

Grand Christmas Number

The Magnet



The Spectre
of Polpelly!



THE FIRST CHAPTER.

Snowball for Smilthy!

BUNTER, you ass!" "Bunter, you fathead!" Harry Wharton and Frank Nugent spoke simultaneously.

Billy Bunter heeded neither of them. Wharton and Nugent were in their study, No. 1 in the Remove, on that cold and frosty morning. It was breaking-up day at Greyfriars, and they had not quite finished packing. They were sorting out various things, when Billy Bunter suddenly barged into the study and closed the door hurriedly behind him. He barged across the study, jammed up the lower sash of the window, and began to gather handfuls of the snow that was thickly packed on the broad stone window-sill.

Which was such an extraordinary proceeding that it caused the chums of the Remove to wonder whether William George Bunter had gone off his rocker.

With hurried fat hands, Bunter gathered snow. Quickly he kneaded it into a large snowball.

Wharton and Nugent stared at him. What Bunter wanted a snowball for indoors was rather a mystery.

"You hawling ass!" exclaimed Harry Wharton. "What's that game?"

Billy Bunter did not answer till he had finished manufacturing the snowball. Then he turned from the window, with the missile in his fat hand and a grin on his fat face.

"I say, you fellows, can you hear him coming?" he breathed.

"Who?" demanded Nugent.

"Coker! He's after me!"

"Oh!"

"I dodged him on the stairs," gasped Bunter. "I say, the beast makes out that I snaffled the Christmas pudding from his study yesterday—"

"So you did!"

"Oh, really, Wharton! I never knew his aunt had sent him a Christmas pudding—I never saw him unpacking it; and if I did, I hope I'm not the fellow to snaffle a fellow's pudding! It wasn't that kept me awake in the dorm last night! I say, he kicked me on the stairs—"

"Good!"

"Beast! I say, you fellows, I dodged the brute, but he's after me. He will be here in a minute. I'm going to get him with this snowball, sec, as soon as he comes! You fellows get hold of the poker and shovel. Coker will be wild when he gets this snowball in his chivvy. He, he, he!"

Harry Wharton laughed.

It was very probable indeed that Coker of the Fifth would be "wild" if he put his head into the study and was greeted by a snowball on his features. Bunter, undoubtedly, would need help—and the poker and shovel would come in useful.

"Sure he's coming?" asked Nugent.

"Yes, you ass! I say, you fellows, get ready!" said Bunter anxiously. "I want to get him with this snowball, but I don't want him to get hold of me afterwards. That's important."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Harry Wharton picked up a ruler. Nugent picked up the poker. They were in cheery spirits on breaking-up day, and not averse from a little shindy with Coker of the Fifth, if that great man started throwing his weight about in the Remove.

"You stand by me, you know," said Bunter. "Keep between me and Coker all the time—see? I'll get him with this snowball as soon as he puts his silly head in. Then you fellows start bashing him. The other fellows will come along as soon as they hear the row—I saw Bob and Inky up the passage, and I know Smilthy's in his study—they'll all come! All you've got to do is to keep between me and Coker!"

"Right-ho!" answered Harry Wharton cheerfully. "If Coker of the Fifth comes along and asks for anything, we'll give him all he asks for."

"And a little over!" agreed Nugent.

"But I don't suppose he's after you," added Wharton. "Coker won't waste time on you when the school's breaking up."

"I tell you he's after me!" hooted Bunter. "You just keep ready to bash him as soon as I get him with this snowball."

"Oh, all right!"

"I believe I can hear him coming!" gasped Bunter.

There was a footstep outside Study No. 1.

Billy Bunter's eyes gleamed behind his big spectacles. Up went his fat hand, with the snowball clutched in it. Bunter was not much of a shot—but at so short a range there was no doubt that he would get the fellow in the doorway as soon as the door was opened.

The door handle turned; the door was thrown open.

Bunter's fat arm swept through the air, and the snowball flew.

"Hold on!" gasped Wharton.

"Stop!" yelled Nugent.

But it was too late for Bunter to stop!

The snowball was already whizzing across the study, right at the face of the fellow in the doorway.

That would have been all right, of course, had the fellow been Coker of the Fifth!

But the fellow wasn't!

It was Herbert Vernon-Smith, the Bounder of Greyfriars, who appeared there. Coker, as Wharton had surmised, had no time to waste on Billy Bunter on such a busy day. The Bounder, on the other hand, naturally dropped into that study, as the chums of the Remove were going with him for Christmas. He dropped in at a rather unfortunate moment for himself.

Squash!

"Oooooogh!" gasped Smithy.

He staggered back as the fat snowball squashed in his face, stumbled, and sat down in the doorway with a heavy bump.

He sat and spluttered, and clawed snow from his face.

"Ha, ha, ha!" yelled Wharton and Nugent.

"Oh crikey!" gasped Bunter. "I—I say, you fellows, that—that isn't Coker, is it? I say, is—is—is that Smithy? Oh lor'!"

Harry Wharton dropped the ruler and Nugent the poker. Those weapons might have been needed for Coker of the Fifth, but they were not required for Vernon-Smith of the Remove.

The Bounder scrambled to his feet.

Smithy, who was not always good-tempered, had been in a very bright and cheery temper that morning—so far! But the crash of the snowball, and the bump in the doorway, seemed to have spoiled his temper! Which was not, perhaps, surprising!

"Who—what—who—" yelled the Bounder.

"Oh crikey! I—I say, Smithy, it wasn't me!" gasped Bunter. "I mean, I thought it was that beast Coker! I—I say—yarrroooooogh!"

Smithy made a jump at him. He grabbed the fat Owl of the Remove with one hand. With the other, he grabbed the ruler Wharton had just dropped on the study table.

Whack, whack, whack!

"Yooo-hoop!" roared Billy Bunter. The whacks of the ruler rang like pistol-shots on the tightest trousers at Greyfriars School. "I say—whoop! Leggo! Leave off! I say, you fellows, draggim-off!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Wharton and Nugent.

"I say—yow-ow-ow! Beast! Leave off!" yelled Bunter. "I won't come home with you for Christmas if you—yarrrooooh! I'll jolly well—yooooop!"

Whack, whack, whack!

"Yow-ow-ow-whoop!" roared Bunter, struggling and wriggling wildly in the Bounder's hefty grip. "Help! Rescue! Yarroop!"

Greyfriars was breaking up that day. The wild yells in Study No. 1 sounded as if Billy Bunter was breaking up, too!

Wharton and Nugent ran at the Bounder, grasped him, and dragged him back.

"That's enough, Smithy!" gasped Wharton. "Cut, Bunter!"

"Yarrooooh!"

Billy Bunter rolled out of the study, roaring. Bunter was going home for Christmas with Smithy that day—but, for the present, he preferred to put the greatest possible distance in the shortest space of time between himself and Smithy! He rolled down the Remove passage, and, like Iser in the poem, he rolled rapidly!

THE SECOND CHAPTER.

Bunter Knows Better!

"BETTER tell Bunter," said Tom Redwing.

Smithy laughed.

"Rot!" he answered.

There was a pleasant scent of hot coffee in Study No. 4. In that study Tom Redwing had been brewing coffee, and the Bounder had gone to Study No. 1 to ask the chums of the Remove to hop along for a whack in the same—hence Billy Bunter's little error with the snowball.

Now, however, Smithy seemed to have recovered from the effect of the snowball; though, perhaps, Bunter had not yet recovered from the effect of the ruler. Judging by Smithy's expression, he was looking forward eagerly to the holidays, which was not always the case. The millionaire's son had too many of the good things of life not to feel a little bored with them sometimes. But this Christmas was going to be spent in very strange quarters, which appealed to the Bounder's adventurous and rather reckless nature.

The Famous Five of the Remove had gathered in the study to whack out the hot coffee, which was grateful and comforting on a frosty December day. And all of them nodded assent to Redwing's remark.

"Much better tell him what to expect, Smithy," said Harry Wharton.

Spending Christmas as guests of Vernon-Smith in a lonely old mansion reputed to be haunted, appeals to Harry Wharton & Co., of Greyfriars. . . until, at midnight's stillly hour, the spectre of Polpelly "drops in" on them!

"Much," agreed Bob Cherry. "The fat ass thinks he's going home with you to your father's place in London—to mingle in the jolly old throng of the happy and the gay—"

"Theatres and restaurants, and shows and things," said Frank Nugent. "And, as a matter of fact—"

"He won't like Polpelly," said Johnny Bull.

"The likefulness will probably not be terrific," remarked Hurree Jamset Ram Singh.

"It will come as a jolly old surprise to him," said the Bounder carelessly. "No end of a joke on Bunter!"

Harry Wharton & Co. made no rejoinder to that. It was not their affair, though they were undoubtedly of opinion that Billy Bunter ought to know what was coming to him.

To the chums of the Remove it was quite a happy and cheery prospect to camp in a lonely old mansion, reputed to be haunted, on a lonely stretch of the Devonshire coast, and to spend a Christmas within the roar of the Atlantic breakers.

Polpelly had all sorts of attractions for strenuous youths of an adventurous turn. But it was not likely to have many for Billy Bunter.

Bunter preferred the fat of the land, when he could get it. The simple life had no appeal for him. Strenuous exertion had even less, if possible.

But though the Famous Five let the matter drop, Redwing persisted.

"Look here, Smithy! Bunter ought to know what to expect," he said. "You ought to tell him. I don't believe he would come, if he knew."

"Rather amusin' to pull his leg," said the Bounder. "Fancy his fat face, thinkin' that he's goin' to roll in jolly old luxury, and findin' that he's landed in a solitary old show full of draughts, and perhaps ghosts," the Bounder chuckled. "I told him I'd take him with me for Christmas, after he helped me out of the clutches of that dago the other day. He was awfully keen to come. He mightn't have been so keen if I'd told him what it was goin' to be like."

"After all, he did help you out when that kidnapping blighter got hold of you, Smithy," said Bob Cherry mildly. "It's rather thick to pull his leg in return."

The Bounder frowned for a moment; then he shrugged his shoulders.

"Oh, all right!" he said. "I'll put him wise. After all, if he changes his mind and doesn't come, we lose the joke on him; but we lose Bunter, too, and Bunter's absence is enough to make any party a success."

"Oh, really, Smithy—" came a fat voice from the doorway.

The door of Study No. 4 had opened rather cautiously while the Bounder was speaking, and a fat face and a big pair of spectacles blinked in.

"Trot in, old fat man!" said the Bounder. "Coffee and cakes."

Bunter blinked at him warily. It was half an hour since the ruler had whacked, but he still felt twinges.

"No larks, you know," he said.

"No, fathead! Roll in!"

Bunter rolled in. Redwing handed him coffee, and Bob handed him cakes. Bunter lost no time in beginning. A little light refreshment was always welcome to Bunter. It was nearly an hour since he had found a cake in Lord Mauleverer's study and disposed of it. So he was ready for more.

"Not bad coffee," he remarked. "Not like our French chef makes at Bunter Court, of course, but not bad. I say, Smithy, I suppose the car is coming for us. Bit of a squeeze with so many. Never mind, I can rough it. I suppose you'll be taking your evening clobber, Wharton. I may want to borrow it."

"You won't want evening clobber where we're going, Bunter," grinned the Bounder. "Sea-boots and oilskins would be nearer the mark."

Bunter blinked at him.

"Eh, we're going home with you, Smithy!" he said. "Wharrer you mean? I suppose we shall keep up some style in Courtman Square?"

"We're not going anywhere near Courtman Square. We're going to a place called Polpelly, on the coast of Devonshire," said Vernon-Smith. "It's an old deserted Tudor mansion, miles from everywhere, in a coomb—sea on one side, rocks on the other. No theatre within thirty miles; no cars, and no road for a car, if there was a car."

"He, ho, he!"

"No servants, except one deaf old man who's acted as caretaker since my father bought the place years ago."

"He, ho, he!"

"If there's snow at Christmas, we may be snowbound, and cut off from everything and everybody."

"He, ho, he!"

"What are you cackling at, you fat duffer?" demanded the Bounder. His description of Polpelly House seemed to entertain Bunter.

"Your little joke old man," grinned Bunter. "Pile it on. I heard what you were saying when I opened the door, you know. He, he, he! Pile it on, Smithy! You can't take me in! He, he, he!"

"But it's true, Bunter," said Tom Redwing. "We're going to have a good time, I think; but it will be rough and ready—not what you would think a good time."

"He, he, he!"

"My esteemed idiotic Bunter—" said Hurree Jamset Ram Singh.

"He, he, he!" cackled Bunter.

Evidently the fat junior did not believe a word of it. Bunter's view was that it was a little game to shake him off.

He had landed himself on the Bounder for Christmas. He had helped Smithy escape from Count Zero, the mysterious Italian who had kidnapped him, and so Smithy had not felt like giving him the answer he would have given in any other circumstances. But Bunter was aware exactly how much his fascinating society was valued.

He had no doubt whatever that the seven juniors, over the coffee and cakes in Smithy's study, had been discussing ways and means of making him come unstuck, as it were, and had hit on this cock-and-bull story as a method.

So Bunter cackled, and was amused.

"That kidnapping foreigner may turn up," said the Bounder. "I'll tell you this, Bunter—that man Zero got hold of me to threaten my father, and make him sell the Polpelly place—"

"Sounds likely, after your description of it," grinned Bunter.

"Well, it's the truth, you fat idiot! And I shouldn't wonder if he turned up again during the Christmas holidays—and that would mean a spot of danger."

"My dear chap," said Bunter breezily, "if you're in danger, I'll protect you. I've done it before, and I'll do it again."

"You howling ass—"

"Oh, really, Smithy—"

"Well, I've told you," said the Bounder, shrugging his shoulders. "You know what to expect now."

"Certainly, old chap! I say, Wharton, mind you don't forget your evening clobber! Nugent's is rather tight for me."

Evidently Bunter did not believe a word of it. He grinned over the cakes till they were finished, and then rolled away, still grinning. If those beasts fancied they were getting shut of Bunter with a story like that, they were jolly well mistaken!

Billy Bunter knew better—at least, he was satisfied that he did. And when the big car came for the Bounder and his party, Billy Bunter was ready to take his place in it, which he did, in the full belief that in two or three hours he would land safe and sound in the millionaire's mansion in London.

THE THIRD CHAPTER.

A Hot Chase!

"**G**IVE a fellow room!" granted Bunter.

It was a big car. But eight fellows filled it pretty full; especially as one of the eight was double-width. Billy Bunter liked to have plenty of room in a car.

"That's right," added Bunter, as the Bounder rose to his feet. "You stand
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for a bit, old chap, and I shall have enough room."

It was not, however, to give Billy Bunter more room that the Bounder had risen. He was looking through the pane at the back of the car, scanning the road behind.

Harry Wharton & Co. looked at him rather curiously. They guessed that Smithy was looking for a pursuer on the road.

The car was about ten miles from the school now, on the way to London. The day was clear and fine; but there was a good deal of snow left from a late fall. They heard the Bounder whistle softly, as he looked back.

"Sister Anne—sister Anne, do you see anyone coming?" asked Bob Cherry.

"There's a blue Napier behind us!" said Smithy. "I'll jolly soon see whether they're following."

"What rot!" said Billy Bunter. "I say, Smithy, you're nerry, old chap! I'm with you, you know."

Vernon-Smith looked at Bunter. He refrained from kicking him, however. Bunter was his guest now; though not, perhaps, a fearfully welcome guest. Even an unwelcome guest could hardly be kicked, earnestly as he might ask for it.

He spoke to Mr. Vernon-Smith's chauffeur, who was driving at a steady twenty, and told him to go all out. The man glanced round at him, apparently not wholly liking the idea of going all out on a slippery road. However, he obeyed, and the car shot into sudden speed.

"Oooogh!" gasped Bunter, as he pitched forward off his seat, and bumped on Bob Cherry's knees. He scrambled back, gurgling, "Oooogh! I say, stop that, you silly ass! 'Tain't safe!"

Unheeding the alarmed Owl, Smithy looked back, and the other fellows crowded round him, looking back also. A blue Napier was behind, and the sudden burst of speed almost dropped it. But it accelerated immediately, and came shooting on again.

In less than a minute it was the same distance behind as it had been when Smithy first noted it.

Harry Wharton whistled.

"That looks—" he muttered.

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

Vernon-Smith snapped to the chauffeur again. The car slowed down, and then, with a growl of brakes, came to a stop. The Napier, shooting on like an arrow behind, overtook it, and shot past. As it went by, the juniors stared hard at it.

The man who was driving was almost hidden by peaked cap and goggles—it was difficult to tell what he was like. Another man sat in the car—a short, thickset man, with a bull neck; but he had a slouched hat pulled down over his face.

The blue Napier shot on, and disappeared round a curve in the road ahead.

"Gone!" said Frank Nugent.

"We shall see!" answered the Bounder.

The chauffeur drove on again. They rounded the curve in the road, and at a short distance passed the blue Napier at a halt. The driver had got down and had the bonnet open.

But if there was anything amiss with the Napier, it was evidently set right very suddenly, for as the schoolboys' car passed, the Napier's driver jumped back to his seat, and followed on.

Once more the blue car hung in the rear of Smithy's car, at its former distance of about thirty yards.

Vernon-Smith breathed hard, and his eyes glistened. It was evident that he was enjoying the thrill of the excitement.

"They're after us!" he said. "That blighter, Zero, came after me last night, in the dorm, and he would have got me, too, if Bunter hadn't happened to be kept awake by Coker's pudding—"

"Oh, really, Smithy! After a fellow sat up to keep watch over you—"

"I dare say he knows that the school breaks up to-day," went on the Bounder. "Easy enough to find out. He's been on the watch, and he saw us leave, and followed."

"Looks like it," said Harry Wharton. "There can't be much doubt that that Napier is shadowing us. If that is Zero driving, the man's got a nerve—with the police hunting after him—"

"He's got lots of nerve! I half-expected to be followed from the school—and now I'm sure of it. Plenty of lonely stretches of road between here and London—for a hold-up!"

"Oh, my hat!" ejaculated Nugent.

"And now we're through Lantham, we're coming to one!" added the Bounder. "We're all right, for two or three miles on—but after that, I fancy that if we let that chap come up, we shouldn't shake him off very easily."

"Rot!" said Bunter. "Don't you be nerry, old chap!"

"You fat, blithering owl—"

"Oh, really, Smithy! If that's the way you talk to a guest you've invited for Christmas—"

The Bounder suppressed his feelings. He stood looking back at the following car.

Harry Wharton & Co. were looking very grave.

There could be little doubt now that the Napier was in pursuit. That meant that it was driven by the kidnapper.

It could hardly be Count Zero's object to follow Vernon-Smith to London. He could easily have found the millionaire's house in London, if he liked, without shadowing the junior home from school, and he could know nothing, of course, of the Bounder's destination being Polpelly. Obviously it was a "hold-up" that was intended.

The Italian was only waiting till a solitary stretch of road was reached, where interruption was not likely, and now that the juniors had passed Lantham, such a stretch lay ahead of them.

Signor Zero, for some reason best known to himself, was determined to obtain possession of Polpelly, which Mr. Vernon-Smith refused to sell, and the juniors knew that he had attempted to kidnap the Bounder, in order to coerce the millionaire by threatening his son's safety.

Mr. Vernon-Smith had bought Polpelly years ago, as a "spec," on the possibility of tin existing there. It was not a great distance from the Cornish tin mines.

The count's eagerness to buy the place had convinced the millionaire that he was after a rich tin mine, and had somehow obtained information that the metal was there. For which reason nothing would have induced Samuel Vernon-Smith to sell.

The Bounder inclined to the belief that it was the legend of the sunken Spanish galleon in Polpelly Cove, and its lost chests of doubloons, that caused the count's interest in the place.

But whatever his reason might be, there was no doubt that Zero was determined to carry out his plans, and that he would stop at very little.

Smithy was grinning back through

the window at the pursuing car; but the other fellows could see nothing at which to grin. Excitement was all very well, but they had no chance of resistance against a desperate kidnapper with an automatic in his hand.

"Better have gone by train, I think!" remarked Nugent.

"Too late to think of that now!" said Bob. "But—"

"We're all right!" said the Bounder. "This car can easily do seventy. We're letting that blighter keep up—but we're going to walk away from him as soon as we choose."

"I say, we're jolly well not going to do seventy!" yelled Billy Bunter, in alarm. "Tain't safe."

"You can get out and walk," suggested the Bounder.

"Beast!"

"Better put it on, Smithy!" said Harry. "We're just on a stretch of road where there isn't a house for five miles, and there's precious little traffic about."

Vernon - Smith nodded and spoke to the chauffeur. A wayside house, the last building for many miles, flashed by. Now the road ran between high hedges, with rolling pasture-land stretching on either side. There was not a vehicle to be seen, save the schoolboys' car, and the blue Napier behind. If Count Zero was looking for a safe spot for a hold-up, this was it. Harry Wharton & Co. could not help feeling a little uneasy as they peered back. But the Bounder was grinning.

The car leaped into rapid speed. Faster and faster it flew, to an accompaniment of startled squeaks from Billy Bunter.

Fast behind roared the Napier. There was hardly any concealment about the pursuit now. The man in the peaked cap and goggles was going all out to overtake the car ahead.

He had a good car, too; and he was a good driver. For several minutes he hung on, keeping pace with the big Rolls as it rushed. But the Bounder's car was faster, and the distance widened.

"Ow! Wow!" gasped Bunter. "Stop! Slow down! We shall all be killed! Suppose we got a skid! Stop, you beasts! Lemme gerrouit! Oh crikey!"

The Rolls roared on.

The Bounder's eyes were dancing. He was in his element now. They were doing a good sixty—on a slippery road! The element of danger was certainly not left out! Harry Wharton & Co. had plenty of pluck, but they did not share the utter recklessness of the Bounder. Hedges and trees streamed by, melting into one another in the wild speed.

Fast behind came the Napier, but dropping off. Foot by foot, almost inch

by inch, the space between the cars widened.

The Bounder laughed gleefully. "I knew we could beat him!" he chuckled. "All serene, old beans! We're all right!"

"If we don't shoot off the road and land on our necks in a field!" grunted Johnny Bull.

"Yaroooh!"

"My hat! We're moving!" gasped Bob Cherry, as a staring cyclist appeared for a split second and vanished.



Everybody at Greyfriars contributed to this feature, but space forced me to cut it down to a chosen few.—Ed.

Harry Wharton:

Here's to you all! My Christmas toast
Is full of health and reason:
May everything you like the most
Be yours this festive season.

Bob Cherry:

A happy, healthy holiday
Be yours, and if you stow away
Sufficient grub on Christmas Day,
You'll have it—that's all I can say!

Johnny Bull:

Here's a Merry Christmas!
Here's a happy time!
Can't think of anything
Else that will rhyme!

Burree Singh:

May Christmas bring new joys along your
pathfulness,
For what does honoured English proverb
tell?
That Christmas is like Bunter Sahib's
bathfulness,
It comes but once a year—so spend
it well!

Lord Mauleverer:

I hope that Christmas makes you glad,
But if it makes you restive,
Try sleeping all the time, begad!
That's my idea of festive!

Horace James Coker:

A heap of fun to evvrywun,
Yes, evvrywun, a heap of fun,
Of fun, a heap, a heap of fun,
Of fun, of fun, of fun, of fun!
(P.S. Coker forgot to mention that he
wishes you all a heap of fun.)

Frank Nugent:

Bay Christbastide gald you a wealth of
good cheer,
Good health to sustaid you throughout
the Dew Year;
Thad's all I cad wish you; I'b goig to bed,
I'be god such—Atishoo!—a gold id by head!

Billy Bunter:

May you have turkees, ham and beef,
Good appetites and helthy teef! (Groooh!—
Ed.)
Sit down to dinner, and I trussed
You'll eet like me, until you bust!

And Lastly:

May boys be surrounded
By buckets of water,
And pushed in and drowned—
From GOSLING, THE PORTER!

"The movefulness is terrific."

"Stop!" yelled Bunter. "You silly asses, there ain't any danger—we ain't being followed, and if we are I'll protect you! I say—"

Bang!

"That a tyre?" gasped Bob.

They stared back. The sudden bang had come from the Napier. A burst tyre at that speed would have stopped Count Zero's pursuit effectually—and probably for ever!

But it was not a tyre.

Bang!

"He's shooting!" yelled Nugent.

There was a crash of a bullet on the back of the schoolboys' car! Even the Bounder ceased to grin. He had not counted on such desperate measures as that.

He set his teeth.

"By gad! He's shooting at the wheels!" he breathed. "If he gets a tyre—oh crumbs!"

Bang! roared the automatic again. The bullet barely missed a whirling wheel. The juniors caught their breath.

They were dropping the Napier fast. Count Zero had no chance of running them down, and the solitary stretch of road was disappearing at dizzy speed. He had one chance of getting them—stopping them with a burst tyre—and such a stoppage meant that the car would go headlong at such a speed—the desperado was risking the life of every fellow in the car.

"Stop!" shrieked Bunter.

But nobody else thought of stopping. It was neck or nothing now—and they went through with it. Good shooting was not easy in the circumstances, and they hoped for the best.

Bang!

Then the Rolls rocked round a curve, and the Napier disappeared.

A couple of minutes later they slowed, coming into a villago. Beyond, they picked up speed again. But they looked back, without seeing anything more of the Napier. There were houses along the road, and a town ahead. Count Zero had lost his chance.

"Chucked it!" said Bob Cherry, in great relief. "By gum! A little excitement like that goes a long way, Smithy!"

"Oh dear!" gasped Bunter. "I shall be jolly glad when we get to London! Oh crikey!"

Vernon - Smith looked back a good many times as the Rolls ate up the miles. But the Napier was

not seen again, and the Bounder's companions, at least, were glad that they were done with it.

Under a frosty, steely sky, the car was threading the London traffic at last.

"I say, this ain't the way, Smithy!" squeaked Billy Bunter, blinking out through his big spectacles. "I say, that silly ass is heading for Waterloo. What's he heading for Waterloo for?"

"Train to Devonshire, fathead!"

"Oh, don't be a silly ass!" hooted Bunter. "Look here, Smithy, stop trying to pull my leg! I want some grub!"

"You'll get some grub on the train—restaurant car!"

"Yah!"

Even yet, Billy Bunter was not to be convinced. Even when the party stopped at the station and their baggage was carried in by the porters, the fat Owl still seemed to have the impression that Vernon-Smith was trying to pull his fat leg, and keep it up till the latest possible moment.

Even when they took their places in the train, the fat junior stood blinking at them through his big spectacles, with an unbelieving blink.

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"I say, you fellows—" he howled. "Coming?" called out the Bouncer, with a chuckle.

Bunter came!

He was puzzled, perplexed, and annoyed. But there was comfort in the restaurant car! In that car, Bunter found solid comfort—lots of it, and very solid!

THE FOURTH CHAPTER.

The Phantom of Polpelly!

JOHAN REDWING lifted his head from his pillow, and listened. The old house in the coomb was full of sounds at night. More than half of the ancient building was in dismantled ruins—broken old stone walls, shattered slates, rotting balks of old timber. But the old oak hall, and the adjacent rooms, were intact, and since Tom's father had been there, great log fires had roared in every available fireplace to dispel damp. All through the dark winter nights the fires were banked up with logs, and a pleasant warmth spread through the old mansion.

Down the coomb, where Polpelly Cove gave anchorage from the wild Atlantic, the breakers roared. Even in calm, summer weather, Polpelly House echoed incessantly with the sound of the sea. In the winter, the boom came loud and heavy on the gigantic rocks that fronted the ocean. But the sailor's ears were so accustomed to the sound that he hardly noticed it.

Through old stone passages the wind whistled, and every now and then some stone or slate would be dislodged and come rattling down. Ancient oak wainscots creaked, rusty hinges growled, windows groaned. To all those sounds John had grown used in the days he had spent at Polpelly, waiting for his son to arrive with his Greyfriars friends.

They were due on the morrow. He had heard from Tom that the party were coming straight down to Devonshire when the school broke up, and passing a night at Barnstaple, where they left the railway. Some time in the frosty morning they would arrive.

All was ready for them. Mr. Vernon-Smith, surprised and rather amused by his son's fancy for spending the Christmas holidays at Polpelly, had telephoned lavish orders to local tradesmen, and John Redwing had opened his eyes wide at the stacks and stacks of supplies that came in from Pilverton, six miles inland—the nearest town. Every day, country carts had laboured down the rough road that ran along the top of the cliffs. But no cart could come quite near Polpelly House.

Built on the steep side of the coomb, on vast, ancient foundations of stone, the house was approached by steps from the path; old cracked mossy stone steps cut in the side of the coomb. Past the steps, the path wound on down the coomb to the cove and the sea—and on either side of the deep coomb, vast cliffs rose against the sky. Except where it opened from the Atlantic, the cove was shut in by high rocks, honeycombed with caves—some high and dry, others flooded by the tides.

Level ground there was little. It was hardly possible to take a dozen steps anywhere without stepping up or stepping down.

John Redwing liked the place. It was rather like his old home at Hawkscliff on the Kent coast, only on a scale a dozen times larger, wilder, and more rugged. The sailor, home from sea for Christmas, was quite satisfied with

his quarters, and he had no doubt that Tom would like it, but he was rather puzzled by a wealthy fellow like Herbert Vernon-Smith coming there for the holidays.

It was lonely enough. The Polpelly estate extended many miles inland, wild and desolate moorland, now sheeted with snow. No other habitation was in sight—not even the smoke of one. Except for the tradesmen's carts coming and going, John saw nobody there but old Dan'l—Daniel Heard, deaf as a post, who had lived for years in the old house as caretaker. Old Dan'l talked little and heard less, and John exchanged few words with him. Old Dan'l could cook—he had been a ship's cook in his younger days—and he was civil and obliging, but his remarks were generally limited to "Hey?"—or a grunt.

John Redwing was a sound sleeper; he had slept in a hammock in a gale by the Horn, in his time. The roar of the breakers down the coomb did not disturb his slumbers, or the clatter of the December wind among the ruins of the dismantled wing of the old house. But he had awakened now, and he sat up, listening intently.

He occupied one of the rooms opening off the great hall, a vast apartment, with walls of oak almost black with age. The deep, old windows had wooden shutters, every one of which creaked and groaned in the winter wind.

His door was open, letting in a glow from the fire that burned in the vast ancient fireplace in the hall. From the fire a glimmer of light showed the doorway, and on the doorway John's eyes fixed.

Something had awakened him—he felt as if a hand had touched him in his slumber. But that surely was impossible. There was no one else in the house but old Dan'l, fast asleep in his room at the end of a passage; and old Dan'l was certainly not the man to wander about at night. Old Dan'l never opened his eyes when they were closed till dawn; and it fell to the sailor to see that fresh logs were added to the fires to keep them burning. Yet John Redwing had a strange feeling that a hand had touched his brow as he slept, and he awoke startled. Now, sitting up on the camp-bed, he stared at the open doorway on the hall into the dim glow of the firelight beyond—and wondered if he was dreaming.

A figure stood there.

It was not old Dan'l; it was nothing like the stumpy old man whose mahogany face was covered to the eyes by shaggy beard and whiskers. It was such a figure as John had never seen before, except in pictures. There was such a picture, dim with age, on the wall in the hall of the dead-and-gone sea-captain Squire of Polpelly!

The figure was clad in doublet and trunk hose, with high sea-boots to the thigh. A short cloak was flung over the shoulder; a helmet was on the head. The right hand rested on the hip; the left on the pommel of a sword. The face, with the pointed beard and the moustache of Tudor times, was ghastly in its pallor—like the face of the dead. And it was the face of the portrait!

From the dead whiteness of the face the eyes gleamed and glittered, catching the gleam of the firelight.

Not a sound came from the strange figure. It stood there motionless, silent, the glittering eyes fixed on the startled sailor. As the fire died down, it almost vanished in shadow; then, as

the flame leaped up, it was thrown into bold relief.

Sitting in the bed, John Redwing gazed at it, passed his hand across his eyes, and gazed again. He was dreaming—surely he was dreaming?—that the old Squire of Polpelly had stepped down from the dingy gilt frame of his portrait in the hall. But the figure was still there—it had not moved.

In the days that he had spent at Polpelly, getting ready for the arrival of the Greyfriars party, John had heard a good deal about the phantom of the old squire of Elizabeth's time. He had paid more than one visit to the fishing village round the cliff, a mile from Polpelly; and in the village of Crewey everyone knew of the phantom—and some, indeed, had seen it on dark nights—or, at all events, fancied that they had. Except old Dan'l, who was glad of a snug port to anchor in, in his old age, and who gave no heed to any spirits except those contained in a black bottle, not a man in the neighbourhood would willingly have passed a night under the roof of Polpelly!

John Redwing was not without his share of a sailor's superstition. But he had given little attention to the story of the ghost; he had been too busy with more material matters since he had been there. Now he sat up in his bed, staring at the figure with his eyes starting and the blood running cold to his heart.

A long, long minute passed. Still thinking, or hoping, that it was a wild fancy, John Redwing gazed, and gazed, expecting the apparition to disappear. But it remained there in the doorway, fixed and motionless, the dead white face staring at him.

"Douse my deadlights!" muttered the sailor faintly.

Was it trickery? But who in that lonely place could be playing such a prank? How could anyone have gained admittance to the house? Every window was shuttered; every door was shut and bolted. John Redwing was a brave man, but he sat as if in a spell—petrified, frozen.

The figure stirred at last. It moved without a sound, and passed from the doorway. Only the low red glow of the firelight met John's eyes as he stared.

The spell was broken! He leaped from his bed, hurriedly threw on a coat, and grasped an oaken cudgel. With his teeth set, he stepped swiftly through the doorway into the firelit hall.

The figure was still in sight. It was passing slowly through another doorway that gave way on a stone passage. Dim, but visible, he saw it in the glimmering firelight.

The chill of dread of the unknown, the unearthly, was still on the sailor. But, with set teeth, the oaken cudgel gripped in his hand, he strode across the floor towards the phantom figure. It passed from sight into the dark passage beyond.

That passage led to the ruined wing of the house. But it was closed by a massive door, bolted and barred. That door, John knew, could not be open, or the wind would have been howling in. There was no other way out. If this phantom figure was a trickster, he had him cornered.

The stone passage was dark. He picked up an ancient iron candlestick, and lighted the candle at the fire.

With the candlestick held high in his left hand, the cudgel gripped in his right, John Redwing followed through



"Smithy!" shrieked Wharton, as the great boulder came rattling and bounding down the steep. "Look out, Smithy!" Quick on the uptake, the Bouncer made a swift, long leap, clear of the cliff. A second later, the boulder thundered harmlessly by!

the arched doorway into the old dark passage.

For a second he had a glimpse of the phantom figure, fleeting in the flickering candlelight. Then it vanished.

His heart beat in great thumps. But with iron resolution he strode down the stone passage to the massive door at the end. It was still closed. It was barred and bolted on the inside, as he had left it.

The candle shook and flickered in his hand as he stared round him. The stone passage was empty—but for himself. He was alone—the phantom had disappeared! The sweat ran down the sailorman's bronzed face. His step was a little uncertain as he stepped back into the firelit hall.

Outside, the wild December wind wailed; the boom of the Atlantic breakers came echoing up the rugged coomb. John Redwing set the candlestick on the huge old mantelpiece, and with a hand that shook, piled logs on the fire. He did not return to his bed. The winter dawn, creeping over the snowy moorland, and glimmering down into the coomb, found him still wakeful and watching.

THE FIFTH CHAPTER.

In Glorious Devon!

"FAR?" asked Billy Bunter.

"About thirty miles, as the crow flies," answered the Bouncer. "Only we shan't fly like the jolly old crow. It's fifty or sixty by road!"

"Well, we shall get in all right for lunch," said Bunter. "No hurry!"

"Leave here at nine," said Smithy.

"I shan't have finished brokker by then!"

"We leave at nine, all the same!"

"Beast!"

It was quite a cheery party that gathered to breakfast at the Barum Hotel. The morning was clear and frosty, with a bright sunshine, and all the Greyfriars fellows were in good spirits. Bunter did not like turning out early—he called eight early—but an extensive and substantial breakfast rewarded him for making the effort.

From Barnstaple, the party were going on by car, which was ordered for nine; but as Bunter, by a quarter to nine, had eaten only enough for three fellows, it hardly looked as if he would be finished on time.

He bucked up, parking foodstuffs at a great rate. The fat Owl had been surprised and perturbed by the railway journey into the West. He had been astonished to find himself in Barnstaple. He had to realise that the party were not going to fix their quarters in London.

But he had worked it out to his satisfaction that the location was going to be one of Mr. Vernon-Smith's country houses, of which the millionaire had at least five or six. A country house Christmas was all right—Bunter was disposed to be satisfied with the prospect. He would have preferred the theatres and pantomimes of town; still, he was going to have a good time in the well-appointed

country house of a millionaire. He still refused to believe that the party were really heading for such a place as had been described to him in Study No. 4 at Greyfriars. That, in Bunter's opinion, was absolute rot—merely a yarn to make him fed-up! Smithy had spun him that yarn in return for the snowball in Study No. 1—so Bunter considered. The astute Owl was not to be taken in so easily as all that!

Sharp at nine the Greyfriars party went out to the car. Bunter was not finished, but he followed the other fellows. He had a suspicion that the party would not have mourned deeply if he had been left behind. Which would have left Bunter in a difficulty; for he did not know the address of the country house for which he supposed Smithy was heading.

"What's the place called, Smithy?" he asked, as the car, packed with cheery schoolboys, rolled out of Barnstaple.

"I've told you a dozen times, fathead—Polpelly!"

"Oh, really, Smithy—I'm getting a bit sick of that yarn!" said the Owl of the Remove peevishly. "I say, is your father there?"

"No fear!" The Bouncer laughed at the idea of the millionaire camping for Christmas at Polpelly. "Redwing's father is, though!"

"Gammon!" snapped Bunter. "A tough old tarry-brecks of a sailorman at a country house party—rats!"

"You can kick him out of the car,"

Reddy, if you like!" said Vernon-Smith. "As he's my guest, I feel bound not to kick him; and I'm going to stick to that as long as I can. But any other fellow here is welcome to kick him as far as Land's End, if so disposed!"

"Let's!" said Bob Cherry.

"I don't mind the fat ass!" said Redwing. "But don't be uncivil when you meet my father, Bunter, or I certainly shall kick you."

"I say, you fellows, is old Redwing really there?" asked Bunter, blinking round at the juniors through his big spectacles.

"Mr. Redwing is really there, you fat frump!" said Harry Wharton. "He's been there for days getting ready for us."

"I suppose the servants have the place ready, haven't they?" demanded Bunter. "What about the staff of servants, Smithy?"

"The staff of servants consists of one deaf old sportsman named Daniel Heard!" grinned the Bounder. "He was a ship's cook once, and can cook—but he will do precious little else. We shall make our own beds—"

"What?" gasped Bunter.

"And wash our own necks!" said Bob Cherry. "You won't, of course—you never do!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You beasts—trying to pull my leg!" gasped Bunter. "I know I jolly well wouldn't make a bed—"

"Any more than you would wash your neck?"

"Beast!"

Billy Bunter frowned over his spectacles, as he blinked out of the car at glorious Devon. He still did not believe in Polpelly—but he was beginning to feel uneasy.

Miles glided fast under the rolling wheels; and all the fellows were feeling eager. They had glimpses every now and then of the vast Atlantic, stretching wide and blue under the wintry sunshine to the infinity of the west. Roads gave place to deep, steep lanes; and the pace slackened. There was

plenty of mud, and there was snow banked in the hedges and trees. The car ran at last across a wide expanse of moorland, beyond which the line of cliffs barred the blue of the sea.

"Getting near it?" asked Frank Nugent.

"Only a few miles now," said Vernon-Smith. "This moor is part of the Polpelly estate. There's said to be tin in the earth here—the pater's going to develop it some day—if any! That's what he thinks our spaghetti friend is after in wanting to buy the place."

"Ten to one on the jolly old galleon!" said Bob.

"Rot!" said Bunter. "How could an Italian know anything about a galleon?"

"It was an Italian ship in the Spanish Armada, called the San Pietro!" answered Vernon-Smith. "The squire of Polpelly sailed with Drake, and helped to beat the Armada. He captured the San Pietro, and brought it home to Polpelly Cove! It's sunk there somewhere; with yards and yards of doubloons on board! So they say, anyhow."

"Bosh!" said Bunter.

"And the jolly old squire lost the doubloons, and his ghost is still hunting for them!" said Bob. "All we've got to do is to spot the giddy doubloons, and the poor old spook will get a rest. He must need it, after rooting about for three hundred and fifty years!"

"Rubbish!" said Bunter.

"And there's caves that the smugglers used to use," said the Bounder. "The old Squires of Polpelly were all smugglers, I believe. The family petered out about fifty years ago, and the place has gone to rack and ruin since. Hallo! Is that it?"

The car came to a halt, and the Barnstaple driver looked round at his passengers.

"Polpelly, sir!" he said. "Can't get the car nearer."

"Far to walk?" asked Vernon-Smith.

"The house is about a quarter of a mile from the road, sir, down the coomb," answered the driver. "Trades-

men's carts get part of the way, I think. But everything has to be carried the last bit."

"I say, you fellows—"

"Hop out, Bunter!"

"Look here, what are we stopping here for?" demanded Bunter peevishly. "We can see scenery any time, if that's what you want. We don't want to be late in for lunch."

"Isn't he a jolly old doubting Thomas?" chuckled Bob. "Leave him sitting in the car till he gets it into his fat head that we're really going to Polpelly."

From the road a steep path led into the coomb, deep and green, with ridges of snow on the rugged slopes of its sides. Far away smoke could be seen rising against the sky, doubtless from the ancient chimneys of Polpelly House. But from the road the house itself could not be seen.

Baggage was landed by the roadside to be fetched down later. Each of the Greyfriars fellows picked up his own suitcase. The crowds of menials in Bunter's imagination had no existence outside that fat imagination; but that did not worry the juniors very much, they were prepared to look after themselves.

Bunter sat in the car, blinking at them.

"I say, you fellows—" he squeaked, as Herbert Vernon-Smith, paying him no further attention, started to walk down the path into the coomb.

"Come on, Bunter!" said Redwing good-naturedly.

"If you're going wandering about I'll wait in the car!" snorted Bunter. "But look here, don't be long—see?"

"We're not coming back to the car, fathead!" hooted Johnny Bull. "The car's going back to Barnstaple."

"Yah!"

"If you sit there, Bunter, you'll go back to Barnstaple, too!" said Harry Wharton, laughing. "Better hop out!"

"Beast!"

"Well, please yourself, old fat man!" And the captain of the Remove followed Vernon-Smith.

"My esteemed idiotic Bunter—" murmured Hurree Jamset Ram Singh.

"Rats to you!" snorted Bunter.

Hurree Singh grinned a dusky grin and followed the other fellows. Carrying their suitcases, and leaving a little pile of luggage by the roadside, the juniors walked away—leaving Bunter sitting in the car in solitary state. The fat Owl breathed wrath.

The Barnstaple driver, apparently puzzled by Bunter's antics, came to the door of the car, touching his cap.

"You going back to Barum, sir?" he asked.

"What the dickens do you mean?" yapped Bunter. "What's Barum?"

"Barnstaple, sir."

"If you mean Barnstaple why the thump can't you say Barnstaple?" snapped Bunter. "I'm waiting here till those beasts come back."

The Devonshire man looked at him.

"They're not coming back, sir! They're going down to Polpelly."

"Rot!"

"Well, the car's going back!" said the driver. "I suppose you can stay in it if you like! No business of mine."

He took his seat and backed and turned the car. Billy Bunter blinked at him, and blinked round at the line of boyish figures going down the coomb. At long, long last conviction was borne in on the mind of the Owl of the Remove. He squeaked angrily.

"Here! Stop! Lemme get out!"

Bunter got out. He stood, frowning—

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and the car started off across the moor on its return to distant Barnstaple.

"Beasts!" gasped Bunter.

He did not pick up his bag. Bunter did not believe in carrying his own luggage. Leaving it with the other left luggage by the roadside, he started in pursuit of the Greyfriars fellows, and followed them down into the coomb.

THE SIXTH CHAPTER.

The Haunted House!

"**A**HOY!" roared Bob Cherry.

John Redwing stood in the old stone gateway of Polpelly House. He looked down at the juniors and waved his hand.

The path ran along the bottom of the coomb. Polpelly House stood high above it. Huge steps cut in the earth, each of them about fifteen feet by nine or ten, led up to the old gateway. They had been paved with stone in far-off days, but the stone was cracked and broken in many places and thick with mud and moss. Behind the house rose the steep side of the coomb.

The Greyfriars fellows looked up at the house with great interest. Beyond it the coomb ran for a quarter of a mile to the sea.

The end, walled with gigantic cliffs, was like an open doorway on the shining Atlantic. A sheltered cove extended some little distance in from the sea.

John Redwing came down the steep steps and met the party at the foot.

"Expecting us this morning, father?" asked Tom Redwing, with a bright smile.

"Ay, ay, Tom!" answered the sailorman.

He shook hands with the party one after another. He had met all the schoolboys before, and they all liked and respected Tom's father. It seemed to them that there was a cloud of troubled thought on his bronzed face. But his manner was cheerful.

"Made yourself comfortable here, Mr. Redwing?" asked Vernon-Smith, as he shook the sailorman's horny hand.

"Ay, ay, sir!" answered John. "It's a lonely place—lonelier than Hawkscliff, I reckon, but that don't worry me. But I'm surprised at you young gentlemen liking it for a holiday."

"We're going to have a ripping time here," said the Bounder. "We may all be rolling in wealth by the end of the hols."

"How's that, sir?" asked John, in astonishment.

"You haven't seen anything of a sunken galleon while you've been here?" grinned Bob Cherry.

John Redwing grinned.

"Oh, that!" he said. "No, sir; but if a galleon went down in the cove, in the reign of Elizabeth, there won't be much left for any man to see. It must have broken up hundreds of years ago."

"Um!" said Bob. "I suppose it

must have! No chance of seeing the masts sticking up at low water, what?"

"Not much, sir!" chuckled John.

"The muchfulness will probably not be terrific!" remarked Hurree Jamset Ram Singh. "But the esteemed doubloons will not have broken up. If any!" he added, with a cheery, dusky grin.

"Well, a lot of the ships in the Armada had treasure on board," said Harry Wharton. "But even if we don't find the doubloons, we may spot the ghost!"

"Seen anything of the spook, Mr. Redwing?" asked Nugent, laughing.

John Redwing gave a start. The expression that came over his bronzed face made the juniors exchange curious glances.

"I'd rather not speak of that, sir!"

Within the gateway was an extensive courtyard, on which the mansion fronted. There was a high, arched stone porch, and, within, the great door stood wide.

The juniors tramped in, and dumped down their bags on the oaken floor. They looked round them with the keenest interest. Deep windows let in the sunlight, and in the great fireplace, which almost filled the upper end of the hall, a gigantic log fire burned and blazed.

Old oak settles were round the hall; there was a great table of ancient mahogany; dim old pictures on the walls, and trophies of weapons and armour. The old house was as it had been left by the last of the Polpelly family, and it looked as if the old squire had made few changes in its appointments since Tudor times.

"Topping old show!" declared Bob enthusiastically.

"The topfulness is terrific!"

"If there was such a thing as a giddy ghost, this is the very place for it!" remarked Frank Nugent.

"Yes, rather!"

"The jolly old ghost ought to show up, to give us a welcome, really," remarked Bob Cherry. "Hallo, hallo, hallo!" Bob gave a cheery roar, which echoed like thunder through the old hall. "Ghost at home? What?"

"Fathead!" said Harry Wharton, laughing. "Why—what—what—"

He broke off, with a sudden jump.

"What the dooce—" gasped the Bounder.

As the echo of Bob Cherry's roar died away a sound came through the silence of the old house. It was a groan!

Whence it came the juniors could not tell. But every one of them heard it, and gave a start, and stared quickly round.

John Redwing caught his breath, and his bronzed face paled a little. The strange, eerie sound died away. There was deep silence.

"What the thump—" muttered Johnny Bull.

"You fellows heard that? Was it the wind?"

"The wind makes queer sounds in the nooks and crannies of an old place like this," said Harry Wharton; but his voice was involuntarily hushed as he spoke.

"That wasn't the wind!" said Vernon-Smith. His brow knitted, and his eyes gleamed. "It's some fool pulling our leg! Who's here, Mr. Redwing?"

"Only old Dan'l, sir."

"Then old Dan'l is a practical joker, and I'll give him a tip not to play his jokes off on us!" said the Bounder savagely.

"Hallo, hallo, hallo! Is that the sportsman?" asked Bob, as a figure appeared at a doorway in the old oak wall.

It was that of an old man, with a wooden leg, and a face so covered by

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Christmas Greetings

To All MAGNET READERS



From: **BILLY BUNTER**

said John abruptly. "But—but if you boys took my advice, you'd turn your backs on this old place."

"We'll watch it!" grinned the Bounder. "Come on, you men! Where's Bunter?"

"I believe he stayed in the car," said Harry. "May have gone back to Barnstaple in it."

"Too much luck!" said Smithy, shaking his head. "Anyhow, let's get in. I'm rather keen to give the old show the once-over."

"Same here."

"The samefulness is terrific."

The juniors tramped up the mossy old steps to the gateway. John following them in silence. Tom Redwing cast a rather unquiet glance, every now and then, at his father. It was easy for him to see that something had happened at Polpelly which had disturbed the sailorman, and of which he was unwilling to speak. But he asked no questions.

shaggy beard and whiskers that it was difficult to make out his features.

"That's Daniel Heard, sir," said John.

The old ship's cook advanced into the hall, touching his forelock, and ducking his head to the visitors. The Bounder strode towards him. That the groan that had answered Bob's thoughtless hail to the ghost was a piece of trickery, the Bounder had no doubt; and as old Dan'l was the only man about the place, he was sure that he had no farther to look for the trickster.

"Look here, my man," rapped the Bounder, "you may be a funny merchant, but you're not here to play tricks, see?"

"Hey?" said the old cook. He put his hand to his ear. "Ay, ay, sir! It's cold weather, and going to blow."

"Can't you hear me?" roared the Bounder.

"Hey?"

"He's deaf, sir," said John.

"I know he's deaf," growled Vernon-Smith; "but, deaf or not, he's not going to play idiotic tricks on us!"

"I don't think he did, sir!" said John Redwing mildly.

"Who did, then?" snapped Vernon-Smith. "Somebody did!"

John Redwing did not answer that question. But Tom noticed that he gave a quick, uneasy glance about him—listening, as if in expectation, or fear, of hearing a repetition of the strange, unearthly sound that had startled the visitors. But the sound was not repeated.

"Look here, you old ass—" exclaimed the Bounder, with an angry stare at Dan'l's bearded visage.

"Hey?"

"If you play any more silly tricks—"

"Ay, ay, sir, you'll be hungry, and I'll have it ready in a jiff!" said the ship's cook; and, touching his forelock again, he went back down the passage to the kitchen.

"That old bean doesn't look much like a practical joker, Smithy," remarked Harry Wharton. "I don't think he was pulling our leg."

"Who, then?" snapped the Bounder.

"I give that one up! Perhaps it was the wind, after all—"

"It wasn't!"

Wharton made no rejoinder to that. The Bounder was annoyed and angry, and it was judicious to allow the subject to drop.

And dropped it was; and the Greyfriars fellows scattered over the old house, exploring it from end to end with great keenness, and soon forgot the incident.

THE SEVENTH CHAPTER.

Unseen!

"BEASTS!" mumbled Billy Bunter. Bunter was tired.

Having covered half the quarter of a mile from the upper road down to Polpelly House, Bunter, naturally, was tired.

Undoubtedly it was rather rough going. At a short distance from the road the ground dipped abruptly into the coomb. The path was rugged and broken, slippery in places with snow, and strewn with stones. It looked as if about a century had passed since that path had received any attention, and wind and weather had not improved it in that space of time.

Billy Bunter slipped on patches of

snow, stumbled on stones, lurched over rugged dips—puffed and blew, and felt more and more deeply injured every moment.

This, it seemed, was the show to which he had been asked for the Christmas hols, or to which, to put it more accurately, he had asked himself!

It was no leg-pull, after all—it was true! That ass, Smithy, who could have passed the holidays in a millionaire's mansion in the West End of London, had come to this awful place—apparently just to annoy Bunter! There was no doubt that Bunter was annoyed!

He was tempted to throw up the whole thing and clear off. But the car had gone back to Barnstaple now, and there was, so far as Bunter could see, no other means of transport. And he was getting hungry! The beasts had interrupted his breakfast at Barnstaple before he had eaten enough for six.

He plugged on, angry and irritated and full of deep grievance. Then he stopped to rest.

There was a little stone lodge in the opening of the coomb. It was more than half in ruins. There was no door in the old stone doorway; fragments of mouldy shutters hung from the windows; half the roof lay piled in the interior.

So steep was the coomb that the building was half-sunk in the earth,

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December 20th.

which had been excavated for it. The roof, at the back, almost touched the abrupt slope behind. Dismal and dismantled as it looked, Bunter rolled into the doorway, looking for something to sit down on. He did not want to sit down to rest on damp earth—and he had to sit down.

There was a worn stone seat by the doorway, and the fat junior plumped down into it. It was a relief to sit down, at all events, and rest his fat little legs after the scramble down the rugged path.

"Beasts!" repeated Bunter.

Sitting there, blinking through his spectacles, he could see the opposite side of the coomb, rising steep to the sky. It was thick with frozen thickets and bracken, glimmering with frost in the wintry sun. Polpelly House was not yet in sight, and Billy Bunter felt as solitary and deserted as Robinson Crusoe on his island.

The other fellows had reached Polpelly long since, but Bunter was in no hurry to get in. There was no occasion for hurry—unless he had been assured that a meal would be ready!

"Putrid place!" murmured Bunter. "Absolutely rotten! I jolly well shan't stick here! Beasts!"

He had rested for about ten minutes, and was beginning to think of resuming the weary scramble down the coomb, when there was a sound in the little building behind him.

He blinked round.

It had not occurred to him, when he stopped there, that there might be anyone on the spot. The lodge evidently belonged to Polpelly House, and had no doubt been occupied by a lodge-keeper in the days of the ancient squires of

Polpelly; but clearly it was a century, at least, since the place could have been inhabited.

But someone was there among the masses of fallen walls that filled almost the whole of the interior, overgrown with ivy and moss and frosty, creeping plants.

Bunter distinctly heard a movement, and he blinked round curiously. One of those silly asses exploring the place, he supposed—they were just the sort of fat-heads to root about a frozen ruin on a cold day!

In the shadowy interior, he caught a glimpse of a moving form. A low, startled exclamation, instantly cut short, came to his ears. But the form, whatever it was, backed into cover instantly, before he had fairly seen it.

Bunter snorted.

"You silly ass! I saw you! I jolly well know you're there! Is that you, Bob Cherry, you fathead?"

No reply.

"Is it you, Smithy, you beast?"

There was no answer. Bunter snorted again. He had no doubt that one of the fellows had stopped there to explore the old ruined lodge, and, having spotted him, was trying to pull his fat leg.

"Think I don't know you're there, you silly ass?" hooted Bunter. "Can't you show yourself, you dummy? Yah!"

He stood in the old doorway, blinking into the building. He knew that someone was there; there was no doubt in his fat mind about that. Who could it be but one of the juniors playing tricks on him?

Bunter's eyes gleamed behind his big spectacles.

He stepped back and gathered up a double handful of snow, where the wind had banked it up thickly against the old stone wall. Having kneaded a snowball he stepped into the lodge. If a silly ass was hiding there to startle him, Bunter was going to startle that silly ass, instead—with a sudden snowball!

He tramped into the lodge, picking his way among the piled rubble, his eyes wide open behind his spectacles for the hidden practical joker.

Stumbling over broken, slippery slates, the fat junior lurched and fell on his knees.

There was a sudden sound of movement.

Before the Owl of Greyfriars could rise, or even turn his head, a sudden grasp was laid on the back of his neck. He squeaked wildly.

That iron grasp forced him down, and his fat face was pressed into the snow and mud among the shattered slates.

"Urrrrrgh!" gurgled Bunter.

He felt a knee grinding into the back of his overcoat. He spluttered in mud and snow.

"Wurrgh! Beast! Leggo!" gasped Bunter. "Lemme gerrup, you rotter! Bob Cherry, you beast—Yarooooogh! Urrrrgh!"

Suddenly he was released.

He rolled and squirmed, and sat up, dizzily, setting his muddy spectacles straight on a muddy nose.

"Urrgh! Beast! Wurrgh!" gurgled Bunter.

From outside the lodge came a sound of rapid running feet! Whoever it was that had downed Bunter had dodged out and fled, unseen, while the fat junior's face was still in the mud.

The running footsteps died away in a few seconds. Billy Bunter staggered up. He was gasping with fury.

"Beast!" he roared.

He wiped his spectacles and set them on his nose again. Then he rolled to the doorway and blinked out.

No one was in sight. His unseen assailant had vanished swiftly. Billy Bunter looked this way and that way, like Moses of old; but there was no man!

"Beast!" he howled. One of the fellows, of course, had lurked in the lodge and played that rotten joke on him! Bunter had no doubt of that!

With a fat face crimson with wrath and considerably spotted with mud, he rolled out of the old stone lodge, and resumed his tramp down the coomb. No doubt the beast had rejoined the other fellows by that time, and they were all clucking over the joke on Bunter!

The fat Owl's only consolation was the

and broken staircases that seemed to lead to nowhere in particular.

Of the upper rooms, only one was quite intact, approached by a stone stair, with walls oak panelled, from the hall. It was a large apartment, and had doubtless been the state bed-room of the old mansion. It was in that room that Bob was rooting about when his startled yell announced a discovery.

There was an immense fireplace in the room, in which a fire roared and crackled. Eight beds stood in a row—looking rather like the old dormitory at Greyfriars. There was room in the vast apartment for three or four times as many. Beds and bedding were new—specially sent in by the orders of Mr. Vernon-Smith, and there were other

Bob's eyes were flashing with excitement. His finger pointed to the old black oak beside the fireplace.

"Look!" he yelled. The juniors looked—and jumped! Deeply carved in the old oak was the strange inscription:

"MARCO ZERO,
1589."

"Zero!" exclaimed the Bounder blankly.

"Fifteen - eighty - nine!" murmured Harry Wharton blankly. "That was the year after the Armada!"

Herbert Vernon-Smith bent his head close to the carved letters. There was little light from the deep old windows,

CO begin with, I may say that it is very rare for any respectable ghost to contribute articles to a magazine. I should not have done so myself, had I not run across a junior named Wharton in the Remove passage. He fairly haunted me until I agreed to write this short article.

I had so much difficulty in holding his pen—which fell right through my hand to the floor—that in the end he agreed to take down my words as I groaned them. I have often been asked why it is that I so persistently groan. On a recent visit to the Remove dorm, several juniors put this question, and one of them, Bolsover major, offered to give me something to groan for if I didn't shut up.

One reason why I find it convenient to groan instead of laugh is that there has been, for the last three hundred years, a large dagger stuck through the middle of my waistcoat.

Another thing I am often asked is why I don't haunt the school all the year round, instead of at Christmas-time as at present. Well, there again, it is a matter of experience. I have found, to my dismay, that I create absolutely no terror at all when drifting along a corridor on a summer's evening. I do not look my best with the sun on me. It makes me as completely invisible as a November fog. In the latter case, I steer clear of November for more reasons than one. It is a habit of Remove juniors to leave the manufacture of their guys until the last moment on November 5th. Often they leave it too



Gentle persuasion goes a long way—even with
"ghosts!" Hence this seasonable article.

late. I have no desire to be roped in as a substitute.

The cold rains of January and February are bad for my rheumatics; in fact, my spook doctor has told they would be fatal to me. And, apart from anything else, a really good haunt is a strain on a ghost. We simply can't do more than a fortnight's haunting every year. Indeed, I am so knocked up by it that I usually have to go to Monte Carlo for a month or two to recover. I go to Monte because it is well known to be a shady spot.

Let me say emphatically that haunting is a serious business, and should not be attempted by any ghost who has not served a seven years' apprenticeship at a good haunter's. It is easy enough to haunt persons like Gosling, whose choice of beverage makes him accustomed to the

sight of unearthly shapes. It is quite a simple matter to haunt Trotter, the page; especially after he has just finished reading "The Corpse of Cut-throat Canyon!" But try haunting a man like Prout, and you'll see the difference.

In haunting Prout great care must be observed, or otherwise he will haunt you instead. Often I have groaned my way into his room with good quality terror on my features, only to be forced into a chair, and compelled to listen to the story of Prout's life from cradle to college. Then have I groaned my way out again, and my groans would have moved a stone statue; while as for the terror on my face, it frightened even me.

The Remove dorm, is another difficult place to haunt, for, like all boys, their chief idea is to take me to pieces to see what I'm made of. Ah, my friends, take it from me that haunting is a tiring and thankless job. You wear yourself out trying to haunt people, and not a word of thanks do you ever get for it.

If, however, any reader of this paper has in mind a house he would like to haunt, I would recommend him first to become a ghost—which may be done very simply by crossing the road at a Belisha beacon—and after that to take lessons from some such past master of the art as William Bunter of the Remove.

The boy Bunter has reduced haunting houses at Christmas to a great science. Just give a party, and see how Bunter haunts it. You will need no further hints from me.

prospect of telling them what he thought of them—which he was going to do, with emphasis, as soon as he arrived at Polpelly.

THE EIGHTH CHAPTER.

The Name in the Oak!

"**H**AILO, hallo, hallo!" roared Bob Cherry. "Look here!"

The Greyfriars fellows were scattered over the old mansion, exploring. From the ancient kitchen, where a goose turned on the spit before a roaring fire, tended by the old ship's cook, came an appetising scent.

John Redwing was piling logs on the fires, Tom lending a hand. But the other fellows were exploring, scattering about musty, ancient rooms, some of them open to the sky; along passages

things fresh from the shops at Pilvorton, giving a modern touch to the ancient room. But the original furniture was still there—old, and massive, and rather mouldy.

The roaring fire, which had been burning ever since Tom's father had taken control, warmed the room thoroughly, dispelling ancient damp. Bob had stopped at the fire, stretching out his hands to the warmth, when his eyes suddenly fixed on the ancient oak mantelpiece, and he jumped.

There was a clattering of feet on stairs and passages as the other fellows arrived. They crowded in eagerly.

"Spotted the ghost?" exclaimed Nugent.

"Found the doubloons?" asked Johnny Bull.

"What the dickens—" demanded the Bounder.

thick with the dust of ages. He kicked the fire into a brighter blaze and scanned the oak.

Evidently it was long, long since those letters had been cut, by a knife long since gone to rust. Hundreds of years ago someone—who?—had carved the name of "Zero" in the oak—the name of the Italian who had attempted to kidnap the Bounder at Greyfriars School.

"Zero!" repeated Vernon-Smith, almost dazedly. "That blighter's name! How the dooce—"

"One of his giddy ancestors must have been here, a jolly long time ago, and left his jolly old signature!" said Johnny Bull.

"Looks like it," said Harry Wharton. "But how—"

The Bounder's eyes glittered. "By gum!" he exclaimed. "That's THE MAGNET LIBRARY.—No. 1,453."

a clue! My pater thinks that Count Zero is mixed up with some financial gang, after a tin mine. But as soon as I heard that it was an Italian ship from the Armada that had been wrecked here, I jumped to it that there was some connection. And now—"

"Blessed if it doesn't look like it!" exclaimed Bob.

Vernon-Smith shouted to John Redwing, who came up the broad stone stair from the hall. He pointed out the carved inscription to the sailorman.

"Seen that before?" he asked.

John nodded.

"Ay, ay, sir! That name's carved in more than one place," he said. "The poor gentleman found time hang heavy on his hands, I dare say, a prisoner here for years, while he was waiting for his ransom to be paid."

"But who—?" exclaimed Harry.

"I asked old Dan'l about it when I first saw it," answered John. "It was the captain of the Spanish ship that the squire of Polpelly captured in the sea-fight."

"The captain of the sunk galleon!" exclaimed Smithy.

"Ay, ay! Most of the crew were drowned when the ship went down on Polpelly rocks; but the captain was saved, and, of course, kept for ransom, as they were in those days."

"And what became of him?" asked Smithy.

"The story is that the ransom was paid, after a long time, and he went back to his own country, sir. But he was kept here for two or three years, so they say, before the ransom came."

The juniors looked at one another. Marco Zero, captain of the sunk galleon, had lived two or three years at Polpelly, in the far-off reign of Queen Elizabeth—a prisoner, waiting to be ransomed. He had commanded the ship captured by the old Elizabethan sea-captain—the galleon that had gone down with chests of doubloons aboard! And it was an Italian of the same name who was seeking to obtain possession of Polpelly—by lawless and desperate means!

"It speaks for itself!" said Vernon-Smith. His eyes were glistening. "Count Zero is after the jolly old doubloons. It beat me how he knew anything about them, but if his ancestor commanded the galleon, that accounts for it. The old bean may have left some documents in the family, over in Italy—our macaroni friend may have a clue."

Bob Cherry whistled.

"My hat! If he's got a clue where to look for the doubloons, no wonder he's keen to get hold of the place! By the way, whose are those giddy doubloons, if ever they turn up?"

"Treasure trove!" said the Bounder. "Zero has no claim on them. The money must have been on the galleon, for the pay of the troops—they had a lot of soldiers in the fleet, for the invasion of England, though they never got on shore. It belonged to the King of Spain. It passed to old Polpelly as prize of war when he captured the galleon—though I dare say Queen Bess and Lord Burleigh would have wanted a finger in the pie if the loot hadn't been lost. Now there aren't any more Polpellies—the estate was sold to my pater, so the treasure is his, subject to the claim of the Government for their legal whack in all treasure trove."

"I don't suppose that would worry Zero much, if he got his paws on it," remarked Johnny Bull.

"Hardly!" grinned the Bounder. "No wonder he's keen to plant himself here, THE MAGNET LIBRARY.—No. 1,453.

if Marco Zero knew anything about the lost doubloons, and left the news in the family documents. If he was a prisoner here for years he may have known more about the treasure than old Polpelly did. May have spotted it, and kept the knowledge to himself. What?"

Harry Wharton nodded thoughtfully.

"If that's the case, Smithy, a man like that Italian sportsman won't be barred off by your father refusing to sell the place. If he can't get possession of it I rather think he will try his luck here, without bothering about the legal side. It's a lonely place; only old Dan'l here. And—"

The Bounder chuckled.

"We're not done with him!" he said. "I was thinking that, having lost us on the way to London, he would conclude that I was with my father; and he couldn't hope to bring off any kidnapping stunt there. He couldn't guess that we were heading for Polpelly. But he—"

"But if he had to chuck up the kidnapping wheeze, thinking you were safe with your father in London, he would be very likely to head for Polpelly himself!" said Harry slowly.

"Exactly!" grinned the Bounder. "In which case, he may have buzzed off in that Napier, direct for Devonshire, when we dropped him on the London road, and may have got here before we did!"

"Nobody's been here, sir," said John Redwing, staring at the Bounder. "Only the tradesmen from Pilverton."

"He wouldn't walk in at the front door," said the Bounder, laughing. "But if it's true that he's got a clue to the doubloons—and I believe it is—I'd go ten to one that he's hanging about the vicinity somewhere; and I fancy it will be no end of a surprise to him to see me here!"

"I say, you fellows!" came an angry squeak from the hall.

"Hallo, hallo, hallo! That's dear old Bunter!"

"I say, you fellows, where are you? I say, you rotters, I want to know which one of you it was. I'm going to punch his cheeky head!" roared Bunter. "I'll jolly well show you whether I'm going to be collared and bunged in the mud, you beasts! I suppose it was you, Cherry, you beefy beast!"

Harry Wharton & Co. went down into the hall, quite surprised by that unexpected and extraordinary greeting from Billy Bunter. The fat Owl of the Remove stood there. He had arrived at last, muddy, and crimson, and wrathful.

"Which of you beasts was it?" roared Bunter.

"The whichfulness is terrific, my esteemed, fat Bunter!" grinned Hurree Jamset Ram Singh. "What is the absurd matterfulness?"

"You jolly well know!" hooted Bunter. "I fancy you were all in it. Look at my face!"

"You want a wash," remarked Bob Cherry. "That's nothing new!"

"Bunging a fellow's face in the mud!" roared Bunter.

"Who did?" yelled Bob.

"You did!" howled Bunter.

"You fat ass, I haven't seen you since we left the car!"

"Well, it was one of you!" gasped Bunter. "I sat down in that old lodge to rest and jolly well heard you skulking, and you got me from behind and jammed my face down in the mud and scooted! And I'm going to punch the beast that did it, see? Who was it?"

"Nobody here," said Harry Wharton, in wonder. "We've all been here, fat-head—"

"Gammon!" howled Bunter. "One of you was in that lodge up the coomb,

and bagged me from behind, without letting me see you."

"Somebody skulking in that old lodge!" said the Bounder quietly. "And you'd have seen him if he hadn't pushed your silly face in the mud?"

"Yes, you beast; and if it was you I—"

"That does it!" said Vernon-Smith. "I think I can guess the name of the sportsman who didn't want Bunter to spot him."

"Zero!" said Harry Wharton, with a deep breath.

"You've got it!"

"Rats!" hooted Bunter. "It was one of you! Playing rotten practical jokes on a fellow! Yah! If this is the way you treat a guest, Smithy, after asking him to a rotten show like this, I can jolly well tell you I'm fed up! I'm going to phone for a car and clear. See?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Blessed if I see anything to cackle at. Where's the telephone?" hooted Bunter.

"At Pilverton."

"What?"

"Only five or six miles—"

"Oh crikey!"

Old Dan'l came stumping along on his wooden leg.

"Dinner's ready, gentlemen!" he said, touching his greasy forelock.

Billy Bunter's wrathful, fat face cleared.

He was angry, and, like the prophet of old, he felt that he did well to be angry! But the magic word "dinner" banished angry feelings. The word dinner wiped the frown from Bunter's fat face. The delicious aroma of roast goose brought a smile there. Bunter loved roast goose. It had the next place in his affections to turkey.

During dinner Bunter made only one remark.

"That chap can cook!" he said, with deep feeling.

Except for which Billy Bunter's jaws were too busy for conversation.

THE NINTH CHAPTER.

A Narrow Escape!

"**S** NOW!" said Bob Cherry.

After dinner Billy Bunter retired to the sleeping apartment, to rest his fat limbs and his equally fat head. He needed some rest after his exertions with the roast goose.

His snore woke the echoes of Polpelly House, as it had been wont to wake those of the Remove dormitory at Greyfriars. But the rest of the party put on caps and coats for a ramble in the coomb. Nobody but Bunter wanted a nap. But everybody was pleased to see the fat Owl roll off to snooze. It was a welcome rest from Bunter.

The flakes were coming down on the wind from the Atlantic. Already there was a powdering of white along the coomb.

"Coming along, Mr. Redwing?" asked the Bounder.

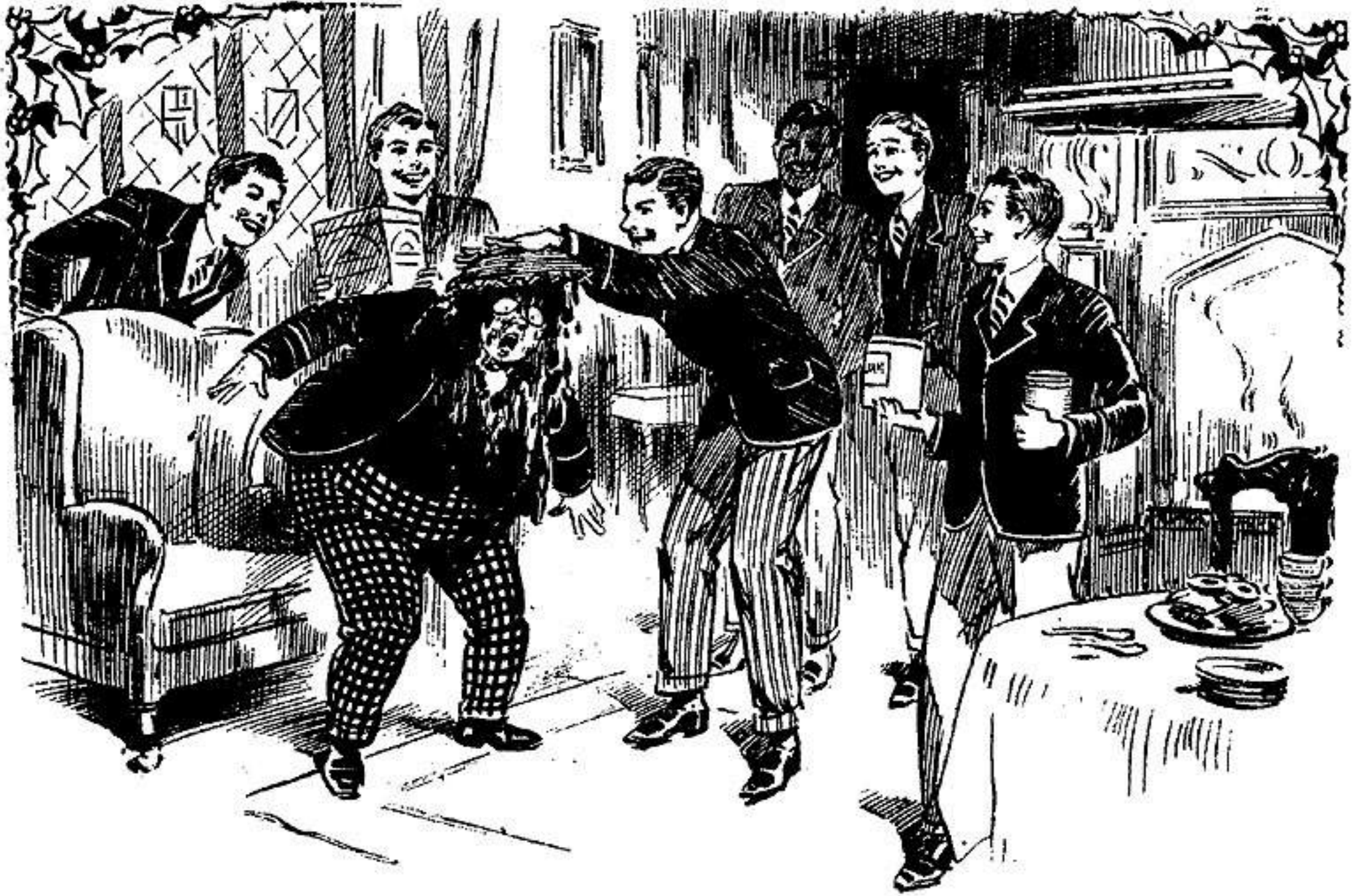
"I think I'll stay in, as Master Bunter's staying in the house, sir," answered the sailorman slowly.

"Bunter's all right—he won't wake up till tea-time," said Bob. "Bunter doesn't need looking after, does he?"

"Well, sir, he might," said John hesitatingly. "Better not leave anyone alone in the house; and old Dan'l's too deaf to hear anything."

The Bounder looked hard at John Redwing.

"Are you thinking of the ghost?" he



Squash! Taking Bunter by surprise, Vernon-Smith up-ended the jam tart on the fat junior's head. "Whurrrroop!" roared the Owl of the Remove, staggering and spluttering wildly, as warm jam ran down his face, his ears, and his neck. "Gurrrrrgh! Whoo-hoop! You horrid beast! Yurrrrrgh!" "Ha, ha, ha!" yelled the Removites.

demand. "Do you think Bunter might fancy he saw a spook, or what?"

"Ay, ay, sir, he might!"

"Rot!" grunted Smithy. "But please yourself, of course."

The juniors went out into the falling flakes, leaving the sailorman standing in the doorway, looking after them. There was rather a worried look on Tom's face.

"I can't quite make my father out!" he said, as they went down the steps from the gateway. "Is it possible that something may have happened here that he hasn't told us?"

"He would tell us if anything happened, surely!" said Harry. "But I've thought, once or twice, that he had something on his mind."

"If he's seen, or fancied he's seen, something, he might think it would scare us!" said Tom. "That groan we heard when we came in. I can't make that out."

"Old Dan'l playing a silly trick!" said Smithy.

"I don't think so, Smithy!"

"The ghost, then?" yawned the Bounder. "Bit upsetting for a ghost to have a lot of schoolboys barging into his stamping-ground."

The juniors laughed. Tom looked back from the gateway, and saw his father still at the door, his bronzed face thoughtful and clouded. He could not help thinking that something must have occurred at Polpelly of which the sailorman had not spoken, and he wondered uneasily what it was.

Smithy led the way up the coomb. They stopped at the old stone lodge, where Bunter's peculiar adventure had happened. That incident had convinced

all the juniors that the enemy was in the vicinity, though Bunter still believed that it had been one of the party playing a practical joke on him.

They rooted through the rubble stacked inside the ruinous building, looking for some trace of the man who had lurked there. The back wall, of big stone blocks, backed on the solid side of the coomb, where it had been excavated to make a level for the lodge to stand. The roof was gone, and snow, several days old, lay there.

"Sign!" grinned Bob.

The fellows did not need to be the good scouts they were, to pick up "sign." There were tracks of boots in the snow, plain proof that someone had been in the old lodge. Now that the snow was falling again the tracks would soon be obliterated; but at the moment they were plainly to be seen.

"Blessed if I quite catch on to what the fellow was doing here," said the Bounder. "He can't have camped in a place like this to watch the house. Bunter seems to have taken him by surprise. But what was he here at all for?"

"Saw us coming, and dodged in here out of sight, perhaps!" suggested Bob Cherry.

"Yes, that's possible."

They left the lodge again; there was nothing more to be discovered there. The snow was coming down more thickly, and the path from the road was covered with it. The Bounder looked up towards the road, and laughed.

"Lucky the pater parked plenty of supplies here for us!" he remarked. "Tradesmen can't get here when there's

a big snowfall. We might be cut off for days at a time."

That prospect did not have a dismaying effect on the juniors. Being snowed in for Christmas rather appealed to them as a tremendous lark. But they agreed that it was fortunate that supplies were not likely to run short.

They rambled down the coomb in a cheery crowd, to the sea. At the bottom of the deep coomb the cove wound in among the cliffs, giving a safe anchorage from the wild Atlantic. But outside, the ocean was wild and rough, stirred by the winter wind, and great waves rolled in and broke on the high rocks.

"That's where old Polpelly brought in the galleon he had captured," remarked the Bounder. "No wonder it went down, if the weather was rough. I should say this was as dangerous a lee-shore as any along the coast. Here's the boathouse—I've got the key."

At the head of the cove, under a bulging cliff, was a timber boathouse, backing on the rock. It looked as if it had been recently repaired—no doubt by Mr. Vernon-Smith's orders. The door was secured by a padlock, and the Bounder sorted out a key to open it.

"Hallo, hallo, hallo!" ejaculated Bob Cherry. "You don't want the key, Smithy."

He jerked the padlock open. It had already been forced.

Vernon-Smith knitted his brows. "Mr. Rodwing had this key," he said. "He wouldn't force the lock. Somebody else has been here."

Vernon-Smith threw open the door.

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(Continued from page 15.)

Within, the light was very dim; the window was small, and the December day was fading into dusk. But the juniors could see a fifteen-foot dinghy, with masts and sails lying in it. They had a natural boyish interest in boats and sails, and they gathered round it to look at it.

"We'll get this out to-morrow morning, and have a sail in the cove," said the Bounder. "If it's calm, we'll run out to sea. Or up into the smugglers' cave—I've heard you can go a long way up on the tide."

"What-ho!" said Bob. "Might spot the jolly old doubloons in the smugglers' cave—perhaps!"

"The perhapsfulness is terrific!" grinned Hurree Jamsot Ram Singh.

"You won't get this boat afloat to-morrow morning, Smithy!" said Johnny Bull.

"Why not, fathead?"

"You'll get a ducking, if you do!"

"What the thump do you mean?" exclaimed the Bounder angrily. "It's a good boat—my father had it sent here specially from Bideford!"

"Somebody's been at it since then! Look!"

Johnny Bull pointed into the boat. The Bounder gave a howl of rage. In the bottom timbers there was a large, round hole, evidently bored there by a brace and bit. Close at hand were two more. The sail, which the juniors would have expected to see neatly folded or furled, lay sprawling in the dinghy, and it was probable that it hid other holes in the timber.

Smithy gritted his teeth.

"So that's why the padlock was forced," he said. "That blighter has been here—and made the boat unseaworthy!"

"My father will be able to repair it, Smithy," said Tom. "He's a useful man at that kind of thing."

"Good!" said Smithy. "Let's see if there's any further damage."

He caught hold of the sprawling canvas in the boat, and dragged it away. What followed made the Greyfriars fellows jump.

That an enemy had been there, they knew, from the state of the padlock and the dinghy. But that he was still there, and that they had surprised him at his work, had not occurred to them. There was no place of concealment in the boathouse—save in the dinghy itself, under the canvas. But as Vernon-Smith dragged the sail away, a figure that had been crouching under it leaped suddenly up.

The Bounder staggered back in amazement, dropping the sail. The figure sprang from the boat, and made one desperate leap for the door, which the juniors had left open.

In an instant he had leaped out of the

doorway, and was running along the rocky bank of the cove.

"Great pip!" gasped Bob Cherry.

So swift had been the movements of the escaping man that, in the dimness of the boathouse, they had had hardly a glimpse of him. They had a vague impression of a thickset figure with a bull neck—but the running man was gone in the twinkling of an eye.

"After him!" roared the infuriated Bounder.

They dashed out of the boathouse.

"There he is!" yelled Bob.

"After him!"

Dim in the falling gloom they had a glimpse of a stocky but active figure clambering up the rocks at the back of the cove with the agility of a monkey. With one accord the juniors rushed in pursuit.

"There's a path here!" panted the Bounder.

It was a steep, zigzag path, suitable rather to a goat than a human being, that wound up the steep cliff. But steep as it was the bull-necked man had gone up it, actively and swiftly, and Smithy did not hesitate to follow.

Bob was next after him. But he stopped, with a yell.

"Look out, Smithy!"

The fugitive had disappeared among the rugged broken irregularities of the cliff-face. From above a great boulder came rattling and bounding down the path. Evidently the fugitive had dislodged it, and sent it rolling down to stop pursuit.

"Smithy!" shrieked Wharton.

The Bounder was already ten feet up the cliff. Had the whirling boulder struck him he would have been hurled off, to crash on the rocks below. Broken limbs, at least, would have been the result.

But Smithy was quick on the uptake. He made a swift long leap and landed on the rocks he had just left, clear of the cliff. Harry Wharton grasped his arm as he landed, and dragged him farther away.

A second later the boulder was thundering past the juniors. It rolled and crashed and rumbled over the rocks, and plunged into the waters of the cove, sending up a great splash.

"By gad!" the Bounder panted.

"By gad!"

"Smithy!" Redwing caught his breath. "Oh, Smithy, if that had hit you—"

"It didn't," said the Bounder coolly.

"But I rather think I shan't go up after that sportsman again."

"I rather think not," said Harry.

"We're dealing with rotters who won't stick at very much, Smithy."

"Some Christmas—what?" grinned the Bounder. "Anybody feel like cutting and running and leaving me to it?"

"Fathead!" answered the Famous Five, with one voice.

But their faces were rather serious as they walked back to Polpelly House in the falling flakes and the thickening gloom. It was clear that, as the captain of the Remove had said, they were dealing with men who would stick at very little, and they could not help wondering what would be the outcome of that wild Christmas adventure.

THE TENTH CHAPTER.

Jam for Bunter!

"SAY, you fellows!"

"Hallo, hallo, hallo! Still alive, Bunter?"

"Eh!" Bunter blinked at the juniors as they came into the lighted

hall, rather glad to get back to it out of the darkness and the snow. "Yes, you ass! Why shouldn't I be?"

"Well, after eating a whole goose, I—"

"I didn't eat a whole goose!" roared Bunter. "I had hardly half of it."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Seen any ghosts or things?" asked Bob.

"Oh, don't be an ass, you know!" said Bunter peevishly. "I say, you fellows, that deaf old ass—I forget his name—has been lighting candles all over the place. Old Redwing says there isn't any electric light."

"Who does?" asked the Bounder. "Do you mean Mr. Redwing?"

"You know I do, you ass!"

"Well, if you mean Mr. Redwing, ou'd better say Mr. Redwing. If you say old Redwing again, you'll get your fat nose rubbed in the cinders."

"Oh, really, Smithy—"

"Bunter hasn't been kicked to day," remarked Bob Cherry thoughtfully. "He can't get through a day without kicking. Turn round, Bunter!"

"Beast! I say, you fellows, old—I mean Mr. Redwing—says there isn't any electric light, and no telephone, and now it's snowing the tradesmen won't be able to get through from Pilverton, wherever that is. What are we going to do for grub?"

"Tons of grub, you fat cormorant!"

"Well, that's all very well, but if the milkman can't come, what are we going to do for milk for tea?"

Billy Bunter propounded that poser, blinking accusingly at the Greyfriars fellows—who, instead of looking alarmed and dismayed at the possibility of missing the milkman, only grinned.

"That's an easy one, too," said Bob.

"Well, what are we going to do, then?" demanded Bunter.

"Without," explained Bob.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Lots of condensed milk, in case of accidents, old fat man," said Frank Nugent soothingly.

"I don't like condensed milk in my tea," Bunter pointed out.

"That's an easy one, too," said Bob.

"Don't have any tea! There's always a way of meeting those fearful difficulties, if you take the trouble to think it out."

"Beast! Look here! If the milkman can't get through, the postman can't," said Bunter. "What about that?"

"We shall have to wait till New Year's Day for our Christmas cards, that's all," said Bob cheerily. "Worse things than that have happened in the history of the universe."

"What I mean is, I'm expecting a postal order—"

"Oh crikey! Give your postal order a rest over Christmas, old fat bean!" implored Bob Cherry.

"I told you fellows I was expecting a postal order—"

"You did!" groaned Bob. "About a hundred times."

"You mean a thousand," said Johnny Bull.

"Wasn't it a million?" asked Harry Wharton.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Blessed if I see anything to cackle at!" snorted Bunter. "I want to give the post office people proper directions for sending on my extensive correspondence, and I want to get it—see?"

I don't want my remittances going all over Devonshire. If I run out of cash I shall have to borrow of you fellows, and you know that's a thing I dislike—"

"Oh scissors!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Oh cackle!" snorted Bunter. "But I can jolly well say—Beasts! Don't walk off while a chap's talking!"

But the juniors did walk off while Bunter was talking. As he showed no sign of leaving off talking, they really had no choice in the matter.

"I say, you fellows!" yelled Bunter.

The cheery chums of the Remove cleared off to clean off mud and snow after their walk, leaving the Owl of Greyfriars to snort.

There were likely to be some hardships in that Christmas holiday at Polpolly if the weather was hard. But the non-arrival of Billy Bunter's celebrated postal order was certainly not the most serious item on the list.

That celebrated postal order had been so long in coming that only Bunter believed that it was on its way—if even Bunter did.

Billy Bunter stood by the fire and blinked through his big spectacles at the juniors when they came back into the old oak hall. Every one of them was carrying something for the tea-table; and Billy Bunter's fat little nose turned up in scorn.

Harry Wharton & Co., accustomed to "teasing" on their own in the study at Greyfriars, had no objection whatever to doing the same at Polpelly. Bunter did not like the idea at all. In Mr. Vernon-Smith's mansion in London, there were at least a dozen manservants. It seemed to Bunter simply idiotic to choose Polpelly instead of the mansion in Courtman Square. The only "staff" was the ancient ship's cook, and old Dan'l was well provided with work by the cooking and washing-up.

"Lend a hand, Bunter!" suggested Bob Cherry.

"Yah!" was Bunter's reply, emphatic if not elegant.

"Lazy as usual?" asked Bob.

"I'm accustomed to the decencies of life," said Bunter loftily. "At Bunter Court there are menials who wait on me hand and foot. Silly fatheaded idea to come here, if you ask me."

"Nobody asked you, sir, she said," sang Bob Cherry.

"Here, Bunter, take this!" called out Vernon-Smith. He was carrying in a large dish, on which reposed an immense jam tart. "Shove it on the table, while I get something else, lazy-bones!"

"Shan't!" retorted Bunter. "If you think I've come here to be a dashed waiter, Smithy, you're jolly well mistaken—see? But I'll tell you what, old chap. Tip old Redwing half-a-crown to do the waiting."

Vernon-Smith did not answer that cheery suggestion. With a gleam in his eyes he stepped towards the fat Owl of the Remove. Bunter blinked at the tart on the dish. It was a large and luscious tart, and contained, at least, a couple of pounds of jam. Bunter's fat mouth watered as he blinked at it. He was more than ready to dispose of that gorgeous jam tart internally.

As it happened, however, it was externally that he was going to dispose of it.

Squash!

Bunter roared.

Taking him quite by surprise, Herbert Vernon-Smith up-ended the big jam-tart on Bunter's head.

"Whurrrrooop!" roared Bunter, staggering, and spluttering wildly, as warm jam ran down his face, his ears, and his neck. "Gurrrrrgh! Whoo-hoop! You horrid beast—yurrrrrgh!"

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

"Grooogh! Oooogh! I'm all sticky!" shrieked Bunter. "Oh, you beast, Smithy! Wharrer you sticking me all over with jam for! Gurrrrrgh!"

Bunter liked jam! But he did not like it in his hair, and his ears, and his fat neck! He clawed frantically at jam. He almost swam in jam! He was of the jam, jammy.

"Anything more to suggest about Mr. Redwing?" asked the Bounder.

"I've got a jar of honey here!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Bunter did not make any more suggestions about "old Redwing." He did not want the honey along with the jam. He spluttered and gurgled and gasped and rolled away for a wash. Washing was not one of Billy Bunter's weaknesses; but even Bunter felt that he needed a wash now.

He was still rather sticky when he came back to tea. And he was in an extremely bad temper.

But nobody seemed to mind what sort of temper Billy Bunter was in; so that did not matter.

(Continued on next page.)

GREYFRIARS INTERVIEWS

1.

Before I recount what occurred
When I interviewed Oliver Kipps,
You'll find me repeating an old Christmas
greeting
Which now is on everyone's lips!
So just let me offer a word
Of hearty good wishes to all,
May Christmastide thrill you with gladness,
and fill you
With memories good to recall!

2.

To-day the Remove held a show,
A Breaking-Up Concert and Ball.
We broke up, it's certain—the stage and the
curtain,
The pictures, the chairs, and the Hall!
'Twas really my fault, as I know,
But no one was injured—not much!
The blackboard was spilt on Fitzgerald and
Hilton,
And Desmond went home on a crutch!

3.

A Christmas-tree hung in the air!
It fell upon Coker Esquire!
No damage—it merely stunned Coker (or
nearly),
And afterwards set him on fire!
Then Bunter tripped over a chair,
And landed on Bolsover's head!
No harm was effected by this, as expected,
(But Bolsoy appears to be dead!)

4.

I went on the platform as well,
To interview Kipps on the spot.
I asked (at a distance): "D'you want some
assistance?
I'll do all your tricks like a shot!"
Said Kipps: "If you want to, you shall!"
And then, in a general hush,
That fatheaded wizard produced from my
gizzard
A pot of green paint and a brush!



5.

The audience yelled with delight!
While I shook a furious fist:
"I know the trick's ended! You never
intended
To make the paint vanish!" I hissed.
"Just look at me—ain't I a sight?"
The audience did—and they roared!
I rushed upon Kipper and landed a ripper
Just under the place where he snored!

6.

While bells in the steeple chime out
That peace has returned to the earth,
A happy and hearty, high-spirited party
Be yours in this season of mirth:
Good health to sustain you throughout,
Good things in galore at the feast,
Good will to prepare it, good comrades to share
it,
Good sleep when the revels have ceased!



7.

The piece-de-resistance (or star)
Was Kipps, with his conjuring tricks;
The audience gazing at feats so amazing
Applauded with thunderous kicks!
He squeezed from a penny cigar
Jam doughnuts and eggs by the ton,
And ribbons and rabbits in horse-riding habits
He shot from a magical gun!

8.

"Now gentlemen all," we were told,
"You see this 'ere brush and this paint?
I'm going to use it on What's-His-Name.
Who's-It,
Who thinks he's so clever, but ain't!
I'll paint his face green, and behold,
I'll blindfold myself and recite
Some verses in Spanish! The paint will all
vanish
And leave his face perfectly white!"



9.

He walloped his left on my chin!
I fell on some holly and yelled!
And that seemed to foment the rest, for next
moment
A general combat was held!
We made such a terrible din
That prefects rushed in by the score!
Five minutes of riot ensued, and then quiet
Returned to the college once more!

Our clever Greyfriars Rhymester has to work hard for his living interviewing Greyfriars celebrities. He's not fortunate enough to be able to get his Christmas dinner out of a hat, nor Treasury notes out of space like

OLIVER KIPPS.

the conjuring genius of the Remove.

THE ELEVENTH CHAPTER.

Bunter Sings!

"JOLLY!" said Bob Cherry. Everybody agreed that it was jolly!

Even Billy Bunter had left off grouching, and seemed merry and bright.

It was a wild, windy, snowy December night—the wind howled up the coomb from the Atlantic, trees creaked and groaned, and the boom of stormy breakers came echoing from the distance. Snow was falling over the old roofs and chimneys of Polpelly.

But in the old oak hall of the lonely mansion in the coomb, all was bright and cosy and cheery.

The log fire blazed and roared and crackled. Innumerable tall wax candles in ancient sconces, illumined the room, glimmering on the red berries of holly branches that decorated the walls. Harry Wharton sat at the piano, running his fingers up and down the keys. It was a grand piano of ancient design. But it had not been overlooked in the general attention given to the old place by the millionaire's orders; it had recently been tuned, and was quite a going concern. Wharton was quite a good pianist, though at Greyfriars he had generally preferred the football field to the music-room. The old yellow ivory keys rippled under his deft fingers.

Billy Bunter sat in an immense armchair, in which ancient squires of Polpelly had sat in their time—perhaps the same old sea-captain who had captured the Spanish galleon, and held Marco Zero a prisoner for years awaiting his ransom. The cushioned arms of the chair were about a foot wide, and on them Bunter had piled refreshments—a plate of tarts, a bag of doughnuts, a little hill of oranges, and a small mountain of rosy apples; a plate of nuts, a plate of almonds, a plate of muscatels, and several other things. He rather looked as if he was expecting Polpelly House to be besieged, and had laid in supplies for the winter!

John Redwing stood by the fire with a cheery smile on his bronzed, weather-beaten face—though every now and then he listened to the howl of the wind, and glanced at the deep windows, through which came the glimmer of snow. He had said nothing to the schoolboys of the phantom of Polpelly; but that vision of the night had not left his own mind.

The Greyfriars fellows were all in great spirits. Billy Bunter condescended to smile. Supper had been good. Old Dan'l might be deaf, and he might be wooden-legged, but he could cook—and supplies were ample. The grub was all right, and Bunter's view generally was that if the grub was all right, everything was all right.

There was going to be a "sing-song"—and Harry, as the only fellow who could handle the piano with good effect, was in great demand. A little musical skill was worth more, at the moment, than the deadliest shot at goal!

And all the fellows were going to sing—whether they could or not! As Bob Cherry remarked, what was the odds, so long as you were happy?

Shut in by December snow and darkness, in sound of the roaring sea, of clattering rocks and groaning trees, the old oak hall of Polpelly was a spot of Christmas brightness and gaiety.

"Now, John, we're going to begin with a chanty!" declared the Bounder, tapping the sailorman on the arm.

Tom gave his chum a friendly grin. Smithy had plenty of faults. They would have made a long list. But Tom could have forgiven all his faults, twice over, for his good qualities. When he saw

him with his father, Tom felt that Smithy was one of the best fellows going. John Redwing was a diamond in the rough; and Smithy treated him as a diamond of the purest water. The millionaire's son liked and respected the sailorman; and though his hasty temper was liable to snap out with anyone else, he never failed in his respect to Tom's father.

"A chanty, sir!" said John. "Well, if you like—"

"Hear, hear!"

"Bravo!"

"I say, you fellows—"

"Shut up, Bunter!"

"But, I say, I'll sing you something when I've finished this orange," said Billy Bunter. "I can do the Harrow School song a treat! When I've finished this orange—"

"When you've finished it begin on another, old bean—you've only scoffed about seventy so far!" said Bob.

"Now, Mr. Redwing."

"I've got a book of chanties here!" said Smithy, and Tom gave his chum another look. The Bounder had thought of everything. "What about 'Blow the Man Down'?"

"I've sung it often enough at sea," said John. "If you really like—"

"Play up, Wharton!"

And John, in a deep voice that almost drowned the December wind, sang "Blow the Man Down," and finished amid great applause.

Then Billy Bunter's squeak was heard again. For the moment, refreshments had cloyed. Ever since supper, Bunter had been packing them steadily away; and even Bunter needed a breathing-space before he did any more packing.

"I say, you fellows—"

"Mr. W. G. Bunter will now oblige!" said the Bounder gravely.

"On the bawl!" grinned Bob.

"Up you get, Bunter!"

Bunter heaved himself out of the old armchair. It was not easy, for Bunter was heavy laden. He put his fat hands on the arms of the chair to heave, and a hill of oranges went rolling, followed by a mountain of apples. Then Billy Bunter was on his feet.

"What's the jolly old song?" asked Harry, smiling.

"Harrow song—'Forty Years On'!" said Bunter.

"Right-ho; I've got it here." There was a volume of school songs on the piano, provided by the thoughtful Bounder. Harry turned the pages to "Forty Years On," and Bunter blinked over his shoulder through his big spectacles.

"Rotten small print—can't see the words!" grunted Bunter. "It's all right, though, I'll sing from memory."

Wharton ran over the keys. Twice he came up to starting-point; but Bunter did not start. He paused.

"I know that song jolly well," said Bunter, "only I've forgotten the tune and the words."

"Oh crikey!"

"Except for that, I know the thing inside out!" explained Bunter. "But it's all right—I'll manage. I'll hum the words where I forget them."

Wharton re-started after the interval, and Bunter got going. Apparently memory did not serve, for he had to hum the first verse through. A series of squeaks and grunts accompanied the music.

"Bravo!" gasped Bob Cherry.

"I say, read out a verse, and then I shall remember the words!" suggested Bunter.

Everybody, in the true spirit of Christmas, was ready to oblige. Frank Nugent read out a verse. Billy Bunter's singing, considered as singing, was

perhaps not in the first flight. But as an entertainment, it had its merits.

"Forty years on, growing older and older,

Shorter of wind, as in memory long; Feeble of foot and rheumatic of shoulder—

What will it help you that once you were strong?" etc.

Billy Bunter cocked his head on one side and listened attentively. He was storing up the words for reproduction. But Bunter's memory was rather in the nature of a sieve.

"That's all right," said the fat Owl. "You can get going, Wharton! I'm all right now! I'll give you that verse with a swing! Let's see! Groogh!"

And Bunter sang:

"Forty years on, growing colder and colder—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Seasonable, anyhow, at Christmas!"

"I say, you fellows, isn't that right?" asked Bunter. "I say, Smithy, you write it out for me in big letters that I can see—see?"

"I see—see!" assented the Bounder. "Anything to oblige!"

Really, Bunter was entitled to consideration, for song-books were printed with ruthless disregard for the short-sighted, and the words on the music were merely a blur to the fat Owl.

Smithy took a sheet of paper and a pencil, and started to write, on the piano-top, in large capitals, which even Billy Bunter could not fail to read.

Some of the fellows, glancing at what he was writing, gurgled.

Smithy was not copying down the words from the song-book. He was, apparently, putting in some of his own.

It was a little joke of the Bounder's, of which William George Bunter was happily unconscious.

"Here you are, Bunter!" said the Bounder blandly, when he had finished.

Bunter took the sheet, and blinked at it.

"Good!" he said. "I can see that! You can get going, Wharton! I've rather got on to the tune now, and I can see these words a treat."

Wharton smote the keys again, and Bunter sang—or, at all events, squeaked. This time he had the words pat—Smithy's new words.

"Forty years on, growing fatter and fatter,

Short in the wind, but quite long in the tongue;

Feeble of brain, full of long-winded chatter—

Who would believe that we ever were young?

Still we remember the glories of footer;

We charged and we barged, or we fancy we did!

Still we remember the House and the Tooter,

And how we backed Blazer each way for a quid!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" shrieked Bunter's audience. "Bravo! Good egg! Topping!"

Bunter grinned with satisfaction. Under the happy delusion that those words really belonged to the Harrow song, the fat Owl felt that he was getting through jolly well. Anyhow, he got the "hands."

Then the whole party came in with the chorus "Follow up!" and the old hall of Polpelly almost rocked. The winter wind roared, and the stormy sea boomed and crashed; but it was a merry Christmas in the old house of Polpelly.



Words failed Bunter, so he took aim at Bob Cherry with the orange. Whiz! Squash! Bob's mouth was still open, after his final merry roar, when the whizzing orange arrived. "Urrrgh!" he gurgled, as the juicy fruit squashed in his open mouth. "Ha, ha, ha!" The company roared at the unexpected finale!

THE TWELFTH CHAPTER.

About Bunter!

"NOW, Bob—"

"Spare my blushes!" murmured Bob Cherry.

"Go it, old man!" said Billy Bunter encouragingly. "Of course, you can't sing like I do, old chap; but do your best."

"Well, if I wanted to sing like you do, old fat bean, I should have to do my worst!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Yah!" said Bunter

Bunter was in the armchair again, refreshing himself after his musical efforts. With an orange in one hand and an apple in the other, Bunter took big bites, and was happy.

Harry Wharton rose from the music-stool, with a smiling face, and looked round at the company.

"Gentlemen, chaps, and sportsmen," he said, "the next item on the programme, sung by the celebrated operatic megaphonic artist, Robert Cherry—"

"Hear, hear!"

"Is a new work, the words written by a famous author, the music by an equally famous composer, on the subject of a gentleman you all know well—no other than W. G. Bunter—"

"Eh—what's that?" ejaculated Bunter.

"The fame of W. G. Bunter," continued Wharton, "has spread far beyond the walls of Greyfriars School. Is there a far corner of our far-flung Empire where the name of Bunter is unknown, and where the population are unaware of the fact that he is expecting a postal order?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Oh, really, Wharton—"

"The fame of Bunter," continued Wharton, "has now been embodied in immortal verse, to the accompaniment of equally immortal music! Long after Bunter has burst, he will be remembered in this song—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"We have only the chorus here," went on Wharton. "But you will all, I am sure, join in it with enthusiasm, to testify your unbounded admiration of its subject—or shall I say object? Bunter, I believe, is more generally alluded to as an object—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Yah!"

"Go it, Bob!"

Wharton sat down again, and rattled the keys. Bob stood up at the piano to sing. There was not, perhaps, a lot of melody in Bob's singing, but there was plenty of energy. He made himself heard! On that point, at least, there was no doubt.

Billy Bunter sat up and took notice. It was the first he had heard of a song about his fat and important self. No song, of course, could have a better subject; Bunter admitted that. In his keenness, Bunter sat with an orange clutched in his fat hand, of which he had taken only one bite. He was so interested that he actually forgot to take another.

There was a chortle in the old hall of Polpelly, and then silence for the song. Wharton rattled off a cheery, snappy melody, and Bob Cherry pealed forth:

"BUNTER:

I say, you fellows, do stop your rotting! Just hold on a minute; I can't keep on trotting!

Who said 'That's Bunter—that fat grub-hunter?'

My postal order hasn't come!

Don't you think it's rather rum?

The big bad wolf I cannot keep from the door,

Unless my dear old pals stand me a few bobs more!

Now, don't you start walking,

While a chap's talking!

Stop, I say!

Don't walk away!

I say—I SAY, YOU FELLOWS!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" came in a roar, when Bob Cherry was through.

Wharton struck up again, and the whole party joined in that rousing chorus. Billy Bunter sat, with his little round eyes gleaming through his spectacles, the picture of wrath.

This was not the sort of thing that Bunter felt that he had a right to expect. It was no description of a handsome, athletic fellow, with polished, fascinating manners, the wealthy heir of Bunter Court—one of the finest fellows going, such as Bunter knew himself to be! Everybody also seemed to think that it was Bunter all over—which, of course, could only be due to a secret jealousy of his good looks and winning ways! Bunter sat and spluttered with wrath.

"I say, you fellows!" he yelled.

"My postal order hasn't come!

Don't you think it's rather rum?" chanted the company.

"I say, you beasts—" roared Bunter.

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"The big bad wolf I cannot keep from the door,
Unless my dear old pals stand me a few bobs more!"

yelled the juniors.

"I say—" howled Bunter. "You listen to me—"

"Now, don't you start walking, While a chap's talking!"

roared the chorus.

"You silly asses!" shrieked Bunter.

"Stop, I say!
Don't walk away!"

came a roar.

"I jolly well tell you—" raved Bunter.

"I say—I SAY, YOU FELLOWS!" came the final roar.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I say, you fellows!" came Bunter's roar, like an echo.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Words failed Bunter! The orange was still in his fat hand, with a juicy gap in it where Bunter had removed a segment. He took aim at Bob Cherry.

Whiz!

Squash!

Bob's mouth was still open, after his final, merry roar. It would have been shut in another moment. But in that moment the whizzing orange arrived.

"Urrrrgh!" gurgled Bob, as the orange squashed in.

He staggered, clutched at Wharton for

support, and dragged him over the back of the music stool.

"Here, look out!" gasped the pianist.

"Oh, crumbs! Yooo-hoop!"

Bump!

"Urrrrgh!"

"Oh crikey!"

Bob Cherry and Harry Wharton and the music stool mixed on the old oak floor.

"Ho, he, he!" chortled Bunter.

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared the whole company.

It was quite an unexpected finale, and it seemed to take them by storm. They roared.

"Ow! Get your elbow out of my eye, you ass!" gasped Wharton. "Ow! Oh! Gerroff!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Gurrgh! Grooogh! I'm chook-chook-choked—urrrrrgh!" gurgled Bob, spluttering as he scrambled up. "I'll burst that fat porpoise all over Pol-pelly! I'll jolly well—"

"He, ho, he! I say, you fellows, keep that beast off! I say—"

Nugent and Bull grasped Bob in time.

"Christmas, old chap!" grinned Nugent.

"Keep smiling!" chuckled Bull.

"Ho, he, he!" cackled Bunter.

"I'll jolly well kick you next term at Greyfriars, you fat villain!" gasped Bob, dabbing his mouth with his handkerchief.

"He, he, he!"

Next term at Greyfriars did not worry Billy Bunter. Bob was not likely to remember his wrath so long as that. As a matter of fact, he forgot it within five minutes.

THE THIRTEENTH CHAPTER.

The Face at the Window!

"SIX bells!" said John Redwing. It was eleven o'clock.

The evening had been a merry one, growing, perhaps, a little uproarious. It was a good deal later than the juniors' usual bedtime, but none was disposed for bed—least of all Billy Bunter, who had started on a third or fourth supper. But John was in charge of the party, and the Bounder, usually careless of authority, and often rebellious, set an example of respect to Tom's father. The gramophone had been on, and Smithy was about to put on a new record, instead of which, he slid it away into the box again.

"Dorm, you men!" he said.

"I say, you fellows, I'm not ready for bed!" squeaked Billy Bunter. "It's all right—no need to get up in the morning in the hols, you know. I'm not going to bed yet."

"Let's roll him along like a barrel!" suggested Bob Cherry.

"Beast!"

"I hope you boys won't be disturbed in the night," said John Redwing, with a rather worried look. "Perhaps you'd better keep candles burning in your room."

"We're not exactly afraid of the dark, Mr. Redwing!" said Bob, with a laugh.

"Oh, no! But—"

"But what, father?" asked Tom.

Mr. Redwing did not reply. But his bronzed face clouded.

As the hour grew later, the vision of the previous night came back more and more to his troubled mind. He was not conscious of fear. Even if there were such things as ghosts, there was nothing for a man with a clear conscience to fear. But he dreaded the effect of such a visitation on boyish nerves. He had puzzled and puzzled over it, trying to explain it to his own mind—without success. He was doubtful whether he ought not to have told the schoolboys—but he was unwilling to cause them alarm.

"Now, look here, Mr. Redwing!" said Vernon-Smith. "We've seen all day long that you've got something on your mind. Something's happened while you've been here on your own. Why not cough it up?"

The old sailorman stood silent, his brows wrinkled in worry. He did not want to alarm the juniors, yet perhaps it was wiser to put them on their guard.

"Is it the giddy ghost?" asked Wharton, with a smile.

"Rot!" said Bunter.

"Shut up, Bunter—"

"Oh, really, you fellows! If anybody is ass enough to believe in ghosts, I jolly well think—"

"You jolly well don't," said Bob. "You've jolly well got nothing to do it with! Give your chin a rest."

"Was it the ghost, Mr. Redwing?" asked Frank Nugent, respectfully trying not to smile as he asked the question.

"I did see something, young gentlemen!" said John, at last. "I wasn't going to tell you—if I had, it wouldn't have made you leave—"

"Hardly!" grinned the Bounder. "If you mean you heard groaning, like we did when we came, that was that old ass Dan! pulling your leg."

"Mr. Redwing says he saw something!" remarked Harry. "Better tell us what you saw, sir, in case we see it, too."

"I'll tell you!" said John slowly. "Look!" He crossed to the wall where the portrait of the old sea-captain

(Continued on page 22.)



"CAPTAIN and SLACKER"

There
are no
"Buts"
about
the

With all his laziness, Ralph Reckness Cardew has an iron determination when his mind is made up. By methods that are none too scrupulous, the slacker of the Fourth makes a bold bid for the junior captaincy of St. Jim's. But the task he has set himself is not an easy one. Never has Martin Clifford written a more exciting yarn of TOM MERRY & CO. of St. Jim's.

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If you want your Christmas Party to go with a swing, boys, try "putting over" a nigger minstrel show. Harry Wharton & Co. tried it out on the night before breaking-up and fairly brought the House down—not to mention Mr. Quelch's wrath!

In the Rag on the night before breaking-up, the Nigger Minstrels, heavily submerged in black boot polish, gave a show, of which the following is part. The Minstrels were: WHARTON (Sambo), HURREE SINGH (who forgot his make-up, but nobody noticed it), FRANK NUGENT, BOB CHERRY (as Bones), JOHNNY BULL, SMITHY, and SKINNER (as Massa Johnson). They started with a

GRAND OPENING CHORUS. (Tune: "Dixie.")

We're gwine home for Christmas,
We've packed up all our boxes!
We've packed our trunks for Christmas,
Our collars, shirts and socks.
Good-bye to school conditions,
Farewell to impositions,
Our hearts are turned to Christmas,
And we must go!

We're gwine home for Christmas,
We're gwino home for Christmas.
We're gwine where the pudding's in eglow.
We hear old Quelch calling,
But never mind his bawling.
We're gwine home for Christmas,
And we must go!

Smithy then announced an item by the Minstrel Band.

SKINNER: Say, dat will be just like reading de MAGNET in de Form-room.

SMITHY: What do yo' mean by dat?

SKINNER: It will be a "banned" performance. (Yells.)

WHARTON: I regrets to announce dat Brudder Johnny has determined to play his banjo! (Groans.)

SKINNER: Dat ain't a banjo—it's a bad-joke!

(Johnny Bull here began the threatened solo, and continued it until the end of the performance. No notice was taken of him after the first half hour; the audience and minstrels alike treating him with silent contempt.)

BONES discovered a new riddle on the subject of "to-morrow," and promptly got rid of it.

CHERRY: What is coming every day but never comes?

LOUD YELL FROM AUDIENCE: Bunter's postal order!

HURREE SINGH: Say, esteemed and ludicrous brudders, did yo' see dat funny old professorful johnny who asked honourable Gosling if dere were any old ruins at Greyfriars?

SMITHY: Sho' we saw him! What did Gosling say?

WHARTON: He said, "No, sah, not until you came!"

BULL: Plonk, plonk, plonk! (One egg.)

SKINNER then burst into a beautiful ballad as follows:

Oh, Greyfriars is a rotten place,
They make us work in any case.
That's bad enough, but who can tell
Why Gosling rings the rising-bell—

CHORUS: So early in de morning,
So early in de morning,
So early in de morning,
Before de break ob day!

When all the ground is thick with snow,
When bitter icy breezes blow,
When owls and bats fly round about,
Old Gosling comes and turns us out—

CHORUS: So early in de morning, etc.

One night we'll take him by surprise
And slaughter Gosling where he lies;
And then, perhaps, no more we shall
Be wakened by a beastly bell—

CHORUS: So early in de morning, etc.

But now we're going home. Hooray!
The bell is silent from to-day,
And when we get to bed, no doubt
Old Samson couldn't turn us out—

CHORUS: So early in de morning, etc.

NUGENT: Can any brudder tell me de difference between Billy Bunter and Nero?

SKINNER: Yessah! One was a double-dyed villain, and de other is a double-wide villain! (Mirth.)

NUGENT: No, sah! Nero worked his fiddle and Bunter fiddles his work! (Cat-calls and carrots.)

BULL: Plonk, plonk, plonk!

WHARTON: Can you tell me why Bunter's postal order is like water in de air?

SMITHY: Because it nebber crystalises!

WHARTON: No, brudder! Because it's "dow" every morning and "mist" every day!

BUNTER: I say, you fellows, I'm going to sing. Gimme a leg-up!

Tune: "Polly-Wolly-Doodle!"

You say I am an ugly freak—

CHORUS: Sing jolly bally-hoodle all the day!

I say, you fellows, let me speak—

Yes, jolly bally-hoodle all the day!

AUDIENCE (pelting BUNTER):

Fare thee well, fare thee well;

Fare thee well, my fairy friend!

Give us songs at the pianna,

Or let's warble "Rule Britannia!"

But not Bunter's bally-hoodle to the end.

SKINNER: Say, brudders, tell me this! If Miss-Ouri lent Mrs. Sippi her New Jersey, what would Dela-ware?

SMITHY: Al-ask-a! (Loud groans.)

WHARTON: Massa Bones, tell me why Bunter always wears dat horrid old check suit of his.

CHERRY: Sho' to match his check waistcoat.

WHARTON: Yes, but why wear de waistcoat?

CHERRY: Well, Niggah, sho'ly you knows dat Bunter has to keep his appetite in check?

BULL: Plonk, plonk, plonk! (Loud and prolonged eggs.)

SKINNER (Tune: "Cock Robin"):

Who ragged old Coker?

CHERRY: "I," said Bob Cherry,

"I felt rather merry,

I ragged old Coker!"

SKINNER: Who saw him ragged?

WHARTON: "I," muttered Wharton,

"As soon as I caught on,

I saw him ragged!"

CHORUS:

All the men of the Fifth are a-looking for the joker

Who dared lay his hands on the great Horace Coker,

Who dared lay his hands on the great Horace Coker!

SKINNER: What made him ragged?

BUNTER: "I," groaned the Owl,

"For Bob heard me

howl!

I made him ragged!"

SKINNER: Who lost a cake?

CHERRY: "I," shouted Coker.

"I've brought Potter's

poker!

I lost a cake!"

CHORUS:

All the men of the Fifth, etc.

Bunter and Coker left hurriedly at this point, Bunter leading by three yards.

BULL: Plonk, plonk, plonk! (Terrific eggs.)

WHARTON: Say, Massa Bones, when is Bunter a cannibal?

CHERRY: Sho', when he eats pork! And when am yo' a cannibal, Massa Sambo?

WHARTON: I, sah? Nobber!

CHERRY: Yessah! When yo' eats yo' mamma-laid on toast! (Heart-rending groans, during which Mr. Quelch gave CHERRY 50,000 lines. Frenzied eggs were raining upon the troupe, and after a hurried consultation, they decided to finish pretty quickly.)

CHORUS (Tune: "Good-night, Ladies.")

Good-bye, Greyfriars. Good-bye, Greyfriars!

Good-bye, Greyfriars, we're going to leave you now!

Merrily we roll along, roll along, roll along. Singing as we roll along, good-bye school!

Christmas-tide is on the way, on the way, on the way.

Christmas-tide is on the way, good-bye, school!

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squire of Polpelly hung. Life-size, the grim old Elizabethan sea-captain stared down from the faded gilt frame at the schoolboys. "I saw—him!"

So quiet and serious was his manner, that the Greyfriars fellows felt no desire to smile now. They stared at the portrait, and they stared at John Redwing. There was silence in the old hall, save for the wail of the wind up the coomb.

"You saw—him?" repeated the Bounder blankly, at last.

"So like him, sir, you'd have thought he had stepped down from the frame!" said John, in a hushed voice. "I don't make out to explain it—but I was wide awake and I saw him! I've seen many strange things at sea, and perhaps I believe more than landsmen do. But I've never banked much on ghosts. But—I saw him as plain as I see you now."

"Where and when?" asked Smithy quietly.

Slowly John told of that strange vision of the night. The juniors listened quietly. They could only suppose that the sailorman, half-awakened, had been deluded by some trick of the firelight. They looked again at the portrait of the old seafaring squire—its strong-featured face, with the pointed beard and moustache, the ruff and the trunk hose, the high sea-boots and the helmet and sword. It was such a face and figure as to impress itself on anyone's mind—to recur to the mind in sleep, and haunt the dreaming fancy.

"You think you saw it?"

"I know I saw it, sir!" said John quietly. "Whether it was a trick, or whether it was a spectre, I saw it, and followed it into the passage yonder, where there's no outlet—and there it disappeared, by neither door nor window."

"Rot!" came from Bunter.

"Shut up, Bunter, you fat ass!" growled Johnny Bull.

"Yah!"

"I believe it was old Dan'l doing the groaning stunt," said Vernon-Smith. "But he can't have made himself up to look like old Polpelly—with his wooden leg and his whiskers. But—nobody else was here—"

"Nobody!" said John.

"Esteemed Shakespeare has remarked," said Hurree Jamset Ram Singh, "that there are more things in the earth and the heavens, than are dreamed of in your geology—"

The juniors chuckled.

"I think Shakespeare said philosophy!" grinned Bob.

"I say, you fellows—"

"Ring off, Bunter!"

"But I say, speaking of spectres, that reminds me of a jolly good joke," said Bunter. "A chap said to a fellow, 'Have you ever seen a talking ghost?' And what do you think the fellow said? He, he, he! He said 'No, but I've seen a gas-inspector!' See? A gassin' spectre! He, he, he!"

Bunter, evidently, was not frightened by the ghost story.

"I say, you fellows, don't be funky," he went on. "I shall be with you, you know! If you get frightened, wake me up!"

"You howling ass!"

"Oh, really, Cherry!"

John Redwing made a sudden, startled movement. A slight sound from one of the tall deep windows had caught his ear. He glanced round—and then his look became fixed, concentrated, and the colour died out of his bronzed cheeks.

Startled, the juniors looked at him; even Billy Bunter's fat face losing his derisive grin. They followed his glance

—and then every eye fixed on the window—frozen there! Hardly believing what they saw, the Greyfriars juniors stared with starting eyes.

Pressed to the window-pane was a face—clear against the glass, in the bright light of the many candles and the glowing fire.

But it was such a visago as had never been seen in life for hundreds of years. The strong features were those of the sea-captain squire of Polpelly—the face of the portrait on the wall. The trim moustache and pointed beard were the same. Below the beard showed the Elizabethan ruff round the neck. Above the thick dark eyebrows was the helmet.

No more of it could be seen than that; but it was a visago of the sixteenth century that stared in from the snow and darkness into the old hall of Polpelly. The whiteness of death was in the face—only in that respect it differed from the portrait on the wall. From that dead whiteness, under the bushy brows, the eyes gleamed and glinted in the light.

No one moved! Transfixed, the juniors stared at the strange vision of the night—the phantom of Polpelly.

Bunter broke the silence! A howl of terror came from him.

"I say, you fellows, what's that? I say—"

Bunter's howl seemed to break the spell. Herbert Vernon-Smith shut his teeth savagely.

"It's a trick!" he panted hoarsely.

"A trick! Follow me!"

He dashed to the door.

"Stop!" panted John Redwing. "It's not of this earth!"

The Bounder did not heed, even if he heard. He clattered down the bars from the great door on the porch. Bareheaded as he was he rushed out into the blinding snow.

"After him!" breathed Redwing.

Phantom or no phantom, trick or evil spirit, the juniors were not going to let Vernon-Smith face it alone. Redwing darted after him, and the Famous Five tore after Redwing. Old John followed more slowly. Billy Bunter was left squeaking with terror in the armchair. Bob caught up a candle as he ran, but outside the wind blew it out instantly. The Bounder, with the other fellows at his heels, rushed round to the window, where the apparition had been seen.

From the deep window came the ruddy glow from within. But it showed no figure there—nothing but blinding snowflakes, falling thickly. The phantom had vanished.

"A light!" shouted the Bounder fiercely. "Who's got a light?"

"I've got a torch!" panted Wharton.

He whipped it from his pocket and flashed it on. He flashed it in every direction; but only the fast-falling flakes met the eye. Smithy threw himself on his knees under the window.

"The light here!" he breathed.

"There must be footprints—"

"Not in this snowfall!" said Bob.

"The light—quick!"

Smithy almost snatched the torch from Wharton's hand. With glinting eyes he examined the snow under the window. But he had to admit that there were no tracks to be picked up. But the snow was coming down so thick and fast that the juniors' own tracks were already being obliterated. The Bounder set his teeth.

"Trickery!" he said savagely.

"What—wha-at's that?" stammered Bob, with a sudden shiver.

A low, deep groan came from the darkness.

The juniors, with beating hearts, listened, staring with uneasy eyes into the December blackness. But there was no sound but the howl of the bitter wind. Wharton shivered.

"Let's get in!" he muttered. "There's nothing here, and we're getting frozen!"

They returned to the house. Smothered with snow, penetrated by the bitter wind, they crowded to the fire. John Redwing put up the bars at the door again. But the look on his face showed that he did not believe that the bars would keep out the phantom of Polpelly.

THE FOURTEENTH CHAPTER.

Trapped!

BILLY BUNTER was ready for bed, after all, when the other fellows went. Not for worlds—not for the fattest turkey in Christendom—would Bunter have remained alone after that terrifying vision at the window. He rolled up the stone stair after the juniors, quaking.

Having expressed such derisive scorn for the ghost story, Bunter might have been expected to set an example of self-possession. But he didn't! The fat Owl was scared to the marrow of his bones.

Only the utter impossibility of getting away from Polpelly kept him within the walls of the ancient mansion. In the state bed-room, where Marco Zero had carved his name in the oak, and where the Italian capitano had slept many weary and restless nights, three hundred and fifty years ago, Billy Bunter blinked round with uneasy eyes behind his big spectacles into every nook.

He rooted through the interior of a gigantic oak wardrobe that filled a great space on one wall, and left the doors wide open.

The other fellows were silent and serious. They hardly knew what to think.

Common sense forbade a belief in ghosts and spectres. Yet how to account for what had happened was beyond their powers.

John Redwing had gone quietly to his room. Old Dan'l was already in bed; his snore rumbled from some shadowy corner of the old house. The juniors were glad that they were all together. They were glad of the fire that leaped and crackled in the wide old hearth, and they heaped it with logs to last the night. A dozen candles were left burning in the room.

The Famous Five turned in. They were troubled in mind; but they were tired and sleepy, and it was useless to remain up. Redwing followed their example. Billy Bunter was slower. Having blinked suspiciously and uneasily into every nook and cranny, the fat Owl proceeded to blink into them all over again.

The Bounder stood before the fire, with his brows knitted, in angry thought.

"Not turning in, Smithy?" asked Tom, from his pillow.

Vernon-Smith shook his head.

"I'm staying up for that sportsman!" he said, between his teeth. "It's pretty clear, Reddy, that your father saw what he told us he saw last night. It was no fancy—unless we fancied the face at the window."

"I'm sure of that!"

"Well, then, what's the game?" asked



"Bunter!" Harry Wharton & Co. gave a sudden yell as Billy Bunter tottered into the room. "I—I say, you fellows!" he gasped. "What place is this? You never told me you were asked out to a Christmas dinner. I've walked about twenty miles——" "And you've come back to the place you started from!" said Vernon-Smith. "This is Polpelly!" "What!" Bunter's spectacles almost fell off in his amazement.

the Bounder savagely. "We're not idiots enough to believe in ghosts, I suppose. It's some sort of a trick to frighten us away."

"But who?" said Bob.

"That hound Zero!" snarled the Bounder. "He had to chuck the kidnapping stunt, and I've already told you that ten to one he would head for Polpelly, to try his luck here, without bothering about the law. Instead of finding the place empty, as he expected, he's found it crowded, and his game is to scare us off and leave him a clear field."

"But——" said Harry Wharton slowly.

"I'm certain of it!" snapped the Bounder. "When he lost us he headed here, and got here a day before we did. That's it, I tell you!"

"You may be right, of course," said Harry. "But look at it, Smithy! What we saw to-night, and what Reddy's pater seems to have seen last night—was the old sea-captain, Polpelly—the portrait over again. That Italian, Zero, is nothing like him."

"Disguise—make-up!"

"We've all seen Count Zero. He's got a plump, chubby face; nothing like old Polpelly, with his square jaw and long nose. He could fix up the beard and moustache, the ruff and the hat, but how the dickens could he alter his features?"

The Bounder was silent. He had no answer ready. Nothing could have been more unlike the Italian count's chubby face than the long-featured, saturnine visage of the old Elizabethan sea-captain.

"And how," said Frank Nugent quietly, "did he get into the house,

Smithy? Mr. Redwing had it bolted and barred last night, as it is now."

"These old places are full of secret passages and hidden doors. I've heard of their existence. All the squires of Polpelly were smugglers, and they used secret passages to get the contraband away after it was run into the cove down the coomb."

"Very likely; but how would an Italian—a man over from Italy—know anything of the secrets of the place? We've rooted all over the house without seeing anything of the kind. So far as we know, Count Zero has never been in the house at all."

The Bounder stood silent. His hard, practical mind rejected anything in the way of the supernatural. But he had to admit that he could make out no plausible connection between Count Zero and the phantom of Polpelly.

The count, doubtless, had a motive for scaring away the occupants of the old house, if he designed to make a search there for the lost doubloons—as Smithy firmly believed. But that was all Smithy had to "go upon." He stood and scowled at the leaping fire.

"Anyhow," he said at last, "Zero or not, somebody is up to some game, and as likely as not there will be some more ghost business to-night. I'm going to stay awake and watch."

"I say, you fellows, suppose we all stay awake," quavered Billy Bunter. "We can get a sleep in the train in the morning."

"Eh! What train?" asked Bob.

"I suppose we're clearing out of this, ain't we?" demanded Bunter. "I jolly well am, I can tell you that! Like Smithy's cheek to ask me here, I think!"

"I never asked you, and the sooner you clear off, the better!" growled Vernon-Smith.

"Beast!"

"We'll manage to get you away in the morning, Bunter, if you want to go," said Harry Wharton. "But we've all got to stick it to-night. Go to sleep, old fat man."

"I—I can't!" mumbled Bunter. "I—I say, if that gig-gig-ghost comes——"

"Think of Christmas pudding and mince pies!" suggested Bob Cherry. "Think of turkey and stuffing!"

"Are you fellows clearing off when Bunter does?" sneered the Bounder. "Are you afraid of spooks?"

Harry gave him a steady look.

"We're here to see you through, Smithy, if you want us. Nobody here is going to let you down, ghost or no ghost."

"You can bank on that!" said Bob.

"I say, you fellows, what about me?" hooted Bunter.

"Nothing about you, old fat bean! Go to sleep, and dream of turkeys and mince pies and pudding and pork!"

"Yah!"

Bunter was under the impression that he would not be able to sleep, after that ghastly apparition at the window of the old hall. But that turned out to be a mistaken impression. There were few things that Bunter was good at—but sleeping was one of the few!

About ten minutes later a deep snore rumbled through the room. Billy Bunter was fast asleep.

One by one the other fellows dropped off into slumber. But the Bounder remained up, walking restlessly about the room, to keep himself awake.

He was tired and sleepy—and getting

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more and more sleepy. After a time he dropped into an armchair by the fire—to rest, not to sleep.

But in spite of himself he nodded.

It was now long past midnight, and drowsiness, combined with the warmth of the fire, soon caused the Bounder's eyes to close.

The night grew older.

The candles burned down, and flickered and spluttered. The log fire burned lower, the blaze died away, but a red glow from the mass of embers spread through the room.

The Bounder slept—but it was an uneasy sleep. The face at the window was in his dreaming mind.

Perhaps some slight sound awakened him.

His eyes opened, and he blinked in the red glow of the sinking fire. It was the only light in the room—the candles were out.

Vernon-Smith felt a sudden thrill as he realised it. The candles could not all have burned out. Had they been blown out?

If so, it meant that there was a strange presence in the room.

Sitting in the high-backed chair, very still, Vernon-Smith listened with beating heart.

Was that a sound?

Outside the wind wailed round the old roofs—the boom of the ocean came up the coomb. Within, Bunter's snore rumbled. But what was that other sound—like a stealthy creeping foot-step? It was in the room somewhere—behind the high back of the chair in which the Bounder sat!

For a few moments Smithy sat still, listening, his heart throbbing, a creepy eerie chill on him, in spite of his nerve and courage. Something was in the room—natural or supernatural, there was something!

He set his teeth. He was going to know. Alive or dead, man or spectre, he was going to know what it was. He rose from the chair and looked over the high back—along the length of the great room. The blood ran to his heart in an icy chill.

Standing in front of the open doors of the great oak wardrobe, was a figure—the figure of the sea-captain of Polpelly—the face and figure of the portrait in the hall. The Bounder gripped the back of the chair as he stood staring—staring, with starting eyes.

From the dead white face, the smouldering eyes of the apparition burned at him. Then it backed slowly, and disappeared—and the shadowy interior of the oaken wardrobe swallowed it from sight.

The Bounder stood gazing, his eyes on the spot where the spectre had vanished.

He had seen Billy Bunter root through that vast old piece of furniture—no one, certainly, had been there then. It was a massive piece, ten feet wide, four or five feet deep, and extending from floor to ceiling. The great oak doors stood wide open as Bunter had left them after his search. The interior was densely dark—the glow of the firelight did not penetrate into it.

Had he fancied that vision? He knew that he had not. He had seen it—seen it disappear into that black interior—and it was there—it must be there! With set teeth, taking his courage in both hands, as it were, Vernon-Smith rushed across the firelit room, grasped at the heavy oak doors, and slammed them shut.

The crash of the thudding oak rang

almost like thunder through the room. It awakened every fellow there—even Billy Bunter—and every fellow started up in alarm.

"What—"

"Smithy—"

"Back up, you men!" said the Bounder, between his teeth. "I've seen him—he's here—and I've trapped him!"

THE FIFTEENTH CHAPTER.

Vanished!

"**B**UT—Smithy—" gasped Harry Wharton.

"I tell you he's here!" hissed the Bounder. "Get hold of something—get ready—I tell you I saw him, and he backed into this, and I shut the doors on him. We've got him trapped!"

"Oh!" gasped Bob Cherry.

Vernon-Smith stood with his shoulder jammed against the closed doors. He was prepared for a desperate push from within—an effort on the part of the trapped trickster to escape.

But there was no movement—no sound.

"I—I say, you fellows, what have you blown the candles out for?" gasped Billy Bunter. "I say—"

"They were out when I opened my eyes!" said Vernon-Smith. "I fell asleep in the chair. Light them, somebody!"

Nugent struck matches and lighted the candles. Bob Cherry stirred the fire, sending up a glowing blaze.

The vast room was brightly lighted now, from end to end.

Every face was eager—except Bunter's. Bunter sat up in bed, with his blankets huddled round him, blinking in terror.

Bob kept the heavy, old-fashioned poker in his hand. Johnny Bull picked up an ancient pair of tongs. The other fellows selected handy billets of wood, from the stack of fuel beside the fireplace. If the strange visitant was there, and if it was human, they were ready to deal with him.

"You're sure, Smithy—" muttered Wharton.

"Of course I'm sure." The Bounder's eyes were gleaming. "We've got him now—Count Zero, or whoever he is—we've got him. I tell you, I saw him, and he backed into this cupboard—and I shut the doors on him. I tell you, we've got him trapped."

His voice was exultant.

Not for a moment did he believe that it was a spectre he had seen, strange and unearthly as it had appeared. It was an imposition—a fake—he was certain of it; and he had the trickster trapped.

"Well, we've got him, if he's there!" said Frank Nugent slowly. "Get the door open, Smithy, and let's see!"

"Look out!" said the Bounder tensely. "If it's that villain Zero, he's armed—"

"I say, you fellows," howled Billy Bunter. "I say, don't open those doors! Keep 'em shut! Stick all the furniture against them!"

"Shut up, you fat ass!"

"Ready?" asked the Bounder, with a glance round. He gripped a cudgel in his hand. "You fellows ready?"

"Quite!" said Harry Wharton quietly. "Get going, Smithy!"

The Famous Five and Tom Redwing stood ready. If a man was trapped in the old wardrobe, he was certain to be desperate, and most likely to be armed.

But they did not shrink from the encounter. Yet if a desperate man skulked there, it was strange that he made no sound or movement—that he waited, in silence, till the juniors chose to drag him from his hiding-place.

The Bounder, at least, had no doubts. Unless it was a spectre, that could vanish through solid walls, he had him trapped. And he did not believe for a moment that it was a supernatural vision.

With a steady hand he flung wide open the heavy doors that he had slammed on the vanishing phantom.

Bob Cherry, with the poker in his right hand, held up a candle in his left.

The light glimmered into the dusky interior.

It showed the solid oak walls of the huge old Tudor wardrobe. It glimmered and glistened on ancient oak. But it showed nothing else.

The interior was empty.

Vernon-Smith stared in. He was ready to strike; but there was nothing at which to strike.

For a moment he stood stupefied.

Then he snatched a candle and strode into the musty interior of the ancient wardrobe. He threw the light round him, into every dim corner.

Nothing!

The other fellows collected at the open doors, staring in. Only the glimmering old oak met their eyes.

There was a dead silence.

Vernon-Smith stood, candle in hand, looking round him, his eyes almost bulging from his head.

He had seen the figure of the old sea-captain disappear there. He had slammed the doors on it. There was no other way out.

Yet the interior was empty!

He pulled himself together. He moved along the oak-panelled back that backed on the stone wall of the room. He tapped the panels with his cudgel, listening for a hollow sound in reply. Some secret panel that would open—that was the thought in his mind.

But from every tap came back the solid sound of a solid wall. There was thick stone behind the oak in every spot.

The perspiration started out on his brow.

What did it mean? What could it mean? Was it, in truth, a visitant from another world that he had seen, in the dim glow of the firelight?

He stepped out again, his face white.

"I—I say, you fellows, is—is anybody there?" wailed Bunter.

"No!"

"Oh lor'!"

The juniors gathered by the fire. Bob Cherry threw on logs. The Bounder pitched down his cudgel, and stood with clenched hands. What did it mean? He was trying to think out what it could mean.

"You—you're sure you saw it, Smithy?" asked Tom Redwing at last, in a low voice.

"Fool!" snarled the Bounder. "Am I the fellow to dream it, or to be taken in by a shadow?"

"If you were only half-awake—" said Tom quietly.

"I was wide awake—as wide awake as I am now!" said the Bounder savagely. "I can't understand it, but I know I saw it. I thought I had it trapped, and now—"

He broke off. Unless there was a secret way through the wall at the back of the old oak, it was a phantom he had seen. There was no sign of a secret way. The wall was solid. And if it was Count Zero how could he know

anything of the secrets of Polpelly, known to no one else—he, a foreigner from a distant country, a stranger to Polpelly? And if it was not the count, who then? Who else could have any motive for such ghastly trickery? The Bounder felt himself utterly beaten, and there was a chill of uneasy dread mingled with his bitter anger.

Not an eye closed again while the long hours of darkness lasted. The juniors remained grouped by the fire, keeping it burning bright till the grey dawn crept in at the windows. But nothing more was seen, nothing was heard, and dawn, to their intense relief, came at last!

THE SIXTEENTH CHAPTER.

Bunter All Over!

"I'm going!"

Billy Bunter made that announcement at breakfast.

The events of that wild night had been enough—in fact, too much—for Bunter. They had not, fortunately, affected his appetite. He was parking quite a substantial breakfast, in preparation for his journey. But he was fed up with Polpelly. Even Bunter Court, and the cheery society of his sister Bessie and his brother Sammy, seemed attractive, in comparison. Bunter was going!

He blinked round as he made the announcement, perhaps in expectation of seeing looks of dismay dawn on every face.

But nobody seemed dismayed. Indeed, nobody seemed to have heard his announcement, important as it was. The other fellows went on with their breakfast, passing Billy Bunter by like the idle wind, which they regarded not.

Bunter frowned.

"I say, you fellows!" he hooted. "I'm going!"

"Hear, hear!" said Bob Cherry, taking note at last of the fact that Bunter was speaking. "Good egg! Make it snappy!"

"I've had enough of this!" said Bunter, glaring at Bob over a plate piled with eggs and bacon, ham and kidneys.

"Better leave the rest," agreed Bob. "You've scoffed enough for about fifteen chaps already—"

"I don't mean I've had enough of this grub, you silly ass! I mean—"

"Never mind what you mean, old fat porpoise. Pack it up!"

"I mean, I've had enough of this rotten show!" said Bunter. "Of course, I'm not afraid of ghosts, like you chaps! You looked a pretty sickly lot last night. What I mean is—Groogh! Ooogh!"

Speaking with a mouth full—especially a mouth as large as Bunter's—was liable to cause trouble. Trouble accrued, as a portion of Bunter's cargo went down the wrong way.

"Urrgh! Grooogh! Ooooh!" spluttered Bunter. "I say, you fellows—wooh!—what I mean is—Groogh—yooogh—mooogh—"

"You don't make your meaning clear," said Bob, shaking his head. "Let's have it plain. Do you mean groogh, or yooogh, or mooogh, exactly?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Urrgh! I mean—woooch!" Bunter gasped, and gurgled, and got over the difficulty caused by the shifting of cargo. "I mean, I'm fed up—and I'm going! You fellows got me here, practically on false pretences—"

"Oh crumbs!"

"Making out it was going to be a

jolly Christmas!" hooted Bunter. "Jolly—I don't think! Well, I'm going! As you got me here, you've got to get me away, somehow! There isn't any telephone, or anything. How are we going to get a car?"

"The howfulness is terrific, my esteemed fat Bunter."

"I say, you fellows—"

"You silly ass!" grunted the Bounder. "No car can get on the road in this snow. You'll have to walk to Pilverton, and take the railway. There are local trains every now and then; they'll land you at Barnstaple some time during the day—with luck! Then you can take the train for London. I'll stand your fare—with pleasure!"

"Easier to stand Bunter's fare than to stand Bunter!" remarked Johnny Bull.

"Yah! How can I get to Pilverton?" demanded Bunter. "Think I can walk it?"

"Crawl on your hands and knees, if you like. Or, if you see a plane buzzing about, ask for a lift."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Beast!" roared Bunter.

Having finished breakfast, the Greyfriars party strolled over to the door, which was wide open, letting in the bright winter sunshine, and the gleam of snow in the coomb. It was cold and frosty, but a glorious morning, and it had the effect of brightening faces that were rather clouded and thoughtful after the eerie happenings of the night.

Whatever might be the explanation of the night's strange mystery, the Bounder was coolly determined to "stick it out" at Polpelly; and his friends were going to stick it out with him, whatever might betide. Billy Bunter was welcome to depart, if he liked, and there was no doubt that there would be dry eyes when he left.

"I say, you fellows!" yelled Bunter. "Don't walk off while a chap's talking to you! I say—"

"Don't you start walking while a chap's talking!" chanted Bob Cherry.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

And the chums of the Remove walked out into the frosty sunshine, heedless of the fat Owl.

Billy Bunter snorted, and finished his breakfast—or, rather, his third or fourth breakfast.

He was going—he was determined on that! The grub was good—he admitted it! But for the first time in his fat career, Billy Bunter considered that grub was not everything!

A five-mile walk to the nearest railway station was rather a lion in the path. But it was the only way!

Fortified with a large—not to say enormous—breakfast, Billy Bunter felt equal to it. Warmly clad for the walk, with Nugent's scarf wrapped round his fat neck, and Bob's woolly gloves on his fat hands, and Johnny Bull's pull-over under his coat, Bunter rolled out—his only trouble being that Wharton's best boots were rather tight.

"I say, you fellows."

The juniors were getting warm with a snowball game. But they ceased as Bunter rolled out into the coomb.

"I'm going," said Bunter. "I shall have to ask you to send on my baggage, Smithy—I can't carry it."

"It won't cause a breakdown on the railway," agreed Smithy.

"Yah! And I shall have to borrow my fare, as my postal order hasn't come along in this outlandish, rotten hole."

"Right-ho!"

"I dare say I can get home on five pounds," said Bunter.

"I dare say you can get home on exactly two pounds three-and-six," said Vernon-Smith, "and that's what you're going to have—though I admit it's worth double to see your back."

"Beast!"

"Merry Christmas, Bunter!" shouted all the juniors, as the fat Owl started.

"Yah!" was Bunter's reply.

With that cheery valediction, Bunter rolled away.

Up the coomb he went, and up the path to the road. From the coast road, over the cliffs, the branch road to Pilverton jutted off. Bunter found it, and trudged along it in the snow.

He started quite cheerfully. Bunter fancied that he was some walker—able to walk any other fellow's legs off. That was, so to speak, before taking. After taking, he felt quite different.

Having plugged half a mile, Bunter was feeling tired. Also, he arrived at a fork in the road.

There was a signpost. But it was high up, and blurred with frost, and Bunter's limited vision failed at the test.

He plugged on, hoping for the best.

But it was the worst that happened.

A mile—which felt like ten—receded slowly under his feet, and then he came to crossroads again. This time there was no signpost at all.

Bunter blinked round on what seemed a totally uninhabited country of snow and frosty branches. No doubt there were inhabitants somewhere, but the weather had not tempted them out.

He trudged on.

How many miles he covered he never knew. Sometimes it was uphill. Sometimes it was downhill. But if he covered five, it could not have been in the direction of Pilverton, for that town remained distant and invisible.

By muddy lanes he trudged, gasping for breath—getting hungry—hardly

(Continued on page 28.)

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Dan of the Dogger Bank!

By David Goodwin



The Mysterious Island!

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

His past life a complete blank, the youngster is given the name of "Dogger Dan," and signed on as fifth hand under Skipper Atheling, Finn 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 engages Jake Rebow, commander of the Black Squadron, a fleet manned by men whom no honest trawler would take on board, to get Kenneth out of the way for ever.

Arriving at Amsterdam, Dan and Buck Atheling go ashore, where Rebow's confederates make a fruitless attempt on their lives.

Late that night, the two chums catch the crew of the Adder, the Blacks' flagship, smuggling. Boarding the trawler, they imprison the two squadron men left in charge, and then make for port, only to get wrecked on a lonely sandbank in the North Sea.

Thoroughly exhausted, Dan and Buck make for a lonely farmstead. Peering through a lighted window, they see a wizened old man seated before a table loaded with gold coins. Both boys swoon a moment or two before the door is flung open!

Dan opened his eyes drowsily; then he closed them again in sleepy content. "Feels jolly comfy!" he murmured, wriggling his toes. "But where are my sea-boots?"

A drowsy grunt sounded somewhere close by.

"That's Buck!" muttered Dan, his eyes still closed. "Buck, old boy, how's weather? She's lying v'ry quiet. When's our watch on deck?"

He opened his eyes with a start, and realised that he was not on the Grey Seal. It was the Adder, then? No;

she had gone ashore in the gale. Dan began to remember things.

How was it he was not lying out upon the sandhills, drenched to the skin, the howl of the sea gale in his ears? Where were the shrieking sea-birds that fluttered and wheeled in the darkness?

It was broad daylight. He was lying between clean sheets of coarse linen, in a cosy bed, like a ship's bunk, let into the wall of a great red room, with a sanded floor. The walls were covered with strange old guns and ancient copper vessels, and blue china dishes. A fire was burning itself out on a large open hearth.

Where was the old farmstead? Where, above all, was the hole in the floor, the table loaded with gold, and the wizened old man whose eyes had gleamed like the cold metal he fingered? That part, Dan concluded, was a dream.

Dan had never seen a gold coin—except as an ornament on a watch-chain.

Then, looking up, he saw the very man himself bending over his couch. But the grey eyes in the wrinkled face were looking at him kindly. The man seemed an ordinary old Dutch islander, half seaman, half tiller of the soil.

Dan was in the farmhouse, after all.

"The gold was all my eye!" thought Dan. "I must have been dreaming!"

The old man spoke in passable English.

"You feels better so, ain't it?" he said. "Vero you from—eh?"

"Wrecked on the sands," said Dan. "English snack—Adder, of Lowestoft."

He stopped suddenly. At the mention of the name the old man's eyes grew stern and grim. A hard light dawned in them.

Dan tried to rise, but the old man thrust him back and looked so fierce that Dan's hand went involuntarily towards his belt. But he was weaponless.

"Before you move hand or foot," said the old man grimly, "tell me vot you do on dot vessel? Who vos you?"

"He thinks we're from the Black Fleet," thought Dan. "Knows the Adder! Well, we owe him something

for taking us in, so he shall have it straight!"

"Quick," said the Dutchman—"the truth!"

"That's what I deal in," said Dan, "and this is how it was. I see the Blacks are no friends of yours, and I've heard they've got a sort of port of call somewhere in these islands. Well, they're up against us for all they're worth, and as we caught the Adder smuggling near Ymuiden, and most of her crew ashore, we just borrowed her."

"We reckoned to take her into port, but the gale blew us along here, and last night she struck the sands and went to pieces. There were two squadron men aboard, but I don't think they got ashore alive. Then we saw your light, and just managed to get up to the door. I don't remember any more; but we were pretty well done for, and I suppose we just wilted where we were—went off, you know."

"That's right," said Buck, from his bed in the other wall.

The old man crossed over to him, rested his hands on the bed, and bent a piercing stare into the boy's eyes. Then he turned and did the same to Dan.

"Goot!" he said, his features relaxing. "You vas honest, both of you! I know der honest man when I see him. You have told der truth—yes! You know noddings more?"

Dan shook his head. At the moment he felt convinced that the dimly remembered vision of the gold was a dream.

"Goot!" muttered their host again. "Now you feel all right—eh? Dot vos fresh food on der table. Dose vos your clothes by der fire. You put dem on, and make good breakfast. I come back soon."

With a kindly word the old man went out.

The boys tumbled out of bed and began to dress. Dan, as he looked round the room, began to wonder again as he noted every detail he had seen the night before. There, too, was the window he had looked through at the weird sight of the miser and his wealth.

"Buck," he said, in an undertone,

"was it a dream, after all? There's the table and the chair. There was a trap-door in the floor, and a big cashbox by it. But there's fresh sand strewn over the place now."

"It was real enough!" said Buck, glancing round. "I'm certain of it. I thought it was a dream, too, at first. Lie low! The old boy may be watching us."

"He's the right sort, if he's a miser," said Dan. "Does himself well. Look at the breakfast. I thought they lived on crusts and water, and never gave anything away. Come on, I'm starving!"

They made a hearty meal, and by the time the old man returned, they were feeling as fit as ever.

"We'd like to do something in return for your kindness, cap'n," said Dan. "Can we lend a hand at your—your business?"

"My business?" said the old man slyly. "Vot you tink dot vos?"

"I don't know," said Dan, "unless it's farming."

He did not like to suggest it was smuggling, as he suspected.

"No," said the old man, "not do much farming, mit only sand and grass, nor smuggling, needer," he chuckled, guessing what was passing in Dan's mind. "Dis is der island of Baltrum, and I show you my business. Jan Osterling vos my name. It vos a poor business, but it shoost keep me alive, you know."

The boys said nothing. They were both keen to see the business, on a lonely sandbank of the North Sea, that could yield so much gold.

"But first we must see if dere are any more saved from der wreck," continued Jan. "I don't like dose fellers loose about my island."

The three went out together into the grey twilight. The wind was still blowing freshly, though the gale had lulled, and a tremendous surf thundered on the lonely beaches. It was a wild spot. The white ribbon of sand that formed the island, walled from the fury of the waters by low dunes, green and fertile only in the middle, looked like a segment of the backbone of the North Sea jutting above the surface.

On its outer front the great breakers roared and fretted without ceasing, and beyond them lay the grey sea. On either side, like beads on a string, lay other islands, with long gaps of frothing, shoal-cumbered water through which the North Sea tides rushed to fill the mighty waste of shallow sea and sand that lay between the islands and the mainland. And far behind them lay the land itself, like an endless white line, so low was the coast.

Jan and the boys walked round the beaches, a circuit of nearly three miles.

The old Dutchman kept a keen eye for any sign of strangers, and seemed ill at ease. But he grew more cheerful as they completed the round without passing anyone else.

Of the wreck of the *Adder*, save for a few battered spars and the main-hatch, split in two and stranded at high-water mark, there was not a trace.

"Der current on der ebb-tide carry everyding away," explained Jan. "Dere never comes much wreckage on der beach. Und now go we to do a liddle work at my trade"—he winked confidentially—"and you shall help."

He led the way to the foot of the sandhills, where Jim and Buck had been east ashore. All round the island they had passed through great clouds of shore-fowl, but here the birds rose at their approach in a flapping, screaming mass. There were thousands of them,

Oyster-catchers, in great black-and-white companies, wheeled and whistled around. Grey plover and ring-dotterels hung in the air, filling earth and sky with their mournful piping. Red-shanks shrieked and dashed almost in the faces of the intruders. From the holes in the dunes rose scores of nesting shelducks, and the wide marsh behind the sandhills was thick with black-headed gulls and peewits.

"Dey don't like strangers," grinned Jan. "Stop! You haf smashed two nests already."

Buck looked down at his boots. They were yellow with the yolk of eggs.

The boys stared in wonder.

"Now you see vere der bread an'

Between Ourselves.

"Christmas comes but once a year,
And when it comes it brings good cheer."

WELL, here we are again, chums, and as Dicky Nugent, author of the tip-top tales of St. Sam's, would say: "All Jolly, Merry and Bright." And here we are again with another Bumper Christmas Number of the good old MAGNET. When you glance through the pages of this issue, I think you will agree with me that it's bang up to standard—with just the kind of stories and articles one can enjoy to the full, sitting round the old Yule log, heedless of the cold winds outside and the whirling snowflakes covering the countryside in a mantle of white. Still, Christmas without snow would be like a plum pudding without plums, wouldn't it?

To "Magnetites" all over the world my staff and I wish you

A Very Merry Christmas and a Bright and Prosperous New Year.

Frank Richards also joins with us in wishing you all you wish yourselves, with tons of tasty tuck and plenty of foaming "pop" with which to wash it down.

Our popular author will certainly add to your enjoyment next week with another seasonable story of the chums of Greyfriars in which Harry Wharton & Co. meet with the most thrilling holiday experiences of their lives at Polpelly in

"THE HOUSE OF MYSTERY!"

fringing the desolate coast of Cornwall. The "Greyfriars Herald," together with the thrill-packed chapters of David Goodwin's stirring sea story and our clever rhymester's effusion will round off another grand twopennyworth.

By the way, if you're undecided as to what you would like in the way of Christmas presents, there's still time to make a selection from our wide range of Annuals, namely: "Holiday," "Hobby," "Modern Boy's Book of Adventure Stories," and "Popular Book of Boys' Stories."

Sorry, this special Christmas Number has left me without space to answer the various queries I have received this week, but I will do my best to answer them next week.

Once again wishing you all the very best for the 25th, and hoping to meet again next week.

YOUR EDITOR.

cheese come from," said Jan. "You don't see der nests—eh? I show you."

The sand and stones and rough grass were all the boys saw. But, stooping rapidly, Jan picked up, within a few yards, a dozen brown, mottled eggs, pointed at one end like plovers' eggs. Then he showed the boys how to search. The eggs were exactly the same colour as the stones and sand. They lay, their points turned inwards, without any nest, and it was easy to pass clutches of them by without seeing them.

Jan produced a pile of flat baskets from a little shed in the dunes, and showed the boys how to pack the eggs.

Then they went to work, taking only the eggs that lay in threes, for the full clutches, Jan explained, had been already eat upon.

Working swiftly, Dan and Buck gathered an enormous number, and then went to the marsh, where they filled a dozen large baskets with gull and plover eggs.

"Dat vos nodings," laughed Jan, seeing the boys' astonishment, as they carried load after load to the farmstead. "Der season vos nearly over. Each bird lay four times if der eggs taken, and der fourth time I leave der eggs to hatch. Dot vos only von place. Dero are many millions of birds on der island. But you haf done very goot, boys, and safe me a lot of time. Now we haf dinner—eh?"

After dinner, Jan packed all the baskets on a couple of large handcarts, and Buck and Dan helped to wheel them down to a little landing-wharf on the inner side of the island.

It was high tide, and soon a red-sailed, long-prowed craft came running across from the mainland.

A good-looking young Dutchman handled the sails, his wife, in snowy white Dutch headdress, was at the helm, and a baby kicked and crowed in a basket in the stern.

"Dis vos my nephew and his wife," said Jan, introducing the boys, whose presence seemed to astonish the newcomers. "Dey take der eggs, and send dem up-country. Gif me der bag, Max."

Max handed over a stout leather bag that clinked suggestively, and Jan slung it to his belt.

Then the vessel—the baskets having been taken on board—set out for the mainland again.

The boys and their host went back to the farmstead.

Jan Osterling grew restless and ill at ease. The cheery, hospitable light died from his eyes, and the hard, cold gleam took its place. Presently, he came up to the boys, nervous and sullen, almost menacing.

"You would do me a great favour to walk round der island for an hour," he said. "I had liddle accounts to make of der pennies I get for der eggs. I cannot think unless I vos alone."

The boys glanced at each other.

"Certainly!" said Buck. "We'll keep out of your way till you've done. After that, we must see about getting away."

"Ah, I do all dat for you," said Jan. He clutched Buck's arm convulsively, his eyes glinting like knife-points. "You vos come back in vun hour!"

"Not a minute before!" said Buck.

And the boys went out.

(Look out for more thrill-packed chapters of this stirring sea story in next week's MAGNET.)

THE MAGNET LIBRARY.—No. 1,453.

THE SPECTRE OF POLPELLE!

(Continued from page 25.)

hoping to get to the railway now, but hoping that he would emerge from those awful lanes on to a high-road, at least.

"Oh lor'!" groaned the hapless Owl. "Beasts! Oh crikey! I—I wonder where I am! Oh scissors!"

He trudged. Frequently he stopped to rest, and then he trudged again. Trudging at a snail's pace, and long and frequent rests, used up the hours. But he emerged on a road at last—and gasped with relief.

He trudged along the road.

Another turning. It led downhill—so Bunter took it.

He plugged on downwards. If only he could meet someone who would tell him the way! He was, happily, unaware that, having wandered in circles, he had never been as much as a mile from his starting-point, on the loneliest stretch of the Devonshire coast.

Gasping for breath, he trudged and plugged. The path he was following grew more rugged and wild. It looked like a path through one of those beastly coombs, shut in by high, sloping sides. But, suddenly, to his intense relief, he saw a building, with smoke rising from a great chimney-pile. He halted, gasping, and blinked at it.

It stood high up the coomb, approached by steps, just like Polpelly. Whatever it was, and wherever it was, Bunter did not care—so long as he had reached a human habitation at last!

With a last effort, Bunter dragged himself up the great steps, passed through an arched gateway, and plugged across a courtyard to an ancient stone porch. The door stood wide open, and firelight played within—a welcome sight to Bunter's weary eyes.

He plugged on into the porch. He tottered into the wide doorway. A scent that seemed sweeter than attar of roses greeted him—the scent of dinner—turkey and stuffing! He gasped, and tottered in. If only they let him have some of that dinner!

There was a sudden yell:

"Bunter!"

Bunter jumped.

He blinked.

His eyes almost popped through his spectacles.

Harry Wharton & Co., the Bounder, Tom Redwing, John Redwing, all rose from the table and the turkey—staring at him! And Bunter stared at them!

"I—I say, you fellows—" he gasped.

"Bunter!" gasped Bob.

"I—I say, how did you fellows get here?" gasped Bunter.

"How did we get here?" repeated Harry Wharton.

"Yes. What place is this?"

"Wha-a-at place is it?" stuttered Nugent.

"You beasts!" groaned Bunter.

"You never told me you were asked out to a Christmas dinner, or I'd have stayed on, and gone with you. You know that! Now I've walked about

twenty miles, and happened on you by chance! What is this place called?"

The Greyfriars fellows stared blankly at Bunter. For a moment or two they did not understand—then they roared.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"It's called Polpelly!" yelled the Bounder.

Bunter's spectacles almost fell off in his amazement.

"Pip-pip-pip-Polpelly!" he stuttered.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The juniors yelled. Bunter, evidently, having wandered in weary circles, had got back to where he had started from—without being in the least aware of it.

"Hungry, old man?" grinned the Bounder. "We've got turkey. Sit down, you blithering idiot! Ha, ha, ha!"

Billy Bunter collapsed into a chair at the table. He had walked and walked and walked—how many miles he shuddered to think of. And he had got back to Polpelly. But there was still balm in Gilead, so to speak! He had got back in time for dinner! And the dinner was good! The turkey was good—in fact, ripping—not to say spilling! Grinning faces surrounded Bunter as he gobbled turkey. But he did not mind—in fact, he grinned himself. The grub was all right—and so, for the time, at least, everything was all right!

THE END.

(Be sure you read the next yarn in this topping Christmas series, entitled: "THE HOUSE OF MYSTERY!" It's a real corker, chums!)

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THE SKOOLBOY SKATERS

By DICKY NUGENT

"Lickham, old scout!" cried Doctor Birchmell, poking his head round the door of Mr. Lickham's study. "Prepare for a very pleasant surprise!"

Mr. L. Jollivell Lickham looked up from the portmanteau he was packing and grinned.

"A pleasant surprise, sir? How jolly!" he exclaimed. "I suppose you mean you've brought me along a Christmas present?"

"It's something you'll enjoy, even more than a Christmas present," grinned the Head. "The fact is, Lickham, I've decided to honour you by staying with you over the Christmas holliday!"

Mr. Lickham's jaw dropped. "Stay with me over the Christmas holliday?" he gasped. "My hat! I thought you said it was a pleasant surprise, sir!"

Dr. Birchmell chuckled. "Ahem! Well, Lickham, if you really want the truth, I am in a bit of a dilemma this Christmas," he admitted. "Owing to the increased cost of living and what-not, I'm stony broke—or, to put it vulgarly, financially embarrassed! Where my turkey and Christmas-pudding are coming

from—unless I'm invited out somewhere—is a real puzzle!"

Mr. Lickham started. "My hat! I've just remembered I picked up a letter for you in the letter-rack just now," he said, diving into his trousers pocket. "I wonder if there's an invitation inside it? Catch!"

The Head caught it—on the tip of his nose—then opened it and read it eagerly. As he read on, his eyes began to gleam.

"Few!" he whispered. "Guess what it is, Lickham!"

"A summons for the rates?" hazarded Mr. Lickham.

"Fathead! It's a challenge from Doctor Wackingham, the headmaster of St. Bill's—a challenge to a carnival ice-hockey match to be played on the frozen River Ripple on Christmas Eve!"

"Between the two of you?" ejaculated the master of the Fourth.

"Ass! Between a St. Bill's team and a St. Sam's team, of course! A number of his boys are staying on at the skool over the week, you see, Lickham, and he thinks this will be a good way of keeping them amused."

"But the St. Sam's boys are all going home," objected Mr. Lickham.

The Head winked. "I fancy many of them will be glad to stay on for a few days when they hear about this attraction, Lickham!"

"But the tuck, sir? How are you going to feed a big crowd when you haven't enuff tuck even for yourself?"

Doctor Birchmell laughed. "Strange as it may sound, Lickham, Doctor Wackingham

himself has answered that question for me! He suggests, just as a sporting gesture, that the headmaster of the winning team shall pay the cost of a wacking grate Christmas feed for the entire party! So it is only necessary for St. Sam's to lose and—presto!—my Christmas problem will be solved!"

"Yes, but supposing they win?"

"They won't!" grinned the Head. "I shall see to that! Just to make sure of the result, I shall play for St. Sam's myself. Well, Lickham, what about staying on for this ripping affair?"

"Thanks, awfully, sir!" grinned Mr. Lickham. "To be quite frank, I wasn't feeling keen on spending Christmas with my Aunt Aggertha. It will be a real treat to stay on for an ice-carnival!"

"Good egg! Now I'll go and see who else I can get for the merry party!"

And the Head scampered off like a two-year-old to find some recruits!

Needless to say, it came as a staggering surprise to the St. Sam's boys when the Head started running about, asking who would stay behind for Christmas.

But when they thought over the matter carefully, there were many who came to the conclusion that there was a lot to be said for staying on at St. Sam's for a few days. Doctor Birchmell's terms were certainly attractive. There were going to be no lessons and no disciplin and no locking-up of gates.

Finally, there was the carnival ice-hockey match with St. Bill's to be considered. It would be letting down the St. Bill's fellows, Jack Jolly of the Fourth argued, if everybody cleared off.

The result was that there was

a ripping response to the Head's appeal and crowds of fellows decided to spend the first part of their week at St. Sam's.

When the rest of the skool had gone, they settled down to have a jolly good time. "Rags" and concerts and study feeds and visits to Muggleton turned the day into one giddy round of pleasure.

Christmas Eve dawned, bright and frosty, and as soon as brekker was over, the fellows crowded down to the frozen River Ripple to prepare for the grate ice carnival. Japanese lanterns and flood-lights were rigged up, and a rink marked out for the ice-hockey match. Then they all went back to the skool to put on their fancy dresses.

After dinner, things began to warm up—although it was freezing harder than ever! From the moment when the St. Bill's

and the St. Bill's fellows simply precked when their eyes fell on Doctor Birchmell in the guise of an old-time highwayman!

"Merry Christmas, everybody!" cried Doctor Wackingham, when he could make himself heard.

"Same to you and many of us!" retorted Doctor Birchmell. "Welcome to the St. Sam's Christmas Ice Carnival! Thanks for your ice-hockey challenge, Doctor Wackingham! I hoap the best team loses—I mean the first team wins!"

"Surely, my dear Birchmell," grinned Doctor Wackingham, "what you really mean is that you hoap the best team will win?"

"Oh—or—eggsactly!" gasped the Head, turning as red as a lony, as he realised how he was putting his foot in it. "Well, gentlemen, I suggest that we

shall therefore have the pleasure of standing Sam for our grate Christmas feast!"

"I trust you're wrong," grinned Doctor Birchmell, with his tongue in his cheek. "I shall be keeping goal for St. Sam's myself, so we ought to win!"

Five minnits later, the two weirdly-arrayed teams lined up for the grate hockey match.

Phe-c-e-p!

They were off! Amid deafening cheers, Slogham, of St. Bill's, slogged the puck half-way down to the St. Sam's goal. Another St. Bill's player skated after it and gave it another nock for goal; but the St. Sam's supporters breathed a sigh of relief when they saw that it was an easy shot which the meekest novice could save.

An instant later, they gasped with astonishment. For, instead of slamming the puck back to the St. Sam's first line, Doctor Birchmell, in goal, calmly hooked it in with his stick and pushed it into his own net!

"Goal!" shrieked the St. Bill's men. And a goal it was! But what on earth had made the Head play so badly? That was the question the St. Sam's fellows were asking each other.

Time and time again, Doctor Birchmell muffed easy saves, or presented the puck to St. Bill's, and it was plain to all that the Head was bent on losing the game for his side!

The first half ended with the score 5—0 in favour of St. Bill's. But the game wasn't over yet! During the interval, Burleigh had called together all the home players bar the Head, and begged them, for the honour of St. Sam's, to go all out for a win.

Burleigh's words acted like a tonic on the team when play was resumed. First, Tallboys scored; then Burleigh himself; then

Jolly and Fearless in quick succession.

The Head, in goal, almost knocked at the neeze when Burleigh brought the scores level. Surely St. Sam's wasn't going to win? But they did! Just before the final whistle, Jack Jolly sent in a smasher that left the St. Bill's goalie standing.

"Goal!"

"St. Sam's wins!"

"Hooley!"

The crowd went nearly mad with eggstement. But not so the Head! If he was mad with anything, it was chagrin!

The ice-carnival went on. When darkness came and the scene was illuminated with floodlights and Japanese lanterns, the revels reached their hite. But through it all the Head went about with a fizzog as long as a fiddle.

The die had been cast now. It was up to the Head to provide the provender for to-morrow's Christmas feast. And what the Head was wondering was, what would happen when his guests found that no Christmas feast would be forthcoming!

(Will the Head find a way of conjuring up a feed for his hungry horde of Christmas guests? For the answer, read "Santa Claus of St. Sam's!" in next week's seasonable number!)

When we heard that Coker had been seen taking them away, we promptly made a move for the Fifth Games Study. We knew their Christmas Party was in full swing just then, and the inference was obvious. Coker had borrowed the props in order to act Father Christmas himself!

Off we dashed to the Fifth Games Study—bent on getting back our Santa Claus outfit and teaching Coker he couldn't touch our stuff without asking permission—even at Christmas!

We were in luck—or so we thought! We ran into Santa Claus, wearing our stuff, right outside the Games Study. There was a yell from our crowd.

"There's Coker!"

"Bump him!"

"Take our clobber off him!"

Before "Santa" could say a word, we were piling into him. He crashed. Westward peeling off his scarlet cloak.

And then someone pulled off his whiskers—and we discovered our horrible mistake.

Santa Claus was not Coker, after all, but Mr. Prout, the Fifth Form Master! Coker himself was inside the Games Study, having merely borrowed the outfit at Mr. Prout's request to enable Mr. Prout to join in his Form's festivities, like the rest, in fancy dress.

Now you know why I'm all for abolishing those very misleading appendages, Santa Claus' whiskers!

SANTA'S BEARD SHOULD BE ABOLISHED!

DECLARES HARRY WHARTON



I'm in favour of doing away with Santa Claus' whiskers!

This sounds revolutionary, I know. But it will be worth making the effort if it saves us from committing again the fearful blunder we made over the Christmas Party they held in the Fifth Games Study this week!

It was partly Wibley's fault. If he hadn't left the props basket of the Remove Dramatic Society unlocked, Coker wouldn't have been able to walk in and help himself to the Santa Claus outfit inside. But he did leave the props basket open, and Coker did come along and help himself!

When we trooped in for the dress-rehearsal of the Remove End-of-Term Rag, the outfit was missing—whiskers and all!



Wingate, North, Loder, and about half a dozen other mighty men of the Sixth saw it—so it must be true. That's how everybody looked on the ghost that was alleged to have appeared in the Sixth passage just before breaking-up!

Of course, if the Remove had seen it, they'd have been called young idiots. But it's a different matter with the Sixth!

What impressed everybody was the number of fellows who saw it. It's true that they were just returning from a breaking-up supper-party in the Prefects' room. But nobody naturally suggested that they had been eating mince pies and Christmas-pudding on such a scale as to make them start seeing things!

Hear what Walker had to say about it when I called on him for the "Herald," and asked him for his version of it:

"Oh, yes! It was a ghost, all right, kid—no mistake about that! All white, it was—white and eerie! We could see the shape of a head and arms and body—but below that it seemed to fade away to nothing!"

"It takes a lot to scare me, though I say it myself; but I don't mind admitting that when I looked at that Nameless Thing, my heart missed a beat!"

"We all felt the same way about it, too; but our numbers gave us courage, and after we'd got over the first shock, we made a rush."

"Believe it or not, kid, the Thing seemed to shrivel away to nothing—and then vanished! We searched the passage from end to end, but there wasn't a trace of it anywhere!"

(Continued at foot of extreme right-hand column.)

GREYFRIARS GHOST SCARES SIXTH—AND HOW!

By DICK RAKE

The appearance of Santa Claus in Bunter's room on Christmas Eve was not a pleasant surprise for the Owl. Thinking it was a ghost, he dived under the bedclothes—till Bob Cherry, his "Santa Claus" disguise removed, dragged Bunter out and reassured him. Bunter was glad Santa's "presence" was past!

"Nap" Dupont is spending Christmas in his native France. Cherry pointed out that he will miss the turkey and plum-pudding of Old England, but "Nap" said he prefers French cooking! "Nap" is no mean cook himself. He cooked a farewell spread at which the guests "fared" very well indeed!

Fisher T. Fish says he likes Yuletide because it is good for trade. Trade is all Fishy thinks about. Last year he "traded" all his Christmas presents for objects he thought more valuable. Cherry says Fishy would collect and sell the Christmas snows if he could—but it's "snow" he's trying!

Sammy Bunter has resolved not to try to "invite" himself to the same place as Billy Bunter this Christmas. The reason is not courtesy, but because Sammy fears there would not be enough to eat for both Billy and himself! At Dicky Nugent's home last Christmas, Sammy "shifted" thirty mince pies at one sitting!

Lord Mauleverer plumps for Christmas hols because he can take a snooze without being asked to play cricket or go swimming. When Harry Wharton & Co. enjoyed a snow-fight on the terrace at Mauleverer Towers, however, Mauleverer's "forty winks" were interrupted by a snowball whizzed through an open window!

Billy Bunter is convinced that some dozens of Christmas cards must have been lost in the post last year. The only one he received was one he had accidentally sent to himself! Asked if he had sent many cards to other fellows, he said he had no cash to waste on them! A queer "card," Bunter!



crowd, who were already in carnival costume, arrived in a sharrabong, the fun was fast and furious. The St. Sam's fellows larked fit to bust when Doctor Wackingham stepped out of the sharrabong, dressed up as a clown

adjorn to the ice at once. Got a long team with you, Wackingham?"

"Yes, rather!" answered the Head of St. Bill's. "I feel confident that St. Bill's will lick your team hollow—and that I

CHRISTMAS FIRST-AID SETS.

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WOULD YOU BELIEVE IT?



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GREYFRIARS FACTS WHILE YOU WAIT!

(Continued from foot of column 1.)

"Without a doubt, what we witnessed was a Psychic manifestation!"

"A whatter?" I gasped.

"That is to say, a ghost!" explained Walker, with a condescending smile. "I never used to believe in ghosts; but I believe in 'em after this, and nothing now will ever shake my belief!"

If I'd only had the nerve, chaps, I could have shaken Walker's belief in ghosts then and there. But I thought it advisable to postpone that process till I could get it into print.

You see, the truth about the "ghost" that Walker and the other senior chaps saw, is that it was only a "fake," composed of silk scarves and worked by strings from the landing above!

I ought to know; I'm the one who did it!