and shut the front door after him. Bunter was shivering with cold—it was much colder in the room where he had taken refuge than in the living-room. The fat Owl's teeth were almost chattering.

"Smithy!" he gasped.

"Bunter!" said Vernon-Smith almost dazedly.

"I say, is that beast gone, or is he coming back?" gasped Bunter.

"He's coming back—he's only gone to fetch some things from the car!" The Bounder pulled himself together instantly. It was absolutely amazing to him to see Bunter there—but there he was!

The Bounder was the fellow to make the very most of that utterly unlooked-for chance. He was cool again in a moment.

"Bunter, get me loose—quick! He will be a few minutes, at least—ten, perhaps! Get me loose!" he breathed.

"I—I'd better see whether he's clear," stammered Bunter. He peered from the window. He had a back view of the Italian, going down to the gate, which he had not yet reached. It was heavy going through the wind and the snow.

Vernon-Smith snapped his teeth with angry impatience.

"Quick, you fat fool!"

"Oh, really, Smithy—"

"Have you a pocket-knife? Quick!" hissed the Bounder.

"He hasn't got to the car yet," said Bunter. "I say, I'm going to get you out of this, Smithy! I could have got out of the window and bunked, but I jolly well wouldn't leave you to it, old chap!"

"Have you a pocket-knife?" hissed the Bounder.

"Yes."

"Get it out, then—quick!"

"But I left it in the study!"

"What?"

"I had it to sharpen a pencil and left it on the table in the study."

"You unspeakable idiot!"

"Look here, Smithy—"

"There's a penknife in my breast-pocket. Get hold of it! You potty porpoise, do you want that villain to catch you here?"

"I think a chap might be civil when a chap—"

"Quick!" hissed the Bounder.

"I'm being as quick as I can, Smithy," said Bunter, fumbling in the Bounder's pocket for the penknife. "Is that it? No, that's a fountain-pen. Oh, here it is! All right, old chap."

Even at opening a penknife Bunter was clumsy. His fat fingers fumbled and crawled. The Bounder watched him, mad with impatience.

Certainly, the Italian had not the remotest idea of what was happening in the hut he had left, and was not likely to hurry himself. Still, minutes, even moments, were precious. Bunter's amazing presence in the old hut was a chance for the kidnapped Bounder—and his only chance. If it failed, all was lost. He trembled with fierce impatience as the fat junior got the penknife open and began to saw at the cord.

"Quick!" he breathed.

"Owl! Keep still!" gasped Bunter.

"You've made me cut my finger." The fat Owl left off sawing to suck a scratched fat finger.



Vernon-Smith, left alone, wrenched savagely at his bonds. Then suddenly he gave a convulsive jump, as the door creaked open and a fat voice squeaked: "I say, Smithy, is that fat beast gone?" Vernon-Smith stared at the Owl of the Remove with starting eyes. The ghost of Billy Bunter could not have startled him more!

The Bounder could have gnashed his teeth with rage. His eyes almost flamed at the fat and fatuous Owl.

"Will you get me loose?" he hissed. "Oh, you fool, you idiot, will you get me loose before that villain comes back?"

"Ow! My finger—"

"You mad idiot, buck up! Be quick—quick—quick!"

Fortunately, the possibility of the Italian returning made Bunter realise the need of haste. He sawed at the cords again.

Vernon-Smith's hands came free, and he snatched the knife from Bunter's hand, and cut loose his legs.

He leaped from the bench.

"I—I say, Smithy—"

"Shut up, idiot!"

Herbert Vernon-Smith ran to the window. He peered out. The door of the car was open, and the Italian was inside the saloon. Smithy had a glimpse of him, packing heavy rugs over his arm.

"We've got time!" he breathed.

"I say—"

"Shut up, dummy! I've got to find a way out at the back!"

"I say, there's the window I got in by—it's unfastened, and—"

"Quick, then!"

Bunter led him into the side room. The Bounder ran to the little casement and tore it open. It flew open with a loud creak of rusty hinges. He was about to fling himself out, but he paused.

"You first, fathead!" he said.

That was Bunter's idea also.

"Lend me a hand, old chap!" he gasped. "There ain't much room. I'm not skinny, like you, you know."

The Bounder grasped him, bunched him to the window, and shoved him headlong through. It was, as before, a tight fit; but Bunter got out much faster

than he had got in. The Bounder's savage shove was full of force. Bunter squeaked as he went, and howled as he landed in a heap in the snow.

In a second Vernon-Smith dropped from the window after him.

He cut along to the corner of the hut, and peered cautiously round. The Italian, with big motor rugs over one arm, and a packed basket in the other, was coming through the gateway—returning. It would take him, perhaps, a minute to reach the hut door. That minute was the Bounder's.

"I say, Smithy," Bunter was squeaking—"I say, don't you go without me! I say—"

"Shut up, dolt!"

Smithy ran back to the fat Owl, grasped him by a podgy hand, and started running. Behind the old Army hut was an enclosure in a barbed wire fence, beyond that, open pasture-land, white with snow, ridged with snowy hedges. Smithy forced a way through two long strands of wire, and dragged the Owl of the Remove after him.

"Wow!" howled Bunter.

"Quick!"

"I'm scratched—"

"Fool!"

"Beast!"

Vernon-Smith tore on, dragging the panting fat Owl. He had to be out of sight—if he could—before the kidnapper got after him. He had not forgotten the automatic.

The fields, thick with snow, were hard going. Knee-deep, the Bounder plunged on, and dragged Bunter after him, with an iron grasp on the podgy arm. Bunter struggled and stumbled and slipped, gasping spasmodically for breath.

"Urrrrrgh!" he gurgled.

"Buck up!" hissed the Bounder.

"Gurrgh!"

Bunter floundered almost helplessly.

But the Bounder dragged him on, and they plunged through a gap in a hedge, at thirty yards distance from the wire enclosure. Bunter rolled over, breathless and gasping, as the Bounder released him.

Smithy peered back through the hedge. Thick-falling flakes were already blanketing the track they had left in the snow. But the traces were far from obliterated.

He caught his breath as he saw a back door in the old Army hut open, and a man come running out. It was the Italian, and even at the distance and in the dimness of the murky sky and the falling snow, Vernon-Smith could read the intense rage and fury in his face.

The escape of his prisoner during an absence of less than ten minutes must have been an utter puzzle to the Italian, knowing nothing of Bunter's presence in the hut. It was a puzzle that maddened him with rage. There was something in his dusky hand as he ran out, and the watching Bounder knew what it was.

If he picked up the track in the snow! Herbert Vernon-Smith set his teeth. He was not going to be taken again!

"Groogh!" came from Bunter. "Oogh! I say, Smithy—Woogh!" The fat Owl began to scramble up, gurgling for breath.

"Keep low, you fool!" breathed Smithy.

"Urrgh!"

"He's come out of the hut—he's looking for us—keep low!"

"Oh crikey!"

The Bounder peered back again. The Italian was running across the enclosure to the barbed wire. There he stopped, scanning the snowy fields with glittering, enraged eyes.

The track was more than half-hidden

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(Continued from page 13.)

by fresh-falling snow. But there was "sign" enough for keen eyes. Vernon-Smith knew that not many minutes would pass before the man would be coming on in pursuit. As soon as he reached the hedge they would be in his sight. He grasped Bunter again.

"Come on, and keep low!" he muttered.

The hedge ran as far as the lane. Almost dragging the breathless Owl after him, Smithy tramped along, keeping the frosty hedge between him and his enemy.

He reached the edge of Potts' Lane, at some little distance from the hut, scrambled through another hedge, dragging Bunter, and staggered into the lane. It was easier going than the fields, and he started at a run down the lane towards the main road, dragging the breathless, gasping Bunter by the arm, heedless of protesting squeaks.

A shouting voice rang through the frosty air. The Bounder's eyes blazed. They had been seen!

He heard a rustling and scrambling, as the Italian emerged into the lane. Evidently the signs in the snow had guided him on the track of the fugitives.

Looking back over his shoulder, the Bounder sighted Count Zero. The man was shouting—but his voice was carried away by the wind. Not that Smithy was likely to heed him. He tore on desperately, dragging Bunter.

Crack! Sharp and clear, the report of the automatic rang on the frosty air, and a bullet kicked up the snow, hardly a yard from the two juniors.

Billy Bunter gave a wild howl, stumbled over, and fell. Vernon-Smith, white and desperate, halted, and clenched his fists, as the Italian came running swiftly down the lane.

THE NINTH CHAPTER.

Removites to the Rescue!

"ROTTER!" said Bob Cherry.

The chums of the Remove agreed that it was rotten. Indeed Hurree Janset Ram Singh declared that the rottenfulness was terrific and preposterous.

That opinion was general on the Wapshot football ground. The match had started well, and the Air Camp eleven and the Lantham Ramblers were going strong, when the snow came.

For a time they kept going. But the snow, falling thicker and thicker, put "paid" to it. The game had to be abandoned before the first half was half over. And Harry Wharton & Co., with their coat collars pulled up, and their caps pulled down, tramped away, amid the falling flakes, feeling extremely annoyed with the weather; seasonable as it was at Christmastide.

"Beastly!" grunted Johnny Bull.

"Putrid!" agreed Nugent.

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"Well, we're getting the jolly old fresh air!" remarked Bob Cherry. Bob was the fellow to see the bright side of anything. "Jolly healthy weather—we shall have topping appetites for tea when we get in."

Harry Wharton laughed.

"May as well get home," he said. "It will be a pretty stiff walk, by Potts' Lane, in this! Mile and a half of it—grooogh!"

"What's the odds, so long as you're 'appy?" said Bob cheerfully.

And the Famous Five started on their homeward tramp much earlier than they had expected. They tramped out of Wapshot, and started down the hilly lane that led to the Redclyffe road—where they hoped to pick up the motor-bus for Courtfield—if the snow hadn't stopped the buses running.

"It's coming down!" grunted Johnny Bull, as the wind landed a flurry of snowflakes in his face.

"That's the jolly old law of gravitation, as described by Sir Isaac Newton," said Bob gravely. "That's what does it, old bean."

"What?"

"I mean, you can't expect it to go up!"

"Fathead!" growled Johnny.

"The coldfulness of the esteemed weather is truly terrific," remarked Hurree Janset Ram Singh.

"That dago chap at the hut in this jolly old lane must be enjoying the weather!" chuckled Bob. "Bit of a change for him after Italy, what?"

"That foreign blighter must be up to something," said Johnny Bull. "This isn't the time of year for camping out in the country."

"Hardly!" said Wharton.

"Hallo, hallo, hallo! There's the jolly old car!" exclaimed Bob, as the juniors came in sight of the old Army hut. "His nibs is at home again."

In the falling snow, they could see the black saloon car standing at the gate. They glanced at the hut rather curiously. It was surprising, and rather suspicious, that dwellers in a sunny climate should select such a spot in the middle of December.

"Hallo, hallo, hallo! There's his nibs!" added Bob.

Five pairs of eyes turned on a figure that scrambled from a hedge at a little distance past the gate of the hut.

It was the Italian—the man who had called at the school that morning. They watched him in astonishment.

What his actions meant they could not guess. Apparently he had come across a field and scrambled out into the lane through the hedge, with no object whatever—unless he enjoyed scrambling about in the snow, which was not probable.

He did not look towards them, and did not see them. His back was turned to them as he stared down the lane in the direction of the Redclyffe road.

"What—what's that in his fist?" gasped Nugent.

"Great Scott!"

As if in answer to Frank's startled question, the Italian flung up his hand, and the winter sunlight glimmered on a barrel. Sharp and clear, the report of the pistol rang on the wintry wind.

The juniors stood transfixed.

"He—he's firing at—at somebody!" stuttered Bob. "Is the man mad? What the thump—"

The Italian, after firing the shot, started running down the lane. Wharton set his lips.

"He's after somebody!" he breathed.

"He's fired at somebody, and now he's after him. We're going to see what this means!"

"Yes, rather!"

"Come on!" said Harry.

They started again, at a run. It was fortunate for them, perhaps, that the Italian did not look round. The automatic was still in his hand. But his attention was wholly concentrated on the escaping Bounder. And the footsteps of the running juniors made no sound in the thick, soft carpet of snow.

Fast as they ran, they did not gain on the Italian. He covered the ground almost like a deer.

A minute later they saw his object. Farther down the hilly lane an exhausted figure lay huddled in the snow, and beside it stood a fellow with clenched fists and white, desperate face. In utter amazement, they recognised the Bounder of Greyfriars.

"Smithy!" panted Bob.

"And that looks like Bunter——"

"Come on!" said Harry, between his teeth.

Fifty yards ahead of them they saw the Italian reach the Bounder. They had a breathless dread of seeing him use the deadly weapon in his hand. But that was not his intention. The shot he had fired had been discharged, probably, only to frighten the fugitives—and it had certainly had that effect on Billy Bunter, who was scared completely out of his fat wits. But the Italian thrust the pistol into his coat, as he reached the Bounder, and grasped the Greyfriars junior with both hands.

Smithy struggled.

The Italian's voice came to the ears of the desperately running juniors, sharp and savage:

"Andiamo! I have you! Fool, will you drive me to strike you senseless? Mi sentite!"

The Bounder, struggling fiercely, spun over in the Italian's powerful grasp. They slipped in the snow and rolled. The Italian struggled uppermost, planting a knee on Vernon-Smith, his dusky face blazing fury. His right hand groped in his coat—for the pistol to stun his prisoner. It was at that moment that Bob Cherry, putting on a desperate burst of speed, reached him.

The automatic came into sight in the dusky hand—and at the same moment Bob flung himself headlong on the Italian.

The unexpected shock sent the man rolling off the Bounder. The automatic dropped in the snow, and the Italian sprawled, panting. A moment more, and the rest of the Co. reached the spot and hurled themselves at him.

THE TENTH CHAPTER.

Beastly for Bunter!

"COLLAR him!" panted Bob.

The Bounder, breathless and exhausted, lay gasping. But all the Famous Five grasped at the Italian.

He scrambled up desperately.

His swarthy face was like that of a wild animal, in his rage and fury. Had his weapon been still in his hand, he might have used it, in his rage. But the automatic was in the snow, trampled out of sight by trampling feet.

Count Zero was struggling to escape now—he no longer had any hope, or thought, of securing his escaped prisoner. The sudden and unexpected arrival of five Greyfriars fellows on the spot had put paid to that. And his own escape was rather doubtful, with five sturdy fellows grasping at him and clinging to him.

But the Italian was as elusive as an eel. He twisted out of the grasping hands and leaped away. As the juniors rushed at him again, he turned and sped up the lane with the fleetness almost of a deer.

"After him!" roared Bob.
"Hold on!" Harry Wharton caught Bob by the arm. "Let him rip, fat-head! We could never get him!"

The Bounder staggered up. He was breathing in great gasps. Harry gave him a helping hand.

Smithy stared after his enemy. The Italian was not making for the hut—perhaps fearing to be pursued there. He vanished through a gap in the hedge, and the snowy fields swallowed him from sight.

The Bounder panted.
"Thank goodness you fellows turned up! He'd have had me! How the dickens— But never mind that! Let's get out of this! The sooner we set the police after that scoundrel the better."

"Bunter—"
Bob Cherry stooped and grasped the Owl of the Remove by a fat shoulder to heave him up.

"Ow! Leggo! D-don't shoot me!" squeaked Bunter. "I say, it wasn't me—I wasn't in the hut at all—I never let Smithy go—I say—keep off, you beast— Ow! Wow! Help! Rescue! Help! Yaroooh!"

"You fat ass!" roared Bob. "It's us!"
"Eh?"

Bunter blinked up. He grabbed at his spectacles, and set them straight, and blinked again.

"Oh! I—I say, you fellows— Oh dear! I say, I'm shot! I—I think the bullet's in my brain—"

"Rot!" said Bob cheerfully. "An empty space couldn't stop a bullet!"
"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Beast! Ow!" Bunter scrambled up, Bob grasping him and pulling. He blinked round wildly. "I—I say, you fellows, is—is he gone?"

"The gonefulness is terrific!" chuckled Hurree Jamset Ram Singh.

"Oh!" gasped Bunter. "The rotter! I jolly well wish he hadn't cut! I'd jolly well pitch into the beast—"

"He may be coming back—"

"Yaroooh! I say, you fellows, come on!" yelled Bunter, and he started down the lane at a frantic run.

Harry Wharton & Co. and the Bounder followed him at a trot. Bunter, not usually much of a sprinter, kept ahead, till the Redclyffe road was reached. He panted, he puffed, and he blew; but he kept going.

The juniors glanced back several times. But nothing was seen of the Italian. Count Zero, for the present, at least, was thinking only of his own escape. But it was probable that he would come back for his car when the coast was clear, and the juniors hoped that the police might be there to look for him when he did.

"No chance of a lift!" remarked Bob Cherry, when they reached the main road.

The juniors looked this way and that, but there was no sign of any vehicle to be seen in the falling snow.

"Shanks' pony!" said Johnny Bull.

"Oh dear! I say, you fellows, I—I can't walk back to Greyfriars!" gasped Billy Bunter. "It's three miles!"

"Sit down in the snow and wait for a bus!" suggested Bob.

"D-d-d-do you think a bus will come?"

"Well, they'll start running again tomorrow, I expect."

"Beast!" roared Bunter.
"Hoof it, old man," said the Bounder, with rather unusual cordiality.

Now that the excitement was over, Smithy remembered the service Bunter had rendered him. Certainly, it would have gone for nothing, but for the fortunate arrival of the Famous Five on the scene. But had Smithy been still a prisoner in the hut, when the chums of the Remove came down the lane, they would have passed on their way, never dreaming that he was there. It was to the fat Owl that he owed his freedom.

"Beast!" was Bunter's grateful reply.

"Only three miles—and we may pick up a lift on the way—"

"Oh lor'! I can't do three miles!" groaned Bunter. "You awful beast, bringing a fellow out and stranding him in a snowstorm! I'd jolly well punch your nose, only I'm too tired!"

"Buck up, old man!"

"Shan't!"

The juniors tramped on through the

snow, Billy Bunter emitting a groan at every few steps. As they went, the Bounder told the Famous Five of what had happened that eventful afternoon, and they listened in great astonishment.

"How that fat ass, Bunter, came to be there, I can't imagine!" the Bounder concluded. "But it was jolly lucky for me! Fancy that blithering idiot turning up trumps like that!"

"Beast!"

"My dear old fat bean, I'm no end obliged," said Vernon-Smith. "I suppose you got into the place for shelter—is that it?"

"Yes, you beast, after you left me stranded, and it began to snow! I didn't know that beast was coming there!" groaned Bunter. "I mean, I shouldn't have cared, anyhow! You know my pluck!"

"The knowfulness is terrific!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You can cackle!" snorted Bunter.

"I saved Smithy's life, anyhow—at

(Continued on next page.)

GREYFRIARS INTERVIEWS

Fighting men or funks, our clever Greyfriars Rhymester's got to interview 'em all. This week's snappy verses are written around

LARRY LASCELLES,

the Mathematics Master at Greyfriars.

(1)

Mathematics is a science
On which I'm never keen,
I place no great reliance
In Todhunter or Green,
And Euclid never thrills me,
Or keeps me up till late,
In fact, he merely fills me
With bitterness and hate.

(2)

When other great attractions
Like grub or footer call,
I take no joy in fractions,
Believe me, none at all!
They've puzzled me and pained me,
But this I'll truly say,
They've never once detained me
From going out to play!



(4)

But when he's not delighting
In facts and figures grim,
He's very fond of fighting
With gloves on in the gym!
He loves a hefty tussle
With boxers worth their salt,
One blow from Larry's muscle
Will cause a somersault!



(5)

A sound of steady talking,
A dull and heavy boom,
I heard when I went walking
To Larry Lascelles' room;
I knocked most circumspectly,
And then I had to grin,
As Larry cried directly:
"Come in, come in, come in!"

(6)

The war mth of Larry's welcome
Was due to Prout, who can,
Like old Bill Shakespeare's Malcolm,
"Dispute it like a man!"
In Larry's study seated,
His jaw was going strong,
And Larry looked defeated.
He'd looked it pretty long!

(7)

"I'm happy to receive you!"
Cried Larry, with delight.
"Let's see! Now I believe you
Want help with Euclid? Right!
Excuse me, Prout! I'm busy!
Some other time! Good-bye!"
And I, who felt quite dizzy,
Could hardly meet his eye.

(8)

Now Larry had suggested
That I had come along
To have my Euclid tested,
Which really was quite wrong!
But as he'd said he'd do it,
He got old Euclid out,
And promptly put me through it,
For saving him from Prout!



(9)

I call that simp, hateful!
I'd stopped old Prouty's hoot,
And Larry, being grateful,
Came back with extra "toot."
I had an hour's tuition,
And I can only say,
When he's in that position
Next time—well, he can stay!



least, I shaved him—I mean, I saved him from that beast! Some fellows would have bolted and left him to it—you fellows, for instance!”

“Why, you fat freak—”
“Yah!”

“Anyhow, Bunter was there and he got me out,” said the Bounder. “I’ll make it up to you somehow, Bunter, old bean!”

Bunter groaned. No doubt the Bounder was grateful; at all events, he was the fellow to repay an obligation—with interest. But that was no use to a fat and weary Owl who could hardly drag one podgy leg after the other.

The other fellows were tired by the time they reached the school. Billy Bunter almost crawled in on his hands and knees.

Tired as they were, the chums of the Remove went at once to their Form-master’s study, to report what had happened to Mr. Quelch.

That gentleman listened with great amazement, and questioned them rather sharply; and then rang up the police station at Courtfield. In his surprise at the extraordinary news, Mr. Quelch omitted to make any reference to the Bounder’s lines—though it was probable that he would remember later!

By tea-time, all the Remove were talking of Smithy’s strange adventure; and, before prep, all Greyfriars had heard about it. He was sent for by the Head, to tell his story again; and Inspector Grimes came from Courtfield to see him about it; and that evening Herbert Vernon-Smith was the most-talked-of-and-gazed-at fellow at Greyfriars School. Which was by no means disagreeable to the Bounder, who dearly loved the limelight.

THE ELEVENTH CHAPTER.

About Polpelly!

“IT’S the old Obadiah!” remarked Skinner. “Anxious about the young Obadiah!”

Skinner made that remark after class the following day, when a big car zoomed in at the gates, and Mr. Samuel Vernon-Smith alighted at the House.

Mr. Vernon-Smith, an imposing figure in his fur coat and top hat, was capped respectfully by the Greyfriars fellows. The Bounder came out to meet his father.

“So you’re safe, Herbert!” said the millionaire, as he shook hands with his son.

“Safe as houses, dad!” answered Smithy, with a grin. “I suppose the news made you jump a little?”

“More than a little!” snapped Mr. Vernon-Smith. “The scoundrel! The rascal! Nothing further has been seen of him here, I suppose?”

“Not likely!”

“No; probably he has fled the country already before the police could lay hands on him! I will come up to your study after I have seen your headmaster, Herbert.”

“Right-ho!”

Trotter came to show Mr. Vernon-Smith in to the Head. Smithy went back to his study with a thoughtful look on his face. His narrow escape from the kidnapper had not affected the Bounder’s nerves in any way. Neither was he affected by the possibility of further danger. But he was intensely curious about the strange occurrence, and he wanted to learn more from his father about Polpelly.

THE MAGNET LIBRARY.—No. 1,452.

Count Zero had vanished, as if into thin air. The police had arrived at the old Army hut in Potts’ Lane, to find the car gone—and no trace left of the count or his confederate.

Of that confederate there was no news, except what the Courtfield chauffeur had to tell. Beppo had stranded him sixty miles from Courtfield, and driven off in his car—which had since been found abandoned.

The two Italians had disappeared—without their intended prisoner. Their descriptions were known and widely circulated, and it appeared probable that they would get out of the country at the first opportunity. The Bounder had little doubt that he had seen the last of them, and he was thinking more of Polpelly than of the kidnappers.

Tom Redwing was in Study No. 4 when Smithy came in. The Bounder gave him a rather sharp look.

Tom was reading a letter written in a rather crabbed hand. Smithy guessed that it was from old John Redwing, now home from sea.

“My pater’s come,” said Smithy.

Redwing put the letter in his pocket and rose.

“Then you’ll want the study!” he said.

“You haven’t changed your mind!”

“About what?”

“About Christmas, fathead!”

“No!”

“Obstinate ass, aren’t you?” said the Bounder. “You’d have been sorry you turned up your nose at my car yesterday, if those foreign blighters had got me.”

“Thank goodness they didn’t!” said Redwing. “I wish I’d been with you, Smithy! But it was really your own fault that—”

“Isn’t it always my fault?” sneered the Bounder. “You needn’t clear off because my father’s coming up. He likes you—more than you deserve.”

“But he’ll want to talk to you—”

“I want you to hear about it, too.”

“About what?” asked Tom, in surprise.

“Polpelly!” answered the Bounder. “Don’t you feel any curiosity about it? That blighter Zero must have some jolly powerful reason for wanting to get hold of the place. I’ve never been there, but I’ve heard of it. An old stone house dating from Tudor times, at the back of a cove on the Atlantic. The people who lived in it once may have seen something of the Spanish Armada when it came, I shouldn’t wonder. Jolly place for a holiday in the summer, what?”

“Very!” said Redwing. “Rather parky at this time of the year, I suppose.”

“Oh, I don’t know! Those Devonshire coombs are a good deal sheltered. I’ve heard of roses growing there in December, I wonder—” The Bounder broke off and said no more. He busied himself with the tea-table, getting ready for his father, and Tom lent him a hand.

“I say, you fellows!” Billy Bunter blinked into the study. “I say, your pater’s come, Smithy—”

“Tell me something I don’t know.”

“I suppose he will want to see me!”

“Why should he?”

Billy Bunter blinked at the Bounder through his big spectacles with a great deal of dignity.

“He might want to thank me for risking my life to save you!” he said loftily. “Perhaps he doesn’t know, though, the fearful risks I ran yesterday, in rescuing you, Smithy.”

“He doesn’t!” grinned the Bounder.

“You haven’t told him that I saved you by my pluck and—and boundless courage?” asked Bunter. “You haven’t told him how I risked my life for you?”

“No; I’ve told him the facts.”

“Beast!”

Billy Bunter snorted and rolled away. A few minutes later the heavy tread of the plump millionaire was heard, and Mr. Vernon-Smith came in.

He gave Redwing a friendly nod, and sat down in the armchair.

“An extraordinary business, Herbert,” he said. “Most extraordinary! That scoundrel Zero—who’d have thought he was such a rascal?”

“You know the man, father?”

“I’ve met him in the City! I knew he was after Polpelly—and very keen to get hold of it! But I never dreamed of this! Who’d have supposed a foreigner understood anything about a tin mining proposition?” The millionaire shook his head. “How can he know anything about it? It’s not at all certain that the tin is there. There have never been any workings. It’s near the Cornish border, and over in Cornwall, of course, there are plenty of tin mines. I had an idea of possibilities, and bought the place as a spec. But—the man must know something, to be so madly keen on it.”

“He told me that the tin had nothing to do with it.”

“Then he lied!” said Mr. Vernon-Smith. “The place has no other value—and that value is problematical, so far as I know. He certainly can’t want the place to live in. And he doesn’t want the ghost, I suppose.”

“The ghost!” exclaimed the Bounder. “It’s a haunted house—so they say in the locality! Rubbish, of course!”

grunted Mr. Vernon-Smith.

“I’m fearfully keen to hear all about it, father. Look here, that man Zero is an awful blighter, but I believe he was telling the truth about the tin! It’s not that he’s after.”

“Then he’s insane!”

“Not that, either! The place has some attraction for him, and I’d jolly well like to know what! He’s risked going to prison to get hold of it. Tell me the ghost story.”

Mr. Vernon-Smith laughed good-humouredly.

“I heard it when I was down there looking over the place,” he said. “The Squire of Polpelly of Queen Elizabeth’s time haunts the house, and the cove, and the coomb! He was captain of a ship in Drake’s fleet when the Spanish Armada came. You’ve heard of that, I hope, in your history lessons here.”

“Just a few!” grinned Smithy. “Spanish Armada, 1588. But the Spanish fleet never came round that side of Devonshire, so far as I know. I thought they were driven the other way, up-Channel—”

“This man Polpelly captured a Spanish galleon, his own ship sinking in the sea fight,” said Mr. Vernon-Smith. “He sailed it round Land’s End, to get it home to his own place. The weather was wild—I seem to remember from my schooldays that a terrible storm scattered the Armada—”

“Good for you, dad—it did!”

“Well, in spite of the wild weather, Polpelly sailed the Spanish ship home to Polpelly Cove, and it ran on the rocks there in the storm, and went down with all hands, or nearly all. Polpelly himself got off in a boat. But he could never find the wrecked galleon again. He spent the rest of his life searching for it, and, according to the story, his ghost is going on with the search to this day!” Mr. Vernon-Smith grinned.



"I say, Smithy!" squeaked Bunter. "I say, don't go without me! I say—" "Shut up, dolt!" hissed the Bounder. He ran back to the fat Owl, grasped him by a podgy hand, and dragged him through the barbed wire. "Wow!" howled Bunter. "I'm scratched! Beast!"

"But why was he so keen to find a wreck?" asked the Bounder. "It couldn't have been much use, after going on the rocks."

"Oh, I've forgotten the doubloons!" said Mr. Vernon-Smith. "There was a chest of Spanish doubloons on the galleon. A doubloon, I believe, was a gold coin of some sort in those days, worth—worth I don't know what."

"About a guinea, sir!" said Redwing, with a smile.

"Well, there were thousands and thousands of them on the galleon," said Mr. Vernon-Smith. "That's what the Squire of Polpelly was after. Many of the Spanish ships had treasure on board, as I dare say you know, as well as packs of Spanish and Italian soldiers—"

"Italian!" exclaimed the Bounder, with a start.

"I shall ask Mr. Quelch what you do in history class!" grunted the millionaire. "Don't you know that Spain had Italian provinces in those days? Some of the ships were from Italian ports."

"Oh, yes, I remember!" The Bounder nodded. His eyes were glistening. "I say, father, was it one of the Italian ships that the Squire of Polpelly captured? What was it called?"

"Let me see!" The millionaire thought for a moment. "It was called the—San Pietro, I seem to remember."

"Then it was Italian."

"How do you know?"

"It would be 'Pedro' in Spanish!" grinned the Bounder.

"Would it?" said Mr. Vernon-Smith. "Well, I dare say it would! But what use does it cut, anyhow?"

"If the story's true—"

"It's true about the ship, I believe. Not about the ghost."

"Never mind the ghost! If it's true about the ship—an Italian ship, mind—mightn't that account for a giddy Italian being interested in the spot?"

Mr. Vernon-Smith stared blankly at his son. Then he burst into a laugh.

"You young ass!" he said. "Ha, ha! Do you fancy that that rascal is after a chest of doubloons sunk in Polpelly Cove three hundred and fifty years ago? Ha, ha, ha!"

The Bounder smiled.

"It sounds a bit thick," he admitted. "But—Look here, father, what is Polpelly House like? Is there a caretaker or anything?"

"Yes; a man lives in the place and looks after it. It is habitable in parts. You might have a boating and fishing holiday there in the summer. What have you got in your head now, Herbert?"

The Bounder did not immediately answer. He turned to Redwing.

"If you want to cut, old man, don't mind me," he said.

Redwing coloured a little. The Bounder had asked him to stay in the study; now he gave him the plainest possible hint to go. Quietly Tom Redwing left the study, leaving the Bounder in talk with his father.

It was more than an hour later that Mr. Vernon-Smith went back to his car. The Bounder said good-bye to him at the door, and several fellows heard the millionaire remark:

"You're a young ass, Herbert! It's an absolutely hare-brained idea! But have your own way—I'll give orders for everything to be done, anyhow."

And the big car zoomed away with the millionaire.

THE TWELFTH CHAPTER.

Land at Last!

"I SAY, you fellows—"

"Don't bother!"

"Oh, really, Wharton!"

The captain of the Remove was looking worried as Billy Bunter blinked into Study No. 1 in the Remove.

That, however, did not matter, so far as Bunter could see. Nobody's worries were of any great consequence except Billy Bunter's.

"Can't be helped, old bean!" Nugent was saying.

"I know! I'm not thinking so much about the hols as about my Aunt Amy," said Harry. "Only it's awkward, as we were all going together."

"I say—"

"Shut up, Bunter!" roared Wharton. "And shut the door after you!"

Billy Bunter did not shut up, and did not shut the door. He stood and blinked at the captain of the Remove through his big spectacles. Break-up was near at hand now, and Bunter wanted to get settled about Christmas. Having cornered his intended victim in his study, Bunter was naturally disinclined to shut up.

"About Christmas," continued Bunter, passing Wharton's words by like the idle wind which he regarded not, "I understand that you're taking some fellows home with you to Wharton Lodge, old chap. Now, I was thinking of asking the lot of you to Bunter Court—"

Harry Wharton burst into a laugh.

"Good egg!" he said.

"I mean, if you've already made up your party I'll let my invitation stand over till Easter. I'll come with you for Christmas, if you like, and you come to me for Easter! What?"

"Never mind Easter," said Harry; "that's a long way off. My little party for Christmas seems to be washed out—"

"Eh?"

"My Aunt Amy has been seedy, and she's going to stay at Bournemouth till the spring. My uncle will be with her. So—"

"Oh!" gasped Bunter.

"So your kind invitation comes exactly at the right moment!" said Harry Wharton. He glanced round at the Co., who were all in the study. "What do you fellows say? Shall we all go to Bunter Court?"

"Good egg!" exclaimed Bob Cherry enthusiastically. "Phone your pater for the Rolls when we break up, Bunter!"

"Yes, rather," agreed Johnny Bull. "We can't go to a place like Bunter Court on such a common thing as a railway. We must play up to the style of a place like Bunter Court."

"The playfulness will be terrific!" assented Hurree Jamset Ram Singh.

"Thanks awfully, Bunter!" said Frank Nugent heartily. "An invitation couldn't have been better timed! We'll all come!"

Billy Bunter blinked at the Famous Five. That general and hearty acceptance of his invitation ought to have pleased him. But he did not seem pleased somehow. He seemed worried.

"I say, you fellows, I should be delighted, of course—" he began.

"The delightfulness of our esteemed selves will also be preposterous!" declared the Nabob of Bhanipur.

"But—" gasped Bunter.

"Never mind the buts," said Harry. "Count on us!"

"I'd be absolutely delighted! I've stayed at your poor little place once or twice, Wharton, and I should be glad—really glad—to give you a holiday at a really decent establishment. But—"

"Let your people know in time that we're coming!" said Bob Cherry gravely. "The suites of magnificent apartments will have to be prepared! Of course, with your hordes of menials that will not be much trouble."

"Oh! No! But—I—I forgot to mention the painters are in!" gasped Bunter. "It's rather rotten, in the circumstances, but I remember now that the pater's having the painters in—"

"That's all right!" said Bob. "We'll help 'em paint!"

"Wha-at?"

"Don't you worry about us, old fat man! I can rough it, at any rate! So long as I have a suite of rooms and a couple of footmen to wait on me and a Rolls car I shall be all right!"

"Same here!" said Nugent.

"The samefulness is terrific!"

"I—I say, I—I remember now that my people will be away for Christmas," stammered Bunter. "The fact is, it's an invitation from royalty, so they couldn't very well refuse—"

"Hardly!" agreed Wharton. "I can see royalty weeping bitter tears if they did! But we'll manage without your people, Bunter! I suppose they won't take the butlers, grooms of the chambers, footmen, chauffeurs, and all the cars with them! We shall be all right."

"Oh! Yes! But—but I—I say—with the royalty in, you know—I mean, with the painters in—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"The—the fact is, you fellows, I'm sorry, but it can't be managed," said Bunter. "Another time—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The Famous Five roared. As they were aware that Bunter Court, on close

inspection, dwindled to Bunter Villa, and the hordes of menials to a cook and a housemaid, they did not take Bunter's magnificent invitation seriously. It dawned on the Owl of the Remove that they had been pulling his fat leg.

"You silly, cackling, chortling idiots!" hooted Bunter.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I couldn't have you at Christmas, anyhow!" snorted Bunter. "We shall have some rather decent people there, and my pater's rather particular whom I take home. Yah!"

And Billy Bunter rolled away, leaving the chums of the Remove still chortling. In the passage he came on Monty Newland.

"I say, old chap, hold on!" exclaimed Bunter, catching Newland by the arm.

"I say, I've just heard that Wharton won't be having anything at Christmas—I mean, I've just told him I can't go with him. I believe I could let you have a week of the hols if you liked."

"Not really?" asked Newland, with a grin.

"Yes, old chap! I don't mind you being a Jew—I'm no snob," said Bunter reassuringly. "I'll come if you like."

"Awfully good of you—but I don't like," said Monty cheerfully. "Take your sticky paw off my sleeve, will you?"

"What I mean is, if you think I'd be found dead among—Ow! Beast! Leave off kicking me, you rotter!"

Billy Bunter dodged into Study No. 7 and slammed the door. Peter Todd, in that study, glanced round at him.

"Fixed up for the hols yet?" asked Peter, with a cheery grin.

"Well, no," said Bunter. "I've turned Wharton down, you know! I've had more than enough of that lot at school; I'm blessed if I could stand them over the holidays, too. They can't expect it! Newland was rather pressing—but I told him plainly I couldn't oblige. Rather a cheek to ask me really—What are you grinning at, Peter?"

"You, old fat man! Rattle on!" said Peter.

"Well, look here, old chap, I'm blessed if I won't chance it with you," said Bunter. "I've roughed it before and I can rough it again. I'll come with you to Bloomsbury, Toddy."

"Are you insured?" asked Toddy.

"Eh? Insured? Why?"

"You'll need to be if I see anything of you in the holidays."

"Beast! If you think I'd come to a poor solicitor's place in Bloomsbury, Peter Todd, you're flattering yourself. Yah!"

Bunter departed from the study, slamming the door. Two or three Remove fellows were in the passage. At the sight of Billy Bunter they accelerated. No doubt they did not want to hear anything from Bunter about Christmas.

The fat junior rolled along to Study No. 4.

There he paused.

He had already offered to fill Redwing's place, and had been rewarded with a kicking. But since then he had helped in saving the Bounder from the kidnappers. Surely that ought to count for something! If there was anything like gratitude in the world, the Bounder ought to be grateful, and to testify the same in a practical form—by asking Bunter for Christmas.

But the fat Owl hesitated long. Gratitude was rather a frail reed to lean upon, and he did not want to be kicked again.

However, he opened the door at last and blinked in. Vernon-Smith was

alone in the study, scanning a large map of Devonshire spread out on his table. Why he was interested in Devonshire Bunter did not know, or want to know. Bunter was interested in Christmas.

"I say, Smithy—" he began.

"Don't worry!" said the Bounder over his shoulder.

"But, I say, about Christmas—"

"Rats!"

"Well, you're a rotten, ungrateful beast!" hooted Bunter. "Who risked his life to save you from those kidnappers?"

"Nobody that I know of."

"Well, you rotter!" gasped Bunter. "Talk about ingratitude being the thankless child of a toothless serpent! After I shaved your wife—I mean, saved your life—"

"Shut the door after you!"

"Well, look here, you beast, I jolly well helped you out, and you know it, and you said you'd make it up to me," said Bunter desperately. "I've been let down for Christmas, and—"

The Bounder looked at him. Then, to Bunter's surprise, he burst into a laugh.

"You'd like to come with me for Christmas?" he asked.

"Yes, old chap. If you've got anything like gratitude in you—"

"Oh, lots!" said the Bounder. "Come by all means."

Bunter's fat face brightened. This was luck! He had hoped, but he had not quite expected, that the Bounder would acknowledge the claims of gratitude.

"I say, Smithy, you mean it?" he gasped.

"Certainly! Leave with me when we break up, and stay as long as you jolly well like!"

"Done!" gasped Bunter.

The Bounder turned to his map again. Billy Bunter rolled down the passage to Study No. 1, pitched the door open, and blinked in at the Famous Five.

"I say, you fellows! I'm going with Smithy for Christmas! He begged me to, and I've consented. And you rotters can go and eat coke!"

After which Bunter slammed the door and departed rather hastily. It was all fixed and settled now; the Owl of the Remove felt like a weary mariner who saw land at last!

THE THIRTEENTH CHAPTER.

Smithy Asks for It!

SEVERAL fellows glanced rather curiously at the Bounder when he wheeled his bicycle out after the school dinner the next day.

It was true that the kidnappers, with the police searching for them, had vanished, and were supposed to be far enough away by that time. Still, after what had happened, it seemed rather a nerve on Smithy's part to go out alone.

Tom Redwing gave him quite an expressive look—but the Bounder evidently did not want his company, and Tom turned away with a clouded face.

A dispute with his chum, almost amounting to a quarrel, just before Christmas, troubled and worried him. But he could not give way in the matter—he was going to have that Christmas with his father—and if Smithy chose to keep his back up, he had to let it go at that.

Harry Wharton, spotting the Bounder going out, ran down to the gate and called to him. Vernon-Smith stopped and looked back.

"Going far?" asked Harry.

"Yes; some miles. The roads are a bit rotten, but I shan't break my neck," said the Bounder, with a grin.

"Like me to come?"

"Yes—no end; if you're not in a hurry to get back."

"Well, we shall have to get back for class—French with Mossos!" said the captain of the Remove. "Look here, Smithy, it doesn't seem to me safe for you to get out by yourself. Those Italian blighters—"

"Hundreds of miles away, I expect."

"Most likely; but you can't be sure till the police get hold of them. If they should be hanging about, looking for another chance—"

The Bounder laughed carelessly.

"What rot! There's no danger—not that it would worry me a lot. But if you want a ride on a slippery road, get your bike. I'd better tell you I shan't be back for class, though."

"You're not cutting class?"

"Just that. I'm going some distance."

"Look here, don't be a silly ass, Smithy!"

"Too late to change, old man—can't help it!" grinned the Bounder, and he wheeled out his bike.

Wharton turned back. If the reckless scapegrace of Greyfriars was going to cut class, Wharton was not disposed to follow his example.

As it was French with Monsieur Charpentier, it was not so risky as with Quelch. Mossos did not always spot an absentee, and if he spotted one, he often forgot to report him afterwards—or good-naturedly affected to forget. Anyhow, Vernon-Smith was taking the risk. He had a distance to go, and it was not much use asking leave from class.

He pedalled away on his machine, and when the juniors went to No. 10 classroom for French with Mossos, he did not turn up.

By that time the Bounder was a good many miles from the school.

He was following the steep road by the cliffs that led up to Hawkscliff, where Redwing's home lay. Tom certainly had not had the remotest idea that that was his destination.

There had been no further fall of snow, but the roads and lanes were in a very uncomfortable state for riding. More than once Smithy was in danger of a skid. But he rode at a good rate, though he had to slack down on the steep rise to Hawkscliff.

With the drop from the cliffs to the sea on his left, and wide, sloping hill-sides stretching away on his right, the Bounder was in as lonely a part of the country in the winter weather as anyone could have wished. In the summer there would have been cyclists and pedestrians on the road over the sea, but in December there was nobody. Looking about him, the Bounder was struck by the thought that it was exactly the spot where Count Zero would have liked to meet him.

He laughed at the idea. He had no doubt that the Italian count was far away—probably out of the country.

Only one human being was in sight when he looked round—a cyclist coming up the steep road behind him. Smithy gave him a careless glance as he came into view, rather suddenly, round a frosty bulge of cliff on the road. The man seemed to be a powerful rider, for he was coming up the slope at a good speed, bent over his handlebars, so that Smithy could see only the top of his head.

The junior rode on, slower and slower as the rise steepened. He was about a

mile out of Hawkscliff when he dismounted to wheel his machine the remainder of the way. The rise was too steep even for the hardy Bounder to ride it.

The sound of a bicycle behind him made him turn his head. The rider was still in the saddle, grinding up the steep. His head was still bent low, and Smithy could not see his face—but for a moment Wharton's words came back into his mind. If his enemies, after all, had not gone—if they had been keeping doggo, and watching for another chance—Was the man following him? Even for a strong man it was hard riding up that steep slope—any cyclist would have dismantled there, unless for a special reason. Was that cyclist trying to overtake him?

He wheeled his machine on as fast as he could, with sharp glances over his shoulder. He was not afraid—fear had been left out of the Bounder's composition. But he knew how little chance he had if an enemy ran him down on that lonely road, far from help. Hawkscliff was still three-quarters of a mile ahead, and there was no other place within three or four miles.

Smithy's face set grimly as he tramped on, pushing his machine. He had always been reckless, carelessly asking for trouble; he began to wonder whether he had been asking for it again.

The rider dismounted at last, panting from his efforts to drive his machine up the steep; but he was now only about fifty yards behind Vernon-Smith. He pitched his bicycle against a cliff and came up on the road at a run.

Smithy's heart gave a jump.

The man was not wheeling his machine up; he had left it. After his exertions at the pedals he was running up a steep road! The Bounder guessed what it meant—and he had proof a few moments later. For he could see the

man's face, and the winter sunlight glimmered on a swarthy skin and chubby features.

"That hound!" breathed Smithy.

It was Count Zero, and he was coming on fast—panting, but without a pause. Vernon-Smith let go his machine, letting it twirl away whither it would, and

(Continued on next page.)



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ran. Up the slope, heading for Hawkscliff, went Vernon-Smith, running his hardest. A voice rang behind.

"Stop! Little signor, stop—or I shoot!"

The Bounder felt a thrill, but he did not stop. He did not believe that the Italian would shoot, and he took the chance. He was right; no shot rang out on the frosty air, but the beating footsteps came faster and faster. Fast as the junior ran, the pursuer was gaining.

With hands clenched and teeth set, the Bounder ran, putting all his beef into it. Hawkscliff was close now—less than half a mile—and he put on a desperate spurt. But it was futile; for closer and closer came the thudding feet of the runner behind. He heard the Italian's panting breath and felt the clutch of a hand on his shoulder.

He was dragged to a stop. In desperation he turned and struck, and his clenched fist crashed in the swarthy face.

"Cospetto!" panted the Italian.

The next moment Herbert Vernon-Smith was struggling unavailingly in the kidnapper's powerful grip.

THE FOURTEENTH CHAPTER.

John Redwing Takes a Hand!

JOHAN REDWING stood on the cliff path below the village of Hawkscliff and looked down the winding way, a smile on his bronzed face.

Homo from sea, the sailorman had written to his son from Dover—a letter that had made Tom happy. It meant that he would spend his Christmas at the little cottage on the cliff, instead of in the Bounder's wealthy home; but that was what Tom wanted, if only Smithy would have taken it more reasonably.

The seafaring man had been home at the cottage only a day. Tom had not seen him yet; Hawkscliff was too far from the school to be visited, except on a half-holiday, and Tom was not the fellow to cut class, as the Bounder so recklessly did—and certainly his father would not have wished him to do so.

But after so long an absence he was anxious to see his son. He did not know whether the exigencies of school work would allow Tom to come up; he knew the boy would come if he could. That afternoon John had kept his weather eye, as he would have termed it, very frequently on the path by the cliffs on the chance of seeing Tom coming.

And he smiled as he saw a schoolboy wheeling a bike up at a distance. The boy was too far off for recognition, but he recognised the colours of the Greyfriars school cap, and had no doubt that it was Tom.

"I knowed he'd come if he could," murmured the sailor, as he watched; then, as the schoolboy came closer, his face clouded a little.

It was not Tom; but he knew who it was—Tom's school pal, the millionaire's son, Vernon-Smith. A message from Tom, perhaps, who couldn't come. Mr. Redwing started down the path to meet the schoolboy as he came.

The winding way soon shut the schoolboy off from his sight. He kept on, with the rolling swing of the sailorman that covered the ground quickly. The steep path ran round the base of a great chalk cliff, ridged with snow. Once past that cliff he would see the boy again.

He saw him suddenly—and what he saw made the bronzed sailorman jump

almost clear of the ground in his astonishment.

The schoolboy was struggling and fighting desperately in the grasp of a swarthy-faced foreigner.

John Redwing, taken utterly by surprise, stared for a spellbound moment; then he slipped his stick from under his arm into his hand and rushed down the path with the speed of the wind.

"Ahoy, lad!" he roared as he rushed. "Coming! Avast there, you lubberly landshark!"

The Italian gave a violent start at the ringing of the sailor's deep voice; the dark face was lifted to stare.

Vernon-Smith, resisting with all his strength, was at his last gasp. He crumpled in the steel-like grip of the Italian. Count Zero had already jerked a cord from his pocket; in another minute the schoolboy's hands would have been bound.

But the count had no minute to spare now—he had not a moment. John Redwing, as he came round the cliff, was quite near at hand, and his sudden swift rush brought him to the spot in the twinkling of an eye.

Count Zero leaped from the Bounder, panting. He groped in his coat for a weapon. The automatic came out, glimmering in the sun—and John Redwing's stick crashed on his arm, sending the pistol spinning away, as the count's arm dropped to his side, numbed by the blow.

A yell of pain and fury broke from the Italian.

He leaped back; but the sailorman followed him up fast, lashing out with the heavy stick.

Zero caught a blow—intended for his head—on his arm, and leaped back again, spitting with rage like a cat.

But the sailorman gave him no pause; he followed up, lashing with the stick; and the count fairly turned and ran for it.

The Bounder panted.

"Oh, good man!" he gasped. "Tom's pater, by gum! Go for him, old bean! Crack the rotter's head for him! Oh, good man!"

Fast after the fleeing Italian rushed the sailorman, swiping with the stick. Twice the blows landed on the count, and he yelled as they landed. Then, with a desperate spurt of speed, he got out of reach and grabbed his bicycle from the cliff.

"Avast, you landshark!" roared old John. He rushed at the count as the kidnapper desperately flung himself on the bicycle.

Only the steep slope of the road saved Count Zero. His feet had no time to find the pedals; but the machine went down the slope with a rush as he got on the saddle, carrying him out of reach of the swiping stick.

He shot down the steep like an arrow.

John Redwing brandished the stick after him. Twenty yards farther on the Italian got his feet on the pedals and steadied the machine, and he disappeared round the next bend at a terrific speed.

John Redwing walked back to the Bounder.

Vernon-Smith, panting and breathless, grinned at him and shook hands. Old John touched his forelock first and shook hands shyly. He was a little awed by Tom's wealthy friend.

But the Bounder, with all his faults—and he had plenty—had no tincture of snobbishness in him. He liked and respected Tom's father, and did not care two straws whether he was a sailor before the mast or an admiral of the Royal Navy.

"By gum! How jolly lucky you came along, Mr. Redwing!" he said. "I

fancy that blighter is sorry he met you. You gave him a few!"

"I'd have given him a few more if I could have laid him alongside, sir," said old John. "Douse my deadlights! Was you coming up to my cottage, sir?"

"I was—to see you," said Vernon-Smith.

"Tom, I s'pose, couldn't come?"

"Tom's in class now; I've got leave." Vernon-Smith did not explain that it was "French leave." "But, look here, now I've met you, will you walk back with me a bit?"

"Just what I was thinking, sir. That landshark might be in the offing, and if you was alone—"

"That's it," said Smithy. "I've got something to say to you, Mr. Redwing, and I'll jaw as we go."

He collected his bicycle and wheeled it down the path, John walking by his side. He was glad enough of the sailorman's company on that lonely road, now that he knew that his enemies were still on the watch. Count Zero had vanished, but it was quite probable that he might have reappeared before the Bounder reached safety if the junior had been alone. Once on a main road he was safe enough, but it was miles to a main road.

"Tom's going to spend Christmas with you, Mr. Redwing," said the Bounder when he had recovered his breath.

"Ay, ay, sir!" said John. "It's the first Christmas I've had home from sea for many a year."

His bronzed face brightened as he spoke, and Smithy felt a pang of shame. What a sulky brute he had been!—was the uncomfortable thought in his mind. But he went on quietly:

"So long as you have Christmas with Tom, Mr. Redwing, you wouldn't care if it was somewhere else, not at Hawkscliff. You see, Tom's rather a pal of mine, and I want him these holidays—and I want you, too."

John looked at him.

"I'm going to spend these holidays," went on Smithy, "at an old place on the Devonshire coast. It's right on the sea—a good deal like Hawkscliff, on a rather bigger scale. But I dare say you know the Devon coast, on the Atlantic side."

The sailorman smiled.

"As well as I know my hand, sir, from Cornwall, up the Bristol Channel," he answered. "I've been in coasting craft on that coast."

"Good egg! Ever heard of Pol-pelly?"

"I've heard tell of it, sir."

"Well, that's the place! My father bought it years ago, and I'm going to fix up a party to camp there these holidays. It will be rather rough, of course—hardly a soul for miles—"

"All that, sir, and more!" said John, staring at him. "I don't understand you going there, sir, when you've got a great house in London to go to."

"Well, that's the game, and I've got a lot of reasons," said Vernon-Smith. "I want you to come there, Mr. Redwing, and Tom. Tom won't come if you're not there, naturally; but why shouldn't you? I haven't spoken about it to him yet. I wanted to see you first, and see if you'd come."

"I'm ready and willing to anchor wherever Tom is," said John. "But you don't want a rough, old sailorman, Master Vernon-Smith."

"You're exactly the man I do want!" said the Bounder. "I've told my father you'll be there, and if you won't come, it's all washed out. You see, my father trusts you and relies on you; he knows we shall be all right if you are there."



Count Zero leaped from Vernon-Smith, panting, and groped in his coat for a weapon. An automatic came to light. Next moment, John Redwing's stick crashed on his arm, sending the pistol spinning away, as the count's arm dropped to his side, numbed by the blow. A yell of pain and fury broke from the Italian!

"That's very kind of Mr. Vernon-Smith," said the sailorman. "But—"

"And it's very likely that I shall be in some danger there," went on the Bounder. "That foreigner you saw collaring me has been after me before, and may get after me again. His game is kidnapping."

"Douse my deadlights!" ejaculated Mr. Redwing.

"So, you see, I want Tom, and I want you!" said Vernon-Smith. "I've got it all fixed up, and you've simply got to come. I'm going to ask some other fellows—all friends of Tom's—fellows you've seen and like. If they come it will be jolly—if they don't, it will be you and Tom and me, and jolly all the same. You'll come?"

Old John scratched his nose.

"But—" he said, perplexed.

"You've got to come!" said the Bounder.

And by the time they reached the Redclyffe road, old John had agreed to come, if Tom did. Which satisfied the Bounder, and he mounted his bicycle and scorching back to Greyfriars in great spirits.

THE FIFTEENTH CHAPTER.

What's in a Name?

HARRY WHARTON was looking out of the school gates when the Bounder arrived. His face was a little anxious, and he was relieved when Vernon-Smith came in sight. Smithy jumped off his bike and wheeled it in.

"Mossoo miss me?" he asked.

"I believe so; but he won't land you in a row just before the hols," answered Harry. "But you're a silly ass, Smithy! I'm glad to see you back safe, at any rate."

"You fancied that that sportsman

Zero might have got after me again?" grinned the Bounder.

"Well, I couldn't help thinking it possible. You can't consider yourself safe till he's under lock and key, or until it's certain that he's got out of the country."

"Quite!" agreed the Bounder. "I'm not safe by long chalks, as I know now. Jolly exciting, ain't it? He got me on the Hawkecliff road. Reddy's pater weighed in with a stick. I fancy Zero's got an ache in his Italian nut!"

"Smithy!" exclaimed Wharton.

"Honest Injun!" said the Bounder. "That sportsman is after me, like a dog after a bone. He won't be happy till he gets it! I think I shall keep in gates after this till we break up."

"You'd better," said Harry. "Are you going to Quelch?"

"And tell him I cut French? No fear! Besides, I don't want to alarm my father! I can look after myself!" said Smithy, with a shrug of the shoulders. "I'm not afraid of the dago!"

He put up his bike, and they walked to the House together.

"How would you like Christmas in a haunted Elizabethan house, looking for lost treasure in a wrecked Spanish galleon, and with a spice of danger thrown in?" asked the Bounder.

Wharton stared at him.

"Is that a joke?" he asked.

"Not in the least!"

Harry Wharton laughed.

"I'd like it no end—especially as my own plans have been rather knocked on the head," he answered. "But it sounds rather too gorgeous to be true. I suppose you're pulling my leg?"

"Sober as a judge!" said Vernon-Smith. "The place is Polpelly—on the Devon coast, near Cornwall. The sunken galleon is guaranteed by local tradition—and the ghost, too, I think; but I won't answer for the ghost. Mind,

I'm not asking you to big parties and shows and the usual bag of tricks. It's a wild place, solitary. It will be rather like camping-out. But the pater's ordered everything that money can buy to be sent in—even Bunter will have enough to eat! It will be a bit of an adventure—what?"

"Yes, rather! But—"

"Only don't forget the spice of danger!" added the Bounder. "If that jolly old dago gets after me again—and I fancy he will—we may find ourselves up against somethin' in the nature of trouble. I'd like to have you and your friends there for that reason, among others. Anyhow, I'm going. That's settled!"

The Bounder's eyes were sparkling. It was clear that he looked forward to the adventure with great keenness.

"Bunter's coming!" he added. "Can you resist that attraction?"

Wharton chuckled.

"Bunter told us he was going with you for Christmas! He never said anything about Polpelly."

"He doesn't know yet! I fancy that he's dreaming of dwelling in marble halls!" grinned Smithy. "He may let me down when he finds out what it's like. I shall try to survive it, if he does!"

"By Jove, it sounds ripping!" said Harry.

"Bring your friends to tea in my study, and I'll tell you all about the jolly old galleon and the doubloons—"

"Doubloons, too!" exclaimed Wharton, with a laugh. "Not pieces of eight?"

"Doubloons, I think—if any! Mind, I don't guarantee the doubloons, any more than the ghost! But I've got an idea that that is what the dago is after—not a tin-mine, as my pater thinks. You and your pals and Reddy and me, will be seven, like the happy family in

the poem—enough to put paid to the dago if he turns up, even if Bunter lets us down! How do you like the stunt?"

"Topping!" said Harry. "Too good to be true! A Spanish galleon, doubloons, and a ghost! My hat! Some Christmas!"

"And perhaps a crack on the nut from a dago!"

"That wouldn't worry us! We'd chance the dagoes!"

The Bounder went to his study, and Harry, rather excited by what he had heard, went to look for his friends.

Tea was ready in Study No. 4 when the Famous Five arrived there.

The Bounder was smiling and hospitable; Tom Redwing rather thoughtful. It was a very cheery tea-party, and the chums of the Remove listened eagerly to all that Smithy could tell them about Polpelly and its legends.

It did not take them long to make up their minds to join the Bounder's party.

"It may be a bit parky at this season," said the Bounder. "But I believe those Devon coombs are rather sheltered. We'll sail all over the jolly old cove looking for the wreck—that's where Reddy will come in useful. You're going to be skipper, Reddy."

"But I'm not coming, you ass!" said Redwing.

"You are!" said Vernon-Smith.

"I can't, Smithy."

"But think of the galleon, and the doubloons, and the ghost," said Vernon-Smith, "and the jolly old cove!"

Redwing shook his head.

"In fact, there's two jolly old coves there!" went on the Bounder, grinning.

"One is called Polpelly Cove—that's where the galleon went down on the rocks. The other's called—"

He paused.

"Well, what's the other called?" asked Frank Nugent.

"I'll tell you in a minute. And I'll bet any man here ten to one in doughnuts that when I tell Reddy what the other jolly old cove is called he will make up his mind to throw over Hawkscliff, and come."

"I can't, Smithy."

"You can—and will!" said the Bounder. "And I'll give you ten to one in doughnuts that you'll agree as soon as I tell you the name of the jolly old cove you'll see there."

Redwing smiled, and shook his head again.

"I suppose you're joking," he said, rather mystified. "I can't imagine the name of the cove making any difference to me."

"It will make lots," assured the Bounder.

"Blessed if I see how it could," said Harry Wharton. "I can see you're pulling our leg somehow, you ass, but I don't get you! What's the name of the cove, anyhow?"

"John Redwing!" answered the Bounder.

The Famous Five stared. Redwing jumped. They all looked at Vernon-Smith blankly. His answer had taken them all by surprise.

"What on earth do you mean, Smithy?" exclaimed Tom.

"Exactly what I say," answered the Bounder. "One jolly old cove is called Polpelly Cove. The other old cove is called John Redwing. A different sort of old cove, of course!" added Smithy, chuckling.

"You mean——" gasped Redwing.

"I mean that I saw your father to-day, fathead, and that he's coming to Polpelly for Christmas, and so are you!" said the Bounder. "I've fixed it up with the jolly old cove——"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"So if you go to Hawkscliff for Christmas, Reddy, you'll miss your father!" grinned the Bounder. "I recommend you to come to Polpelly and see the jolly old cove. He's quite good company, I believe."

Tom Redwing's sunburnt face brightened. He understood now.

"You're coming?" asked Smithy.

"Of course, fathead!"

"So that's settled," said Vernon-Smith.

And settled it was; and seven fellows looked forward eagerly to breaking-up day—and Polpelly!

THE SIXTEENTH CHAPTER.

An Alarm in the Night!

BILLY BUNTER moaned.

It was the last night of the term, and, with the school breaking up next day and a journey before him, Billy Bunter felt it hard that he couldn't get some sleep. But he couldn't.

It was all the fault of Coker of the Fifth and his Aunt Judy. Coker's Aunt Judy had sent Horace Coker a Christmas pudding. That Christmas pudding had mysteriously disappeared from Coker's study. Nobody knew what had become of it—excepting Billy Bunter! Bunter knew only too well! It was the reason why Bunter couldn't sleep! Outside Bunter, that pudding had looked too luscious and attractive for the fat Owl to leave a morsel of it. Inside Bunter, it had completely lost its attractiveness. Bunter had wondered, when he had finished parking that pudding, whether he had not overdone it a little. Now he knew that he had!

His snore did not, as usual, awaken the echoes of the Remove dormitory. Indigestion claimed Bunter as a victim, and he strove to sleep in vain. Morpheus passed him by unheeding.

All round him, fellows were sleeping soundly. It was, as Bunter bitterly realised, fearfully selfish of them to sleep when he couldn't get a wink.

He heard two boom from the clock-tower. He moaned, and turned his fat head once more on the pillow to woo slumber.

But it was in vain. Coker's Christmas pudding was taking its revenge.

The chime died away. The December wind, whirling snowflakes, whistled round the old chimney-pots of Greyfriars School. All sorts of eerie sounds were heard at that hour of the night. And suddenly it seemed to Bunter that he heard a faint sound from the door, as if it had opened.

He lifted his head from the pillow and blinked uneasily. Of course, it was only imagination! But was it?

There was a sudden gleam of light in the dark dormitory. Bunter, transfixed with amazement, realised that it was the gleam of an electric torch.

The light was gleaming at a distance from him. A shadowy figure loomed against the dim starlight from a high window. In terrified amazement, the fat Owl realised that the figure was passing from bed to bed, scanning each sleeping face in turn.

He stopped, with his back to Bunter. He was at Vernon-Smith's bedside. In the gleam of the torch, Bunter had a glimpse of a dark, swarthy face, and black eyes that glittered like polished jet.

Then he knew!

It was the Italian he had seen at the old Army hut, in Potts' Lane; the foreigner who had kidnapped the Bounder. And he was standing by the sleeping Bounder's bed!

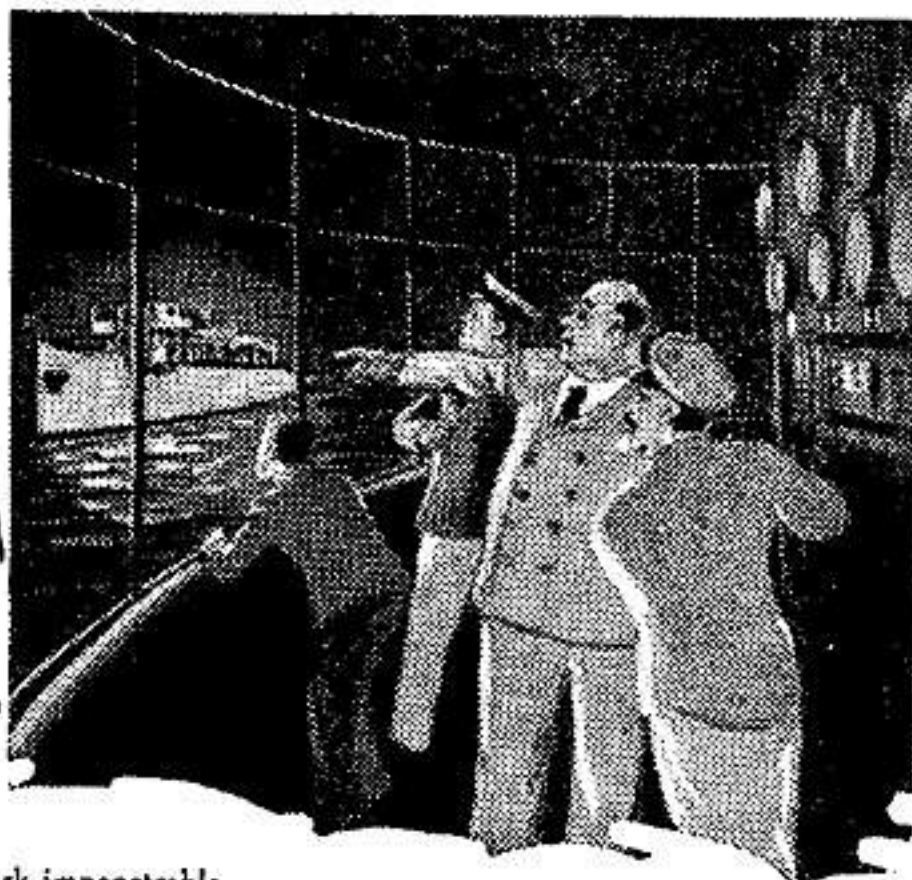
(Continued on page 28.)

"WORLD IN DARKNESS!"

by

Murray Roberts

A
Powerful
Yarn to
Thrill every
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MORE THRILLS IN THIS SMASHING SEA STORY!

DAN of the DOGGER BANK!

By DAVID GOODWIN.

A Rough Passage I

KENNETH GRAHAM, son of a millionaire shipowner, is rescued off the Dogger Bank by the Lowestoft fishing trawler, Grey Seal.

His past life blotted from his brain, the youngster is given the name of "Dogger Dan," and signed on as fifth hand under Skipper Atheling, Fian Macoul, Wat Griffiths, and Buck Atheling.

Aware of his nephew's fate, and knowing that he will be heir to the shipowner's money when his brother dies, Dudley Graham promises to pay Jake Rebow, commander of the Black Squadron, a fleet manned by men whom no honest trawler would take on board, one thousand pounds to get Kenneth out of the way for ever.

With a good load of fish aboard the Grey Seal, Skipper Atheling makes for Amsterdam to sell his catch. Here, Dan and Buck Atheling go ashore, where Rebow's confederates make a fruitless attempt to drown the two chums in a flooded cellar.

Late that night, when walking along by the sandhills that front the coast, Dan and Buck catch the crew of the Adder, the Black's flagship, smuggling. Seizing their opportunity, the two boys board the trawler and, with three toughs imprisoned in the cabin, make for port, only to get caught in a hurricane and see their own trawler—the Grey Seal—leaving the harbour.

The Adder got within a hundred yards of the Seal, and the boys grinned to see the alert readiness of her crew. John Atheling had recognised the trawler, and was prepared for any new treachery from the Blacks.

Dan sprang into the shrouds and sent a long hail through the roaring darkness. The Seal was dead to leeward, and it reached her.

"They've spotted us, Buck!" cried Dan. "They've tumbled! They can see we hold the decks."

"Look out!" shouted Buck. "Hang on! We must heave her to!"

A howling, whipping squall bore down upon them, hurling the trawler on to her beam-ends. The dark water roared over her hatches, and a frantic uproar arose from below decks.

"The squadron rats are all scared," said Buck, "an' no wonder. They think they're going down all standing. There she comes up again! Haul the fore-sail a-weather, for Heaven's sake!"

It was beyond the power of the boys, however, to do so. Heavily canvased as she was, and with far too much headsail for such weather, the Adder would not come to the wind, but lay nearly flat in the water, helpless and in irons.

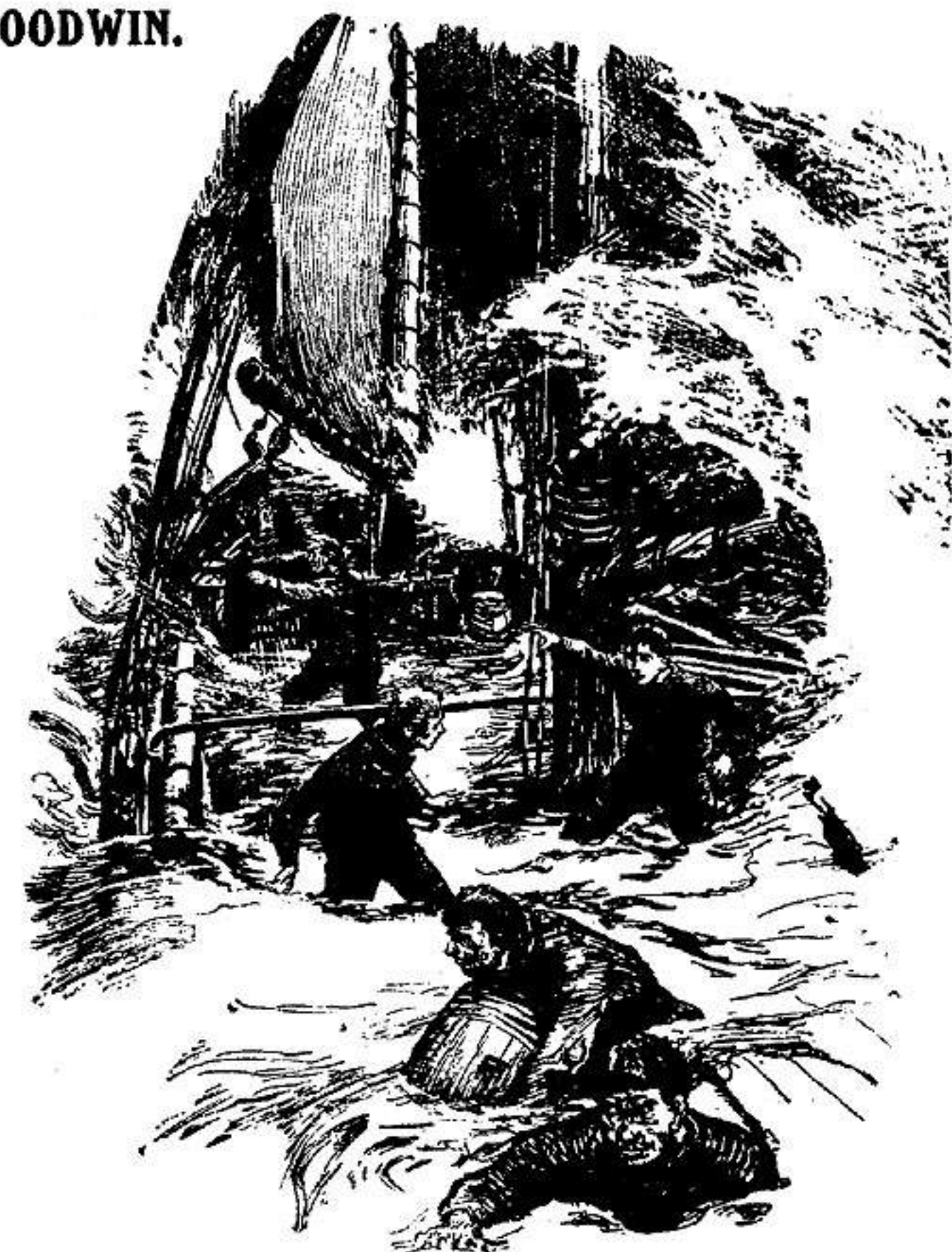
"Slack away mainsheet," roared Buck, "or she's done for!"

Away went the boom with a run.

The Seal was invisible in the darkness, now, and driving spindrift, but she was lying to comfortable enough, having storm canvas set.

The Adder refused to do anything of the sort, and threatened to dismast herself altogether, or to be rolled bottom upwards by the sea.

"No, good!" shouted Buck, wrench-



With a crash, the Adder struck the iron-hard sand and a huge sea thundered down on the stranded vessel!

ing the helm up. "We must shove her before the storm an' run for it!"

"Run where?" said Dan, as the Adder lurched down and turned her tail to the hurricane.

"Goodness knows!" returned Buck. "To Davy Jones, like enough! Slack the peak right down and trice up the tack, or we shall have the mast out of her an' be driven ashore among the squadron's men."

With her mainsail "scandalised," so as to render it half ineffective, the trawler went a little easier, but she could do nothing but drive along before the gale, now blowing with terrific force.

Wallowing and rolling, she soused through the waves, and now and again taking the crest of one over her quarter, and filling her decks with raging water. It took all the boys' strength to steer her both at the helm at once.

It was a night to be remembered. The roaring gale, the reeling trawler, the aching, weary work to keep her straight before the seas, made up a long nightmare that the breaking dawn did little to dispel.

The young day spread grey and dismal over a waste of white-capped seas, and out to leeward, closer than it should have been, was a dreary line of low, yellow sandhills, with line upon line of terrible surf breaking at their feet.

Far out, very little clear of the trawler's course, the sea broke and spouted furiously on outlying sandbanks, which in ten minutes would have ground to ruin the stoutest smack ever built. A wide gap, where the sea ran in through the land, edged and dotted with banks of roaring surf, yawned far on the lee quarter.

It was the Texel. In the long night run, the Adder had cleared the mainland of Holland, and was passing the first of the long chain of islands that curve out from the coast like the hook of a sickle, enclosing a great tract of shallow, wind-ing sea and sand between themselves and the mainland, and showing their outer fronts, low and guarded by deadly fangs and flats of sand, to the wild North Sea.

The gaps between them, leading to the desolate but safer waste inside, were

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so choked with banks and wrecks that to try to run through them in a storm meant the almost certain loss of the vessel with all hands.

The Texel was the one possible haven. But when day dawned the Adder had run too far past to make it.

"This is awful!" groaned Dan. "I'm starving! And if we lift the hatch, those toughs will get us! Hark at them!"

All through the wild rush along the seas the prisoners below had raved and shouted and hacked at the hatch covers, fearing they would be drowned like rats in a trap.

"Lucky they've no hatchets," said Buck, bracing himself wearily against the helm, "or there'd be trouble! That's Englishman's Gat to leeward. There's a way through, but there'll be dead Englishmen there if we tried it this weather! Look at the surf!"

"Let's keep the sea," said Dan. "This gale must blow itself out sooner or later. If we hit anything, I hope it'll be an island; might get ashore then. But those surf-bars in the channels have deep water round them. To strike there would be a sure finish."

"Nothin's sure on the high seas," replied Buck.

They ran on till the day waned, past Umeland and Terschelling, the hard-mouthed trawler always lurching and bucking as she went, and the hungry seas surging by her with a long, wet hiss.

Gap after gap in the land was passed, but each was more hopeless than the other; and the Doggerman will always choose the wrath of the sea rather than lay his vessel upon the rocks or the sand.

Shipwrecked!

"I CAN'T stick this any longer!" said Dan at last, with hunger and thirst and exhaustion. "Must have something to eat!"

"Those beasts are living on the fat of the land down below!" replied Buck. "They've got rifles and revolvers by way of sauce, too. They'll be likely to bag one of us before we can persuade them to share grub. Are you game?"

"May as well be shot as starved!" said Dan. "I've got an idea!"

"You'll have to work it yourself, then," said Buck; "for if I leave the helm for as much as three seconds, this hooker'll broach-to, an' we'll be goners!"

"Yes," said Dan; "but you can nearly reach the hatch from where you stand. Couldn't you shove it back if I raise the catch?"

"I'll try it," returned Buck. "What are you going to do?"

"I'll stand for'ard o' the hatch with an oar handy," said Dan. "They know we haven't pistols. Only one can get up the ladder at a time. I'll get him with the oar and slam the hatch again. When we've got him, we'll deal with him!"

"We sure will!" said Buck grimly. "Get to it!"

Dan picked up the stout ash oar with which he had knocked out Rebow, and then quietly raised the catch of the hatch-cover from the staple.

Silence followed the action below. The squadron men had heard the sound, and were waiting their chance. They thought the boys were starved out, and were going to offer terms—terms to the Black Squadron!

Dan slipped to the forward side of the hatch, and took a good grip of his oar with both hands.

Buck darted forward for a moment slid back the hatch, and ran back to his helm again, just in time to save the Adder from broaching-to.

There was a dead pause as the smack flew along before the gale. Slowly a tuft of hair rose above the level of the hatch, and a head followed it, till a pair of evil, black eyes bent themselves on Buck at the helm. The man had his back to Dan.

"Wish he'd turned his ugly face to me!" thought Dan. "Can't swipe the beggar while he isn't looking."

Quick as a flash, the man drew himself nearly clear of the hatch, a revolver in his hand, and fired it at Buck.

As the shot rang out, Dan's oar caught the ruffian on the side of the head.

The bullet flew wide, and the man rolled on the deck, hugging his head with his hands. The pistol clattered along the planks.

With the end of his oar Dan slammed down the hatch, and snapped the hasp down just as a second prisoner drove his head against it, himself stopped in the nick of time.

The man in the scuppers recovered himself promptly, and grabbed the revolver just as Dan sprang at him.

"Grab his wrist!" cried Buck, in an agony of anxiety, wishing he could help in the struggle.

Dan had his opponent by the wrist in a moment, and

clasped his free arm round the man's middle in a firm grip.

Crack, crack, crack!

The revolver barked as the ruffian fired wildly, hoping to scare the boy, though his wrist was wrenched to this side and that, and the bullets sang harmlessly skyward.

With a desperate effort, the ruffian strove to wrest the pistol round and line its muzzle upon Dan for a single second.

The struggle was short and terrible. Putting forth all his strength, the man wrenched the pistol round, and pulled the trigger twice.

The first bullet cut through the jersey on Dan's shoulder, scaring the flesh as it passed.

With a powerful twist, Dan brought the man's wrist right round as the trigger was pulled again. The man gave a choking cry, and as Dan, exhausted, let him go, he reeled overboard and sank in the spuming sea, to be swept away to leeward.

Dan sat down on the hatch, panting.

"Well done, youngster!" cried Buck.

"Are you hurt?"

"No," said Dan; and he looked at the raging sea beyond. "Poor beggar!" he said, with a shudder.

"Thank your stars you ain't where he is!" returned Buck. "Another inch, an' you would ha' been!"

"Ay, ay!" said Dan soberly, picking the pistol out of the scuppers. "And now about the grub?"

He cocked the revolver and slung the hatch open viciously.

"Steady, lad!" warned Buck. "Be careful!"

"Careful!" returned Dan. "I've had enough of this!"

In a flash he covered the man at the foot of the companion ladder.

"Fling your gun up here," he said—"butt-end first! And, remember, if you try any funny stuff, you'll get it in the neck! No half-measures with me, I mean what I say!"

Scared and sullen, seeing that he was covered to a hair, the man complied.

The weapon fell on deck.

"I see your mate behind you," continued Dan. "Let him do the same, and quick."

The second man obeyed.

"Put your hands behind you, an' go for'ard!" commanded Dan. "Remember, I've got you both covered!"

The two men went forward. Dan shut them up in the fore-castle, and fastened the door. Then he rummaged out rifles from under the bunk mattress. Retaining two of these, he flung the rest overboard. That done, he found and opened a tin of bully-beef and brought it on deck, together with a bag of biscuits. The scuttle-butt was full of fresh water.

The boys feasted royally. They felt in better spirits as the food warmed them. But even louder blew the gale. And the constant sweeping by of green water—that at times nearly beat the breath out of them—and the dismal death that waited always under their lee upon the surf-lashed beaches, would have tried the endurance of stouter men than they.

"It's a poor look-out, I'm thinking," said Buck, at last, as the light began to fail.

Instead of easing, the gale blew harder; and just as they were off the chain of lesser islands, towards the end of the string, the darkness came down amid a squall that made the foregoing gale seem mild and harmless. The wind veered right on shore, and the Adder, refusing to sail with the gale abeam, drove right before it towards the thundering surf.

"She's done for!" shouted Buck,

wrenching at his tiller. "Get hold of anything you can to float you ashore! Open the hatches when she strikes, an' give those rats their chance! We can't drown 'em!"

"They won't want any help!" cried Dan. "The sea will attend to their business—and ours. I'll let 'em out! Shall we get ashore, do you think?"

"Ashore!" cried Buck, pointing to the raging breakers. "There's a chance, so strike out for your life when she goes!"

Crash!

With a crash that started every timber in the hull, the Adder struck and her keel split all along its length.

Dan rushed to the fore-hatch, and flung it open. Then he hung on for his life as a huge sea thundered down on the stranded vessel, blotting the last

COME INTO THE OFFICE, BOYS AND GIRLS!

SEVERAL readers have asked me if the MAGNET is going to celebrate Christmas in the usual way with a special seasonable number. Bet your sweet life it is, chums! And next Saturday will see our grand Christmas number on the market. And what a number it will be, too! Take my oft-repeated advice, chums, and order your copy in good time!

Our

GRAND CHRISTMAS PROGRAMME

opens with a tip-top story of your old chums of Greyfriars—Harry Wharton & Co., who, in the happiest of spirits, set out for a lonely old mansion reputed to be haunted, to spend Christmas within the roar of the Atlantic breakers! The title alone.

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THE "GREYFRIARS HERALD,"

the main feature of which is a Yuletide yarn of the Jolly, Merry and Bright chums of St. Sam's, is chock-a-block full of Christmas fun and jollity. In addition to all this, there will be two other smaller Christmas features, an "Interview" by the Greyfriars Rhymester, and further thrill-packed chapters of our sensational sea story. You could not wish for a bigger, brighter, bumper number than the one that is in store for you next week!

The chief item of conversation among boys, at any rate, at this time of the year is Christmas presents. Some have "surprise" presents, while others are given the opportunity of choosing what they would like best. To the latter I vote they make a wise choice by selecting one of the following Annuals: "Holiday Annual," "Hobby Annual," "Modern Boy's Book of Adventure Stories," or the "Popular Book of Boys' Stories." All these Annuals are real value for money propositions and range in price from 2s. 6d. to 6s. Ask your newsagent to let you have a glance at these wonder books. He'll be only too pleased to oblige.

I think that is all for this week, chums, so here's looking forward to next Saturday's Bumper Christmas Number.

YOUR EDITOR.

glimmer of the sky from the boys, for it buried them four feet deep in solid water. Overboard roared a breaker, taking half the rail with it, and up from the swamped cabin struggled the prisoners, gasping and panting under the fear of death.

Smash! came another breaker.

The trawler groaned and squealed in her death-agony, as the trembling garboards split from end to end. A third wave lifted the vessel up and dropped her on the iron-hard sand, as though in brutal play. The North Sea took her for its own. A few armfuls of black timber lurked shorewards through the surf, but the flagship of the Black Fleet was gone.

How he reached the land, Dan never knew. Choking and gasping in the boiling surf, battered and bleeding, he got hold of a broken timber, and saw dimly that Buck had hold of the other end of it. It was half a mile to the dry beach.

At last, broken and exhausted, the boys dragged themselves out of reach of the sea and sank down upon the sand. For a long time they lay, silent and motionless.

"We can't stay here," said Buck, at last. "Can you walk?"

"I can drag along somehow," replied Dan. "What has become of the prisoners?"

"They're prisoners in another place by now, I guess!" said Buck grimly. "There's a light over the dunes there. Let's try an' make it!"

The two chums rose slowly, and painfully climbed the sandhills. The place they had landed on was evidently a small island of the long string. The gale howled over it pitilessly. As they walked, a great host of sea-birds seemed to rise out of the sand, shrieking and whirling around them like lost spirits of the darkness.

"Bear up, old boy!" said Buck, though he was on the point of dropping with fatigue himself. "We're all but there!"

Covering the last few yards of green grass, they reached a large, low farmstead of the Dutch variety.

A single window, beside a great oak door, was lighted.

The two chums crept wearily up and peered in.

Dan blinked at the light, and his head swam. Was he dreaming? Had the whole wild rush across the seas, the shipwreck, the light in the house, been a nightmare?

He looked dreamily into a wide room, sandy-floored, and hung about with strange old chinaware and jugs of copper. Black oak chests, carved in queer shapes, stood round the walls.

A fire of wreck-timber blazed on the great open hearth, and its flickering light played on the form of an old man, seated at a round oak table, his face lined and seamed like the sea-sand itself.

Before him, on the blackened oak, lay a pile of gold coin, gleaming strangely in the uncertain light of the fire. The old man picked up handfuls of the coins, kissing them, and laughing a laugh that made Dan shudder.

He looked at Buck. His comrade had sunk down by the window and made no sound. Sick with fatigue, still thinking he dreamed, Dan's brain swam giddily, and he sank down at the great oak door, with a groan, and swooned.

A moment later the door was flung open sharply, and a flood of firelight lit the outer darkness.

(For the continuation of this stirring sea story, see next week's BUMPER CHRISTMAS NUMBER of the MAGNET!)

THE MAGNET LIBRARY.—No. 1,452.

SMITHY'S STRANGE ADVENTURE!

(Continued from page 24.)

The light shut off.

A soft, strange, sickly scent came to Bunter's nose.

He knew the smell of chloroform! So that was the game! The Bouncer was not to wake!

Bunter was trembling in every fat limb. But he tried to pull himself together. The man's back was to him—and he could not see Bunter in the dark. The Owl of the Remove screwed up his courage, such as it was, to the sticking point, sat up in bed, and grasped his pillow.

Whiz!

It flew!

The instant it had left his hand Billy Bunter was snuggling in terror under the bedclothes. The pillow missed the shadowy figure by the Bouncer's bed. But it dropped on Vernon-Smith, startling him out of slumber with a jump.

The Bouncer gave a gasp and started up.

His face, as he did so, knocked on a hand that was about to press a chloroform pad over his mouth.

The kidnapper was as surprised as the Bouncer. The pad was knocked from his hand, and the Bouncer gave a loud, startled yell at the dim vision of a shadowy figure looming over him.

"Cospetto!" came a hiss from Count Zero. The sudden awakening of his intended victim had disconcerted his plans, but he seized the Bouncer with one hand and groped for the pad with the other.

"Help!" yelled Vernon-Smith.

He struggled up, striking out fiercely. His yell rang through the dormitory and awoke nearly every fellow there.

"Hallo, hallo, hallo!" came from Bob Cherry.

"Help!" shrieked the Bouncer.

"That's Smithy!" panted Harry Wharton. He bounded out of bed.

"Help! Help!" yelled Smithy, as he struggled. "It's the Italian! Help!"

"Get a light!" shouted Bob.

Wharton jumped to the Bouncer's bedside. Two dim figures struggled there—Smithy and his enemy! Wharton grasped at them blindly—he could hardly see one from the other in the dark. Tom Redwing leaped out of bed—all the Famous Five were up—there was a roar of excited voices all through the dormitory. Bob cut across to the door and switched on the light.

"The Italian!" panted Wharton.

Count Zero flung the panting Bouncer from him. He made a rush to the door. A savage blow sent Bob staggering

aside, and the Italian tore the door open and leaped into the passage.

The Bouncer rolled, gasping, off his bed.

"That villain! After him!"

He panted to the door, and a dozen fellows followed him into the corridor. There was a sound of running feet on the dark stairs—and then silence. The juniors crowded down the staircase, switching on lights as they went. A sharp, angry voice called, as Mr. Quelch came whisking from his room in a flowing dressing-gown.

"Boys! Wharton—Cherry—Vernon-Smith—what—" spluttered the Remove master.

"It was the Italian, sir!" gasped Wharton. "He came to the dormitory after Smithy—"

"What?"

"Here's an open window!" called out Johnny Bull.

"Good heavens!" gasped Mr. Quelch. "Is it possible—"

The Remove master and the juniors looked into the wintry night from the open window. From the darkness and the whirling flakes there came the roar of an engine on the road.

"Gone!" said the Bouncer between his teeth. "He had a car waiting, of course; he's in it now—"

"Lucky you're not in it, too, old chap!" gasped Redwing. "That must have been his game!"

Mr. Quelch gasped.

"The villain! The desperate rascal! Go back to your dormitory, my boys. I will ring up at once and ask for a constable to be sent! Go back to bed; there is no danger now."

Mr. Quelch hurried down to the telephone. A hill of bedclothes on Bunter's bed hid the Owl of the Remove from sight.

"But who woke me up?" asked the Bouncer. "The villain would have had me, safe as houses, but somebody woke me up, buzzing a pillow at me!"

A fat face peered out from under Bunter's blankets.

"I say, you fellows, is—is—is he gone?"

"Miles away, you fat funk!" grunted Johnny Bull.

Bunter sat up.

With danger at a distance Bunter was bold as a lion.

"Lucky I was awake, Smithy, old man!" he remarked. "You'd have been in Queer Street but for me—what?"

The Bouncer stared at him.

"You!" he ejaculated.

"You might hand me back my pillow," said Bunter. "I chucked it at him, you know, to knock him over—"

"It landed on me—"

"I mean, I chucked it at you to wake you up!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Blessed if I see anything to cackle at! I'd like to know what would have happened to Smithy if I hadn't stayed awake to watch over him!" said the fat Owl indignantly.

"Did you know that dago was coming, then?" grinned Bob Cherry.

"Well, I—I thought he might, you know!" said Bunter cautiously.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Cackle away!" snorted Bunter. "You'd cackle on the other side of your mouths if that villain came back! You wouldn't tackle him as I did! I'm not afraid of him, and I fancy I'm the only chap here who isn't—"

"Who's that coming up the passage?" asked Peter Todd.

"Yarrah!"

Bunter disappeared under the bedclothes again.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

But it was only Mr. Quelch coming up the passage. The Remove master saw his flock back to bed with the assurance that a constable was coming and that all was safe. When he had put out the light and gone, Billy Bunter's voice was heard again.

"I say, you fellows, talk about presence of mind—"

"Bunter, old fat man—" said the Bouncer.

"Yes, Smithy? Talk about presence of mind—"

"Exactly! Did you tell me yesterday you were expecting a postal order?"

"Eh? Yes, old chap!" answered Bunter. "It's for ten bob—"

"I'll cash it for you to-morrow."

There was a brief silence. Then Bunter's voice came again:

"I say, Smithy!"

"Eh? Yes?" The Bouncer's voice was sleepy. "What?"

"I mean a pound."

"Right-ho!" chuckled Smithy.

Perhaps the excitement had helped Coker's Christmas pudding to settle. Anyhow, Billy Bunter fell asleep while he was still considering whether to make it two pounds!

THE END.

(Be sure you read the grand long complete story of Harry Wharton & Co. in next week's **DUMPER CHRISTMAS NUMBER**, entitled: **"THE SPECTER OF POLPELLE!"** By Frank Richards. As there is always a great demand for the Christmas number of the **MAGNET** regular readers should make a point of ordering their copy at the earliest opportunity!—Ed.)



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STAMMERING!

Cure yourself as I did. Particulars Free.—FRANK B. HUGHES, 7, SOUTHAMPTON ROW, LONDON, W.O.1.

All applications for Advertisement Space in this publication should be addressed to the Advertisement Manager, The MAGNET, The Fleetway House, Farringdon Street, London, E.C.4.

SIR JIMMY VIVIAN describes—
**MAULY'S MAD
DECEMBER DIP**

If you had been at the pool on the River Sark last Wednesday, you'd have seen a sight for sore eyes. With the temperature at zero and a coating of ice over the water in the pool, Lord Mauleverer came along, wearing a bathing costume under a fur-lined coat!

"My dear old chap—" I gasped in alarm. Mauly nodded distantly. There was a far-away look in his eyes.

"Hallo, old bean! By the way, what have they done with the divin' board?"

"Diving-board at this time of the year?" I yelled. "Why, they've taken it away, of course!"

"Well, I wish they wouldn't do these things without warnin' a man!" sighed Mauly. "I suppose I shall have to dive in from the bank, then!"

And he calmly shed the fur-lined coat and dived in.

Then he yelled! Fortunately, the ice was as thin as a wafer, and easily broke. But the temperature of the water upset Mauly tremendously!

"Wow!" he yelled, as he swam ashore, breaking the ice as he did so. "It's cold!"

"Of course it's cold, idiot!" I snapped. "What else would you expect it to be, when it's so near Christmas?"

Mauly stared at me with distended eyes, as he climbed up the bank and started pummeling himself with a towel.

"Christmas?" he echoed. "Oh, gad! What a fatheaded mistake to make!"

"What mistake's that?" "Br-r-r! I thought the comin' holiday was the summer holiday—not Christmas!" explained Mauly. "An' rememberin' I promised to practise divin' for the end-of-summer-term divin' contest, I thought I'd better put in a bit of practice!"

Mental aberration, Mauly called it afterwards. I don't quite know what that means, but if it means sleeping so often that you don't know whether it's summer or winter in the odd periods when you're awake, then it's just the right description to apply to Mauly!

**THE BOYS of our
FIRE BRIGADE**

You can't beat the boys of our Fire Brigade! I've always said it, and the way they behaved when they were called to Study No. 14 in the Remove passage this week only confirms what I've said.

Experienced onlookers swear that no professional brigade could have achieved a smarter turn-out. Not more than a few seconds elapsed between the smoke being noticed coming out of No. 14 and the arrival of the brigade!

The clouds of black, stifling smoke that

(Continued at foot of extreme right-hand column.)

EXTRA-SPECIAL CHRISTMAS EDITION NEXT WEEK, BOYS!



The
GREYFRIARS HERALD

No. 167.

EDITED BY HARRY WHARTON.

December 14th, 1935.



**HOW TO RUN
A DORM FEED**

By H. VERNON-SMITH

The first thing to do when you run a dorm feed is to hop round the Form, collecting all the cash you can rake in for the tuck. Having done this, leave the money loose in your pocket and go to a football match, taking care to stand in front of an obvious sneak-thief who will be certain to help himself to the lot during the game.

REBELLS of the DESERT!



Concluding Instalment of Dicky Nugent's
Smashing Serial: "The Skoolboy Eggs-
plorers!"

"Mr. Lickham! Wake up!"

Mr. I. Jolliwell Lickham stirred uneasily in his sleep. He had been dreaming that he was back at St. Sam's, feeding his face with Christmas pudding at the St. Sam's breaking-up party, and it was such a plezzant dream that he didn't like waking out of it.

"Go 'way!" he mormered peevishly. "Tain't rising-bell yet!"

"Wake up, sir! It's urgent!" hissed the same tense voice in his ear.

Mr. Lickham opened his eyes and came back to earth with a bump. It was a sad contrast with his dream to find himself still in a fowl dungeon beneath the palace of the Sheek of Alljeers, but such was the unplezzant truth!

"Ah, me!" he mormered, with a sigh. "Then we're still here—ow! Help!"

The Fourth Form master sat up with a jerk as he realised that a figger clad in the white robes of an Arab was bending over him. At the same time several others woke up, and a mormer of alarm ran round the dungeon. "Quick, you fellows! There's an Arab attacking Lickham!"

Then the prisoners had a big surprise. Just as they were preparing to go to the reskow, the "Arab" threw back the hood of his robe, to reveal the grinning face of Jack Jolly, of the Fourth!

"Jolly!" cried the St. Sam's fellows, in amazement.

"Hooray!"

It was a subdued cheer from the prisoners, all of whom were now awake. They were simply delighted at the prospect of escaping from the tyrannical Sheek of Alljeers.

"When can we make our bid for freedom, then, Jolly?" asked Mr. Lickham.

"Now, sir!" replied Jolly.

"Eggscept for a few guards, everyone in the palace is fast asleep. Our motto should be: 'Strike while the iron's hot!'"

"That's the talk I like to hear!" Bursleigh! Call those two airmen in the next dungeon!" ordered Mr. Lickham. "By the way, Jolly, what has happened to Dr. Birchmell?"

Jack Jolly's eyes flashed indignantly. His lip curled scornfully.

"Believe it or not, sir, he has thrown in his lot with the sheek!" he said.

"Impossible!"

Jack Jolly laughed.

"I'm afraid it's only too true, sir. As soon as we were caught, he went down on his hands and knees and told the sheek it was all my fault, and when the sheek offered him the chance of becoming a spy among the prisoners, he simply jumped at it!"

"My hat! What a beastly cadd!" eggsclaimed Mr. Lickham disgustedly. "If that's what has happened, we certainly won't go out of our way to reskow him! He

deserves to be left behind!"

"Hear, hear!" Here are the airmen!" said Jack Jolly. Kaptin Manley and Air-Pilot Curridge had crawled through the hole in the wall in response to Bursleigh's call, and they now joined the group.

"So you've located the Gigantic, yungster?" Kaptin Manley asked.

"Yes, rather, sir! It's at the back of the palace, hidden by palm trees; and only a stone's throw away from it there's a store of petrol which the sheek keeps for his cars!"

"Good bizness!" cried Kaptin Manley. "Well, if you're all ready—"

"We're ready, sir!"

"Ready, I say!"

"Then we'll get going!"

"This way," said Jack Jolly.

Led by the ntrepid kaptin of the Fourth, the rebels of the desert went forth!

They had hoped to get to the air-liner without waking a sole. But Mr. Lickham tripped over the head of one of the sleeping guards outside the dungeons, and that hope was quickly dispelled. The awakened Arab jumped to his feet with a fierce imprecation.

"Grate jumping crackers! The prisoners are escaping! Help!" he yelled, in his native tung.

"That's done it! We shall have to fight our way through now!" said Kaptin Manley, gritting his teeth. "Dubble up, lads! Let nobody stand in our path!"

There was grim determination in every dial as the rebels raced up the stone steps leading to the ground floor of the palace. They realised that the odds were against them, but they were

ready to give the Arabs a run for their munny!

A crowd of swarthy ruffians came rushing to meet them, brandishing swords and daggers.

Bang! Crash! Wallop!

With a deafening clatter the opposing forces met, and for a few ticks arms and legs and swords and daggers whirled round wildly in a fearful tangle. Then the rebels rushed on again, with a ringing cheer, leaving the yelling Arabs wondering dizzily whether they had been hit by an earthquake or a hurricane!



At last they reached the open air. Eggscept for a bright full moon and millions of stars the nite was as black as pitch, but Jack Jolly led the way to the concealed air-liner without haltering.

"The Gigantic!" cried Kaptin Manley hoarsely, as the grato airplane loomed into site. "My hat! It's simply ripping to see the old bus again! Quick, boys, the petrol!"

Willing hands brought the petrol across from the sheek's store. The Gigantic was wheeled into a good position for starting off. Then the rebels started crowding into the grato aerial monster, just as a fresh force of the enemy, headed by the sheek himself, burst into view!

The sheek's face was purple with pashun.

"Come back, you rotters!" he hooted. "Get out of that airplane at once! D'you hear?"

But the rebels of the desert were deaf to the voice of the charmer. They hurriedly finished scrambling in, then leaned out of the winders and made long noses at him, thereby making the sheek madder than ever!

An instant later Kaptin Manley had pressed the self-starter and sent the air-liner careering across the desert sand, and soon they were zooming away far above the heads of their late captors.

Their grato bid for freedom had succeeded!

"Well, boys, it's a relief to be on our way to England, home, and bowty again!" grinned Mr. Lickham, as he mopped his perspiring brow. "It's a pity, in a way, though, that we had to leave the Head behind. I'm afraid they'll give him an awfully ruff time."

"Hallo! What's that?" asked Jack Jolly.

They listened. Faintly above the roar of the engines they heard a cry as of a wounded animal in agony.

"Wooooop! Y a r o o o o! Reskow, St. Sam's!"

"What the merry dickens is—"

"It's the Head!" cried Jack Jolly. "He must be hanging on outside! My hat! Isn't that the end of his beard

poking through under the door?"

"Bless my sole! So it is!" eggsclaimed Mr. Lickham. "We must have shut the door just as he was trying to get in! Hang on to that bit of beard like the very dickens, boys, and I will open the door!"

"All serene, sir!"

Eager volunteers grabbed the wisps of beard that were protruding under the door, then Mr. Lickham opened the door. Sure enuff, there was the Head, trailing through the air with the Gigantic, with the sole aid of his hirsute appendages!

"Ow-wow! Grooooo!" he gasped, as they hawled him into safety and closed the door again. "That's the most uncomfortable jerney I've ever had in all my life! Ow!"

And the St. Sam's crowd felt so simperthetick at Dr. Birchmell's yelps of pain that none of them had the hart to take him to task for the dishonourable part he had played in the rebellion!

The jerney back seemed all too short. Towards daybreak they felt several terrific bumps underneath them. Air-Pilot Curridge told them they were passing Egypt, and had just grazed a couple of pyramids and given the Sphinx a tap on the torrid.

After that it seemed only five minutes or so before they saw beneath them the buildings and playing-fields of St. Sam's.

A mitey cheer went up as the grato airplane made a perfect landing in the quad.

They had had many stirring adventures, but now they were back again. And the fact that they were back just in time to break up for Christmas put the finishing touch to the happiness of the Skoolboy Eggsplorers!

When you have lost the money, return to the school and announce that the feed is postponed. This makes the shareholders anxious and increases the general interest in the affair.

After you have applied unsuccessfully to your relatives for help, take your camera to the Courtfield pawnshop and raise a loan that way. Make your exit at the exact moment when Mr. Quech is passing the shop. This will lead to exhaustive inquiries on his part and leave him with a shrewd idea that a dorm feed is in the offing.

When, with additional help from the wealthier subscribers, you have set the Dorm Feed Fund on its feet again, tell the full story of your troubles to as many people as possible. This isn't very helpful in keeping the feed a secret, but it relieves the feelings immensely!

Your next step is to announce the time of the feed. Whisper it to the fellows, of course — preferably when others are looking on, so that lots of people will be set wondering what it's all about.

Finally, when the time of the feed arrives, fall over when you're holding the tuck, and send it flying in all directions with sufficient noise to bring up two beaks and half a dozen prefects immediately.

Of course, you may think this method of running a dorm feed open to criticism. If you do, I can only say that Squiff claims to be the dorm-feed expert of the Remove, and this is just how he ran our last affair—blow him!

Don't be alarmed if you hear that Dicky Nugent is following in Loder's footsteps. He's becoming a private detective—not a crook!

WOULD YOU BELIEVE IT?



Supporting Bob Cherry on his stomach, Johnny Bull demonstrated his physical fitness in the gym. Johnny's abdominal muscles are so well developed that he can "stand" a heavy weight laid on him—but he fibbed when Billy Bunter wanted to stand on his "tummy." Too "weighty" a matter!



Keen on wireless, Dick Rake has constructed a crystal set of improved design, with which he claims to pick up the main programmes clearly. Rake says his set allows of very fine tuning—that is, unless his study-mates are jogging the table, doing odd jobs. Then everybody gets "out of tune!"



Convinced that he could win the boxing championship of Greyfriars, Horace Coker succeeded in getting into the Final, where he gave a plucky if windmill-like exhibition against Wingate. Coker was beaten by a big margin of points—but his belief that he ought to have won could never be "knocked out!"



S. Q. I. Field's nickname of "Squiff" came into being on the day of his arrival at Greyfriars, when Bob Cherry spotted the initials S.Q.I.F. on his baggage. "Squiff" is a first-class goal-keeper. There was nothing "squiffy" about the way he held St. Jim's at bay the other afternoon! Friars won, 1-0.



Pointing out that he is becoming round-shouldered, the school gym-instructor told Alonzo Todd to stand against the wall bars for ten minutes every day. "Lonzy" did so—but at the end of a week his limbs were so stiff the instructor had to prescribe limbering exercises! "Lonzy's" a "stiff" problem!



A ten-mile hike through the woods struck Harry Wharton & Co. as a splendid way of spending a half-holiday. Billy Bunter, who "trailed" them, feeling they would be sure to stop somewhere for refreshment, thought it was a regular wild goose chase. All Bunter got out of his "hike" was a crop of blisters!

GREYFRIARS FACTS WHILE YOU WAIT!

(Continued from foot of column 1.)

poured out of No. 14 when they opened the door were enough to daunt the bravest. But were the Remove amateur firemen daunted? Not likely! They worked away like Trojans on the manual pump in the quad below, while others in the passage above helped to direct the jet of water into the right channel.

Goodness knows how many hundreds of gallons were pumped into No. 14 before Quechely arrived and ordered a halt, but it must have been an awful lot.

Of course, there was bound to be criticism from somebody, so the fact that the beaks have come down heavily because there wasn't really a fire at all need surprise nobody. Still, it's a little unfair on our fire-fighters. After all, they weren't to know it was only that fathead Fish making toffee, were they?