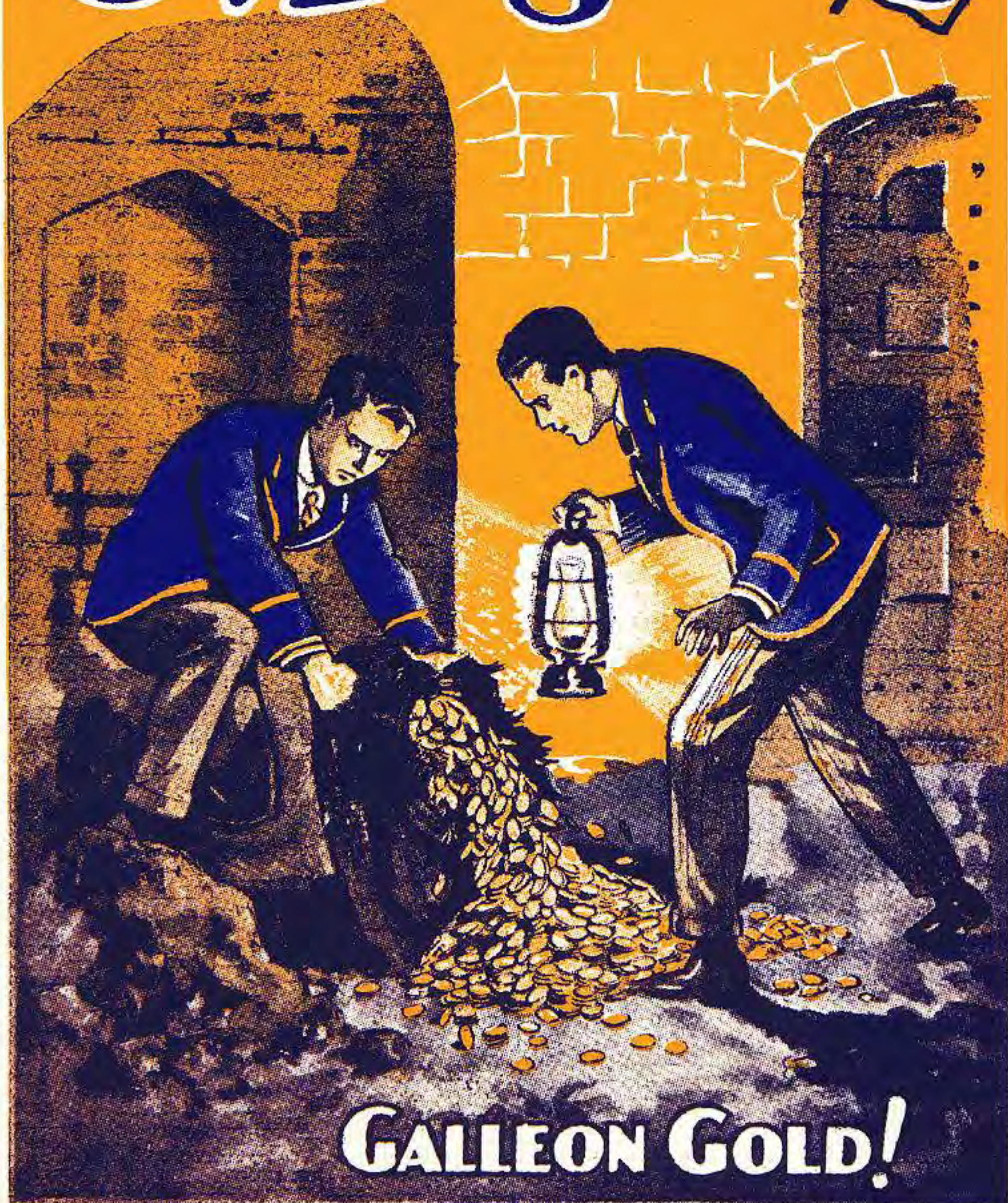


SCHOOLBOYS' THRILLING ADVENTURE in QUEST of TREASURE! See Inside

The Magnet ²/₂^d



GALLEON GOLD!



COME INTO the OFFICE, BOYS - AND GIRLS!

Your Editor is always pleased to hear from his readers. Write to him: Editor of the "Magnet," The Amalgamated Press, Ltd., Fleetway House, Farringdon Street, London, E.C.4. A stamped, addressed envelope will ensure a reply.

I SUPPOSE most of you fellows know something about Luxembourg, the little European country tucked away between France, Belgium and Germany, and which is so proud of its monster broadcasting station? A pal of mine called on me the other day, and told me he had just come back from there. He also told me one or two interesting yarns about the place. Here's one that might interest those of you who are wireless fans. Have you heard of

THE MOUSE THAT STOPPED A BROADCAST?

Radio Luxembourg pride themselves that if there is the slightest breakdown they can immediately switch over to emergency transmitters with only the loss of a few seconds. But they were caught napping once. There was a sudden breakdown. Even the emergency transmitters could not be used. The engineers were in desperation. The most vital piece of machinery had broken down, and they could not discover the trouble. Everything had previously been regarded as accident proof. The search to discover the trouble went on—and then the culprit was discovered!

A venturesome mouse had managed to get itself in amongst the terminals, and, by touching two of them at the same time, had short-circuited the whole station. Needless to say, the mouse had been frizzled up to a cinder in a split second—but it had caused the longest hold-up ever experienced at the radio station.

Another yarn my pal told me concerned the chief announcer, who is an Englishman. The radio station of Luxembourg is built on the site of an old fort, and at one time the only means of entering this fort was by way of

A MAZE OF UNDERGROUND PASSAGES

which run for miles beneath the rock upon which the city is built. In fact, it is claimed that hardly anyone knows exactly how far these subterranean passages extend. In one part of the radio station a long shaft descends into these secret passages, and the announcer decided to do a little exploring one day. He took a guide with him, but the guide had to return up the shaft for something he had forgotten. The announcer, left alone in the passages, did not realise the baffling nature of them, and began to walk around. Before long he realised that, instead of getting back to where he had started from, he was hopelessly lost! The more he tried to find his way out, the more he was bewildered. And what was worse, it was nearly time for him to be back at the microphone.

It seemed like hours before the announcer heard a faint shout in the distance. The guide was looking for him. All he could do was to remain where he was, and shout back, and his voice eventually brought the guide to him. There was only just time to get back to the shaft, ascend to the station, and carry out his broadcast!

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Those secret passages, or "Casemates," as they are called, were

A HOT-BED OF SPIES

during the Great War. When the Germans occupied Luxembourg, many loyal Luxembourgers took refuge in the passages. So did a number of Allied spies. They knew the passages perfectly. The Germans didn't. Although the Germans did their utmost to clear the passages they were unsuccessful, for the men they were after managed to give them the slip. There is no doubt that a lot of exceedingly useful information was smuggled through to the Allies by the spies of Luxembourg's subterranean passages.

I must have a trip over to Luxembourg and explore those secret passages myself one of these days. But what would happen to the good old MAGNET if your Editor lost himself?

SOME curious things happen in this funny old world of ours, and many readers have written to ask me for a further selection of

THINGS YOU'D HARDLY BELIEVE!

So here goes:

The Man Who Laughed Himself to Death! A Chinese was sentenced to death. He appealed against the verdict, and secured a pardon. He was so pleased about it that he gave a party to his fellow-prisoners in the gaol. Overcome with joy and relief, he started laughing, couldn't stop—and laughed himself to death!

Another Human Ostrich! A London man hit on a new way of making money. He laid lavish bets that he could swallow spoons, fountain-pens, pennies, screws, nails, hat-pins, and even a pencil-box! He has undergone several operations for the removal of his curious diet. But he's still going strong!

The Shortest Fight in the World! The world's fastest knock-out record is claimed by a British boxer. While fighting in America, he swung in one blow at the beginning of the first round, and knocked out his opponent—in exactly one and a half seconds!

The Word "Gazette" does not Mean a Newspaper! Actually a gazette is the name of a small coin once used in Venice. The price of the first newspaper, published in 1563, was one gazette. This originated the habit of calling certain newspapers "gazettes."

The Police Who Arrested Seven Donkeys. In Preston a little time ago seven donkeys were found wandering in the street "with no visible means of support." The police promptly "arrested" them—and then found themselves in a quandary. No one came to claim the donkeys!

You've heard of the "Q" ships which played a great part in defeating Germany's submarine blockade of this country during the War? Well, you'll probably be interested in the

"Q" SHIPS OF THE AIR,

which are now being constructed by a British firm. Ostensibly these new aeroplanes are civil craft, but, at the touch of release-gear, a startling change comes over them. Stream-lined-covered machine-guns rise into position, a sliding hatch opens, and provides a means for dropping bombs, and sliding hatches reveal the cockpits of the gunners. The whole of the aeroplane's armament can be made to vanish in two or three seconds, and she becomes, to all appearances, a civil machine again.

If another war breaks out, civil aeroplanes will be used to transport goods, and enemy aircraft will be on the look-out to attack them. This is where the "Q" aeroplanes will come in useful, and an attacking plane will soon find that she has bitten off more than she can chew!

Now for a few

RAPID-FIRE REPLIES

to various queries which have been sent to me by readers:

How is "Horse-Power" Reckoned? One unit of "horse-power" is the amount required to lift 33,000 lb. a height of one foot in one minute.

How Many Gases are there in the Air? Air is a mixture of nitrogen, oxygen, water vapour, and carbonic acid. The last two are present only in minute proportions.

What is the Origin of the Name "Challoner"? It originally meant a dealer in "shallon," a cloth that was first made at Chalons-sur-Marne, in France.

What is the Meaning of the Surname "Coward"? It has no reflection upon the bravery of its first owner. It was originally spelled "Kuherde" or "Cow-hirde," and means a man who looked after cows.

What is the Longest Walk a Man has Made? The record is claimed by John Ennis, who walked from New York to San Francisco. He took 80 days and 5 hours to do it, and covered 4,000 miles on the journey!

Does Manchester Possess the Longest Railway Platform in the World? No. The longest platform is at Sonapur, in India. It is 805 yards in length. The platform at Victoria and Exchange Stations, Manchester, is just over 731 yards and is the longest in Britain.

Which is the Heaviest—Water or Cider? Cider. Its specific gravity is 1.26 as against water's 1.00. Blood, beer, glycerine, and milk are all heavier than water.

How Should the Name "Wriothesley" be Pronounced? Strange as it seems, it is pronounced "Roxley." Other curious pronunciations are: Leveson-Gower (Loosen-Gore); Colquhoun (Co'hoon); Knollys (Noles); and Claverhouse (Clavers).

Where did the Surname "Penniger" Originate? Its original bearer was a carrier of an ensign. It is similar to the Scottish name "Bannerman."

And now for next week's MAGNET programme. Frank Richards kicks off with:

"BUNTER'S BID FOR A FORTUNE!"

a yarn that you'll all enjoy. It's full of fun, and has a rattling fine plot, too. And what's more, you'll be surprised to hear that Billy Bunter actually receives a postal-order! Time for the skies to fall, says you! Exactly how this comes about and what effect it has on the great "W. G. B." you will learn when you read this exciting story. Don't miss it, whatever you do! As usual, there will be more thrill-packed chapters of our stirring sea story, a tip-top issue of the "Greyfriars Herald," and another "Interview" in rhyme by our brilliant poet. Meet you all again next week, chums.

YOUR EDITOR.

GALLEON GOLD!

By
FRANK RICHARDS



Vernon-Smith and his schoolboy chums—**HARRY WHARTON & CO., of GREYFRIARS**—are hunting for lost doubloons worth tens of thousands of pounds. But they have a rival in the quest . . . Count Zero, a ruthless Italian, who is determined that not even the lives of the schoolboys shall stand in the way of his discovering the lost treasure!

and was about to glide under the high arch of rock when a rumble overhead caused Bob to look up.

He yelled a warning.

Sixty feet up, the cliff sloped back in rugged ledges of rock. Over the edge, a huge jagged boulder came rolling.

"Look out!" shrieked Bob. "Oh, look out!"

"What—"

"What the thump—"

Down from the high ledge, clear of the cliff, the huge boulder came, direct at the boat below.

John Redwing gave the tiller a swift twist. He had no time for more.

But that twist of the tiller rocked the dinghy out of the direct path of the falling boulder.

The next instant the crash came.

Barely missing the gunwale, the great rock crashed down, smashing Harry Wharton's oar from his hand, and plunging into the water with a mighty splash.

Almost a water-spout rose beside the boat, drenching every fellow in it with spray.

The boat rocked wildly.

"Back water!" shouted Smithy. "Get out of this! Quick!"

It was not easy to get out of it quick, with the tide running strongly into the cave. But three oars pulled hard, and the dinghy rocked away from the cavern's mouth, out of reach of another missile from above.

Herbert Vernon-Smith stared up at the cliff with set lips and glittering eyes.

He could see no one there; whoever had dislodged the great boulder had kept back out of sight. But the Bounder of Greyfriars knew that an enemy was there; only a hefty push from a muscular man would have moved that great mass of rock.

"The villain!" breathed Smithy. "If that rock had hit us—"

The Greyfriars juniors stared up, silent, with startled faces. If the boulder had crashed on the boat, it would have been sunk instantly, and the crew left to swim in a strong tide.

"Get to the landing place!" said Vernon-Smith, between his teeth.

"We're going after that rotter. It's Count Zero or his man Beppo—one of the scoundrels! And we're going to get him!"

Harry Wharton compressed his lips hard. His broken oar, wrenched from his hand by the shock, had cracked on his knee with a crack that almost fractured the bone. The pain was intense, and he had to set his teeth to endure it in silence.

John Redwing scanned the cliff with a grim look on his bronzed face.

"That landshark won't stop at much!" said the sailorman.

"We'll stop his tricks if we get hold of him!" snarled the Bounder. "By gad, I'll hunt him down like a mad dog! Get to the shore!"

The juniors pulled. No sign was seen of the man on the cliff. Probably he was already in retreat, having failed in his attempt to sink the boat, and fearing pursuit.

But the Bounder was savagely determined to run him down. In that, all the Greyfriars fellows were in full agreement.

The dastard had intended to sink the dinghy and leave them swimming in the tide at the risk of their lives. But the falling boulder might have crashed on one of the boat's crew, and that would have been instant death.

"By gum!" said Bob. "If I get my hands on that rotter—"

"We're going to get our hands on him," said Vernon-Smith, between his teeth. "Pull—pull!"

The boat shot along the cliff to the landing place. Harry Wharton sat with a rather white face, his hand pressed to his damaged knee.

"Hurt, old chap?" asked Frank Nugent anxiously.

"Only a knock," answered Harry. "The oar banged on my knee when it broke! I fancy there's rather a bruise."

The boat bumped at the landing place. The Greyfriars fellows scrambled quickly ashore, and John Redwing made the painter fast.

"Come on!" shouted Smithy. He started at a run for the rugged path that wound up the cliff.

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THE FIRST CHAPTER.

A Narrow Escape!

LOOK out!" yelled Bob Cherry. He stared upward with starting eyes.

The tide from the Atlantic, rolling into Polpelly Cove, surged and foamed into the yawning opening of the Black Rock Cave.

Over the rugged, rocky arch of the cave-mouth, the cliff rose perpendicular, for sixty feet or more.

Only when the tide served could a boat pull into the smugglers' cave of Polpelly. Now the water was deep, and the four-oared dinghy glided swiftly on the running tide, under the wintry sunset.

Harry Wharton and Smithy, Johnny Bull and Tom Redwing, were pulling. John Redwing sat at the tiller. Frank Nugent and Hurreo Singh, in the bows, peered into the darkness of the cavern ahead.

Bob Cherry was standing by the mast, to light the lantern that hung there. All the Christmas party of Polpelly were in the boat except Billy Bunter. The dinghy had reached the cavern's mouth,

The other fellows followed him. Wharton was limping painfully. With his damaged knee it was impossible to run and difficult to walk. He halted.

"I shall have to chuck it!" he called out. "I can't climb with a game leg! You fellows get on."

"I'll help you back to Polpelly House!" said Frank.

"That's all right, I can manage! You get on after Smithy."

Nugent hesitated a moment. But he nodded, and ran on after the rest. Harry Wharton limped away along the path up the coomb.

The Bounder was already scrambling up the steep cliff. After him went the rest, as fast as the steepness of the path allowed.

They came out breathlessly on the rugged summit of the cliff, high over Black Rock Cave. It was a desolate expanse of bare, broken, rugged rock, powdered with snow from the last fall.

The Bounder came to a halt on the rocky ledge over the cave-mouth. He pointed to tracks of boots in the snow.

"That's where he stood when he pitched the rock over!" he said. "He's gone, but we can pick up his tracks from here!"

"After him!" said Bob.

The Bounder led the way, his eager eyes picking up the sign in the powdery snow. The track was indistinct, but here and there footprints came out clearly, where the snow lay deeper. The sign led away inland, from the sea. Behind the juniors the red sun was dipping to the Atlantic, sending long shadows before them as they went.

The man on the cliff had struck inland when he retreated. There was nothing to be seen of him. But the sign in the snow was unmistakable, and the Greyfriars juniors pressed fast on the track.

THE SECOND CHAPTER.

The Phantom of Polpelly!

HARRY WHARTON sank thankfully into the big armchair by the fireside in the old oak hall of Polpelly House.

His bruised knee was painful, and it had not been improved by the tramp up the rugged coomb and climbing the steps to the ancient mansion. He threw logs on the fire, and sat down to rest, leaning back in the roomy old chair, in which once had sat the old seafaring squire of Polpelly, the sea-captain of Elizabeth's time, whose portrait hung on the wall.

The house was very silent. Only now and then came a sound from the kitchen, at the end of a long passage, where Daniel Heard was at his duties.

The old ship's cook was cooking supper for the party, and Wharton could hear his wooden leg stumping on the stone floor. But old Dan'l did not know that he had come in; he was deaf, and heard nothing; and he did not expect the juniors back for hours yet.

The last red glimmer of the sunset came in at the ancient windows and gleamed on the portrait of the old sea-captain on the wall. Harry Wharton looked at the picture of the grim old squire, with his hard-bitten face, sea-boots, and trunk hose, ruff and cloak and sword and helmet. It was in the likeness of the old seafaring squire that the phantom of Polpelly had appeared to the juniors that Christmas—and they were still puzzled and mystified by the strange apparition.

They had discovered that Count Zero

and Beppo lurked in the hidden recesses under the old house. But that did not explain the strange appearance of the phantom, for neither of the Italians bore the remotest resemblance to the old squire—and the spectre had been his exact image.

Harry Wharton was thinking of that strange mystery as he sat by the glowing fire, the dusk deepening in the old hall as the sun disappeared.

John Redwing, who had a touch of a sailor's superstition, looked on the phantom of Polpelly as a thing not of this earth. The Greyfriars fellows were convinced that it was some sort of trickery.

Yet they could not undertake to explain how it was that the phantom appeared in the likeness of the old sea-captain. According to the legend, the ghost of the old squire haunted the house and the coomb, seeking for the lost doubloons of the sunken Spanish galleon. And on more than one occasion the Christmas party had seen it—looking as if the old portrait had stepped down from the wall!

The dusk deepened to dark.

Only the leaping firelight illumined the old dusky hall, casting strange lights and shadows on the ancient oak of the walls and the floor.

Wharton rose from the chair at last, with the intention of lighting the candles. As the trip into the smugglers' cave had been abandoned, he expected his friends to return much earlier than had been planned.

A faint sound caught his ears as he rose, and he glanced round quickly. He felt a sudden thrill as he realised that he was not alone in the shadowy hall.

It was not old Dan'l; he would have heard the wooden leg stumping on the stone flags if the ship's cook had come up the passage from the kitchen. With his back to the fire, Harry stared along the great hall to the deep, dusky shadows at the farther end.

His teeth shut hard.

Dim in the shadows, but visible in the uncertain leaping of the fire—silent, strange, and ghostly—the figure of the phantom of Polpelly stood before his eyes.

It was the figure and the face of the old sea-captain in the portrait; the Elizabethan garb to the last detail—the pointed beard and trim moustache, the harsh, strongly marked features and bushy eyebrows.

Wharton felt the blood run to his heart with a chill. It was a trick—a trick to frighten away the dwellers in Polpelly, to leave the field clear for their rivals in the hunt for the Spanish doubloons. He was certain of it—assured of it. Yet he could not repress the chill of horror that ran through him at the strange, unnerving sight.

The fire died down—the phantom was hidden in blackness. But Wharton knew that the unearthly figure still stood there, unseen, and would reappear when the fire blazed up again.

With a determined effort, he pulled himself together. In the darkness he stooped and picked up one of the logs that lay by the great hearth.

He gripped the heavy billet of wood in his hand, his hand behind him, and stood watching, waiting for the phantom to become visible again. Man or spectre, he was going to see what it was.

There came a sudden leaping of flame from the fire. The dark old hall was illumined again.

The spectral figure detached itself from the blackness, standing out visible. The eyes, glittering under the bushy

brows, were fixed on the schoolboy; the right hand was slowly raised, to point at him.

With set teeth, Wharton suddenly whipped his hand from behind him, and hurled the log, with all the strength of his arm, at the ghostly figure.

Crash!

In an instant the missile crashed on the phantom, proving only too clearly that it was no spectral, immaterial figure, for the sound of the crash on a human form rang loud and sharp. The figure staggered back as the log dropped at its feet. A sharp, startled cry broke the silence.

"Cospetto!"

Wharton panted.

It was an exclamation in Italian! The phantom of Polpelly was no spectre—but a trickster, one of the Italian conspirators! He knew it now, beyond the shadow of a doubt.

The ghostly figure staggered—but only for a moment! Then, recovering, it came springing forward.

Another moment, and a fierce grasp fell on Harry Wharton. He struck out fiercely, his clenched fist dashing in the face that was so exactly like the face of the old sea-captain in the portrait. But the grasp on him was that of a powerful, muscular man, and he went whirling over, struggling desperately, but unavailingly.

"Help!" he shouted wildly.

But he knew that old Dan'l could not hear.

The helmet fell from the strange figure. The Elizabethan ruff crumpled and crackled in the struggle. Wharton, resisting desperately, was dragged along the hall—in the grasp, only too human and real, of the phantom of Polpelly!

"Help!" he shrieked.

"Silenzio!" came a hissing voice.

"Zitto!"

"Help! Oh, help!"

From the distant kitchen came the sound of a wooden leg stumping on stone. But old Dan'l could not hear. There was no help! Harry Wharton struggled wildly, but he struggled in vain. He had discovered the trickery of the phantom of Polpelly—only to fall helplessly into its hands!

THE THIRD CHAPTER.

In the Nick of Time!

HERBERT VERNON - SMITH scowled as the sun dipped below the cliffs and the winter dusk deepened into darkness.

The juniors had descended from the cliff and reached the road, which ran parallel with the line of high cliffs facing the sea. On the road the snow lay thick—it was many days since a vehicle of any sort had been able to approach the lonely mansion in the coomb. In the thick snow the tracks were clearer than before—but the darkness had fallen to cover them. The Bounder groped in his pocket for an electric torch. All the juniors had provided themselves with torches for the exploration of the smugglers' cave. Vernon-Smith flashed on his light, and the others followed his example.

"Not much use now, Smithy!" remarked Bob Cherry. "The blighter's well ahead of us, and in the dark!"

"He can't help leaving a track in this snow!" snapped the Bounder. "We'll get him yet."

"Carry on!" assented Bob.

It did not seem very hopeful to the rest of the party. But the Bounder

was savagely determined, and they were ready to back him up.

The tracks of the retreating man were easily picked up by the torch light. They were deep in the snow, and led along the road in the direction of Polpelly.

The juniors tramped on, Smithy leading the way, his eyes on the track. The darkness thickened, and a few flakes of snow began to fall.

"Looks as if he's heading for Polpelly!" said Frank Nugent.

"I'm not surprised at that!" grunted the Bounder. "We know that those scoundrels have their den under the house—Count Zero knows every secret of the place. The rotter's heading for home."

"I suppose it's the same track!" remarked Johnny Bull. "This is a public road, you know, and anybody—"

Polpelly House was a good quarter of a mile from the road, and was not in sight. Suddenly the track turned from the path to the left.

"He's not heading for the house!" remarked Nugent, as the juniors made that discovery.

"Come on!" grunted the Bounder. The track led to an old stone lodge, now in ruins. Right up to the shattered doorway, it ran clear in the snow.

Smithy's eyes gleamed as he reached the lodge.

"We've got him now!" he said between his teeth. "He's dodged into this old ruin—we've got him cornered here."

"Blessed if it doesn't look like it!" said Bob. "This is the place where Bunter was collared the day we came to Polpelly. If he's here, we've got him."

in his grasp, stood in the doorway. Vernon-Smith tramped in, followed by the others.

If the fugitive was hiding there he kept very still. But it seemed certain that he must be there, and the juniors searched through and through the rubble, exploring every nook and cranny.

But they discovered—nothing! Even the Bounder, savagely disappointed as he was, had to admit at last that there was no one hidden in the old stone lodge.

He stopped at the back wall—solid stone blocks on the excavated hillside. He flashed his light over the ancient stones.

"Looking for a way in, Smithy?" asked Bob, with a grin.

"He came in here!" snarled the Bounder. "You know that as well as I



With all the strength of his arm, Harry Wharton hurled the log at the ghostly figure. Crash! The missile crashed on the phantom and a startled cry broke the silence. "Cospetto!" It was an exclamation in Italian. The phantom was no spectre—but a trickster!

"Who'd be coming along here, with nearly a foot of snow on the ground?" snapped Vernon-Smith. "The tradesmen come across the moor, from Pilverton—inland! Nobody comes along this road."

"Well, somebody might—"

"Oh, rot!"

Johnny Bull shrugged his shoulders. The Bounder was not in the best of tempers; and when his temper was irritable, his manners were not at their best.

He tramped on, flashing his light on the trail.

It led along to the upper end of Polpelly coomb. There it turned from the road, and led down into the dusky coomb.

"Look at that!" snapped Vernon-Smith. "He's gone into the coomb—he's heading for Polpelly right enough. It's the man we want."

"Looks like it!" agreed Bob.

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

Smithy tramped down into the coomb, with the rest of the party at his heels.

There's no way out; there's the solid hill behind this building."

"He's here—he must be here! Haven't you any eyes?" snarled the Bounder. "You can see the track leads right in, and there's no track leading out! We've got him—stand ready to bag him."

"We're ready, old bean; keep your little temper."

The interior of the old lodge was densely dark. Most of the roof had fallen in, and all the interior walls, and the space was filled by irregular masses of rubble and broken slates, thick with frozen ivy and moss and snow. No sound could be heard, but the Bounder was convinced that the fugitive had taken cover, and was hiding among the rubble.

"Mr. Redwing, you stand in the doorway while we search among this rubbish," said Vernon-Smith. "He will make a break for it when we root him out."

"Ay, ay!" answered John Redwing.

"He won't get past me, sir!"

The sailorman, with an oaken cudgel

do. He never went out by the doorway. There's some sort of a secret hiding-place here. Polpelly is full of them. But—"

"Might as well hunt for a needle in a haystack!" said Frank Nugent.

Smithy gritted his teeth. If there was some secret nook in the old place where the man was hidden it was impossible to find it, and the Bounder had to realise that.

He tramped savagely out of the lodge again. The coomb, shut in by high cliffs, lay black as a pit, save for the glimmer here and there of the snow.

The juniors waited, looking at Smithy. He was savagely unwilling to give up the hunt, and they were ready to keep it on as long as he did. But it was only too clear that there was nothing doing.

"Well, what about it?" asked Bob, at last. "It's a bit parky standing about here, Smithy."

"The parkfulness is terrific, my esteemed and absurd Smithy!" said Hurree Jamset Ram Singh, with a shiver.

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The Bounder breathed hard and deep. "May as well chuck it!" he said savagely. "Let's get back to Polpelly. We've wasted our time."

"Lots of time ahead, old bean!" said Bob cheerfully. "We're not near the end of the hols yet."

"Oh, rats!"

Herbert Vernon-Smith thrust his torch back into his pocket and tramped away down the path into the coomb. Bob winked at his comrades, who smiled. They followed the Bounder, tramping down the path in silence towards Polpelly House.

The old mansion stood high, approached by great steps from the path. Vernon-Smith clambered up the steps and passed through the gateway into the old courtyard that lay in front of the house.

"Why the dickens hasn't Wharton got a light on?" he grunted. "I suppose he got in before this, game leg and all."

"He's got the fire going, anyhow," said Bob, as he caught a flicker of firelight at one of the windows, "and I shall be jolly glad to get near it."

"Same here!" remarked Nugent.

"The sameness is terrific!" murmured the Nabob of Bhanipur. "The coldfulness of this excellent and execrable climate is preposterous."

"Hallo, hallo, hallo!" yelled Bob suddenly. "What—"

From the dusky old hall of Polpelly, ringing sharp and clear through the wide-open doorway, came a shrieking cry:

"Help! Oh, help!"

"That's Wharton!" panted Nugent.

He shot towards the house like an arrow from a bow. Instantly the whole party were racing at his heels.

Wharton was there—alone in the

house, except for old Dan'l. And he was shrieking for help. What was happening in the house of mysteries? Frank Nugent tore in at the door.

In the blaze of the leaping firelight he saw two struggling figures—one that of his chum, the other—startling to the view—the likeness of the old sea-captain in the portrait on the wall. Wharton, struggling madly, was being dragged along the hall.

Nugent tore across the hall and leaped to his aid. Man or ghost, man or demon, he did not care. He rushed to the aid of his chum. But it was upon a solid form that his grasp fell, as he gripped Wharton's assailant.

"Harry!" he panted.

"Help—oh, help!"

There was an exclamation in a foreign tongue. Wharton's assailant turned savagely on Nugent.

But the Bounder reached him, and Bob Cherry a split second later. Both of them grasped at him.

It was the turn of the Polpelly phantom to be assailed. Wharton, released, staggered away, and the strange figure struggled desperately in the grasp of Nugent and Bob and the Bounder. Through the doorway came Johnny Bull and the nabob, Tom Redwing and his father, rushing to their aid.

With a terrible effort the strangely disguised man tore himself loose and bounded away.

Nugent was left with the cloak in his hand; Bob with something else that had torn away from the figure in the struggle—he did not know what for the moment. With the swiftness of a hunted deer, the panting figure rushed from a doorway, out of the hall, up a stone passage, and vanished.

"After him!" shrieked the Bounder.

He dashed up the passage. It was as black as the inside of a hat. He tore the torch from his pocket and flashed it on.

At the end of the passage, close to the barred door that closed it, one of the great flagstones in the floor was sinking from sight. With it went the figure of the phantom of Polpelly. But even as the Bounder rushed on the figure vanished, and the flagstone shot up into place again, and the floor was intact. The secret enemy had escaped, and the Bounder, gritting his teeth, tramped back to the hall.

THE FOURTH CHAPTER.

The Face of the Phantom!

HARRY WHARTON stood panting in breath in great gulps.

He leaned on the table, overcome by his efforts in that desperate struggle with his assailant.

Frank Nugent still had the old cloak trailing in his hand that had been wrenched from the shoulders of the pretended phantom. On the floor lay the helmet, tramped out of shape, and a sword in its scabbard that had fallen in the struggle. And in Bob's hand was the strange object that had torn from the unknown, and he held it up, and all the juniors stared at it in blank wonder.

It was a life-like mask of flexible material that fitted to the face, such as is sometimes worn in theatricals, complete from the bushy eyebrows over the eyeholes down to the chin with its pointed beard. And it was designed in the exact image of the face of the old sea-captain in the portrait. It had been designed with the greatest skill, evidently from the portrait itself, or from a photograph of it. As Bob held it up it was startlingly life-like, save for the emptiness of the holes left for sight.

"So that's it!" said Bob, with a deep breath. "That's how the jolly old spook looked so like the old skipper! See?"

"The cunning rotter!" breathed Nugent. "He must have had that mask made on purpose, and it must have taken time to make, too. He must have got ready for this game a good time ago—"

"Everything cut and dried!" said the Bounder contemptuously. "He was going to kidnap me and threaten my father into selling him the property, but he had this stunt ready if he failed. He did fail and the ghost game followed—a trick of amateur theatricals."

"Sort of costume play!" grinned Bob. "But who'd have thought it?"

John Redwing stood silent, staring at the life-like mask in Bob's hand.

There was a surge of colour in his bronzed cheeks. The sailorman had believed, or half believed, that it was the phantom of the ancient squire of Polpelly that the Christmas party had seen. But now that he saw the face-mask, made in the likeness of the old squire, even he could have no further doubt. The trick was completely exposed now.

It was Count Zero, clad in Elizabethan garb, with a false face over his own, who had played phantom, and that game, at least, was up. Whatever might be the next move of the Italian plotter, it was not likely that there would be any further supernatural visitations at Polpelly. It was the last attempt to scare away the Christmas visitors, and it had failed utterly, and very nearly cost the count his liberty.

"Well, I've heard of a fox that got out of a trap and left his tail behind him!"

"WORLD IN DARKNESS!"

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remarked Bob. "This jolly old fox has bolted and left his features behind him!"

The juniors chuckled.

"We're done with the ghost, anyhow," said the Bounder. "Rather lucky for you we barged in just then, Wharton; he had you fair and square!"

"The luckfulness was terrific!"

"Jolly lucky!" said Harry, still gasping for breath. "Old Dan'l never heard a sound, and I thought I was done for. Goodness knows what he was going to do! He jumped at me after I heaved a log at him, he was dragging me away when you fellows barged in. Why, goodness knows—"

The Bounder pointed to the passage that led to the sinking stone.

"That's why!" he said. "You spotted him, and he was going to make sure that you didn't tell the world. If we hadn't come in you'd be in his den under Polpelly now—a prisoner."

"I suppose that was it," assented Wharton. "The man's a lawless brute; but he might have knocked me on the head! He was two or three times as strong as I. I hadn't an earthly. You can bet I was glad when you fellows rushed in!"

"He might have——" faltered Nugent.

"He's no murderer!" grunted the Bounder. "He's not a crook—only he's after the doubloons, like a hungry dog after a bone. I dare say he thinks he has as much claim on the treasure as anybody else; his giddy ancestor was in command of the galleon that carried the doubloons. But he won't get his fingers on them, all the same."

"Not if we can stop him!" said Bob. "But I wonder what his next move will be? He must know that the ghost game is up now."

"I only hope he'll show up again!" said Vernon-Smith. "He will find us ready for him if he does. If we could shift that flagstone we'd follow him into his den; but we can't move it. I've thought of getting a gang of workmen from Pilverton, with crowbars, to prise up the floor, but——"

He shook his head.

"It's no use," he went on. "The brute would clear off for a time, and come back. He's got secret ways in and out of the place. It's no good stopping one hole, when he's got half a dozen others to choose from. The place is like a rabbit-warren for secret passages. We've got to get hold of the man himself."

"We've nearly had him twice," said Bob. "Third time is lucky!"

There was a stumping of a wooden leg on stone flags, and old Dan'l looked into the hall. He stared at the juniors. Not a sound of the struggle in the hall had reached the deaf old sea-cook.

"You young gentlemen back!" said Daniel Heard. "I wasn't looking for you for two hours yet. Supper ain't ready!"

"Blow supper!" grunted the Bounder. "Bother supper!"

"Hey?" Old Dan'l put his hand to his ear. "It's steak and kidneys, sir!" Apparently the old sea-cook supposed that the Bounder had asked him what he had for supper. "A pie, sir!"

Bob Cherry grinned.

"Bunter doesn't know what he's missing!" he remarked. "He would roll in if he knew there was steak-and-kidney pie!"

"That there pie's cooking, sir!" said Dan'l. "But it ain't done yet. You says, says you, you won't be back till the tide turned, says you!"

"Hang supper!" snapped the Bounder.

"It ain't no good giving me black

looks, sir, 'cause that pie ain't done," said Dan'l. "Hour and narf yet, sir, like it or like it not. You'll get that pie at eight bells, and you won't get it afore!"

"Buzz off, you deaf old ass!" hooted the Bounder, while the other fellows grinned.

"Hey! Hour and narf!" said old Dan'l. "But there's some cold chicken, if you're sharp set. And some Christmas pudding. The things don't go like they did when that fat young swab was aboard."

"Get out!" howled Smithy.

"Hour and narf, sir, and I've told you twice already," answered old Dan'l. "And I tell you, sir, I can't get that pie done no sooner!"

And old Dan'l stumped back to his kitchen, leaving the Bounder scowling and the other fellows laughing.

Bob Cherry had thrown the mask on the table. The Bounder picked it up, stepped to the fire, and threw it into the glowing logs.

The flames licked round it and consumed it in a few minutes, and the ghostly face of the phantom of Polpelly disappeared into ash. It was the last of the haunting spectre; but all the Greyfriars fellows knew that they were not done with Count Zero yet, and they wondered what the next move of their hidden enemy would be.

THE FIFTH CHAPTER.

The Hold-up at Polpelly!

"TIDE at three, sir!" said John Redwing.

It was the following day, and the Polpelly party were sitting down to lunch in the old hall. That afternoon they intended to resume the exploration of the smugglers' cave, interrupted the previous day by the falling rock from the ledge, and the vain pursuit of their unseen enemy. John Redwing came in from the snowy coomb, his bronzed face glowing from the sea wind.

"Lots of time," said Bob Cherry. "The boat's all right, Mr. Redwing?"

"I've left it safe, sir, looked up in the boathouse," said the sailorman. "But there's no telling what those land-sharks may be up to. They got at it once, and bored holes in the timbers. I'll go down after dinner, sir, and see that all's ship-shape; and you young gentlemen can follow on when you're ready."

And when lunch was over John Redwing went out and disappeared down the coomb towards the sea. Tom Redwing went with his father. The juniors gathered about the fire, and Bob Cherry turned on the wireless. It was more than an hour yet before the tide would serve, and it was useless to arrive at the cove before the tide was on the turn.

The strains of a band came from the radio, filling the old hall and echoing in dark stone passages. In the lonely old mansion, in the solitary coomb, miles from any other habitation, shut in between the snowy moorland and the rolling sea, it was strange enough to hear the merry strains of Henry Hall and his band. Bob Cherry, who never could keep still, executed a shuffle to the cheery music, about as gracefully as a dancing bear.

The juniors were looking—and feeling—cheery and bright. There was mystery, and a spot of danger, in the strange old house of Polpelly, but they were all enjoying the adventure of that unusual holiday. Only the Bounder had a rather moody look on his face. He was anxious to see something of the

unseen enemy, and to get to grips with his rival for the lost treasure of the galleon. But it was for the hidden enemy to choose his time, and the Polpelly party could only wait till he made his next move.

They little guessed what it was going to be, or how soon the blow was to fall. Count Zero had failed to scare away the schoolboys and drive them into leaving him in possession of Polpelly House. He was driven to more desperate measures, as they were about to learn.

"Stand where you are!"

That sudden, quiet voice, coming through the strains from the radio, made all the Greyfriars fellows jump and turn their heads.

The Bounder's eyes blazed.

"Count Zero!" he breathed.

The Italian stood within ten feet of him.

Behind him, in the old oak wall, a panel had opened. The count had stepped out into full view, and he stood surveying the juniors with a cool smile on his dark, chubby, handsome face.

Vernon-Smith made a step towards him.

The Italian's hand came up like a flash. An ugly, bluish barrel looked the Bounder in the face.

"Stand back!"

The command came sharply.

Herbert Vernon-Smith did not retreat a step. But he stopped, his hands clenched hard. Bob Cherry quietly shut off the wireless. Deep silence fell on the old hall.

"You villain!" breathed the Bounder. "You dare not fire!"

"If you put that to the test it will be to your cost," said the Italian, in smooth, quiet tones. "I will not willingly harm anyone here, but if you lift a finger I will shoot! I recommend you to restrain yourself, Signorino Vernon-Smeet."

The Bounder made a movement.

Harry Wharton caught him by the arm.

"Stop!" he breathed.

"Let me go!" snapped the Bounder savagely.

"Don't be mad, Smithy! Stand where you are!"

Wharton gripped his arm hard.

The deadly weapon in the hand of the Italian covered the group of juniors, and every life there was Count Zero's to take, if he chose to pull the trigger. And that he would use his weapon if he was assailed was clear to all the Famous Five, if not to the hot-headed Bounder.

A faint smile flickered on the dark face, looking over the levelled automatic.

"You are wise, little signor," said Count Zero. "Your lives are in my hand, but I will spare them if I can. You are my prisoners!"

"Prisoners!" repeated the Bounder, hoarse with rage. His glance turned to the wide-open door, by which John Redwing and his son had gone out, hardly a quarter of an hour ago.

Count Zero, still keeping the juniors covered with the automatic, stepped across the hall, to interpose between them and the door.

Standing facing them, with his back to the door, he watched them like a cat over the levelled weapon.

The secret panel by which he had entered stood wide open. Beyond was a shadowy stone passage.

It was one of the many secrets of the strange old house, all of which were known to the man from Italy. The count's ancestor, who had commanded a galleon in the Spanish

Armada, had been for two years in that house, in the far-off days of Queen Bess, waiting for his ransom to be paid. Probably his captor the seafaring squire, had not known, or cared, how his captive spent the weary days, and weeks, and years of detention—in exploring the old place from end to end, and discovering its strange secrets.

But the juniors knew that it was from ancient documents, in the Palazzo Zero, at Milan, that the count had derived the information that he was now putting to such a lawless use. And they could guess, too, that the count had explored the place a good many times, unknown to its proprietor, Mr. Vernon-Smith, and to deaf old Dan'l, the caretaker. It was clear that all the secrets of Polpelly were known to the man from Italy.

"Prisoners," repeated the count, with a nod. "I regret it, but you have left me no other resource. If your father, amico Vernon-Smeeth, would have sold me this dismal old place, all would have been well. If you had fallen into my hands when I came after you at your school, I should have induced Signor Vernon-Smeeth to sell, by threatening your life. But these plans failed, and I came here, as I had come before, to explore the place and search for the doubloons—and then—"

He shrugged his shoulders.

"What madness possessed you to come to this lonely, dismal, deserted spot for your Christmas holidays?" he went on. "Your presence here disconcerted all my plans! Yet there was one resource—the phantom of Polpelly—which has frightened others away, and which I fully believed would frighten away a party of schoolboys. But—"

He gave another expressive shrug.

"That also has failed! Now I am driven to play my last card! You are my prisoners! You will pass through that panel in single file, and I shall follow you! Attempt to escape, or to turn upon me, and I swear I will shoot you down! I shall be sorry—but I shall do it! If you will not take warning, so much the worse for you!"

"So this is a hold-up!" said Bob Cherry.

"Perfectly so!" assented the count. "If you desire to be riddled by a stream of bullets, that is your choice! Dead or alive, you must be removed from my path! You have, as you say in your extraordinary language, asked for it! Now you receive that for which you have asked!"

Harry Wharton still grasped the Bounder's arm. Only that grasp kept Vernon-Smith from rushing upon what all the Famous Five knew to be certain death.

"Will you let me go, Wharton?" breathed the Bounder.

"No," answered Harry quietly. "That villain means every word he says, and you have no chance against a loaded pistol, any more than we have."

"Let me go!" hissed Smithy.

"Don't be a mad ass, Smithy!" growled Johnny Bull. "Do you think we'd knuckle under if there was a chance?"

The Bounder almost choked with rage.

"Are you going to let that scoundrel bag you like rabbits?" he hissed. "Are you going to let him shut you up in some dungeon under this house while he finds the doubloons and gets away with them?"

"I don't see that we've got any choice, Smithy!" said Frank Nugent quietly. "We never bargained for this."

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"If you're all rotten funks, I'm not!" yelled the Bounder. "I will not take a step! Back me up, and get hold of that villain!"

"Oh, shut up!" snapped Johnny Bull.

The Famous Five had plenty of pluck—quite as much as the Bounder. But they were cooler-headed.

To rush on a loaded automatic, in a desperate hand, was not good enough.

To surrender was bitter and galling; but it was useless to go down helplessly under a rain of bullets. And every fellow could see the Italian was in grim earnest. He was, as he had said, playing his last card, and the trumps were in his hand.

"Smithy—" muttered Harry, as the Bounder wrenched at his arm.

"Let me go!"

"I tell you—"

"Let go!" yelled the Bounder furiously, and he struggled in the grasp of the captain of the Greyfriars Remove.

Bob Cherry grasped his other arm.

"Smithy, you ass—" he panted.

"Hang you, let go!"

The Bounder, lost to every consideration but passionate rage, struggled. Count Zero watched—over the levelled automatic. His dark face hardened grimly.

Smithy was struggling to break loose and rush upon him; and if he succeeded, he would roll over on the oaken floor the next moment, with a bullet through his body. The Famous Five knew it, and Wharton and Bob held him back—from certain and terrible death. The Bounder, blind with rage, struggled madly to break loose, and suddenly, with a desperate wrench, tore himself away from their restraining hands.

THE SIXTH CHAPTER.

Billy Bunter Blows In!

"BEASTS!" remarked Billy Bunter.

The fat Owl of the Greyfriars Remove looked out of the porch of the Ship Inn, at Crewey.

A bitter wind swept down the rugged street of the Devonshire fishing village.

Bunter put out his fat little nose, and jerked it back again.

It was cold!

Crewey was only about a mile from Polpelly House. But it was a mile of rugged track, thick with snow, winding round the base of the great cliffs. Even Billy Bunter was equal to a mile—but a rough-and-tough mile like that from Crewey to Polpelly daunted him.

Still, Billy Bunter had decided to get a move on.

It was several days since the Greyfriars party had stayed a night at the inn, and left Bunter there when they departed.

Bunter had been quite willing to be left. Nothing would have induced him to turn out early in the morning.

Still, he felt that he was being treated badly.

He was a guest at Polpelly House—a distinguished and fascinating guest. And the fellows, having left him at Crewey, seemed to have forgotten his fat existence, just as if he did not matter.

Even Vernon-Smith, his host, seemed to have forgotten him. Clearly he did not care whether Bunter returned to Polpelly or not. Indeed, the fat Owl had a suspicion that Smithy would be all the better pleased if he didn't!

For several days Bunter remained at the Ship Inn, more or less contented. The food was good—which was the

most important thing. Bunter, naturally, expected the fellows to come back for him.

But they didn't!

It looked as if they were prepared to leave him at the Ship Inn for the remainder of the Christmas vacation!

That did not suit Bunter.

Bunter was a gregarious animal! If was fearfully solitary at Crewey in the winter. Plump and hospitable Mr. Yeo, the landlord, was a very pleasant man, but his society palled on Bunter; neither did Mr. Yeo seem delighted with that particular guest.

Beasts as the other fellows were, Bunter would have been glad to see them, and every day he blinked out for them a dozen times through his big spectacles; but, like Sister Anne, he failed to see anyone coming.

But if the mountain would not come to Mahomet, Mahomet could always get a move on to the mountain! Bunter resolved, at long last, to negotiate that awful mile to Polpelly.

The grub at the Ship Inn was all right, and, so far, everything was all right. Bunter made deep inroads on it. But he was beginning to feel uneasy about the bill he was running up.

Of course, it was up to the Bounder to pay that bill, as Bunter was his guest. But it was barely possible that Smithy might not see the matter in the same light! Mr. Yeo was quite unsuspecting; he was not worried about his bill.

Still, if Bunter wanted to leave, without paying it, even the kind and hospitable Devon innkeeper was likely to have something to say about it. Billy Bunter had an unquiet feeling that if the bill ran on much longer, and he was seen walking out with his suitcase in his hand, he might be tapped on the shoulder by Mr. Yeo or the boots.

He felt that it was, in fact, time to rejoin his friends. His suitcase could remain at the inn, as a guarantee of good faith, and also because Bunter was too lazy to carry it.

So, after putting out his fat little nose into the winter wind and drawing it back again two or three times, Billy Bunter made up his fat mind to chance it.

Mr. Yeo had given him directions for getting to Polpelly. He only had to walk round the cliffs, keeping them on his right hand all the time, and then he would arrive at Polpelly Coomb. As for a lift, that was out of the question. No vehicle could get through the snow piled on the roads.

Bunter had parked a substantial lunch. He hoped to arrive at Polpelly in time for tea. Thoughtfully, he packed a large number of rosy-cheeked apples in his pocket, to devour en route. Bunter was not much given to looking ahead, but he never forgot that he might be hungry.

He started at last.

He tramped up the rugged street and rolled out on the snowy road that wound along the base of the great cliffs fronting the Atlantic.

It was heavy going! The snow was thick, and Bunter's feet sank in it. Not a vehicle—not a pedestrian was to be seen.

It was one of the loneliest stretches of coast on the Atlantic side of Devonshire. Here and there, through openings of the cliffs, Bunter had a view of the vast ocean rolling, glimmering under the winter sunshine.

On his left was a wide waste of untrodden moorland. The road, or, rather, track, was quite hidden by snow; but the range of cliffs was an unmistakable guide.



"Stand back!" rapped out Count Zero, levelling his revolver at the Greyfriars juniors. Realising how matters stood, Billy Bunter took aim with the apple. The missile crashed on the back of the Italian's head, and the sudden, unexpected shock sent him staggering forward, the automatic dropping from his hand.

Bunter paused every now and then to eat an apple, and then resumed his way refreshed. At long, long last he came to the spot where the deep coomb opened to the sea, and turned from the road.

It was downhill now to Polpelly, and Bunter plugged on more cheerfully. He passed the old stone lodge, deep in the side of the coomb, and plugged on down the rugged path. Polpelly House came in sight, its ancient roofs and old chimney-pots backed by the high slope of the coomb.

Billy Bunter arrived at the great steps that led up to the courtyard. There he paused, to get his breath before ascending.

From the direction of the house strains of music came to his fat ears. The beasts, it seemed, had the wireless on, after lunch—evidently not thinking about Bunter, or missing him at all.

Looking down the coomb towards the sea, Bunter made out two figures in the distance. They were getting the dinghy out of the boathouse, and getting it down to the water, to launch it in the cove. Bunter's range of vision was limited, even with the aid of his big spectacles, and he could not make them out clearly; but he guessed that they were Tom Redwing and his father.

The other fellows, it seemed, were in the house, and had the wireless on. Bunter squatted on a boulder to rest, before negotiating the steps. But he restarted after the interval, and noticed that the sounds of music from the house had ceased. Someone had shut off the radio.

Slowly and laboriously Billy Bunter clambered up the steps and rolled into the old gateway.

He paused there for another rest, leaned on the gateway, and groped in his pocket for an apple. It was the last of his supply; a big, red apple, very inviting to look at. Bunter dug his teeth into it, and took a large bite.

Then, with his mouth full, and the apple in his fat hand, the Owl of the Remove plugged across the snowy courtyard, to the great doorway of Polpelly House, which stood wide open.

Sounds of sharp voices reached him as he approached, and a fat grin came over his face. It sounded as if the fellows were rowing. Smithy, of course, with his rotten temper as usual.

He heard the Bounder's loud, angry voice shouting, to be let go. They were handling him, it seemed. Bunter grinned. Serve the beast right! He hoped they were giving it to him hot.

Grinning, the fat junior reached the big doorway, and blinked in through his spectacles—prepared to enjoy the scene of Smithy getting a ragging from the other fellows. That was what it sounded like.

The next moment Billy Bunter's little round eyes almost popped through his big round spectacles.

He blinked, amazed.

Vernon-Smith was struggling in the grasp of Harry Wharton and Bob Cherry—breaking loose from them.

But who was that that stood between Bunter and the Greyfriars group—with his back to the door and Bunter, his arm raised, a pistol in his hand levelled at the juniors?

Bunter gaped.

Even as he gaped, Vernon-Smith broke loose from the juniors who were holding him. With a face white with fury he made a spring towards the man with the automatic.

"Stand back!"

Count Zero's voice rapped.

The Bounder did not heed it.

Bunter, gaping, saw Wharton spring after him, and catch at his shoulder. Smithy, savagely, wrenched himself away. It was then that Billy Bunter woke up, as it were, realising how matters stood, and it was then that the fat Owl had a brain-wave. His fat hand

shot up, with the apple in it! Even Bunter could not miss at that short range. There was a swift whiz, and the apple crashed on the back of the Italian's head, and the sudden, unexpected shock sent him staggering forward. The automatic crashed on the oaken planks, as Count Zero stumbled to his knees, and fell to the floor.

THE SEVENTH CHAPTER.

Turning the Tables.

CRASH!

The Italian pitched almost at Smithy's feet, his outspread hands slapping on the oaken floor, barely saving his face from a crash on the oak. The automatic shot past the Bounder as it flew from Zero's hand, and dropped within a foot of him.

For a split second Smithy stood panting, amazed; but he was quick on the uptake. He leaped at the fallen pistol.

Instantly he clutched it up.

There was a gasp of amazement from the Famous Five. In the tense excitement of the scene in the hall no one had observed Bunter—least of all Count Zero, whose back had been to the door. The sudden change in the situation was startling. The Italian was sprawling on the floor—the Bounder was clutching up the automatic. Bunter was blinking in, with popping eyes behind his big spectacles.

Count Zero leaped to his feet.

His swarthy face was furious. His black eyes glittered round for the weapon that had flown from his hand.

But that weapon was already in the Bounder's grip.

As the Italian gained his feet Vernon-Smith swung it up, his eyes blazing over it.

"Now, you hound!" panted the Bounder.

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"Smithy!" gasped Wharton. For a moment he believed that the Bounder was about to fire and shoot the Italian down.

There was no doubt that Count Zero believed so, too—indeed, the Bounder would undoubtedly have fired had the Italian advanced upon him. But the count did not advance. As he saw that the tables were turned, he made a swift backward leap to the door.

Smithy was between him and the open panel by which he had entered; he could not escape that way. But with the agility of an antelope, he leaped for the doorway.

Bump!

"Ooogh!" gasped Bunter.

The leaping Italian crashed into him, and sent him spinning. Bunter rolled off the step into the courtyard, yelling.

Unheeding him, Count Zero bounded away. He crossed the courtyard to the gateway with the fleetness of a deer.

"After him!" shrieked Vernon-Smith. He tore out of the door. After him rushed the Famous Five. They were keen and eager to tackle the Italian now.

"I say, you fellows!" spluttered Billy Bunter.

He sat up dizzily, and set his spectacles straight on his fat little nose. But they tore past him unheeding.

The Bounder was in the lead, the count's automatic gripped in his hand, half-raised. Zero was running with amazing swiftness for the gateway on the coomb.

"Stop!" yelled Vernon-Smith.

The count raced on.

"Stop! I'll shoot!" roared the Bounder.

Zero reached the gateway and sprang through. The Bounder, with shut teeth and glittering eyes, fired.

Bang!

The count disappeared headlong down the steps outside the gateway. A yell rang back.

"Smithy!" panted Harry Wharton. "You've—"

"He's hit!" gasped Nugent.

With gritted teeth, the Bounder rushed on. He reached the gateway with the Famous Five at his heels.

That the fugitive had been grazed by the bullet was certain, from the yell he had uttered. But it was clear that he had not been hurt, for he was bounding away up the coomb with almost incredible swiftness.

"There he goes!" gasped Johnny Bull.

Even as he spoke, the running man vanished among the rocks. Vernon-Smith ran down the steps—Harry Wharton & Co. close behind him.

In the distance down the coomb, Tom Redwing and his father had left the boat, and were running up towards the house. Evidently they had heard the shot at Polpelly.

It was the other way that Zero had gone—up the steep path. Had he gone down towards the sea Tom and his father would have intercepted him.

But it was a steep way up the coomb to the road, and the fugitive was not likely to keep up his speed for long. Vernon-Smith dashed in pursuit, followed by the Famous Five.

"There he is!" shouted Bob.

A running figure was sighted among the rocks.

"He's making for the lodge!" panted Wharton.

"We'll get him!"

The juniors tore on. The running man disappeared again, and then reappeared, making for the old stone lodge, where the trail had been lost the previous day. He vanished into the building, the juniors panting after him.

"We've got him now!" hissed the Bounder. "By gum, I'll give him some of his own medicine if he shows fight! Come on!"

They rushed into the ruined lodge. Eagerly they searched among the piles of rubble.

But no man was there!

The previous day the snow-trail of the man on the cliff had led them to the old lodge, and they had found nothing. Now they had seen, with their own eyes, the fugitive Italian dash into the building. But they searched among the rubble in vain. He was gone.

The Bounder panted.

"That settles it!" he said. "There's a way out from here—some secret way. This is the way they get into Polpelly if we could spot it. The man yesterday, and now that scoundrel—"

"Pretty certain now!" gasped Bob. "But he's gone!"

"The gonefulness is terrific!" panted the Nabob of Bhanipur.

The Bounder savagely scanned the thick stone wall at the back of the old lodge. That there was a secret way that led by some hidden tunnel to Polpelly House was fairly clear now—a hidden way used by the smugglers of old days, when the tough old squires of Polpelly had been in the free trade. But it was too well hidden to be discovered.

"Let's get back!" said Smithy, between his teeth. "There's another way to get at him; he left the panel open! Come on!"

And the Greyfriars fellows tramped back to Polpelly House, reaching it as Tom and his father arrived from the cove.

THE EIGHTH CHAPTER.

The Spiral Stair.

"I SAY, you fellows!"

Billy Bunter blinked at the juniors as they came hurrying across the courtyard to the house.

"Don't bother now, Bunter!" snapped Vernon-Smith.

"Well, I like that!" exclaimed Bunter indignantly. "After what I've done for you—"

"Oh, shut up!"

"Look here, you beast—Ow!" gasped Bunter, as the Bounder shoved him unceremoniously aside and ran into the doorway.

Bunter sat down on the step with a bump and a splutter.

"Ow! Beast!" he gasped. "I say, you fellows—Urrgh! I say, you ungrateful beasts—groogh—ooogh—who shaved your wives, you beasts—I mean, who saved your lives—Urrrrgh!"

But the juniors did not heed. Bunter, it was true, had come in remarkably useful for once; but they had no time to waste on him, all the same. Bunter could wait, and the hunt for Count Zero could not.

They ran into the house, leaving the Owl of the Remove spluttering with breathless indignation.

The secret panel, by which the count had entered the hall, and through which he had planned to drive the schoolboys at the pistol's point, stood wide open. Herbert Vernon-Smith, with an electric torch in his left hand, the count's automatic in his right, strode towards it.

"Get hold of something, you fellows, and follow on!" he said, over his shoulder. "This is a chance to get at the rotter! Come on!"

"Mind what you do with that gun,

Smithy!" said Harry Wharton, rather dryly.

The Bounder gave him a look.

"What would have happened to me if that fat ass Bunter hadn't blown in?" he asked, between his teeth. "Well, I'm telling you, that very same thing is going to happen to Count Zero if I get at him and he puts up a fight! Sauce for the goose is sauce for the gander!"

"My esteemed Smithy—" murmured Hurree Jamsset Ram Singh.

"Cut it out!" snapped Smithy. "I mean every word of it, as that scoundrel will find! You can follow me or not, as you choose! I'm going!"

With that, Herbert Vernon-Smith stepped through the open panel, flashing his light ahead. Tom Redwing was after him at once, and John Redwing and the Famous Five followed, every one of them armed with a stout oaken stick.

Billy Bunter rolled into the hall, and blinked after them in alarmed astonishment.

"I say, you fellows," he yelled, "where are you going? What about tea?"

Bob Cherry glanced round, with a grin.

"Follow on, Bunt, old bean!" he said. "We're going to look for the giddy Italians in their den! We shall want you to do the scrapping! Come on!"

"Oh, really, Cherry—"

Bob disappeared after his friends. But Billy Bunter did not follow on. Exploring the mysterious recesses of Polpelly House, in search of desperate men in the dark, had no appeal for William George Bunter. Discretion was the better part of valour, and Billy Bunter prudently remained where he was.

Heedless whether the other fellows followed him or not, Herbert Vernon-Smith tramped into the hidden passage behind the oak wall. The juniors followed him, with rather grim faces. They were keen enough to get to close quarters with the enemy, if it came to that. But they did not like the look on the Bounder's face and the way he handled the captured automatic. There was a hard and fierce strain in Vernon-Smith's nature, and it was well to the fore now.

"Look out here! Steps!" snapped the Bounder.

The stone wall behind the oak was a couple of feet thick. A great block had rolled out of place on some hidden pivot, leaving a doorway. Beyond was a wide passage, but after a dozen paces it narrowed, ending at a spiral stair that dropped away into black darkness.

Vernon-Smith flashed the light down. Then he stepped into the opening. From the well of darkness below a sound came up.

Harry Wharton hastily caught the Bounder's shoulder.

"Hold on, Smithy! There's somebody below!"

"I'm not deaf!" snapped Vernon-Smith. "I can hear him as well as you. He's had ample time to get in ahead of us, if there's a secret tunnel from the lodge—and we know there is."

He tramped down the winding stair.

Harry Wharton & Co. followed him. Every one of them carried a light, and the dismal, musty old staircase was well illuminated. Over one another's shoulders, as they descended in single file, the juniors watched with wary and uneasy eyes. They had to deal with a desperate man, and, though he had been disarmed, there was little doubt that he had other weapons available. It was not pleasant to think of the swartly

Italian lurking in the darkness below, with an automatic in his dusky hands.

But the Bouncer, as usual, was utterly reckless, and the other fellows backed him up. They stepped on and downward—an interminable distance, the winding stair seeming to lead them into the very heart of the earth. The unending stair, as they wound on and on, made them almost giddy.

But the Bouncer, in the lead, stopped at last.

"That the jolly old terminus?" called Bob, from above him.

"Yes!" snarled Smithy.

"Thank goodness for that!"

The party stepped down and joined the Bouncer. He was flashing his light about him, with a savage, disappointed face.

No further sound had been heard from the man who lurked below. But that Count Zero had reached the spot first, there was no doubt. The way must have been open when he ordered the juniors to descend from the hall as his prisoners. But it was closed now.

The spiral stair ended in a stone-walled cellar, from which there was no visible exit.

Vernon-Smith passed round the walls, flashing his light and tapping on the stone with the automatic.

But every wall was solid, and the huge stones fixed and immovable. That there was a turning stone like the one above was certain, for it was obvious that an exit must exist. But it was secured on the farther side, and the pursuit was stopped.

The Bouncer gritted his teeth.

"Beaten again!" he muttered.

He scanned the stone walls. But he could not even pick out which block it was that turned, let alone stir it. Perhaps it was as well for the reckless fellow, with an armed and desperate man lurking on the other side.

"We're done!" said Bob.

"The donefulness is terrific!" remarked Hurree Jamset Ram Singh.

The Greyfriars fellows turned back to the spiral stair. It was useless to linger in the chilly stone cellar, heavy with foul air. Vernon-Smith lingered after the rest, unwilling to give in; but he followed them at last.

It was a weary tramp up the almost endless spiral stair. Every fellow had had enough by the time they reached the top.

They returned to the hall, and the panel in the wall was closed. Billy Bunter, sitting in the old sea-captain's armchair by the fire, warming his toes at the glowing logs, blinked round at them through his big spectacles. He grinned at the Bouncer's savage, disappointed face.

"Nothing doing—what?" asked the Owl of the Remove breezily.

"Not a thing, old fat man!" answered Bob.

"I rather thought so," said Bunter, with a nod. "I'd have come down with you if I hadn't been so tired, walking here from Crewey. I fancy I'd have spotted the rotters if I'd come. You fellows are rather duds!"

"Shut up, you gabbling Owl!" snapped the Bouncer.

"That's what you call gratitude, I suppose!" sneered Bunter. "I'd like to know what would have happened to you if I hadn't come to the rescue! I saved your life, and all you can do is to keep me waiting for my tea!"

Vernon-Smith opened his lips for a savage answer. But he closed them again. It had to be admitted that Billy Bunter, for once, had been the right man in the right place. It was like Bunter, of course, to make the most of

it. Bunter was no man to hide his light under a bushel.

"I've been hanging up for days at Crewey, waiting for you fellows to come back for me!" said Bunter warmly. "You never came! Why didn't you come back for me?"

"Forgot all about you, old fat bean," answered Bob.

"Beast! There's a bill run up at the Ship," continued Bunter. "I shall leave that to you to pay, Smithy! I consider that it's up to you."

Vernon-Smith nodded, without speaking. He was in a savage and bitter temper, but, in the circumstances, he tried to be civil to Bunter. It was not pleasant to think of what might have happened, had not the fat Owl weighed in when he did.

"Now, I'll tell you what!" went on Bunter. "I didn't want to hang on at Crewey by myself. But there's jolly good grub at the Ship, as you know. What about all of us going back there, and leaving this rotten place? It's jolly dangerous here, you know—"

"Go back as soon as you like!" said Smithy.

"I don't mean that I care about the danger personally," explained Bunter. "But I may not be always able to protect you fellows! That's really what worries me. Better get out of this, I think."

"Fathead!"

"Oh, really, Wharton—"

Vernon-Smith fastened the safety-catch of the automatic and slipped it into his pocket. Then he fixed his eyes on the party.

"Bunter's right in one thing," he said quietly. "It's dangerous here! That blighter Zero is pretty desperate, as you've seen. He may try to hold us up again! If he does, I'll fire on him as if he were a mad dog! I've got his gun, and I'm keeping it—and I'm going to use it if he puts it up to me. But you fellows never counted on this sort of thing! If you're fed-up, I shan't take it amiss if you clear."

"And you?" said Harry quietly.

The Bouncer gave a harsh laugh.

"I'm staying here! I wouldn't run from that scoundrel to save my life or a thousand lives."

"I hope we've got as much pluck as you have, Smithy!" said the captain of the Remove. "We're certainly not leaving you to it."

"I say, you fellows—"

"Shut up, Bunter!"

"Shan't!" roared Bunter. "I jolly well think—"

"You jolly well don't," contradicted Bob Cherry, "for you've jolly well got nothing to do it with!"

"Beast! I think—"

"Gammon!"

"I think—" shrieked Bunter.

"Rot!"

"I think—"

"Impossible!"

"Time to get going if we're going to catch the tide!" said Vernon-Smith. In the excitement of the hold-up, and what had followed, the juniors had forgotten the intended exploration of the Black Rock Cave. The Bouncer's words reminded them.

"I say, you fellows, you're not going to leave me here alone!" yelled Bunter, in alarm.

"You come along, too!" said the Bouncer, and he went out.

"I say, you fellows, I'm tired! And hungry! And— Don't walk off while a chap's talking!" yelled Bunter.

But the Greyfriars party did walk off, and Billy Bunter, in great wrath and indignation, detached himself from the

armchair and followed. He was tired after walking a mile, and he was lazy, and he had no taste whatever for exploring smugglers' caves. But he was not going to be left in the house of mysteries on his own. With angry grunts, he rolled after the Greyfriars party down the coomb to the cove.

THE NINTH CHAPTER.

Smithy Pulls Trigger!

HARRY WHARTON & CO. scanned the great cliff with watchful eyes as the boat followed the running tide swirling in at the yawning mouth of the Black Rock Cave.

They were keenly on the watch this time for a falling boulder from above. But there was no sign of an enemy, and the boat glided under the great arch of rock, all the crew feeling relieved when it was safe under shelter.

They pulled up the cove on the swirling, deepening tide. Billy Bunter sat in the stern, blinking to and fro with uneasy blinks through his big spectacles. Bunter had been in that cavern once, and he was fed-up with it, and he rather regretted that he had left the hospitable inn at Crewey.

"I say, you fellows, it's jolly cold here!" grunted Bunter.

"That's because it's winter-time!" explained Bob Cherry gravely. "It's quite a well-known fact that the temperature falls in the winter, Bunt."

"You silly ass!" hooted Bunter. "It's all rot coming to this rotten cave! What do you think you're going to find here?"

"Chests of doubloons, old fat man, if we're lucky! Think of the jam tarts you could buy for thirty thousand doubloons."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Rot!" grunted Bunter. "I don't believe there are any doubloons. What's a doubloon worth, anyhow?"

"The common-or-garden doubloon is worth about a guinea, I believe," answered Bob. "But the old Spanish doubloons are said to be worth two or three times as much as the modern article. But even at a quid each, thirty thousand doubloons would buy as much tuck as you could park at a single sitting!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"All bosh and piffle!" said Bunter. "I don't believe there's any doubloons at all. I don't believe there ever was a Spanish galleon sunk in the cove. I don't believe that old ass of a squire ever got any doubloons off it and buried them in the cave, and I don't believe that Marco Zero ever dug them up and hid them somewhere else—in fact, I don't believe there ever was a Marco Zero, and, if there was, Count Zero isn't descended from him. I don't believe there's anything in it at all! So let's go back."

Having delivered this sweeping and weighty opinion, Billy Bunter blinked at the boat's crew, apparently expecting them to turn the boat and pull out of the cave again.

Instead of which they grinned, and pulled on up the cave with the tide, passing Bunter's weighty opinion by, like the idle wind which they regarded not.

"So you're going on?" hooted Bunter.

"You've guessed it!" assented Bob.

"Well, if you run into danger, don't expect me to protect you, that's all!" snorted Bunter. "I wash my hands of it."

"They could do with a wash!" remarked Bob.

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"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Yah!"

Bunter relapsed into dignified silence. The dinghy pulled on up the vast cavern, the lantern swinging on the mast, casting a glimmering light over the swirling water, and the rugged, soaring walls of dark rock.

High up the cave the tide washed on shelving sand, and there the crew made it fast and landed. Far behind, the daylight at the mouth of the cavern was a small patch. The juniors turned on their torches.

"One of us had better stop with the boat, I think," said Harry Wharton. "It would be rather more than a joke if the enemy bagged it and left us stranded here."

"Oh crikey!" gasped Bunter.

"Good egg!" agreed the Bounder. "You'd better stop and rest your game leg."

Wharton nodded, and sat on the gunwale of the boat, which had been drawn up the sand out of reach of the lapping tide.

With gleaming lights, the juniors scattered about the great cavern, which extended under the Polpelly cliffs to a vast and unknown distance. They knew that there was a secret way from the cave to the house of Polpelly, used by the old smuggling squires, and they were very keen to discover it.

Billy Bunter blinked doubtfully after them, and blinked at Wharton. Finally, he attached himself to John Redwing, and rolled off with him, apparently considering it safest to keep under convoy of the sailorman. Harry Wharton was left alone with the boat, watching the flickering light of his comrades' torches as they went farther and farther up the great cavern.

The lantern at the mast-head showed light for some distance round him, glimmering into the crevices and clefts that split the rocky walls of the cave, into some of which the tide was gurgling. Others were high and dry—dark openings that led to unknown distances.

By one of them, no doubt, lay the secret way to Polpelly House—but they were almost innumerable.

As he sat on the gunwale, the captain of the Greyfriars Remove pictured in his mind the old days, when smugglers had tramped up the cave with their bundles of contraband goods, to be conveyed by the secret tunnel to the house; and the still older days, when the sea-faring squire had hidden the Spanish doubloons in the sand, only to be robbed of them by the captive whom he was holding to ransom. Somewhere at the bottom of Polpelly Cove still lay the rotten timbers of the galleon that tough old seaman of Elizabeth's days had captured from the Great Armada, and sailed home round Land's End to Polpelly.

And now, three hundred and fifty years later, a descendant of the old squire's prisoner was hunting for the lost doubloons—the rival of Smithy and his schoolboy comrades. Times had changed; manners and customs had changed; but the greed for gold had not changed. The Spanish doubloons were as strong a lure as ever.

Wharton was thinking of it, when the sound of a pebble moving under a foot caught his ear, and he glanced quickly round. From one of the dark openings in the cavern wall, a brawny, bull-necked figure leaped—and rushed at him across the sand.

"Beppo!" breathed Harry.

Unheeding a twinge of pain in his

bruised knee, he caught up an oar, and raised it over his head with both hands.

"Help!" he shouted at the top of his voice.

His voice rang and echoed up the cavern, repeating in the hollow with an echoing boom. There was a shout back from the distance.

"Silenzio!" hissed Beppo.

He approached the boat swiftly, crouching like a cat.

"Stand back!" said Harry, between his teeth.

The swarthy ruffian sprang, and he swept the oar down. But the bull-necked man was as active as a tiger. He leaped back, and the blow missed him.

"Help!" roared Wharton.

Bang!

The Italian was springing after him when the roar of an automatic thundered through Black Rock cave.

The Bounder was coming at a burst of speed, and he fired as he came.

A sharp shriek came from the Italian, and he staggered.

Wharton, panting, caught up a cudgel from the boat. But it was not needed. The bull-necked man was hit—the junior could see a stream of crimson pouring down his swarthy cheek, where the bullet had torn away a strip of skin. Beppo clapped a dusky hand to the gash, spitting with fury, and glaring round at the juniors, who came racing down the cavern. Then he turned and bounded away, and vanished into the narrow, dark cleft from which he had emerged.

THE TENTH CHAPTER.

One Man Missing!

SMITHY came panting up.

After him came Bob, Johnny Bull, and Hurree Singh. John Redwing was in sight, coming along fast, with Billy Bunter gasping after him. Tom was at a farther distance, but he could be seen running towards the boat. Frank Nugent was not to be seen—but Wharton's shouts had reached the ears of all the others, and drawn them to the spot.

"All serene?" grinned the Bounder, as he joined the captain of the Remove by the boat, the automatic in his hand. "Lucky I had this jolly old gun, as I think even you will admit."

Wharton, gasping for breath, nodded.

There was little doubt that Beppo had intended to get away with the boat, with Wharton a prisoner; and the other fellows, fast as they had come at his call, would never have reached the spot in time to prevent the ruffian from carrying out his intention.

It was the bullet gashing his swarthy cheek that had stopped Beppo, and he had fled in time to escape a second, which might have done more damage.

"He was hit!" panted Bob Cherry. "I think—"

"He was hit all right!" said the Bounder coolly. "I've done a good deal of shooting practice, and I'm jolly glad of it now. That spaghetti sportsman has somethin' to remember us by."

"Oh crikey!" gasped Billy Bunter. "I say, you fellows, let's get out of this! I say, it ain't safe here!"

"Safe as houses, old fat bean!" said the Bounder. Smithy's eyes were shining with excitement, and he was evidently enjoying the thrill. "So long as there are some cartridges left in this jolly old popgun, they will mind their p's and q's."

"I—I say, mind it doesn't go off again!" gasped Bunter. The Owl of the Remove did not like firearms at close quarters.

"It will go off again, quick, if that black-jowled blighter shows up," said Vernon-Smith. "I shouldn't wonder if the other scoundrel is lurking about somewhere, too!"

"Where's Frank?" asked Harry Wharton. He noticed that his chum had not arrived with the others, and Nugent was not in sight. It seemed impossible that Frank had not heard the shouting echoing up the cavern, and it was impossible that he had not heard the shot. But there was no sign of him coming.

"Isn't he here?" The Bounder stared round. "Queer that he hasn't come. Anybody seen Nugent?"

"I saw him a quarter of an hour ago," said Bob. "He passed me, looking into some cranny up the cave."

"He must have heard!" said Harry.

"Unless he's gone deaf!" said Vernon-Smith. "I hope he hasn't tumbled into some hole—the place is full of pitfalls. Give him a yell, Cherry—you've got a voice like a megaphone."

"Fathead!" answered Bob.

He gave a yell:

"Hallo, hallo, hallo! Franky! This way, Franky!"

Bob's roar rang through the cavern, echoing almost like thunder in the hollows. But the echoes died away into silence, and there was no answer from Frank Nugent.

Wharton's face grew anxious.

"Something's happened to Frank!" he muttered. "We'd better look for him at once! But the boat—"

"We can drag it up the sand, sir," said John Redwing, "and I'll take the oars and the tiller out."

"Lend a hand, everybody!" said Bob.

All hands, except Bunter's, grasped the boat, and it was dragged up the sandy floor of the cave to a distance from the water. The juniors took out the oars, and John lifted the tiller from its place. Without oars or tiller, it was unlikely that an enemy would attempt to get away in the dinghy; and it could not be sent drifting, with the tide running into the cave. The juniors had to risk it, at that, if they were going to search for Nugent—and that was a pressing necessity now.

Black Rock Cave was almost honey-combed with clefts and crevices and pitfalls, and the fear was in every mind that Frank might have taken a tumble. And there was another danger, of which they were all aware. Beppo had been defeated and driven off—but if Count Zero was lurking in the darkness up the cavern, it was possible that Frank might have fallen in with him, and had not had a chance to call for help.

Leaving the boat, the Greyfriars fellows tramped up the cave, flashing their lights to and fro, and calling to Nugent.

Only the booming echoes answered their calling voices.

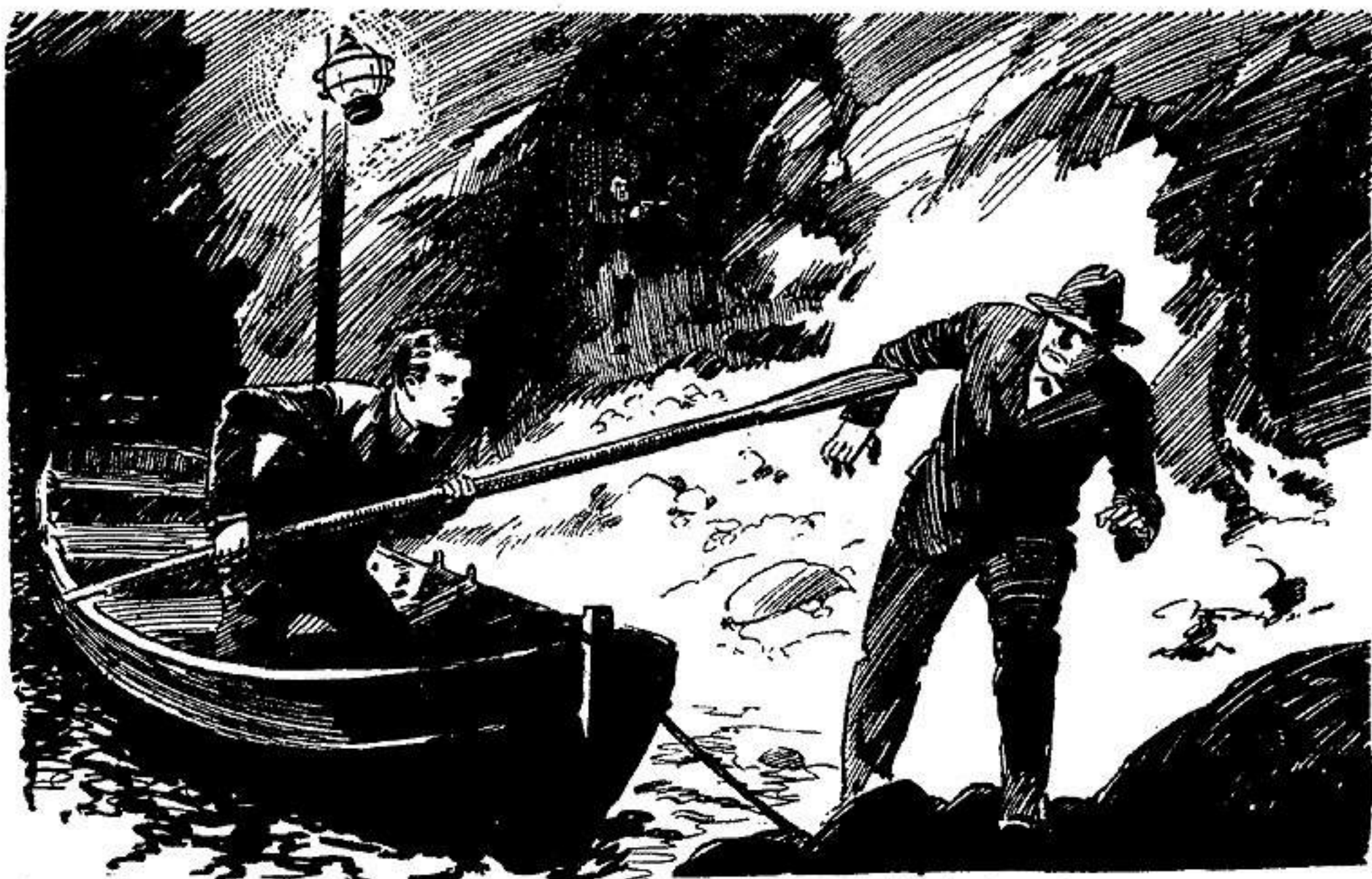
For the first time in their explorations they reached the limit of the great cavern; rugged walls of rock that barred further progress.

Not a sign had been seen of Nugent.

Faces grew darker and more anxious. They had now explored the whole of the main cavern, and found nothing. Exploring the crevices and tunnels that opened in the rocky walls was another matter. There were scores of them, and searching them all, one after another, was not a matter of hours, but of days, and a good many days.

The Greyfriars party came to a halt, and exchanged grim looks. Billy Bunter sat on a boulder and gasped for breath. His fat little legs were tired out.

"He's not taken a tumble!" said



"Help!" roared Wharton, as the blow from the oar missed the Italian. "Help!" Bang! The Italian was about to spring at him when the roar of an automatic thundered through the cave. Vernon-Smith was coming at a burst of speed, and he fired as he came.

Harry, in a low voice. "We should hear him calling to us! Where can he be?"

There was only one answer to that question. But nobody liked to utter it. In the dismal silence Billy Bunter's voice was heard:

"I say, you fellows!"

"Don't jaw, Bunter!" snapped Vernon-Smith.

"Oh, really, Smithy! What about tea?"

Nobody answered that. The juniors were not thinking of tea. Billy Bunter blinked at them.

"We shall be late for tea, at this rate!" he said. "Did any of you fellows think of bringing some sandwiches?"

"Will you shut up?" hissed the Bounder.

"No—I jolly well won't!" retorted Bunter. "If you think I'm going to be starved, you're jolly well mistaken, see? I think you ought to have brought some sandwiches. Selfishness all round, as usual!"

"Nugent's missing, Bunter!" said Harry Wharton quietly.

"Well, that's not my fault, but yours," answered Bunter. "I warned you not to come to this rotten hole, and you can't say I didn't! The best thing we can do, is to get out, before anybody else is missing!"

"Oh, shut up!" grunted Johnny Bull.

"It might be me next!" said Bunter warmly. "Suppose those beasts got hold of me?"

"No such luck!"

"Beast!" hooted Bunter.

"We've got to find Nugent!" said Smithy, between his teeth. "Better separate, and search up and down those clefts—"

Harry Wharton shook his head. "Better not separate, Smithy!" he said. "If that villain Zero has got hold of Frank, it was because he caught him away from the rest. He may be

watching for a chance to get hold of another chap."

"That's sense!" agreed the Bounder. "But it's going to take a jolly long time to search all these nooks and crannies."

Billy Bunter grunted.

No doubt he was concerned for Frank Nugent, and his unknown fate. But he was hungry. When Billy Bunter was hungry, all other considerations faded into insignificance. A prolonged search in the cave meant being very late for tea—perhaps missing tea altogether, and perhaps supper, too!

That prospect was awful! And there was danger in the cave—and Bunter did not like danger.

Sitting on the boulder, resting his fat and weary limbs, the Owl of the Remove blinked round, through his big spectacles, into the shadows outside the radius of the lights carried by the juniors. Every shadow seemed, to Bunter, peopled by dark, threatening, fierce faces of swarthy Italians.

A glimmer caught his eye from a dark opening in the cave wall. It was not a light; it was something bright that lay on the sandy floor, and caught the light from the juniors' lamps and reflected it back.

Bunter blinked at it, wondering what it was. Headless of Bunter, the juniors discussed what was to be done.

"Not much good trying to pick up tracks in the sand," said Bob. "We've made too many ourselves, all over the place, to pick up Nugent's."

"Might be a chance!" said Harry. "But—"

"I say, you fellows!"

"Shut up!" yelled Bob.

"But, I say—"

"Kick that fat idiot!" growled Johnny Bull.

"Will you let a chap speak?" howled Bunter. "I was going to say—"

"Will you shut up?" roared Smithy.

"I was going to say— Keep off, you beast!" howled Bunter, dodging. "I say, I was going to say, Nugent must have gone that way—"

Bunter pointed a fat finger at the dark crevice in the rocky wall.

"And why, you fat owl?" snapped Smithy.

"Well, he must have dropped that torch," argued Bunter. "It must be Nugent's, as all you fellows have got yours."

"What torch, you blithering ass! What— Oh!"

Smithy broke off suddenly, and darted at the crevice.

On the rocky floor lay an electric torch. It was extinguished, and looked as if it had been trampled on; but the bright parts had caught the gleam of the lights carried by the juniors, and revealed it to Bunter.

Vernon-Smith picked it up. "That's Nugent's!" he said.

"I say, you fellows—"

"Fancy Bunter talking sense for once!" said Bob Cherry. "Franky came this way, you fellows. That's his torch, and I suppose he dropped it when he was collared. There's been a bit of a tussle here."

That was plain enough for the sand was kicked up, and the torch itself had been trodden on. The juniors could picture the swarthy Italian, lurking in that dark crevice, and suddenly leaping out and seizing Nugent as he passed. Evidently he had dragged his prisoner into the crevice—and they knew now, at least, the way Frank had gone.

Flashing his light ahead, Vernon-Smith led the way up the opening. It was hardly more than three feet wide, here and there widening, and again narrowing, irregularly. The floor was of rough, uneven rock, and gave no sign. But there could be little doubt

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(Continued from page 13.)

that Frank Nugent had gone that way, in the grasp of his captor—Count Zero had had better luck than his man Beppo.

But the Boulder stopped suddenly.

Bare, rugged rock confronted him, where the tunnel came to an end. He flashed the light round, on dark rock—overhead, where the roof was lost in darkness beyond the reach of the light.

"Beaten again!" he said, between his teeth.

He groped savagely, almost desperately, over the rough rock. But it was natural rock—it was evident that no secret door could exist there.

The juniors had come to the end of a blind alley; and, with something like despair in their hearts, they turned and tramped back into the cave.

THE ELEVENTH CHAPTER.

The Hidden Room!

"SON io!" grinned Count Zero.

Frank Nugent looked at him.

He could not speak.

The light, suddenly turned on, revealed the dark, swarthy face of the Italian count. In the blackness, hitherto, Frank had hardly realised what was happening, so suddenly and swiftly had it happened.

He had been seized from behind, a little distance from his comrades, out of their sight. His torch, dashed from his hand, had fallen, and was trodden underfoot, as he strove to struggle. He could not call out—a strong hand was clapped over his mouth, and his struggles were futile, in the grip of a muscular and powerful man.

Silenced, resisting desperately, but unavailingly, he felt himself dragged over rough rock, in deep darkness. He knew that he was dragged out of the main cavern, for several times he brushed on the rugged walls of the fissure as he was dragged along.

When his unseen captor stopped at last, it was to thrust a gag into his mouth, effectually silencing him, and to buckle a strap round him, pinning his arms down to his sides.

Then the amazed and bewildered junior felt himself lifted on a powerful shoulder, slung over it like a sack. He felt himself swaying in the air, and realised that the unseen man was clambering up a rope-ladder.

Nugent was not a heavy-weight; but he heard his captor panting with the exertion as he clambered up. It was a test of strength, even for a powerful man.

But the clamber ended, and he felt himself pitched down on hard rock. A hand gripped his shoulder—but for a full minute his captor did not stir, waiting to recover his breath after climbing the rope-ladder.

Then sounds in the darkness told Frank that the rope-ladder was being pulled up after him.

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He heard it rattle down, coiling, on the rock. Then the grip on his shoulder lifted him to his feet, and he was forced to walk onward, in dense darkness.

Again there was a halt. Then a light flashed on. Frank Nugent stared about him dizzily.

The swarthy, grinning face of the Italian was before him. He knew now into whose hands he had fallen—though he had guessed it already.

The buckled strap held his arms pinned; the gag in his mouth kept him silent. He could only stare at the man who had kidnapped him.

He was standing in a rugged tunnel of rock. If he had hoped that his friends might be able to trace him, he had to give up that hope now.

From the fissure in the cave wall, the court had ascended by a rope-ladder, which he had pulled up after him—leaving no clue to the way he had gone. Frank could guess that this was the secret way into Polpelly House; but his friends in the cave were not likely to discover it.

He stood unsteadily, with the light glimmering on his face, half-choked by the gag driven into his mouth.

"Have no fear, little signor!" smiled the count. "You are a prisoner, and your friends will join you soon; but you are safe in the hands of a count of Italy."

He led the junior on again, stumbling over the rough rock of the tunnel. The way sloped upward now, and here and there were steps in the rock, which showed signs of having been shaped by human hands.

This was the way the smugglers of the old days had come, conveying contraband goods to Polpelly House.

The rugged tunnel ended, at last, in a stair, up which the schoolboy was forced to clamber, the count's hand on his shoulder.

At the top of the stair a passage opened. But it was no longer a rugged tunnel of natural rock; it was built with solid stone blocks. Frank Nugent knew now that he was under Polpelly.

The count stopped at a door of ancient oak. Ancient as it was, it was solid and strong. The old lock on it was rusted and useless; but a bolt of more recent date was screwed on the outside.

Count Zero threw the door open.

Within was a faint red glow and a feeling of warmth. Frank, staring round with dizzy eyes, saw the glow of a fire. His captor lighted a hurricane lamp that hung from a hook, and thrust his electric lamp into his pocket. Then he removed the gag from Nugent's mouth.

"You may speak now, ragazzo!" he said, smiling. "Your friends will not hear you—you are far enough from them, non è vero?" He waved a dusky hand round the subterranean room. "These are your quarters—you will make yourself at home, till your friends join you."

"You villain!" gasped Frank.

"This is where you would all have come, had my hold-up been a success," smiled Count Zero. "But the young Vernon-Smeet, he beat me to it, as the Americans say! Cospetto, that one, boy as he is, is more ready to use an automatic than I myself! But if you come not all at once, you come one by one, little signor!"

"So that's your game!" muttered Frank.

"That, as you say, is my game. I cannot search for the lost doubloons with so many rivals on the scene. I

must remove you from my way first. Here you will remain until——"

"You fool!" panted Frank. "If my friends fail to find me they will call in the police——"

Count Zero laughed.

"And you fancy that the police will find you?" he asked banteringly. "Cospetto! They will have to search long and hard before they unearth this hidden nook. There are many secrets in this strange old place, little signor, discovered by my ancestor, who was a prisoner here so many years ago, and written down in papers that I have read in the Palazzo Zero at Milano. But when I came here, secretly, armed with these descriptions and plans, I was yet a long time in finding out all that I know now. I snap the finger at your police."

Frank stood silent.

If his friends failed to find him, and he knew they would, the police had no more chance than they had. If the terror of the law did not influence the Italian adventurer, he had little to fear.

"Make yourself at home!" smiled the count. "So far as is possible I shall treat you as a guest rather than a prisoner—as my ancestor Marco was treated in the old days in the mansion above us."

He slipped the buckled belt from Nugent's arms.

The junior stood free, and he clenched his hands. But it was futile to think of a struggle; he was little more than an infant in the grasp of the muscular Italian.

"If my man Beppo has had luck you will soon have a companion here!" said Zero. "I will not say addio, as soon I shall see you again, senza dubbio."

He stepped back into the stone passage and shut the door. Frank heard the bolt shoot into the socket.

He stood breathing hard, looking about him in the hidden room. It was plain that it had been prepared for prisoners. The floor was covered with old rugs, doubtless brought down from the house above; there were chairs and a table from the same source. The ancient barred iron grate, rusted with disuse, was sunk in the stone wall, in the thickness of which was the chimney, the smoke escaping by some hidden outlet far away. Evidently the hidden room had been occupied on occasion in ancient days, doubtless as a hiding-place in times of danger, in the perilous times of Plantagenet and Tudor.

It did not take Frank long to ascertain that there was no escape from the room.

That there was some means of ventilation was certain, for the air was fairly fresh. But it must have been by means of pipes hidden in the walls or the roof. The only outlet was the door, and that was bolted on the outside. Frank Nugent was a helpless prisoner.

There was food on the table—food and drink in plenty. A heap of logs lay near the fireplace. Hard and ruthless as he was in his pursuit of the treasure of the lost galleon, the count of Italy was no ruffian or crook—indeed, it seemed that he was, in many ways, a kind-natured man. But he was ruthlessly determined to carry out his purpose, and neither the liberty, nor even the lives, of the schoolboys would have been allowed to stand in his way. He had said that another of the party was likely to join Nugent in his imprisonment if his man Beppo had luck, and Frank listened as he moved about the hidden room for a sound of footsteps, the sound of the withdrawing bolt.

But no such sound came to his ears.

Dead silence reigned round him, unbroken. Beppo, it seemed, had had no luck. Leaden minutes crawled slowly by, lengthening into weary hours, and, save for the crackle of the fire, no sound broke the tomb-like silence of the Greyfriars junior's prison.

THE TWELFTH. HAPTER.

No Luck!

"**N**OTHING doing!" said Vernon-Smith, between his teeth.

He hated to give in, and his feeling was more than shared by Frank Nugent's chums. But they all knew that there was nothing doing.

Night had fallen on the wild coast. The tide had long ebbed, flowing and swirling out of Black Rock Cove.

Since the discovery of the trodden torch in the fissure no sign had been found of Frank Nugent.

The juniors were forced to realise that he was no longer in the cave, or near it. He had been taken away by some secret means of egress which they could not discover.

More likely than not he was hidden in some remote recess under Polpelly House, where, as they knew, Zero had his hidden den.

The long and weary search, growing more and more hopeless, had tired them out, especially Bunter. Not that Bunter was searching; he was too fatigued and too hungry to think of anything but his own discomfort. But he dared not be left alone, and wherever the juniors moved, the fat and weary Owl rolled wearily after them.

But they had to give it up at last. It was clear that the search was futile. Nugent was gone, and the way he had gone was a secret they could not discover. For all they knew they might have passed close by it a dozen times without seeing or suspecting it.

"We may as well get back," said Harry Wharton, in a low voice. "We shan't find Frank here, that's a cert."

"More likely to find him at Polpelly," said the Bounder. "If we find him at all, it will be there."

Wharton nodded. "Let's get out, then," he said.

They went back to the boat. Billy Bunter rolled after them, glad, at least, that he was going to get out of the cave at last.

The tide had receded far. There was still water at the mouth of the cave, but it was shallow within—too shallow for the dinghy. The juniors had to drag the boat a great distance before it could be launched again.

It was launched at last, and they crowded into it, Bunter plumping down into the stern seat with a grunt of relief. In grim silence they pulled away from the cave across the dark waters of the cove to the landing-place.

There they landed, and Bunter sat down to rest, while John Redwing and the juniors carried the dinghy into the boathouse and locked it up.

Then they tramped up the path in the coomb, back to Polpelly. Hardly a word was spoken as they went.

Nugent's absence clouded every face. They did not believe that he had been harmed—it did not seem that their enemy had any object in harming him. But he was a prisoner, and the hope of finding him and rescuing him was very faint indeed. It was an unexpected and unlooked-for blow, and they hardly knew how to deal with the situation.

They reached Polpelly House at last. Old Dan'l had a roaring fire and lighted candles to greet them. The old oak hall

looked very bright and cheery and hospitable as the weary juniors tramped in. The sea-cook was standing at the door, looking out for them.

"You're late, sir," said Dan'l. "I got supper ready—"

"Oh, good!" gasped Bunter.

"I got it ready nour and narf ago," said Dan'l. "I been a-keeping of it warm. Ain't the other young gentleman coming in?"

"Nugent's been kidnapped!" grunted the Bounder.

"Hey?" Dan'l put his hand to his ear. "If he don't come in yet he'll have his supper cold, and you can lay to that. I been keeping it 'ot an nour and a narf—"

"Oh, go and eat coke, and don't bother!"

"Ay, ay, sir! I'll bring it in at once!" said Dan'l, not hearing a word, as usual. "If it's spiled don't blame

me. Nour and a narf ago I had that supper ready."

And Dan'l stumped away.

"I say, you fellows, I'm fearfully hungry!" groaned Billy Bunter, falling rather than sitting in a chair. "I say, if you'd taken some sandwiches—"

"Shut up, ass!"

"Beast!"

All the fellows were hungry. It was dismal enough to sit down to supper without their missing chum, but it was useless to fast, and they ate their supper in glum silence and in haste. Billy Bunter was still going strong when they left the table and gathered in a group by the fire. Bunter was not likely to be finished soon. He had a great deal of leeway to make up.

The Bounder stood staring at the crackling logs on the ancient hearth with a black brow.

(Continued on next page.)

GREYFRIARS INTERVIEWS

Continuing his series of interviews, our clever Greyfriars Rhymester beards a lion in its den in the shape of

DOCTOR LOCKE,
the headmaster of Greyfriars.

(1)

I wandered down the old familiar lane,
I saw the old familiar school again,
With all its joys departed!
I heard no voice, or other cheerful sounds,
The school stood empty in its empty grounds.
The Christmas vac had started!

(3)

And Gosling seemed to have the same idea.
Said he: "You're not supposed to come in here
Until the school's assembled!"
"Be good enough to let me in," I said.
"It happens that I've come to see the Head!"
At which the porter trembled.



(2)

On duty bent, I rang the entrance bell,
Which volleyed forth, as solemn as a knell,
From under Gosling's portal.
"Come not within," I thought I heard it say,
"For ghosts live here while scholars are away!
Depart, you foolish mortal!"

(4)

I walked through places grown forlorn and odd,
Until I found old Fishy in the Quad,
His face was melancholy.
His home is in the far United States,
And so he spends the vac within the gates
Of Greyfriars—which is jolly!

(5)

I stopped to hear the piecan wag his chin.
"I'll sure allow I wish you'd take me in
To join your Christmas party!"
Said I: "My friend, you told me,
don't forget,
You never have been 'taken in' as yet!
You won't start now, my hearty!"



(6)

I then went on to visit Dr. Locke.
And gave our worthy Head a kind of shock
When he was thus confronted.
He questioned me: "What ever brings you here?"
His voice was stern, his eye was most severe!
(I very nearly shunted!)

(7)

"Forgive me, sir, for interrupting you,
The fact is, I require an interview,
If you would be so willing!
They're published in the MAGNET every week.
Twopennyworth of pleasure, so to speak—
And worth about a shilling!"

(8)

The doctor's face relaxed into a smile.
"I'd like to see some samples of your style,"
He said, with kind inflexion.
I therefore showed him copies of the rhymes
Which I have printed here at various times.
A notable collection!

(9)

He did not seem to like my splendid verse!
Indeed, he muttered: "This is rather worse
Than I anticipated!"
Aloud he said: "You're now in the Remove.
I hope it won't be long e'er you improve!
Your powers are overrated!"



(10)

"The print," he said, "is very clear
and bold;
The drawings are a pleasure to behold,
And tastefully selected!
But of your poems, I will only say
I do not think that Tennyson or Gray
Will find their works neglected!"



(11)

"Now take," he said, "this Interview with Greene!
It's quite the worst example I have seen,
The verses are atrocious!
Please understand it's little short of crime
To make 'a riot' and 'deny it' rhyme!"
His glare was quite ferocious!

(12)

He stopped to read the poem through again,
Then made a sudden bound to reach his cane,
And left me unattended!
I bounded, too—but not towards the Head!
I felt a sudden urge for home, instead.
The interview was ended!

"What are we going to do about it?" asked Johnny Bull, at last.

"We've got to find Nugent!" muttered Smithy.

"Not much chance of that! Kidnapping is a matter for the police," said Johnny. "What about getting over to Pilverton?"

The Bouncer gave an angry grunt.

"What's the good? Do you think a policeman will find out anything that we can't find out here? Or do you think that Zero is a man to be frightened by the sight of a policeman's helmet?"

"I think that it's a matter for the authorities to deal with," answered Johnny Bull quietly, "and one of us ought to walk over to Pilverton at daylight, and report what's happened at the police station."

"I think so, too, Smithy," said Harry. "The matter's a bit too serious now to keep in our own hands."

Vernon-Smith shrugged his shoulders angrily. Clearly, he would have preferred to keep the matter in his own hands, and carry on the strange contest with Count Zero on his own.

"What do you think, Mr. Redwing?" asked Bob.

"The law's the law, sir!" said the sailorman. "I think that the police authorities ought to be told what's happened."

Tom Redwing glanced at the Bouncer uneasily. He feared an outbreak of angry temper from his headstrong chum.

But Smithy, hasty and hot-headed as he was, never failed in his respect to Tom's father.

"If you think so, sir, I agree," he said. "No good trying to get across the moor to-night; but if we haven't got on Nugent's track by morning, anybody who likes can go over to Pilverton and call in the police."

"If there's the faintest chance of getting on Nugent's track—" said Bob Cherry.

"We're going to try again down that dashed spiral stair!" growled the Bouncer. "There must be a way through below; and we've got a chance of finding it."

He tramped across to the panel that hid the secret doorway in the hall, and dragged it open. The juniors prepared to follow him, little as they hoped from another search in a place they had already searched thoroughly that day.

But the Bouncer, with an exclamation of rage, stopped at the wall. The oak panel had opened to his hand; but there was no longer a cavity beyond it. The stone block was in its place again, and the wall was solid. The way to the spiral stair was barred.

He shoved savagely at the stone; but it was fixed and immovable. The way was shut, and that was that!

With gritting teeth Vernon-Smith slammed the panel shut again. He came back scowling to the group at the fire.

"Beaten again!" he said savagely. "That villain beats us all along the line. But I'll beat him yet! I—"

He broke off as a low, mocking laugh came. The juniors started and stared round them with startled eyes. But, save for themselves, the old oak hall was empty. Yet they knew that it was Count Zero who had laughed—and they knew that from some hidden spyhole in the ancient walls he could see and hear, unseen by them. The Bouncer, with glinting eyes, thrust his hand into the pocket where he carried the auto-

matic. But no sound came again. The man who had laughed in mockery of the Bouncer's words was silent.

THE THIRTEENTH CHAPTER.

Another Man Missing!

DAWN came up over Polpelly House, glimmering on the grey, tumbling sea.

At the first gleam of daylight the Greyfriars fellows were up. And for once Billy Bunter rose early, too. He could have done with two or three more hours in bed, but he did not venture to remain in the sleeping-room after the other fellows had gone down.

Grunting discontentedly the fat Owl of the Remove followed them down, finding comfort, however, in a Gargantuan breakfast. The other fellows breakfasted hastily. By the time they had finished the sun was well up, and shining down into the coomb. Vernon-Smith stood in the doorway, and stared out into the glimmering sunlight.

Harry Wharton & Co. exchanged glances. It was clear that the Bouncer was unwilling for the message to be sent to the police station at Pilverton. But all the other fellows had agreed that that was what ought to be done. The matter was getting rather too serious to be kept in their own hands.

"Well, what about it?" said Johnny Bull at last.

The Bouncer gave him rather a dark look.

"We've got a chance of finding Nugent," he said. "We've got the day before us, to root over the place from end to end. If we can get at those scoundrels, we can handle them."

"It's your place, Smithy, and you're boss here," said Harry Wharton slowly. "But Nugent's missing, and he's got to be found."

"We can find him."

"Looks to me as if we can't. We're going to try, of course, but—"

"Well, let's try, and not so much jaw!" said the Bouncer sourly. "Plenty of time to call in help if we fail."

Wharton looked at his friends. Three members of the Co. seemed dubious. But there was one who was not dubious. That was Johnny Bull. Johnny's mind was made up, and when Johnny's mind was once made up he was very slow to change it, if he changed it at all.

"Well?" said Bob, hesitating.

"My esteemed Smithy—" murmured the Nabob of Bhanipur.

"Perhaps—" said Wharton slowly.

"No perhaps about it!" said Johnny Bull stolidly. "A case of kidnapping has to be reported to the proper authorities. We've no right to take the law into our own hands. You men can hunt for old Franky, if you like. You won't find him, as you jolly well know! I'm going over to Pilverton to do the right thing."

"You know best, of course!" snapped the Bouncer.

"Yes, in this case, I think I do," assented Johnny, with a nod. "Sorry to put your back up, Smithy. And if you're tired of my company here, I'll get out as soon as you like—when Nugent's found. But I'm going to do what I think right, and that's that!"

"Oh, go to the police, or go to Jericho, if you like!" snarled the Bouncer. "I'm going to hunt for Nugent, and I dare say I shall have found him by the time you get back

with a bobby. Are you fellows going to help, or are you going for a morning walk with that pigheaded ass?"

"We're going to help, of course," said Harry. "But I really think that Johnny's right, Smithy."

"Oh, rats!"

"The ratfulness is not terrific, my esteemed Smithy," said Hurree Jamset Ram Singh gently. "If we fail to find the esteemed Franky, we shall be posterously glad to see Johnny come back with an absurd peeler."

"We're going to find him," grunted Vernon-Smith. "Bull can do as he jolly well likes, and go to the dickens, for all I care!"

"I'm going to," said Johnny calmly. "And after you fellows have hunted about all the morning, and found nothing, you'll be glad, as Inky says, to see a bobby blow in. I don't suppose I shall be back much before noon. It's stiff going across the moor. I'm off!"

And Johnny Bull put on his coat and cap and started.

His friends went with him as far as the gateway, and saw him tramp up the steep coomb towards the upper road.

When he was out of sight they went back into the house and rejoined Vernon-Smith. It was going to be a busy morning, though the chums of the Remove had little hope that anything would come of it. Even the Bouncer, in spite of his obstinacy, had to realise how little chance there was of getting at the hidden enemy.

More than one of the secrets of the strange old house had become known to the juniors. But they had no means of moving the solid blocks of stone that barred their way, where they knew a secret passage to exist. The only method was to call in hefty workmen with the proper appliances. And that, they supposed, would be the method adopted by the police when they took charge of the matter.

In the meantime, there was, or the Bouncer persisted in believing that there was, a sporting chance of discovering some way into the hidden den of the enemy somewhere below the great mass of Polpelly House. And during the sunny morning hours the Removites rooted over the old house as they had done many times before.

But it proved futile, as all but the Bouncer knew in advance that it would. Angry and disappointed Vernon-Smith gave it up at last, and led the way to the old stone lodge up the coomb. He entertained an obstinate hope of finding the secret way in from the lodge. There had been a fall of snow overnight, though the morning was fine and clear. Snow carpeted the path up the coomb, and lay thick round the old lodge.

"Hallo, hallo, hallo! Somebody's been here!" remarked Bob Cherry.

He pointed to the track of boots in the snow leading up to the lodge.

"We know that this is their way in," growled the Bouncer. "If we could only get through after them—"

He tramped into the lodge. The rest of the party followed him in, picking their way among the rubble covered with snow. That someone had been on the spot already that day was quite plain, for the snow had been heavily trampled. Tracks were picked up leading both inward and outward.

But the stone wall at the back was an impassable barrier. That there was a way in, they knew, but the knowledge was useless. Even the Bouncer had to give up the idea at last.

"Perhaps Bull was right," he said



The door opened, and Beppo appeared, his dusky face bandaged, and a helpless figure thrown over his brawny shoulder like a sack. "Stand back, little signor!" he said to Frank Nugent, tossing the unconscious Johnny Bull on to the rugs.

ungraciously. "The only way is to get the wall shifted, and the sooner we get going at it the better. Pretty near time that ass was back, I should think."

They walked back to Polpelly House. It was past noon now, but Johnny Bull had not yet returned. It was five miles, across a snowy and rugged moor, to Pilverton, and the going was slow and hard. But they had expected him back by midday, if not sooner.

They sat down to a rather silent lunch. Even the Bounder by that time would have felt it a relief to see a police officer arrive. Billy Bunter was the only fellow who enjoyed that meal. Bunter, happily, could always find solace in foodstuffs.

After lunch the fat junior parked himself in the big armchair by the fire.

"I say, you fellows, call me if you go out!" he said. "I don't want to be left here alone. I'm not funky of that man Zero, like you fellows; but the two of them might come together, you know, and I'm not sure I could handle both of them at once."

Which remark caused a grin to lighten the clouded faces of the chums of the Remove for a moment.

Bunter snored in the armchair, while the other fellows, in a group at the door, watched for Johnny Bull to arrive.

Every moment they expected to see him, but he did not appear. The early winter dusk began to darken in the coomb.

"What the dickens can be keeping him all this time?" growled the Bounder. "It's pretty thick on the moorland road, but he's had time to do it twice over now! Can he have been idiot enough to lose his way?"

"He can't have lost his way in the daylight," said Harry.

"Bunter did."

"Bunter's a fozzling idiot; Johnny isn't. He must have got to Pilverton all right."

"Then why the dooce doesn't he come back?"

"Goodness knows. Unless——" A dark doubt had been rising in Wharton's mind, but he had hesitated to give it utterance.

The Bounder started, and gave a whistle.

"Oh, my hat! You don't think——" He whistled again. "By gad! If that villain Zero was watching for him—if he's got him——"

"I thought of it when we saw those footmarks in the lodge," said Harry, in a low voice. "It's possible."

"We may see him any minute!" said Bob Cherry uneasily.

They watched from the doorway as the dusk deepened over the coomb. But they did not see Johnny Bull—and the thought was in every mind now that they would not see him returning at all.

"We were fools to let him go alone," muttered Redwing.

"But who would have thought—in the broad daylight——" said Bob. "I can't quite believe, even now——"

"Where is he, then?" muttered Wharton.

Bob did not answer that. They stared out into the darkening coomb in grim silence. Bunter's snore rumbled through the hall.

"They've got him!" said the Bounder at last.

There could no longer be any doubt of it. Johnny Bull had not taken the news of the kidnapping to Pilverton; there was no police officer to be expected at Polpelly. Johnny Bull, out of sight of his friends, had fallen into the hands of the kidnapper, and even while they waited and watched for him, with anxious hearts, he had joined Frank Nugent in his hidden place of imprisonment. As the darkness of another winter night fell on Polpelly, they knew it—knew it only too well!

THE FOURTEENTH CHAPTER.

Dogged Does It!

FRANK NUGENT gave a start and caught his breath.

There was a sudden break in the dead silence that hung like a leaden weight on the hidden room far beneath the house of mysteries. Through the oaken door came the sound of footsteps and the grinding of a bolt withdrawn.

It seemed to the imprisoned junior that he had been days, if not weeks, in that dreary silence and solitude; but his watch told him that, endless as the time seemed, it was only a matter of hours. A night had passed, and he had slept soundly enough, rolled in rugs on the earthen floor. No faintest ray of daylight penetrated to his prison, but when he woke his watch again told him that it was a new day above ground. Now he was restlessly and wearily pacing the prison room, when the sounds from the stone passage without startled him, and he knew that his captor was coming—and he wondered whether it meant that another of the Greyfriars party had fallen into the hands of the man from Italy.

The door was flung open.

Frank eyed it eagerly, ready to take a chance of making a dash for freedom. But there was no chance. The bull-necked Italian appeared, his dusky face bandaged, and a helpless figure thrown over his brawny shoulder like a sack. Behind him stood Count Zero—watching. The count's face relaxed into a grin as he glanced at Nugent.

"Stand back, little signor!" he said.

Beppo tossed his burden on to the rugs. He drew the door shut, and the bolt was shot again.

The footsteps of the two Italians died away.

But Frank Nugent was not heeding

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them. He dropped on his knees beside the insensible figure on the rugs.

"Johnny!" he breathed.

It was Johnny Bull, and he was unconscious. But even as Frank bent over him with anxious face, his eyes opened, and he blinked dizzily. He passed a hand over his head.

"What—where—" he muttered.

"It's me, old man!" said Frank. "So they've got you, too!"

"I got a rap on the head," muttered Johnny Bull.

Frank helped him to a sitting position, and he sat on the heap of rugs, his back to the stone wall, rubbing his head dazedly.

It was some minutes before he spoke again. Frank looked at him in miserable silence. He was glad of the breaking of his solitude, but it was a blow to see one of his comrades also in the hands of the enemy. Count Zero had failed to kidnap them in a bunch, but it looked as if he was scoring success in taking them in detail.

"They've got me," muttered Johnny. "Glad to see you again, old man—though I'd rather have seen you anywhere else."

"Same here," said Nugent, with a faint smile. "I suppose the fellows have been hunting for me?"

"Yes; and I was going to Pilverton, to get the police here, and they got me at the top of the coomb," said Johnny. "That brute Beppo gave me a crack on the nut—Gum, it's aching!"

There was silence again for a long time.

But Johnny Bull rose at last. He had been temporarily stunned by the "crack on the nut," and he still had a headache. But he was pulling himself together.

"How did they get you here?" he asked.

Nugent told him.

"No wonder we never got on your track," said Johnny. "Not much chance of the other fellows doing so, either. They'll never find us. We shan't be found unless they get the police here and pull the dashed old place to bits. And Zero will stop that, if he can."

Johnny Bull proceeded to make an examination of the hidden room, scanning every inch of the stone walls. Nugent, who had already done so many times, watched him in silence.

"Nothing doing, old chap," he said at last. "They've got us safe here."

"We're not stopping, if we can help it, Franky. That blighter will get the whole party, one after another, at this rate, and then—" Johnny broke off, and, stooping his head, peered into the narrow chimney that slanted away in the thickness of the ancient stone wall.

Nugent grinned faintly.

"No chance there, old man!" he said.

Johnny Bull grunted. The chimney was too narrow for climbing. He turned from it and went to the door and groped over it. But a door of two-inch oak, bolted on the outside, was a hopeless proposition.

"I've rooted over this beastly place time and again," said Nugent. "There's no way out, old chap. We've got to stick it."

"Stone walls do not a prison make, nor iron bars a cage!" said Johnny, in his stolid way. "We're not stopping here."

"Lead on, old bean, and I'll follow fast enough," said Frank, with a grin. "I don't spot the exit myself."

Johnny Bull grunted. Johnny was a Yorkshireman, with all the dogged

determination for which the natives of that great county are famous. He rather resembled the "tyke" of his native county, which is said to bite alive or dead! He was not going to give in, at all events, so long as he had a kick left!

He sat down to think it out.

Overhead the day waxed and waned, and the Greyfriars party, as the prisoners knew, were busy on the hunt. But no sound came to the hidden room. It was impossible for the juniors to find it, and it was, in a way, a relief to hear no sound—for they knew that if anyone came, it could only be the count and his confederate dragging in another prisoner. It was certain that the plotters were watching for chances to add to their "bag." But the silence was unbroken.

They ate, and replenished the fire, and the weary hours passed. It was late in the afternoon when Johnny Bull, having rolled aside the rugs that covered the earthen floor, went over it carefully, scanning it, Frank watching him with a rather dismal amusement.

"Looking for a way out there, old bean?" he asked. "Nothing but the jolly old solid globe under us. We're right under the foundations of the house."

"That's so," agreed Johnny, with a nod. "If it were a floor of stone flags, like most we've seen here, there might be a sporting chance of finding one that would shift; the place seems full of such dodges, but—"

"But it isn't," said Frank.

"No; but—" Johnny wrinkled his brows in thought. "I dare say those walls are sunk pretty deep. Still, we're below the foundations, and there's earth under them and under us. Earth can be shifted."

"Oh, my hat!" ejaculated Nugent.

"I'm not saying it's easy, or even possible, to dig a way out under one of the walls," said Johnny Bull stolidly. "But we're not frightfully busy just now, Franky, and doing something is better than doing nothing. Sitting down and waiting for something to turn up isn't Yorkshire way."

"I'll help," said Frank.

Johnny Bull sorted out a pocket-knife from his pocket. Nugent had a knife, too, but it was not much use for such a task. But Johnny's pocket-knife was of the same solid construction as Johnny himself. It was big, it was heavy, it was strong, and it was provided with all sorts of tools and gadgets. That the task was hopeless, or very nearly hopeless, was plain enough—certainly such a possibility could not have occurred to the mind of their captor. But, as Johnny declared, sitting down and waiting for something to turn up would serve no purpose. It was better to make a hopeless attempt than to do nothing.

The earthen floor seemed almost as hard as stone when Johnny Bull tackled it. But Johnny was a methodical youth, slow and steady and sure. He tested the earth in spot after spot, seeking some spot where it was not so hard as in other places. And at length, almost in the middle of the room, he found a place where the knife sank in more easily.

"Not much good beginning there," remarked Nugent. "If we're trying to get under a wall we want to begin close to the wall."

"We want to begin where the going's good, old chap," answered Johnny. "Once we're under the top crust it will be softer."

"Oh, all right!"

"Keep those rugs handy," added

Johnny cautiously. "If those blighters barge in we don't want them to spot what we're up to. Cover it up at once if we hear a sound. See?"

With a strong and steady hand Johnny Bull began to excavate.

It was hard going, but it was an undoubted fact that in the middle of the earthen floor the earth was not so hard packed as in the other places. Possibly damp had affected it there, or possibly there was some other reason. Anyhow, Johnny Bull loosened the earth with his knife, and as fast as he loosened it Frank scooped it away with his hands and piled it in a corner, with a rug ready to throw over it if there was a sound of alarm.

Clink!

"What the thump—" exclaimed Johnny, in astonishment.

He had been at work an hour, and already he had an excavation a foot deep. Suddenly his knife struck on something harder than earth. But it was not a stone; it was a metallic clang that came back.

"What the dickens—" exclaimed Nugent. He took the hurricane lamp from its hook and held it over the hole.

Johnny cut and scooped at the earth. In the light of the hurricane lamp a sudden gleam met his eyes. With a gasp of amazement, he clutched up a disc of metal. It was an ancient coin, darkly discoloured, but gleaming bright gold where the knife had struck it. The two juniors stared at it blankly. Silently Johnny Bull rubbed it clean till it shone in the light, and the effigy engraved on it could be distinguished—the saturnine features of Philip of Spain.

It was a Spanish doubloon of the sixteenth century.

THE FIFTEENTH CHAPTER.

Asking For It!

"**I**L tesoro qui." Herbert Vernon-Smith stared at the words in faint, ancient ink on the parchment.

The winter evening had set in wild and dark. The Greyfriars juniors were gathered by the fire in the hall. Billy Bunter, in the big armchair, was travelling slowly and steadily through a cake, filling up any small spaces that might have been left after an ample supper. Old Dan'l, stumping in the kitchen, was humming a sea song. John Redwing sat with a sombre face. Wharton, Bob, Hurree Singh, and Tom were conversing in low tones with clouded faces.

The Bounder, with knitted brows, scanned the old fragment of parchment which had been taken from Count Zero a week or more ago. The words in "il tesoro qui," meaning "the treasure here" were easy to read. The rest of the parchment was covered by what was evidently the plan of a building—and that building was Polpelly House. But the ink was so faded with time that little of it could be clearly traced. Had it been decipherable it would have led Count Zero to the treasure he sought. As it was, it was simply evidence that the treasure was there, but no clue to its precise locality. Vernon-Smith, knitting his brows over it, was seeking to read the lost secret—with little hope of succeeding where the count had failed.

The other fellows had not the slightest interest in the treasure now. Their thoughts were concentrated on their missing comrades.

The Bounder looked up at last with a slightly sarcastic expression on his face.

"Nothing doing with this!" he grunted. "It never led that scoundrel Zero to the doubloons, and it won't lead us."

"Bother the doubloons!" grunted Bob Cherry.

"We're not thinking of the doubloons now, Smithy," said Harry Wharton quietly.

"But you're not surprised to see me thinking about them while Nugent and Bull are prisoners somewhere in the hands of that villain!" sneered the Bounder.

Wharton made no answer to that. As a matter of fact, he was a little surprised that even the Bounder could continue to take any interest in the lost gold of the galleon in the circumstances.

"Well, it's not the doubloons I'm bothering about!" snapped Vernon-Smith. "But if we could find them, it would be the quickest way to get our friends out of limbo."

"How do you make that out?" asked Bob. "I don't see it."

"You wouldn't!" grunted Smithy. "But I dare say you'll see it if I explain it in words of one syllable."

"Oh, don't be an ass!" said Bob gruffly.

"What do you think that man Zero is after?" demanded Vernon-Smith. "Do you suppose he's risking penal servitude for the fun of the thing? He's after the galleon's gold—and if we found it and got it away, his game would be up. He hasn't kidnapped Nugent and Bull because he likes their company. He would let them go at once if his game was up here."

"Oh!" said Bob. "I suppose that's so."

"The supposefulness is terrific," agreed Hurree Janset Ram Singh. "But the findfulness of the esteemed doubloons is as difficult as the findfulness of our absurd friends."

Harry Wharton took the parchment and scanned it. There was something in what the Bounder said, and he realised it. If the galleon's gold was once unearthed and removed to a safe place Count Zero's game would be up, and he was not likely to linger at Polpelly—or in England at all. But the captain of the Remove shook his head as he scanned the dim old document.

The written words seemed to indicate a spot outside the main building. But the tracings that had accompanied them were quite obliterated, leaving a blank. The spot might have been some secret passage running from the house, or an open place in the coomb, or even the smugglers' cave—there was no telling. It was an indication that the galleon's gold was hidden somewhere at Polpelly, and that was all.

Wharton threw the parchment on the table again.

"I've been trying to think it out," went on the Bounder. "We learned from Zero that his ancestor who was a prisoner here spotted the old squire burying the doubloons in the sea cave, watching him secretly, and removed them while the old bean was absent in London. He wasn't likely to leave them in the cave, I should think. But where—"

"The wherefulness is terrific."

"But he wouldn't have carried them far," went on Smithy. "Thirty thousand doubloons are a tidy weight; he must have made a good many trips to get them shifted. He would carry them off to the nearest spot where he thought he could hide them safely."

"Most likely," agreed Harry.

"He could hardly have moved the chests they were packed in without help—and he could have had no help. He

was a prisoner—allowed to wander about where he liked, but a prisoner—with people keeping an eye on him when he took his walks abroad. He must have carried the doubloons off in sackfuls. And would he venture out into the open—even at night?" The Bounder shook his head. "I tell you, men, that old bean Marco Zero got the doubloons out of the cave, and never got them farther than Polpelly; he banked them in this house somewhere."

"Likely enough, Smithy," said Tom Redwing, with a nod.

"Looks as if Count Zero thinks so, too," went on the Bounder. "He could explore the cave and the coomb all he wanted to without trouble, but it's the house he wants to get possession of. We dished all his plans by coming here for Christmas."

Harry Wharton nodded.

"I think you're right, Smithy," he said. "But—who's going to spot the place, in a rambling old building like this, full of secret passages like a dashed rabbit-warren?"

"Zero hopes to, if he gets a free hand!" answered Vernon-Smith. "We've as much chance as he has!"

"Might have to pull the old place to pieces, stone by stone, and then very likely there would be nothing doing," said Bob.

The Bounder did not answer. He picked up the parchment again, and knitted his brows over it.

Billy Bunter finished his cake and yawned.

"I say, you fellows, what about bed?"

"Go to bed, or go to the dooce!" grunted Vernon-Smith.

"Oh, really, Smithy—"

"Better turn in, I think," said Harry. "We've got to be up at daylight, to get over to Pilverton, Smithy."

"Well, go to bed; I'm not stopping you!"

"You're not staying down alone, you ass!" said Bob. "That rotter Zero is watching for just such a chance. He may have his eye on us this very minute, from some spy-hole."

"I'm going to thrash out this dashed parchment," growled the Bounder, "and I shall do it better alone. Get off to bed, and leave me to it!"

"Nothing of the kind," said Harry.

Vernon-Smith gave him a grim look.

"I'm asking you to leave me alone!" he said. "Do you want me to tell you twice over that I don't want your company?"

Wharton coloured with anger. But he suppressed the words that rose to his lips. Without answering, he took a candle and went to the stairs. Bob and Hurree Singh followed him in silence, and Billy Bunter rolled after them.

John Redwing rose to his feet, looking at Vernon-Smith.

"I'm not leaving you alone, sir, with that landshark in the offing," said the sailorman.

"I should have thought it was for me to say, in my father's house!" snapped the Bounder.

John Redwing gave him one look, and walked out of the hall.

Tom stood with a crimson face. It was the first time that Vernon-Smith had failed in respect to his father. Tom did not speak—he was too hurt and indignant to speak. He went to the stairs after the other juniors, and the Bounder was left alone in the old hall of Polpelly.

Vernon-Smith stood for some minutes by the fire.

Then he heaped on more logs, and moved his chair nearer the hearth. He picked up the document again, and set scanning it, knitting his brows over it.

Silence fell on the old house, broken only by the wail of the wind in the coomb. The hour grew later. The Bounder's head nodded, and nodded again.

The parchment dropped from his hand to the floor, his chin sunk on his breast, and his eyes closed.

He did not stir, as there came a faint click in the silence, and a panel opened in the old oak wall. He did not stir, as Count Zero, with noiseless tread, emerged, and stood looking at him, in the candle-light, with gloating triumph in his swarthy face. Soft and silent as a cat, the Italian stepped towards the still figure in the chair—and yet Herbert Vernon-Smith did not stir.

THE SIXTEENTH CHAPTER.

Spanish Doubloons!

"GOLD!" whispered Frank Nugent.

"Gold!" repeated Johnny Bull.

They knelt on either side of the excavation, in the earthen floor of the hidden room, staring at the gleaming coin in the light of the hurricane lamp. In their amazement at the strange discovery, they forgot even the purpose for which they had been excavating. Almost spellbound, they gazed at the old Spanish doubloon.

Johnny Bull, at last, laid it down and grasped his pocket-knife, and resumed scooping. Nugent aided him, with feverish eagerness. Neither spoke again; but the same thought was in both their minds.

That Spanish doubloon could not have come there by accident, buried a foot under the earth. They guessed—they knew—what they would find, if they dug farther.

And it was not long in coming. Clink, clink, the knife sounded again, and half a dozen discoloured coins turned up among the mould.

Then, a rag of ancient rotten sacking. It was a fragment left of a sack that had once held the coins.

Clink, cnlik, clink!

The musical sound was almost incessant.

More and more earth was scraped and scooped away, and a mass of coins, once enclosed in a sack that had rotted away, lay under their hands.

They ran their fingers through them—hundreds of them—it looked as if there were thousands of them.

"By gum!" breathed Johnny Bull.

"The treasure!" gasped Nugent.

Johnny nodded, and grinned.

"Galleon's gold!" he said. "This is where that old Italian johnny hid it, three hundred and fifty years ago, when he pinched it from the sea-cave. By gum!"

"Galleon's gold!" repeated Nugent. "And we've found it!"

"We've found it all right!" chuckled Johnny. "No good to us here—but we've jolly well found it! Anyhow, it isn't ours—it belongs to Smithy's father, and a whack to the Government—but we've found it, right as rain!"

"Who'd have thought of looking here for it?"

"Nobody! Fancy that blighter Zero's face—if he knew!"

Nugent started, and turned his eyes on the door, and listened. The thought of the count entering, and finding what they had discovered, startled him. But there was no sound.

It was not likely that Zero would come, till he came with another prisoner.

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He had left ample food and drink in the hidden room, and had no occasion for coming, till another of the Greyfriars party fell into his hands.

All was silent and still.

"Fancy—if he knew!" grinned Johnny. "He picked out this room as the safest place to park his prisoners—and it jolly well is! His giddy ancestor, three hundred and fifty years ago, picked it out as the safest place to hide the doubloons—and so it was, too! If that old parchment had been a little plainer, Zero could have walked in here and bagged the loot. This is the jolly old spot marked on that parchment that Smithy's got—'il tesoro qui.' And here's the giddy tesoro!"

They stared at the glinting mass in the excavation.

The upper layers of coins were discoloured; but those packed lower, and protected from contact with the earth, gleamed with a dull gleam. The glow of gold was shining from the earth, in the light of the hurricane lamp.

"We've got to keep this dark!" went on Johnny. "Not a hint of it to that spaghetti sportsman when he comes again. He's not getting his thieving fingers on this little lot!"

"No fear!" agreed Nugent. "Better cover it up again."

Johnny shook his head.

"Not likely! This is where we've started, and where we're going on. I suppose that was why it was easier to dig here—because the ground had been dug once, though it was a jolly long time ago. These dashed old doubloons are in the way—shift them!"

"But if they're seen—"

"Chuck them in that corner, and we can put a rug over them. The blighter won't look under the rugs when he comes—why should he? Anyhow, we've got to get them out of the way."

Nugent grinned. Johnny, in his steady, stolid way, was keeping to the business in hand. After the amazing surprise of discovering the lost treasure he came back to business—which was striving to dig a way out of the underground prison. The Spanish doubloons were worth tens of thousands of pounds, but at the moment they were simply an impediment in the way of Johnny Bull's task.

They had to be shifted. And the two juniors proceeded to shift them. They carried double handfuls from the excavation to the darkest corner of the room, where they piled the glinting coins.

It was a long and weary task, for the stack of doubloons seemed almost inexhaustible. But it was no harder work than shifting the earth, which they had set themselves to do. Precious as the old Spanish coins were, the two juniors soon grew quite indifferent to the fact that they were handling gold, instead of earth and stones. The treasure was simply a weight to be shifted, and they worked long and laboriously at the strange task.

Quite a deep pit was left when the last of the doubloons had been scraped out and stacked in the corner, where a couple of the old rugs were thrown over them, hiding them from sight.

Now they were working in earth again, scraping and scooping, the excavation growing deeper and deeper. The displaced earth was growing bulky. They threw it into the darkest corners of the room, and stamped it down. Below the surface it was damp and easier to work. But fatigue claimed Frank Nugent at last. He was strong and

sturdy, but he had not the untiring strength of his stocky, muscular chum.

"Take a rest, old chap!" said Johnny. "I'm keeping on for a bit. If we hear them coming, chuck the rugs over this hole, quick, and stand the table over them. Ten to one they won't spot anything."

He laboured on, more slowly, but with dogged persistence. Nugent, worn out, could only sit and watch him now.

"Johnny, old bean," he said at last, "at this rate, how long do you think it will take to tunnel under a wall?"

Johnny Bull paused a moment or two and considered.

"About ten days," he answered quietly.

"Oh crikey!"

"Did you think we should do it in ten minutes?" asked Johnny, with gentle sarcasm.

"Oh, no! But if we're going to be found—"

"If we're going to be found, we shall be none the worse for having worked here instead of sitting about doing nothing," said Johnny. "And if we're not going to be found, we may be here a good bit longer than ten days—if we ever get out alive at all! I've never been a chap to sit down and twiddle my thumbs."

Nugent did not answer. Johnny was right, and he knew it; but the prospect of such an interminable task was utterly disheartening. But Johnny Bull had no room for discouragement. It was an almost hopeless hope but it was all they had, and Johnny, in his bulldog way, was getting his teeth into the bone.

"What about turning in?" asked Nugent at last. He looked at his watch. "It's nearly eleven."

"Hark!" muttered Johnny.

There was a faint sound. Johnny Bull jumped up, and Nugent, all trace of sleepiness gone, leaped to his feet.

Instantly two or three of the tattered old rugs were flung across the excavation and the table lifted over them, the chairs put close to it.

Footsteps were heard through the thick oak of the door. Someone was coming; it sounded like more than one.

"They've got another!" muttered Nugent.

Johnny Bull nodded.

They had no doubt that another of the party had been caught napping, and was being brought a prisoner to the hidden room. Johnny gave a quick glance round. There was little to betray how the prisoners had been occupied, unless Count Zero stepped in and made an examination of the room, which he was not likely to do. But their hearts beat as the rasp of the withdrawn bolt sounded on the other side of the oak door.

THE SEVENTEENTH CHAPTER.

Tricked and Trapped!

COUNT ZERO, soft-footed as a cat, stopped across the oak floor of the hall of Polpelly towards the still figure in the chair by the fire.

His black eyes glinted in the candle-light; his gleaming white teeth showed in a grin.

Herbert Vernon-Smith made no movement.

He sat with his chin sunk on his breast, the fallen parchment lying at his feet, his left arm hanging by his side, his right hand resting in his jacket pocket. His eyes were closed, his breathing quiet and regular. The Italian grinned in triumph as he drew nearer.

The Bounder was at his mercy! But the Italian was very cautious. He could guess that the sleeping junior's hand, in his pocket, rested on the automatic. And he had already had proof that the Bounder could shoot straight, and that he was ready to handle the weapon. It was only because the Bounder was armed, and ready to use the automatic, that Zero had been driven from open attack to cunning strategy. But once the cool, hardy Bounder was disarmed and overcome, there would be no trouble with the rest; they would be driven to the prison-room under the muzzle of a pistol. Once Herbert Vernon-Smith was in his hands—

There was a loaded stick in the Italian's grasp. He was taking no chances. Once within striking distance, one blow would hurl the sleeping school-boy senseless to the floor.

Then the game would be in Count Zero's hands.

Closer and closer he crept; his eyes fixed on the sleeping face, which was a little in shadow. If the eyelids were slightly parted, he could not see it in the shadow on Vernon-Smith's face.

Closer and closer—till he was within six feet, and about to spring and strike. And then—

Bang!

The roar of the automatic came simultaneously with a sudden movement of the junior who seemed so sound asleep.

Cunning and wary as a fox as he was, Count Zero was taken utterly by surprise by the sudden movement and the sudden shot.

Before he even knew that the Bounder had stirred, the bullet smashed his knee, and he toppled over and crashed on the floor.

He made a wild attempt to rise, shrieked, and sank back again. The Bounder, on his feet in a flash, sprang at him.

Spitting with fury, the Italian groped in his hip pocket—Smithy knew for what. He kicked the pistol from the count's grasp as it was drawn, and then grinned down at the infuriated man.

"Catch a weasel asleep, my pippin!" grinned the Bounder.

He grabbed up the count's automatic from the floor, and glanced swiftly round, weapon in either hand. He was ready for a sight of Beppo, if the count's confederate came.

There was a shout, ringing through the old house. John Redwing came dashing into the hall down the passage from his room.

"Douse my deadlights!" gasped the sailorman, thunderstruck at the sight of the count sprawling on the oak floor, groaning, and Smithy standing armed like a gunman.

There was a patter of feet on the stone stairs, and Harry Wharton came running in, followed by Bob Cherry and Hurree Jamset Ram Singh and Tom Redwing. The shot, ringing through the silent house, had startled them all into wide wakefulness. Only Billy Bunter was still asleep, and his rumbling snore echoed down the stair.

"Smithy!" shouted Wharton.

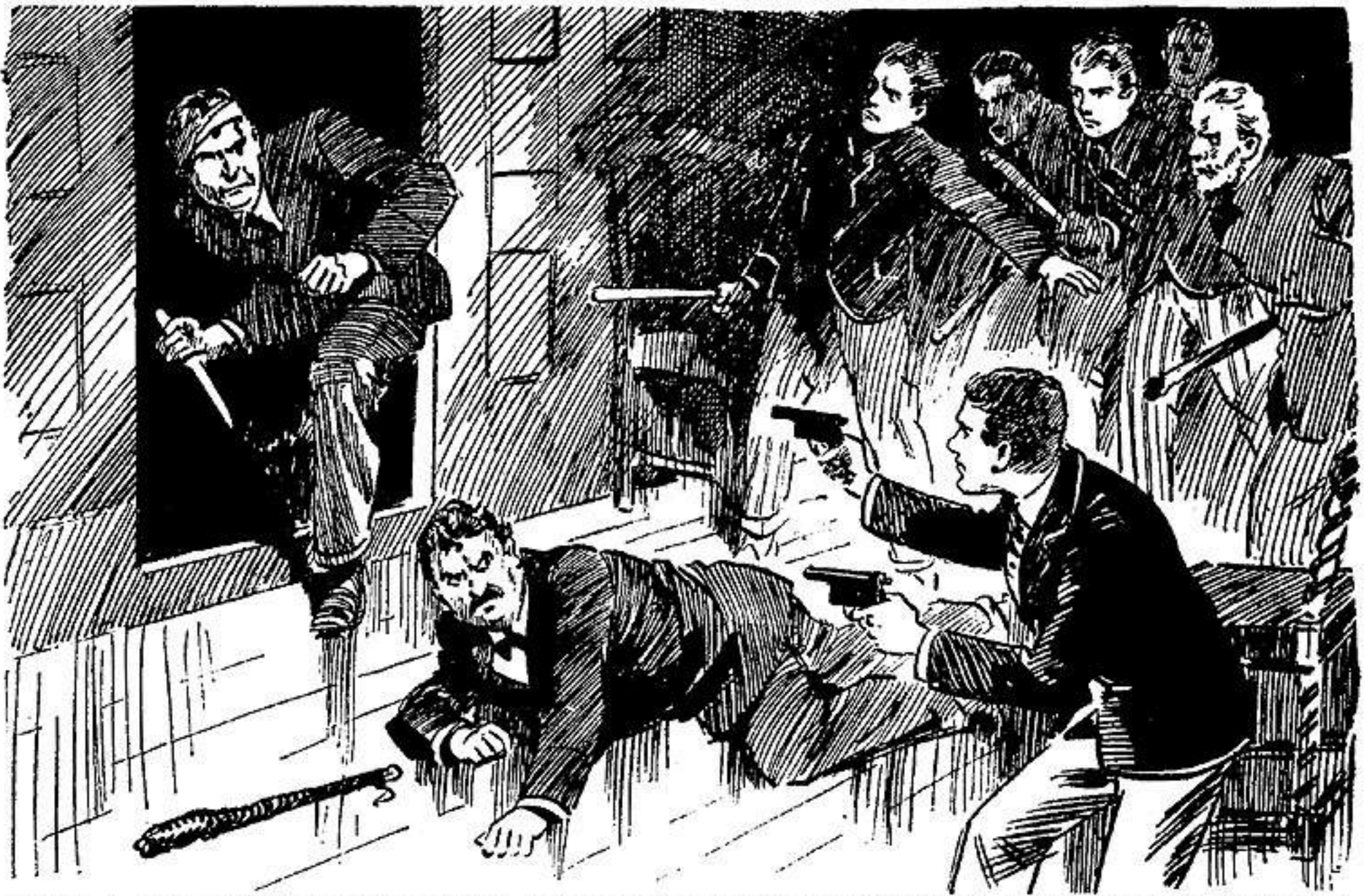
"Hallo, hallo, hallo! What—"

"You can bag him," said the Bounder coolly. "I don't think he's likely to get away, with a ball in his leg. But make sure of the brute!"

"Count Zero!" gasped Wharton.

"Look out for the other blighter!" said Vernon-Smith, with icy coolness. "He must have heard the shot, and may—"

"Cospetto!" came in a gasping groan from Count Zero. "Ah, furfante—furfante! Beaten—by a boy!"



"Tricked and trapped!" said Vernon-Smith, coolly, standing over the sprawling Count Zero, a weapon in either hand, "Bagged like a rabbit!" "Beppo!" called the Count. "Look out!" gasped Bob Cherry, as from the open panel a bandaged, swarthy face appeared, and a knife gleamed in the grip of a dusky hand.

"Tricked and trapped!" said the Bounder coolly. "Caught, my pippin—bagged like a rabbit!"

"Beppo!" yelled the count. He made another effort to rise, yelled with the pain of his wounded leg, and sank back again. "Beppo! Presto—prestissimo! Beppo!"

"Look out!" gasped Bob.

There was a sound of running feet. From the open panel, by which the count had entered, a bandaged, swarthy face glared, and a knife gleamed in the grip of a dusky hand.

Beppo had heard the shot; he had heard his master's desperate yell. With a swarthy face blazing with ferocity, he leaped into the hall, knife in hand.

The juniors, grasping their cudgels, faced him. The Bounder, cool as ice, levelled an automatic.

"Drop that knife, you scoundrel!" he snapped. "Drop it, or——"

Beppo, with blazing eyes, leaped right at him.

Bob Cherry struck with his stick, and the bull-necked ruffian reeled as the heavy blow crashed on his head. Instantly the other juniors were lashing out, and Beppo rolled over on the floor under a rain of fierce blows. John Redwing wrenched the knife from his grasp, and gripped him by his bull neck.

"A rope here, Tom!" said the sailorman. "Tie up this swab!"

The bull-necked ruffian struggled fiercely. But the Greyfriars fellows had him down, and they pinned him down, and Tom Redwing bound his arms and his legs, reducing him to helplessness. He lay panting with rage and ferocity when he had been secured.

The count lay groaning. John Redwing quietly dropped on a knee by his side to bind up his wound. The other fellows looked at Herbert Vernon-

Smith, who was grinning with fierce elation.

"Smithy," muttered Wharton, "how the——"

"You never guessed?" grinned the Bounder. "And if I'd told you, that villain would have heard as likely as not, and I should never have caught him napping. I knew that if I stayed down alone, and fell asleep in my chair, he wouldn't lose such a chance. I was right, I think, Mr. Zero?"

"Ah, furfante!" groaned the count.

"But—but——" gasped Bob.

"Sorry I had to forget my polished manners in getting you fellows to leave me alone!" said the Bounder. "You'll excuse me, in the giddy circumstances."

"Oh!" gasped Wharton.

He understood now.

"Mr. Redwing"—the Bounder spoke more gravely—"I beg your pardon! I spoke to you disrespectfully. I wanted to be left alone to catch that scoundrel in a trap! I hope you'll forgive me?"

"Ay, ay, sir!" answered John. "No harm done, sir."

"Oh, Smithy!" muttered Tom. "And—and I thought——"

"You thought I was a rotten, ill-tempered outsider, treating your father with disrespect——" grunted the Bounder.

"I—I——" stammered Tom.

"Well, I had to be left alone, if I was going to carry out my jolly old plan. Looks as if it was a winner—what?"

"But—but did you——" gasped Bob.

"I pretended to fall asleep in my chair," said the Bounder coolly. "But I went to sleep with one eye open and my hand on that jolly old automatic that I borrowed from his nibs. I banked on the rotter watching, and jumping at the chance, and I gave him enough rope to hang himself!"

"Oh, Smithy!"

"Just when he got almost near enough to crack my nut with that handy little stick I let him have it," said the Bounder grimly. "I was tempted to let him have it right through his ear-case——"

"Smithy!"

"But I let him have it in the leg, and we've got him!"

"We've got him, all right!" assented Bob, with a glance at the white face of the wounded plotter. "Is—is he much hurt, Mr. Redwing?"

"Ay, ay; he'll be laid on his beam ends for a while, while that leg mends," said the sailorman. "He won't be hopping about so lively for a few weeks, sir. But he'll get over it all right, if that's what you mean."

"I don't care a fearful lot whether he does or not," drawled the Bounder.

"Yes you do, Smithy!" said Tom.

"Shut up, and don't be as ass!"

The Bounder laughed.

"Well, perhaps I do," he agreed. "Doctor him all you can, Mr. Redwing, by all means. Lift him on that settee, you chaps. Make him comfortable. We'll get a doctor to him in the morning. You don't think he's got a chance of making a break, Mr. Redwing?"

"He couldn't walk to save his life, sir," answered John. "Not if the house was on fire!"

The count was lifted to the settee and made as comfortable as possible with cushions. John Redwing bandaged the wound. Count Zero lay with his eyes glittering at Vernon-Smith.

"Cospetto! You have me!" he muttered at last. "But you have not the treasure, neither have you found your friends!"

"We're going to find them, old bean, don't you make any mistake about that," said the Bounder. "The treasure

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can go hang till we've done it. But it won't take us long, I think."

"How do you make that out, Smithy?" asked Harry.

"We've got a guide now," said Vernon-Smith. "If Mister Zero could walk I'd make him lead us to Nugent and Bull. But Beppo will serve our turn."

"Oh!" exclaimed Wharton.

Beppo glared at the Bounder like a wild animal.

"Mai! Mai!" he snarled.

"If that means never, never's a long word!" said Vernon-Smith. "Loosen his legs, you men, and take hold of his arms. You'll stay with Zero, Mr. Redwing, won't you? We're going to take a little walk with Beppo."

"But will he—" began Bob.

"He will," answered the Bounder, with icy coolness, "because I'm going to make him. I'm not standing on ceremony with a scoundrel who's kidnapped our friends and shut them up in some underground den!"

"Mai, mai, giammai!" hissed Beppo.

The Bounder picked up one of the sticks.

"You're going to lead us to where you've shut up our friends, Beppo," he said, "and I'm going to thrash you like a dog until you do. Your game's up now, my dusky friend. You and your master are both going to chokey, and you may as well chuck up the sponge, here and now. If you want me to beat you to a jelly first you've only got to keep me waiting!"

Beppo eyed him like a savage animal, but the Bounder's grim look and his evident determination to carry out his threat daunted the ruffian. He glanced at his master.

"Andate!" snapped Count Zero.

And Beppo, with a black, scowling brow, led the way, and the Greyfriars juniors followed him through the secret panel.

THE EIGHTEENTH CHAPTER.

Treasure Trove!

"HALLO, hallo, hallo!" Frank Nugent and Johnny Bull jumped clear of the floor in their astonishment.

With beating hearts they had listened to the footsteps in the passage, the rasping of the bolt as it was withdrawn. The door swung open, and they fully expected to see Count Zero and Beppo, with another prisoner.

Beppo they did see; but his arms were bound, his bandaged face scowling. And with him came, not the count, but a crowd of Greyfriars fellows, and Bob Cherry's cheery roar filled the hidden room with echoes.

"Frank!" shouted Wharton.

"Harry, old man!" gasped Nugent.

"W-well, this beats it!" stuttered Johnny Bull.

"Here we are, here we are, here we are again!" roared Bob.

And in his exuberant satisfaction he grabbed Nugent and Johnny, and walked them round the prison-room.

"Chuck it, ass!" gasped Nugent.

"Fathead!" roared Johnny Bull.

"Hurrah!" roared Bob, whirling them round. "Oh, my hat!" They crashed into the table, and sent it spinning. Chairs flew right and left. Bob Cherry staggered, where the table had been, and gave a sudden howl as his foot went through a rug on the floor into a deep hole beneath.

"Hallo! Why—what—yarooooop!"

Bob sat down suddenly.

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"Ha, ha, ha!"

"W-what the thump!" stuttered Bob. "I've fallen into something! What the merry dickens—"

Harry Wharton grasped him and pulled him up. Bob kicked the rugs aside and stared blankly at the pit in the floor.

"What the dickens—" exclaimed the Bounder.

"Way out!" explained Johnny Bull. "We never expected to see you fellows drop in, and we started digging a way out."

"Oh, my only hat!"

"But how the dickens did you find us, and what is that brute Zero doing, letting you do it?" asked Johnny Bull.

"Zero's taking a little rest in the hall, nursing his leg!" grinned the Bounder. "Jolly old Beppo guided us here, because I was going to wallop him black and blue if he didn't! If you're tired of this luxurious and commodious residence, what about getting a move on?"

"What-ho!" said Frank.

"We're getting the dagoes to chokey to-morrow," went on Vernon-Smith. "They won't worry us any more while we're looking for the treasure. What are you grinning at?"

"Well, as you fellows are all here, we may as well take the treasure back with us!" remarked Johnny Bull carelessly.

"Take it back with us!" repeated the Bounder.

"Yes," grinned Nugent. "May as well put it in a safe place."

"What the dickens do you mean by that—if you mean anything at all?" demanded Smithy.

"Just this—look!" chuckled Johnny Bull.

He stepped to the corner and whipped the rugs aside. There was a yell from the juniors at the sight of the stacks of Spanish doubloons.

"The treasure!" howled Bob.

"The doubloons!" gasped Wharton.

"The galleon's gold!" articulated Redwing.

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## SOLVING THE FAMILY PROBLEM!

Parents of families are confronted every winter with the same problem of how to provide healthy entertainment for their children during the long evenings. Because of the competition of the many outside diversions, this is not always easy. More and more parents, however, are finding a solution to this problem in home billiards.

Riley "Home" Billiard Tables are not toys because every model is a perfect replica of a full-size table, including a slate bed, scientifically constructed cushions, durable covering, etc. They are made in five different sizes, and each table is supplied complete with accessories, and is sent carriage paid on seven days' free trial. Most outstanding of their many features is the fact that all models can be obtained either for cash or easy terms. The very reasonable sum of 8s. deposit brings immediate delivery of a Riley "Home" Billiard Table.

Another famous model in the Riley range is their "Combine" Billiard and Dining Table, which, as its name indicates, embodies the functions of two entirely different styles of tables. It can be transformed in a few seconds from a luxurious dining table to a perfect billiard table. Here again, there are various sizes and patterns which are offered for cash or easy terms.

The manufacturers will gladly send an attractive Art List of Riley Billiard Tables on application. Their address is E. J. Riley, Ltd., Belmont Works, Accrington, or Dept. 24, 147, Aldersgate Street, London, E.C.1.

"The esteemed and ridiculous treasure!" ejaculated Hurreo Jamset Ram Singh. "This beats the estimable and respectable Banagher!"

Vernon-Smith cut across the room, staring at the stacks of doubloons with almost unbelieving eyes. He ran dozens of them through his fingers, as if to make sure that they were real. Beppo, in the doorway, gazed at the golden pile, his eyes almost popping from his swarthy face.

"Il tesoro!" he gasped. "Dio mio! Il tesoro!"

"The jolly old tesoro, and no mistake!" said Bob Cherry. "But when—how—"

"That old bean, Marco Zero, must have buried it here after he pinched it from the sea cave!" said Nugent, "and Johnny's idea of digging a way out—"

"A spot of work never hurts any fellow!" said Johnny Bull.

"Il tesoro!" repeated Beppo, like a man in a dream. "Il tesoro, sicuro! Il tesoro trovato."

"I wonder what my pater will say to this!" grinned the Bounder. "He thought I was an ass to put in the Christmas holidays here, hunting for the galleon's gold! By gum, this will surprise him! Load up, you men—there's more than we can carry, but we'll come back for the rest. It's worth it, what?"

Count Zero's eyes turned on the Greyfriars fellows as they came trooping back into the old oak hall with joyous faces. The Bounder walked across to him and held up a fistful of golden doubloons.

The Italian started violently.

"Il tesoro!" he breathed. "You have found it!"

"Thanks to you!" grinned the Bounder.

"To me?" exclaimed Zero.

"It was hidden in the den where you shut up our friends!"

Count Zero lay silent for a moment or two staring at the golden doubloons in the Bounder's hand. Then he shrugged his shoulders.

"Ecco la fine del mio cammino!" he said. "It is the finish!"

It was the finish, not only to Count Zero's desperate game, but to the adventures of the Greyfriars chums at Polpelly.

The next morning John Redwing tramped across the snowy moor to Pilverton to send a telegram to Mr. Vernon-Smith in London.

That telegram from Smithy was certain to bring the millionaire down to Devonshire as fast as an express train could bring him, in spite of the winter weather.

The galleon's gold, packed in a roomy trunk, was ready to greet his astonished eyes when he arrived.

But Count Zero and his man were not there when he came.

The discovery of the treasure had altered the Bounder's plans; and he could be merciful to a defeated enemy.

When a man came trudging through the snow from Pilverton with Mr. Vernon-Smith's wired reply that he would arrive that afternoon, the Bounder had an unexpected word to say to the count.

"Your game's up, old bean!" he said. "My father will be here to-day to take charge of the treasure, and we're getting out of Polpelly. You can't do any more harm—and you've had a hard knock; and if you like to beat it, beat it while the going's good. Catch on?"

The count smiled faintly.

(Continued on page 28.)

THE MOST THRILLING SEA STORY EVER TOLD!

# DAN of the DOGGER BANK

By DAVID GOODWIN.

## Dan's Brain-Wave!

**K**ENNETH GRAHAM, son of a millionaire shipowner, is rescued off the Dogger Bank by the crew of the fishing trawler, Grey Seal.

His past life a complete blank, he 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 cut-throats, 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 Black's flagship, smuggling. Boarding the trawler, they imprison the two men left in charge and make for port.

Caught in a hurricane, they are wrecked on a lonely sandbank, where they discover an old Dutchman, named Jan Osterling, gloating over a huge pile of gold coins.

After confiding in Dan and Buck, Jan is murdered by the two prisoners from the Adder, who make good their escape. The two boys light a bonfire in the hope of attracting attention from the mainland, and then turn in for the night.

The dawn broke windy and wild, with a grey sea and a grey sky. But the boys slept on in a heavy, death-like slumber—the sleep that follows heavy bodily and mental strain. It was past noon when they awoke.

"There's a fresh breeze," said Buck, as they stepped out into the open, glad to be quit of the house of death. "I hope those slack-backed beggars on the mainland will hurry up, if they're coming."

"If?" echoed Dan. "The wind's westerly, too."

"That's what I mean," said Buck. "It'll bring the Blacks up flying if that boat the spies stole reaches them. They always know where one of the fleet's likely to be. If she hammered away all night to westward—an' it's pretty certain she did—she may ha' found Rebow's lot already. You bet he's routed out his other vessel, an' come this way after the Adder. They'll meet him. Is there no way off this old sandbank? Nobody seems to care what happens here."

The bonfire had not induced the slow-moving inhabitants of the mainland to come and investigate if they had seen it. All day the boys patrolled the island, but effected nothing. They fired guns to attract the attention of distant fishing-craft between Baltrum and the land, but to no purpose. It was as though the world shunned the lonely island, its gold, its prisoners, and its dead.

All night the boys took turns to patrol the sea-front, for their anxiety was growing. Late next day, they knew, Jan's nephew would probably bring his boat across if the weather



The barrel struck Dan's attackers, sending a shower of blazing tar-drops over them. Then men and barrel rolled off the roof together!

allowed. But the heavy wind raised a furious short sea on the inner waters, dangerous to any small craft.

"If nobody comes," said Buck, as they lay on the sandhills, peering out to sea by the gap next day, "we'll pull down the barn and make a raft. It's a dog's chance of fetching anywhere, even then, for the ebb'll most likely take us out to sea. But I'm not going to stay here any longer."

"I'm game," said Dan, "if we can only get away. We can't hunt for the gold, either."

"Not while Jan's above ground," said Buck, "an' the other money not handed over to his nephew, as per contract. Has it occurred to you that we're alone here with a murdered man, and nobody to prove we didn't—"

"Hallo!" exclaimed Dan, rising to his feet and staring out to sea. "What sails are those?"

Buck rose and joined his chum. For a couple of minutes the boys watched, without speaking, three small dark smears that showed against the whites and greys of the tumbling sea, far in the distance. Rapidly the dark spots approached, resolving themselves into sharp-peaked mainsails with naked top-masts above; for there was too much wind for topsails. The hulls were not yet visible.

"Ay," said Buck, "it's the Blacks at last! Now is there a chance of saving ourselves and Jan's money—or are we to be—"

He broke off and walked rapidly to and fro upon the dunes with short strides, his brows knit, his wits working. There seemed to him no escape, no hope. The three swift black vessels of the squadron raced up before the breeze.

"Buck," said Dan suddenly, "how will they land?"

"There's a lot of surf on the beach, an' there's too much sea to anchor outside. They'll run in through the gap here, between us and the next island, and bring up in smooth water. All the worse for us."

"Think so?" said Dan. "But the channel between isn't ten yards wide at this time of tide. Half the gap's dry sand now, and the deep water only a gutter through it. Jan told us that it isn't more than eight feet deep."

"What's the idea?"

"I mean that there's a fine bundle of old scythe blades in Jan's barn. I saw them yesterday, and some water-logged beams. Now, connecting the scythe blades with those beams—"

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"Come along!" interrupted Buck, quickly gathering what his chum was driving at. "Dan, you've a head worth six o' mine."

The two boys rushed off towards the house.

The plan was simple but ingenious. It might fail; but, as Buck said, they were gambling their lives against a straw. It was a last hope.

They hauled out a long wooden beam that had once been a derrick, so clamped with iron and water-logged by long soaking that it could not float. There were old mortise-slots in its side that helped the boys in their task. Then sorting out the scythe blades they bound them tightly in the slots with tarred rope yarn, of which there was plenty.

Very soon the beam began to look like the jawbone of some great prehistoric beast, with a row of gleaming steel teeth six feet long sticking up from it, and leaning slightly forward. The boys worked with feverish haste, but did the work thoroughly and well.

At every turn of their hands the lean swift trawlers of the Black Fleet crept nearer. But the tide was against them, and it takes a long time for a vessel sighted, hull down, to come close.

The three dark smacks were still a mile away when the strange weapon that Dan's brain had conceived was ready.

"Quick!" cried Buck. "The big grass-rope from the shed, or we shall be too late!"

They fastened the rope to the beam, made a couple of bowlines, harnessed themselves to it, and set off towards the gap between the islands, dragging it after them. The strange weapon was heavy—a load enough for a strong horse—but the two chums succeeded in getting it over the dunes to the channel, where the tide came through. A corner of the sandhills hid them from the three smacks at sea.

The tide was out. They hauled the beam laboriously over the sands to the narrow, deep-water channel, panting and exhausted.

"We must swim for it!" said Dan. "In with you!"

They plunged into the water and swam across, taking the slack of the rope with them.

Beyond was a waste of shallow water and impassable quicksands, extending right away to the next island. But this did not concern Dan and Buck. They hauled on the rope, and slowly the great beam, with its fearful-looking teeth—the scythes were Dutch, and nearly straight—glided into the water.

The two boys dragged it to the middle as near as they could judge, and left it there, hidden, vicious, its steel fangs a couple of feet below the surface of the water.

And even as they flung the rope away the red peak of the first smack came sweeping round the bend of the channel!

Plunging into the water again, the chums swam back rapidly to their own bank.

The trawler's hull was still hidden by the point of the dunes, and her crew could see nothing.

Buck and Dan gained the sandhills and sank down to recover their breath.

Right in the entrance to the gateway, as soon as she had luffed out of the rough sea outside, the leading trawler shot up into the wind and lay-to. The others were still a mile from the beach, standing on and off. The leader had been sent on to report.

"I hope it works!" panted Buck. "Rebow's an' old bird to catch with a trick like that!"

"He can't suspect anything," returned Dan. "I flatter myself it's a good dodge. Of course, there's plenty of room for the smack to miss the contraption altogether; but if she keeps in the middle, as she's sure to do in a

strange passage, she must hit it. And it can't topple over. She'll jam it right against the bottom and spike herself. What are they stopping for?"

"Sending a boat to take soundings over the bar. The shoalest water's just inside. She knows that. There'll be plenty of water for her, though."

They saw the boat hitched to the trawler's stern again, and the sounding-crew jump aboard. Then the trawler squared away, and came looming up the gateway like a torpedo-boat.

"Lucky the tide's strong," commented Dan. "She couldn't anchor in the mouth or the middle in a tide like that. She's bound to go through."

"Try to, you mean," replied Dan.

Helped by the strong current, in smooth water, and with a hooting westerly breeze, the trawler raced along. She kept dead in the middle, a man heaving the lead smartly. But, deep or shoal, nothing could have stopped her.

The sloven, savage-eyed crew stood alert and ready at their posts.

"It's the Vulture!" muttered Buck. "Ah, she's got it!"

The black trawler gave a violent lurch, stopped nearly dead, and then drove slowly on again. To the untrained eye there seemed nothing very wrong with her for the moment. A volley of oaths arose from the crew. They thought they had touched ground.

A tearing, rending noise burst through her as she swung round, and a man came rushing up from below with a shriek.

"She's struck through the bilges!" he yelled. "There's devil's work here! There's two great blades stickin' right through her an' rippin' her up like a log!"

The trawler was thrown into wild confusion. Foxey Backhouse—for it was he—had told the truth, for once. Two of Dan's scythe-blades had pierced her skin, and as the strong tide twisted her round they tore a couple of long gashes in her bilge before they snapped off short. The water was pouring in irresistibly.

"She's done!" cried Dan. "She's sinking!"

"It won't stop their landing, though," said Buck. "They've got the boat up. They're getting into her!"

The trawler began to settle down rapidly. Her crew crowded into the boat and headed for the shore.

"Look out!" shouted Dan. "The other boats have landed!"

In the foam on the outer beaches were two dark masses—the boats of the smacks at sea. They had dared the surf, and landed. A swarm of black figures poured out of them and came rushing towards the boat with fierce cries.

Dan and his chum were fairly taken in the rear.

#### Holding the Fort!

"To the house!" cried Buck. "It's the only chance now!"

The boys turned and scudded towards the farm. A yell went up from the pursuers, and then the race was run in silence—a race for life.

Well did Buck and Dan know that if they failed to gain their stronghold first it would be the finish for them. The boys had a start of a hundred yards, and they ran as they had never run before.



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chums are  
here again!

The Rookwood Chums' latest adventures are the most exciting ever written by that popular author, OWEN CONQUEST. If you have met Jimmy Silver & Co., you will be sure to want to meet them again. If you haven't, then now's the time to get to know them! Read all about their thrilling adventures in this grand Yuletide yarn appearing to-day in

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# The GEM

The men of the Black Fleet, Jake Rebow at their head, swept after them like a pack of wolves.

The party that had been marooned on the farther bank, seeing the tables turned, hurried into their boat and launched her, stuffing coats and jerseys into the gaps in her side. They pulled frantically for the shore of the island, but, short as the distance was, the boat, loaded to her gunwales and leaking like a sieve, could not cover it.

Buck felt a gleam of satisfaction as, glancing back over his shoulder, he saw the boat founder in the middle of the creek and leave her crew struggling in the water.

But there was no time for comment. The boys set their teeth and ran. Jake Rebow, now barely eighty yards away, opened fire with a revolver as he tore along. The bullets flew wide, but the boys could not stop to reply.

The house was still a quarter of a mile away. Rebow's long legs were bringing him up fast.

Suddenly he tripped over a tussock and fell sprawling.

Past the fallen man, running like the wind, came a big, long-limbed ruffian, who travelled at an extraordinary pace for his size. He outstripped all the others with ease, and came up with the boys rapidly. The house was nearly won, but he was close on their heels. A knife was in his hand, but no pistol.

"Lead him in!" gasped Buck, in a strained whisper. "Get him inside!"

Dan nodded. He could not speak. They rushed round the house, to open the back door, the ruffian behind so close that they could hear the laboured breath hiss between his teeth.

Right through the narrow entrance into the big room swept the three, the man almost within striking distance.

The instant they were inside Buck slammed the door to and let fall the iron bar that closed it from within. Dan, leaping aside, grabbed a chair and brought it down on the side of the ruffian's head with a crash that sent him rolling among the chairs on the floor, stunned, and out of the fight.

"Good!" said Buck, panting. "That's put paid to number one! Close the shutters—quick!"

A howl of rage arose outside. The sheet-iron shutters were quickly closed and barred, and half a dozen bullets rattled on them harmlessly.

The storming-party paused irresolute, fifty yards away. Two rifle-muzzles gleamed through the loopholes, and the boys poured out a quick fire. Rebow's voice sounded in a hoarse order, and the attackers scattered, and threw themselves flat on the ground.

"It's war now!" muttered Buck.

Dan made a rapid tour of the room, ensuring that every outlet was secure. They saw how true was Jan's assertion that the house could be held for a long time against an armed force. The four windows looked to all quarters of the compass, one commanding each side, for the house, like many old Dutch farmsteads, was practically only a single large room.

"All's well!" he said, flinging open the ammunition cupboard.

He loaded a rifle, and Rebow's voice was heard outside.

"Keep down, an' creep up tae the walls!"

Before Dan could get to his window a thundering crash shook the door. The enemy were using a beam as a battering-ram. But the great, iron-bound oak stood the strain bravely, and the attackers gave it up as a bad job.

There was a lull in the attack—a sinister silence. Dan took advantage of it to bind the arms of the ruffian

he had felled, and who was regaining consciousness.

"There's a party rolling a barrel up!" cried Buck. "And, by George, there's someone on the roof!"

"What?"

"They're goin' to burn us out! That's tar in the barrel—sure thing! The roof's dry, and half-thatched, an' there's a ladder in the shed."

"All right!" said Dan coolly. "Let 'em get the barrel up. I reckon I can give 'em as good as they bring!"

"Look sharp, then," said Buck anxiously. "They're getting it up now!"

There was a platform-loft under the ceiling of the room, and a ladder leading up to it. Dan climbed to the loft, loosed the catch of a little trapdoor in the roof, and waited, a seven-foot rake-handle ready in his hand.

A match was struck outside, and the hiss of a torch followed. The thatch was so patchy that to fire it alone would have done little harm. The enemy's intention was to light the tar-barrel and pour its blazing contents over the roof.

Dan opened the trapdoor gently, and thrust his body through.

Two villainous-looking trawlermen were on the roof, the barrel between them. One had just thrust a torch into the tar and set it ablaze. Below, watching intently, and lying on the ground to be out of reach of the loopholes, were a dozen of Rebow's men.

The man with the torch gave a shout on seeing Dan, and tried to overturn the barrel. Then a bullet whizzed past the boy's head.

With a swift thrust of his rake-handle, Dan hurled the barrel outwards. It struck the two men violently, sending a shower of blazing tar-drops over them, and men and barrel rolled off the roof together into the midst of their comrades, who yelled and danced energetically, forgetting all about the loopholes, as the hot tar stung them.

Buck's rifle blazed off in the air, and in ten seconds the tar-party was in head-long flight.

"They got it that time!" chuckled Dan, beating out the burning spots on the roof. He closed the trap and descended. "I think they've had enough."

"Not they!" returned Buck, fingering his rifle. "They're madder than ever. They're gathering for a rush! What we've had is child's play to what's coming!"

And Buck proved to be right. The enemy, grim and silent now, crept up close under the walls, and commenced an attack terrific in its fury. They pounded the doors, and dashed rocks against the shutters.

With a last thundering crash the door broke from its hinges.

The noise made by the falling door was drowned in the terrific roar outside. Hoarse cries and the rattle of deep-mouthed oaths rent the air, and above all rose the hoarse voice of Rebow:

"Rally, lads—rally! The Dutchmen are on to us!"

#### Arrested!

THE attack on the door ceased, and Dan, seizing his opportunity, dragged the heavy oak table across as a barricade.

Next moment he was fairly dancing with joy.

"It's a gang of men from the mainland!" he cried excitedly. "They've taken Rebow's men in the rear!"

"By gosh, you're right!" cried Buck. "Hold the door for all you're worth!"

But there was no need. The hot,

heavy struggle round the door, the splintering of timber, and the hoarse cries of rage had ceased. The attackers were out beyond the fencing. They took open order, and fired rapidly and unceasingly at something that could not be seen.

"Who are they?" cried Dan impatiently. "An' what are they shootin' with? It sounds like a volley o' blunderbuses! Let's get out!"

"Stay where you are!" advised Buck. "It may be a trick, an' our job is to hold the fort! As for the firing, it's heavy duck-guns by the sound! Sit tight and keep your rifle ready!"

There was a rush from the invisible enemy behind the house, and the Black Fleet broke and fled. A moment later, a horde of big, hairy, fur-capped men, armed with large-bore duck-guns, swarmed into the yard, yelling and whooping.

"They're fenmen from the mainland marshes!" cried Buck. "Great Scott, there's a couple o' score o' 'em! But they'll never catch the Squadron men!"

A thunderous blow on the door from a musket-butt interrupted him, and a hoarse voice cried, in low Dutch:

"Open!"

"Come in, mynheer—come in!" returned Dan, dragging the table away. "Jolly glad to see you!"

"Hold on!" exclaimed Buck, springing forward. "Let's see what they're going to do first!"

But the leader of the rescue-party, a huge six-foot-three Low-Countryman, holding a gigantic single-barrelled duck-gun, had already strode into the room, followed by half a dozen others. They were light-haired, big-limbed men, roughly clad, wearing caps and long thigh boots—typical wild fenmen of the Dutch marshes.

"Straight men, at any rate," said Dan to himself.

The big leader addressed him fiercely in low German.

"Who are you, and how did you get here?"

"Same to you!" said Dan. "You must speak English, or I can't be civil to you!"

The leader put his head outside the door and shouted:

"Hans!"

A small, dried-up looking man came in, and, as he entered, the captain of the party looked round the room slowly, and noticed the bound Squadron prisoner on the floor, looking very sullen and scared.

The big fenman stared at him long and gravely, but said nothing. His large blue eyes travelled from the prisoner to the bunk in the wall, where lay the dead miser, and he started.

"Herr Gott!" he said. "Jan Osterling!"

He stepped to the bunk-side and looked closely at the body. Silently he beckoned his comrades, and they came. The leader pointed slowly to the dead man.

"Murdered!" he said, in his own tongue.

The others looked and understood, while the boys stood still and silent.

The captain wheeled quickly round.

"Arrest those cubs," he said, "and take the man that is bound! Bring them outside!"

In an instant, Dan and Buck were seized. They did not resist, guessing what the move meant, and feeling secure in their innocence.

"Take it quietly," said Dan in an undertone, as they were led into the yard. "We can clear ourselves. I hope they won't take us to the courts inland, though, and waste a lot of time."

"I don't know about that," said Buck, rather gloomily. "I rather hope they will. They're a wild lot. And it's beginning to dawn on me that things look pretty black against us."

"Rot!" said Dani. "We don't belong to the Black Squadron."

Buck did not reply. They were led into the open, beneath a large, withered tree, and as soon as they were there the party that had pursued the flying enemy returned, angry and empty-handed. Some rough talk ensued.

"They didn't catch 'em!" muttered Buck. "Knew they wouldn't."

The Blacks had outstripped their heavy pursuers altogether, and launched their boats before the fenmen arrived on the beach. The crew were even then boarding their smaaks in the offing and putting to sea. But three of Rebow's crew lay stark upon the sand, their lips closed for ever.

The captain of the fenmen spoke to the returning party. They went into the house, stayed some minutes, and returned. A grim, stern look was in the eye of each. The captain called forward the little, withered man, who answered to the name of Hans, and gave him a curt order. The men drew up in a group beside their captain, save two, who held Buck and Dan opposite the group, and another in charge of the Squadron prisoner on the left-hand side.

Then Hans turned to the two boys and spoke in good English. He had evidently been a sailor.

"The captain tells me to ask you how Jan Osterling came by his death?"

"He was murdered," said Dan.

The man translated, though it was evident that most of the fenmen understood the reply.

Hans spoke again.

"By whom?"

"By two men of the Black Fleet—the crews you have beaten off."

"Where are they?"

"One of them lies there," Dan pointed to the bodies that lay stiffening on the sand. The centre one was, in truth, the back-bearded scoundrel who had escaped with his comrades in the Dutch boat. "Where the other is I do not know."

"Now attend," said the old fenman. "You were found in the room with the murdered man, and one man beside. Answer my question clean, for the one we find guilty will hang from that tree!"

"And who are you to judge us?" cried Dan. "Put it in the hands of the law."

"We serve out our own law on the islands," said Hans grimly.

"Well, go ahead with your sham court!" said Dan. "We're innocent, anyway. You can't scare us."

"How came you in the room with Jan Osterling's body?"

"We took refuge there from the Black Fleet's men, and held the house against them."

"What, you two, alone?"

"Yes."

"Were you the only defenders?"

"Sure! You saw the fight, or heard it, I suppose. That is what brought you here, isn't it?"

"Nonsense, boy! Two boys to keep off that gang of toughs! How did you come here?"

"We were wrecked in Friday's gale."

"In what vessel?"

"The Adder."

"On the Adder! She's a Squadron ship! How did you come to be on her?"

"We captured her, smuggling off Ymuiden. Her crew were ashore—all but two. We clapped the two under hatches, with another that came aboard on his own invite, and we had to run before the gale. One of the men went overboard before she struck the sands. The other two landed safely. It was they who killed Jan Osterling."

"What became of them after that?"

"We caught them in the act. I shot one through the arm, but they escaped. While we were attending to Jan, who was dying, they stole the boat and got away. They brought the Squadron down upon us. We spiked one of their vessels in the gateway, and held them up till you came. Now you have the whole story."

"Who are you?"

"Dogger Dan, of the trawler Grey Seal."

"And you?" pursued Hans, turning to Buck.

"Buck Atheling, son o' the skipper, same vessel," he replied.

"You were wrecked on the sands, Friday. What did you do between that time and Jan Osterling's death?"

"We went egg-hunting with him next day. He was murdered the same night," said Dan.

"You knew he was a wealthy man, and had money in the house?"

The boys were silent, though the question was repeated twice. They knew nothing of these men. They would not say a word of the treasure, or do anything that might betray the dead man's trust.

(Dan and Buck have been in tight corners before, and come out best. Will fortune favour them this time? Be sure you read next week's exciting chapters of this popular adventure yarn, chums.)

## GALLEON GOLD!

(Continued from page 24.)

"Grazie tanto, little signor!" he said. "But—" He glanced at his bandaged leg.

"It's chokey if you hang on!" said Vernon-Smith. "And you're not all bad, though you've given us a pretty tough time. Your man Beppo can get you down to the cove, and you can take the boat—and take your chance!"

Count Zero was not likely to refuse such a chance. An hour later, the two Italians were gone. And the chums of Greyfriars were glad enough to see the last of them.

"I say, you fellows!"

"Say on!" grinned Bob Cherry.

"I've been thinking—" said Billy Bunter.

"Gammon!"

"Beast! I've been thinking. The grub's good here, I admit, but after all, grub isn't everything."

"What!" gasped Bob Cherry. "Do my aged ears deceive me? Listen, you men! Did you hear Bunter say that grub wasn't everything?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Oh, do stop cackling!" howled Bunter. "Blessed if I see anything to cackle at. I've been thinking—"

"You exaggerate, old chap!"

"Will you let a fellow speak!" roared Bunter. "Can't I open my mouth without you butting in?"

"Well, there's room—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I've been thinking; what about going back to London with Smithy's pater and chucking this? What do you think, Smithy?"

"Good idea!" said the Bounder, laughing. "Quite a good suggestion—especially as we've arranged it already!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Oh!" said Bunter. "Well, all right! I'll come, Smithy! I'm going to stick to you for the rest of the rac, old chap!"

"I guessed that one!" said the Bounder.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

And Bunter did.

THE END.

(Watch out next week for another grand story of Harry Wharton & Co., entitled: "DUNTER'S BID FOR A FORTUNE!" It's one of Frank Richards' extra-specials and you'll enjoy it no end! Be sure to order your copy early!)

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# THE BOGUS HEADMASTER!

By DICKY NUGENT

"There's only one drawback about this New Year party," said Merry, of the St. Sam's Fourth. "The Head's coming."

Jolly and Bright groaned, as they gazed out of the library at the moonlit grounds of Merry Manner, where they were spending part of the Christmas vacation.

"Bust the Head!" said Jack Jolly. "We see enuff of him during the term. Why was your pater such a silly ass as to invite the Head, Merry?"

"He thought it was up to him, as Birchey entertained me for the St. Sam's Ice Carnival," grinned Merry. "After all, he wasn't a bad host to us over Christmas, you know."

"Trew—but he's always his best as a host and his worst as a guest," retorted Jolly. "You know what he's usually like at parties!"

"Yes; he scoffs all the tuck and makes rude remarks about everything and everybody," nodded Merry. "But the pater says he's not standing any nonsense like that on this occasion. If the Head starts any funny bizziness he'll go out on his neck. So perhaps it will be all right."

"We'll soon know, anyway. Here he comes!" said Bright, as a taxi came rolling up the drive towards the house.

By the time they reached the front door, Legge, the footman, was already ushering in the new arrival. One glarnso was sufficient to tell Jack Jolly & Co. that the Head was not in the best of hewmers. There was a glint in his greenish eyes and a bright red spot on the end of his nose—sure signs of trouble!

"Good evening, sir!" remarked Merry. "A happy New Year, sir!"

"Thanks, Merry—but it won't be very happy for your honored guests if you don't look after them better than what you do!" rapped out Doctor Birchey. "Why, mite I ask, didn't you send a Rolls Rice to meet me, instead of leaving me to come up from the station in a paltry taxi?"

Before Merry could answer

that question Major Morry himself appeared on the scene.

"Welcome to Merry Manner, my dear Birchey!" he cried heartily. "Sorry we couldn't send the Rolls, my dear fellow. It broke down."

"You don't say so!" eggsclaimed the Head with crushing sarcasm. "Why didn't you send another, then? But I am forgetting, of course, that you're only a retired Army man and as poor as a church mouse!"

"What? What?" roared Major Merry.

"That being the case, of course, my dear major, I freely forgive you," grinned the Head. "Pay the taxi for me, will you?"

"Good gad!" gasped Major Merry.

For a moment, he looked like ticking the Head off properly. But, remembering in time that he was dealing with a guest, he swallowed his wrath and signalled to the footman.

"Pay the taxi, Legge," he ordered.

"Well, that's that!" remarked Doctor Birchey, as he looked critically round the hall. "Not a bad little cottage you've got here, Major Merry—though not quite up to my class, of course. By the way, in the circles I usually move in, it's customary to ask a guest if he feels peckish!"

Major Merry's eyes twinkled hewmerously.

"Do you feel peckish then, Birchey?" he asked.

"Yes, rather—famished!"

"Good!" grinned the major. "Then in about an hour's time you'll be able to do something about it. That's when we all sit down to dinner!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You—you cheeky rotters!" gasped the Head, as Jack Jolly & Co. roared. "If this is the way you treat honored guests, I shall think twice before honoring you with my distinguished prezzence again."

But the chums of the Fourth were quite unaffected by that

dire threat. More guests were arriving for the party now, and they seemed much more concerned with welcoming the new arrivals than with Doctor Birchey.

It wasn't long before Merry Manner was fairly ringing with the cheery chatter and happy laughter of the swelling crowd. Everybody seemed out to have a jolly good time, and the party looked like being a gratesuccess. There was only one fly in the ointment—the Head!

He barged into groups of guests and swanked about the titled jentry he knew. He made rude remarks about his fellow-guests' clobber.

It was when he sat down to dinner that he reached his top note. He sprawled all over the table and helped himself to everything within reach, in-

bough. "But what about the custard trifle he has just ordered? Shall I give him that first?"

"Give it him—yes!" said Major Merry. "But give it him upside down over his napper. Do you understand?"

"Certainly, sir!" mermered Podgson, boughing again.

"Hurry up with that trifle!" bawled the Head, across the table at that moment, and Jack Jolly & Co., who had overheard the major's order, grinned.

Podgson secured a cupple of waiters and gave them their orders. The waiters seized a big bowl of custard trifle and carried it between them to the Head. Doctor Birchey's mouth fairly watered when he saw it.

"My hat! This is something like!" he cried. "Don't trubble about dishing it out. I'll have the lot!"

And the next moment he got the lot!

"Swooooosh! Plop!"

"Yaroooooo!" shrieked the Head. "Grooooo!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Major Merry's guests fairly yelled at the comical site the Head now presented. Custard trifle was in his hair, eyes, ears, and mouth; it was oozing steddily down his neck!

Before the Head knew quite what was happening, the two waiters seized him by the seat of the trousers and the scruff of the neck and rushed him towards the door.

"Woocooop! Grooooo!" roared the Head. "What's this for?"

"It's because you're upsetting the whole party by being such a swanking, ill-mannered rotter!" eggsplained Major Merry. "Throw him out, men!"

"Half a minnit!" yelled the Head, struggling furiously.

"Before I go, I must make a confes. At I'm not Doctor Birchey at all!"

"Wha-a-at?"

Everybody stared agast. They thought the Head had gone potty.

"My name's Sam Birchey, and I'm Doctor Birchey's cuzen, if you want to know!" cried the supposed Head. "If you want Doctor Birchey himself, you'll find him in the woodshed in the grounds! I left him there bound and gagged before I went back to the station."

With that, the self-confessed impostor nodded aside his captors and dashed for the door. A few ticks later he was swallowed up in the nite.

Of course, the story that the Head of St. Sam's was a prisoner in the woodshed had to be investigated at once, and shortly afterwards a search party, headed by Major Merry himself, went to see for themselves.

Grave was their surprize to find that there really was a prisoner in the woodshed, bound and gagged, just as they had been told. What's more, the prisoner turned out to be none other than Doctor Birchey!

"Thank heven you've come!" cried the Head, as they removed his gag. "Tell me, gentlemen, what has that raskaly cuzen of mine been a-doing of? Has he been passing himself off as me? He can easily do so, you know—we're as like as two peas!"

"Then it's trow!" gasped Major Merry. "What a bit of luck we've found out! Your cuzen is a greedy and boastful rotter with simply awful manners, and, but for finding this out, we should always have beleieved it was you!"

"Perish the thought, major," grinned the Head. "I couldn't

**WILLIAM GREENE "Spills the Beans" re—**

## COKER'S THRILLING ICE RESCUE

As it seems that Coker is running all over the show telling everyone he saved me from drowning at the risk of his life the other day, I've decided to have my say about it. Hero goes!

Coker's version is that I skidded off towards a danger zone when he was teaching me to skate and fell in before he could stop me. Realising what was required, Coker speedily obtained a ladder and crawled over it to the rescue, thereafter hauling me out of the water and carrying me to safety, regardless of the fearful risk he ran of drowning himself.

be like that, if I tried! Anyway, all's well that ends well. I suggest that we all adjern and carry on with the merry party."

"Good egg!" cried Major Merry. "This way then, my dear fellow!"

And he led the way back to Merry Manner.

The party turned out a tremendous success and everybody said what a polite gentleman Doctor Birchey was and how much better he was than his cuzen Sam.

As to Sam Birchey, he was never seen again. When Jack Jolly & Co. noticed that the Head's coat bore distinct traces of custard trifle, they understood why! But they didn't give the game away. As Jack Jolly said, the Head had learned his lesson. So no useful purpuss would have been served by revealing the trowth about the Bogus Headmaster!

Now there are some minor mistakes in this little story. In the first place, I was teaching Coker to skate—not Coker teaching me.

Secondly, the reason I skidded off into the danger zone was that Coker tried to keep himself upright by grabbing me round the neck!

It's the rescue part of the yarn, however, that really gets my goat. Actually, I didn't need rescuing at all. The water was only about three feet deep and I could quite easily have waded out of it to the bank again. But Coker wouldn't let me! He just flung off his skates, got hold of the ladder that unfortunately lay near the pond and rushed it over the ice towards me!

Naturally, I objected to being "rescued." But all the objecting in the world makes no difference to Coker. The more I objected, in fact, the more he insisted! In the finish we were scrapping for all we were worth on the ladder!

I crawled out eventually, quite unaided, and you can take my word for it, if anyone was rescued it was Coker himself—not me!

# IT'S A SMALL WORLD FOR SNOWBALLERS

Moans SIDNEY JAMES SNOOP

You often hear people say the world's a small place. So it is! In fact, it's a jolly sight too small for chaps who go in for snowballing! I've found that out—to my sorrow!

If I thought there was any danger in it, I certainly shouldn't have taken it up. But I didn't think there was. I was staying with Skinner, and as Skinner pointed out, there wasn't a man we knew in the district. We could chuck snowballs at all and sundry and get away with it, because nobody would know who we were!

So we went out on this bright and snowy morning and started bombarding the locals good and plenty! Naturally, we avoided anyone who looked young enough to hit back, and concentrated on old fogeys instead. And for a time we certainly got good fun out of it. Several times we scared old boys out of their lives, and once we even had the luck to knock one backwards into a snowdrift!

And then it happened! Over the other side of a hedge we spotted a topper, bobbing up and down as its wearer walked along the path!

Of course, we promptly guessed it was some local bigwig, and equally promptly gathered up ammunition. A topper on a snowy day in the country was a chance not to be missed—in more senses than one! As soon as we had made sufficient snowballs, we chased after that bobbing topper and let fly.

Our aim was true. The topper flew off the old boy's head and the rest of our ammunition crashed around his neck. For a moment we chorled.

But then he turned round. We recognised him in a tick. That, of course, didn't matter. What did matter was that he recognised us, too!

If you ever heard of such fearful luck lads, our victim was Quelchey himself!

He didn't say anything. He couldn't! But, oh crumbs, won't he have it in for us next term!

Oh, yes, the world's a small place, right enough. As I said to begin with, it's a jolly sight too small for snowballers!

(Continued from foot of column 1.)

It's no light task, chums, preparing the "Herald" for the printers in our spare time at Greyfriars. Games and club meetings and rags and trips out of gates take up a lot of our time, and it's often a difficult task to whip in all the members of our staff for a session of newspaper editing. But when we do get going, we make the fur fly—and very proud we feel of ourselves when the result of our efforts comes out each Saturday morning in the good old Moxer, to be read in every quarter of the globe!

My pals and I have had a great time over the festive season, and we're looking forward to more great times when we start the new term at Greyfriars. Outdoors, we've some first-rate footer matches to play and cross-country running and rowing to follow later on—and indoors, let's hope, there will be high jinks, japes, and rags in sufficient quantity to satisfy the keenest appetite!

Depend on it, though, chums—however crowded the term may be, we're always going to find time to keep the "Herald" in the proud position it holds to-day—that of the best-known and most popular schoolboy paper on earth!

# HAPPY NEW YEAR ALL

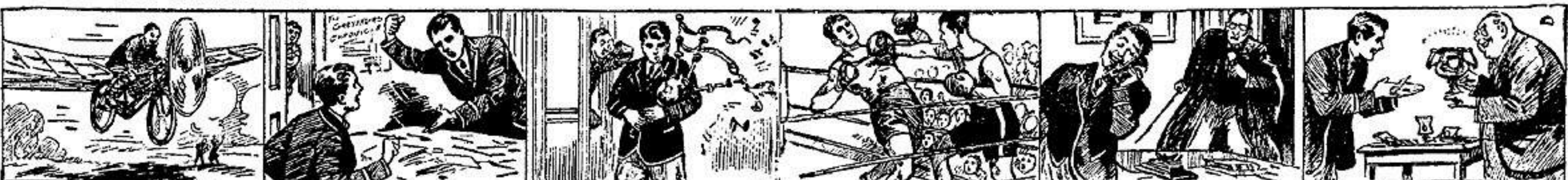
By HARRY WHARTON

Here's a Happy New Year to readers all over the world from myself and the staff of the "Greyfriars Herald." And we mean it, too!

We need hardly tell you that our New Year resolution is to make our bright little paper brighter and better than ever. Keep your peepers open, boys and girls, and you'll soon see that there's one New Year resolution anyway that isn't going to be broken!

(Continued at foot of extreme right-hand column.)

## WOULD YOU BELIEVE IT?



Wun Lung proved his ingenuity by constructing a "cycle plane" on the chassis of a bicycle. By pedalling very hard to work the propeller he actually flew 100 yards in it! The Chinese plane then crashed—fortunately doing more damage to the bicycle chassis than to himself. Bol-sover roared when he learned that the bicycle belonged to him.

Eager to start a rival paper to the "Herald," Skinner assembled a staff consisting of Snoop, Stott, and Fish. When Loder called at Skinner's study to inquire about a libellous statement published in the first issue, Skinner's staff bolted! Skinner had nobody to "lean" on—and when Loder had finished he had hardly a leg to stand on!

Reading that 1,000 pipers had played at a Highland gathering, Donald Ogilvy was inspired to parade the Remove passage skirling shrilly on the bagpipes he keeps in his study! Ogilvy certainly "roused the clans" out of the Remove studies! Unfortunately, he "roused" a peck, too—Ogilvy had to "piss down"!

Wingate and Gwynne represented Greyfriars at an inter-schools boxing tournament—and fought their way through to the semi-final. Wingate beat Bulkeley of Rookwood, and Gwynne was beaten by Kildare of St. Jim's. In the final, Wingate just beat Kildare on points. Both could give "points" to many professional boxers!

To revenge himself for a caning, Skinner rang up Courtfield double one double one, the number of a friend of Mr. Quelch's with whom he plays chess. Skinner made some very rude remarks, imitating "Quelch's" voice. But when Mr. Quelch came in unexpectedly behind him, Skinner experienced a "rude" awakening! The cane "rang" on Skinner's trousers!

Cedric Hilton of the Fifth has taken up golf, and distinguished himself by winning the "Under 17" championship at the Courtfield Golf Club. Mr. Prout, his Form-master, felt almost as proud presenting the cup to Hilton as if he had won it himself. "Prouty" is never likely to win a cup at golf, though—he is too much of a "mug."

## GREYFRIARS FACTS WHILE YOU WAIT!

Capital needed for uncek now skoolboy jermal, "The Greyfriars Gorgor." This paper will make an instant popular appeal. Grub-fanciers and tuck-trouncers will rally to it in their thousands! All we need is kapital. What offers?—W. G. BUNTER, Study No. 7; Remove.